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THE POETIC THEORY AND PRACTICE OF LANGSTON HUGHES

by

Philip M. Royster

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

February

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PREFACE

The primary reason for making this study is to draw the relationships between Langston Hughes' theoretical statements concerning writing poetry and his actual practice of the craft. To this end his theories have been collected and classified with examples in the first chapter. The second chapter is a volume by volume analysis of each of Langston Hughes' published collections of poetry from the point of describing the literary techniques that control his poetry and determining the chronological development of those techniques as well as the relation of those techniques to Hughes' theories. The last chapter is a summary of my findings.

This research has been dependent on the services of the following libraries, collections, and people:

Fisk University Library; Ann Shockley, Sue Chandler, Veronica Tucker, Beth Howse, and Clarencetta Jelks; the Langston Hughes Collection and the Julius Rosenwald Fund Archives.

Trevor Arnet Library (Atlanta University); Countee Cullen Memorial Collection; the Langston Hughes Papers.

Howard University Founders' Library; Dorothy Porter and Mrs. Price; The Moorland Foundation, the Library of

Negro Life and History, Arthur Spingarn Collection, Joel Elias Spingarn Collection, Alain Le Roy Locke Papers.

Lincoln University (Pa.) Library; Sophie Cornwell; Langston Hughes Collection.

New York Public Library (135th Street Branch); the Schomburg Collection of Negro Literature and History; the Langston Hughes Papers.

Sterling Memorial Library (Yale University); Arna Bontemps; James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection of Negro Arts and Letters, Langston Hughes Papers.

University of Chicago Libraries; the Negro Collection.

I am also indebted to the following persons for personal interviews and conversations concerning Langston Hughes and his poetry: Arna Bontemps, George Kent, and Leslie M. Collins.

VITA

The author, Philip Maurice Royster, is the son of Maurice Floyd Royster and Grace Elizabeth (Pleasant) Royster. He was born July 31, 1943, in Chicago, Illinois.

His elementary education was obtained in the public schools of Chicago, Illinois, and secondary education at Harrison High School, where he was graduated in 1960.

In September, 1960 he entered the University of Illinois at Navy Pier, Chicago; in December 1962 he entered DePaul University in Chicago, and in June 1965, received the degree of Bachelor of Arts with a major in English. While attending the University of Illinois he was president of the University Jazz Club in 1961.

In June, 1967 he was awarded the Master of Arts in English from DePaul University. DePaul University awarded him the Arthur J. Schmitt Scholarship in 1967 to begin his doctoral studies. For the academic year 1966-67 he taught English at St. Mels High School, Chicago, Illinois.

In September, 1967 he was granted an assistantship in English at Loyola University. In September, 1968 he was granted a Loyola University Fellowship. During the academic year 1968-1969 he was elected president of The Graduate English Club of Loyola University. In September 1969 he was

granted an instructorship for the academic year in the English Department of Loyola University.

With Stanley Clayes of Loyola, he co-authored Instructor's Manual to accompany Contexts for Composition (1969).

In 1970 he became a member of OBAC (Organization of Black American Culture), The Writers' Workshop. His first book of poetry, The Back Door, appeared in 1971. A second is scheduled for publication during Spring, 1974. He has published poetry in the Journal of Black Poetry, Black World, Liberator, Cadence (Loyola), and the Herald (Fisk). He has published a book review in BANC. The first chapter of this dissertation is being considered for publication by the editors of Third World Press, Chicago, Illinois. He has read poetry for neighborhood units and institutions in Chicago.

In September, 1970 he received an instructorship at Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee. There he has participated in and directed the Writers' Workshop, as well as he has taught simultaneously in the English Department, the Honors Program, and an experimental Freshman Interdisciplinary Program. He has read poetry at Fisk University, Vanderbilt University, Austin Peay University, Peabody Demonstration School of Peabody College, Northern Illinois University, and for the Louisville Public School System of Kentucky, as part of their Poetry in the Schools Program (1971-1972). As part

of that program he conducted a Workshop for College Students in Lexington, Kentucky along with poetess Sandra Royster and poet Malcolm Glass. In 1971-1972 he organized a Community Writers' Workshop with Sandra Royster for Black children between the ages of four and fourteen.

CHAPTER I

THE POETIC THEORY OF LANGSTON HUGHES

A. APPROACH AND CAPTURE

Why did Langston Hughes choose the medium of poetry and how did he capture his insights? Hughes enumerates four forces which motivated his writing and which expose the emotional basis of his inspiration: "I only really feel like writing when I am unhappy, bored or else have something I need very much to say, or that I feel so strongly about I cannot hold it back."¹ Speaking of the period just after his graduation from Central High School (Cleveland, Ohio) in 1920, Hughes establishes the relationship between the intensity of his emotions and the quality as well as quantity of his poetry:

I felt bad for the next three or four years, to tell the truth, and those were the years when I wrote most of my poetry. (For my best poems were all written when I felt the worst. When I was happy I didn't write anything.)²

One of Langston Hughes' biographers established the natural inception of Hughes' inspiration: "The lines came freely to him now no matter where he was or what he was

¹Langston Hughes, The Big Sea, American Century Series (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), p. 317.

²Ibid., p. 54.

doing."¹ The biographer is referring to Hughes at the age of sixteen, the same period of which Hughes says ". . . I did not dare write stories yet, although poems came to me now spontaneously, from somewhere inside."² Hughes explains his method of capturing these insights: "I put the poems down quickly on anything I had at hand when they came into my head, and later I copied them in a notebook."³ The poet had good reasons to hurry, for he felt that "poems are like rainbows: they escape you quickly."⁴ He probably captured most of his poetry in the forms of song as he did the blues: "The blues poems I would often make up in my head and sing on the way to work."⁵ During an interview in 1944 Hughes said that he wrote by ear, comparing himself with some musicians: "You can't write poetry by working on it, it must come easy and natural in order to be expressive. . . ."⁶

¹Milton Meltzer, *Langston Hughes* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968), p. 47. Although Mr. Meltzer is speaking doubtlessly in an informal tone, for reasons of clarity and emphasis it should be noted that Mr. Hughes probably wrote more because of than in spite of what he was doing (see below, p. 3).

²Hughes, *The Big Sea*, p. 34. ³*Ibid.*

⁴Meltzer, *Langston Hughes*, p. 65.

⁵Hughes, *The Big Sea*, p. 217.

⁶"Poetry To Be Appreciated Must 'Come Easy--Langston Hughes," *Lincoln Star*, April 28, 1944.

And yet, not all of his poetry came so effortlessly.

There is no use waiting for a mood to strike. Write yourself into a mood. . . I didn't wait for those sonnets to come to me, I worked myself into the mood.¹

The apparent contradiction posed by this contrast to Hughes' other statements concerning spontaneity may be reconciled by the conditions of either time or audience: By 1946 Hughes' creative range had expanded to include not merely the highly valued natural spontaneity but also the highly functional, self-conscious techniques. And here Hughes, in giving advice to a group of young writers, may be trying to reach those who write more from method than depression.

Hughes took several approaches towards the problems of selection and revision. Speaking of the years 1924-1925 he wrote:

My two years in Washington were unhappy years, except for poetry and the friends I made through poetry. I wrote many poems. I always put them away new for several weeks in a bottom drawer. Then I would take them out and re-read them. If they seemed bad, I would throw them away. They would all seem good when I wrote them and, usually, bad when I would look at them again. So most of them were thrown away.²

In his 1940 autobiography Hughes wrote

But there are seldom many changes in my poems, once they're down. Generally, the first two or three lines come to me from something I'm thinking about, or looking at, or doing, and the rest of the poem (if there is to be a poem) flows from those first few lines, usually right away. If there is a chance to put the poem down

¹Stella Kamp, "Langston Hughes Speaks to Young Writers," Opportunity, XXIV (April, 1946), 73.

²Hughes, The Big Sea, pp. 216-17.

then, I write it down. If not, I try to remember it until I get to a pencil and paper. . . .¹

But by 1947 revision had come to play a more important role:

When I write, the words just put themselves together. . . . My poems are spontaneous, but I re-work and revise. Sometimes they come up complete, though, and I just work them over for an hour or two.²

As Langston Hughes matured he took his poetry more seriously, revising more often than not; he continued to write spontaneously inspired by his feelings and experiences, but he also worked up his inspiration to experiment with various forms and techniques. In the following section we shall examine Hughes' conception of what poetry is.

¹ Ibid., p. 56.

² Mary Harrington, "Closeup: Jim Crow Can't Keep a Poet Down," New York Post, April 10, 1947 (Langston Hughes Papers, Special Collections, Fisk University Library, Box 10, Folder 2).

B. THE EMOTION AND RHYTHM OF EXPERIENCE

As an introduction to Hughes' conception of what poetry is it may be good to begin with his considerations of what poetry is not. By 1919 he had put into practice his theoretical distinction between a poem and other poetic forms:

I had a whole notebook full of poems by now, and another one full of verses and jingles. I always tried to keep verses and poems apart, although I saw no harm in writing verses if you felt like it, and poetry if you could.¹

He defined a poem as "often the distilled essence of experience, the concentrated flavor of an emotion."² Hughes echoed this definition (1951) with a stronger emphasis on brevity during the National Poetry Festival at the Library of Congress on October 24, 1962.³ In "Silence" first published in 1941 Hughes captures his intention:

I catch the pattern
Of Your silence
Before you speak.

I do not need
To hear a word.

¹Hughes, The Big Sea, p. 53.

²Langston Hughes, "Ten Ways to Use Poetry in Teaching," CLA Journal, XI (June, 1968), 275.

³James Emanuel, Langston Hughes, Twayne's United States Authors Series, (New York: Twayne, 1967), p. 127.

In your silence
 Every tone I seek
 Is heard.¹

"Silence" has concentrated the expansive experience of a lover's emotional sensitivity no less perfectly than "Luck" distills the bitter flavor of faint joy:

Sometimes a few scraps fall
 From the tables of joy.
 Sometimes a bone
 Is flung.²

For Langston Hughes the defining and identifying quality of poetry is rhythm:

Poetry is rhythm--and, through rhythm, has its roots deep in the nature of the universe; the rhythms of the stars, the rhythm of the earth moving around the sun, of day, of night, of the seasons, of the sowing and the harvest, of fecundity and birth. The rhythms of poetry give continuity and pattern to words, to thoughts, strengthening them, adding the qualities of permanence, and relating the written word to the vast rhythms of life.³

Of the words that rhythm organizes:

Words are the paper and string to package experience, to wrap up from the inside out the poet's concentric waves of contact with the living world. Each poet makes of words his own highly individualized wrappings for life segments he wishes to present. . . . regardless of quality or content, a poem reveals always the poet as a person. Skilled or unskilled wise or foolish, nobody can write a poem, without revealing something of himself.⁴

¹Langston Hughes, Fields of Wonder (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), p. 47.

²Ibid., p. 64. ³Hughes, "Poetry in Teaching," p. 275.

⁴Langston Hughes, "A Note on Poetry," Schomburg Collection, New York Public Library, Typed carbon of a note submitted to The Free Lance (a magazine of verse published by the Free Lance Poet's and Prose Workshop, Inc., Cleveland, Ohio), one page in folder "Langston Hughes--Poetry."

Revealed at the heart of the matter is the self of the creator, the poet. Rhythm organizes things and words, words organize the experiences of the living world, and rhythmically organized verbal experiences reveal the creating self. Paradoxically, although self-revelation is inextricably tied to creating poetry, Langston Hughes directs his intentional thrust towards society:

The best ways of word-weaving, of course, are those that combine music, meaning and clarity in a pattern of social force. One's own creative talents must supply the music of the words, one's background and experience, the meaning, and one's ability to study and understand, the clarity--to understand being the chief of these qualities toward clarity.¹

Langston Hughes' theories concerning the relation between the rhythm of poetry and the rhythm of life can be applied to his own practice, as in "Dimout in Harlem":

Down the street young Harlem
In the dusk is walking
In the dusky dimout
Down the street is walking

Shadows veil his darkness
Shadows veiling shadows
Soft as dusk the darkness
Veiling shadows cut by laughter
Then a silence over laughter

Shadows veiling silence
Silence veiling shadows
Silence and the shadows
Veiling Harlem's laughter

¹Langston Hughes, "Weaving Words," New York Post, Nov. 12, 1965, p. 54.

Silence
 No one talking
 Down the street young Harlem
 In the dark
 Is walking.¹

The rhythm of walking narrated by the observer is echoed in the techniques of repetition and variation. A young black walking down a Harlem street in the silent shadows of evening becomes a collective individual representing and demonstrating the relationships between many young urban black people and their natural and unnatural environments. The rhythm in the life of young Harlem is evoked by eighteen occurrences of seven theme-slanted phrases:

- a. Down the street young Harlem..2
- b. Down the street.....3
- c. young Harlem.....2
- d. In the dusk.....2
- e. is walking.....3
- f. Shadows veil.....4
- g. Veiling shadows.....3

twenty occurrences of eight images clustering around the symbols of darkness:

- a. dusk.....2
- b. dusky.....1
- c. dimout.....1
- d. shadows....7
- e. veil.....1
- f. darkness...2
- g. veiling....5
- h. dark.....1

twenty occurrences of six theme slanted words:

- a. Down.....3
- b. laughter...3
- c. silence....5

¹Hughes, Fields of Wonder, pp. 95-96.

- d. walking....3
- e. street.....3
- f. Harlem.....3

twenty-seven occurrences of three initial sounds:

- a. d...11
- b. s....9
- c. sh...7

and the hammering flutter sustained by a rhyme scheme of internal and external word repetition:

- a. Harlem
- b. walking
- c. darkness
- d. laughter
- e. silence
- f. shadows

A thematic analysis of "Dimout in Harlem" will help to expose the relationship between the rhythms of the poem and the rhythms of life. A young man, typical of Harlem (the most densely populated black ghetto in the world), is walking down a dark street at evening. The "Shadows that veil his darkness" are the shadows of night that render the young man's black skin less noticeable, but the equivocal "Shadows veiling shadows" casts symbolic shadows over both the dusk of night and the Harlemites' dark skin, shadows that evoke the social and personal miseries of the political oppression that has vitiated, debased, and defiled both the history and the lives of black people in America, rendering their lives as well as their dark skins a shadow. The inimical qualities of the veiling shadows are revealed in that they are "cut" by laughter and moreover in that a

silence then overcomes that laughter, paralleling the shadows that have veiled the soft as dusk darkness of the black man. The repetitions, variations, and chiasms of the third stanza represent the complicated and subtle suppression of Harlem's laughter, the guile of the oppressor. These same techniques analogously outline the restricted range of behavioral possibilities for the oppressed, a range which extends, contrary to the relevant stereotype, to their emotional expressions. The "Silence / No one talking" of the last stanza are just as much commands as descriptions. The softness and shadows of dusk have dimmed out to a darkness not merely of night.¹ Langston Hughes is writing about the young black men in the community where he lived most of his adult life and grew to an acute social and political awareness.² He approached his education at

¹The psychology of the oppressed as viewed by black intellectuals can be further investigated for a verification of this interpretation by consulting 1) Frantz Fanon, "The North African Syndrome," in Toward the African Revolution (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967), pp. 3-16; Joseph White, "Toward a Black Psychology," Ebony, XXV, 11 (September, 1970), 45, 48, 50, 52; William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, "The Shadow of the Past," in Black Rage (New York: Bantam Books, 1969), pp. 18-32.

²In "What the Negro Wants" (Common Ground, II, 1, Autumn, 1941, 52-54), Langston Hughes reveals his objective and rational insight into the perennial "problems" of oppressed black people in America. He enumerates economic opportunity, equal educational opportunity, decent housing, full participation in government, a fair deal about law, public courtesy, and social equality in the use of public services as what Negroes want.

Lincoln University (1926-1930) with the intention of refining that same awareness:

I wanted to return to college mostly in order to get a better background for writing and for understanding the world. I wanted to study sociology and history and psychology, and find out why countries and people were the kinds of countries and people they are.¹

This ability to reflect the interior topography of oppressed black folk by rhythmically patterning the symbols of their oppression did not blunt his sensitivity to lyric expression as in "Fulfillment":

The earth-meaning
Like the sky-meaning
Was fulfilled.

We got up
And went to the river,
Touched silver water,
Laughed and bathed
In the sunshine.

Day
Became a bright ball of light
For us to play with,
Sunset
A yellow curtain,
Night
A velvet screen.

The moon,
Like an old grandmother,
Blessed us with a kiss
And sleep
Took us both in
Laughing.²

The first stanza presents the theme, a reflection by the

¹Hughes, The Big Sea. p. 204.

²Hughes, Fields of Wonder, pp. 43-44.

persona, and the next three stanzas represent the actions and symbols from which the theme is abstracted. The constructively ambiguous voice of the first stanza is appropriate for at least two interpretations: 1) "both the earth-meaning and the sky-meaning were fulfilled; 2) "the earth-meaning, which is also the sky-meaning, was fulfilled." The poem does not merely establish the unity but also the relationship between the two worlds, both the earth and the heavens in harmony with man's use of them. The diurnal rhythm of time--morning, day, sunset, night--lights with myriad shades the circular pattern of the lover's fulfillment--awakening, bathing, playing, loving, kissing, laughing, and returning to sleep. Langston Hughes' intentional use of words for musical effect can be verified finally by his description of "words." They "are only printed symbols for sounds, tones, and rhythms."¹

Langston Hughes was explicit about whose rhythm and whose emotions should make up poetry; his biographer writes:

Good writing, Langston Hughes believe, comes out of your own life. You start at home, with what you know best. . . .²

Mr. Hughes understood the difficulty of this seemingly easy task:

¹Martin Bernheimer, "Entrances and Exits: Langston Hughes," in The Philharmonic Hall Program, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts 1962-1963 (Published by Saturday Review), pp. 10.

²Meltzer, Langston Hughes, p. ix.

You have to learn to be yourself, . . . natural and undeceived as to who you are, calmly and surely you.¹

as well as its reward:

You will find the world in your own eyes, if they learn how to see, in your heart if it learns how to feel, and in your own fingers, if they learn how to touch. What your fingers transfer to paper--if you are able to make yourself into a writer--will grow and grow and grow until it reaches everybody's world.²

Mr. Hughes chiefly valued poetry based on the experiences of the common man:

The best poetry is not written in books, but comes from the lives of men and women in the streets.³

Langston Hughes followed his own advice, using his personal experience for the subject matter of much of his poetry.

From his first autobiography,

When I was in the seventh grade, I got my first regular job, cleaning up the lobby and toilets of an old hotel near the school I attended. I kept the mirrors and the spittoons shined and the halls scrubbed.⁴

From this menial work comes the poem "Brass Spittoons"

Clean the spittoons, boy.
 Detroit,
 Chicago
 Atlantic City,
 Palm Beach.
 Clean the spittoons.
 The steam in hotel kitchens,

¹Ibid. ²Ibid., p. 250.

³Hughes Glorifies Com . . . (mutilated newspaper), The Michigan Ch . . . (mutilated), Saturday, April 15, 1939. See in Box 40, The Langston Hughes Papers, Countee Cullen Memorial Collection, Trevor Arnett Library, Atlanta University, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁴The Big Sea, p. 22.

And the smoke in hotel lobbies,
 And the slime in hotel spittoons:
 Part of my life.

Hey, boy!
 A nickel,
 A dime,
 A dollar,
 Two dollars a day.

Hey, boy!
 A nickel,
 A dime,
 A dollar,
 Two dollars
 Buys shoes for the baby.
 House rent to pay.
 Gin on Saturday,
 Church on Sunday.

My God!
 Babies and gin and church
 and women and Sunday
 all mixed up with dimes and
 dollars and clean spittoons
 and house rent to pay.

Hey, boy!
 A bright bowl of brass is beautiful to the Lord.
 Bright polished brass like the cymbals
 Of King David's dancers,
 Like the wine cups of Solomon.

Hey, boy!
 A clean spittoon on the altar of the Lord.
 A clean bright spittoon all newly polished,--
 At least I can offer that.

Com' mere, boy!¹

Langston Hughes wrote more and better when he was unhappy. As a child he established a behavior pattern that suppressed the display of violent or sad emotions. One of the stimuli for this suppression was his grandmother's stories:

Through my grandmother's stories always life moved, moved heroically toward an end. Nobody ever cried in my grandmother's stories. They worked, or schemed, or fought. But no crying. When my grandmother died, I

¹Hughes, Fine Clothes To The Jew, pp. 28-29.

didn't cry, either. Something about my grandmother's stories (without her having said so) taught me the uselessness of crying about anything.¹

Although his prose strives for honesty, "Grief" comes much closer to the contradiction at the essence of this experience:

Eyes
That are frozen
From not crying.

Heart
That knows
No way of dying.²

"Poem" is Langston Hughes' natural, undeceived, and calm expression of personal grief and love after the loss of a friend:

I loved my friend.
He went away from me.
There's nothing more to say.
The poem ends,
Soft as it began--
I loved my friend.³

Hughes' poetic sensitivity and personal honesty are reflected in his matchless prose comic character Jesse B. Simple, of whom he said:

I felt that by writing honestly enough and truthfully enough and beautifully enough about one man in one

¹Hughes, The Big Sea, p. 17.

²Hughes, Fields of Wonder, p. 69.

³Hughes, The Dream Keeper (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932), p. 12.

place on one corner, 125th and Lenox, people around the world might recognize him as being one of them, no matter where they lived.¹

Hughes believed that Simple's poetic counterpart, the irresistible Albert K. Johnson or "Madam to You," would receive that same recognition.² Although Madam is obviously without a sophisticated academic background,

Shall I use Old English
Or a Roman letter?
I said, Use American.
American's better.³

Her repartee with the rent man displays a sharp, bright, and vigorous intelligence that boldly seizes the contradictions of her oppressed existence:

The rent man knocked.
He said, Howdy-do?
I said, What
Can I do for you?
He said, You know
Your rent is due.

I said, Listen,
Before I'd pay
I'd go to Hades
And rot away!

The sink is broke,
The water don't run,
And you ain't done a thing
You promised to've done.

¹Meltzer, Langston Hughes, p. 246.

²Langston Hughes, One Way Ticket (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), pp. 1-27.

³Ibid., p. 7.

Back window's cracked.
Kitchen floor squeaks,
There's rats in the cellar,
And the attic leaks.

He said, Madam,
It's not up to me.
I'm just the agent,
Don't you see?

I said, Naturally,
You pass the buck.
If it's money you want
You're out of luck.

He said, Madam,
I ain't pleased!
I said, Neither am I.

So we agrees!¹

But this chapter on Mr. Hughes' poetic theory is not the proper place to consider and analyze Madam; I shall pick her up again in Chapter II.

¹Ibid., pp. 9-10.

C. THE FUNCTION OF POETRY

Life Affirmation and Protest to Transform Society and Heart

For Langston Hughes the chief function of poetry is to affirm life, to yeah-say the excitement of living in relation to the vast rhythms of the universe of which we are a part, to untie the riddles of the gutter, in order to closer tie the knot between man and God.¹

His conception of what poetry should do is intimately related to his conception of what poetry is: the emotion and rhythm of experience (above, p. 7). What poetry does is what it is, or the essence of poetry is defined by its effect. The excitement of existence is the infusing spirit of "Dream Variation":

To fling my arms wide
In some place of the sun,
To whirl and to dance
Till the white day is done.
Then rest at cool evening
Beneath a tall tree
While night comes on gently,
Dark like me,--
That is my dream!

To fling my arms wide
In the face of the sun,
Dance! whirl! whirl!
Till the quick day is done.
Rest at pale evening. . . .
A tall, slim tree. . . .

¹Langston Hughes, "Black Writers In a Troubled World," written especially for the Colloquium at Dakar, Senegal, dated March 26, 1966, The Langston Hughes Collection, Box 3, Folder 22, Fisk University Library, Nashville, Tennessee.

Night coming tenderly
Black like me.¹

The black man affirms the reflections of his color in the gentle and tender night personified. In "To A Little Lover-Lass, Dead" Hughes straddles the riddles of both the gutter and the wider avenues of death and nothingness:

She
Who searched for lovers
In the night
Has gone the quiet way
Into the still,
Dark land of death
Beyond the rim of day.

Now like a little lonely waif
She walks
An endless street
And gives her kiss to nothingness.
Would God his lips were sweet!²

In the final lines he tenuously leaps three feet off bare certainty to an ambiguous faith in God's existence. Hughes was acutely conscious of chasmic voids in man's awareness of existence: "Poetry can be used to bridge the often imagined gulf between literature and life."³ Poetry spans this gulf because "One of the functions of poetry is to capture the nuances of everyday life,"⁴ as in "Supper Time"

¹Langston Hughes, The Weary Blues (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926), p. 43.

²Ibid., p. 31.

³Hughes, "Ten Ways To Use Poetry," p. 275.

⁴"Poet Explains Crux of Color Problems Here," Scranton Tribune, Tuesday, November 23, 1943, p. 8.

I look in the kettle, the kettle is dry.
 Look in the bread box, nothing but a fly.
 Turn on the light and look real good!
 I would make a fire but there ain't no wood.
 Look at that water dripping in the sink.
 Listen at my heartbeats trying to think.

That place where your trunk was,
 ain't no trunk no more.
 Place where your clothes hung's empty and bare.
 Stay away if you want to, and see if I care!
 If I had a fire I'd make me some tea
 And set down and drink it, myself and me.
 Lawd! I got to find me a woman for the WPA--
 Cause if I don't they'll cut down my pay.¹

The final lines of this forsaken lover's complaint reflect Langston Hughes' conviction that the nuances of everyday black lives are determined chiefly by an alien society. Milton Meltzer, one of Hughes' biographers says,

It was only natural, Langston believed, that Negro art is largely protest art. "Our time today is the time of color from Selma to Saigon, and of the heartaches and heartbreaks of racial conflict from Cape Town to Chicago."²

In "Christ In Alabama" Hughes switches some traditional identities to expose the contradiction of a Christian society that makes a recreation of lynching black people:

Christ is a Nigger,
 Beaten and black--
 O, bare your back

¹Langston Hughes, Shakespeare In Harlem (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942), p. 4.

²Langston Hughes, p. 253.

Mary is His Mother--
Mammy of the South,
Silence your mouth.

God's His Father--
White Master above,
Grant us your love.

Most holy Bastard
 Of the bleeding mouth:
Nigger Christ
On the cross of the South.¹

"Southern Mammy Sings" treats the same problem from a dramatized perspective:

Miss Gardner's in her garden.
 Miss Yardman's in her yard.
 Miss Michaelmas is at de mass
 And I am gettin' tired!
 Lawd!

The nations they is fightin'
 And the nations they done fit.
 Sometimes I think that white folks
 Ain't worth a little bit.
 No, m'am!
 Ain't worth a little bit.

Last week they lynched a colored boy.
 They hung him to a tree.
 That colored boy ain't said a thing
 But we all should be free.
 Yes, m'am!
 We all should be free.

Not meanin' to be sassy
 And not meanin' to be smart--
 But sometimes I think that white folks
 Just ain't got no heart.
 No, m'am!
 Just ain't got no heart.²

¹Langston Hughes, Scottsboro Limited (New York: Golden Stair Press, 1932), p. 7 (not numbered).

²Hughes, Shakespeare In Harlem, pp. 75-76.

"Share-Croppers" dramatizes the collective broodings of dehumanized chattel:

Just a herd of Negroes
Driven to the field,
Plowing, planting, hoeing,
To make the cotton yield.

When the cotton's picked
And the work is done
Boss man takes the money
And we get none,

Leaves us hungry, ragged
As we were before.
Year by year goes by
And we are nothing more

Than a herd of Negroes
Driven to the field--
Plowing life away
To make the cotton yield.¹

Hughes understates his analysis of the function of his poetry:

Those of us who are colored have, of course, difficulties to overcome, obstacles in the way of our dreams, that most Americans do not have. Much of my poetry has dealt with these difficulties, these problems, of the Negro people in America.²

Langston Hughes clearly understood that the problems of black people were not confined to the feudal-like relationships which persist to this moment in America's South.

"Porter" dramatizes a service worker's attitude toward the principal contradiction of all oppressed workers:

¹Ibid., p. 77.

²Langston Hughes, "Hold Fast to Dreams," The Lincoln University Bulletin, LXVII, no. 22 (Langston Hughes Issue, 1964), p. 2.

I must say
 Yes, sir,
 To you all the time.
 Yes, sir!
 Yes, sir!
 All my days
 Climbing up a great big mountain
 Of yes, sirs!

Rich old white man
 Owns the world.
 Gimme yo' shoes
 To shine.

Yes, sir!¹

The workers of the world are its slaves, not its owners.
 Chained to the wheel of poverty, the speaker of "Workin'
 Man" has an existential awareness of his material conditions:

I works all day
 Wid a pick an' a shovel.
 Comes home at night,--
 It ain't nothin' but a hovel.

I calls for ma woman
 When I opens de door.
 She's out in de street,--
 Ain't nothin' but a 'hore.

I does her good
 An' I treats her fine,
 But she don't gimme lovin'
 Cause she ain't de right kind.

I'm a hard workin' man
 An' I sho pays double
 Cause I tries to be good
 An' gits nothin' but trouble.²

¹Hughes, Fine Clothes to the Jew, p. 39.

²Ibid., p. 59.

He sees the contradictory relationship of his labor to his poverty, and of himself to his woman, but he neither connects the two contradictions nor discerns any cause of his condition that does not beg the question--"Cause she ain't de right kind." The speaker of "Prize Fighter" battles for a critical awareness of his conditions:

Only dumb guys fight.
 If I wasn't dumb
 I wouldn't be fightin'.
 I could make six dollars a day
 On the docks
 And I'd save more than I do now.
 Only dumb guys fight.¹

These poems dramatize the psychological reality of representative types of oppressed people, but Hughes did not flinch from snatching the covers off actual incidents, lives, and experiences:

Many of my verses were documentary, journalistic and topical. All across the South that winter I read my² poems about the plight of the Scottsboro boys. . . .

In "Scottsboro" his dramatic audience is the world, whose conscience must be stimulated as well as its consciousness raised:

8 Black Boys In A Southern Jail.
 World, Turn Pale!

8 black boys and one white lie.
 Is it much to die?

¹Ibid., p. 33.

²Langston Hughes, I Wonder As I Wander (American Century Series, New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), p. 58.

Is it much to die when immortal feet
 March with you down Time's street,
 When beyond steel bars sound the deathless drums
 Like a mighty heart-beat as They come?

Who comes?

Christ,
 Who fought alone.

John Brown.

That mad mob
 That tore the Bastile down
 Stone by stone.

Moses.

Jeanne d' Arc.

Dessalines.

Nat Turner.

Fighters for the free.

Lenin with the flag blood red.

(Not dead! Not dead!
 None of those is dead.)

Gandhi.

Sandino.

Evangelista, too,
 To walk with you--

8 Black Boys In A Southern Jail.
 World, Turn Pale!¹

Then Hughes narrows his subject to "The Town of Scottsboro":

Scottsboro's just a little place:
 No shame is writ across its face--

¹Hughes, Scottsboro Limited, p. 5 (not numbered).

Its court, too weak to stand against a mob,
Its people's heart, too small to hold a sob.¹

This poem is directed to the same dramatic audience, but now the world's sympathy and awareness are focused on the little, meanheartedness of the town. An attitude held by many black people is revealed in Hughes' bitter metaphor of "Justice":

That Justice is a blind goddess
Is a thing to which we black are wise.
Her bandage hides two festering sores
That once perhaps were eyes.²

"Christ in Alabama" (above, p. 20) explodes the hypocritical spell of Christian mythology by synthesizing the identity of the oppressor God with that of his victim, the oppressed.

Near the beginning of his socialist period (1935) in an essay to black writers Hughes directed them to eleven "practical" goals to be achieved through their writing. Each of these goals involves revealing the thematic contradictions within the American system of class and race oppression:

1. reveal "the lovely grinning face of Philanthropy";
2. reveal "white labor leaders who keep their unions closed against Negro workers and prevent the betterment of all workers";
3. reveal "the sick-sweet smile of organized religion" and "the half-vooodoo, half-clown face of revivalism, dulling the mind with the clap of its empty hands";
4. reveal "the false leadership that besets the Negro people";
5. reveal "the economic roots of race hatred and race fear";
6. reveal "the Contentment Tradition of the O-lovely-Negroes school of American fiction";
7. expose war;
8. expose "the My-Country-Tis-of-Thee-lie";

¹Ibid., p. 9. ²Ibid., p. 3.

9. expose problems concerning civil rights;
10. expose discrimination;
11. expose unequal opportunity for employment.¹

In the topical "Red Cross" Hughes focuses on this philanthropic institution's contradictory discrimination:

The Angel of Mercy's
Got her wings in the mud,
And all because of
Negro blood.²

"Union" focuses on the need to topple the walls that separate black and white workers:

Not me alone--
I know now--
But all the whole oppressed
Poor world,
White and black,
Must put their hands with mine
To shake the pillars of those temples
Wherein the false gods dwell
And worn-out altars stand
Too well defended,
And the rule of greed's upheld--
That must be ended.³

This same theme is treated in another poem from the same volume, "Open Letter to the South."⁴ "Communion" dramatizes

¹Langston Hughes, "To Negro Writers," in American Writers Congress, edited by Henry Hart (New York: International Publishers, 1935), pp. 139-40.

²Langston Hughes, Jim Crow's Last Stand (Atlanta: Negro Publication Society of America, 1943), p. 8.

³Langston Hughes, A New Song (New York: International Workers Order, 1938), p. 31.

⁴Ibid., p. 27.

the irrational tendencies that are encouraged by organized religion:

I was trying to figure out
 What it was all about
 But I could not figure out
 What it was all about
 So I gave up and went
 To take the sacrament
 And when I took it
 It felt good to shout!¹

"Sunday Morning Prophecy" exposes the exploitation of the Gospel: from the last lines of the minister's sermon,

Come into the church this morning,
 Brothers and Sisters
 And be saved--
 And give freely
 In the collection basket
 That I who am thy shepherd
 Might live.

Amen!²

"Democracy" reveals some of the traits of false leaders:

Democracy will not come
 Today, this year,
 Not ever
 Through compromise and fear.

I have as much right
 As the other fellow has
 To stand
 On my two feet
 And own the land.

I tire so of hearing people say,
Let things take their course.
 I do not need my freedom when I'm dead.
 I cannot live on tomorrow's bread.

¹Hughes, Fields of Wonder, p. 98.

²Hughes, One Way Ticket, p. 35.

Freedom
 Is a strong seed
 Planted
 In a great need.
 Listen, America--
 I live here, too.
 I want freedom
 Just as you.¹

Hughes humorously pokes fun at inadequate leadership in several stanzas of "The Ballad of Margie Polite":

Colored leaders
 In sound trucks
 Somebody yelled,
 Go home, you hucks!

They didn't kill the soldier,
 A race leader cried.
 Somebody hollered,
 Naw, But they tried!²

But makes a point argument against "Elderly Leaders":

The old, the cautious, the over-wise--
 Wisdom reduced to the personal equation:
 Life is a system of half-truths and lies,
 Opportunistic, convenient evasion.

Elderly,
 Famous,
 Very well paid,
 They clutch at the egg
 Their master's
 Goose laid:
 \$\$\$\$
 \$\$\$
 \$\$\$
 \$\$
 \$
 .3

¹Hughes, Jim Crow's Last Stand, p., 6.

²Hughes, One Way Ticket, p. 78.

³Langston Hughes, The Panther and the Lash (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), p. 7.

This money used to purchase "race leaders" is a symbol within the economic system that exploits the "Puzzled" black masses:

Here on the edge of hell
 Stands Harlem--
 Remembering the old lies,
 The old kicks in the back,
 The old, Be patient,
 They told us before.

Sure, we remember.
 Now, when the man at the corner store
 Says sugar's gone up another two cents,
 And bread one,
 And there's a new tax on cigarettes--
 We remember the job we never had,
 Never could get,
 And can't have now
 Because we're colored.

So we stand here
 On the edge of hell
 In Harlem
 And look out on the world
 And wonder
 What we're gonna do
 In the face of
 What we remember.¹

A stanza from "Blue Bayou" dramatizes a southern black worker's awareness of the peculiar form of economic exploitation:

White man
 Makes me work all day
 And I work too hard
 For too little pay--
 Then a white man
 Takes my woman away.²

¹Hughes, One-Way Ticket, pp. 71-72.

²Langston Hughes, Selected Poems (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), p. 170.

The "Contentment Tradition of the O-lovely-Negroes school of American Fiction" is exposed in "Theme for English B":

It's not easy to know what is true for you or me
 at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what
 I feel and see and hear, Harlem, I hear you:
 hear you, hear you--we two--you, me, talk on this page.
 (I hear New York, too) Me-who?¹

All of Hughes' protest literature stands against this contentment tradition, including his many poems against war such as "Green Memory":

A wonderful time--the War:
 when money rolled in
 and blood rolled out.
 But blood
 was far away
 from here--²
 Money was near.

The irony of "Relief" is more humorous yet just as certainly a protest against racism and militarism:

My heart is aching
 for them Poles and Greeks
 on relief way across the sea
 because I was on relief
 once in 1933.

I know what relief can be--
 it took me two years to get on WPA.
 If the war hadn't come along
 I wouldn't be out the barrel yet.
 Now, I'm almost back in the barrel again.

To tell the truth,
 if these white folks want to go ahead
 and fight another war,
 or even two,
 the one to stop 'em won't be me.

Would you?³

¹Ibid., p. 247. ²Ibid., p. 237. ³Ibid., p. 238.

Instead of a patriotic American dream the black man's history will probably cause an "American Heartbreak":

I am the American Heartbreak--
 Rock on which Freedom
 Stumps its toe--
 The great mistake
 That Jamestown,¹
 Made long ago.¹

But there is cause for concern over not merely the history of the race but also the plight of the individual striving for civil equality and human recognition:

MERRY-GO-ROUND

Colored child

at carnival

Where is the Jim Crow section
 On this merry-go-round,
 Mister, cause I want to ride?
 Down South where I come from
 White and colored
 Can't sit side by side.
 Down South on the train
 There's a Jim Crow car.
 On the bus we're put in the back--
 But there ain't no back
 To a merry-go-round!
 Where's the horse
 For a kid that's black?²

"The Black Man Speaks" of discrimination:

I swear to the Lord
 I still can't see
 Why Democracy means
 Everybody but me.

¹Ibid., p. 9.

²Hughes, The Panther and the Lash, p. 92.

I swear to my soul
 I can't understand
 Why Freedom don't apply
 To the black man.

I swear, by gum,
 I really don't know
 Why in the name of Liberty
 You treat me so.

Down South you make me ride
 In a Jim Crow car.
 From Los Angeles to London
 You spread your color bar.

Jim Crow Army,
 And Navy, too--
 Is Jim Crow Freedom the best
 I can expect from you?

I simply raise these questions
 Cause I want you to state
 What kind of a world
 We're fighting to create.

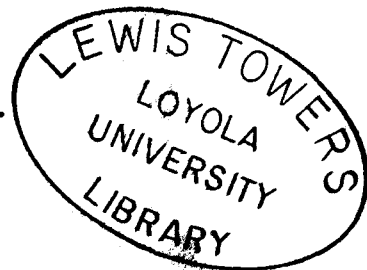
If we're fighting to create
 A free world tomorrow,
 Why not end right now
 Old Jim Crow's sorrow?¹

Jim Crow is the term used by many people to refer to legalized Southern segregation of black and white people. Hughes thought that World War II would bring about "Jim Crow's Last Stand":

There was an old Crow by the name of Jim.
 The Crackers were in love with him.
 They liked him so well they couldn't stand
 To see Jim Crow get out of hand.
 But something happened, Jim's feathers fell.
 Now that Crow's begun to look like hell.

December 7, 1941:
 Pearl Harbor put Jim Crow on the run.

¹Hughes, Jim Crow's Last Stand, p. 29.



That Crow can't fight for Democracy
 And be the same old Crow he used to be--
 Although right now, even yet today,
 He still tries to act in the same old way.
 But India and China and Harlem, too,
 Have made up their minds Jim Crow is through.
 Nehru said, before he went to jail,
 Catch that Jim Crow bird, pull the feathers
 out his tail!

Marion Anderson said to the DAR,
 I'll sing for you--but drop that color bar.
 Paul Robeson said, out in Kansas City,
 To Jim Crow my people is a pity.
 Mrs. Bethune told Martin Dies,
 You ain't telling nothing but your Jim Crow lies--
 If you want to get old Hitler's goat,
 Abolish poll tax so folks can vote.
 Joe Louis said, We gonna win this war
 Cause the good Lord knows what we're fighting for!

December 7, 1941:

When Dorie Miller took gun in hand--
 Jim Crow started his last stand.
 Our battle yet is far from won.
 But when it is, Jim Crow'll be done.
 We gonna bury that son-of-a-gun!¹

Unequal employment opportunities are exposed in such poems
 as "Puzzled" (above, p. 30), "Broke,"² and "Out of Work."³

Langston Hughes assigned at least one essential
 function to all of his poetry:

. . . I have come to believe that no system of ethics,
 religion, morals, or government is of permanent value
 which does not first start with and change the

¹Ibid., p. 29.

²Langston Hughes, The Negro Mother (Los Angeles: Hugh
 Gordon Book Shop, 1958), pp. 4-7.

³Hughes, Shakespeare in Harlem, pp. 40-41.

heart.¹

Hughes intended to heighten human awareness and expand sensibility with poetry that affirmed life, that protested social injustices, and that exposed the thematic contradictions within the experiences of his audience, but he held no romantic illusions concerning the breadth of that audience: in "Sliver" he acknowledges that

Cheap little rhymes
A cheap little tune

Are sometimes as dangerous
As a sliver of the moon.

A cheap little tune
To cheap little rhymes
Can cut a man's
Throat sometimes.²

To those who will listen he dialogues:

Goodmorning, Poetry!
Poetry, how-do-you-do?
I'm worrying along--
So I come to worry you.

He then explains himself:

To modify a line from an old blues, this means that poetry possess [sic] the power of worriation. Poetry can both delight and disturb. It can interest folks. It can upset folks. Poetry can convey both pleasure and pain. And poetry can make people think. If poetry makes people think, it might make them think constructive thoughts, even thoughts about how to change

¹Langston Hughes, "Concerning 'Goodbye Christ'" (in the Arthur Spingarn Papers, Negro Collection, Howard University Library, Howard University, Washington, D. C.), p. 4 (not numbered).

²Langston Hughes, Montage of a Dream Deferred (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), p. 67.

themselves, their town and their state for the better. Some poems, like many of the great verses in the Bible, can make people think about changing all mankind, even the whole world. Poems, like prayers, possess power. *12/19*

Then he concludes:

So goodmorning, Poetry!
Poetry, how-do-you-do!
I'm writing a poem
To see if it takes on you.¹

Even disturbing and dangerous words have a correct function:

Words have been used too much to make people doubt and fear. Words should be used to make people believe and do. Writers who have the power to use words in terms of belief and action are responsible to their power not to make people believe in the wrong things. And the wrong things are (surely everyone will agree) death instead of life, suffering instead of joy, oppression instead of freedom--whether it be freedom of the body or of the mind.²

And good words need not be remembered to be effective:

Such words, even when forgotten, may still be reflected in terms of our motives and actions, and so go out from the readers to many people who have never read the original words.³

Hughes intended for his work to overcome the inferiority complex that ravaged the values and attitudes of the black middle class:

Let the blare of Negro jazz bands and the bellowing voice of Bessie Smith singing Blues penetrate the closed ears. . . . Let . . . Aaron Douglas drawing strange black fantasies cause the . . . Negro middle class . . .

¹Langston Hughes, "Foreword," in Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee: Freedom School Poetry, compiled by Publisher, Nancy Cooper (Atlanta, Georgia, 1965), p. v (not numbered).

²Hughes, "Weaving Words," p. 54. ³Ibid.

to catch a glimmer of their own beauty.¹

Hughes made this statement in June, 1926 and followed his advice for more than forty years until his death in 1967.

Hughes never lost sight of the masses of people:

We can reveal to the Negro masses, from which we come, our potential power to transform the now ugly face of the Southland into a region of peace and plenty.

We can reveal to the white masses those Negro qualities which go beyond the mere ability to laugh and sing and dance and make music, and which are a part of the useful heritage that we place at the disposal of a future free America.²

Refreshingly, Hughes expressed no attitudes, values, or feelings of racism. From the mid-thirties he held a Marxian analysis of the problems and solutions for Americans: through writing, blacks were to "unite blacks and whites . . . on the solid ground of the daily working-class struggle to wipe out, now and forever, all the old inequalities of the past."³

For young people and students Hughes appears to be more interested in expanding their minds than their hearts: He felt that poetry "can be used to stimulate students to start a mental search."⁴ Poetry read "for its sheer sensuous beauty . . . can be used to acquaint young people

¹"A Glimmer of Their Own Beauty"; Black Sounds of the Twenties (Washington, D. C.: National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, June, 1971), title page, epigraph.

²Hughes, To Negro Writers, p. 139. ³Ibid.

⁴Hughes, "Ten Ways to Use Poetry," p. 275.

with the musical and esthetic value of words used carefully and precisely."¹

And Hughes' poetry served his own personal needs:

For ten years 1920-1930 I had been a writer of sorts, but a writer who wrote mostly because, when I felt bad, writing kept me from feeling worse; it put my inner emotions into exterior form, and gave me an outlet for words that never came in conversation.²

¹Ibid., pp. 275-76.

²Hughes, I Wonder as I Wander, p. 3.

D. THE NATURE OF THE ARTIST

A Folk Prophet

How did Langston Hughes see himself as a poet? What kind of poet did he intend to be? Milton Meltzer records that he "always thought of himself as first a poet and a writer of books. . . ." ¹ Hughes told Walter Kerr, a journalist, in a banned (by the organized reactions of red baiters) television interview: "I'm not a formal poet you know. I don't write in highly conventional form." ² Meltzer makes a cursory analysis of what Hughes meant by "conventional":

The conventional poet's beauty and lyricism were not for him. They were really related to another world, "to ivory towers, to your head in the clouds, feet floating off the earth. Unfortunately, having been born poor--and also colored--in Missouri, I was stuck in the mud from the beginning. Try as I might to float off into the clouds, poverty and Jim Crow would grab me by the heels, and right back on earth I would land. A third-floor furnished room is the nearest thing I have ever had to an ivory tower." ³

Undoubtedly, what might be beautiful or lyrical to the conventional poet might not be so to the unconventional one, but Hughes' argument against ivory tower worlds speaks chiefly against the attitude of retreat characterized by a preoccupation with lofty, remote, or intellectual thoughts and

¹Langston Hughes, p. 203.

²"I'm Not a Formal Poet. . . Highly Conventional," Nashville Tennessean, October 31, 1963, p. 4.

³Meltzer, Langston Hughes, p. 253.

language. The dramatic speaker of "Bed Time" is concerned with the practical and concrete:

If this radio was good I'd get KDQ
 And see what Count Basie's playing new.
 If I had some money I'd stroll down the street
 And jive some old broad I might meet.
 Or if I wasn't so drowsy I'd look up Joe
 And start a skin game with some chumps I know.
 Or if it wasn't so late I might take a walk
 And find somebody to kid and talk.
 But since I got to get up at day,
 I might as well put it on in the hay.
 I can sleep so good with you away!
 House is so quiet! . . . Listen at them mice.
 Do I see a couple? Or did I count twice?
 Dog-gone little mouses! I wish I was you!
 A human gets lonesome if there ain't two.¹

The persona's material conditions limit his aspirations as well as heighten his loneliness; contracted consciousness and isolation are inseparable from his squalid social and economic poverty. The "third floor furnished room" that could easily have been the setting of "Bed Time" also lends itself to "Daybreak":

Big Ben, I'm gonna bust you bang up side the wall!
 Gonna hit you in the face and let you fall!
 Alarm clock here ringing so damn loud
 You must think you got to wake up a crowd!
 You ain't got to wake up no body but me.
 I'm the only one's got to pile out in the cold,
 Make this early morning time to keep body and soul
 Together in my big old down-home frame.
 Say! You know I believe I'll change my name,
 Change my color, change my ways,
 And be a white man the rest of my days!
 I wonder if white folks ever feel bad,
 Getting up in the morning lonesome and sad?²

¹Hughes, Shakespeare in Harlem, p. 5. ²Ibid., p. 6.

This poem suggests the persona's awareness of the problems of the oppressor's time system, the sublimation of violence by the oppressed, loneliness and isolation, wage-slave employment, the desire on the part of the oppressed to reverse roles with his oppressors.

Hughes' humorous metaphor--"I was stuck in the mud from the beginning."--reflects his perception of himself as a poet:

"I'm a racial writer in the folk tradition, though some of my verse is in surprisingly good English.¹

"Vari-Colored Song" supports Hughes' appraisal:

If I had a heart of gold,
As have some folks I know,
I'd up and sell my heart of gold
And head North with the dough.

But I don't have a heart of gold.
My heart's not even lead.
It's made of plain old Georgia clay.
That's why my heart is red.

I wonder why red clay's so red
And Georgia skies so blue.
I wonder why it's yes to me,
But yes, sir, sir, to you.

I wonder why the sky's so blue
And why the clay's so red.
Why down South is always down,
And never up instead.²

The punning title as well as the subject matter support his assertion to being a "racial writer," while the forms employed are strongly influenced by the folk tradition:

¹Dan Sullivan, "Langston Hughes Likes 'Satchmo'," Saint Paul Pioneer Press, June 26, 1962, first section, p. 10.

²Hughes, The Panther and the Lash, p. 98.

I suppose in a sense you might say that I am a "folk poet." My earlier poems were in a sense inspired or derived from Negro folk songs. . . blues . . . the spirituals . . . the work songs that I knew as a child.¹

"Bad Man" sings a blues of rebellion:

I'm a bad, bad man
Cause everybody tells me so.
I'm a bad, bad man.
Everybody tells me so.
I takes ma meanness and ma licker
Everywhere I go.

I beats ma wife an'
I beats ma side gal too.
Beats ma wife an'
Beats ma side gal too.
Don't know why I do it but
It keeps me from feelin' blue.

I'm so bad I
Don't even want to be good.
So bad, bad, bad I
Don't even want to be good.
I'm goin' to de devil an'
I wouldn't go to heaben if I could.²

Hughes wrote many poems using this form which will be more closely analyzed in the next chapter. The spiritual song form inspired the poem, "Spirituals":

Rocks and the firm roots of trees.
The rising shafts of mountains.
Something strong to put my hands on.

Sing, O Lord Jesus!
Song is a strong thing.
I heard my mother singing
When life hurt her:

Gonna ride in my chariot some day!

¹Hughes, "'I'm Not a Formal Poet'," p. 44.

²Hughes, Fine Clothes to the Jew, p. 21.

The branches rise
 From the firm roots of trees.
 The mountains rise
 From the solid lap of earth.
 The waves rise
 From the dead weight of sea.

Sing, O black mother!
 Song is a strong thing.¹

But "Spirituals" is a poem about spirituals; Hughes' incomparably beautiful "Fire" (set to music by H. Johnson) is a true spiritual.

Fire,
 Fire, Lord!
 Fire gonna burn ma soul!

I ain't been good,
 I ain't been clean,--
 I been stinkin', low-down, mean.

Fire,
 Fire, Lord!
 Fire gonna burn ma soul!

Tell me, brother,
 Do you believe
 If you wanta go to heaben
 Got to moan an' grieve?

Fire,
 Fire, Lord!
 Fire gonna burn ma soul!

I been stealin',
 Been tellin' lies,
 Had more women
 Than Pharoah had wives.

Fire,
 Fire, Lord!
 Fire gonna burn ma soul!
 I means Fire, Lord!

¹Hughes, Fields of Wonder, pp. 113-114.

Fire gonna burn ma soul!¹

The moan referred to in this spiritual is an earlier folk song form from which developed both spirituals and the blues.

Hughes' "Moan" is an example of the form:

I'm deep in trouble,
Nobody to understand,
Lord, Lord!

Deep in trouble,
Nobody to understand,
O, Lord!

Gonna pray to ma Jesus,
Ask him to gimme His hand.
Ma Lord!

I'm moanin', moanin',
Nobody cares just why.
No, Lord!

Moanin', Moanin'
Feels like I could die,
O, Lord!

Sho, there must be peace,
Ma Jesus,
Somewhere in yo' sky.
Yes, Lord!²

The shout is an even earlier, more rudimentary expression of complaint or appeal:

Shout

Listen to yo' prophets,
Little Jesus!
Listen to yo' saints!³

¹Hughes, Fine Clothes to the Jew, p. 50.

²Ibid., p. 51. ³Ibid., p. 49.

Hughes considered himself a social poet; he used the forms of his people to write about their problems, and they were the nucleus of his audience: "'I mostly write social poetry, probably because I'm a Negro and have a lot of social problems'."¹ Hughes recognized the primary problem facing black people--belonging to an oppressed class:

Down Where I Am

Too many years
 Beatin' at the door--
 I done beat my
 Both fists sore.

Too many years
 Tryin' to get up there--
 Done broke my ankles down,
 Got nowhere.

Too many years
 Climbin' that hill.
 'Bout out of breath.
 I got my fill.

I'm gonna plant my feet
 On solid ground.
 If you want to see me,
Come down.²

Hughes' persona, awakening to an awareness of the strength of the masses, rejects the moribund values of upward socio-economic mobility. Hughes expressed the seriousness and absurdity of racial discrimination in poems like "Merry-Go-Round" (above, p. 32). He exposed many of these social

¹"Must Take Poetry to Public, Negro Writer Declares Here," Louisville Times, February 19, 1951.

²Hughes, The Panther and the Lash, p. 50.

problems by describing the concrete conditions and specific events in which they were manifest. Thus much of his writing was consciously documentary (above, p. 24). He did not fail to analyze this practice, and from that analysis he developed his theory and self-consciousness in regards to his character and role as a poet:

I do feel I am, I guess, what you might call 'a documentary poet.' I kinda document the happenings of our time in relation to myself and my own people . . . and of course, our democracy.¹

"Chant for Tom Mooney" and "Freedom Train" are examples of his many documentary poems, as well as those cited earlier concerning the Scottsboro brothers (above, pp. 24-25).

Based upon his knowledge of the social problems of Black people, including his personal experiences, Hughes understood himself to be a prophet, not of the religious or metaphysical order but of the social and economic order:

"'Poets', he says, 'are more or less prophets, and this poem is somewhat a prediction'."² "Warning" is an example of his type of prophesy:

Negroes,
Sweet and docile,
Meek, humble, and kind:
Beware the day
They change their mind!

Wind
In the cotton fields,

¹"'I'm Not a Formal Poet'," p. 4.

²"Langston Hughes Recites His Poems at Special Assembly."

Gentle breeze:
Beware the hour
It uproots trees!¹

¹Hughes, The Panther and the Lash, p. 100.

E. THE INTENTION OF THE ARTIST

Birth

Oh, fields of wonder
Out of which stars are born
And moon and sun
And me as well,
Like a stroke
Of lightning
In the night
Some mark
To make
Some word
To tell.¹

When speaking of the responsibilities of an artist, Hughes avoided the traditional truism--to delight and instruct:

I believe, with Anatole France that the function of the serious artist is to depict his personal facet of the wheel of truth--a wheel with many spokes.²

The truth is a whole, the natural universe of "Birth," in which the creative artist has a personal position, not isolated but interrelated and interconnected:

Hughes believes that the trend in modern poetry is towards obscurity and subjectivity. Although he is a 'socially conscious' poet using his poetry as a means of provoking thought and action on social issues--he believes that the beautiful can be as valuable as the useful. A

¹Hughes, Fields of Wonder, p. 9.

²John Upton, "Carmel American In Best Sense, Says Langston Hughes, Here On Visit," Carmel Pine Cone (Langston Hughes Papers, Special Collections, Fisk University Library, Box 10, Folder 2).

combination is desirable. "Each of us has a social obligation to something larger than ourselves."¹

Langston Hughes

The truth includes the objective world and man's subjective awareness of that world, but the objective world is primary from which arises subjective awareness. Man's life is controlled by social laws that are also facets of the truth:

Because our world is like that today, so related and interrelated, a creative writer has no right to neglect to try to understand the social and economic forces that control our world.²

Hughes understood that the most effective way of expressing his personal relation to objective forces was by focusing on the social unit to which he belonged:

I wanted to write seriously and as well as I knew how about the Negro people, and make that kind of writing earn for me a living.³

Hughes made this statement concerning his intentions in 1930. Thirty years later he said, "'I explain and illuminate the Negro condition in America. This applies to 90 percent of my work'."⁴ Hughes revealed these intentions in "Note on Commercial Theatre" addressed literally to the exploiters of Black social and cultural life:

You've done taken my blues and gone--
You also took my spirituals and gone.

¹Marcia Newfield, "Poetry of Langston Hughes Effective As Social Weapon," Justice, March 4, 1953, p. 4.

²Hughes, "Weaving Words," p. 54.

³Hughes, I Wonder As I Wander, p. 5.

⁴Emanuel, Langston Hughes, p. 68.

But someday somebody'll
Stand up and talk about me,
And write about me--
Black and beautiful--
And sing about me,
And put on plays about me!
I reckon it'll be me myself!
Yes, it'll be me.¹

Although Hughes avoided the excesses of subjectivity he supported the integrity of personal expression:

We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame.²

For Hughes, personal expression could not be separated from racial expression, as he makes evident in his criticism of a young unnamed poet (Countee Cullen):

. . . no great poet has ever been afraid of being himself. And I doubted then that, with his desire to run away spiritually from his race, this boy would ever be a great poet.³

One of Hughes' biographers notes the non-apologetic mode of Hughes' racial expression:

The Weary Blues is also a sign of how far young Langston had gone along the road mapped out by Sandburg and the other new poets. He was neither sentimental nor preachy. He displayed no false optimism and sought no romantic escape. The Speech he used was not stiff and artificial but natural and human. Instead of pleading their case, he tried to express his people's inmost feelings.⁴

¹Hughes, Jim Crow's Last Stand, p. 24.

²Hughes, "Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," Black Expression, ed. Addison Gayle, Jr. (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1969), p. 263.

³Ibid., p. 258.

⁴Meltzer, Langston Hughes, p. 79.

Hughes believed that white America's cultural and aesthetic systems of values and attitudes were rigidly opposed to the expression of Black racial and personal identity:

Nordic manners, Nordic faces, Nordic hair, Nordic art (if any), and an Episcopal heaven. A very high mountain indeed for the would-be racial artist to climb in order to discover himself and his people.¹

The Black artist must play a role in smashing the oppressive system that manipulates the values of Black people:

But, to my mind, it is the duty of the younger Negro artist, if he accepts any duties at all from outsiders, to change through the force of his art that old whispering "I want to be white," hidden in the aspirations of his people, to "why should I want to be white? I am a Negro--and beautiful!"²

"Poem" attempts to hush the old whispering:

The night is beautiful,
So the faces of my people.

The stars are beautiful,
So the eyes of my people.

Beautiful, also, is the sun.
Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people.³

The use of local color breaks the grip of oppressive images alien to the culture of the artist:

What makes any culture interesting is the individuality of the regional or tribal background.

¹Hughes, "Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," p.259.

²Ibid., p. 262.

³Hughes, The Weary Blues, p. 58.

It is the duty of the artist, writer, musician or sculptor to strive to use much local colour in his works.¹

Hughes' many poems in the blues form are examples of his use of local color. In one of his biographies he discusses the vitality of the song forms he employed:

I tried to write poems like the songs they sang on Seventh Street--gay songs, because you had to be gay or die; sad songs, because you couldn't help being sad sometimes. But gay or sad, you kept on living and you kept on going. Their songs--those of Seventh Street--had the pulse beat of the people who keep on going.²

Hughes considered that pulse beat as the core of Black racial identity:

To these themes the Negro artist can give his racial individuality, his heritage of rhythm and warmth, and his incongruous humor that so often as in the Blues, becomes ironic laughter mixed with tears.³

The artist is responsible to not merely the artistic heritage and psychological contour of his people but also their historical development and present condition:

You are right in what you say--we must recreate our own history, and background. I hope I can help on this. And make it glorious!⁴

Attitudes and values are based upon the historical

¹Okey Nwanko, "Revisiting Nigeria," Sunday Post, July 1, 1962, p. 14.

²Hughes, The Big Sea, p. 209.

³Hughes, "Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," p. 260.

⁴Hughes, Letter to Charles S. Johnson (January 31, 1941), (Julius Rosenwald Fund Archives, Fisk University Library, Langston Hughes: 1931-1948, Folder 13).

development and material conditions of existence, and, in turn, social relationships as well as material conditions are shaped by the values and attitudes held. The history of Black people was and still largely is written by those who belong to the class of their oppressors, economically and racially. More significantly, these historians know little or no active commitment to the destruction of economic and racial oppression. In an objective sense no one is qualified to write Black history except Black people or people who have attained a political awareness of what it means to belong to an oppressed class. The documentary character of Hughes' work provided material for the development of that awareness:

I document the feelings of our time in relation to myself and my own people, and, of course, the problems of our democracy. . . .¹

He was committed to his understanding that the oppression of Black people in America is an international problem that includes the oppression and exploitation of many nationalities and races:

. . . most of the Negroes in the Brigades spoke grammatically, but that others--and plenty of whites, as well--had had but little formal education and did not speak as if they were college men. Like the colonial Moors of Franco's side who had had meager, if any,

¹"'I'm Not a Formal Poet'," p. 4.

opportunities for education, Negroes from states like Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi had attended very poor schools at best, and in some communities they had none. Anyway, one of the things I was trying to show in my poems was that even the least privileged of Americans, the Southern Negroes, were represented in the International Brigades, fighting on the side of the Spanish peasants and workers to help them preserve a government that would give the peasants and workers--as were most Negroes, too--a chance at schools and the learning of grammar.¹

Under a bourgeois attack for using the language patterns of working class people, Hughes seized the opportunity to politically educate his audience. He did not fail to identify what he believed to be the fundamental problems of the world.

It is because the reactionary and Fascist forces of the world know that writers like Anand and myself, leaders like Herndon, and poets like Guillen and Roumain represent the great longing that is in the hearts of the peoples of the world to reach out their hands in friendship and brotherhood to all the white races of the earth. The Fascists know that we long to be rid of hatred and terror and oppression, to be rid of conquering and of being conquered, to be rid of all the ugliness of poverty and imperialism that eat away the heart of life today. We represent the end of race. And the Fascists know that when there is no race, there will be no Capitalism, and no more war, and no more money for the munitions makers, because the workers of the world will have triumphed.²

Hughes clearly understood that the unified forces of capitalism, imperialism, and racism can only be destroyed by the

¹Hughes, I Wonder As I Wander, p. 378.

²Langston Hughes, "Too Much Race," Speech made by Langston Hughes at the Second International Writers Congress, Crisis, V, 44 (Sept., 1937), p. 272.

consolidation of all oppressed people:

UNION

Not me alone--
 I know now--
 But all the whole oppressed
 Poor world,
 White and black,
 Must put their hands with mine
 To shake the pillars of those temples
 Wherein the false gods dwell
 And worn-out altars stand
 Too well defended,
 And the rule of greed's upheld--
 That must be ended.¹

But Hughes would not sacrifice his integrity as a writer to a political organization:

Arthur Koestler asked me one day why in Moscow I did not join the Communist Party. I told him that what I heard concerning the Party indicated that it was based on strict discipline and the acceptance of directives that I, as a writer, did not wish to accept. I did not believe political directives could be successfully applied to creative writing. They might well apply to the preparation of tracts and pamphlets, yes, but not to poetry or fiction, which to be valid, I felt, had to express as truthfully as possible the individual emotions and reactions of the writer, rather than mass directives issued to achieve practical often temporary political objectives.²

Here Hughes is not arguing for individualism, the cult of selfishness or the pit of isolation, rather Hughes believed that creativity that would reach his people must be grounded in the techniques of concreteness and not those of vagueness, abstractions, or generalizations. Thus the persona of

¹Hughes, A New Song, p. 31.

²Hughes, I Wonder as I Wander, pp. 121-22.

"Pride," though he may voice what others feel, speaks for himself:

Let all who will
 Eat quietly the bread of shame.
 I cannot,
 Without complaining loud and long,
 Tasting it's bitterness in my throat,
 And feeling to my very soul
 It's wrong.
 For honest work
 You proffer me poor pay,
 For honest dreams
 Your spit is in my face,
 And so my fist is clenched--
 Today--
 To strike your face.¹

"Pride," first published in 1930, before Hughes' trip to Russia, voices the anger of the oppressed, but not the political theory of "Union," published after the trip in 1936. Although his trip had a profound influence on his poetry and life he never joined the Party.

But Hughes did feel socially obliged and his theories reveal his intentions:

It is the social duty of Negro writers to reveal to the people the deep reservoirs of heroism within the race.²

"Frederick Douglass: 1817-1895" focuses on the heroism of the Nineteenth Century Black abolitionist:

¹Hughes, A New Song, p. 16.

²Langston Hughes, "The Need For Heroes," The Crisis, XLVIII, 6 (June, 1941), p. 185.

Douglass was someone who,
 Had he walked with wary foot
 And frightened tread,
 From very indecision
 Might be dead,
 Might have lost his soul,
 But instead decided to be bold
 And capture every street
 On which he set his feet,
 To route each path

Toward freedom's goal,
 To make each highway
 Choose his compass' choice,
 To all the world cried,
Hear my voice! . . .
Oh, to be a beast, a bird,
Anything but a slave! he said.

Who would be free
Themselves must strike
The first blow, he said.

He died in 1895.
He is not dead.¹

Hughes attacked Broadway's representation of Blacks from O'Neil's Emperor Jones produced in 1920 to The Cool World of the Sixties. Broadway's invalid image portrays the Black as a loser and neglects not merely Black survival but also Black striving and thriving.² He was concerned with more than the Blacks of the United States:

As to Negro writing and writers, one of our aims, it seems to me, should be to gather the strengths of our people in Africa and the Americas into a tapestry of words

¹Hughes, The Panther and the Lash, p. 31.

²Langston Hughes, "Negroes on Broadway," for Chicago Defender, Immediate Release (Langston Hughes Papers, Special Collections, Fisk University Library, Box 3, Folder 6).

as strong as the bronzes of Benin, the memories of Songhay and Mele, the war cry Chaka, the beat of the blues, and the Uhuru of African freedom, and give it to the world with pride and love, and the kind of humanity and affection that Senghor put into his poem: To the American Negro Troops when he said:

You bring the springtime of peace
 and hope at the end of hope
 down flowing streets of joy, boys play with dreams.
 Men dance in front of machines,
 and astonished burst out singing.
 The eyelashes of students
 are sprinkled with rose petals.
 Fruit ripens in the breast of virgins.
 And the hips of women--oh, how sweet!---
 handsomely grow heavy.
 Oh, black brothers
 warriors whose mouths are singing flowers---
 Delight of living when winter is over---
 You I salute as messenger of peace!

That is Senghor. To this I affirm, how mighty it would be if the black writers of our troubled world became our messengers of peace.¹

Hughes gathers the "strengths of our people" in "Me and My Song":

Black
 As the gentle night
 Black
 As the kind and quiet night
 Black
 As the deep productive earth
 Body
 Out of Africa
 Strong and black
 As Iron
 First smelted in
 Africa
 Song
 Out of Africa
 Deep and mellow song

¹Hughes, "Black Writers in a Troubled World," pp. 7-8.

Rich
 As the black earth
 Strong
 As black iron
 Kind
 As the black night
 My song
 From the dark lips
 Of Africa
 Deep
 As the rich earth
 Beautiful
 As the black night
 Strong
 As the first iron
 Black
 Out of Africa
 Me and my
 Song.¹

Hughes establishes a poetic identity among Black people, himself, and his poetry--they are all "Out of Africa."

One of the most concrete determiners of a writer's intention is the relations to the problem of audience:

But I began to be afraid to show my poems to anybody, because they had become very serious and very much a part of me. And I was afraid other people might not like them or understand them.²

Hughes soon outgrew these feelings of about 1918 and sent his materials to magazines and journals. In "Sun Song" Hughes draws the center of his audience:

Sun and softness,
 Sun and the beaten hardness of the earth,
 Sun and the song of all the sun stars
 Gathered together,--
 Dark ones of Africa,

¹Hughes, Jim Crow's Last Stand, p. 26.

²Hughes, The Big Sea, p. 34.

I bring you my songs
To sing on the Georgia roads.¹

This poem was first published in 1927, four years before his travels through the South to read poetry to his people.

I wanted to continue to be a poet. Yet sometimes I wondered if I was barking up the wrong tree. I determined to find out by taking poetry, my poetry, to my people. After all, I wrote about Negroes, and primarily for Negroes. Would they have me? Did they want me?²

In 1951, twenty years after Hughes began his reading tours a newspaper reported:

The only way to reach the Negro public with poetry is to take it to them yourself, author Langston Hughes believes, so he is doing just that.³

Hughes' creativeness was not satisfied with merely reading to his audiences;

On I went, driving down the road, deeper and deeper into Dixie with poetry as a passport. That fall and winter I covered every state in the South. Thousands of students heard me, and I sold many books. Alfred A. Knopf issued a special dollar edition of The Weary Blues for me to sell on tour. And because it was depression times--even a dollar was a lot of money to some people--I prepared a smaller booklet of some of my newer poems to sell for a quarter. Its title poem was "The Negro Mother." Prentiss Taylor, a young artist in Greenwich Village, designed the booklet, endowed it with a dozen handsome black and white drawings, and supervised the printing of it. Since Prentiss Taylor was white, a Southerner from Virginia, and I, colored, I

¹Hughes, Fine Clothes to the Jew, p. 69.

²Hughes, I Wonder As I Wander, pp. 41-42.

³"Must Take Poetry to Public, Negro Writer Declares Here," Louisville Times, February 19, 1951 (See the Langston Hughes Papers in the James W. Johnson Collection at the Yale University Library.).

thought maybe such a book, evidence in itself of inter-racial collaboration and good will, might help democracy a little in the South where it seemed so hard for people to be friends across the color line. Few white people bought our books. But to Negroes I sold three large printings.¹

This passage reveals Hughes' initiative, his desire to get his poetry to the people, and his concern with combatting racism, a concern that did not blind him to the differences between Blacks and whites:

Fundamentally, perhaps, all peoples are the same. But as long as the Negro remains a segregated group in this country he must reflect certain racial and environmental differences which are his own.²

Hughes was sensitive to the peculiar position of Black writers in segregated America:

The Negro writer in the United States has always had--has been forced to have in spite of himself--two audiences, one black, one white, And, as long as been America's dilemma, seldom "the twain shall meet." The fence between the two audiences is the color bar which in reality stretches around the world. Writers who feel they must straddle this fence, perforce acquire a split personality. Writers who do not care whether they straddle the fence of color or not, are usually the best writers, attempting at least to let their art leap the barriers of color, poverty, or whatever other roadblocks to artistic truth there may be. Unfortunately, some writers get artistic truth and financial success mixed up, get critical acclaim and personal integrity confused. Such are the dilemmas which the double audience creates.³

¹Hughes, I Wonder As I Wander, pp. 47-48.

²Hughes, "American Art or Negro Art?: To the Editor of The Nation," The Nation, August 18, 1926 (See the Yale collection).

³Hughes, "Black Writers in a Troubled World," p. 4.

It is certain that Hughes had to grapple with this dilemma of audiences in his own writing. What he would liked to have achieved is evident from the alternatives that he poses. The degree of his success will be analyzed in the third chapter on critical evaluation. For now, it is certain that he wrote for a public:

One poet who does consider the public, it turned out, is Langston Hughes, who admitted frankly that he does write for a public. This way, Hughes said, he has been supporting himself for 30 years, although this has meant being a "performer and reading in a loud voice."¹

The implication in this note that Hughes compromised his standards of writing in order to make money is somewhat misleading. Actually the reading process that Hughes specifies is completely congruent with the form and content of his poetry:

"Blues, ballads, and reels to be read aloud, crooned, shouted, recited, and sung. Some with gestures, some not--as you like. None with a far-away voice."²

To term Hughes' statement that he wrote for a public as an admission must involve some cultural bias of this critic that is not shared by Hughes, who would have if not broadcast at least proclaimed the fact. He respected his audience but would not sacrifice his integrity:

¹Jean White, "Poets Stage Light Hearted Debate On Whether they Have a Public," Washington Life, September 24, 1962 (See the Yale Collection.).

²Hughes, Shakespeare In Harlem, p. iii (unnumbered).

An artist must be true to his own integrity. He may hope that the public would like what he has written but if they don't then he has the satisfaction of having said what he wanted to say.¹

Moreover, he felt that the quality of one's writing was dependent on his self-integrity:

The best writers are those who possess enough self-integrity to wish first and foremost to please themselves, only themselves and nobody else.²

These statements concerning integrity, recorded in 1959 and 1966 respectively, reflect his concern and intention. What needs to be distinguished in this discussion is the concept public. Hughes was strongly criticized by a small, conservative, middle-class, section of his audience for writing about black working-class people and poor people in a style that reflected those people's cultural awareness and heritage. Hughes gave little space to defending himself from these kinds of attack, but occasionally he vigorously responded to people like Allison Davis, who charged that the content of Hughes' work was controlled by Carl Van Vechten:

My second book is what I personally desired it to be and if the poems which it contains are low-down, jazzy, cabaret-ish, sensational, and utterly uncouth in the eyes of Mr. Davis the fault is mine,--not Mr. Van Vechten's. I do not resent Mr. Davis' criticism of my work and I know very well that a great many persons agree

¹"Writer Wants a 'Big Hit': Langston Hughes On Lecture Tour." Trinidad Guardian, Friday, November 13, 1959, p. 15 (See Langston Hughes Papers, Special Collections, Fisk University Box 10, Folder 3).

²Hughes, "Black Writers in a Troubled World," p. 4.

with him,--nay, go even farther in believing that all of my verses are tainted with the evils of utter blackness. To such people my poems are as the proverbial red rag to the bull. To say the least they seem quite distasteful to them and evidently not the kind of reading diet on which they should feed, but I am not hurt about it. I have never pretended to be keeping a literary grazing pasture with food to suit all breeds of cattle. However, for the sake of truth, I cannot allow Mr. Davis' rather extravagant misstatement of fact to go unanswered, therefore this letter offering a correction.¹

In "Laughters" Hughes catalogues the kinds of people that make up his audience:

Dream singers,
 Story tellers,
 Dancers,
 Loud laughers in the hands of Fate--
 My people.
 Dish-washers,
 Elevator-boys,
 Ladies' maids,
 Crap-shooters,
 Cooks,
 Waiters,
 Jazzers,
 Nurses of babies,
 Loaders of ships,
 Rounders,
 Number writers,
 Comedians in vaudeville
 And band-men in circuses--
 Dream-singers all,--
 My people.
 Story-tellers all,--
 My people.
 Dancers--
 God! What singers!
 Singers and dancers.
 Dancers and laughers.
 Laughers?

¹Hughes, "Letter to the Editor," in "The Outer Pocket," Crisis, XXXV (September, 1928), p. 302.

Yes, laughers . . . laughers . . . laughers--
 Loud-mouthed laughers in the hands
 Of Fate.¹

These are oppressed people, the people with the least to lose--working people, their entertainers, and their leeches. And all of these people are creators, makers, and doers; while their lives reflect their creative dreams and fantasies, the poet recreates as well as reflects those lives, a poet of the people then, the oppressed people. The oppressor is personified by Fate. Two stanzas from "Corner Meeting" suggests relationships between speaker and audience that perhaps apply to Hughes and his audience:

The speaker catches fire
 looking at their faces.

His words
 jump down to stand
 in listeners' places.²

The poet is the voice of the people; he says what they say and what they would like to say. His acute sensitivity gives him a gift for hearing "Silence":

I catch the pattern
 Of your silence
 Before you speak

I do not need
 To hear a word.

In your silence
 Every tone I seek
 Is heard.³

¹Hughes, Fine Clothes to the Jew, p. 77-78.

²Hughes, Montage of a Dream Deferred, p. 25.

³Hughes, Fields of Wonder, p. 47.

"The Dream Keeper," from a volume of the same title, suggests that the poet is the harvester and watchman of his audience's imaginative and emotional faculties:

Bring me all of your dreams,
 You dreamers,
 Bring me all of your
 Heart melodies
 That I may wrap them
 In a blue cloud-cloth
 Away from the too-rough fingers
 Of the world.¹

In "Beggar Boy" the poet is symbolically transformed into flutist defying poverty, oppression, and even death to blow a song of liberation and freedom:

Is not he but a shadow in the sun--
 A bit of clay, brown, ugly, given life?
 And yet he plays upon his flute a wild free tune
 As if Fate had not bled him with her knife!²

And yet with his unwavering consciousness of the plight of poor black people in America and around the world, Hughes was not a racist:

. . . and this you will have to be too: writer first colored second. That means losing nothing of your racial identity. It is just that in the great sense of the word, anytime, any place, good art transcends land, race, or nationality, and color drops away. If you are a good writer, in the end neither blackness nor whiteness makes a difference to readers.³

¹Hughes, The Dream Keeper, p. 3.

²Ibid., p. 23.

³Hughes, "Writers: Black and White," in Black Voices, edited, with an Introduction and Biographical Notes by Abraham Chapman, A Mentor Book (New York: The New American Library, 1968), p. 621.

F. MATERIALS FOR THE ARTIST

The Wealth of Poverty, The Freedom of the Oppressed

One of the inescapable concerns for an artist is subject matter. For Langston Hughes this becomes a question of which people shall provide the experiences for his creative formations. In his "manifesto" he takes up this concern:

These common people are not afraid of spirituals, as for a long time their more intellectual brethren were, and jazz is their child. They furnish a wealth of colorful, distinctive material for any artist because they still hold their own individuality in the face of American standardizations. And perhaps these common people will give the world its truly great Negro artist, the one who is not afraid to be himself.¹

Hughes did not merely observe the common people of which he writes, he grew up in a poor, working-class environment and spent most of his life with and among these people:

Almost every Saturday night when I was in Harlem I went to a house-rent party. I wrote lots of poems about house-rent parties, and ate thereat many a fried fish and pig's foot--with liquid refreshments on the side. I met ladies' maids and truck drivers, laundry workers and shoe shine boys, seamstresses and porters, I can still hear their laughter in my ears, hear the soft slow music, and feel the floor shaking as the dancers danced.²

Hughes also worked with the people until 1930 when he decided to make his living from writing; he held such jobs as working

¹Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," pp. 259-260.

²Hughes, The Big Sea, p. 233.

on a truck-garden farm on Staten Island, delivery "boy" for a florist, mess "boy" to the petty officers on the S. S. Malone and other ships, doorman in a nightclub in Montmartre, second cook (dishwasher), beachcomber, work-away on shipboard (without pay), working in a wet wash laundry, and busboy. While in the course of his writing career he traveled extensively and periodically lived in other places, his home base was Harlem where he lived until his death in 1967. This cosmopolitan social poet was quite comfortable in the black metropolis of the world:

That Harlem should have been the basis of much that Hughes wrote may be explained by the fact that, far more than any other single spot, here were the foreign-born blacks, the carefree Negro from the South, the disappointed Negro veteran back from the war, in fact, the "melting pot" of Negro culture. Life, at least much of it, was characterized by a spirit of abandon, and it was this emphasis on the coarse, and the sensational that brought Hughes in for a critical lashing.¹

In general, the same can be said of his poetry as he said of his fiction:

In many of my stories I have used real situations and actual people as a starting point, but have tried to change and disguise them so that in fiction they would not be recognizable.²

For his choice of subject matter Hughes was strongly criticized by a small group of middle-class critics (See

¹John W. Parker, "'Tomorrow' in the Writings of Langston Hughes," College English, X, 8 (May, 1949), 439.

²Hughes, I Wonder As I Wander, p. 365.

pages 63 and 64). His attitude towards them is apparent in the "manifesto":

The Negro artist works against an undertow of sharp criticism and misunderstanding from his own group and unintentional bribes from whites. "Oh, be respectable, write about nice people, show how good we are," say the Negroes. "Be stereotyped, don't go too far, don't shatter our illusions about you, don't amuse us too seriously. We will pay you," say the whites. Both would have told Jean Toomer not to write Cane.¹

Hughes recognized a need for books about middle-class life and concerns but argues strongly against his qualification for the task of writing those books:

I sympathize deeply with those critics and these intellectuals, and I saw clearly the need for some of the kinds of books they wanted. But I did not see how they could expect every Negro author to write such books. Certainly, I personally knew very few people anywhere who were wholly beautiful and wholly good. Besides I felt that the masses of our people had as much in their lives to put into books as did those more fortunate ones who had been born with some means and the ability to work up to a master's degree at a Northern college. Anyway, I didn't know the upper class Negroes well enough to write much about them. I knew only the people I had grown up with, and they weren't people whose shoes were always shined, who had been to Harvard, or who had heard of Bach. But they seemed to me good people, too.²

Hughes sometimes overlooked or forgot some of his responses to critics:

So I didn't pay any attention to the critics who railed against the subject matter of my poems, nor did I write them protesting letters, nor in any way attempt to defend my book.³

¹Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," p. 261.

²Hughes, The Big Sea, pp. 267-268.

³Ibid., p. 268.

Hughes is referring to Fine Clothes to the Jew (1927) which he did find occasion to defend: by identifying critical generalizations:

That many of the Negro write-ups of my own collection of poems . . . were unfavorable was not surprising to me. And to be charged with painting the whole Negro race in my poems did not amaze me either. Colored critics are given to accusing all works of art touching on the Negro of portraying and representing all Negro life.¹

And in this same article Hughes retorts to the charge that his poems are indelicate with "so is life." To the charge that he deals with "low life" he asks whether "life among the better classes [is] any cleaner or any more worthy of a poet's consideration?"

What disturbed many critics was not merely the class of people Hughes wrote about but also the approach he took towards that class and the identity established between himself and that class:

Some of my earliest poems were social poems in that they were about people's problems--whole groups of people's problems--rather than my own personal difficulties. Sometimes, though, certain aspects of my personal problems happened to be also common to many other people.²

Margaret Larkin in Opportunity was the first critic to term my work proletarian, in her review of Fine Clothes. Since high school days I had been writing

¹"Says Race Leaders, Including Preachers, Flock to Harlem Cabarets," Pittsburgh Courier (April 16, 1927), First Section, p. 8.

²Hughes, "My Adventures as a Social Poet," an Article written for Phylon in the Langston Hughes Papers, Special Collections, Fisk University, Box 3, Folder 22.

poems about workers and the problems of workers--in reality poems about myself and my own problems.¹

He says of "Red Silk Stockings" in Fine Clothes that it is "an ironical poem deploring the fact that in certain southern rural communities there is little work for a beautiful colored girl to do other than the selling of her body, . . ." ²

In the same place he answers the charge that he writes about "harlots and gin-bibers" by appealing to the authority of Solomon, Homer, Shakespeare and Whitman, who "were not afraid or ashamed to include them." A French critic discusses the relationship between the poet and his subject matter and finds Hughes to be the "poet of the masses":

La vision de Hughes s'exerce pour ainsi dire en sens inverse [of McKay, Toomer, and Cullen]: il vit essentiellement en fonction du monde extérieur, et a son diapason; il se confond avec la collectivité et ne se veut pas un individu distinct d'elle, de sorte que sa poésie traduit des états d'âme collectifs comme s'ils étaient tout naturellement les siens propres. Par ailleurs, il ne s'aventure que rarement dans cette analyse minutieuse du moi par laquelle d'autres ont cherché à tracer avec rigueur les frontières de leur propre individualité.

Cette confusion quasi-totale de la personnalité du poète avec son groupe racial fait de Langston Hughes au premier chef le poète des masses.³

For Hughes this question of "soul" is the nucleus of his concern for subject matter: *soul
negritude*

¹Hughes, The Big Sea, p. 272.

²"Says Race Leaders, Including Preachers," p. 8.

³Jean Wagner, "Langston Hughes," in Les Poètes Negres des Etats-Unis, (Paris: Librairie Istra, 1963), pp. 431-432.

I do not write in the conventional forms of Keats, Poe, Dunbar or McKay. But I do not write chiefly because I'm interested in forms,--in making a sonnet or a rondeau. I write because I want to say what I have to say. And I choose the form which seems to be best to express my thoughts. I fail to see why I should be expected to copy someone else's modes of expression when it amuses me to attempt to create forms of my own. Certainly the Shakespearean sonnet would be no mould in which to express the life of Beale Street or Lenox Avenue. Nor could the emotions of State Street be captured in a rondeau. I am not interested in doing tricks with rhymes.¹ I am interested in reproducing the human soul, if I can.¹

Hughes understood Negro soul to be "not a subject, but a complex of feelings" says critic and scholar James Emanuel.² Hughes was literally the poet of "the souls of Black folks;" in their lives he discerned and expressed the wealth of their poverty--a long and rich folk tradition--and the freedom of their oppression--self-affirmation while facing the contradictions of experience.

¹"Says Race Leaders, Including Preachers," p. 8.

²Langston Hughes, p. 137.

CHAPTER II

THE TECHNIQUES OF LANGSTON HUGHES' POETRY

A. THE WEARY BLUES

The sixty-nine poems of The Weary Blues (TWB), (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926), Hughes' first collection are distributed among a proem and seven topic headings: "The Weary Blues," "Dream Variations," "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "Black Pierrot," "Water-Front Streets," "Shadows in the Sun," and "Our Land."

In the introductory "Proem" a collective Black persona sings in free verse of the historical and contemporary identity of his race. He affirms, initially, his metaphorically black skin, and African cultural heritage:

I am a Negro:
Black as the night is black,
Black like the depths of my Africa.
(TWB, p. 19)

Then in four paralleled stanzas he sketches his historical roles as slave, worker, singer, and victim, comparing the African and American experience for each role:

I've been a slave:
Caesar tole me to keep his door-steps clean.
I brushed the boots of Washington.

I've been a worker:
Under my hands the pyramids arose.
I made mortar for the Woolworth Building.

I've been a singer:
All the way from Africa to Georgia
I carried my sorrow songs.
I made ragtime.

I've been a victim:
 The Belgians cut off my hands in the Congo.
 They lynch me now in Texas.

In the last stanza the persona repeats literally the first, but now its significance has exploded. This calm and certain voice has told us of its humiliation and pain, but with pride.¹ The collective persona returns later (TWB, p. 51) to expand the metonymy "depths of my Africa" in "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," Hughes' first poem published outside of Central High School (Crisis, 1921), written while crossing the Mississippi River (June, 1920). After sketching his relation to the Euphrates, Congo, Nile and Mississippi Rivers the persona iterates a variation of the first stanza:

I've known rivers:
 Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

transforming the metonymy to a metaphor. The deep rivers are objective correlatives of the soul, and, like the rivers to their land and people, the soul is the source of the life of the race. This speaker's perceptions would find those of Conrad's Kurtz in Heart of Darkness totally alien

¹See also "Epilogue" (TWB, p. 109) for another collective persona speaking in a more natural and free voice.

for Hughes' voice Black is natural ("Black as the night is black") and comely

The night is beautiful,
So the faces of my people.
("Poem," TWB, p. 58)

not opposed to but a part of light

The stars are beautiful,
So the eyes of my people.
(Ibid.)

and the soul whirls at the center of Blackness:

Beautiful, also, is the sun.
Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people.
(Ibid.)

the late Kwame Nkrumah contrasts the African and Western views of human nature:

The traditional face of Africa includes an attitude towards man which can only be described, in its social manifestation, as being socialist. This arises from the fact that man is regarded in Africa as primarily a spiritual being, a being endowed originally with a certain inward dignity, integrity and value. It stands refreshingly opposed to the Christian idea of the original sin and degradation of man.¹

Hughes says it this way:

So I learned early not to hate all white people. And ever since, it has seemed to me that most people are generally good, in every race and in every country where I have been.²

And his world view seems to unconsciously reinterpret the

¹Consciencism (New York: Modern Reader Paperbacks, Monthly Review Press, 1970), p. 68. See above p. 72 for Hughes' intentional use of soul as subject matter for his poetry.

²Hughes, The Big Sea, p. 14. See "Lament for Dark Peoples" (TWB, p. 100) for a less effective use of a collective persona.

Christian mythology:

That's the way the world is, I thought, if you bite the specks out, its still a good apple.¹

This African and Black American view of human nature provides the platform from which Hughes' collective personae take their affirmative stances.

The speaker of "Dream Variations," although not literally collective, dreams of a metaphorical dance of self expression flowing from the vision of human nature expressed by the collective voices:

To fling my arms wide
 In some place of the sun,
 To whirl and to dance
 Till the white day is done.
 Then rest at cool evening
 Beneath a tall tree
 While night comes on gently,
 Dark like me,--
 That is my dream!
 (TWB, p. 43)

The variations of the voice in the second stanza suggest the peeling away of restraints and inhibitions:

To fling my arms wide
 In the face of the sun,
 Dance! Whirl! Whirl!
 Till the quick day is done.
 Rest at pale evening. . . .
 A tall, slim tree. . . .
 Night coming tenderly
 Black like me.
 (Ibid.)

Wedded to the cycle of the sun, the speaker emphasizes his desires by dropping prepositions to create commanding verbs,

¹Hughes, I Wonder as I Wander, p. 402.

using repetition and exclamation, becoming more concrete, and by the climaxing intensity of his final analogy. Hughes illuminated some of the significance of these race conscious poems in a 1964 article, "Stereotypes":

To be Negro and yet not afraid of being Negro is to possess what the French West African writers call negritude. Sartre termed it "anti-racist racism," which could mean pride in being black without objecting to others being white.¹

In 1966 he said,

Had the word negritude been in use in Harlem in the twenties, Cullen, as well as McKay, Johnson, Toomer, and I, might have been called poets of negritude--²

Hughes felt that "certainly pride of heritage and consciousness of race was ingrained in us."³

Although Hughes re-created the real dreams of his people, he did not mistake those dreams for reality, and yet he projected the mythical role of "The Dream Keeper" demonstrating his concern for man's capacity to dream:

Bring me all of your dreams,
You dreamers.
Bring me all of your
Heart melodies
That I may wrap them
In a blue cloud-cloth
Away from the too rough fingers
Of the world.

(TWB, p. 94)

¹New York Post, Dec. 31, 1964, p. 54, see at Yale University, James Weldon Johnson Collection, The Langston Hughes Papers.

²Hughes, "The Twenties: Harlem and Its Negritude," African Forum, I, 4 (Spring, 1966), 16.

³Ibid., p. 18.

Throughout his poetic career Hughes continually returned to the subject matter of dreams, often a metaphor of man's imaginative powers as in "As I grew Older":

It was a long time ago.
I have almost forgotten my dreams.
But it was there then,
In front of me,
Bright like a sun,--
My dream.

(TWB, p. 55)

The speaker faintly remembers a bright dream of long ago:¹

And then the wall rose,
Rose slowly,
Slowly,
Between me and my dream.
Rose slowly, slowly,
Dimming,
Hiding,
The light of my dream.
Rose until it touched the sky,--
The wall.

The speaker's dramatic description of the imprisoning wall that shuts out the light of his dream projects the experience before the reader's imagination. Then the wrenching terseness of

Shadow.
I am black.

crystallizes what too many Black people discover of Western civilization: central to its ethos is the identification of blackness with denial, disappointment, shortcoming, ignorance, evil, and death. Or sexuality. And all these are

¹See also "After Many Springs" (TWB, p. 92) for another voice that searches for lost dreams.

heaped on darkness and night. Black people are then conditioned to accept their inferior status as somehow natural (like darkness and night) and appropriate (like "darky" and "spook") and ironically humorous (like "Shine" and "Lightning"). This sky-high wall is the ultimate symbol of confinement and oppression before which

I lie down in the shadow.
No longer the light of my dreams before me,
Above me.
Only the thick wall.
Only the shadow.

The speaker has discovered his own spiritual death, a discovery which faces the ineluctability of revolutionary violence if the oppressed of mankind are to be reborn:

My hands!
My dark hands!
Break through the wall!
Find my dream!
Help me to shatter this darkness,
To smash this night,
To break this shadow
Into a thousand lights of sun,
Into a thousand whirling dreams
Of sun!

(TWB, pp. 55-56)

The speaker discovers the life and hope of his hands, fundamental weapons of violence and symbols of man's violent capacity. Now his old dream, frustrated by racism, is transformed into a new dream, dialectically, that will destroy racism and release the natural creative and visionary powers of Black people. A transformation in the darkness imagery supports and complements the dream transformation

because now "dark hands" will smash the wall of darkness, of oppressive racism.

These poems should not be confused with those that display atavistic desires such as "Afraid":

We cry among the skyscrapers
 As our ancestors
 Cried among the palms in Africa
 Because we are alone,
 It is night,
 And we're afraid.
 (TWB, p. 101)

Although it is difficult to believe Africans forlornly cried under palm trees because of fear, loneliness, and the dark, it is quite easy to imagine that some would believe so. Unfortunately, I have discovered nothing as of yet to indicate Hughes was satirizing this speaker. But the romanticism of the analogy adds momentum to the poem's thrust: Black people are now and were during the Harlem Renaissance indeed isolated from not merely their cultural and historical past, but also from current world events, other peoples, and themselves. Of this, Hughes' statement, made in a different context, shows a level of self-awareness: "The artist, denied the world, takes refuge in creative imagination."¹ But it is not in the poems that

¹Hughes, "Sons of Moses and Sons of Ham Are Greatest Artist," Fisk University Library, Special Collections, Langston Hughes Papers, Box 3, Folder 6. For other poems with atavistic allusions see "Harlem Night Club" (TWB, p. 32), "Nude Young Dancer" (TWB, p. 33), "The Jester" (TWB, p. 53), and "Our Land" (TWB, p. 99).

allude to Africa that primitivism is most convincing.

In "Dillusion" the disenchanted speaker addresses a personified Harlem, a Harlem like a cruel lover:

I would be simple again,
 Simple and clean
 Like the earth,
 Like the rain,
 Nor ever know,
 Dark Harlem,
 The wild laughter
 Of your mirth
 Nor the salt tears
 Of your pain.
 Be kind to me,
 Oh, great dark city.
 Let me forget.
 I will not come
 To you again.

(TWB, p. 104)

The monologue of the free verse is convincing, sketching deftly this rather subjective persona. This desire for simplicity in both Hughes and his audience will mature almost twenty years later producing and accounting for the popularity of the matchless urban folk hero, Jesse B. Simple. But in 1929 Hughes wrote a foreword to a sociological survey for a senior sociology class at Lincoln University (Pennsylvania) which elucidates the argument of "Dillusion":

In the primitive world, where people live closer to the earth and much nearer to the stars, every inner and outer act combines to form the single harmony, life. Not just the tribal lore then, but every movement of life becomes a part of their education. They do not, as many civilized people do, neglect the truth of the physical for the sake of the mind. Nor do they teach with speech alone, but rather with all the acts of life. There are no books, so the barrier between words

and reality is not so great as with us. The earth is right under their feet. The stars are never far away. The strength of the surest dream is the strength of the primitive world.¹

Hughes' comment is from a 1940 perspective: "This mean, I suppose, that where life is simple, truth and reality are one."² Not more than a year later, after his graduation and during the depression, Hughes' maturing views of primitivism alienated him from his patron:

She wanted me to be primitive and know and feel the intuitions of the primitive. But, unfortunately, I did not feel the rhythms of the primitive surging through me, and so I could not live and write as though I did. I was only an American Negro--who had loved the surface of Africa and the rhythms of Africa--but I was not Africa! I was Chicago and Kansas City and Broadway and Harlem. And I was not what she wanted me to be. So, in the end it all came back very near to the old impasse of white and Negro again, white and Negro--as do most relationships in America.³

Ten years after this statement from his 1940 autobiography Hughes again evaluated the issue:

Now there may have been certain false values which tended at the time to be overstressed--perhaps the primitivism and that business of the "color" of Negro life was overdone. But that kind of exaggeration is inevitable, and I doubt that any real harm was done.⁴

Langston Hughes chiefly valued the voice of working class Blacks. In "Mother to Son" he adapts the testimonial form of fundamentalist religious expression--testifying--to

¹Hughes, The Big Sea, p. 311. ²Ibid. ³Ibid., p. 325.

⁴Hughes and the editor of Phylon, "Some Practical Observations: a Colloquy," Phylon XI (Fourth Quarter, 1950), p. 307.

capture the character, expression, and values of a Black woman:

Well, son, I'll tell you:
 Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
 It's had tacks in it,
 And splinters,
 And boards torn up,
 And places with no carpet on the floor--
 Bare.
 But all the time
 I'se been a-climbin' on,
 And reachin' landin's,
 And turnin' corners,
 And sometimes goin' in the dark
 Where there ain't been no light.
 So boy, don't you turn back.
 Don't you set down on the steps
 'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
 Don't you fall now--
 For I'se still goin' honey,
 I'se still climbin',
 And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
 (TWB, p. 107)

The mother's voice, its rhythm caught in the free verse, controls the poem, testifying in metaphor to the value of not merely steadfastly enduring but also aggressively pursuing life, not fantasy. After painting her ascent as an example (ll. 2-13), she advises her son to follow (ll. 14-17), for she is still doing as she has done (ll. 18-20), a process that she emphasizes by ending with her initial hyperbolic metaphor. Rhetorically, the mother makes testimony grounded in the authority of her own wisdom and experiences to persuade her son (audience). "Life for me ain't been no crystal stair" is an apothegm that forms the center for the voice's folk expression and ethos. Black dialect verbalizes the folk spirit: double negative

(ll. 2, 13), softened and muted word endings (ll. 9, 10, 11, 12, 18, 19), creative conjoining of subject pronouns with "to be" and auxiliary verbs (ll. 9, 18, 19, 3), dropping superfluous prefixes (l. 16), transforming prepositions to suffixes (l. 16), and the use of "ain't instead of "has not," Hughes said that it "is a writer's job to put down, within limits, what people say and do and think in life."¹ Monologue is one of the forms he used to express the people's usage, but he was not trying to prescribe form: "There are no 'correct' forms in writing; each person must choose his own."² A scholar of the Harlem Renaissance expresses Hughes' conviction and intention concerning voice:

Langston Hughes was convinced that beneath the artifice of middle-class Negro life there was an authentic and pure voice which the black artist would do well to interpret. It was this special well-spring of culture that should feed the Negro genius.³

A psychologist concerned with the psychology of Black people indicates the significance of oral folk tradition to the Black ethos:

¹Hughes, "My Simple Minded Friend and Me" (Written for Phylon at request of Editors), Fisk University, Library, Special Collections, Langston Hughes Papers, Box 3, Folder 2, p. 2.

²Hughes, "Langston Hughes on Writing," Fisk University, Library, Special Collections, Langston Hughes Papers, Box 3, Folder 22, p. 1.

³Nathan Irvin Huggins, Harlem Renaissance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 203.

With respect to the use of language, the oral tradition with its heavy rap, folk tales, blues, spirituals and down-home sermons has a vital impact within the black experience.¹

"Mother to Son" is one of three poems of The Weary Blues in which Hughes employs a female persona, yet the fidelity of his re-creation elicits from Black audiences the kind of recognition that a new young Black poet deftly captures--

"On Seeing an Old Friend":

yea, sweet sister,
you she can rap
in the natural tongue.²

We will study Langston Hughes' skillful treatment of black female voices in his later books, maturing with the "Madam to You" series and the incomparable dramatic monologue The Sweet Flypaper of Life.

Hughes' poems that examine "fallen women" as subject matter or thematic material contrast sharply in perspective against the image of womanhood projected in "Mother to Son." "Jazzonia" draws parallels that suggest this "fallen woman" theme:

A dancing girl whose eyes are bold
Lifts high a dress of silken gold,

¹Joseph White, "Toward a Black Psychology," Ebony, XXV, 11 (September, 1970), 50.

²Sandra Royster, in The Broadside Annual, 1972, ed. Jill Witherspoon (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1972), p. 14.

and

Were Eve's eyes
 In the first garden
 Just a bit too bold?
 Was Cleopatra gorgeous
 In a gown of gold?
 (TWB, p. 25)

Sibling gulfs of education and class separate the poetic observer from the "Young Singer":

One who sings "chansons vulgaries"
 In a Harlem cellar
 Where the jazz-band plays
 From dark to dawn
 Would not understand
 Should you tell her
 That she is like a nymph
 For some wild faun.
 (TWB, p. 28)

Or this could be a "hip" Black trying "to school" a "square" (that is, an admirer with education and class) who is out "slumming." This question of the identity of stance of the poetic observer is crucial, for he controls the perspective for all the poems which speak directly to or about "fallen women." Does the poetic observer believe these to be "fallen women," or is he consciously satirizing the values and attitudes and prejudices that generate such a view of human nature? "To Midnight Nan at Leroy's" employ a poetic observer who speaks to not the admirer but the woman herself:

Strut and wiggle,
 Shameless gal.
 Wouldn't no good fellow
 Be your pal.

Hear dat music. . . .
Jungle night.
Hear dat music. . . .
And the moon was white.

Sing your Blues song,
 Pretty baby.
 You want lovin'
 And you don't mean maybe.

Jungle lover. . . .
Night black boy. . . .
Two against the moon
And the moon was joy.

Strut and wiggle
 Shameless Nan.
 Wouldn't no good fellow
 Be your man.
 (TWB, p. 30)

Nor is the poetic audience the only difference: The observer's voice has dropped its cultured formality and now employs Black dialect and slang to reinforce his encouraging and sympathetic attitude. The 1-2-3-2-1 structure of the poem's five stanzas draws attention to the center: This stanza, a variation of the framing stanza, clarifies the poem's significance. The observer identifies with Nan: For him, as for Langston Hughes, positive response to the contradictions of experience took its forms from the cultural expression of the race; dancing and singing the blues are positive, to be valued. Nan is shameless only through the eyes of "good fellow"; for the observer she is a "Pretty baby," and together they laugh at the hypocritically prudish "good fellow," undoubtedly a victim of sexist and racist stereotyped perceptions. Arna Bontemps, one of Hughes'

closest friends for more than forty years, said, "It is true that Langston Hughes had a warm and sensitive feeling for the masses of Blacks from the beginning."¹ Hughes broadcasts his attitudes in his "manifesto":

But then there are the low-down folks, the so-called common element, and they are the majority, may the Lord be praised! . . . Their joy runs, bang! into ecstasy. Their religion soars to a shout. Work maybe a little today, rest a little tomorrow. Play awhile, sing awhile. O, let's dance.²

The observer's easy, ironic tone in "Young Prostitute" leaves little room to doubt his satire of bourgeois and petty bourgeois attitudes:

Her dark brown face
Is like a withered flower
On a broken stem.
Those kind come cheap in Harlem
So they say.
(TWB, p. 34)

The observer's analogy reveals his sensitivity and compassion for nature destroyed and contrasts sharply with the mercantilistic metaphor of human availability of the bourgeoisie (l. 4). What Hughes develops in these poems is a poetic observer of the bourgeois slummers, observers, themselves, a poetic observer who can contrast the values of the aliens and his people, and while doing so, expose the

¹Arna Bontemps, taped interview by Leslie M. Collins for Fisk University Oral Black History Project, Fisk University Library, Oral History Project, January 9, 1972.

² The "Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," p. 259. Also, see above, pp.

alien's egocentricity and inhumanity.

Hughes also employs subject matter and thematic material concerning "elevated women." The core of this theme is expressed in four poems (TWB, pp. 63-66) controlled by the voices of ardent lovers. "Songs to the Dark Virgin" are sung by a voice in a worshipping attitude:

I

Would
That I were a jewel,
A shattered jewel,
That all my shining brilliants
Might fall at thy feet,
Thou dark one.

II

Would
That I were a garment,
A shimmering, silken garment,
That all my folds
Might wrap around thy body,
Absorb thy body,
Hold and hide thy body,
Thou dark one.

III

Would
That I were a flame,
But one sharp, leaping flame
To annihilate thy body,
Thou dark one.

(TWB, p. 63)

The voice of the first song tempts the dark lover with his wish to be a jewel, which would be, of course a gift to the beloved. Then cunningly her expectations are teased as the jewel fractures. (In each of these songs the lover strives to control the virgin's emotional and imaginative

faculties; if he can keep her moving through his several intended stages, if she responds to his stimuli, then he is successful.) Then he transforms her disappointment into rapture as miraculously from the small tragedy she discovers not one but many jewels paying homage not merely by their inferior position but also by providing a veil to her dark beauty, with their "shining brilliants." The voice in the second song repeats and varies the supposition form. Now the gift is "A shimmering, silken garment," continuing both the gifts and light imagery but also suggesting greater intimacy. The mundane functions of protection and adornment (ll. 10-11) prepare for the miraculous metaphor of metaphysics defying love (ll. 12-14). In the last song the lover transforms the flame of love imagery into a real fire (ll. 15-17), overcoming its triteness and preparing for the ultimate release, the metaphorical death of the body, consumed by the fire of love. With all desires satisfied, the lover's consciousness would float in a eupheric state of blissfull afterglow.

Ardella's lover (TWB, p. 64) has a cunning method of refreshing several old cliches:

I would liken you
 To a night without stars
 Were it not for your eyes.
 I would liken you
 To a sleep without dreams
 Were it not for your songs.

The poem is an isocolon which gains its force by seeming to

deny the flattery that it actually affirms. The lover of "the Black Beloved" denies her one flattering quality only to affirm another its superior in "Poem":

Ah
 My black one,
 Thou art not beautiful
 Yet thou hast
 A loveliness
 Surpassing beauty.

Oh,
 My black one,
 Thou art not good
 Yet thou hast
 A purity
 Surpassing goodness.

Ah
 My black one,
 Thou art not luminous
 Yet an altar of jewels,
 An altar of shimmering jewels,
 Would pale in the light
 Of thy darkness,
 Pale in the light
 Of thy nightness.

(TWB, p. 65)

The last of these paradoxical variants climaxes in oxymoron-like comparisons based on the light and darkness that runs through these last three poems. The speaker of "When Sue Wears Red" (TWB, p. 66) compares her face to "an ancient cameo / Turned brown by the ages." Walking like an Egyptian queen, her beauty "Burns in my heart a love-fire sharp like pain." This lover is not speaking to his beloved, but this indirection does not slacken the flow of his hyperbole. All of these "elevated woman" poems pivot

on hyperbole in praise of Black women.

Hughes also wrote many poems concerning women that lie beyond the distorted perspectives of "fallen women" and "elevated women."¹ The narrator of "Aunt Sue's "Stories" tells of a situation similar to the one dramatized in "Mother to Son":

Aunt Sue has a head full of stories.
 Aunt Sue has a whole heart full of stories.
 Summer nights on the front porch
 Aunt Sue cuddles a brown-faced child to her bosom
 And tells him stories.

Black slaves
 Working in the hot sun,
 And black slaves
 Walking in the dewy night,
 And black slaves
 Singing sorrow songs on the banks of a mighty river
 Mingle themselves softly
 In the flow of old Aunt Sue's voice,
 Mingle themselves softly
 In the dark shadows that cross and recross
 Aunt Sue's stories.

And the dark-faced child, listening,
 Knows that Aunt Sue's stories are real stories.
 He knows that Aunt Sue
 Never got her stories out of any book at all,
 But that they came
 Right out of her own life.

And the dark-faced child is quiet
 Of a summer night
 Listening to Aunt Sue's stories.

(TWB, p. 57)

¹See analysis of "Mother to Son" above pp. 83-85, one of the most important of the "balanced women" poems but analyzed earlier because of its voice.

The narrative is sewn together with the techniques of parallelism, repetition, and variation that produce the woven effect suggested in lines 12 through 16, a fabric that serves as a metaphor for Aunt Sue's life (ll. 20-22).

"Natcha" is certainly a different kind of woman but just as "balanced":

Natcha, offering love.
 For ten shillings offering love.
 Offering: A night with me, honey.
 A long, sweet night with me.
 Come, drink palm wine.
 Come, drink kisses.
 A long, dream night with me.
(TWB, p. 79)

The form is controlled by the figure of repetition; with each successive phrase expanding from the preceding, creating a gradation that climaxes with the theme and value loaded last line. This woman of love is a kind of dream keeper. Her voice may begin initially, or after the colon of the third line; whichever, it is a topic intended to reveal not depth of character but the relationship of her role or profession to man's subjective imagination and dreams. Other figures of repetition reinforce the steps of the logical climax form: epistrophe (ll. 1-2), diacope (ll. 2-3), epanados ("offering"), and anaphora (ll. 5-6).¹ The poetic observer of "Troubled Woman" projects her misery and despair with description and imagery of a ravaged

¹See "Port Town" (TWB, p. 74) for a less economic treatment of the same subject matter.

flower:¹

She stands
 In the quiet darkness,
 This troubled woman,
 Bowed by
 Weariness and pain,
 Like an
 Autumn flower
 In the frozen rain.
 Like a
 Wind-blown autumn flower
 That never lifts its head
 Again.

(TWB, p. 86)

Hughes uses rhyme effectively to tie the woman's psychological condition to its objective correlative (ll. 5 and 77); this functional use of rhyme is not an accident but characteristic of Hughes' style. Description serves the poetic observer to paint "A Cuban Portrait" (subtitle) in "Soledad":

The shadows
 Of too many nights of love
 Have fallen beneath your eyes,
 Your eyes,
 So full of pain and passion,
 So full of lies.
 So full of pain and passion,
 Soledad,
 So deeply scarred,
 So still with silent cries.

(TWB, p. 89)

Like the other poems concerning prostitutes in this section of "balanced women" poems, this poem is analyzed here because it is informed by an awareness of man's humanity (or

¹See "Young Prostitute" (TWB, 34 and above, p. 89) for a less developed use of the flower simile.

woman's) and does not depict an awareness that has lost this sensitivity. Moved by the pain in this woman's eyes, the poetic observer sketches them and outlines the processes leading to their present condition. He is upset not by the moral question of prostitution but by the physical and emotional deterioration and its influence on her integrity. The question is not what she is or does but her ability to affirm her existence. The poetic observer uses the old metaphor of nightfall to creatively pencil the color under her eyes (ll. 1-3). Her eyes project the fact of her experience (ll. 4-5) and its resolutions: lies, loneliness, the scars of struggle, and finally, in an oxymoron which captures the expressive quality of her agony: "So still with silent cries." The poetic observer of "Mexican Market Woman" is also interested in how her past has influenced her appearance:

This ancient hag
 Who sits upon the ground
 Selling her scanty wares
 Day in day round,
 Has known high wind-swept mountains,
 And the sun has made
 Her skin so brown.

(TWB, p. 91)

Her vision sees beyond the aged surface, out to her elemental closeness and struggle with nature.

Langston Hughes was concerned with a continuum of themes stretching from the joy of life to the pain of death. Dancing the Charleston was one means to express

one's joy with life:

Negro Dancers

"Me an' ma baby's
 Got two mo' ways
 Two mo' ways to do de Charleston!
 Da, da,
 Da, da, da!
 Two mo' ways to do de Charleston!"

Soft light on the tables,
 Music gay,
 Brown-skin steppers
 In a cabaret.

White folks, laugh!
 White folks, pray!

"Me an' ma baby's
 Got two mo' ways,
 Two mo' ways to do de Charleston!"
 (TWB, p. 26)

Hughes characteristically uses various framework stanzas through the use of repetition and variation. Here the voice of the dancer frames the poetic observer's voice, but the two intervening paragraphs amplify the last, adding to its significance perspectives formerly unknown. Initially, the voice of a dancer, using black idiom and scat talk, boasts of improvising, with his or her baby, two variations of the Charleston (an Ashanti ancestral dance). Then the poetic observer describes the (Harlem Renaissance) cabaret and its "white folks" observers.

The saturation of these people's lives with the gay music becomes more apparent in "The Cat and the Saxophone," formed by interlacing dialogue and the lyrics to a popular tune:

EVERYBODY
 Half-pint,--
 Gin?
 No, make it
 LOVES MY BABY
 corn. You like
 liquor,
 don't you, honey?
 BUT MY BABY
 Sure. Kiss me,
 DON'T LOVE NOBODY
 daddy.
 BUT ME.
 Say!
 EVERYBODY
 Yes?
 WANTS MY BABY
 I'm your
 BUT MY BABY
 sweetie, ain't I?
 DON'T WANT NOBODY
 Sure.
 BUT
 Then let's
 ME,
 do it!
 SWEET ME.
 Charleston,
 Mamma!
 !
 (TWB, p. 27)

Although no observer speaks in this poem, one does listen; in stereophonic, he hears, on one hand, the lyrics suggested by the saxophone melody and, on the other, a male dancer's dialogue with first a bartender and then his "mamma."

"Harlem Night Club" draws direct relationships between the cabaret scene and hedonistic preoccupations and values such as *carpe diem*:

Sleek black boys in a cabaret.
 Jazz-band, jazz-band,--
 Play, play, PLAY!
 Tomorrow. . . . who knows?
 Dance today!

White girls eyes
 Call gay black boys.
 Black boys' lips
 Grin jungle joys.

Dark brown girls
 In blond men's arms.
 Jazz-band, jazz-band,--
 Sing Eve's charms!

White ones, brown ones,
 What do you know
 About tomorrow
 Where all paths go?

Jazz-boys, jazz,--
 Play, pLAY, PLAY!
 Tomorrow. . . is darkness.
 Joy today!
 (TWB, p. 32)

The satirical vision of the poetic observer focuses on the contradictions of this cabaret-world existence: the struggle between present desires and the future, the disparity between the reciprocal expectations of the participants, the struggle between stereotype and reality. "Cabaret" projects Hughes' awareness of the double-edged character of joy:

Does a jazz-band ever sob?
 They say a jazz-band's gay.
 Yet as the vulgar dancers whirled
 And the wan night wore away,
 One said she heard the jazz-band sob
 When the little dawn was grey.
 (TWB, p. 29)

Beneath the thin layer of good times and joy lies a cake of sorrow. Hughes expressed his own self-awareness during the period:

All of us know that the gay and sparkling life of the so-called Negro Renaissance of the '20's was not so gay

and sparkling beneath the surface as it looked.¹

An even more poetic statement of the contradiction occurs when the poetic observer speaks "To A Black Dancer in 'The Little Savoy'":

Wine-maiden
 Of the jazz-tuned night,
 Lips
 Sweet as purple dew,
 Breasts
 Like the pillows of all sweet dreams,
 Who crushed
 The grapes of joy
 And dripped their juice
 On you?
 (TWB, p. 35)

Skin-deep the joy appears unmixed until it becomes apparent that that is as far as the joy gets. Beneath the flirting and cajoling description, the question treads on images that suggest destruction and waste ("crushed" and "dripped"). The joy is superficial. "Joy" records the frustration of the speaker's allegorical pursuit:

I went to look for joy,
 Slim, dancing Joy,
 Gay, laughing Joy,
 Bright-eyed Joy,--
 And I found her
 Driving the butcher's cart
 In the arms of the butcher boy!
 Such company, such company,
 As keeps this young nymph, Joy!
 (TWB, p. 48)

This personification suitably depicts the fruitless search for abstractions in human beings.

¹Hughes, The Big Sea, p. 227.

Hughes' poetry that focuses on the sea displays an awareness of the elusiveness of joy:

WATER-FRONT STREETS

The spring is not so beautiful there,--
 But dream ships sail away
 To where the spring is wondrous rare
 And life is gay.

The spring is not so beautiful there,--
 But lads put out to sea
 Who carry beauties in their hearts
 And dreams, like me.

(TWB, p. 71)

The sailor's voice speaks of a land across the sea that will provide an escape from the drab reality of the waterfront, but he also knows that he dreams. The values sketched in "Young Sailor" resemble those of the Harlem cabaret poems:

He carries
 His own strength
 And his own laughter,
 His own today
 And his own hereafter,--
 This strong young sailor
 Of the wide seas.

What is money for?
 To spend, he says.
 And wine?
 To drink.
 And women?
 To love.
 And today?
 For joy.
 And tomorrow?
 For joy.
 And the green sea
 For strength,
 And the brown land
 For laughter.
 And nothing hereafter.

(TWB, p. 77)

The poetic observer relates to his audience a dialogue between the sailor and himself (second stanza) which forms the basis for his descriptive summary in the first stanza. The poem's one rhyme ("laughter" and "hereafter," once in each stanza) projects a dramatic tension between the observer's questions and the sailor's values and beliefs. The audience hears the echo of "Lenox Avenue: Midnight": "And the gods are laughing at us" (TWB, p. 39).

The anguish of the struggle between joy and sorrow for man's soul wrenches a monologue from "The Jester":

In one hand
 I hold tragedy
 And in the other
 Comedy,--
 Masks for the soul.
 Laugh with me.
 You would laugh!
 Weep with me.
 You would weep!
 Tears are my laughter.
 Laughter is my pain.
 Cry at my grinning mouth,
 If you will.
 Laugh at my sorrow's reign.
 I am the Black Jester,
 The dumb clown of the world,
 The booted, booted fool of silly men.
 Once I was wise.
 Shall I be wise again?

(TWB, p.53)

Logically, the structure of the monologue is a series of five antitheses (ll. 1-4, 6-9, 10-11, 12-14, 18-19), with two statements of identity sandwiched in like digressions (ll. 5 and 15-17). The stereotyped Black man speaks, for himself, without Black talk, in paradox. His diction

enables his audience to overcome racism and shortsightedness as they discover his identity with the clowns of the world, if they will. Initially, the clown tells us that he holds both tragic and comic masks for his soul in his hands. He realizes some will see that as funny, others as sad, but he invites both responses as appropriate to his paradoxical predicament. The "silly men" of the world are responsible for his condition, the oppressors whose boots are not merely on his feet but also on his soul. The dramatic irony of the last two lines underscores the urgency of his need for liberation: He is unaware of the level of wisdom that supports his own self-awareness. He differs distinctly from the persona of "As I Grew Older" (see above, pp. 79-80) who has risen to a militant stance to violently smash the forces of oppression surrounding him. The significance of "The Jester" is its conceptual vision of the relation of comedy and tragedy (also laughter and weeping, pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow) to the soul of Black people: it is oppression that has reduced the Black man to the condition of the world's fool.

A variation of the jester image appears in Hughes' love poetry such as "A Black Pierrot":

I am a black Pierrot:
She did not love me,
So I crept away into the night
And the night was black, too.

I am a black Pierrot:
 She did not love me,
 So I wept until the red dawn
 Dripped blood over the eastern hills
 And my heart was bleeding, too.

I am a black Pierrot:
 She did not love me,
 So with my once gay-colored soul
 Shrunken like a balloon without air,
 I went forth in the morning
 To seek a new brown love.

(TWB, p. 61)

Pierrot bares a simple complaint of unrequited love using the devices of parallelism, repetition, variation, and climax. His retreat into a night black like himself suggests that the cause of his being spurned was his color, but the black night also serves as a haven for his rejected spirit to pine at his loss until the sun, projecting an objective correlative of his heartbreak, rises. Pierrot, too, rises with the morning and, despite his depressed spirit, will search for love again. The droll "Pierrot"--a literary ballad--contrasts the life styles of Simple John and Pierrot, who seems much less inclined to grieve than the Black Pierrot:

I work all day,
 Said Simple John,
 Myself a house to buy.
 I work all day,
 Said Simple John,
 But Pierrot wondered why.

For Pierrot loved the long white road,
 And Pierrot loved the moon,
 And Pierrot loved a star-filled sky,
 And the breath of a rose in June.

I have one wife,
 Said Simple John,
 And, faith, I love her yet.
 I have one wife,
 Said Simple John,
 But Pierrot left Pierrot.

For Pierrot saw a world of girls,
 And Pierrot loved each one,
 And Pierrot thought all maidens fair
 As flowers in the sun.

Oh, I am good,
 Said Simple John,
 The Lord will take me in.
 Yes, I am good,

Oh, I am good,
 Said Simple John,
 The Lord will take me in.
 Yes, I am good,
 Said Simple John,
 But Pierrot's steeped in sin.

For Pierrot played on a slim guitar,
 And Pierrot loved the moon,
 And Pierrot ran down the long white road
 With the burgher's wife one June.

(TWB, pp. 67-68)

It is the narrator talking about the same person who speaks in "The Black Pierrot," or are these two lovers different. It is interesting to consider them the same and account for the differences in perception by the subjective persona in contrast to the objective narrator. The first, third and fifth stanzas vary from the traditional ballad stanza form of the other stanzas (two, four, and six): each of what would have been traditional tetrameters is divided to form a sextet with a rhyme scheme of a-b-c-a-b-c. Appropriately, the narrator employs contrasting narrative forms to

describe the contrasting personalities of Simple John and Pierrot: he tells us what Simple John has said but what Pierrot has done. The inversion of line three serves not merely the rhyme scheme but also to render Simple John somewhat stuffy and self-centered. He boasts of his industriousness, its rewards of house and wife, as well as of his uprighteousness, while casting Pierrot to the devil. Pierrot, on the other hand, loves freedom (l. 7) and life. A dreamer, he is intoxicated with both nature and women and cares little for the petty bourgeois values of Simple John, the burgher, whose simplicity is underscored not merely by the dramatic irony of his crowing but also of his finally losing his property (l. 30).

Langston Hughes made literary adaptations of other folk forms including the blues. In an editorial interview he commented:

But I have been listening to and setting down the words of blues and other folk songs as long as I can remember. That was the basis of my first book of poems, "Weary Blues."¹

This modifies an earlier statement from his autobiography that "scarcely any dialect or folk-poems were included in the Weary Blues."² Actually, there are at least ten

¹Ted Poston, "Closeup: The 'Simple' World of Langston Hughes," New York Post, CLVII, 7, sec. 2, p. 2. Seen in Fisk University, Library, Special Collections, Langston Hughes Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.

²The Big Sea, p. 271.

occurrences of dialect and folk elements, one of the most significant of which is the blues. The blues elements of The Weary Blues are literary in the sense that they are not used independently but are placed with another form: The freedom of the fantasy as a form of composition enabled Hughes to experiment with blues form, symbolism, and ethos in "Blues Fantasy":

Hey! Hey!
 That's what the
 Blues singers say.
 Singing minor melodies
 They laugh,
 Hey! Hey!

My man's done left me,
 Child, he's gone away.
 My good man's left me,
 Babe, he's gone away.
 Now the cryin' blues
 Haunts me night and day.

Hey! . . . Hey!

Weary,
 Weary,
 Trouble, pain.
 Sun's gonna shine
 Somewhere
 Again.

I got a railroad ticket,
 Pack my trunk and ride.

Sing 'em, sister!

Got a railroad ticket,
 Pack my trunk and ride.
 And when I get on the train
 I'll cast my blues aside.

Laughing,
 Hey! . . . Hey!

Laugh a loud,
 Hey! Hey!
 (TWB, pp. 37-38)

A Black critic indicates the significance of Hughes' blues poems in this volume:

On the other hand, Langston Hughes introduced the pattern of the "blues" into poetry. He made no pretense of being the poet's poet, of writing intellectual poetry, or conforming to any particular school of aesthetics. The pattern of the "blues" was, nevertheless, the first new Negro idiom introduced into American poetry since the time of Paul Lawrence Dunbar and his Negro dialect that was typical of the antebellum plantation life.¹

The narrator's commentary and refrain concerning the paradox of the blues experience are interspersed with the singing voice of a blues woman complaining of the change in her lover's heart. The paradox of the blues is that, like catharsis, although they involve disappointment and desperation rendering both the singer and his audience sad or depressed, at some time during the performance the dominant negative feelings are transformed into recessive negatives, and positive feelings of pleasure, laughter, optimism, and even elevation, all formerly recessive, become dominant, for both performer and audience. As for the Black Pierrot, the sun with the light of day beams positive and aggressive energy for the blues woman, and it serves as a central

¹Margaret Walker, "New Poets," Black Expression, Addison Gayle, Jr., 1969, p. 96.

natural symbol of the promise of tomorrow that will overcome the blues passions that cling in tonight's darkness.

The voice of "Song for a Banjo Dance"¹ focuses on the significance of the sun to the folk people:

Shake your brown feet, honey,
Shake your brown feet, chile,
Shake your brown feet, honey,
Shake 'em swift and wil'--

Get way back, honey,
Do that low-down step.
Walk on over, darling
Now! Come out
With your left.

Shake your brown feet, honey,
Shake 'em, honey chile.

Sun's going down this evening--
Might never rise no mo'
The sun's going down this very night--
Might never rise no mo'--
So dance with swift feet, honey,
(The banjo's sobbing low)
Dance with swift feet, honey--
Might never dance no mo'.

Shake your brown feet, Liza,
Shake 'em, Liza, chile,
Shake your brown feet, Liza,
(The music's soft and wil')
Shake your brown feet, Liza,
(The banjo's sobbing low)
The sun's going down this very night--
Might never rise no mo'.

(TWB, p. 36)

Although the spirit of carpe diem enlivens this poem it also casts shadows behind the dancing figures lightly burdened with the threatening promise of death. The ironic,

¹In his M.A. thesis (pp. 104) for the English Department of Howard University (Washington, D. C.), "An Analysis of the Poetry of Langston Hughes" (1967), Theodore R. Hudson identifies the form of this poem as a Ring-shout.

hyperbolic metaphor of the voice in the second stanza coaxingly prods Liza with the inevitability of her own death in order that she seize the moment to cast off the shackles of inhibitions fettering her physical, emotional, and psychological expression. If lines six and seven are taken out of the second stanza of this poem it would be a perfect blues verse form.

In "The Weary Blues" the shadow of death casts a more prominent shadow over the life of the blues man narrated by the poetic observer:¹

Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,
 Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,
 I heard a Negro play.
 Down on Lenox Avenue the other night
 By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light
 He did a lazy sway. . . .
 He did a lazy sway. . . .
 To the tune o' those Weary Blues.
 With his ebony hands on each ivory key
 He made that poor piano moan with melody.
 O Blues!
 Swaying to and fro on his rickety steel
 He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool.
 Sweet Blues!
 Coming from a black man's soul.
 O Blues!
 In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone
 I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan--
 "Ain't got nobody in all this world,
 Ain't got nobody but ma self.
 I's gwine to quit ma frownin'
 And put ma troubles on the shelf."
 Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor.

¹See also "Lenox Avenue: Midnight" (TWB, p. 39) for a persona's declaration of weariness. See also "Summer Night" (TWB, p. 103) for a less indifferent variation on this theme.

He played a few chords then he sang some more--

"I got the Weary Blues
 And I can't be satisfied.
 Got the Weary Blues
 And can't be satisfied--
 I ain't happy no mo'
 And I wish that I had died."

And far into the night he crooned that tune.
 The stars went out and so did the moon.
 The singer stopped playing and went to bed
 While the Weary Blues echoed through his head.
 He slept like a rock or a man that's dead.

(TWB, pp. 23-24)

The poetic observer narrates in weaving rhymed free verse his recent experience as part of the audience of a Harlem blues man entertainer. Using repetition, alliteration, rhyme, onomatopoeia, and refrains as well as the blues man's song to add music to his story, the speaker describes the music he heard, immediately foreshadowing narratively the blues man's sleep and thematically the burden of death that rides that sleep. The blues texture and ethos established in the first two lines is continued in lines four and five with location and atmosphere: Again the night is the time for the blues, but it's the night's light that shines the poems most evocative blues image: "By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light." The blues man's "lazy sway" develops the rocking motion of line two that creates the rhythm for a song that pleads the weariness of an isolated and lonely man, tired of the struggle between his will to live and his will to die. The blues man's control of the piano transforms it into an extension of himself (ll. 9-10), while his stool serves as both an

instrument to keep the rhythm and a symbol of man's precarious perch on the world (ll. 12-13). The observer then identifies the ontological source of the blues (ll. 14-16), shifts to the instruments of its production (l. 17), and, before he quotes the song, identifies what he conceptually hears: a Negro singing and making his piano moan (l. 18). The first stanza of blues projects a persona who intends to overcome his existential isolation by not thinking about it. Between verses the observer's attention moves to the singer's timekeeper "thumping" like a heart under his chordal bridge (ll. 23-24). In the next verse the singer, weary of the struggles of existence and unsatisfied with his compromises, indulges in death-wishing (ll. 25-30). The speaker telescopes the rest of the night (l. 31), focuses on the objective correlative of "The Weary Blues" (l. 32), and then, violating his narrative position, comments on both the psychology of the blues man and his death-like sleep (ll. 33-35).

Complementing the technique of using songs with poems are Hughes' poems concerned with the significance of song.¹ Generally, these poems describe the role of song in

¹For examples of songs within poems see "The Weary Blues," above, pp. 110-111, "Negro Dancers," above, pp. 96-97, "The Cat and the Saxophone," above, pp. 97-98, and "Blues Fantasy," above, pp. 107-08. For examples of poems about songs see "Cabaret," above, p. 99, "Harlem Night Club," above, pp. 98-99, "Beggar Boy," above, p. 66. Also see poems that are songs such as "Song for a Banjo Dance," above, p. 109, "Harlem Night Song," TWB, p. 62.

sustaining men and women through their struggles with life and against death.

For Black people in the South all too often the struggle against death could not be won, for the enemy had grown omnipresent and omnipotent. The speaker of "The South" recreates his ambivalent feelings and perceptions:

The lazy, laughing South
 With blood on its mouth.
 The sunny-faced South,
 Beast-strong,
 Idiot-brained.
 The child-minded South
 Scratching in the dead fire's ashes
 For a Negro's bones.
 Cotton and the moon,
 Warmth, earth, warmth,
 The sky, the sun, the stars,
 The magnolia-scented South.
 Beautiful, like a woman,
 Seductive as a dark-eyed whore,
 Passionate, cruel,
 Honey-lipped, syphilitic--
 That is the South.

And I, who am black, would love her
 But she spits in my face.
 And I, who am black,
 Would give her many rare gifts
 But she turns her back upon me.
 So now I seek the North--
 The cold-faced North,
 For she, they say,
 Is a kinder mistress,
 And in her house my children
 May escape the spell of the South.

(TWB, p. 54)

This black speaker personifies the South by projecting his ambivalent awareness of its contradictory relation to himself (ll. 1-17). While it is aggressively a lynch-mad, sadistically homicidal, monstrous idiot, (ll. 1-8) its

passive natural beauty masks a depraved whore, externally ravishing but internally ravaged (ll. 9-17). Spurned in his love for this hot agrarian but feudal disease (ll. 18-22), the Black reluctantly escapes, prodded by the rumors of a colder but kinder whore (ll. 23-28). This dramatic monologue exposes the effectiveness of America's racist and genocidal oppression of Black people, exploiting their African feudal history and agrarian tradition to bind them to land pimped and hustled by American imperialism.¹

The parallel growth of the urbanization of Blacks and their suicide rate reveals the hopelessness that welcomed Black people in the North, hopelessness that fed Black spirits death. The elegiac monody "To a Little Lover-Lass, Dead" laments an endless search:

She
 Who searched for lovers
 In the night
 Has gone the quiet way
 Into the still,
 Dark land of death
 Beyond the rim of day.

Now like a little lonely waif
 She walks
 An endless street
 And gives her kiss to nothingness.
 Would God his lips were sweet!
 (TWB, p. 31)

With metaphor and simile, the poetic observer projects the suicide of a prostitute as an ironic continuation of her

fruitless search for love. The paradoxical last wish (optatio) is freighted with irony, for the observer believes in neither God nor the efficacy of his prayer. Rather, he mourns so deeply because of the futility of suicide, and because he recognizes the absurdity of death's image as lover and consoler.¹ This victim easily could have written "Suicide's Note":

The calm,
Cool face of the river
Asked me for a kiss.
(TWB, p. 87)

love

The death-dealing instrument is personified as a lover playing on the cliché "kiss of death." Hughes himself had struggled with the impulse to commit suicide. Living with his muy americano father for the summer of 1919 was miserable enough to push him to the brink:

. . . most of the time I was depressed and unhappy and bored. One day, when there was no one in the house but me, I put the pistol to my head and held it there, loaded, a long time, and wondered if I would be any happier if I were to pull the trigger. But then, I began to think, if I do, I might miss something. I haven't been to the ranch yet, nor to the top of the volcano, nor to the bullfights in Mexico, nor graduated from high school, nor got married. So I put the pistol down and went back to my bookkeeping.²

The suicide's note form is not the only method of hearing the dead; the poetic form of "Death of an Old Seaman" is controlled by a persona who hears and projects the

¹Also see "Young Bride" for a variation on this theme (TWB, p. 93).

²Hughes, The Big Sea, p. 47.

voice of the old seaman speaking from the "afterlife":

We buried him high on a windy hill,
 But his soul went out to sea.
 I know, for I heard, when all was still,
 His sea-soul say to me:

Put no tombstone at my head,
 For here I do not make my bed.
 Strew no flowers on my grave,
 I've gone back to the wind and wave.
 Do not, do not weep for me,
 For I am happy with my sea.

(TWB, p. 81)

The persona's vision reveals the reconciliation of the dead: like suicide, in death he follows the pursuit of his life--the sea. "Poem" is spoken by a persona whose expression of loss is so simple that it transcends his grief:

I loved my friend.
 He went away from me.
 There's nothing more to say.
 The poem ends,
 Soft as it began,--
 I loved my friend.

(TWB, p. 95)

The lamenter's monody employs an anticlimax (ll. 1-3) followed by a climax (ll. 4-6), initiating his descending grief and culminating his ascending reconciliation with transcendent love.

But sometimes the victim struggles alone as in "Sick Room":

How quiet
 It is in this sick room
 Where on the bed
 A silent woman lies between two lovers--
 Life and Death,
 And all three covered with a sheet of pain.

(TWB, p. 88)

Hughes was very sensitive to the silent moments of experience. Here the persona's awareness of soundlessness contrasts sharply with the fierce tension of the patient's agony. The personification of the strugglers deepens the irony of the silence until the paronomasia (l. 6) broadcasts the absurdity of existence and death. The poem forms an exclamation softly silenced by the awe-inspiring presence of death. Hughes uses this same form and awareness in two of his nature poems. "Sea Calm" stirs a softened exclamation followed by a foreboding judgment:

How still,
 How strangely still
 The water is today.
 It is not good
 For water
 To be so still that way.
 (TWB, p. 75)

In the opposite direction, the moon portends a sign even more ominous:

How thin and sharp is the moon tonight!
 How thin and sharp and ghostly white
 Is the slim curved crook of the moon tonight!
 (TWB, p. 44)

This "Winter Moon" has transformed into the grim reaper's scythe. Stalked too are the earth and its vegetation in "Poème D'Automne":

The autumn leaves
 Are too heavy with color.
 The slender trees
 On the Vulcan Road
 Are dressed in scarlet and gold
 Like young courtesans
 Waiting for their lovers,

But soon the winter winds
 Will strip their bodies bare
 And then
 The sharp, sleet-stung
 Caresses of the cold
 Will be their only
 Love.

(TWB, p. 45)

With personification and metaphor the observer captures an analogy between a grove of trees in autumn and the life of prostitutes. With a metaphored conceit describing the color of the leaves the observer suggests a pretty myth of nature that prepares for the onset of winter, the courtesan personification, and death (ll. 1-2). The trees' slender shape (l. 3) contrasts ominously with their heavy leaves as well as initiates the personification continued with the identification of their brilliant but gaudy colors (l. 5). The courtesan simile (ll. 6-7) ends the first half of the poem in a climax that projects a human image in which adheres all the previously suggested qualities and relationships of nature. Moreover the feeling of expectancy, hopeful but hesitant, that pervades this half of the poem is concretized during this climax. The last half of the poem (ll. 8-15) forecasts the withering death of coming winter, a metaphor that suggests the whore's plight: physical and psychological deterioration, isolation and loneliness, and finally, a cold death.¹

he decays
 depletes
 prostitute
 weary
 loneliness

¹Also see "To the Dark Mercedes of 'El Palacio de Amer'" (TWB, p. 90) for further development of the theme of death in the life of a prostitute.

The extreme conceit of "Caribbean Sunset" suggests a death larger than man's or nature's:

God having a hemorrhage,
Blood coughed across the sky,
Staining the dark sea red,
That is sunset in the Caribbean.
(TWB, p. 76)

The internal vessel of an eternal myth has burst under the pressure of man's imaginative vision. In a land where the intensity of natural phenomena drives even its indigenous people past reality it may be easier for a foreigner to examine the mythology of his values and attitudes and perceptions.

B. FINE CLOTHES TO THE JEW

The fifty-seven poems of Fine Clothes to the Jew FCTTJ (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), are distributed among six topic headings: "Blues," "Railroad Avenue," "Glory! Halleluiah!," "Beale Street Love," "From the Georgia Roads," and "And Blues." The eight poems of "Blues" and the nine of poems of "And Blues" are blues song form. They develop the themes of the blues, melancholy, poverty and hard times, the problems and benefits of love, and alienation. The thirteen poems of Railroad Avenue focus on the occupations of oppressed ghetto dwellers: service workers, the oppressed exploiters or lumpen-proletariat, and the exploited athlete. The nine religious poems of "Glory! Halleluiah!" project visions of the afterlife, confessions and prayers for comfort, direction, attention, mercy, and understanding. The ten poems of "Beale Street Love" project sadistically brutal love, abandoned lovers, the plight of the socially ostracized would-be lover, protective concern, and felicitious love. "From the Georgia Roads" contains eight poems rooted in the Black Southern experience: regional and racial concern, pride and identification, the discovery of the inhumanity of the South, including the plight of the mulatto, and the Southern

pastime of lynching Blacks.

In Fine Clothes to the Jew Hughes transforms the blues song form itself into poetic form for the first time (see above, 106-112). In "A Note on Blues" he discusses the form, structure, and mood of the blues:

The first eight and the last nine poems in this book are written after the manner of the Negro folk-songs known as Blues. The Blues, unlike the Spirituals, have a strict poetic pattern: one long line repeated and a third line to rhyme with the first two. Sometimes the second line in repetition is slightly changed and sometimes, but very seldom, it is omitted. The mood of the Blues is almost always despondency, but when they are sung people laugh.¹

The blues transforms its listeners' moods into its opposite not despite but because of the identity between the despondent mood of both the song-poem form and the lives of its Black creators, choked and trampled by America's consummate oppression. That transformation is nourished by not merely the willful determination of black energy to survive all blows but moreso its striving to flourish and thrive. Clarifying with metaphor, the blues is a secular eucharist with the death of black lives as host and the rebirth of the living dead as epiphany. The blues singer is both priest and scapegoat whose individuality arises from his suitability for embodying, bearing and expressing the conditions of the masses of oppressed Blacks. His earthiness, sensitive emotion, and ironic humor infuse his honesty, sincerity, and humility with the energy to support both his

¹Fine Clothes to the Jew, p. 15.

confrontation with the reality of oppression and his role as ritual scapegoat. In the first step of the transformation the audience recognizes the fabric of their lives being woven by the blues. Each individual, more or less isolated from his fellows initially, gains this awareness for himself. This individual awareness is transformed into a community of experience by the antiphonal-responsorial behavior that expresses Black Americans' traditional African cultural inheritance: stimulated by the symbolic recreation of his own experience, a black person, who has not denied or been cut away from his roots, responds immediately and energetically to express his recognition of the fidelity of the creation with the movements of his body and his voice. Finger-popping, hand-clapping, foot-tapping, head-shaking, trunk-rolling, and knees swaying provide the rhythmical base to a multitude of vocal responses. A communal unity grows as each member feels others responding like himself. The development of this level of unity alone is enough to transform the despondent, but there is much more, for the interaction of self-recognition and communal awareness produces a reconciliation with life's hardships that enables the individual and the race to endure and survive. The oppressed personify the conditions of their oppression and then laugh at or ridicule them, flaunting the indomitability of the people. "Look you upon me,

Death, You have struck but I have not broken, You have descended but I will not fall. And I am not alone." This is the realization that inspires the joy, humor, and happiness of the oppressed. "We have gathered now to look upon you, O Death, and when you stoop to retrieve your crutch, our ridicule and scorn will crush you to nothing."

Hughes' sensitivity to oppression arises from the concrete conditions of his experience:

The blues, spirituals, shouts, and work poems of my second book were written while I was dragging bags of wet wash laundry about or toting trays of dirty dishes to the dumbwaiter of the Wardman Park Hotel in Washington.¹

One black critic calls blues the "folk expression of a traditionally oppressed people. . . ." ² Hughes expresses this analysis with more poetry: Blues were folk songs "born out of heartache" felt by Black people "of the black South, particularly the city South," where they were "songs of the poor streets and back alleys" to be sung alone "out of black and beaten, but unbeatable throats, from the strings of pawnshop guitars, and the chords of pianos with no ivory on the keys." ³ Hughes suggests the life giving power of this music by sketching its force with his chief symbolic images:

¹Hughes, The Big Sea, pp. 271-72.

²LeRoi Jones, Blues People (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1963), p. 176.

³Hughes, "Songs Called the Blues," Phylon, II (Second Quarter, 1941), 143.

Like the waves of the sea coming one after another, always one after another, like the earth moving around the sun, night, day--night, day--night, day--forever, so is the undertow of black music with its rhythm that never betrays you, its strength like the beat of the human heart, its humor, and its rooted power.¹

The Black Diaspora created an urban folklore that sustained Hughes' folk spirit his entire life:

I think there is an urban folklore, I mean, a lot of poeple seem to think of folklore only in connection with rural areas . . . in the deep South . . . or in the Tennessee mountains . . . or something . . .but to my mind, there is a great deal of material on the South-side of Chicago or Jefferson Street in St. Louis.²

In his early (1924) reaction to the Black Bourgeoisie of Washington, D. C. Hughes reveals that he was a street man who loved to be with the people:

From all this pretentiousness Seventh Street was a sweet relief. Seventh Street is the long, old, dirty street, where the ordinary Negroes hang out, folks with practically no family tree at all, folks who draw no color line between mulattoes and deep dark-browns, folks who work hard for a living with their hands. On Seventh Street in 1924 they played the blues, ate watermelon, barbecue, and fish sandwiches, shot pool, told tall tales, looked at the dome of the Capitol and laughed out loud.³

A Black historian and critic relates his affinity to the oppressed to his conception of poetry:

Langston Hughes conceived of poetry as the music of the common people's language, captured and tied to the images of their minds. He saw himself and his poems as the means through which ordinary Negro men

¹Hughes, The Big Sea, p. 209.

²Hughes, "'I'm Not a Formal Poet'," p. 4.

³Hughes, The Big Sea, pp. 208-09.

and women could become poets. And, perhaps, he could be the means for others to see their own beauty, see themselves as artists.¹

Hughes recognized that traditional African culture gave rise to the musical techniques and psychic and social energy of the blues.² The "peculiar institution" of American slavery influenced strongly the work songs, shouts, chants, yells, hollers, spirituals, and ballads spoken and sung by its captives, leading to the birth of the blues.³

Fine Clothes to the Jew begins with eight and ends with nine blues poems, the first and last of which are complementary blues verses announcing the contrasting messages of initially the arrival and finally the departure of the melancholy blues mood:

Hey!

Sun's a settin',
This is what I'm gonna sing.
Sun's a settin',
This is what I'm gonna sing:
I feels de blues a comin',

¹Huggins, Harlem Renaissance, p. 78.

²Cyrus Durgin, "17,500 at Arts Festival Hear Blues in the Night," Boston Globe (Wednesday, June 21, 1961), Fisk University, Library, Special Collections, Langston Hughes Papers, Box 13, Folder 14 (no article pagination).

³See LeRoi Jones' Blues People, pp. 59, 65-66, and 142; and Sidney Finkelstein's How Music Expresses Ideas (New York: International Publishers, 1970), p. 119.

Wonder what de blues'll bring?
 (FCTTJ, p. 17)

Hey! Hey!

Sun's a risin',
 This is gonna be ma song.
 Sun's a risin',
 This is gonna be ma song.
 I could be blue but
 I been blue all night long.
 (FCTTJ, p. 89)

The blues brings on the poems of Fine Clothes to the Jew.¹
 The conventional folk symbol of the sunset forecasts the coming night of prolific melancholy that will end with the sunrise, also a traditional blues convention.² Hughes uses here a persona who projects his own self-consciousness of the conditions that stimulated his creative expression. Like the opening and closing stanzas of many of his poems, through repetition and variation as well as position these poems form a kind of framework to the other poems of this volume.

Poverty fell granite hard, a slab on the imaginations of Northern urban working-class Blacks, stifling and smothering their gasps for viable alternatives to their oppressed lives:

Hard Luck

When hard luck overtakes you
 Nothin' for you to do.
 When hard luck overtakes you
 Nothin' for you to do.

¹See above, p. 1. ²See above, pp. 103 and 104.

Gather up yo' fine clothes
An' sell 'em to de Jew.

Jew takes yo' fine clothes,
Gives you a dollar an' a half.
Jew takes yo' fine clothes,
Gives you a dollar an' a half.
Go to de bootleg's,
Git some gin to make you laugh.

If I was a mule I'd
Git me a waggon to haul.
I'm so low-down I
Ain't even got a stall.

(FCTTJ, p. 18)

Poverty prods the persona to desperately pawn his "fine clothes," symbols of his imaginative flight from drabness, merely to purchase from another of his exploiters an even more harmful alcoholic trip. Chained by the brutal drudgery of mindless work, poverty, and despair, as well as the liquor, his imagination descends to the beast of burden, a symbol from his slave-laboring and share-cropping Southern rural past, with which he identifies. And yet there is humor here that relieves the poem's oppressive burden, for the persona sings of what is, which elicits the appreciative laugh of recognition that initiates the process described above.¹ Reinforcing this level is the humor of the last stanza's supposition and hyperbole. The oppressed appreciate the appropriateness and the humor of the supposition, for they have "worked like a mule" so much that

¹See above, pp. 121-123.

it appears they strive to bestialize themselves. The final hyperbole (ll. 17-18) plays with the folks' knowledge that even a mule must have shelter.

The female speaker of "Young Gal's Blues" has more perspective on the problems of death, poverty, loneliness and old age:

*em. position for
woman*

I'm gonna walk to de graveyard
'Hind ma friend Miss Cora Lee.
Gonna walk to de graveyard
'Hind ma dear friend Cora Lee
Cause when I'm dead some
Body'll have to walk behind me.

I'm goin' to de po' house
To see ma old Aunt Clew.
Goin' to de po' house
To see ma old Aunt Clew.
When I'm old an' ugly
I'll want to see somebody, too.

De po' house is lonely
An' de grave is cold.
O, de po' house is lonely,
De graveyard grave is cold.
But I'd rather be dead than
To be ugly an' old.

When love is gone what
Can a young gal do?
When love is gone, O,
What can a young gal do?
Keep on a-lovin' me, daddy,
Cause I don't want to be blue.

(FCTTJ, p. 83)

Love serves to fortify her against her melancholy pre-occupation with the bleak prospects of the future. Most of the blues poems in this volume explore variations of the love theme (eleven out of seventeen). When love is good

it is "out of sight," as the female speaker of "Ma Man" reveals:

When ma man looks at me
 He knocks me off ma feet.
 When ma man looks at me
 He knocks me off me off ma feet.
 He's got those 'lectric-shockin' eyes an'
 De way he shocks me sho is sweet.

He kin play a banjo.
 Lordy, he kin plunk, plunk, plunk.
 He kin play a banjo.
 I mean plunk, plunk . . . plunk, plunk.
 He plays good when he's sober
 An' better, better, better when he's drunk.

Eagle-rockin',
 Daddy, eagle-rock with me.
 Eagle-rockin',
 Come an' eagle-rock with me.
 Honey baby,
 Eagle-rockish as I kin be!

(FCTTJ, p. 88)

High on the spirits of love and creativity this soulful woman sings of her transformation from an object of admiration initially to finally an active subject. The humor of the first verse-stanza is based on an hyperbolic metaphor (electrical shock) that pivots on her idiomatic expression of her response (ll. 2 and 4). Both the idiomatic and literal levels of the expression are transformed in the last verse as, very much on her feet, she becomes a dance in response to his music.

Love is much more often a problem in Hughes' blues that project a spectrum of situations from lamenting the dying of a lover, through anger with a hard hearted lover,

complaining of lost love, chauvinistic bias against the opposite sex, and finally suicide and death-wishing.

"Gal's Cry For a Dying Love" answers the question posed in "Young Gal's Blues"--"When love is gone what / Can a young gal do?":

Heard de owl a hootin',
 Knowed somebody's bout to die.
 Heard de owl a hootin',
 Knowed somebody's bout to die.
 Put ma head un'neath de kiver,
 Started in to moan an' cry.

Hound dawg's barkin'
 Means he's gonna leave this world.
 Hound dawg's barkin'
 Means he's gonna leave this world.
 O, Lawd have mercy
 On a po' black girl.

Black an' ugly
 But he sho do treat me kind.
 I'm black an' ugly
 But he sho do treat me kind.
 High-in-heaben Jeses,
 Please don't take this man o' mine.
 (FCTTJ, P. 82)

This poem gives strong support to one Black critic's analysis of one of the blues' effects:

The blues impulse was a psychological correlative that obscured the most extreme ideas of assimilation for most Negroes, and made any notion of the complete abandonment of the traditional black culture an unrealizable possibility. In a sense, the middle-class spirit could not take root among most Negroes because they sensed the final fantasy involved.¹

The blues impulse surfaces with the folk superstitions concerning the natural noises of hooting and barking which reinforce the audial imagery of the girl's cry for mercy,

¹LeRoi Jones, Blues People, p. 142.

as well as with the racial inferiority complex revealed in the last stanza. The blues woman who sings "Hard Daddy" is complaining about her lover's hardheartedness:

I went to ma daddy
Says Daddy I have got de blues.
Went to ma daddy,
Says Daddy I have got de blues.
Ma daddy says Honey
Can't you bring no better news?

I cried on his shoulder but
He turned his back on me.
Cried on his shoulder but
He turned his back on me.
He said a woman's cryin's
Never gonna bother me.

I wish I had wings to
Fly like de eagle flies.
Wish I had wings to
Fly like de eagle flies.
I'd fly on ma man an'
I'd scratch out both his eyes.
(FCTTJ, p. 86)

Using "black talk" she relates her frustrated search for succor, focusing on Daddy's callous and contrary humor coldly rhymed against her melancholy (first stanza). This contrariety is furthered through the natural symbolism of his unconcerned back replacing his unsympathetic shoulder (second stanza). The humor of the last stanza moves on a surprising reversal of expectations, for her wish appears initially to be for escape, but the last sentence reveals her vindictiveness.

In "Misery" the blues woman sings a complaint that

consciously expresses the function of the blues:

Play de blues for me.
 Play de blues for me.
 No other music
 'Ll ease ma misery.

Sing a soothin' song.
 Said a soothin' song,
 Cause de man I love's done
 Done me wrong.

Can't you understand,
 O, understand
 A good woman's cryin'
 For a no-good man?

Black gal like me,
 Black gal like me
 'S got to hear a blues
 For her misery.
 (FCTTJ, p. 19)

The blues serves to dilute the misery of having an unfaithful lover. The logical humor of the poem is centered in the absurd situation of "A good woman's cryin' / For a no-good man." The stance of the speaker shifts from a self-centered concern to a collective consciousness for other good, Black women like herself.¹

For the singer of "Listen Here Blues" the enmity between the sexes has heightened her consciousness as she transforms her awareness of her experiences into testimony and advice for others:

Sweet girls, sweet girls,
 Listen here to me.

¹See "Gypsy Man" (FCTTJ, p. 22) and "Midwinter Blues" (FCTTJ, p. 84) for variations on this thematic situation.

All you sweet girls,
 Listen here to me:
 Gin an' whiskey
 Kin make you lose yo' 'ginity.

I used to be a good chile,
 Lawd, in Sunday School.
 Used to be a good chile,--
 Always in Sunday School,
 Till these licker-headed rounders
 Made me everybody's fool.

Good girls, good girls,
 Listen here to me.
 Oh, you good girls,
 Better listen to me:
 Don't you fool wid no men cause
 They'll bring you misery.

(FCTTJ, p. 85)

The poem pivots on the contradiction between her specific experiences with "licker-headed rounders" (i.e., alcoholic playboys) and the attitude exposed in her message of categorically rejecting men.

Among Hughes' blues love poems that project suicidal death wishes are those such as "Lament Over Love" that demonstrate the hopelessness of the female chauvinistic attitude of posing men as the principal contradiction:

I hope ma chile'll
 Never love a man.
 I say I hope ma chile'll
 Never love a man.
 Cause love can hurt you
 Mo'n anything else can.

I'm goin' down to de river
 An' I ain't goin' there to swim.
 Goin' down to de river,
 Ain't goin' there to swim.
 Ma true love's left me, an'
 I'm goin' there to think about him.

Love is like whiskey,
 Love is like red, red, wine.
 Love is like whiskey,
 O, like sweet red wine.
 If you wants to be happy
 You got to love all de time.

I'm goin' up in a tower
 Tall as a tree is tall.
 Say up in a tower
 Tall as a tree is tall.
 Gonna think about ma man an'
 Let ma fool-self fall.

(FCTTJ, p. 81)

The speaker squeezes herself into this suicidal impulse with her patently subjectivistic generalizing. Undoubtedly this impulse is overcome by her blues impulse as she too transforms her misery into song.¹ The humor of exaggeration (1st stanza), understatement (ll. 11-12), and caricature (l. 24), as well as the suitability of her simile (3rd stanza) energize the transformation.

The theme of alienation in the blues controls the situations of migration, homesickness, and rebellion. Black people's diaspora from America's South during this century's first generation provided them with problems as well as opportunities that continue to penetrate their lives. In "Bound No'th Blues" Hughes recreates the attitudes and energy that helped to propel that movement:

¹See "Suicide" (FCTTJ, p. 20) for a variation on this thematic situation.

Goin' down de road, Lawd,
 Goin' down de road.
 Down de road, Lawd,
 Way, way down de road.
 Got to find somebody
 To help me carry dis load.

Road's in front o' me,
 Nothin' to do but walk.
 Road's in front o' me,
 Walk . . . and walk . . . and walk.
 I'd like to meet a good friend
 To come along an' talk.

Hates to be lonely,
 Lawd, I hates to be sad.
 Says I hates to be lonely,
 Hates to be lonely an' sad,
 But ever friend you finds seems
 Like they try to do you bad.

Road, road, road, O!
 Road, road . . . road . . . road, road!
 Road, road, road, O!
 On de No'thern road.
 These Mississippi towns ain't
 Fit fer a hoppin' toad.

(FCTTJ, p. 87)

This singer initially focuses on the necessity of his journey in a monologue unconsciously directed to God, a conventional but significantly hollow vestige of the development of the secular blues form out of the earlier religious and secular song forms (see above, p. 125). This poem demonstrates the resolution of the Black man's struggle between myth and reality: Southern fundamentalist religious tradition projects a paternalistic "Lawd" as the load carrier and burden bearer (1st stanza) or the friend and companion (2nd and 3rd stanzas) of the oppressed, but this singer offhandedly calls this abstraction's attention to

his careful search among his fellow men for aid, comfort, and companionship. Escaping those "Mississippi towns" down lonesome roads signified both physical and psychological escape from the death-dealing and stasis of a benighted land that consumed Blacks in the wrinkled funky whirls of its dying feudal navel. The hyperbole of the poem's last lines suggests the degree of Southern inhumanity as it coaxes out the spirit of humor in the oppressed.¹ And oppression was indeed their condition despite their legal status:

The blues was conceived by freedmen and ex-slaves-- if not as the result of a personal or intellectual experience, at least as an emotional confirmation of and reaction to, the way in which most Negroes were still forced to exist in the United States.²

But Langston Hughes was aware of the Black man's dialectical relationship to the South as well as the conditions of oppression. In "Homesick Blues" the singer longs for home:

De railroad bridge's
A sad song in de air.
De railroad bridge's
A sad song in de air.
Ever time de trains pass
I wants to go somewhere.

I went down to de station.
Ma heart was in ma mouth.

¹Hughes treats extensively the theme of the North-ern/Southern dialectic all through his poetic career.

²LeRoi Jones, Blues People, p. 142.

Went down to de station.
Heart was in ma mouth.
Lookin' for a box car
To roll me to de South.

Homesick blues, Lawd,
'S a terrible thing to have.
Homesick blues is
A terrible thing to have.
To keep from cryin'
I opens ma mouth an' laughs.

(FCTTJ, p. 24)

The North offers merely a different kind of alienation, a variation on the Black man's oppression, not escape, not even an effective change of venue. This realization and disillusionment gave impetus to the profound yet isolated and individualistic rebellion of such people as "Bad Man":

I'm a bad, bad man
Cause everybody tells me so.
I'm a bad, bad man.
Everybody tells me so.
I takes ma meanness and ma licker
Everywhere I go.

I beats ma wife an'
I beats ma side gal too.
Beats ma wife an'
Beats ma side gal too.
Don't know why I do it but
It keeps me from feelin' blue.

I'm so bad I
Don't even want to be good.
So bad, bad, bad I
Don't even want to be good.
I'm goin' to de devil an'
I wouldn't go to heaben if I could.

(FCTTJ, p. 21)

His rejection of everything from God to girlfriend is the seed of the revolutionary spirit which will have a life and

death struggle in his future to overcome the oppressor within himself, the ultimate struggle to end his alienation.

In the second section of Fine Clothes to the Jew, "Railroad Avenue," Hughes projects the awareness and experiences of service workers, the lumpen-proletariat exploiters of the working class, and the exploited Black athlete.

Three poems develop working-class personae varying in their awareness of the oppressive forces in their lives. The interior monologue of "Brass Spittoons" projects working conditions on the job, the economics of the exploited, and the role of religion within the worker's life:

Clean the spittoons, boy.
 Detroit,
 Chicago,
 Atlantic City,
 Palm Beach.
 Clean the spittoons.
 The steam in hotel kitchens,
 And the smoke in hotel lobbies,
 And the slime in hotel spittoons:
 Part of my life.
 Hey, boy!
 A nickel,
 A dime,
 A dollar,
 Two dollars a day.
 Hey, boy!
 A nickel,
 A dime,
 A dollar,
 Two dollars
 Buys shoes for the baby.
 House rent to pay.
 Gin on Saturday,
 Church on Sunday.
 My God!
 Babies and gin and church
 and women and Sunday
 all mixed up with dimes and
 dollars and clean spittoons

and house rent to pay.

Hey, boy!

A bright bowl of brass is beautiful to the Lord.
Bright polished brass like the cymbals
Of King David's dancers,
Like the wine cups of Solomon.

Hey, boy!

A clean spittoon on the altar of the Lord.
A clean bright spittoon all newly polished,--
Com' mere, boy!

(FCTTJ, pp. 28-29)

The porter's initial thoughts pose the dialectic of his working conditions--he is oppressed by the authoritarian orders to clean (ll. 1-6) as well as by the filthy, polluted, working environment (ll. 7-10). The oppressor strengthens his oppression by prescribing a dehumanizing identity to the oppressed--boy. The oppressor conceives of the oppressed as immature and undeveloped like children, but, unlike children, they will or must remain so always. This mythic identity echoes from end to end of the porter's consciousness, considered yet unchallenged. The second section (ll. 11-30) projects his awareness of the economic contradictions in his condition. His slave wages are consumed by necessities, including liquor and religion to escape the grinding crush of reality (ll. 11-25). But his self-awareness, submerged by the dehumanization of his oppression, unable to order or classify his experiences, is confined to merely confused enumeration (ll. 26-30). As the oppressive summoning continues, boxing and splitting the poem's final section (ll. 31-40), it transforms his

confusion into a fantasy in which the symbols of his oppression coalesce in adoration offering to another master.

The speaker of "Elevator Boy" has a higher level of consciousness than the spittoon cleaner:

I got a job now
 Runnin' an elevator
 In the Dennison Hotel in Jersey.
 Job ain't no good though.
 No money around.
 Jobs are just chances
 Like everything else.
 Maybe a little luck now,
 Maybe not.
 Maybe a good job sometimes:
 Step out o' the barrel, boy.
 Two new suits an'
 A woman to sleep with.
 Maybe no luck for a long time.
 Only the elevators
 Goin' up an' down,
 Up an' down,
 Or somebody else's shoes
 To shine,
 Or Greasy pots in a dirty kitchen.
 I been runnin' this
 Elevator too long.
 Guess I'll quit now.
 (FCTTJ, p. 38)

This worker's monologue reveals a higher level of consciousness that enables him to challenge as well as analyze the contradictions of his experience. The limits of his awareness are outlined by his belief that chance and luck are responsible for his plight. "Porter" presents a more concrete analysis, and thus displays the highest level of awareness:

I must say
 Yes, sir,
 To you all the time.

Yes, sir!
 Yes, sir!
 All my days
 Climbing up a great big mountain
 Of yes, sirs!

Rich old white man
 Owns the world.
 Gimme yo' shoes
 To shine.

Yes, sir!
 (FCTTJ, p. 39)

He identifies the enemy.

Eight poems in the "Railroad Avenue" section of Fine Clothes to the Jew sketch the environment and pose the problems of the lumpen-proletariat of Black urban life. The narrator of "Railroad Avenue" catalogues photographic stills of street life (ll. 1-16) which are ominously transformed by a faceless omnipresent laughter (ll. 17-29):

Dusk dark
 On Railroad Avenue.
 Lights in the fish joints,
 Lights in the pool rooms.
 A box-car some train
 Has forgotten
 In the middle of the
 Block.
 A player piano,
 A victrola.
 942
 Was the number.
 A boy
 Lounging on a corner.
 A passing girl
 With purple powered skin.
 Laughter
 Suddenly
 Like a taut drum.
 Laughter
 Suddenly
 Neither truth nor lie.

Laughter
 Hardening the dusk dark evening.
 Laughter
 Shaking the lights in the fish joints,
 Rolling white balls in the pool rooms,
 And leaving untouched the box-car
 Some train has forgotten.
 (FCTTJ, p. 27)

Laughter, the catalyst for these stills, bursts through the existential loneliness and despair creating both tension (l. 19) and isolated movement to project the inner psychological conditions of the exploiting oppressed: hard-heartedness (l. 24), distrust (l. 26) and boredom (l. 27). The laughter need not touch the abandoned box-car (ll. 5-9 and 28-29), for through abandonment and isolation it symbolizes the forlorn existence of this class.

After this initial poem establishing the milieu Hughes presents three poems focusing on women and three poems focusing on men. The tragic mulatto situation controls the prosaic narration of "Ruby Brown" as well as the other two women poems:

She was young and beautiful
 And golden like the sunshine
 That warmed her body.
 And because she was colored
 Mayville had no place to offer her,
 Nor fuel for the clean flame of joy
 That tried to burn within her soul.

One day,
 Sitting on old Mrs. Latham's back porch
 Polishing the silver,
 She asked herself two questions
 And they ran something like this:
 What can a colored girl do

On the money from a white woman's kitchen?
And ain't there any joy in this town?

Now the streets down by the river
Know more about this pretty Ruby Brown,
And the sinister shuttered houses of the bottoms
Hold a yellow girl seeking an answer to her questions.
The good church folk do not mention
Her name any more.

But the white men,
Habitués of the high shuttered houses
Pay more money to her now
Than they ever did before,
When she worked in their kitchens.

(FCTTJ, p. 30)

This prosaic narrative suits Hughes' purpose of protesting society's ambivalent malevolence towards Black people-- economic discrimination fostering sexual exploitation. The chief figurative language of the poem projects Hughes' conception of the body-soul dialectic. He affirms both by associating to them positive images of energy-laden heat and light in the first stanza. It is not original sin but society that exploits the body and corrupts the soul. In the next stanza the narrator relates two questions Ruby Brown poses that reveal her awareness of the struggle between society and the individual. Society strives to suppress and confine both her body (ll. 13-14) and her soul (l. 15). In the third stanza the narrator personifies streets and houses as symbols of oppressive society, but these streets and houses are in the waterfront district, one of the cities where society dumps the wastes of its exploitation. These negative symbols confine Ruby Brown's

body to pimp it (ll. 16-20), while other societal forces reject her soul (ll. 21-22). In the last stanza bigoted, discriminatory, oppressive, white society exchanges its sinister money for its tainted joy of her body, while snuffing out the warmth and light of her soul. The two other poems that treat mulatto "fallen" women focus on the problems of anxiety, depression, and suicide produced by their attempts to escape the burdens of racial and economic oppression.¹

The three poems concerning men in oppressive situations also focus on methods of escape. The persona of "Crap Game" has found a creative escape from which flows an insight that can overcome anxiety and depression:

Lemme roll 'em, boy.
 I got ma tail curled!
 If a seven don't come
 'Leven ain't far away.
 An' if I craps,
 Dark baby,
 Trouble
 Don't last all de time.
 Hit 'em, bones!
 (FCTTJ, p. 34)

In the gambler's argot the dicer strings five incantations to secure his relation to his experience. The scorpion image (l. 2) symbolizes his armed and aggressive self-assurance reinforced by his optimistic view of chance (ll. 5-8).

¹"The New Cabaret Girl," FCTTJ, p. 31 and "Closing Time," FCTTJ, p. 32.

"Death of Do Dirty: A Rounder's Song" is a ballad narrated dramatically by a friend of the anti-hero.

O, you can't find a buddy
Any old time
'Ll help you out
When you ain't got a dime.

He was a friend of mine.

They called him Do Dirty
Cause he was black
An' had cut his gal
An' shot a man in de back.

Ma friend o' mine.

But when I was hungry,
Had nothin' to eat,
He bought me corn bread
An' a stew o' meat.

Good friend o' mine.

An' when de cops got me
An' put me in jail
If Dirty had de money
He'd go ma bail.

O, friend o' mine.

That night he got kilt
I was standin' in de street.
Somebody comes by
An' says yo' boy is gettin' beat.

Ma friend o' mine.

But when I got there
An' seen de ambulance
A guy was sayin'
He ain't got a chance.

Best friend o' mine.

An' do ones that kilt him,--
Damn their souls,--

I'm gonna fill 'em up full o'
Bullet holes.

Ma friend o' mine.
(FCTTJ, pp. 36-37)

In the first part (ll. 1-20) the singer renders a secular "testifying" concerning the character and strength of his friendship with Do Dirty, preparing for the second part (ll. 21-35) in which he narrates his faithful but fruitless attempt to save Do Dirty's life. Much of the poetry of this poem springs from the rounder's point of view and values expressed in the vernacular by the persona. The a-b-c-b quatrains, refrains, and two beat verses characterize Hughes' ballad form.

Hughes continues his analysis of the character of "low life's" rounder in "Sport" who could have been Do Dirty:

Life
For him
Must be
The shivering of
A great drum
Beaten with swift sticks
Then at the closing hour
The lights go out
And there is no music at all
And death becomes
An empty cabaret
And eternity an unblown saxophone
And yesterday
A glass of gin
Drunk long
Ago.

(FCTTJ, p. 40)

Like the persona in "Mother to Son" the narrator develops

a metaphor to evoke the slant of the rounder's perceptions and experiences (ll. 1-6). Unlike that persona this narrator has enough distance to perceive and evoke metaphors for death (ll. 7-11), eternity (l. 12), and the past (ll. 13-16). Jazz and the black cultural heritage provide the drum and saxophone metaphors which suggest the creative release from oppression by transforming the energy generated by that oppression. The drum metaphor of life suggests the taut hypertension of the Sport's consciousness, submerged in subjectivity (ll. 1-6). Only with death is any distance gained, any perspective from which to view or reflect (ll. 7-16).

"Saturday Night," the last poem of the "Railroad Avenue" section, catches up the threads of its other poems:

Play it once.
 O, play some more.
 Charlie is a gambler
 An' Sadie is a whore.
 A glass o' gin:
 Strut, Mr. Charlie,
 Till de dawn comes in.
 Pawn yo' gold watch
 An' diamond ring.
 Git a quart o' licker,
 Let's shake dat thing!
 Skee-de-dad! De-dad!
 Doo-doo-doo!
 Won't be nothin' left
 When de worms git through
 An' you's a long time
 Dead
 When you is
 Dead, too.
 So beat dat drum, boy!
 Shout dat song:

Shake 'em up an' shake 'em up
 All night long.
 Hey! Hey!
 Ho . . . Hum!
 Do it, Mr. Charlie,
 Till de red dawn come.
 (FCTTJ, p. 41)

The narrator's voice is loaded with irony, desperation, and inevitability which produces a determined resolution directing Charlie and Sadie to seize what they can of the music, song, dance, and intoxication of life before the rush of death overwhelms.

Religious subjects and themes control the nine poems of the third section, "Glory! Halleluia!" The first poem is a dead persona's testimony concerning the afterlife; in the second a narrator describes a prayer meeting. The other seven poems, including a moan and a spiritual, are prayers.

The dead speaker of "Judgment Day" testifies of his meeting with his Lord in rhyming couplets and quatrains, and refrain:

They put ma body in de ground,
 Ma soul went flyin' o' de town.

Lord Jesus!

Went flyin' to de stars an' moon
 A shoutin' God, I's comin' soon.

O Jesus!

Lord in heaben,
 Crown on His head,
 Says don't be 'fraid
 Cause you ain't dead.

Kind Jesus!

An' now I'm settin' clean an' bright
In de sweet o' ma Lord's sight,--

Clean an' bright,
Clean an' bright.
(FCTTJ, p. 45)

The persona rejoices over his life after and in spite of death in the presence of his anthropomorphic God.

The narrator of "Prayer Meeting" describes the occasion by focusing on the song and location of a Black woman:

Glory! Halleluiah!
De dawn's a-comin'!
Glory! Halleluiah!
De dawn's a-comin'!
A black old woman croons
In the amen-corner of the
Ebecanezer Baptist Church.
A Black old woman croons,--
De dawn's a-comin'!
(FCTTJ, p. 46)

The woman's repeated exclamations emphasize her hope, symbolized simply and naturally by the image of dawn, for spiritual salvation and social justice as well as another tomorrow.

Two short poems are prayers for mercy. The persona of "Feet O' Jesus" expresses Christian humility and anthropomorphism in a prayer for relief from life's sorrows:

At de feet o' Jesus,
Sorrow like a sea.
Lordy, let yo' mercy
Come driftin' down on me.

At de feet o' Jesus,
 At yo' feet I stand.
 O, ma little Jesus
 Please reach out yo' hand.
 (FCTTJ, p. 47)

With the hyperbolic simile for sorrow the supplicant makes an anthropomorphic appeal to God's sympathy; likewise, the pose at his feet appeals to his pride. The supplicant's humility is tempered by his familiar and proprietary stance in the last stanza; no longer leaving God's mercy to the chance of drifting, he requests an extension of the anthropomorphic hand.¹

The simplicity and directness of the speaker of "Prayer" makes his questions seem more sincere and urgent:

I ask you this:
 Which way to go?
 I ask you this:
 Which sin to bear?
 Which crown to put
 Upon my hair?
 I do not know
 Lord God,
 I do not know.
 (FCTTJ, p. 48)

The supplicant appeals to God to lift him from the horns of his dilemma. He assumes that God knows the identity of both horns, of which he remains therefore silent. His three questions reveal his perception of his role as analogous to that of Jesus, through metaphors that suggest Christ's

¹See also "Sinner" (FCTTJ, p. 53) for another example of a self-conscious appeal for mercy.

mission in the world.

The speaker of the emblematic "Angels Wings" expresses his moral guilt with traditional Christian imagery:

De angels wings is white as snow,
 O, white as snow
 White
 as
 snow.
 De angels wings is white as snow,
 But I drug ma wings
 In de dirty mire.
 O, I drug ma wings
 All through de fire.
 But de angels wings is white as snow,
 White
 as
 snow.
 (FCTTJ, p. 52)

He does not see that the angel's snow white wings may be the result of innocence or inexperience or ignorance or even privilege, while the "dirty mire" of "low life" and the painful "fire" of worldly suffering and oppression may temper man into a finer being.

Three of the prayers are song forms from black folk oral tradition. "Shout" is a shout that appeals to Jesus for audience:

Listen to yo' prophets,
 Little Jesus'.
 Listen to yo' saints!
 (FCTTJ, p. 49)

The prayer's brevity emphasizes the shouter's faith.

The persona of "Moan" expresses a more urgent need in a form of worship called moan:

I'm deep in trouble,
 Nobody to understand,
 Lord, Lord!

Deep in trouble,
 Nobody to understand,
 O, Lord!

Gonna pray to ma Jesus,
 Ask him to gimme His hand.
 Ma Lord!

I'm moanin', moanin',
 Nobody cares just why.
 No, Lord!

Moanin', moanin',
 Feels like I could die.
 O, Lord!

Sho, there must be peace,
 Ma Jesus,
 Somewhere in yo' sky.
 Yes, Lord!
 (FCTTJ, p. 51)

Both the shout and the moan gave rise to the secular blues as well as spirituals and gospels. Except for the religious references and refrain "Moan" could have been a blues, each stanza forming a line. In the first and second stanzas the persona emphasizes his worldly plight of trouble and isolation from which the only relief comes from the hand of Jesus (st. 3). Two variations of the suicidal impulse close the poem: In the face of oppressive troubles he feels more dead than alive (st. 5), but his image of heaven offers an escape from this living death (st. 6).

The singer of the spiritual "Fire" confesses his sins and fear of hell and testifies of his belief in Christian dogma in a prayer that appeals to the Lord:

Fire,
 Fire, Lord!
 Fire gonna burn ma soul!

I ain't been good,
 I ain't been clean,--
 I been stinkin', low-down,mean.

Fire,
 Fire, Lord!
 Fire gonna burn ma soul!

Tell me, brother,
 Do you believe
 If you wanta go to heaben
 Got to moan an' grieve?

Fire,
 Fire, Lord!
 Fire gonna burn ma soul!

I been stealin',
 Been tellin' lies,
 Had more women
 Than Pharaoh had wives.

Fire,
 Fire, Lord!
 Fire gonna burn ma soul!
 I means Fire, Lord!
 Fire gonna burn ma soul!
 (FCTTJ, p. 50)

The incremental repetition of the refrain gives the poem its energy. The refrain opens and closes the poem and alternate with the stanzas. Hughes was conscious of his experimentation with folk forms. Speaking of the early Twenties he said:

Well I began to sort of be interested in other forms of folk music. . . . I at that time began to write some poems in the manner of spirituals, too, and gradually I went from a folk idiom to what I guess you might call a pure idiom . . . pure lyricism.¹

¹Poston, "The 'Simple' World," p. 2.

Hughes lived with, enjoyed and carefully observed the folks who created and nourished the folk forms. While living in Washington, D. C., for example, he watched Southern migrants worshipping in "storefront" churches and singing spirituals "as they sang them in the deep South."¹ Hughes reworked these folk idioms into original patterns. In "Fire," for instance, the centrally positioned fourth stanza poses the persona's fundamental moral concern of seeking for a witness. The stanzas on either side are symmetrically balanced.

The ten poems of the fourth section, "Beale Street Love," treat various aspects of love: three concern brutal love; one, mother's love; five, lost love; and one, fulfilling love.

The narrator of the title-poem "Beale Street Love" defines Clorinda's conception of love by identifying it with an action that generates radical ambivalence:

Love
 Is a brown man's fist
 With hard knuckles
 Crushing the lips,
 Blackening the eyes,--
 Hit me again,
 Says Clorinda.
 (FCTTJ, p. 57)

The narrator opposes a male image of extreme, brutal sadism (ll. 1-5) with Clorinda's equally aggressive, bitter masochism (ll. 6-7).

¹"I'm Not a Formal Poet," p. 4.

The persona of "Cora" has defeated this ambivalence in her complaint against male brutality:

I broke ma heart this mornin'.
 Ain't got no heart no mo'.
 Next time a man comes near me
 Gonna shut an' lock ma door
 Cause they treats me mean,--
 The ones I loves.
 They always treats me mean.
 (FCTTJ, p. 58)

But the brutality has produced a disillusionment and dejection which leave a chauvinistic scar of fear and pessimism.

A male point of view of the problem of brutality is presented by the speaker of "Evil Woman":

I ain't gonna mistreat ma
 Good gal any more.
 I'm just gonna kill her
 Next time she makes me sore.

I treats her kind but
 She don't do me right.
 She fights an' quarrels most
 Ever night.

I can't have no woman's
 Got such low-down ways.
 Cause a blue-gummed woman
 Ain't de style now days.

I brought her from de South
 An' she's goin' on back
 Else I'll use her head
 For a carpet tack.
 (FCTTJ, p. 62)

His initial ironical promise (ll. 1-2) underscores the exaggeration of his aggressive proposition (ll. 3-4). His violence is fair mistreatment since his "evil woman"

repays his kindness with her own mistreatment. His rationalizations of the third stanza reveal his blind double standard and intraracism. In the fourth stanza he presents alternative propositions with the second, a humorous threat of violence, functioning as a crucial issue to support the first. This humor is a strange yet real component of this poem: the persona's exaggeration and caricature of the woman's personality (i.e., an "evil woman" with "low down ways"), her features ("blue-gummed"), and their violent interaction (e.g., "I'll use her head / For a carpet tack.") humorously reveal society's oppressive conditioning of his attitudes. The persona feels that what he is saying is funny and he expects you to laugh.

In five poems three male speakers and two female speakers consider the problem of lost love. The speaker of "Workin' Man" complains of his domestic situation because his woman doesn't accept his division of labor:

I works all day
 Wid a pick an' a shovel.
 Comes home at night,--
 It ain't nothin' but a hovel.

I calls for ma woman
 When I opens de door.
 She's out in de street,--
 Ain't nothin' but a 'hore.

I does her good
 An' I treats her fine,
 But she don't gimme lovin'
 Cause she ain't de right kind.

I'm a hard workin' man
 An' I sho pays double
 Cause I tries to be good
 An' gits nothin' but trouble.
 (FCTTJ, p. 59)

In his eyes she is indeed a "fallen" woman (l. 8), a condition which he apparently attributes to her nature (l. 12). This causal analysis, combined with his minimal self-awareness of his relation to the domestic problems as well as his maximal self-pity (ll. 13-16), produces an ironic tension between the speaker and his listeners.

"Bad Luck Card" exposes the role superstition plays in impeding self-awareness:

Cause you don't love me
 Is awful, awful hard.
 Gypsy done showed me
 Ma bad luck card.

There ain't no good left
 In this world for me.
 Gypsy done tole me,--
 Unlucky as can be.

I don't know what
 Po' weary me can do.
 Gypsy says I'd kill ma self
 If I was you.
 (FCTTJ, p. 60)

Complaining to his lost love, he threatens suicide because of not merely the loss but also the gypsy's figment of a predetermined and hopeless future. This threat, cunningly veiled in the mouth of the gypsy, reveals both his self-pity and his ploy of frightening his love into returning.

The speaker of "Dressed Up" focuses with a more acute consciousness on the ironic distance between his spruce

apparel and his barren misery and loneliness:

I had ma clothes cleaned
Just like new.
I put 'em on but
I still feels blue.

I bought a new hat,
Sho is fine,
But I wish I had back that
Old gal o' mine.

I got new shoes,--
They don't hurt ma feet,
But I ain't got nobody
For to call me sweet.

(FCTTJ, p. 65)

The rhymes of the colloquial voice in reflection reinforce his contrasts, and give to the poem the breadth of easiness of a man laughing at himself.

A sense of humor is conspicuously absent in the morose complaint of the speaker of "A Ruined Gal":

Standin' by de lonesome riverside
After de boat's done gone,
Po' weary me
Won't be nobody's bride
Cause I is long gone wrong.

Standin' by de weary riverside
When de boat comes in,
Po' lonesome me
Won't meet nobody
Cause I ain't got no friend.

By de edge o' de weary riverside
Night-time's comin' down.
Ain't nothin' for a ruined gal
But jump overboard an' drown.

O, de lonesome riverside,
O, de wicked water.
Damn ma black old mammy's soul
For ever havin' a daughter.

(FCTTJ, p. 63)

This voice dramatizes the death-wish situation narrated in "Closing Time" (see above, p. 144, note; and FCTTJ, p. 32). In the first line of each stanza she personifies the riverside, attributing to it her feelings of depression. In the first variation she is weary of a life trapped in the plight of a "fallen woman" (ll. 35-5). Exchanging characteristics with the river (ll. 6-8) while indulging in profound self-pity, she focuses on her isolation and loneliness (ll. 7-10). In the third variation, with night falling, a traditional time for the descent of melancholy and the blues, she contemplates suicide. The last variation climaxes with religious imagery that suggests the source of the values and attitudes that dominate the "ruined" woman's perception of self: the water is wicked (l. 16) as she believes herself to be (l. 5), and she damns the soul of her mother as she believes her own to be (l. 13).

Conscious that she is not a "fallen" woman, the speaker of "Black Gal" complains of being exploited and then deserted by men in favor of mulatto women:

I's always been a workin' girl.
 I treated Albert fine.
 Ain't cut him wid no razor,
 Ain't never been unkind.

Yet it seems like always
 Men takes all they can from me
 Then they goes an' finds a yaller gal
 An' lets me be.

I dressed up Albert Johnson.
 I bought him suits o' clothes,
 An' soon as he got out de barrel
 Then out ma door he goes.

Yet I ain't never been no bad one.
 Can't help it cause I'm black.
 I hates them rinney yaller gals
 An' I wants ma Albert back.
 Ma little, short, sweet, brownskin boy,--
 Oh, God, I wants him back!

(FCTTJ, p. 66)

Her humorous understatement ameliorates her rather defensively self-assertive stance while searching for a cause of her predicament (st. 1). In the second stanza she generalizes concerning her problems. In the third she gets down to specific complaints. In the last stanza she concludes that the cause of her problems is her black skin and not that she is a "fallen" woman. This distinction has vast social significance, for it militates against an attitude of identifying Blackness with Evil, especially moral evil.

In "Baby" Hughes projects a mother's concern for the safety of another Albert:

Albert!
 Hey, Albert!
 Don't you play in dat road.
 You see dem trucks
 A goin' by.
 One run ovah you
 An' you die.
 Albert, don't you play in dat road.
 (FCTTJ, p. 61)

She uses exclamatory calls (ll. 1-2), repeated imperative (ll. 3 and 8), and enthymeme (ll. 3-8) to warn Albert

of the impending danger.

In "Minnie Sings Her Blues" Minnie's satisfaction with having her lover at hand is ironically haunted by her insecurity concerning the relationship:

Cabaret, cabaret!
That's where ma man an' me go.
Cabaret, Cabaret!
That's where we go,--
Leaves de snow outside
An' our troubles at de door.

Jazz band, jazz band!
Ma man an' me dance.
When I cuddles up to him
No other gal's got a chance.

Baby, O, Baby,
I'm midnight mad.
If ma daddy didn't love me
It sho would be sad.
If he didn't love me
I'd go away
An' dig me a grave this very day.

Blues . . . blues!
Blue, blue, blues!
I'd sho have them blues.
(FCTTJ, p. 64)

Like the male speaker of "Bad Luck Card" (see above, p. 157), she considers suicide as a way of dealing with desertion. This suicide provides the central energy, standing, as possibility, against the actuality of singing the blues. But she overcomes her death wish through recognizing that it would be an even greater source of misery in need of transformation by the blues (st. 4). The poem then is really a song of survival or survival

motion:¹ The escape into the cabaret protects the lovers from the harshness of nature as well as it enables them to forget their economic and social problems (st. 1). The jazz band enables Minnie to overcome her jealousy (st. 2). The threat and fear of suicide force Minnie to an awareness of the crucial role of love in her life (st. 3). And finally her very song form, the blues, with the insight that informs its moods, force her to recognize the futility of suicide: It would be no escape at all, for she would be more blue than ever.

The poems of "From the Georgia Roads," the penultimate section, have a dramatic organization: The first and last poems form a framework in which the poet defines his purpose and audience--to portray for Black people the trilemma of their experiences in the American South--inhumane brutality, flight, or death.

In "Sun Song" the poet describes his audience and intention, revealing his consciousness of race and cultural heritage:

Sun and softness,
Sun and the beaten hardness of the earth,
Sun and the song of all the sun-stars
Gathered together,--

¹Survival motions is a concept developed by Dante (Donald L. Graham), now deceased, while writing poetry and a novel as well as teaching at Fisk University. The term represents the behavior Black people developed to overcome destructive oppressive forces.

Dark ones of Africa,
 I bring you my songs
 To sing on the Georgia roads.
 (FCTTJ, p. 69)

In the first half of the poem (ll. 1-4) the poet alternates the symbol of the sun with emotional (l. 1), physical (l. 2), and cosmological (l. 3) references from the lives of his audience (l. 4). The harmony of Black men with the universe is produced by their complementary songs (ll. 3-4, 6-7).

In "Magnolia Flowers" the speaker stumbles over the muted reality of the dying South while searching for its romantic image:

The quiet fading out of life
 In a corner full of ugliness.

I went lookin' for magnolia flowers
 But I didn't find 'em.
 I went lookin' for magnolia flowers in the dusk
 And there was only this corner
 Full of ugliness.

'Scuse me,
 I didn't mean to stump ma toe on you lady.

There ought to be magnolias
 Somewhere in this dusk.

'Scuse me,
 I didn't mean to stump ma toe on you.
 (FCTTJ, p. 70)

The poem employs four dimensions of voice that shape both its formal pattern and structural density. The voice of the first dimension philosophically capitulates the poem's theme in the elliptical initial sentence of two

antithetically balanced verses (fading/full, out/in, quiet/ugliness, life/corner, and the/a). This voice gains the pose of objectivity in its meditative and descriptive comment by referring to neither itself nor its audience. The shift to the second dimension of this voice (ll. 3-7) is characterized by its references to itself, incremental variation in the capsulized narration of the search and discovery, and amplification of the first dimension. The magnolias (state flower of both Mississippi and Louisiana), symbolizing the natural and cultural vitality and beauty of the South (i.e., "corner") are gone. Analogously, the symbol of dusk suggests both the fading of light and time as the South becomes a night "full of ugliness." In its third dimension the persona enters deeper into the experiences he narrates as he remembers the apology uttered at the moment of his accidental discovery of the reality of the South (ll. 8-9). The Southern lady, a cultural symbol of virtue is the life quietly fading in the ugly corner. In the fourth dimension the speaker enters even deeper into this experience by projecting his self-conscious thought at the moment of his discovery. The thought underscores the irony in his discovery, for the lady and the flower were closely related as symbols of Southern beauty. In a sense, he has found his magnolia flower in this woman. The refrain repetition of the last stanza underscores his nervous fear.

In "Mulatto" Hughes explores the "corner full of

ugliness" with an examination of the struggle of a mulatto against his father and brother for recognition.

I am your son, white man!

Georgia dusk
And the turpentine woods.
One of the pillars of the temple fell.

You are my son!
Like hell!

The moon over the turpentine woods.
The Southern night
Full of stars,
Great big yellow stars.
 Juicy bodies
 of nigger wenches
 Blue black
 Against black fences.
 O, you little bastard boy,
 What's a body but a toy?
The scent of pine wood stings the soft night air.
 What's the body of your mother?
Silver moonlight everywhere.
 What's the body of your mother?
Sharp pine scent in the evening air.
 A nigger night,
 A nigger joy,
 A little yellow
 Bastard boy.

Naw, you ain't my brother.
Niggers ain't my brother.
Not ever.
Niggers ain't my brother.

The Southern night is full of stars,
Great big yellow stars.
 O, sweet as earth,
 Dusk dark bodies
 Give sweet birth
To little yellow bastard boys.

Git on back there in the night,
You ain't white.

The bright stars scatter everywhere.
Pine wood scent in the evening air.

A nigger night,
A nigger joy.

I am your son, white man!

A little yellow
Bastard boy.
(FCTTJ, pp. 71-72)

In the dialogue the mulatto simply affirms his relationship while his father and half-brother vehemently deny it. The speaker contrasts images of the natural phenomena of Georgia against the crumbling institutions erected on racial exploitation. The rhetorical questions to the mulatto confront him with his condition and plight (ll. 15-16, 18, 20).

"Red Silk Stockings" presents the tragic mulatto situation from the point of view of a speaker chiding a "Black gal" who, like "Ruby Brown," is trapped in a hostile racist and male chauvinist environment:

Put on yo' red silk stockings,
Black gal.
Go out an' let de white boys
Look at yo' legs.

Ain't nothin' to do for you, nohow,
Round this town,--
You's too pretty.
Put on Yo' red silk stockings, gal,
An' tomorrow's chile'll
Be a high yaller.

Go out an' let de white boys
Look at yo' legs.
(FCTTJ, p. 73)

The speaker's tone distinctively conveys the irony of his commanding the inevitable; this tone and its stance form

another survival motion for the oppressed.¹

The grieving Black woman who sings "Song For a Dark Girl" has lost faith in a god created in the image of her lover's lynchers:

Way Down South in Dixie
 (Break the heart of me)
 They hung my black young lover
 To a cross roads tree.

Way Down South in Dixie
 (Bruised body high in air)
 I asked the white Lord Jesus
 What was the use of prayer.

Way Down South in Dixie
 (Break the heart of me)
 Love is a naked shadow
 On a gnarled and naked tree.
 (FCTTJ, p. 75)

The crucifixion image of her lynched lover (st. 1) suggests the destruction of dark girl's faith in Christianity (st. 2). For her love is a Black man (st. 3), not "the white Lord Jesus." The first two lines of each of the three ballad stanzas are paralleled with variation and repetition forming a refrain that emphasizes the relationship between physical and psychological violence ("Break the heart . . . Bruised body"). The "cross roads tree," "gnarled and naked" like the "hung" lover, is a symbol of man and nature ruthlessly oppressed.

"Mammy" is a moan that personifies the maternal

¹See also "Jazz Band in a Parisian Cabaret" (FCTTJ, p. 74) for another example of this tone and attitude.

aspects of death:

I'm waiting for ma mammy,--
She is Death.

Say it very softly.
Say it very slowly if you choose.

I'm waiting for ma mammy,--
Death.

(FCTTJ, p. 76)

The framing reiteration of the first and third stanzas emphasizes the moaner's transcendent realization that a certain awareness of death can nurture our living with an urgency and yet a calmness that surpasses understanding. In the experimental second stanza the speaker directs the expression of the reiteration and thereby reveals both his conviction and his solemnity.

"Laughters," the last poem of this section, "From the Georgia Roads," returns to the mood of "Sun Song," the first, and thereby creates a framework parallel to the first and last stanza frames characteristic of Hughes' poetry. The poet-speaker catalogues the various social roles played by the "Dark ones of Africa" to whom he brings his songs:

Dream singers,
Story tellers,
Dancers,
Loud laughs in the hands of Fate--
My people.
Dish-washers,
Elevator-boys,
Ladies' maids,
Crap-shooters,
Cooks,
Waiters,
Jazzers,
Nurses of babies,

Loaders of ships,
 Rounders,
 Number writers,
 Comedians in vaudeville
 And band-men in circuses--
 Dream-singers all,--
 My people.
 Story-tellers all,--
 My people.
 Dancers--
 God! What dancers!
 Singers--
 God! What singers!
 Singers and dancers.
 Dancers and laughers.
 Laughers?
 Yes, laughers . . . laughers . . . laughers--
 Loud-mouthed laughers in the hands
 Of Fate.
 (FCTTJ, pp. 77-78)

His theme, projected in the first (ll. 1-5) of the three parts, is that Black people assume creative stances that bring humor and joy into their lives despite being trapped by unknown but nonetheless inexorable forces of conditioning. In the second section the poet catalogues Black people's employment--service workers, laborers, entertainers, and "hustlers" (ll. 6-18). Forming a framework, the last section is an amplification of the first (ll. 19-32).

C. DEAR LOVELY DEATH

Dear Lovely Death, DLD (Amenia, New York: Privately printed at the Troutbeck Press, 1931) is a collection of 12 poems. One hundred copies were hand printed by Hughes' friends Joel and Amy Spingarn. Nine of the poems treat the dialectic of life and death; one is concerned with intuitions of an African cultural heritage; one draws the portrait of a sailor; and one broadcasts the critical voice of a laborer. The controlling stance of this collection is to confront death in order to identify, understand, and overcome it.

In a voice that cautions and reminds, the poetic observer of "Drum" both identifies and defines death through the extended use of the metaphor, "death is a drum."

Bear in mind
That death is a drum
Beating for ever
Till the last worms come
To answer its call,
Till the last stars fall,
Until the last atom
Is no atom at all,
Until time is lost
And there is no air
And space itself
Is nothing nowhere.
Death is a drum,
A signal drum,
Calling all life
To Come! Come!
Come!

(DLD, fifth unnumbered page)

Hughes strives to evoke the ineluctability of death by

identifying it with the irresistibly vital cultural symbol of the drum. The poem has a two-part logical structure: part one (ll. 1-12) defines through description death with the metaphor of the drum (ll. 1-2), tells what it does (l. 3), and gives six variations on the length of that doing (ll. 4-12). Part two (ll. 13-17) repeats the descriptive identity (l. 13) and gives the significance of death (ll. 14-17) by describing its function. Like the drums of Black people in Africa or Cuba, Death calls all life. In his variations on the length of forever (ll. 4-12), Hughes reveals the philosophical depth of his poetic intuition. Firstly, forever seems a relative concept depending upon the subject of each variation. Secondly, thematically Hughes projects a living and material world in a constant and absolute polar relationship with death that will end only when there "Is nothing nowhere."

The voice of "Dear Lovely Death" carries an apologetic and conciliatory tone appropriate to its traditional theme of reconciling death as merely change:

Dear lovely Death
 That taketh all things under wing--
 Never to kill--
 Only to change
 Into some other thing
 This suffering flesh,
 To make it either more or less,
 But not again the same--
 Dear lovely Death,
 Change is thy other name.

(DLD, unnumbered p. 7)

The poem is an apostrophe to death animated as a protective and maternal bird of change with all life as its brood.

"Tower" continues Hughes' attempt to understand and reconcile death by defining it through a metaphor:

Death is a tower
To which the soul ascends
To spend a meditative hour--
That never ends.

(DLD, unnumbered p. 8)

In contrast to the dynamic metaphor of "Dear Lovely Death" the tower image is a static and timeless retreat.

Hughes pursues the dialectic of death and life in "The Consumptive" by focusing on the victim patiently waiting death's creeping onslaught.

All day in the sun
That he loved so
He sat,
Feeling life go.

All night in bed
Waiting for sleep
He lay,
Feeling death creep--
Creeping like fire

Creeping like fire from a slow spark
Choking his breath
And burning the dark.

(DLD, unnumbered p. 6)

The prosy, free verse sentence stanzas are developed by the use of metaphor (e.g., "creep"), simile (e.g., "Creeping like fire from a slow spark"), and personification (i.e., death creeping). As the patient feels life go in the day (st. 1), he feels death coming or creeping at night (st. 2). This personification depicts the fearful awareness of the

patient. That fear is further concretized by the simile that compares death to fire, a symbol that naturally strikes fear and terror as well as awe into the heart of men (st. 2). In the last stanza the narrator amplifies the simile by showing firesmoke suffocating the patient and firelight destroying even the darkness.

The narrator of "Flight" encourages the Southern "Black boy" to flee the racist lynching that hounds him:

Plant your toes in the cool swamp mud.
Step and leave no track.
Hurry, sweating runner!
The hounds are at your back.

"No I didn't touch her
White flesh ain't for me."

Hurry! Black boy, hurry!
They'll swing you to a tree.
(DLD, unnumbered p. 10)

This poem is remarkable for the experimental technique of a dialogue between the narrator and the character on whose activities he focuses. The futility of Black innocence in the American South is emphasized by the narrator's rejoinder in the last stanza.

"Poem" is a persona's vision of nature gone awry:

Strange,
Distorted blades of grass,
Strange,
Distorted trees,
Strange,
Distorted tulips on their knees.
(DLD, unnumbered p. 15)

The unanswered question of where the distortion lies--

within nature or the persona's perception of nature--sets up a functional ambivalence between these two possibilities. The characteristic parallelism of the three two-line phrases adds emphasis to the climaxing personification that underscores the unanswered question.

Using parallel syntax with one end rhyme recurring every other line, the narrator of "Two Things" draws parallel relationships between the qualities and effects of life and death:

Two things possess the power,
Two things deserve the name,
Two things can reawaken
Perpetually the flame.
Two things are full of wonder,
Two things cast off all shame.

One is known by the name of Death.
And the other has no name
Except the name each gives it--
In no single mouth the same.
(DLD, unnumbered p. 9)

The unnamed could be love as well as life, and this ambiguity, rendering the poem a riddle, is its crucial technique.

A different kind of ambiguity informs the voice of a "dead" body that demands, in apostrophe to its dream of life, the source of its vitality:

Listen!
Dear dream of utter aliveness--
Touching my body of utter death--
Tell me, o quickly! dream of aliveness,
The flaming source of your bright breath.
Tell me, O dream of utter aliveness--
Knowing so well the wind and the sun
Where is this light
Your eyes see forever?
And what is this wind
You touch when you run?
(DLD, unnumbered p. 12)

This body could be addressing its soul or its spirit; it could be questioning all of life that flickers in its darkness; it could be seeking the life into which it will be transformed. Or it could be the voice of living depression murmuring questions from the sink of despair.

In "Aesthete In Harlem" Hughes concretizes this voice, giving it the face of a race and class mentality as well as the benefit of an ironic accident:

Strange,
 That in this nigger place,
 I should meet Life face to face
 When for years, I had been seeking
 Life in places gentler speaking
 Until I came to this near street
 And found Life - stepping on my feet!
 (DLD, unnumbered p. 16)

As with the ambiguous "Poem" the strangeness is probably more in the perception of the speaker than in what he observes.

Dear Lovely Death includes three poems not directly involved in the life/death dialectic that controls the foregoing nine poems. Yet if one looks closely and listens carefully at "Afro-American Fragment" one discovers that the drum that measures the metaphor of "Drum" (See above, pp. 170-171) provides the beat that sustains African cultural survivals for Black Americans:

So long
 So far away,
 Is Africa.
 Not even memories alive
 Save those that history books create,
 Save those that songs beat back into the blood--
 Beat out of blood with words sad sung
 In strang un-Negro tongue--

So long
 So far away
 Is Africa.

Subdued and time lost are the drums--
 And yet, through some vast mist of race
 There comes this song
 I do not understand,
 This song of atavistic land,
 Of bitter yearnings lost, without a place--
 So long,
 So far away
 Is Africa's
 Dark face.

(DLD, unnumbered p. 11)

The rhythms of the twice repeated refrain and the emphatic alliteration of b's and s's provide the beat and the song with which the fragment is concerned.

"Florida Road Workers" is spoken by a Black laborer whose pride in his work does not bind him to the social contradiction that the highway he constructs will be used primarily by a race and class to which he does not belong.

I'm makin' a road
 For the cars
 To fly by on.
 Makin' a road
 Through the palmetto thicket
 For light and civilization
 To travel on.

Makin' a road
 For the rich old white men
 To sweep over in their big cars
 And leave me standin' here.

Sure,
 A road helps all of us!
 White folks ride--
 And I get to see 'em ride.
 I ain't never seen nobody
 Ride so fine before.
 Hey buddy!

Look at me!
I'm making a road!
(DLD, unnumbered p. 14)

The persona uses a free verse held together by parallelism and repetition along with a vernacular voice to convey an ambivalence toward the exploiting situation in which he is trapped. The poem reflects Hughes' awareness of the crucial role of the working class in a capitalist society. The development of that awareness is evident with the contrast between the personal preoccupations of "Workin' Man" (see above, pp. 156-57) and this persona's awareness of the relationships between his labor and his society.

In "Sailor" the narrator assumes a point of view undistorted by feelings or thoughts to describe a sailor whose observation is undoubtedly equally as direct and free from judgments:

He sat upon the rolling deck
Half a world away from home,
And smoked a Capstan cigarette
And watched the blue waves tipped with foam.

He had a mermaid on his arm,
An anchor on his breast,
And tattoed on his back he had
A blue bird in a nest.

(DLD, unnumbered p. 13)

Both the poetic observer and the sailor-observer, oblivious to past and future, are consumed by a moment of meditative awareness. To convey this awareness the poetic observer draws a verbal portrait of the sailor.

D. THE NEGRO MOTHER

In The Negro Mother and other Dramatic Recitations, TNM (New York: The Golden Stair Press, 1931) Hughes experiments with a form he calls dramatic recitation or dramatic monologue to project the concerns, problems, hopes, and fears of Black personae. Each poem is introduced with a description of the character of the persona, the form of his delivery, and the musical accompaniment appropriate to the poem. In three poems Hughes juxtaposes a section, "The Mood," to the body of the poem, "The Poem." "The Mood" gives dramatic directions to the speaker of "The Poem." This early experiment matures later in Ask Your Mama (1961); here it reveals Hughes' concern for producing something more than a mere collection of poetry. His experiments with the form and structure of his collections reveal a concern for unity, coherence, and development, for dramatic interaction between his work and his audience (a concern he more fully realized in his plays), and for musical accompaniment to highlight and echo his poetry. Hughes' six characters play roles that are defined by the problems of poor Blacks in a racist and politically oppressive America. Two of the poems are rather successful--"The

Colored Soldier" and "Broke"--two represent the middle range of Hughes' genius--"The Big Timer" and "The Negro Mother"--and two seem relative failures--"The Black Clown" and "Dark Youth."

The power and strength of "The Colored Soldier" rises from the voice of the speaker telling his audience of a dream in which he sees and hears a vision of his brother possessed by an illusion that Black soldiers fighting and dying in World War I in France have secured the end of racism and the beginning of democracy in America:

My brother died in France--but I came back.
 We were just two colored boys, brown and black,
 Who joined up to fight for the U.S.A.
 When the Nation called us that mighty day.
 We were sent to training camp, then overseas--
 And me and my brother were happy as you please
 Thinking we were fighting for Democracy's true reign
 And that our dark blood would wipe away the stain
 Of prejudice, and hate, and the false color line--
 And give us the rights that are yours and mine.
 They told us America would know no black or white:
 So we marched to the front, happy to fight.

Last night in a dream my brother came to me
 Out of his grave from over the sea,
 Back from the acres of crosses in France,
 And said to me, "Brother, you've got your chance,
 And I hope you're making good, and doing fine--
 Cause when I was living, I didn't have mine.
 Black boys couldn't work then anywhere like they can to-
 day,
 Could hardly find a job that offered decent pay,
 The unions barred us; the factories, too,
 But now I know we've got plenty to do.
 We couldn't eat in restaurants; had Jim Crow cars;
 Didn't have any schools; and there were all sorts of
 bars
 To a colored boy's rising in wealth or station--
 But now I know well that's not our situation:
 The world's been made safe for Democracy
 And no longer do we know the dark misery

Of being held back, of having no chance--
 Since the colored soldiers came home from France.
 Didn't our government tell us things would be fine
 When we got through fighting, Over There, and dying?
 So now I know we blacks are just like any other--
 "Cause that's what I died for--isn't it, Brother?"

And I saw him standing there, straight and tall,
 In his soldier's uniform, and all.
 Then his dark face smiled at me in the night--
 But the dream was cruel--and bitter--and somehow
 not right.
 It was awful--facing that boy who went out to die,
 For what could I answer him, except, "It's a lie!"
 It's a lie! It's a lie! Every word they said.
 And it's better a thousand times you're in France dead.
 For here in the South there's no votes and no right.
 And I'm still just a "nigger" in America tonight.

Then I woke up, and the dream was ended--
 But broken was the soldier's dream, too bad to be
 mended.
 And it's a good thing all the black boys lying dead
 Over There
 Can't see! And don't know! And won't ever care!
 (TNM, pp. 1-3)

The persona tells of a dream in which he destroys an illusion held by his brother while in dialogue with him. These techniques of illusion within a dream and dialogue within a dramatic recitation give the poem its structural creativity. The prosy effect of its long irregular lines is balanced by the regularity of the couplet rhyme scheme.

The power and strength of "Broke" rise from the accuracy or verisimilitude in the speaker's voice, especially the projection of its humor:

Uh! I sho am tired.
 Been walkin' since five this mornin'.
 Up and down, and they just ain't no jobs in this
 man's town.
 Answerin' them want-ads' not nary bit o' fun,

'Cause 'fore you gets there, ten thousand and one
 Done beat you to de place, standin' out side de dō'
 Talkin' 'bout "We'll work for 50¢ a day, if we can't
 get no mo'."

And one old funny boy said, "I'll work at any price
 Just only providin' de boss man is nice!"
 You all out there laughin', but that ain't no joke--
 When you're broke.

Last job I had, went to work at five in de mornin', or
 little mo'

And de man come tellin' me I better get there at fo'.
 I mean four--before daylight--s'pose to've done hit
 yo' first stroke--

Folks sho is gettin' hard on you--just 'cause you broke.
 So I say, "mister, I ain't no sweepin' machine."
 So de man say, "I'll get somebody else, then, to clean,"--
 So here I is, broke.

Landlady 'lowed to me last week, "Sam, ain't you got
 no money?"

I say, "Now, baby, you know I ain't got none, honey."
 And don't you know that old woman swelled up like a
 speckled toad

And tole me I'd better pay her for my room rent and
 board!

After all them dollars I gived her these last two years,
 And she been holdin' 'em so tight till de eagle's
 in tears--

I wouldn't pay her a penny now if I was to croak--
 Come bawlin' me out, 'cause I'm broke.
 (I don't care nothin' 'bout her myself!)

Um-mm! Sign here says they wants somebody to shovel
 coal.

Well, ain't never done it, but for to keep body and soul
 Together, reckon I'll try . . . Sho, I wants de job!

Yes, sir!

Has I did it befo'? Certainly!

What I don't know 'bout shovelin' coal, ain't no mo'
 to know!

Willing worker? Un-uh! Yes! What's that you say?
 De time is fourteen hours a day?

Well, er--er . . . how much does you pay?

Six dollars a week? Whee-ooo! You sho pays well!

You can take that job and go to----I hope you choke,
 Even if I is broke.

But I sho been lookin' round hard lately for ways and
 means

O' gettin' a new winter coat, or havin' that old one cleaned.

Tried to find one o' them little elevator and switch-board jobs they used to have.

But they givin' 'em to school boys now and payin' just about half.

So I went down to a hotel where I used to work at night, And de man come tellin' me they ain't hirin' no mo' colored--just white.

I can't even get de money for to buy myself a smoke, I tell you it's awful, when you're broke.

And I sho had a pretty gal, too, up yonder on Surgar Hill.

She bought a new hat last week and come sendin' me the bill.

I said, "Baby, you know I loves you, and all like that But right long through here now, I can't 'ford to buy you no hat."

So when I got ready to go, I said, "I'll be seein' you son, Marie."

And she come tellin' me, she ain't got no mo' evenings free!

I thought love was a dream, but I sho have awoke-- Since I'm broke.

'Course, you hears plenty 'bout this-here unemployment relief--

But you don't see no presidents dyin' o' grief--

All this talkin' ain't nothin' but tinklin' symbols and soundin' brass:

Lawd, folkes, how much longer is this gonna last?

It's done got me so crazy, feel like I been takin' coke, But I can't even buy a paper--I'm so broke.

Aw-oo! Yonder comes a woman I used to know way down South.

(Ain't seen her in six years! Used to go with her, too!) She would be alright if she wasn't so bow-legged, and cross-eyed,

And didn't have such a big mouth.

Howdy-do, daughter! Caledonia, how are you?

Yes, indeedy, I sho have missed you, too!

All these years you say you been workin' here?

You got a good job? Yes! Well, I sho am glad to see you, dear!

Is I married? No, all these-here girls up North is too light.

Does I wanta? Well, can't say but what I might-- If a pretty gal like you was willin', I'd bite.

You still bakes biscuits? Fried chicken every night?

Is that true?

Certainly, chile, I always was crazy 'bout you!

Let's get married right now! Yes! What do you say?

(Is you lookin' at me, baby, or some other way?)

'Cause I'm just dyin' to take on that there marriage yoke.

Yes, um-hum'. You sho is sweet! Can you pay fo' de license, dear?

'Cause I'm broke.

(TNM, pp. 4-7)

Hughes' unerring ear for the voice of "the last hired and the first fired" has captured the contradictions and the humor of the experience. More than ten years later Hughes' gift will mature into the Jess B. Simple stories and the Madam Alberta K. Johnson poems, but for now the persona is anonymous. Despite this anonymity his personality is highly individuated because of his folk narrative ability. This narrative is characterized by anecdote (e.g., st. 4 & 6), caricature (e.g., ll. 8-9), exaggeration (e.g., l. 24), urban folk phrases (e.g., "not nary bit o' fun," l. 4), metaphor (e.g., l. 16), and simile (e.g., l. 21). (All this he renders in the orthographically signalled vernacular.) His mood of snatching humor from the funk of melancholy reflects a Black cultural attitude and survival motion shaped by the folk tradition of the blues. In the introductory directions Hughes describes the poem as

A complaint to be given by a dejected looking fellow shuffling along in an old suit and a battered hat, to the tune of a slow-drag stomp or a weary blues.

The initial stanza is controlled by the speaker's recognition

of the ironic humor of his absurd situation: he is tired although out of work. An early bird hunting for a job, he found only earlier birds in greater need. Although he resents his audience's laughter, not only does he recognize the humor of his situation, but also he narrates it in the mood of "laughing to keep from crying." In the second stanza his mood continues with his saucy repartee with a perspective employer. His narration of the confrontation with his landlady in stanza three carries a lighter more playful humor, including the techniques of folk simile (l. 24) and metaphor (l. 24), as well as exaggeration (l. 25) and wheedling (l. 20) to suit this not quite so urgent situation. In the fourth stanza the absurdity of a salary of six dollars a week for shoveling coal fourteen hours a day arouses a little irony and a lot of "guts" (ll. 36-38). But he has little humor with which to face racism when he is discriminated against in seeking a job as an elevator operator in stanza five. And a bitter taste of disillusionment disperses his initial conciliatory humor as he discovers in stanza six that his pretty girl from Sugar Hill is more interested in money than love. Looking for an escape in stanza seven he has little faith in unemployment relief and no money for cocaine, so, in the last stanza, he cons Caledonia--an urban folk comic type, a woman with coarse manners, homely looks and very Negroid features covering an honest, sincere, lusty, and hard-

working although not too bright personality--into marriage.

In the introduction to "The Big Timer" Hughes calls it a "moral poem"; more precisely, it is a moral satire against the hustler. The strongest weakness of the poem is the absence of verisimilitude in the speaker's voice, probably related to Hughes' lack of sympathy for his character. At one point in "The Mood" Hughes' directions read: "Strutting about proudly, bragging and boasting like a cheap bully." This sympathetic void is filled by Hughes' didactic mood. The blood type of

I ran away.
Went to the city.
Look at me now and
Laugh--or take pity.
(TNM, p. 12)

belongs to Hughes and not his "Big-Timer," who is more accurately portrayed in the fourteenth and fifteenth stanzas:

So don't worry 'bout me,
Folks, down yonder at home.
I guess I can stand the racket
And fight it out alone.

I guess I know what I'm up against,
I don't cry over troubles.
Look 'em in the face and
Bust 'em like bubbles.
(TNM, p. 14)

This aggressive, lumpen-proletarian, rugged individualism faintly tinged by self pity seems more believable.

The voice of "The Negro Mother" is an abstraction who is supposed to represent all Black women. This poem flattens the pithy metaphors and folk wisdom of "Mother to

Son" (See above, pp. 83-84) into weak generalizations in an attempt to serve a didactic purpose. The story that the mother has come to tell lacks a developed narrative line as well as the immediacy of concrete experience.

These problems of abstraction, generalizations, and didacticism unrelieved by narrative development or concretized experience vitiate the effectiveness of "The Black Clown" (TNM, pp. 8-11). Undoubtedly the clown metaphor flows from Hughes' sensitivity to the themes of joy and laughter and their role in mitigating the cruelty of political oppression, but the metaphor seems trifling and absurd as a projection of the Black experience in America.

"Dark Youth of the USA" has no over-riding metaphor unless it be that of a self-righteous child giving a recitation in which he sacrifices syntax and communication for end and internal rhyme. This poem suffers the foregoing weaknesses of the other poorly conceived poems of this volume and has to be one of the most certain failures of the poet's career.

E. THE DREAM KEEPER

The Dream Keeper and Other Poems, TDK (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932) collects nineteen new poems with forty poems appearing in his earlier collections. Each of its five sections is distinguished by a prevailing mood.

In the first section, also called "The Dream Keeper," Hughes sympathetically champions fragile and sensitive worlds of imagination, dreams, and nature in eleven poems. Of the six new poems in this section, three show some development in the poet's craft. The representative speaker of "Fairies" explains the creative sources of fantasy and wonder:

Out of the dust of dreams
Fairies weave their garments.
Out of the purple and rose of old memories
They make rainbow wings.
No wonder we find them such marvellous things!
(TDK, p. 5)

The persona identifies three sources; the first two (ll. 1-4) are sources of fantasy; drawing the poem together, the last line identifies the first two as the source of our fascination or wonder with fantasy.

The speaker of "Dreams" also uses theme and variation structure with parallel and balanced development of his two stanzas to say that life without dreams is death:

Hold fast to dreams
 For if dreams die
 Life is a broken-winged bird
 That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams
 For when dreams go
 Life is a barren field
 Frozen with snow.
 (TDK, p. 7)

The admirer of "Quiet Girl" employs the same balanced variations structure to shape the two litotes complimenting a shy woman:

I would liken you
 To a night without stars
 Were it not for your eyes.
 I would liken you
 To a sleep without dreams
 Were it not for your songs.
 (TDK, p. 11)

Among the eleven poems of "Sea Charm," the second section, two new poems appear of which one, "Irish Wake", focuses without sentiment on mourning.

In the dark they fell a-crying
 For the dead who'd gone away,
 And you could hear the drowsy wailing
 Of those compelled to stay--
 But when the sun rose making
 All the dooryard bright and clear
 The mourners got up smiling,
 Happy they were here.
 (TDK, p. 25)

Hughes found that like Black people the Irish transformed their troubles into joy. This transformation is indicated by the antithetical relation of the first four lines to the second four.

The third section, "Dressed Up," focuses on the

experiences of Blacks "up South" with ten old and five new poems. Three of the new poems pivot on causal analysis. The speaker of "Reasons Why" uses the vernacular to express two variations of his identification with nature through love concretizing the Platonic theme that love improves the lover:

Just because I loves you--
That's de reason why
Ma soul is full of color
Like de wings of a butterfly.

Just because I loves you
That's de reason why
Ma heart's a fluttering aspen leaf
When you pass by.
(TDK, p. 32)

The structure of this poem parallels that of "Dreams" and "Quiet Girl" (See above, p. 188). The last lines of the first stanza express the enrichment and happiness of the lover's soul through the metaphor of color and describe that color with the simile of the butterfly wings, a variant shape of the valentine heart image that prepares for the second stanza. Here the speaker gives witness to his heart's sensitivity through the metaphor of the quaking aspen leaf, another variant of the valentine heart shape. The fluttering motion plays on the motion of butterfly wings in flight.

The singer of "Passing Love" reconciles himself to the insecurity of love by three parallel causal metaphors in rhyming couplet stanzas to describe his lover's identity:

Because you are to me a song
I must not sing you over-long.

Because you are to me a prayer
I cannot say you everywhere.

Because you are to me a rose--
You will not stay when summer goes.
(TDK, p. 42)

The very qualities that render his lover so exquisite require his self-control or containment and eventual relinquishment of her.

In "Minstrel Man" Hughes divides his version of a ballad stanza in half to create two eight-line stanzas, balanced octaves, in which the speaker explains the ignorance created by preoccupation with appearances:

Because my mouth
Is wide with laughter
And my throat
Is deep with song,
You do not think
I suffer after
I have held my pain
So long?

Because my mouth
Is wide with laughter,
You do not hear
My inner cry?
Because my feet
Are gay with dancing,
You do not know
I die?
(TDK, p. 38)

The graphic lines indicate the pattern of the four sets of parallels, as well as the variations between the first and second stanzas. The speaker is addressing racist white America.

Of the eight poems in the fourth section, "Feet O' Jesus," two are new. Although a religious mood dominates this section, several poems treat the relationship between mother and child. In Albert, the notable of the new poems, a Black mother sings in free verse a song about singing to her child:

My little dark baby,
 My little earth-thing,
 My little love-one,
 What shall I sing
 For your lullaby?

Stars,
 Stars,
 A necklace of stars
 Winding the night.

My little black baby,
 My dark body's baby,
 What shall I sing
 For your lullaby:

Moon, Moon,
 Great diamond moon,
 Kissing the night.

Oh, little dark baby,
 Night black baby,

Stars, stars,
 Moon,
 Night stars,
 Moon.

For your sleep-song lullaby!
 (TDK, pp. 57-58)

In her search for appropriate content for her lullaby (1st stanza) she discovers the analogy that the stars and moon are to the night as she is to her child (remainder of poem).

The fifth section, "Walkers With the Dawn," develops

racial and national consciousness in fourteen poems, four of which are new. Of these four, "Lincoln Monument: Washington" stands out for its evocativeness and paradoxical relationships of time and sound:

Let's go see old Abe
 Sitting in the marble and the moonlight,
 Sitting lonely in the marble and the moonlight,
 Quiet for ten thousand centuries, old Abe.
 Quiet for a million, million years.

Quiet--

And yet a voice forever
 Against the
 Timeless walls
 Of time--
 Old Abe.

(TDK, p. 68)

The tourist's eagerness (l. 1) is stilled by the image evoked by the monument (ll. 2-6), yet that stillness itself is the source of the voice that defies all the limitations. The poem about the Lincoln Monument is a monument to Lincoln, a heroic figure for Hughes.

F. SCOTTSBORO LIMITED

Scottsboro Limited: Four Poems and a Play in Verse, SL (New York: Golden Stair Press, 1932), concerned with the notorious Scottsboro case, displays the explicit socialist themes that characterize Hughes' writings for the decade of the Thirties. Starting with this period and continuing to the end of his career his topical content leads him to the evaluation of himself as a documentary poet. During this decade his narrators and personae look beyond the needs, joys, and problems of the individual in an oppressive environment. Intent upon awakening the political and social consciousness of the oppressed Black masses of poor and working people, Hughes becomes a social poet.

The voice of the epigrammatic initial poem, "Justice," retorts for Black people collectively, expressing their attitude toward American justice:

That Justice is a blind goddess
Is a thing to which we black are wise.
Her bandage hides two festering sores
That once perhaps were eyes.
(SL, unnumbered p. 3)

The symbol of justice is not blindfolded for impartiality but is bandaged to hide the decaying corruption by which the personification is guided. The retort, with its re-interpretation of a symbol for which there is a long

tradition of respect in Western so-called civilization, gives the Black point of view. He makes a functional use of rhyme to reinforce the audience's awareness of the dramatically struggling opposites (wise/eyes).

The speaker of "Scottsboro" uses functional rhyme, a framing refrain, and catalogue as he stands between and addresses the "World" and the eight Black victims sentenced to death. (A ninth, fourteen years old, was convicted but sentenced to life imprisonment.)

8 BLACK BOYS IN A SOUTHERN JAIL.
WORLD, TURN PALE!

8 black boys and one white lie.
Is it much to die?

Is it much to die when immortal feet
March with you down Time's street,
When beyond steel bars sound the deathless drums
Like a mighty heart-beat as They come?

Who comes?

Christ,
Who fought alone.

John Brown.

That mad mob
That tore the Bastille down
Stone by stone.

Moses.

Jeanne d' Arc.

Dessalines.

Nat Turner.

Fighters for the free.

Lenin with the flag blood red.

(Not dead! Not dead!
None of those is dead.)

Gandhi.

Sandino.

Evangelista, too,
To walk with you--

8 BLACK BOYS IN A SOUTHERN JAIL.
WORLD, TURN PALE!
(SL, unnumbered p. 5)

Capitalizing the refrain to reinforce the emphasis, the speaker exhorts the world to become more sensitive to the conditions of the Scottsboro victims; he assures the victims that should they die they will join the company of the heroes of the oppressed, society's scapegoats. This poem foreshadows Hughes' later concern for heroic images for Black people and Black heroes. Its primary audience is the conscience of the world, and the speaker attempts to awaken and harness the historical guilt of society in order to save the lives of the Scottsboro eight. Hughes recognized that they were political prisoners, persecuted because of their race.

"Christ in Alabama" pivots on a metaphorical comparison of the plight of the Southern Black man to the agony and crucifixion of Christ:

Christ is a Nigger,
Beaten and black--
O, bare your back.

Mary is His Mother--
Mammy of the South,
Silence your mouth.

God's His Father--
 White Master above,
 Grant us your love.

Most holy bastard
 Of the bleeding mouth
Nigger Christ
On the cross of the South.
 (SL, unnumbered p. 7)

The energy of the poem flows from this metaphorical identity of which Hughes wrote in the December 18, 1931 issue of The Atlanta World:¹

. . . anything which makes people think of existing evil conditions is worthwhile. Sometimes in order to attract attention somebody must embody these ideas in sensational forms. I meant my poem to be a protest against the domination of all stronger peoples over weaker ones.

The poetic observer of "The Town of Scottsboro" uses description of the personified town to portray the lack of collective moral commitment and human compassion:

Scottsboro's just a little place:
 No shame is writ across its face--
 Its court, too weak to stand against a mob,
 Its people's heart, too small to hold a sob.
 (SL, unnumbered p. 9)

The rhyming couplets reinforce the poem's meaning: place/face to express the personification and mob/sob to express the group responsibility and lack of compassion.

¹This note appears in James Emanuel's Langston Hughes, p. 97.

G. A NEW SONG

A New Song, ANS (New York: International Workers Order, 1938) collects some of Hughes' most explicitly proletarian themes in seventeen poems, of which one, "Justice," appeared in an earlier collection. Although randomly arranged these poems fit into five subject categories: 1) the proletarian manifesto--"Let America Be America Again," "Chant for May Day," "Open Letter to the South," "A New Song," and "Union"--2) the social protests of individuals--"Park Bench" and "Pride"--3) poems that describe regions of severe oppression--"Song of Spain," "Lynching Song," and "Negro Ghetto"--4) poems for heroes of the proletariat--"Chant for Tom Mooney," "Ballad of Ozzie Powell," "Kids Who Die," "Ballads of Lenin," and "Sister Johnson Marches"--5) poems that define or describe abstractions from the point of view of the oppressed--"Justice" and "History."

The speakers for each of the poetic manifestos have multiple, collective, representative, or group identities suitable to the proletarian concern for the masses. In "Let America Be America Again," the speaker, with a multiple identity representing the masses of people, arrives at a manifesto for democratic freedom while examining the night-

mares and shortcomings of the "American dream."

Let America be America again.
 Let it be the dream it used to be.
 Let it be the pioneer on the plain
 Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed--
 Let it be that great strong land of love
 Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
 That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

O let my land be a land where Liberty
 Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,
 But opportunity is real, and life is free,
 Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me,
 Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")

Say who are you that mumbles in the dark?
And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,
 I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.
 I am the red man driven from the land,
 I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek--
 And finding only the same old stupid plan.
 Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

I am the young man, full of strength and hope,
 Tangled in that ancient endless chain
 Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!
 Of work the men! Of take the pay!
 Of owning everything for one's own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.
 I am the worker sold to the machine.
 I am the Negro, servant to you all.
 I am the people, humble, hungry, mean--
 Hungry yet today despite the dream.
 Beaten yet today--O, Pioneers!
 I am the man who never got ahead,
 The poorest worker bartered through the years.

Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream
 In that Old World while still a serf of kings.
 Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,
 That even yet its might daring sings
 In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned
 That's made America the land it has become.
 O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas
 In search of what I meant to be my home--
 For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore,
 And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,
 And torn from Black Africa's strand I came
 To build a "homeland of the free."

The free?

Who said the free? Not me?
 Surely not me? The millions on relief today?
 The millions shot down when we strike?
 The millions who have nothing for our pay?
 For all the dreams we've dreamed
 And all the songs we've sung
 And all the hopes we've held
 And all the flags we've hung,
 The millions who have nothing for our pay--
 Except the dream that's almost dead today.

O, let America be America again--
 The land that never has been yet--
 And yet must be--the land where every man is free.
 The land that's mine--the poor man's, Indian's,
 Negro's, ME--
 Who made America,
 Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,
 Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,
 Must bring back our mighty dream again.

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose--
 The steel of freedom does not stain.
 From those who live like leeches on the people's lives.
 We must take back our land again,
 America!

O, yes,
 I say it plain,
 America never was America to me,
 And yet I swear this oath--
 America will be!

Out of the rack and ruin of our ganster death,
 The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,

We, the people, must redeem
 The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers,
 The mountains and the endless plain--
 All, all the stretch of these great green states--
 And make America again!
 (ANS, pp. 9-11)

The first sixteen lines alternate between quatrains of the speaker's prayer-like demands for a new realization of the American dream and parenthetical lines in which he recognizes the dream has never been fulfilled for him. In reply to another voice's demand to know (ll. 17-18), the speaker catalogues the multiplicity of his identity (ll. 19-50), summarized by "I am the people, humble, hungry, mean." Then the speaker catalogues oppressive situations that belie the image of American democratic freedom (ll. 51-61). In the next stanza (ll. 62-69), he argues the proletarian concept that the working class who produced America must bring about democratic freedom. The next stanza (ll. 70-74) is a defense against redbaiting. The last two stanzas clarify and reiterate the proletarian manifesto. The free verse form with its repetition, balance, parallelism, alliteration, and irregular rhyme complement the poem's ideological thrust for freedom.

The four remaining manifesto poems are concerned primarily with transforming the racial chauvinism within the working class into unity and mutuality. To this end Hughes experiments with a choir of one hundred voices arranged to give the impression of sea waves in "Chant for May Day":

WORKER: The first of May:
 When the flowers break through the earth,
 When the sap rises in the trees,
 When the birds come back from the South.
 Workers:
 Be like the flowers,
 10 VOICES: Bloom in the strength of your unknown power,
 20 VOICES: Grow out of the passive earth,
 40 VOICES: Grow strong with Union,
 All hands together--
 To beautify this hour, this spring,
 And all the springs to come
 50 VOICES: Forever for the workers!
 WORKER: Workers:
 10 VOICES: Be like the sap rising in the trees,
 20 VOICES: Strengthening each branch,
 40 VOICES: No part neglected--
 50 VOICES: Reaching all the world.
 WORKER: All workers:
 10 VOICES: White workers,
 10 OTHERS: Black workers,
 10 OTHERS: Yellow workers,
 10 OTHERS: Workers in the islands of the sea--
 50 VOICES: Life is everywhere for you,
 WORKER: When the sap of your own strength rises
 50 VOICES: Life is everywhere.
 10 VOICES: May Day!
 20 VOICES: May Day!
 40 VOICES: May Day!
 50 VOICES: When the earth is new,
 WORKER: Proletarians of all the world:
 20 VOICES: Arise,
 40 VOICES: Grow strong,
 60 VOICES: Take Power,
 80 VOICES: Till the forces of the earth are yours
 100 VOICES: From this hour.

(ANS, pp. 14-15)

The speakers instruct all workers to unify for growth and the power to seize control of the state. To inspire the proletariat their roles are compared, through simile and metaphor, to plants struggling for life in Spring. The poem's meaning puns on the celebration day, also an international distress signal (ll. 28-30).

The persona of "Union" testifies against his individualism as well as against racism; he casts his proletarian intent in a Christian mold with Old Testament metaphors:

Not me alone--
 I know now--
 But all the whole oppressed
 Poor world,
 White and black,
 Must put their hands with mine
 To shake the pillars of those temples
 Wherein the false gods dwell
 And worn-out altars stand
 Too well defended,
 And the rule of greed's upheld--
 That must be ended.

(ANS, p. 31)

This free verse monologue sentence resolves into rhyme, reflecting the closed attitude of the speaker.

The speaker of "A New Song," representing the Black proletariat and speaking to primarily the Black working class argues for the unity of the working class despite the long history of white racism:

I speak in the name of the black millions
 Awakening to action.
 Let all others keep silent a moment.
 I have this word to bring,
 This thing to say,
 This song to sing:

Bitter was the day
 When I bowed my back
 Beneath the slaver's whip.

That day is past.

Bitter was the day
 When I saw my children unschooled,
 My young men without a voice in the world,

My women taken as the body-toys
Of thieving people.

That day is past.

Bitter was the day, I say,
When the lyncher's rope
Hung about my neck,
And the fire scorched my feet,
And the oppressors had no pity,
And only in the sorrow songs
Relief was found.

That day is past.

I know full well now
Only my own hands,
Dark as the earth,
Can make my earth-dark body free.
O, thieves, exploiters, killers,
No longer shall you say
With arrogant eyes and scornful lips:
"You are my servant,
Black man--
I, the free!"

That day is past--

For now,
In many mouths--
Dark mouths where red tongues burn
And white teeth gleam--
New words are formed,
Bitter
With the past
But sweet
With the dream.
Tense,
Unyielding
Strong and sure,
They sweep the earth--

Revolt! Arise!

The Black
And White World
Shall be one!
The Worker's World!

The past is done!

A new dream flames
Against the
Sun!

(ANS, pp. 24-25)

His opponent argues that because of the historical role of white people in the slavery and oppression of Blacks, it would be fruitless and absurd for Blacks to unite with them. Today, more than forty years later, the dream of these Black proletarians has yet to be realized. But we need not look to the outcome to determine the absurdity of the poem's argument. The evidence that he musters to support his crucial issue "That day is past," did not then, as well as it does not now, reflect the reality of Black life in America. This title poem is one of the emptiest of Hughes' propagandistic work. In his attempt to push the political line of unity between the races he is dangerously out of touch with reality.¹

The publication dates of the individual protests against social oppression reveal Hughes' expanding consciousness. The tone of the speaker of "Park Bench," first published in 1925, is almost casual like a wish, or incidental like an accident, reflecting his teasing intent as

¹See also "Open Letter to the South" (ANS, pp. 27-28) for a similar thrust in epistle form.

well as his newly awakened consciousness:

I live on a park bench.
 You, Park Avenue.
 Hell of a distance
 Between us two.

I beg a dime for dinner--
 You got a butler and maid.
 But I'M wakin' up!
 Say, ain't you afraid

That I might, just maybe,
 In a year or two,
 Move on over
 To Park Avenue?

(ANS, p. 12)

The speaker is awakening to the relationships--comparisons and contrast. Dramatically, his audience is probably sitting on the bench trying to enjoy the Times.

The more militant "Pride," first published in 1930 has stopped joking, although the speaker is still wasting words on his oppressor:

Let all who will
 Eat quietly the bread of shame.
 I cannot,
 Without complaining loud and long,
 Tasting it's bitterness in my throat,
 And feeling to my very soul
 It's wrong.
 For honest work
 You proffer me poor pay.
 For honest dreams
 Your spit is in my face,
 And so my fist is clenched--
 Today--
 To strike your face.
 (ANS, p. 16)

The speaker assumes a declamatory stance that probably suits the character of his awareness despite the inadvisability of broadcasting one's defense.

Three poems focus upon regions or areas of severe repression. The sympathetic speaker of "Negro Ghetto" is sensitive to the restriction and humiliations of the oppressed which he expresses through altered nature images:

I looked at their black faces
 And this is what I saw:
 The wind imprisoned in the flesh,
 The sun bound down by law.
 I watched them moving, moving,
 Like water down the street,
 And this is what moved in my heart:
 Their far-too-humble feet.

(ANS, p. 29)

The images and relationships of containment or imprisonment control the poetic effect: In the poem's first half (ll. 1-4), within the prison of the ghetto the persona looks into Black faces and discovers nature imprisoned there; in the second half, still within the ghetto he looks at the flow of Black movements in the streets and discovers that these images of the oppressed have aroused his sympathy.

The poetic observer who sings "Lynching Song" focuses on an institution of the American South:

Pull at the rope! Oh!
 Pull it high!
 Let the white folks live
 And the black boy die,

Pull it, boys,
 With a bloody cry
 As the black boy spins
 And the white folks die.

The white folks die?
 What do you mean--
 The white folks die?

That black boy's
 Still body
 Says:
 NOT I!
 (ANS, p. 30)

The expectations of the first stanza are reversed in the second giving rise to a question in the third that is answered by the image of the lynched black body in the fourth. Both the reversal of expectations stanza and the answer stanza project paradoxical situations: the death of the "white folks" is spiritual and emotional; the lynched body is the existential answer or a product of their dead souls.

In "Song of Spain" Hughes returns to the use of dramatic dialogue (see also "Sister Johnson Marches," ASN, p. 26), one voice projecting a stereotyped image of Spain shaped by its cultural heritage, the other exposing the realities from a Loyalist point of view; this dialogue occurs during the Spanish Civil War (see poem, ANS, pp. 21-23).

"Kids Who Die" is an example of a fourth group of poems that celebrate proletarian heroes and themes:

This is for the kids who die,
 Black and white,
 For kids who die certainly.
 The old and rich will live on awhile,
 As always,
 Eating blood and gold,
 Letting kids die.

Kids will die in the swamps of Mississippi
 Organizing sharecroppers.

Kids will die in the streets of Chicago
 Organizing workers.
 Kids will die in the orange groves of California
 Telling others to get together.
 Whites and Filipinos,
 Negroes and Mexicans,
 All kinds of kids will die
 Who don't believe in lies, and bribes, and content-
 ment,
 And a lousy peace.

Of course, the wise and the learned
 Who pen editorials in the papers,
 And the gentlemen with Dr. in front of their names,
 White and black,
 Who make surveys and write books,
 Will live on weaving words to smother the kids
 who die,
 And the sleazy courts,
 And the bribe-reaching police,
 And the blood-loving generals,
 And the money-loving preachers
 Will all raise their hands against the kids who die,
 Beating them with laws and clubs and bayonets and
 bullets
 To frighten the people--
 For the kids who die are like iron in the blood
 of the people--
 And the old and rich don't want the people
 To taste the iron of the kids who die,
 Don't want the people to get wise to their own power,
 To believe an Angelo Herndon, or ever get together.

Listen, kids who die--
 Maybe, now, there will be no monument for you
 Except in our hearts.)
 Maybe your bodies'll be lost in a swamp,
 Or a prison grave, or the potter's field, *world view*
 Or the rivers where you're drowned like Liebknecht,
 But the day will come--
 You are sure yourselves that it is coming--
 When the marching feet of the masses
 Will raise for you a living monument of love,
 And joy, and laughter,
 And black hands and white hands clasped as one,
 And a song that reaches the sky--
 The song of the new life triumphant
 Through the kids who die.

(ANS, pp. 18-19)

The first stanza gives the speaker's purpose--an elegy for

those who will die (ll. 1-7)--the speaker's audience--the kids (ll. 1-3)--and the destroyers (or creators) of that audience (ll. 4-7). The second stanza amplifies through description the speaker's audience, identifying where the kids will be dying, what they'll be doing, and why they'll be doing it (ll. 8-18). The third stanza amplifies the description of the creators of destruction, identifying who they are and why they allow the kids to die (ll. 19-36). In the last stanza the speaker elegizes those who will die (ll. 37-51). The elegiac stanza comes as a climax to the very strong, descriptive and penetrating analysis of the kids and the killers.

Two poems of this volume deal with abstractions. In the epigrammatic "Justice" (see above, p. 193) Hughes substitutes poor for black as it appeared in Scottsboro Limited reflecting his exposure to proletarian ideology.

The less dense "History" strikes a note of optimism:

The past has been
A mint of blood and sorrow
That must not be
True of tomorrow.
(ANS, p. 19)

The mint image reflects the profit motive of the capitalist; the blood and sorrow are the contingencies for the struggling poor and working class. Both mint and blood are synecdoches, and the whole second line stands in a synecdochic relationship to the first line. Tomorrow is also a synecdoche for the future.

H. SHAKESPEARE IN HARLEM

Although Langston Hughes had not abandoned his proletarian consciousness in the Forties, Shakespeare in Harlem, SIH (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942) is strategically void of proletarian references and allusions. America's participation in World War II undoubtedly helped to shape this strategy. The techniques and themes of this volume reflect Hughes' shift or return to the perspective of poor Black folks, rural as well as urban, and their creative oral tradition. A few social protest poems combat Jim Crow and argue for extension of democratic rights to Black people. Hughes describes his intentions in an untitled foreword:

A book of light verse. Afro-Americana in the blues mood. Poems syncopated and variegated in the colors of Harlem, Beale Street, West Dallas, and Chicago's South Side.

Blues, ballads, and reels to be read aloud, crooned, shouted, recited, and sung. Some with gestures, some not--as you like. None with a far-away voice.

(SIH, unnumbered p. 6)

Hughes returns to his concern for the vitality of folk oral expression; here he consciously eschewed the academic and mainstream tradition. The poems are distributed among eight sections by themes, moods, or forms.

The first section, "Seven Moments of Love," subtitled "An Un-Sonnet Sequence in Blues," reflects Hughes' care and

experimentation; these poems could be called blues-sonnets-- blues in mood and content, modern or modified sonnets in sequence form and poem structure. The lightly satirized speaker of each poem, Jack, assumes a stance of bravado in the face of being temporarily deserted by his girlfriend, Cassie. That desertion has produced for him the problem of what to do with his time. The motif of time controls the titles of the first six poems--"Twilight Reverie," "Suppertime," "Red Time," "Daybreak," "Sunday," and "Pay-day"--and forms a prominent image strand in the last poem, "Letter."

"Suppertime" is a representative example of the blues-sonnet:

I look in the kettle, the kettle is dry.
 Look in the bread box, nothing but a fly.
 Turn on the light and look real good!
 I would make a fire but there ain't no wood.
 Look at that water dripping in the sink.
 Listen at my heartbeats trying to think.
 Listen at my footprints walking on the floor.
 That place where your trunk was, ain't no trunk no more.
 Place where your clothes hung's empty and bare.
 Stay away if you want to, and see if I care!
 If I had a fire I'd make me some tea
 And set down and drink it, myself and me.
 Lawd! I got to find me a woman for the WPA--
 Cause if I don't they'll cut down my pay.
 (SIH, p. 4)

This is the only fourteen line poem in the sequence. These seven rhyming closed couplets complement the mood and movement of the speaker's self-conscious thoughts (ll. 6-7). His actions of looking (ll. 1-5, 8-9) and listening (ll. 6-7) only to find nothing or the self discovering nothing

dominate the first nine lines of the poem and provide a focus for the mundane images that produce a blues texture. In the last five lines the speaker hoists a stance of bravado against his awareness of feeling empty and lonely. The humor is everywhere in the poem--the anti-thetically balanced lines (e.g., 1, 2, 8), the closed couplet rhymes mocking as well as emphasizing the neatly closed situations, the relentless focus on a series of hard luck situations, the hyperbolic personifications ("heart-beats trying to think" and "footprints walking on the floor"), and the speaker's stance of bravado.

The final poem of the sequence, "Letter," is an epistle in reply to one of Cassie's and reflecting their reconciliation.

Dear Cassie: Yes, I got your letter.
 It come last night.
 What do you mean, why I didn't write?
 What do you mean, just a little spat?
 How did I know where you done gone at?
 And even if I did, I was mad--
 Left me by myself in a double bed.
 Sure, I missed your trunk--but I didn't miss you.
 Yal, come on back--I know you want to.
 I might not forget and I might not forgive,
 But you just as well be here where you due to live.
 And if you think I been too mean before,
 I'll try not to be that mean no more.
 I can't get along with you, I can't get along without--
 So let's just forget what this fuss was about.
 Come on home and bake some corn bread,
 And crochet a quilt for our double bed,
 And wake me up gentle when the dawn appears
 Cause that old alarm clock sho hurts my ears.
 Here's five dollars, Cassie. Buy a ticket back.
 I'll met you at the bus station.

*see page
 201/202*

Your baby,
 Jack.
 (SIH, pp. 10-11)

The naivety of Jack's epistolary dramatic monologue is revealed by his ironic attempts to dissemble his needs.

Fourteen poems with various assertive voices or moods form "Declarations," the second section of Shakespeare in Harlem. These poems carry the wit, wisdom, insight, and aspirations of Black folk and differ markedly in mood from the blues-sonnets or the traditional blues poems that appear later. As with the blues-sonnets, all these poems employ the vernacular. They are controlled by three broad thematic concerns: wisdom (six poems), love (two poems), and escape (six poems).

The poems that convey wisdom--"Evil" (p. 15), "Hope" (p. 16), "Snob" (p. 27), "Statement" (p. 28), "Me and the Mule" (p. 29), and "Present" (p. 30)--use example, instruction, statement of fact, and analogy to form epigrams.

The speaker of "Evil" capsulizes his determined maliciousness, and thus provides as example of ill will:

Looks like what drives me crazy
 Don't have no effect on you--
 But I'm gonna keep on at it
 Till it drives you crazy, too.
 (SIH, p. 15)

One of the sources of this poem's humor must certainly be the speaker's thwarted intent as well as the tenacity of his determination to create unpleasantness. The wisdom of the poem lies more with the poet's perception of his

persona than in the persona's narrow pragmatism.

In "Snob" it is the speaker who teaches the wisdom of the community through pithiness, logical construction, rhyme, personification, and common sense:

If your reputation
 In the community is good
 Don't snub the other fellow--
 It might be misunderstood--
 Because a good reputation
 Can commit suicide
 By holding its head
 Too far to one side.
 (SIH, p. 27)

This wisdom of the community or "street" is conveyed by a declaration of fact in "Statement":

Down on '33rd Street
 They cut you
 Every way they is.
 (SIH, p. 28)

The speaker of "Me and the Mule" returns to Southern rural experience and wisdom and disarms his audience by drawing an analogy between the identities of his mule and himself:

My old mule,
 He's got a grin on his face.
 He's been a mule so long
 He's forgot about his race.

 I'm like that old mule--
 Black
 And don't give a damn!
 So you got to take me
 Like I am.
 (SIH, p. 29)

The comparison is humorous because the speaker seems to lower himself on any social status scale, especially those

used by Blacks "up South." But the speaker reverses the Black migrant expectation (as well as he reinforces those who feel homesickness) by arrogantly affirming the existential nature of being Black through his comparison.

This affirmation of the Black experience provides the focus for the two poems of "Declarations" that concern beauty and love: "Young Negro Girl" (p. 17), in which Hughes, like Jean Toomer in Cane, draws a simile between racial beauty and dusk, and "Harlem Sweeties." The latter catalogues the rainbow of colors of Black beauty with epithets and metaphors that both suggest and tease the appetitive nature of desire and admiration by describing Black women in terms of different foods:

Have you dug the spill
Of Sugar Hill?
Cast your gims
On this sepia thrill:
Brown sugar lassie,
Caramel treat,
Honey-gold baby
Sweet enough to eat.
Peach-skinned girlie,
Coffee and cream,
Chocolate darling
Out of a dream.
Walnut tinted
Or cocoa brown,
Pomegranate lipped
Pride of the town.
Rich cream colored
To plum-tinted black,
Feminine sweetness
In Harlem's no lack.
Glow of the quince
To blush of the rose.
Persimmon bronze
To cinnamon toes.

Blackberry cordial,
 Virginia Dare wine--
 All those sweet colors
 Flavor Harlem of mine!
 Walnut or cocoa,
 Let me repeat:
 Caramel, brown sugar,
 A chocolate treat.
 Mollasses taffy,
 Coffee and cream,
 Licorice, clove, cinnamon
 To a honey-brown dream.
 Ginger, wine-gold,
 Persimmon, blackberry,
 All through the spectrum
 Harlem girls vary--
 So if you want to know beauty's
 Rainbow-sweet thrill,
 Stroll down luscious,
 Delicious, fine Sugar Hill.
 (SIH, pp. 18-20)

The catalogue of epithets and metaphors (all three techniques are fundamental to oral folk tradition) suggests the myriad shades of Black loveliness.

Six poems of "Declarations" treat the theme of escape. The speaker of the title poem, "Declaration," playfully fantacizes his escape from an unfaithful lover in three suppositions of altered identity:

If I was a sea-lion
 Swimming in the sea,
 I would swim to China
 And you never would see me.
 No!
 You never would
 See me.

If I was a rich boy
 I'd buy myself a car,
 Fill it up with gas
 And drive so far, so far.
 Yes!
 I would drive
 So far.

Hard-hearted and unloving!
 Hard-hearted and untrue!
 If I was a bird I'd
 Fly away from you.
 Yes, way
 Away
 From
 You.

(SIH, pp. 22-23)

In a contrasting situation the speaker of "Free Man" taunts his woman with the impossibility of his being captured or tied down:

You can catch the wind,
 You can catch the sea,
 But you can't, pretty mama,
 Ever catch me.

*sex?
 ... real life?*

You can tame a rabbit,
 Even tame a bear,
 But you'll never, pretty mama,
 Keep me caged up here.

(SIH, p. 31)

The hyperboles from comparisons with nature come from the folk tradition.

"If-ing" uses the technique of three progressively more imaginative suppositions to express the speaker's desire to escape poverty and boredom:

If I had some small change
 I'd buy me a mule,
 Get on that mule and
 Ride like a fool.

If I had some greenbacks
 I'd buy me a Packard,
 Fill it up with gas and
 Drive that baby backward.

If I had a million
 I'd get me a plane
 And everybody in America'd
 Think I was insane.

But I ain't got a million,
 Fact is, ain't got a dime--
 So just by if-ing
 I have a good time!
 (SIH, p. 32)

The last stanza shows the speaker's self-awareness as it snaps from a million dollar dream to a dime reality.¹

"Blues For Men," the third sector of Shakespeare In Harlem, includes nine poems by male personae written in the traditional blues form. "Evening Air Blues" is significant for its discussion of the function of dancing and the origin of the blues:

Folks, I come up North,
 Cause they told me de North was fine.
 I come up North
 Cause they told me de North was fine.
 Been up here six months--
 I'm about to lose my mind.

This mornin' for breakfast
 I chawed de mornin' air.
 This mornin' for breakfast
 Chawed de mornin' air.
 But this evenin' for supper,
 I got evenin' air to spare.

Believe I'll do a little dancin'
 Just to drive my blues away--
 A little dancin'
 To drive my blues away,
 Cause when I'm dancin'
 De blues forgets to stay.

But if you was to ask me
 How de blues they come to be,
 Says if you was to ask me

¹See also "Little Lyric" (p. 21), "Kid Sleepy" (pp. 24-25), and "Aspiration" (p. 33) for treatment of the theme of escape.

How de blues they come to be--
 You wouldn't need to ask me:
 Just look at me and see!
 (SIH, pp. 38-39)

The first stanza projects the problematic situation of Black people's migration from the South only to find disillusionment in the North. The humor of the second stanza is embedded in the vernacular pun on air. His stomach full of air indicates his poverty. In the third stanza he decides to dance to end his melancholy blues, an expression of the function of not merely dancing but also singing the blues. This extends my analysis of how the blues produces laughter to keep from crying: The energy that would be used to sulk in depression is consumed in the creative expression, which, because of its movement, patterns, designs, rhythm, speed, wit, humor, and other artistic techniques and effects, as well as the contingency of the social status of creativity in the Black communities of America, produces joy and laughter.¹ In the last stanza the singer expresses the origin of the blues song form by suggesting that its ontogeny recapitulates its phylogeny.

"Death in Harlem," the fourth section of Shakespeare In Harlem, contains six poems that examine the irony of death. The section title poem is a long narrative ballad in an experimental, irregularly rhymed verse form. A four beat

¹See above analysis of the relation between blues form and audience, pp. 120-23.

line forming half of a rhymed closed couplet is the basic unit of the poem. These lines are often divided in half producing a rhyme every other line. The number of lines in the eight stanzas vary from nine to forty-six. Withdrawn from the emotional subjectivity of his characters, the narrator spins a satirical tale of the Texas Kid ("the pickins"), Arabella Johnson, and Bessie (the "night birds"). In summary, after Arabella and the Texas Kid enter a Harlem night club, Arabella retreats momentarily to the Ladies Room. On her return she finds her "pickins" partying with another "chippie," Bessie. Arabella shoots Bessie and is hauled off to jail; the Texas Kid picks up another woman and goes to bed. The narrator's identity is carefully balanced against his story producing a critical perspective for his audience that enables them to perceive, judge and laugh at the irony and absurdity of the tale: the "pickins" gets the goods while the tricksters foil themselves.

Arabella Johnson and the Texas Kid
 Went bustin' into Dixie's bout one a.m.
 The night was young--
 But for a wise night-bird
 The pickin's weren't bad on a 133rd.
 The pickin's weren't gad--
 His roll wasn't slim--
 And Arabella Johnson had her
 Hands on him.

The word choice of this first expository stanza in the vernacular voice of the narrator initiate the speaker's identity by revealing his critical and satirical attitudes toward the principal characters. (e.g., "bustin," "bout,"

"night-bird," and "pickin's"). Alliteration, rhyme, and repetition reinforce the four beat rhythm to give the narration the effect of satirical poetic song. The second stanza continues the narrative exposition with focus on the musical setting of Dixie's and a descriptive characterization of The Texas Kid:

At a big piano a little dark girl
 Was playin jazz for a midnight world.
 Whip it, Miss Lucy!
 Aw, pick that rag!
 The Texas Kid's on a
 High-steppin jag.
 A dumb little jigaboo from
 Somewhere South.
 A row of gold in his upper mouth.
 A roll of bills in his left-hand pocket.
 Do it, Arabella!
 Honey baby, sock it!

The narrator describes the Kid from a "night-bird's" perspective to convey the hustler's contempt and greed for the gullibly flamboyant. He ends the stanza by egging on Arabella to her game. In the third and fourth stanzas the narrator continues the general description of the setting's dancing and music as well as to spur Arabella, who seemingly has control of her mark:

Dancin close, and dancin sweet,
 Down in a cellar back from the street,
 In Dixie's place on 133rd
 When the night is young--
 For an old night bird.
 Aw, pick it, Miss Lucy!
 Jazz it slow!
 It's good like that when you
 Bass so low!

Folks at the tables drink and grin.
 (Dixie makes his money on two-bit gin.)
 Couples on the floor rock and shake.
 (Dixie rents rooms at a buck a break.)
 Loungers at the bar laugh out loud,
 Everybody's happy. It's a spendin crowd--
 Big time sports and girls who know
 Dixie's ain't no place for a gang that's slow.
 Rock it, Arabella,
 Babe, you sho can go!
 (st. 3 and 4)

The forty-six line fifth stanza can be divided into three narrative sections. In the first section (ll. 41-57) the narrator focuses on Arabella's voice revealing her cunning aggressiveness:

She says to the waiter,
 Gin rickeys for two.
 Says to Texas,
 How'd a dance strike you?
 Says to Lucy,
 Play a long time, gal!
 Says to the world,
 Here's my sugar-daddy pal.
 Whispers to Texas,
 Boy, you're sweet!
 She gurgles, to Texas,
 What you like to eat?
 (ll. 41-52)

six

and the answer to her question:

Spaghetti and gin, music and smoke,
 And a woman cross the table when a man ain't broke--
 When a man's won a fight in a big man's town--
 Aw, plunk it, Miss Lucy,
 Cause we dancin down!
 (ll. 53-57)

Echoing the principle situation the second section of the stanza (ll. 58-76) shifts focus to the reciprocal relationships between whites and Blacks in the background of Dixie's where the hustled are hustling their hustlers:

A party of whites from Fifth Avenue
 Came tippin into Dixie's to get a view.
 Came tippin into Dixie's with smiles on their faces,
 Knowin they can buy a dozen colored places.
 Dixie grinned, Dixie bowed.
 Dixie rubbed his hands and laughed out loud--
 While a tall white woman
 In an ermine cape
 Looked at the blacks and
 Thought of rape,
 Looked at the blacks and
 Thought of a rope,
 Looked at the blacks and
 Thought of flame,
 And thought of something
 Without a name.

see "something
"and a name"

Aw, play it, Miss Lucy!
 Lawd!
 Ain't you shame?
 (ll. 58-76)

The narrator shifts back to the principal characters in
 the third section of stanza five (ll. 77-86) as Bessie
 seizes the opportunity and the Texas Kid while Arabella is
 in the Ladies Room:

Lucy was a-bassin it, boom, boom, boom,
 When Arabella went to the LADIES' ROOM.
 She left the Texas Kid settin by himself
 All unsuspectin of the chippie on his left--
 Her name was Bessie. She was brown and bold.
 And she sat on her chair like a sweet jelly roll. see "jelly roll"
 She cast her eyes on Texas, hollered,
 Listen, boy,
 While the music's playin let's
 Spread some joy!
 (ll. 77-86)

The onomatopoeic and alliterative rendering of the music
 (l. 77) foreshadows the gunshots during the fight. The
 phrases settin by himself and all unsuspectin reveal the
 narrator's irony, for he knows that Texas is playing his
 own game. The twelve lines of the sixth stanza are balanced

in content with six lines that focus on Texas and Bessie with Miss Lucy and Arabella in the background, and six lines that focus on the returning Arabella in a jealous rage:

Now, Texas was a lover.
 Bessie was, too.
 They loved one another till
 The music got through.
 While Miss Lucy played it, boom, boom, boom.
 And Arabella was busy in the LADIES' ROOM.
 When she come out
 She looked across the place--
 And there was Bessie
 Settin in her place!
 (It was just as if somebody
 Kicked her in the face.)
 (ll. 87-92)

The seventh stanza records the climactic fight with its background. The stanza's thirty-two lines are actually divided into six mini-stanzas, each followed by a refrain:

Arabella drew her pistol.
 She uttered a cry
 Everybody dodged as
 A ball passed by.
 A shot rang out.
 Bessie pulled a knife,
 But Arabella had her gun.
 Stand back folkses, let us
 Have our fun.
 And a shot rang out.
 Some began to tremble and
 Some began to scream.
 Bessie stared at Bella
 Like a woman in a dream
 As the shots rang out.
 A white lady fainted.
 A black woman cried.
 But Bessie took a bullet to her
 Heart and died
 As the shots rang out.
 A whole slew of people
 Went rushin for the door
 And left poor Bessie bleedin

In that cellar on the floor
 When the shots rang out.
 Then the place was empty,
 No music didn't play,
 And whoever loved Bessie was
 Far away.
 Take me,
 Jesus, take me
 Home today!
 (ll. 99-130)

The narrator injects a grim but playful, ironic humor into his description of the "fun" by using group caricature (ll. 101-02), vernacular (e.g., ll. 106, 125), and incongruity (ll. 114-18) as he moves to the heart of the matter (ll. 126-30)--the expense and waste of all this energy among his characters and their interactions where no love has been lost. The last stanza includes the resolution for Arabella and the Texas Kid:

Oh, they nabbed Arabella
 And drove her off to jail
 Just as the sky in the
 East turned pale
 And night like a reefer-man
 Slipped away
 And the sun came up and
 It was day--
 But the Texas Kid,
 With lovin in head,
 Picked up another woman and
 Went to bed.
 (ll. 131-42)

*Shows LH's
 compassion for
 woman? they take
 love & sex harder.
 Can't admit joy
 But she's free*

The descriptive resolution of the night into day parallels and reinforces the narrative resolution. The simile--"And Night like a reefer man / Slipped away"--underscores the lumpen-proletariat subject matter of the

poem.¹

"Mammy Songs," the fifth section of Shakespeare In Harlem, contains five poems spoken by personae who reflect and protest against the systematic genocide of Black people in the South.

The persona of "Southern Mammy Sings" employs simplistic yet cunning common sense and understatement as well as stigmata from the mammy stereotype to slip in a condemnation of Southern lynching, white people, and America:

Miss Gardner's in her garden.
 Miss Yardman's in her yard.
 Miss Michaelmas is at de mass
 And I am gettin' tired!
 Lawd!
 I am gettin' tired!
 (st. 1, p. 75)

This mammy, whom oppression forces to speak indirectly desires to subvert the social order of the South. Her use of names that reflect roles and therefore identities is humorous, yet telling of her own identity, of which she very seriously has had enough:

The nations they is fightin'
 And the nations they done fit.
 Sometimes I think that white folks
 Ain't worth a little bit.
 No, m'am!
 Ain't worth a little bit.
 (st. 2, p. 75)

¹See "Sylvester's Dying Bed" (SIH, pp. 67-68) for the death of a persona like the Texas Kid. "Cabaret Girl Dies on Welfare Island" (SIH, p. 66) projects the voice of a type of Bessie.

The effect of this stanza is achieved by the contrast between world violence and her understated appraisal of those she sees responsible. In the third stanza she narrows her focus to the lynchings of Blacks in the South:

Last week they lynched a colored boy.
 They hung him to a tree.
 That colored boy ain't said a thing
 But we all should be free.
 yes, m'am!
 We all should be free.
 (st. 3, pp. 75-76)

Her awareness of the political causes for this lynching reveal her ability to see relationships including that between nations and communities.¹ In the last stanza the image of stereotype that the Black woman uses to protect herself and veil her criticism is most explicit:

Not meanin' to be sassy
 And not meanin' to be smart--
 But sometimes I think that white folks
 Just ain't got no heart.
 No, m'am!
 Just ain't got no heart.
 (st. 4, p. 76)

And yet we see that the stereotype and role playing are merely masks, for Mammy is both sassy and smart.² Her contradiction and understatement in the face of the enemy are

¹See "Ku Klux" (SIH, pp. 81-82) for the problem of lynching from the point of view of a victim.

²See "Share-Croppers" (SIH, p. 77) and "West Texas" (SIH, pp. 78-79) for attacks against the Southern agricultural institution of share-cropping by personae whose knowledge of the immediate conditions outweighs both their awareness of the interrelations of the world as well as their wit.

traditional, defensive "survival motions" that are preserved in this poem.

Written in protest of racially discriminatory laws, "Merry-Go-Round" pivots logically on the recognition by the "colored child" that the circle has neither front nor back, and that, therefore, her past Jim Crow experiences will not solve her problem of where to sit for what should be her amusement:

Where is the Jim Crow section
 On this merry-go-round,
 Mister, cause I want to ride?
 Down South where I come from
 White and colored
 Can't sit side by side.
 Down South on the train
 There's a Jim Crow car.
 On the bus we're put in the back--
 But there ain't no back
 To a merry-go-round!
 Where's the horse
 For a kid's that's black?
 (SIH, p. 80)

The poem's pathos depends on the innocence, naivety, and yet frankness of the child's questions and observations. Hughes intended that the audience should be moved to confront the conditions that shape such human qualities into submissive adaptability.

Seven poems form "Ballads" the sixth section of Shakespeare In Harlem. These experiments in ballad form are spoken by either narrators or personae who focus on contradictions, highlights, and summaries of action in the lives of the lumpen-proletariat, religious exploiters, and

social misfits. All of the poems display dry and often bitter humor, and five end with an ironic twist. Cliche's, slang, and colloquialisms add flavor to the word choice.

"Ballad of the Sinner" squeezes fresh moral significance out of the cliché dressed to kill:

I went down the road,
Dressed to kill--
Straight down the road
That leads to hell.

Mother warned me,
Warned me true.
Father warned me,
And Sister, too.

But I was bold,
Headstrong and wild.
I did not act like
My mother's child.

She begged me, please,
Stay on the right track.
But I was drinking licker,
Jitterbugging back,

Going down that road,
All dressed to kill--
The road that leads
Right straight to hell.

Pray for me, Mama!
(SIH, pp. 85-86)

The speaker's position itself is a cliché that supports the many verbal clichés.

The narrator of the "Ballad of the Girl Whose Name is Mud" dissembles a socially prescribed perspective that both reflects and rejects moral values and norms:

A girl with all that raising,
 It's hard to understand
 How she could get in trouble
 With a no-good man.

The guy she gave her all to
 Dropped her with a thud.
 Now amongst decent people,
 Dorothy's name is mud.

But nobody's seen her shed a tear,
 Nor seen her hang her head.
 Ain't even heard her murmur,
Lord, I wish I was dead!

No! The hussy's telling everybody
 (Just as though it was no sin)
 That if she had a chance
She'd do it agin!
 (SIH, p. 91)

Unlike the preceding persona Dorothy has no ambivalence towards the social and religious norms. The speaker uses irony to mask his sympathy for Dorothy. As in the preceding poem the language reflects the attitudes and values of people not far from their folk origins. Especially in this poem about Dorothy, Hughes recreates the rebellious spirit of the young, fresh with life's vitality and unscarred by the weapons of social control. Unfortunately the "sinner" has accepted the guilt for his behavior; but he represents a beginning. These poems are very important because they reveal the critical nature of Hughes' treatment of folk materials--he understood them from a balanced point of view, and he therefore saw both strengths and weaknesses.

"Ballad of the Pawnbroker" is a dramatic monologue of a poor Black man to a Jewish pawnbroker. With a bitterly

ironic humor the client complains of the low rate of exchange:

This gold watch and chain
That belonged to my father?
Two bucks on it?
Never mind! Don't bother.

How about this necklace?
Pure jade.
Chinese? . . . Hell, no!
It's union-made.

Can I get Ten on this suit
I bought two weeks ago?
I don't know why it looks
Worn so.

Feel the weight, Mr. Levy,
Of this silver bowl.
Stop hunting for the price tag!
It ain't stole.

O.K. You don't want it?
Then I'll go.
But a man's got to live,
You know.

Say! On the last thing I own,
Pawnbroker, old friend--
Me!
My self!
Life!
What'll you lend?
(SIH, pp. 95-96)

The ironic twist of the last stanza provides the monologue with climax as well as satire.

The four blues songs that comprise the seventh section, "Blues for Ladies," treat the themes of poverty, friendship, love, loneliness and death from the point of view of women personae. Each of the poems is in the traditional blues song form.

*feeling of
woman*

"Midnight Chippie's Lament" alludes to the heart of the Black ghetto in Chicago as well as the heart of a "chippie" (prostitute).

I looked down 31st Street,
Not a soul but Lonesome Blue.
Down on 31st Street,
Nobody but Lonesome Blue.
I said come here, Lonesome,
And I will love you, too.

Feelin' so sad, Lawd,
Feelin' so sad and lone.
So sad, Lawd!
So sad and lone!
I said, please, Mr. Lonesome,
Don't leave me here alone.

Lonesome said, listen!
Said, listen! Hey!
Lonesome said, listen!
Woman, listen! Say!
Buy you two for a quarter
On State Street any day.

I said, Mr. Lonesome,
Don't ig me like you do.
Cripple Mr. Lonesome,
Please don't ig me like you do.
Lonesome said when a two-bit woman
Gives love away she's through.

Girls, don't stand on no corner
Cryin' to no Lonesome Blue!
I say don't stand on no corner
Cryin' to no Lonesome Blue!
Cry by yourself, girls,
So nobody can't low-rate you.

(SIH, pp. 105-06)

The singer, a prostitute, is relating to an audience that includes literally the "Lawd" and the "Girls" an allegorical meeting with loneliness while standing on the corner of 31st and State Streets. The personification,

Lonesome Blue, effectively evokes the "chippie's" fantasy world, her relation with her pimp, the bluesy feeling of forlornness, and the racist-tempered image of any very dark complexioned Black person. This complex of associations with the personification produces ambiguity of meaning that tempers the transformation of sadness into laughter. For example, the last two lines of the first stanza will support the following interpretations:

1. "The woman is so lonely that she has nothing else to love but loneliness itself."
2. "She is so resourceful that she can learn to appreciate loneliness."
3. "She is teasing her audience by exaggerating her loneliness and confronting them with a paradox."
4. "Business is slow, and she may have time to relate to her pimp."
5. "She has fantacized someone to fulfill her needs."
6. "She is so sad and lonely that she will accept as a customer the socially stigmatized very dark-skinned Black man."

The lament is an almost gossipy report to the "Girls" of what the "chippie" said, what Lonesome Blue said--their dialogue--to provide the lonesome girls with an example of what to do.

The eighth and final section of Shakespeare In Harlem, "Lenox Avenue," a street in Harlem--contains ten poems that examine different aspects of the struggle between the sexes. Flippant levity marks the query and reply dialogue of the poem that gives the volume its title: se/10

Hey ninny neigh!
 And a hey nonny noe!
 Where, oh, where
 Did my sweet mama go?

Hey ninny neigh
 With a tra-la-la-la!
 They say your sweet mama
 Went home to her ma.
 (SIH, p. 111)

Hughes uses the allusion to the second Page's song of Act V, scene iii in As You Like It to emphasize the foolishness of the forsaken lover.

Levity characterizes the tone of the speaker of "Fired" and reflects his attitudes towards both work and love:

Awake all night with loving
 The bright day caught me
 Unawares--asleep.

"Late to work again,"
 The boss man said.
 "You're fired'."

So I went on back to bed--
 And dreamed the sweetest dreams,
 With Caledonia's arm
 Beneath my head.
 (SIH, p. 112)

"Early Evening Quarrel" is an argument in blues dialogue between Hammond and Hattie, an example of the battle between the sexes:

Where is that surgar, Hammond,
 I sent you this morning to buy?
 I say, where is that sugar
 I sent you this morning to buy?
 Coffee without sugar
 Makes a good woman cry.

I ain't got no surgar, Hattie,
 I gambled your dime away.
 Ain't got no sugar, I
 Done gambled that dime away.
 But if you's a wise woman, Hattie,
 You ain't gonna have nothin to say.

I ain't no wise woman, Hammond.
 I am evil and mad.
 Ain't no sense in a good woman
 Bein treated so bad.

I don't treat you bad, Hattie,
 Neither does I treat you good.
 But I reckon I could treat you
 Worser if I would.

Lawd, these things we women
 Have to stand!
 I wonder is there nowhere a
 Do-right man?
 (SIH, pp. 113-114)

Poverty and disillusionment relentlessly hound these oppressed "lovers" backing them into hollows of despair where trifling issues scare up their despair. Chauvinism characterizes their interaction blinding them before the external conditions that they must understand and overcome in order for their love to thrive.

The speaker of "Evil Morning" conveys a similar impoverished causal analysis, but with conscious and comic understatement (st. 1 and 4) and hyperbole (st. 2 and 3) that functions to both humor and intimidate his mate:

It must have been yesterday,
 (I know it ain't today)
 Must have been yesterday
 I started feeling this a-way.

I feel so mean I could
 Bite a nail in two.

But before I'd bite a nail
I'd pulverize you.

You're the cause
O' my feeling like a dog
With my feet in the mire
And my heart in a bog.

Uh! It sure is awful to
Feel bad two days straight.
Get out o' my sight be-
Fore it is too late!
(SIH, p. 118)

Hughes tried to capture the contradictory nature of love--its miraculous vitality and its anguishing waning--in "Love," the final poem of this volume:

Love is a wild wonder
And stars that sing,
Rocks that burst asunder
And mountains that take wing.

John Henry with his hammer
Makes a little spark.
That little spark is love
Dying in the dark.
(SIH, p. 124)

In the first stanza the narrator defines through four parallel metaphors to express the vital creative energy of love; in the second he draws an analogy from the folk heroic legend of John Henry to suggest the faint hope of love's survival. Although he revitalizes the spark of hope cliché, the poem ends on a distinctly despairing note.

I. JIM CROW'S LAST STAND

Jim Crow's Last Stand, JCLS (Atlanta: Negro Publication Society of America, 1943) is a collection of twenty-three serious poems of Black political and social protest. All of the poems reflect a heightened political consciousness and concern for what it means for a Black person to be born, live, and die in America. Hughes demands that the rights and privileges of American democracy be extended to include Black people, and, to this end, that the killing of Jim Crow (i.e., the termination of all forms of segregation, discrimination, and intolerance against Blacks) is a sine qua non. Logically, his primary audience for this volume was whites. Four clusters of themes dominate these poems: nine poems focus on aspects of Jim Crow; two focus on exploitation; seven poems focus on Black pride and history, and five poems focus on brotherhood.

"The Black Man Speaks" continues the focus of "The Colored Soldier" (see above, pp. 179-80) on the contradiction of Blacks (now in World War II) fighting for a democracy from which they are excluded:

I swear to the Lord
I still can't see
Why Democracy means
Everybody but me.

I swear to my soul
I can't understand

Why Freedom don't apply
To the black man.

I swear, by gum,
I really don't know
Why in the name of Liberty
You treat me so.

Down South you make me ride
In a Jim Crow car.
From Los Angeles to London
You spread your color bar.

Jim Crow Army,
And Navy, too--
Is Jim Crow Freedom the best
I can expect from you?

I simply raise these questions
Cause I want you to state
What kind of a world
We're fighting to create.

If we're fighting to create
A free world tomorrow,
Why not end right now
Old Jim Crow's sorrow?
(JCLS, p. 5)

The Black man speaks more directly and impatiently than did the colored soldier. Not yet militant, the voice suggests the urgency of the situation by confronting the enemy with the facts of discrimination and with questions of why and what to do. The speaker uses Hughes' characteristic ballad quatrains as he reasons himself in three steps to questioning white America's doctrine and practice of Jim Crow. In the first step (st. 1-3), using repetition and parallelism, he rhetorically focuses on America's failure to extend democracy (st. 1), freedom (st. 2), and liberty (st. 3) to Blacks. The progression of the speaker's

oaths--"the Lord," "my soul," "by gum"--reflect his increasing political awareness and emotional involvement as his mask crumbles in the face of his indignation. In the second step he focuses (st. 4-5) on the extent of Jim Crow practices. In his third step (st. 6-7) he explains why he asked, and thereby he exposes the logical absurdity of fighting to secure rights for others from which he has been and is still being excluded.

The volume's title poem reflects the significance of "the black man's" awareness: World War II and the inter-related responses of Black and Third World people have created enough pressures in the political world to insure the destruction of institutionalized racism:

There was an old Crow by the name of Jim.
 The Crackers were in love with him.
 They liked him so well they couldn't stand
 To see Jim Crow get out of hand.
 But something happened, Jim's feathers fell.
 Now that Crow's begun to look like hell.

DECEMBER 7, 1941:

Pearl Harbor put Jim Crow on the run.
 That Crow can't fight for Democracy
 And be the same old Crow he used to be--
 Although right now, even yet today,
 He still tries to act in the same old way.
 But India and China and Harlem, too,
 Have made up their minds Jim Crow is through.

Nehru said, before he went to jail,
 Catch that Jim Crow bird, pull the feathers out
 his tail!
 Marion Anderson said to the DAR,
 I'll sing for you--but drop that color bar.
 Paul Robeson said, out in Kansas City,
 To Jim Crow my people is a pity.

Mrs. Bethune told Martin Dies,
 You ain't telling nothing but your Jim Crow lies--
 If you want to get old Hitler's goat,
 Abolish poll tax so folks can vote.
 Joe Louis said, We gonna win this war
 Cause the good Lord knows what we're fighting for!

December 7, 1941:

When Dorie Miller took gun in hand--
 Jim Crow started his last stand.
 Our battle yet is far from you.
 But when it is, Jim Crow'll be done.
 We gonna bury that son-of-gun!

(JCLS, pp. 29-30)

Implementing the spirit and techniques of oral folk tales for a satirical effect, the narrator spins a modern beast fable from the epithet Jim Crow. He puns on the epithet's meanings--socialized racism, a bird, and a derogatory name for a Black person. From this ambiguity arises much of the satirical humor reinforced by the couplet rhyming for all but the last triplet.

The narrator of "Red Cross" satirically develops an epithet at the expense of the discriminatory practices of the Red Cross Society:

The Angel of Mercy's
 Got her wings in the mud,
 And all because of
 Negro blood.

(JCLS, p. 8)

This little epigram reflects Hughes' documentary concerns.

One of Hughes' best poems written in a declamatory voice, whose very artificiality becomes a channel for both grief and protest, is "The Bitter River." The first four lines combine strands of water and gustatory imagery that

function as metaphors to reflect the main theme--the Black man's hatred and repudiation of Southern racism:

There is a bitter river
Flowing through the South.
Too long has the taste of its water
Been in my mouth.

(JCLS, p. 11)

The environmental pollution of the river becomes metaphors of the moral pollution of the South:

There is a bitter river
Dark with filth and mud.
Too long has its evil poison
Poisoned my blood.

(ll. 5-8)

Not merely lynchings but embitterment, disillusionment, and stagnation have poisoned the hearts of too many oppressed Black people:

I've drunk of the bitter river
And its gall coats the red of my tongue.
Mixed with the blood of the lynched boys
From its iron bridge hung,
Mixed with the hopes that are drowned there
In the snake-like hiss of its stream
Where I drank of the bitter river
That strangled my dream:
The book studied--but useless.
Tools handled--but unused,
Knowledge acquired but thrown away,
Ambition battered and bruised.

(ll. 9-20)

After the personae connects the water imagery with death and the blood imagery with life the former overcomes the latter. In an apostrophe he accuses the river (the racist South) of being without hope, for, unnaturally, it reflects no light:

Oh, water of the bitter river
 With your taste of blood and clay,
 You reflect no stars by night,
 No sun by day.
 (ll. 21-24)

In these last four lines of the first stanza he shifts from the mixture relationship that dominated this stanza to the relationship of reflection which will dominate the second stanza:

The bitter river reflects no stars--
 It gives back only the glint of steel bars
 And dark bitter faces behind steel bars,
 The Scottsboro boys behind steel bars,
 Lewis Jones behind steel bars,
 The voteless share-cropper behind steel bars,
 The soldier thrown from a Jim Crow bus behind
 steel bars,
 The 15¢ mugger behind steel bars,
 The girl who sells her body behind steel bars,
 And my grandfather's back with its ladder of scars,
 Long ago, long ago--the whip and steel bars--
 The bitter river reflects no stars.
 (p. 12, ll. 25-37)

Instead of the light of hope the river reflects steel bars, a metonymy for the oppressive imprisonment of the people, the atrocities of which the persona catalogues. In the third stanza the river's swirl is a metaphor for the suffering produced by oppression and racism. That very swirl of suffering exposes the oppressive intent behind the bourgeois pattern of gradual amelioration and baiting:

"Wait, be patient," you say.
 "Your folks will have a better day."
 But the swirl of the bitter river
 Takes your words away.

"Work, education, patience
 Will bring a better day."
 The swirl of the bitter river
 Carries your "patience" away.
 "Disrupter! Agitator!
 Trouble maker!" you say.
 The swirl of the bitter river
 Sweeps your lies away.
 (ll. 38-49)

In the fourth stanza the persona identifies the actions of his enemy (ll. 50-63), and then identifies himself in relation to the acts of oppression (ll. 64-81):

I did not ask for this river
 Nor the tast of its bitter brew.
 I was given its water
 As a gift from you.
 Yours has been the power
 To force my back to the wall
 And make me drink of the bitter cup
 Mixed with blood and gall.
 You have lynched my comrades
 Where the iron bridge crosses the stream,
 Underpaid me for my labor,
 And spit in the face of my dream.
 You forced me to the bitter river
 With the hiss of its snake-like song--
 Now your words no longer have meaning--
 I have drunk at the river too long:
 Dreamer of dreams to be broken,
 Builder of hopes to be smashed,
 Loser from an empty pocket
 Of my meagre cash,
 Bitter bearer of burdens
 And singer of weary song,
 I've drunk at the bitter river
 With its filth and its mud too long.
 Tired now of the bitter river,
 Tired now of the pat on the back,
 Tired now of the steel bars
 Because my face is black,
 I'm tired of segregation,
 Tired of filth and mud.
 I've drunk of the bitter river
 And it's turned to steel in my blood.
 (pp. 12-13, ll. 50-81)

The voice uses irony (ll. 50-53), catalogue of the acts of oppression, word and phrase repetition and parallelism along with alliteration to tie together this potent protest.

The last stanza recapitulates the theme:

Oh, tragic bitter river
 Where the lynched boys hung,
 The gall of your bitter water
 Coats my tongue.
 The blood of your bitter water
 For me gives back no stars.
 I'm tired of the bitter river!
 Tired of the bars!

The main images are woven together to make this final statement.

As with the preceding poem, "Ballad of Sam Solomon" reflects Hughes' intention to be a documentary poet as he focuses on the struggle by Blacks of Miami, Florida for suffrage:

Sam Solomon said,
 You may call out the Klan
 But you must've forgot
 That a Negro is a MAN
 It was down in Miami
 A few years ago.
 Negroes never voted but
 Sam said, It's time to go
 To the polls election day
 And make your choice known
 Cause the vote is not restricted
 To white folks alone.
 The fact we never voted
 In the past
 Is something that surely
 Ain't due to last.
 Sam Solomon called on
 Every colored man
 To qualify and register
 And take a stand
 And be up and out and ready

On election day
 To vote at the polls,
 Come what may.
 The crackers said, Sam,
 If you carry this through,
 Ain't no telling what
 We'll do to you.
 Sam Solomon answered,
 I don't pay you no mind.
 The crackers said, Boy,
 Are you deaf, dumb, and blind?
 Sam Solomon said, I'm
 Neither one nor the other--
 But we intend to vote
 On election day, brother.
 The crackers said, Sam,
 Are you a fool or a dunce?
 Sam Solomon said, A MAN
 Can't die but once.
 They called out the Klan.
 They had a parade.
 But Sam Solomon
 Was not afraid.
 On election day
 He led his colored delegation
 To take their rightful part
 In the voting of a nation.
 The crackers thought
 The Ku Klux was tough--
 But the Negroes in Miami
 Called their bluff.
 Sam Solomon said,
 Go get out your Klan--
 But you must've forgotten
 A Negro is a MAN.
 (JCLS, pp. 22-23)

The ballad celebrates the political organizing of Sam Solomon; moreover it is intended to rally Black people to organize their actions by inspiring them with example, facts, values, and principles. The framing refrain (ll. 1-4, 53-56) capsulizes the redefinition of Black people's identity through their action of overcoming their fear of the Ku Klux Klan as well as the comfortable Southern white stereotype,

"black boy" in order to vote. First Sam rallies his people (ll. 5-24). Then his retorts to the threats of "the crackers" in dialogue (ll. 25-40) as well as action (ll. 41-48) render him a heroic leader.

The speaker of "Color" uses a balanced pair of suppositions, each containing contrasting similes, to express his pride in being Black:

I would wear it
Like a banner for the proud--
Not like a shroud.
I would wear it
Like a song soaring high--
Not moan or cry.
(JCLS, p. 7)

Of the two poems that focus on exploitation, "Blue Bayou" and "Ballad of the Landlord," the latter is formed by shifting points of view:

Landlord, landlord
My roof has sprung a leak.
Don't you 'member I told you about it
Way last week?

Landlord, landlord,
These steps is broken down.
When you come up yourself
It's a wonder you don't fall down.

Ten Bucks you say I owe you?
Ten Bucks you say is due?
Well, that's Ten Bucks more'n I'll pay you
Till you fix this house up new.

What? You gonna get eviction orders?
You gonna cut off my heat?
You gonna take my furniture and
Throw it in the street?

Um-huh! You talking high and mighty.
 Talk on--till you get through.
 You ain't gonna be able to say a word
 If I land my fist on you.

Police! Police!
 Come and get this man!
 He's trying to ruin the government
 And overturn the land!

Copper's whistle!
 Patrol bell!
 Arrest.

Precinct Station.
 Iron cell.
 Headlines in press:

MAN THREATENS LANDLORD

TENANT HELD NO BAIL

JUDGE GIVES NEGRO 90 DAYS IN COUNTY JAIL.

(JCLS, p. 20)

The first five stanzas are the tenant's dramatic monologue with the landlord. When the exasperated tenant threatens violence, the focus shifts to the landlord (st. 6), who retaliates by calling the law. In the last five stanzas a narrator catalogues images that reflect and satirize the unjust legal system designed to protect the interests of the landlord.

The five poems treating the theme of brotherhood, argue for alliance and solidarity between Blacks in and out of the United States, Black and white workers, fellow workers, Black and whites in the South, and blacks and

Soviet Russians.

"Brothers" is an important example of Pan-Africanist ideology:

We are related--you and I.
You from the West Indies,
I from Kentucky.

We are kinsmen--you and I
You from Africa,
I from these States.

We are brothers--you and I.
(JCLS, p. 15)

Technically, this poem of identity using parallelism and repetition is not unique.

"Big Buddy" is a folk song that alludes to the earlier folk songs about the legendary hero John Henry to inspire solidarity among workers:

Big Buddy, Big Buddy,
Ain't you gonna stand by me?
Big Buddy, Big Buddy,
Ain't you gonna stand by me?
If I got to fight,
I'll fight like a man,
But say, Big Buddy,
Won't you lend a hand?
Ain't you gonna stand by me?

Big Buddy, Big Buddy,
Don't you hear this hammer ring?
Hey, Big Buddy,
Don't you hear this hammer ring?
I'm gonna split this rock
And split it wide!
When I split this rock,
Stand by my side.
Say, Big Buddy,
Don't you hear this hammer ring?
(JCLS, p. 21)

It is not improbable that the poem is also allegorical with a call for international support, especially from the U.S.S.R., during an American proletarian revolution.

J. FREEDOM'S PLOW

Freedom's Plow, FP (New York, Musette Publishers, Inc., 1943) is a declamatory, poetic sermon and argument of 200 lines distributed into twelve stanzas.

This poem was read by Paul Muni over the Blue Network on Monday, March 15, 1943 from 3:45 to 4:00 P. M. Eastern War Time. Background music was furnished by organ accompaniment and the Golden Gate Quartet. (FP, p. 2)

The narrator employs the metaphor of the world as a rural wilderness which man has come to cultivate and farm. He uses free verse with Hughes' characteristic balance, repetition, parallelism, and variations to support his argument that the American dream will be realized with the unrelenting work of men in search of freedom. The central images and themes appear in the first stanza, a hypothesis:

When a man starts out with nothing,
When a man starts with his hands
Empty, but clean,
When a man starts out to build a world,
He starts first with himself
And the faith that is in his heart--
The strength there,
The will there to build.

(p. 3, ll. 1-8)

The imagery of the human is set in a struggling relationship with the imagery of the land. The hypothesis is that a man with nothing but his hands must have faith in his heart as well as strength in those hands. The second stanza

explores the hypothesis and extends the two strands of imagery:

First in the heart is the dream--
 Then the mind starts seeking a way
 His eyes look out on the world,
 On the great wooded world,
 On the rich soil of the world,
 On the rivers of the world.
 The eyes see there materials for building,
 See the difficulties, too, and the obstacles.
 The mind seeks a way to overcome these obstacles.
 The hand seeks tools to cut the wood,
 To till the soil, and harness the power of the waters.
 Then the hand seeks other hands to help,
 A community of hands to help--
 Thus the dream becomes not one man's dream alone,
 But a community dream.
 Not my dream alone, but our dream.
 Not my world alone,
 But your world and my world,
 Belonging to all the hands who build.
 (pp. 3-4, ll. 9-27)

The American dream--the object of man's strength and faith--must be built in community and owned as well as shared by its builders. This is a radical socialist extension of the principle of democracy beyond its existing limits in America. This stanza moves to this principle by the following image progression: heart, mind, eyes, hands. This focus on human images common to all produces a collective central figure, a kind of Everyman or communal man or man of the masses, if you will. The third stanza shifts from hypothetical projections of what had to have been and what should be to a historical sketch of what was; first who came to build America:

A long time ago, but not too long ago,
 Ships came from across the sea
 Bringing Pilgrims and prayer-makers,
 Adventurers and booty seekers,
 Free men and indentured servants,
 Slave men and slave master, all new--
 To a new world, America!

(pp. 4-5, ll. 28-34)

Both the slaves and slavers had faith in freedom, the object of their dreams, and inspired by them they built America with their hands:

With billowing sails the galleons came
 Bringing men and dreams, women and dreams.
 In little bands together,
 Heart reaching out to heart,
 Hand reaching out to hand,
 They began to build our land.
 Some were free hands
 Seeking a greater freedom,
 Some were indentured hands
 Hoping to find their freedom,
 Some were slave hands
 Guarding in their hearts the seed of freedom.
 But the word was there always:

FREEDOM.

Down into the earth went the plow
 In the free hands and the slave hands,
 In indentured hands and adventurous hands,
 Turning the rich soil went the plow in many hands
 That planted and harvested the food that fed
 And the cotton that clothed America.
 Clang against the trees went the ax in many hands
 That hewed and shaped the rooftops of America.
 Splash into the rivers and the seas went the boat-hulls
 That moved and transported America.
 Crack went the whips that drove the horses
 Across the plains of America.
 Free hands and slave hands,
 Indentured hands, adventurous hands,
 White hands and black hands
 Held the plow handles,
 Ax handles, hammer handles,
 Launched the boats and whipped the horses
 That fed and housed and moved America.
 Thus together through labor,
 All these hands made America.

(pp. 6-7, ll. 35-69)

This stanza is controlled by the hand imagery, its work and its products. Continuing this historical sketch the fifth stanza catalogues the products of men's labor:

Labor! Out of labor came the villages
 And the towns that grew to cities.
 Labor. Out of labor came the rowboats
 And the sailboats and the steamboats,
 Came the wagons and the coaches,
 Covered wagons, stage coaches,
 Out of labor came the factories,
 Came the foundries, came the railroads,
 Came the marts and markets, shops and stores,
 Came the mighty products moulded, manufactured,
 Sold in shops, piled in warehouses,
 Shipped the wide world over:
 Out of labor--white hands and black hands--
 Came the dream, the strength, the will,
 And the way to build America.
 Now it is Me here, and You there.
 Now it's Manhattan, Chicago,
 Seattle, New Orleans,
 Boston and El Paso--
 Now it is the U. S. A.
 (pp. 7-8, ll. 70-89)

Labor has produced America! In the sixth stanza the narrator appeals to white historical authorities, from which he quotes, to justify the extension of democratic rights to Blacks:

A long time ago, but not too long ago, a man said:
 ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL . . .
 ENDOWED BY THEIR CREATOR
 WITH CERTAIN UNALIENABLE RIGHTS
 AMONG THESE LIFE, LIBERTY
 AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS.
 His name was Jefferson. There were Slaves then,
 But in their hearts the slaves believed him, too,
 And silently took for granted
 That what he said was also meant for them.
 It was a long time ago,
 But not so long ago at that, Lincoln said:
 NO MAN IS GOOD ENOUGH
 TO GOVERN ANOTHER MAN
 WITHOUT THAT OTHER'S CONSENT.

There were slaves then, too,
 But in their hearts the slaves knew
 What he said must be meant for every human being--
 Else it had no meaning for anyone.

(pp. 8-9, ll. 90-108)

It is this stanza in which it become evident that the narrator is making an argument and that everything up to this point has been part of his focus on the history of the question. In the seventh stanza he appeals to historical Black authorities who have provided the examples for how Blacks should pursue their human rights:

Then a man said:

BETTER TO DIE FREE,
 THAN TO LIVE SLAVES.

He was a colored man who had been a slave
 But had run away to freedom.
 And the slaves knew
 What Frederick Douglass said was true.
 With John Brown at Harper's Ferry, Negroes died.
 John Brown was hung.
 Before the Civil War, days were dark,
 And nobody knew for sure
 When freedom would triumph.
 "Or if it would," thought some.
 But others knew it had to triumph.
 In those dark days of slavery,
 Guarding in their hearts the seed of freedom,
 The slaves made up a song:
Keep Your Hands On the Plow! Hold On!
 That song meant just what it said: Hold On!
 Freedom will come!

Keep Your Hands On the Plow! Hold On!

(pp. 9-10, ll. 109-29)

The narrator focuses on the hero of the people--Douglass-- and on the people's heroism projected allegorically in their song of fortitude and inspiration from which flows the poem's central image and its title. The eighth stanza, wrapping up

the history of the question, focuses on the outcome of the Civil War: a united nation free of legal human bondage yet still a wilderness standing in the path of civilization:

Out of war, it came, bloody and terrible!
 But it came!
 Some there were, as always,
 Who doubted that the war would end right,
 That the slaves would be free,
 Or that the union would stand.
 But now we know how it all came out.
 Out of the darkest days for a people and a nation,
 We know now how it came out.
 There was light when the battle clouds rolled away.
 There was a great wooded land,
 And men united as a nation.
 (pp. 10-11, ll. 130-41)

In the ninth stanza the narrator reveals the relationship of the people to America and both the people and America to the dream:

America is a dream.
 The poet says it was promises.
 The people say it is promises--that will come true.
 The people do not always say things out loud,
 Nor write them down on paper.
 The people often hold
 Great thoughts in their deepest hearts
 And sometimes only blunderingly express them,
 Haltingly and stumbling say them,
 And faultily put them into practice.
 The people do not always understand each other.
 But there is, somewhere there,
 Always the trying to understand,
 And the trying to say,
 "You are a man. Together we are building our land."
 (pp. 11-12, ll. 142-56)

Here Hughes reveals the vigor of his faith in the masses as well as his critical perception of the poet and, implicitly, his function of speaking for the people. In the tenth stanza the narrator presents his proposition and supporting

issues in an apostrophe:

America!
 Land created in common,
 Dream nourished in common,
 Keep your hand on the plow! Hold on!
 If the house is not yet finished,
 Don't be discouraged, builder!
 If the fight is not yet won,
 Don't be weary, soldier!
 The plan and the pattern is here,
 Woven from the beginning
 Into the warp and woof of America:
 ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL.
 NO MAN IS GOOD ENOUGH
 TO GOVERN ANOTHER MAN
 WITHOUT THAT OTHER'S CONSENT.
 (pp. 12-13, ll. 157-71)

This appeal to the history of America seems to be Hughes' crucial issue. In the eleventh stanza, after an appeal to one's patriotic identity, he rallies his audience to use counter-assertion and American ideals to fight external and internal enemies.

BETTER DIE FREE,
 THAN TO LIVE SLAVES,
 Who said those things? Americans!
 Who owns those words? Americans!
 Who is America? You, me!
 We are America!
 To the enemy who would conquer us from without,
 We say, NO!
 To the enemy who would divide
 And conquer us from within,
 We say, NO!
 FREEDOM!
 BROTHERHOOD!
 DEMOCRACY!
 To all the enemies of these great words:
 We say, NO!
 (pp. 13-14, ll. 172-87)

In the last stanza the narrator returns to his farming imagery and produces a symbolic tree from his initial plowing:

A long time ago,
 An enslaved people heading toward freedom
 Made up a song:

Keep Your Hand On The Plow! Hold On!
 That plow plowed a new furrow
 Across the field of history.
 Into that furrow the freedom seed was dropped.
 From that seed a tree grew, is growing, will ever grow.
 That tree is for everybody,
 For all America, for all the world.
 May its branches spread and its shelter grow
 Until all races and all peoples know its shade.

KEEP YOUR HAND ON THE PLOW! HOLD ON!
 (p. 14, ll. 188-200)

Despite the creeping in of socialist ideas--communalism and a passionate dedication to labor and its products--Freedom's Plow is a manifesto reaffirming the dream of American democracy. Considered in perspective it serves notice of the end of Hughes' explicit relationship with socialist proletarian ideology. Hughes' intention was to foster national unity and patriotic commitment to America and its dream of democracy, which, he argues to Black people, will be fulfilled at the end of World War II as manumission was secured at the end of the civil war. Hughes is embarrassingly silent concerning the barren democratic harvest for Black people after World War I that he complained about earlier in "The Colored Soldier" (see above, pp. 179-80). This is also quite a propagandistic shift from the militancy of "The Black Man Speaks" (see above, pp. 237-38). But it is without a doubt that the poem's social validity arises out of its representation of the very myopic and yet

actual survival of the American dream and hope for its fulfillment in the hearts of many Black Americans. Not ten years later the dream will have become too great a burden.

K. FIELDS OF WONDER

Fields Of Wonder, FOW (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947) is a collection of seventy-four poems grouped under nine sections. The book represents a great leap in Hughes' poetic craftsmanship, poetic vision, wisdom, and self awareness. His crudely proletarian consciousness has matured and integrated with his life long love and dedication to the oppressed as well as with a growing awareness of the self and its relations to what may be called the mysterious and the common, and he is much more aware that he is a poet developing the function of Black artistic techniques and forms. He sees deeper into the meaning and relationships of his characteristic themes, for example, the meaningfulness of silence to express love and the intuitive relation between the poet and his subject and the shortcomings of a poet's strivings. His maturing style, in the process of contracting, is more concise with precision, more tense yet delicate, singing with a penetrating lyricism. His diction and style then have risen above the idiomatic speech of the masses in order to express what they feel or cloudily think but are unable to communicate. His epigrammatic poems foreshadowed this development, especially

*world, new
writing*
autobiog
mission

those that embody folk wisdom.

The first of the seven poems of the first section-- "Fields of Wonder"--at the volume's end for a circular effect. The poem, "Heaven," cast as a vision of fantasy foreshadowed in poems of The Dream Keeper, is really an inspired mystical metaphor for the singing of the universe:

Heaven is
The place where
Happiness is
Everywhere.

Animals
And birds sing--
As does
Everything.

To each stone,
"How-do-you-do?"
Stone answers back,
"Well! And you?"
(FOW, p. 3)

The speaker defines heaven by describing it. The three stanzas are ordered from the generic definition to a specific illustration of miraculous dialogue. The talking stones initiate a motion in the reader's awareness from specific to generic, for his experienced imagination answers that if stones may greet each other then it is not incredible that everywhere there is happiness revealed by the singing of all things. The naivety of the poetic observer is conveyed by the simplicity of his diction and style as well as the child-like fantasy of his vision. This poem represents a development of Hughes' central theme of joy for which so many of his characters are searching.

Hughes continues to develop his vision of singing (often as possibly here a metaphor for writing poetry as well as other forms of creativity) in the epigrammatic "Big Sur," a corollary of "Heaven":

Great Lonely hills.
Great mountains.
Mighty touchstones of song.
(FOW, p. 5)

Through metaphor the observer identifies nature as the inspiration for creativity.

"Snail" is a dramatic monologue by a speaker who has attempted to intuit a snail's awareness:

Little snail,
Dreaming you go.
Weather and rose
Is all you know.

Weather and rose
Is all you see,
Drinking
The dewdrop's
Mystery.

(FOW, p. 4)

His relationship to the snail parallels that of the snail to the dewdrop: One knows a mystery by in some way intentionally becoming not knowing, that mystery.

*would know
relieve*

And mysteries are born out of mysteries to be discovered as "Birth" reveals:

Oh, fields of wonder
Out of which
Stars are born,
And moon and sun
And me as well,
Like stroke
Of lightning
In the night

Some mark
 To make
 Some word
 To tell.
 (FOW, p. 9)

The poem is an apostrophe to the mystery-filled sky for which this volume's title is an epithet. But this sky is also a synecdoche for the "Everything" of "Heaven"; that is, anything that creates or gives birth, it's all the same. And the poet is also speaking of the act of poeting, a miracle he feels he was born to create.

In "Snake" the speaker recognizes the relation between his fear and his aggressiveness:

He glides so swiftly
 Back into the grass--
 Gives me the courtesy of road
 To let me pass,
 That I am half ashamed
 To seek a stone
 To kill him.
 (FOW, p. 7)

The first four lines show cause, the last three, effect. The climax of the ordering of the lines forces the reader to reconsider his violent impulses as well as the significance of the snake image as has the persona.

The second section, "Border Line," contains sixteen poems whose themes of the anguish and suffering of death, loneliness, disillusionment, alienation, and sorrow stand markedly in contrast to the themes of the first section.

Each of the two parallel paradoxes of the initial poem, which gives this section its title, balances the

speaker's present awareness against his past, structurally,
and his present position against his future position,
logically.

I used to wonder
About living and dying--
I think the difference lies
Between tears and crying.

I used to wonder
About here and there--
I think the distance
Is nowhere.

(FOW, p. 13)

The difference between living and dying is the person (the source) who lies between tears (the product) and crying (the act). That is, the pain of life and the agony and grief of death help man to discover himself.¹ In the second stanza the person records his discovery, or the essence of that discovery, that time and place do not change his possibilities, problems, tasks, and fulfillments. These two balanced paradoxes form an epigram that Hughes said

Is one of my favorite poems because it seems to carry within itself a melody which I can hear although I cannot sing a note. Since this poem is like a song, its sound conditioned its saying. What it says is therefore so much of a piece with the way it is said that form and content are one, like a circle whose shape is itself and whose self is its shape, and which could be no other way to be what it is. I did not consciously compose this poem. It came to me, and

¹In Fields of Wonder see "End" (p. 28) and "Graveyard" (p. 21) for the theme of death, and "Dustbowl" (p. 15) and "Convent" (p. 22) and "Desert" (p. 27) for that of life.

I simply wrote it down, and wondered where it came from, and liked it. Possibly I like it because it was not¹ contrived, its conception having been outside myself.

"Burden" focuses with epigrammatic sharpness on a problem for creators that possibly includes the poet:

It is not weariness
That bows me down,
But sudden nearness
To song without sound.
(FOW, p. 16)

Through negation and affirmation the poet describes, in contrast to the preceding poem, the frustration of an empty grasp despite a short reach.

The speaker of "One" creates verbal pictures as similes of loneliness:

Lonely
As the wind
On the Lincoln
Prairies.

Lonely
As a bottle of likker
On a table
All by itself.
(FOW, p. 17)

The first stanza is a scene from nature; the second, a still life.

The observer of "Gifts" uses logical distinction to suggest the arbitrariness of experience:

¹Hughes, "Written for an Anthology" (Poet's Choice, edit. by Paul Engle and Joseph Langland) a monologue dated 3/31/62 and signed by Hughes.

To some people
 Love is given.
 To others--
 Only heaven.
 (FOW, p. 19)

The observer of "End" negates metonymies to convey his awareness of death:

There are
 No clocks on the wall,
 And no time,
 No shadows that move
 From dawn to dusk
 Across the floor.

There is neither light
 Nor dark
 Outside the door.

There is no door!
 (FOW, p. 28)

The five poems of the third section, "Heart on the Wall," focus on the realizations and disappointments of human feelings. The observer of "Remembrances" draws an epigrammatic analogy to suggest the delicate thoughtfulness of sensitivity:

To wander through this living world
 And leave uncut the roses
 Is to remember fragrance where
 The flower no scent encloses.
 (FOW, p. 33)

The observer of "Girl" gives a twist to a simple elegy by saving the Christian damned by resurrection through nature:

'She lived in sinful happiness
 And died in pain.
 She danced in sunshine
 And laughed in rain.

She went one summer morning
 When flowers spread the plain,
 But she told everybody
 She was coming back again.

Folks made a coffin
 And hid her deep in earth.
 Seems like she said:
My body
Brings new birth.

For sure there grew flowers
 And tall young trees
 And sturdy weeds and grasses
 To sway in the breeze.

And sure she lived
 In growing things
 With no pain
 To laugh in sunshine
 And dance in rain.

(FOW, p. 36)

The poetic observer sees her as a natural saint happy in death for the same reasons as in life--she was joy. Only the transition of death was painful, and the mitigated undoubtedly by the certitude of her faith, which the folks seem to lack. This poem is significant for its development and integration of three earlier themes: the "fallen" women, joy, and death.

A satirical attitude toward the folk is also evident in "Heart":

Pierrot
 Took his heart
 And hung it
 On a wayside wall.

He said,
 "Look, Passers-by,
 Here is my heart!"

But no one was curious.
 No one cared at all
 That there hung
 Pierrot's heart
 On the public wall.
 So Pierrot
 Took his heart
 And hid it
 Far away.

Now people wonder
 Where his heart is
 Today.
 (FOW, pp. 31-32)

The typical Pierrot pantomimes his meaning in the first and fourth stanzas, the first in demonstrative optimism. But faced with apathetic rejection, as the folks of "Girl" hid her body so does he his heart.

The seven poems of the fourth section, "Silver Rain," reveal life and love in fulfillment. Three are among the finest of his lyrics. The beautiful dramatic monologue "Silence" captures in paradox the intuitive communion between lovers:

I catch the pattern
 Of your silence
 Before you speak.

I do not need
 To hear a word.

In your silence
 Every tone I seek
 Is heard.

(FOW, p. 47)

With crystalline perfection the monosyllabic and dis-syllabic tones sing in still silence of satisfaction that is communication. The strand of sound imagery, supported

by internal and end rhyme, heightens one's sensitivity to that silence. This poem reflects an aspect of Hughes' relationship to his people. ✓

(relationship)

Framed by a conditional refrain, the lyric "Sleep" expresses the silence and stillness of sympathetic and sexual union of lovers: 827

When the lips
And the body
Are done
She seeks your hand,
Touches it,
And sleep comes,
Without wonder
And without dreams,
When the lips
And the body
Are done.
(FOW, p. 51)

Through a variety of negations the speaker expresses the perfect peace of a blissful sleep.¹

In contrast to those of "Silver Rain," the four poems of "Desire," the fifth section of Fields of Wonder, record the disillusionment and alienation of those who go no further than the human passions. The speaker of the section-title poem "Desire" uses a complex simile to describe the end of passion:

Desire to us
Was like a double death
Swift dying
Of our mingled breath,

¹See also "Fulfillment" (pp. 43-44, FOW) for a less epigrammatic treatment of the same theme.

Evaporation
 Of an unknown strange perfume
 Between us quickly
 In a naked
 Room.
 (FOW, p. 55)

The first two lines present a generic simile--"double death"; the next two specify half of the "Double death," but that half is itself also a double death as the mingled breath of the spent lovers subsides. The other half of the "double death" is expressed in lines five and six, and that half also has two deaths--the evaporating scent from the lovers' bodies. The fading scent of this "double death" separates the lovers quickly, while the personified room becomes an objective correlative of their shame (ll. 8-9).¹

With exquisite narrative control of irony and surprise the speaker of "Dream" makes the action happen for his reader as it did for himself:

Last night I dreamt
 This most strange dream,
 And everywhere I saw
 What did not seem could ever be:

You were not there with me!

Awake,
 I turned
 And touched you
 Asleep,
 Face to the wall.

¹See also "Man" (FOW, p. 60) for the same theme from a more objective male voice and "Juliet" for related theme from a narrator focusing on a woman (FOW, pp. 58-59).

I said,
How dreams
Can lie!

But you were not there at all!
(FOW, pp. 56-57)

The eight poems of the sixth section--"Tearless"--of Fields of Wonder focus on bourgeois society's outcasts and their pain, sorrow, alienation and death. In "Luck" the poetic observer suppresses the metaphor of a dog for whom

Sometimes a few scraps fall
From the tables of joy.
Sometimes a bone
Is flung.
(FOW, p. 64)

But not even the master seems able to enjoy his table, for in "Walls" his sheltering home is also his prison:

Four walls can hold
So much pain,
Four walls that shield
From the wind and rain.

Four walls can shelter
So much sorrow
Garnered from yesterday
And held for tomorrow.
(FOW, p. 66)

The poetic observer uses the walls as a synecdoche for the home.

Playing on the saw, "The eyes are the windows to the soul," the observer of "Grief" focuses and parallels the external and internal signs:

Eyes
That are frozen
From not crying.

Heart
 That knows
 No way of dying.
 (FOW, p. 69)

In "Vagabonds" (p. 63), "Chippy" (p. 67), and "Dancers" (p. 68) Hughes draws pictures of those who have attempted to escape.

Eleven poems make up the seventh section, "Mortal Storm." These treat man's search for himself and for God, for mystical awareness when inspired by fear, loneliness, contradictions between himself and nature, fantasies, dreams, love, and the odd, strange, or rare. "A House in Taos" is a satirical monologue in which a weary, representative speaker appeals to the beauty of nature for relief from a bourgeois-bohemian life whose comfort and luxury cannot cover the nothingness, stillness, and barrenness gnawing at its heart. But the forces of nature stand as firmly mocking sentinels over a forbidden land:

Rain

Thunder of the Rain God:
 And we three
 Smitten by beauty.

Thunder of the Rain God:
 And we three
 Weary, weary.

Thunder of the Rain God:
 And you, she, and I
 Waiting for nothingness.

Do you understand the stillness
 Of this house
 In Taos
 Under the thunder of the Rain God?

Sun

That there should be a barren garden
 About this house in Taos
 Is not so strange,
 But that there should be three barren hearts.
 In this one house in Taos--
 Who carries ugly things to show the sun?

Moon

Did you ask for the beaten brass of the moon?
 We can buy lovely things with money,
 You, she, and I,
 Yet you seek,
 As though you could keep,
 This unbought loveliness of moon.

Wind

Touch our bodies, wind.
 Our bodies are separate, individual things.
 Touch our bodies, wind,
 But blow quickly
 Through the red, white, yellow skins
 Of our bodies
 To the terrible snarl,
 Not mine,
 Not yours,
 Not hers,
 But all one snarl of souls.
 Blow quickly, wind,
 Before we run back
 Into the windlessness--
 With our bodies--
 Into the windlessness
 Of our house in Taos.

(FOW, pp. 73-75)

In Rain a weary trio, waiting for nothing in a still house is both assaulted and enthralled by thunder and rain, the sounds of which create for them an anthropomorphic image that heightens their awareness of their condition. In Sun the speaker draws an analogy between the barren garden and their hearts, both in the face of an anthropomorphic

sun. The "ugly things" are undoubtedly themselves and/or their art works:

I met a lot of very exotic and jittery writers and artists of that period, too. And the more exotic and jittery they were, the more they talked of heading for Taos and the desert and the Indians. So I began to wonder what the Indians would think about their coming and if they would drink as much in Taos as they did in the Village.¹

In Moon the questioner ridicules the bourgeois values that would purchase the "loveliness of moon." In Wind he appeals in apostrophe to the wind to touch their hostile, bitter souls quickly before they retreat into their unnaturally empty house.²

The satirical poetic observer of "Old Sailor" uses cliches and puns to ironically ridicule his subject:

He has been
 Many places
 In ships
 That cross the sea,
 Has studied varied faces,
 Has tasted mystery,
 In Oriental cities
 Has breasted
 Monstrous pities
 And to all
 Fleshly pleasures
 Known the key.

Now,
 Paralyzed,
 He suns himself
 In charity's poor chair--

¹Hughes, The Big Sea, p. 259.

²See also "Strange Hurt" (FOW, pp. 80-81) for a similar treatment of nature.

And dreams
 That women he has left
 Lament him
 Everywhere.
 (FOW, pp. 76-77)

Each of the two stanzas of the poem is a loose sentence. The last phrase of the first stanza catches the reader by surprise. The narrator's description, until now full of sentimental cliches, takes a sharp twisting thrust by punning on the "earthly treasure" cliché. In the second stanza the poor syphilitic old man who seem to see so much of the world sits trapped in his own egotistical fantasies.¹ This brutal realism represents quite a shift from the romantic nostalgia of Hughes' earlier sea poems.

The transcendentalist "There" represents quite a different religious persona from Hughes' earlier fundamentalist speakers:

Where death
 Stretches its wide horizons
 And the sun gallops no more
 Across the sky,
 There where nothing
 Is all,
 I,
 Who am nobody,
 Will become Infinity,
 Even perhaps
 Divinity.
 (FOW, p. 88)

¹See also in Fields of Wonder: "Little Song" (p. 82) for the theme of loneliness, "Jaime" (p. 84) for the fantasies produced in loneliness, "Sailing Date" (pp. 86-87) for the asperity and hopelessness of sailor's lives, and "Faithful One" (p. 85) for a glimmer in the darkness.

The speaker explores the paradox of death when nothing becomes everything--in balanced stanzas.

The seven poems of "Stars Over Harlem," the eighth section of Fields of Wonder, focus on themes concerning Black people--racism, oppression, creative expression and release, escape, and hope.

"Trumpet Player: 52nd Street" continues Hughes' striving to interpret the significance of Black music, this time for the musician himself:

The Negro
 With the trumpet at his lips
 Has dark moons of weariness
 Beneath his eyes
 Where the smoldering memory
 Of slave ships
 Blazed to the crack of whips
 About his thighs.
 (FOW, p. 91, st. 1)

The narrator begins by interpreting the musician's facial expression--in which he sees the oppressive memory of slavery--as he will later interpret his music--which attempts to both capture and escape the past. In the second stanza the narrator focuses on the musician's coiffured hair:

The Negro
 With the trumpet at his lips
 Has a head of vibrant hair
 Tamed down,
 Patent-leathered now
 Until it gleams
 Like jet--
 Were jet a crown.
 (pp. 91-92)

a symbol of both oppression ("Tamed down") and racism ("Patent-leathered now / Until it gleams / Like jet-- /

Were jet a crown"). Through metaphor the narrator describes the ecstasy of the music's soothing and stimulating effects.

The music
 From the trumpet at his lips
 Is honey
 Mixed with liquid fire.
 The rhythm
 From the trumpet at his lips
 Is ecstasy
 Distilled from old desire--
 (p. 92)

The old desire has a double identity in the fourth stanza:

Desire
 That is longing for the moon
 Where the moonlight's but a spotlight
 In his eyes,
 Desire
 That is longing for the sea
 Where the sea's a bar-glass
 Sucker size.
 (p. 92)

In a sense the desire is old because it can never be satisfied; in another the musician is a victim of civilization teased by its surrogate images of nature (spotlight for moon, bar-glass for sea). The music is an expression of the musician's captivity, and yet how it serves a narcotic function he is unaware.

The Negro
 With the trumpet at his lips
 Whose jacket
 Has a fine one-button roll,
 Does not know
 Upon what riff the music slips
 Its hypodermic needle
 To his soul--
 (p. 93, st. 5)

The last stanza reveals the relationship between the

function of this jazz and the blues songs:

But softly
 As the tune comes from his throat
 Trouble
 Mellows to a golden note.
 (p. 93, st. 6)

The last line deftly picks up the imagery of honey and fire and resolves the mixture to express the resolution of conflicts that the music is.¹

In the nine poems of "Words Like Freedom," the last section of Fields of Wonder, Hughes explores the meanings of and ways to freedom. One of his most ambiguous poems against war is "When the Armies Passed" which may allude to the Chinese Communists:

Mama, I found this soldier's cap
 Lying in the snow.
 It has a red star on it.
 Whose is it, do you know?
I do not know
Whose cap it is, son.
All stained
With wet and mud.
 But it has a red star on it!
Are you sure
It is not blood?
 I thought I saw red stars, mother,
 Scattered all over the snow.
 But if they were blood, mother--
 Whose?

¹See the following related poems from Fields of Wonder: "Motherland" (p. 97) for the significance of colonized Africa to Hughes, "Harlem Dance Hall" (p. 94) for more of the function of music, "Communion" (p. 98) for another form of escape. See above, pp. 7-10 for analysis of "Dimout in Harlem" (FOW, pp. 95-96) that projects the force of oppression in the life of a Black male in the streets.

Son, I do not know.
It might have been
Your father's blood,
Perhaps blood
Of your brother.
 See! When you wipe the mud away,
 It is a red star, mother!
 (FOW, pp. 109-10)

This dialogue plays with the identity of death with honor to expose absurd cruelty of war that kills just as ruthlessly the enemy and the loved one.

"Oppression" focuses on Hughes' concern for dreams again, and although he is optimistic he is not very convincing:

Now dreams
 Are not available
 To the dreamers,
 Nor songs
 To the singers.

In some lands
 Dark night
 And cold steel
 Prevail--
 But the dream
 Will come back,
 And the song
 Break
 Its jail.
 (FOW, p. 112)

Dreaming and singing are either acts of freedom or acts of man in search of freedom. Overcoming these metonymies are those of oppression in the second stanza.

L. ONE WAY TICKET

In One Way Ticket, OWT (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949) Hughes returns to the voices and problems of Black, politically oppressed people in sixty-six poems, fifty-six of which are new, distributed among ten sections. The themes of these sections do not create mutually exclusive categories.

The first section, "Madam to You," is a series of twelve witty monologues by Alberta K. Johnson, Hughes' poetic female counterpart to his prose folk hero, Jesse B. Simple, as well as Jack of the "Seven Moments of Love" un-sonnet sequence of Shakespeare In Harlem. As with Simple and Jack, Hughes is warmly sympathetic and therefore gently satirical of "Madam." She expresses the vitality of Black folks in daily struggle for life in the urban ghettos of Harlem, Chicago, Watts and Atlanta, etc. Moreover she crystalizes much of the spirit of the Black working class woman with her pride, self-confidence, common sense, skillful repartee, industriousness, and aggressive striving for upward mobility. The stanzaic patterns of the poems of the sequence vary, but Hughes' ballad stanza is the standard of the variations. "Madam's Past History" establishes her identity through her work history:

My name is Johnson--
 Madam Alberta K.
 The Madam stands for business.
 I'm smart that way.

I had a
 HAIR-DRESSING PARLOR
 Before
 The depression put
 The prices lower.

Then I had a
 BARBECUE STAND
 Till I got mixed up
 With a no-good man.

Cause I had a insurance
 The WPA
 Said, We can't use you
 Wealthy that way.

I said,
 DON'T WORRY 'BOUT ME!
 Just like the song,
 Take care of yourself--
 And I'll get along.

I do cooking,
 Day's work, too!
 Alberta K. Johnson
 Madam to you.
 (OWT, pp. 3-4)

"Madam and Her Madam" reveals the gossipy voice of
 report that controls these poems:

I worked for a woman,
 She wasn't mean--
 But she had a twelve-room
 House to clean.

Had to get breakfast,
 Dinner, and supper, too--
 Then take care of her children
 When I got through.

Wash, iron, and scrub,
 Walk the dog around--
 It was too much,
 Nearly broke me down.

I said, Madam,
 Can it be
 You trying to make a
 Pack-horse out of me?

She opened her mouth.
 She cried, Oh, no!
 You know, Alberta,
 I love you so!

I said, Madam,
 That may be true--
 But I'll be dogged
 If I love you!
 (OWT, pp. 5-6)

The first three stanzas answer the elliptical question of why Alberta doesn't like this "day's work." In the last three Alberta relates a protest in which she slices through the bourgeois hypocrisy of her employer.

"Madam and the Phone Bill" is a comic satire in the form of an argumentative, dramatic monologue on telephone with a representative from the telephone company:

You say I O.K.ed
 LONG DISTANCE?
 O.K.ed it when?
 My goodness, Central,
 That was then!

I'm mad and disgusted
 With that Negro now
 I don't pay no REVERSED
 CHARGES nohow.

You say, I will pay it--
 Else you'll take out my phone?
 You better let
 My phone alone.

I didn't ask him
 To telephone me.
 Roscoe knows darn well
 LONG DISTANCE
 Ain't free.

If I ever catch him,
 Lawd, have pity!
 Calling me up
 From Kansas City

Just to say he loves me!
 I knowed that was so.
 Why didn't he tell me some'n
 I don't know?

For instance, what can
 Them other girls do
 That Alberta K. Johnson
 Can't do--and more, too?

What's that, Central?
 You say you don't care
 Nothing about my
 Private affair?
 Well, even less about your
 PHONE BILL does I care!

Un-hummm-m! . . . Yes!
 You say I gave my O.K.?
 Well, that O.K. you may keep--

But I sure ain't gonna pay!
 (OWT, pp. 13-15)

Madam is "shucking and jiving" or "playing that nut roll."
 She blows a smoke screen of feigned ignorance and dramatic
 belligerance in order to slip out of her debt: she attacks
 the technology of profit and the logic of oppression with
 emotional illogic with which she hopes to intimidate the
 representative of the system.

In the more serious "Madam and Her Might-Have-Been"
 the persona shows the most self-consciousness in her under-
 stated recognition of a mistake and its cause:

I had two husbands.
 I could of had three--
 But my Might-Have-Been
 Was too good for me.

When you grow up the hard way
 Sometimes you don't know
 What's too good to be true,
 Just might be so.

He worked all the time,
 Spent his money on me--
 First time in my life
 I had anything free.

I said, Do you love me?
 Or am I mistaken?
 You're always giving
 And never taking.

He said, Madam, I swear
 All I want is you.

Right then and there
 I knowed we was through!

I told him, Jackson,
 You better leave--
 You got some'n else
 Up your sleeve:

When you think you got bread
 It's always a stone--
 Nobody loves nobody
 For yourself alone.

He said, In me
 You've got no trust.

I said, I don't want
 My heart to bust.
 (OWT, pp. 24-25)

Madam is aware that her brutally oppressive background has rendered her afraid to trust loving generosity as well as unable to risk giving her own heart.

Six new poems form "Life is Fine," the second part of One Way Ticket. The controlling theme of this section is that life and its continuation are more important than the social and economic conditions designed to control or

exploit life.

"Mama and Daughter" is a dialogue that reveals contrasting attitudes toward men.

Mama, please brush off my coat.
I'm going down the street.

Where're you going, daughter?

To see my sugar-sweet.

Who is your sugar, honey?
Turn around! I'll brush behind.

He is that young man, mama,
I can't get off my mind.

Daughter, once upon a time--
Let me brush the hem--
Your father, yes, he was the one!
I felt like that about him.

But many a long year ago
He up and went his way--
I hope that wild young son-of-a-gun
Rots in hell today!

Mama, he couldn't be still young.

He was young yesterday.
He was young when he--Turn around!
So I can brush your back, I say!
(OWT, pp. 31-32)

The inspiration of the daughter's expectancy and hope overcomes the mother's fear and bitterness as she prepares her daughter to meet a young man. The daughter confronts her mother's habit of living in the past that has blinded her to the effect of time on the object of her fantasy--her husband. As the reality of age rushes through the space caused by her shifting awareness (last stanza), the mother, inwardly "turned around," continues to prepare her daughter.

Hughes' sensitivity to female personae is demonstrated in "S - S S S - S S - SH!" that satirizes the restrictive values and attitudes with which society scapegoats the individual woman:

Her great adventure ended
As great adventures should
In life being created
Anew--and good.

Except the neighbors
And her mother
Did not think it good!

Nature has a way
Of not caring much
About marriage
Licenses and such.

But the neighbors
And her mother
Cared too much!

The baby came one morning
Almost with the sun.

The neighbors
And its grandma
Were outdone!
(OWT, pp. 33-34)

The titular shush is an onomatopoeic metonymy that suggests society's ambivalence: the secret thrill of reporting as misfortune the tabooed experiences of those one envies.¹

The dramatic monologue "Sunday Morning Prophecy" is a preacher's argumentative sermon:

¹See also for related theme "The Ballad of the Girl Whose Name is Mud" (above, pp. 229-30) and "Girl" (above, pp. 265-66).

An old Negro minister concludes
His sermon in his loudest voice,
having previously pointed out the
sins of this world:

. . . and now
When the rumble of death
Rushes down the drain
Pipe of eternity,

And hell breaks out
Into a thousand smiles,
And the devil likes his chops
Preparing to feast on life,
And all the little devils
Get out their bibs
To devour the corrupt bones
Of this world--

Oh-ooo-oo-o
Then my friends!
Oh, then! Oh, then!
What will you do?

(OWT, p. 35, ll. 1-16)

This first leg of the argument is a conditional and rhetorical question--"What will you do when you die and face the threat of damnation--posed to the "sinners" of his audience. The minister mesmerizes their awareness through the repetition created by paralleled phrases and familiar metaphors. On his next leg he answers his own question:

You will turn back
And look toward the mountains.
You will turn back
And grasp for a straw
You will holler,
Lord-d-d-d-ah!
Save me, Lord!
Save me!
And the Lord will say,
In the days of your greatness
I did not hear your voice!
The Lord will say,
In the days of your richness
I did not see your face!

The Lord will say,
No-oooo-ooo-oo-o!
I will not save you now!

And your soul
 Will be lost!
 (ll. 17-35)

This question and reply support the minister's proposition that has an ironic duality:

Come into the church this morning,
 Brothers and Sisters,
 And be saved--
 And give freely
 In the collection basket
 That I who am thy shepherd
 Might live.

Amen!
 (LL. 36-43)

The juxtaposition of the economic and the spiritual concerns conveys Hughes' satire as well as does the minister's loose paraphrase of "The Lord is my shepherd: therefore can I lack nothing."

"Dark Glasses," the third section of One Way Ticket, gathers four poems, three of which are new. Of these "Lincoln Theatre" reveals a development in Hughes' descriptive powers. From a satirical distance the poetic observer describes the entertainment of the folk:

The head of Lincoln looks down from the wall
 While movies echo dramas on the screen.
 The head of Lincoln is serenely tall
 Above a crowd of black folk, humble, mean.
 The movies end. The lights flash gaily on.
 The band down in the pit bursts into jazz.
 The crowd applauds a plump brown-skin bleached blonde
 Who sings the troubles every woman has.
 She snaps her fingers, slowly shakes her hips,

And cries, all careless-like from reddened lips!
De man I loves has
Gone and done me wrong . . .
 While girls who wash rich white folks clothes by day
 And sleek-haired boys who deal in love for pay
 Press hands together, laughing at her song.
 (OWT, p. 46)

The contrast between the picture of Lincoln and the audience provides a satirical comment alluding to his attitudes toward Black slaves. From his overseer position he looks down into a pit where the descendents of the slaves he freed from physical bondage are being entertained. But their entertainment reveals their continuing bondage--sociologically, psychological and economically. These descendents are conditioned into humility and meanness not by choice but by a dominant alien capitalistic society. The Black woman blues singer applauded by the crowd is yet chained to that alien culture's image of beauty--blond hair and reddened lips. The rich white folks pay just enough for daywork to allow and keep their Black servants coming back another day--wage slavery. Like their women the "sleek-haired boys," pimps, have coiffured their hair to resemble that of white oppressors. "Lincoln Theater" is a poem about the blues but much larger in scope than the individual-oriented blues poems.

"Silhouettes," the fourth section of One Way Ticket, gathers four poems on lynching, one of which, "Silhouettes," is new. Since it shows no noteworthy stylistic development we will move to the next section.

"One-Way Ticket" is the first of eight poems in the fifth section. It gives the section as well as the volume its title that alludes to the Black Diaspora. But Blacks only escaped from the overt racism of the South to the covert racism of the North. The poems of this section expose the oppressive conditions of the ghetto spawned by that racism. For example, "Restrictive Covenants" exposes de facto housing segregation by owners and managers (OWT, p. 64). "The Ballad of Margie Polite" (OWT, pp. 75-78) looks at the causes and conditions of a 1943 riot in Harlem.

Only two of the seven poems of "Making a Road," the sixth section, are new. The section treats Black people's expanding awareness of the significance of oppression: "Man into Men" expresses that awareness expanding through incremental repetition in three stanzas:

A nigger comes home from work:
 Jostle of fur coats
 Jostle of dirty coats
 Jostle of women who shop
 Jostle of women who work
 Jostle of men with good jobs
 Jostle of men in the ditches.

A Negro comes home from work:
 Wondering about fur coats
 Dirty coats
 White skins
 Black skins
 Good jobs
 Ditches

A man comes home from work:
 Knowing all things
 Belong

To the man
 Who becomes
 Men.
 (OWT, p. 85)

The parallelism and catalogue suggest the repetitive nature of stimuli on the man's consciousness. The syllogistic reasoning that represents his expanded awareness appears in the last stanza.

"Too Blue," the seventh section, has eight new personal complaints concerning love, jealousy, envy, frustration, and the blues. This section develops no new themes or techniques.

The six new poems of "Midnight Raffle," the eighth section, have no particular focus besides hard times in the ghetto. Hughes uses a significantly creative form of satire in "White Felts in Fall":

The pimps wear their summer hats
 Into late fall
 Since the money that comes in
 Won't cover it all--
 Suit, overcoat, shoes--
 And hat, too!

Got to neglect something
 So what would you do?
 (OWT, p. 109)

Hughes focuses on an important contradiction that destroys the romantic image of the lumpen-proletarian class held by many poor and oppressed people, especially their young. Then in the couplet he offers his audience vicarious participation, rather than prescriptive forbiddance, that allows his audience to make judgments without aversive influences.

The speaker of "Blues on a Box" continues the analysis of the function of the Blues through paradox (ll. 1-5) and personification (ll. 6-8):

Play your guitar, boy,
Till yesterday's
Black cat
Runs out tomorrow's
Back door
And evil old
Hard luck
Ain't no more!
(OWT, p. 112)

Setting this creative behavioral pattern against hard times as well as folk superstitions, Hughes reveals the faith of Black people in their ability to overcome.

The five new poems of "Home in a Box," the ninth section of One Way Ticket, treat the theme of death. "Final Curve" is a pithy, paradoxical epigram that says death brings the end to escape from oneself:

When you turn the corner
And you run into yourself
Then you know that you have turned
All the corners that are left.
(OWT, p. 118)

Self-revelation is a function of not merely physical but all forms of death. This wisdom Hughes extracts from the familiar saying concerning turning corners.

The last section, "South Side: Chicago," is subtitled A Montage. Its continuity balances that of the first section of One Way Ticket, "Madam to You," and foreshadows the form and structure of his next collection, Montage of a Dream Deferred. "Summer Evening" is pictured by cataloging

its sights and sounds in the first stanza:

Mothers pass,
 Sweet watermelon in a baby carriage,
 Black seed for eyes
 And a rose pink mouth.
 Pimps in gray go by,
 Boots polished like a Murray head,
 Or in reverse
 Madam Walker
 On their shoe tips.
 I. W. Harper
 Stops to listen to gospel songs
 From a tent at the corner
 Where the carnival is Christian.
 Jitneys go by
 Full of chine bones in dark glasses,
 And a blind man plays an accordian
 Gurgling Jericho.

(OWT, p. 123, ll. 1-17)

The absurd juxtapositions--mothers toting plugged watermelon in a baby carriage, pimps using hair grease to polish their shoes, a gospel loving drinker epitheted with the brand of his whiskey, a church meeting in a tent, jitney patrons epitheted with one of the cheap cuts of pork that is a staple of poor Blacks' diets, and a blind man that gurgles like a baby--expose fantastic realities common to Black ghettos. In the second stanza Hughes enters the world of one of the ghetto's women:

Theresa Belle Aletha
 Throws a toothpick from her window,
 And the four bells she's awaiting
 Do not ring, not even murmur.
 But maybe before midnight
 The tamale man will come by,
 And if Uncle Mac brings beer
 Night will pull its slack taut
 And wrap a string around its finger
 So as not to forget

That tomorrow is Monday.
 (OWT, pp. 123-24, ll. 18-28)

Waiting for a man to make tomorrow important enough to remember, or waiting for some beer and tamales until he arrives. All the details of the focus reveal Aletha mocking time unfulfilled. The third stanza is a snatch of voice from a child hustling bottles for the deposit:

A dime on those two bottles.
Yes, they are yours,
Too!
 (Ibid., p. 124, ll. 29-31)

In the final stanza the narrator suggests the repetitive character of these experiences:

And in another week
 It will again
 Be Sunday.
 (ll. 32-34)

"Jitney" recreates the feeling of riding in a jitney by presenting the voices of the driver and his passengers en route. Each of the stanzas is a round trip between 31st and 63rd Streets. People call the jitney, and the driver calls out their stops; Hughes adds humor by showing two instances of intimate conversation becoming gossip (ll. 9-18 and 46-52):

Corners
 Of South Parkway:
 Eeeooooo!
 Cab!
 31st,
 35th,
 39th,
 43rd,
 Girl, ain't you heard?

No, Martha, I ain't heard.
I got a Chinese boy-friend
 Down on 43rd.
 47th,
 51st,
 55th,
 63rd,
 Martha's got a Japanese!
 Child, ain't you heard?
 55th,
 51st,
 47th,
 Here's your fare!
 Lemme out!
 I'm going to the Regal,
 See what this week's jive is all about:
 The Duke is mellow!
 Hibbler's giving out!
 43rd,
 39th,
 Night school!
 Gotta get my teaching!
 35th,
 31st,
 Bless God!
 Tonight there's preaching!
 31st! All out!
 Hey, Mister, wait!
 I want to get over to State.
I don't turn, Madam!
Understand?
Take a street car
Over to the Grand.

35th,
 39th,
 43rd,
 I quit Alexander!
 Honey, ain't you heard?
 47th,
 50th Place,
 63rd,
 Alexander's quit Lucy!
 Baby, ain't you heard?
 Eeeeeooooooooo!
 Cab!
 If you want a good chicken
 You have to get there early
 And push and shove and grab!
 I'm going shopping now, child.

Eeeeeoooo!

Cab!

55th,

47th,

35th,

31st,

Hey!

Cab!

(OWT, pp. 131-33)

With the sounds that one would hear while riding in the jitney Hughes creates a dynamic portrait of the movement of the mundane world through a main artery of the ghetto. The verbal impressionism captures the highlights of this black experience (e.g., the Regal theater was a cultural institution in the community with its "stage shows" of internationally famous black creators such as Duke Ellington or Count Basie or Al Hibbler as well as regional and local talent; the night school at 39th is Wendell Phillips High School that maintained adult education programs; or the jitneys' hustle--many drivers refused to turn off South Parkway because turning would cramp their hustle of racing each other from one Parkway corner to the next to cram their cabs full of the waiting fares.) Also, this impressionistic technique complements the montage that this last section forms.

M. MONTAGE OF A DREAM DEFERRED

Hughes considered Montage of a Dream Deferred, MOADD (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1951) to be a single long jazz poem formed by ninety-one smaller poems distributed among six sections. Two of these poems appeared in earlier collections of his poetry. Looking towards other fine arts for technical innovations, Hughes borrowed the montage form and structure from painting and the segue process from formal or classical music to shape and unify this collection. These techniques were added to those coming from Black music, the source of the poem's spirit, feeling, and movement:

In terms of current Afro-American popular music and the sources from which it has progressed--jazz, ragtime, swing, blues, boogie-woogie, and be-bop--this poem on contemporary Harlem, like be-bop, is marked by conflicting changes, sudden nuances, sharp and impudent interjections, broken rhythms, and passages sometimes in the manner of the jam session, sometimes the popular song, punctuated by the riffs, runs, breaks, and distortions of the music of a community in transition.¹

As with most of his poetry he intended this poem to be read aloud.

Thematically, the poem explores the disenchantment and disillusionment of Black Americans whose dream of living in a democracy of freedom and equality has grown very old

¹This note is from the tenth unnumbered page.

without fulfillment. The dream deferred theme provides a refrain which begins and ends and draws all concerns back to the poem's center.

"Boogie Segue to Bop," the first section, includes seventeen new poems. Its first poem, "Dream Boogie," borrows the boogie-woogie rhythm from jazz; this poem is the source of the refrain variations lacing and unifying the book poem. Hughes ties together the music and dream imagery and thereby reveals the significance of the music to the oppressed. The music is both conditioned by and expressive of the Black man's oppression:

Good morning, daddy!
Ain't you heard
The boogie-woogie rumble
Of a dream deferred?

Listen closely:
You'll hear their feet
Beating out and beating out a----

You think
It's a happy beat?

Listen to it closely:
Ain't you heard
Something underneath
Like a----

What did I say?

Sure,
I'm happy!
Take it away!

Hey, pop!
Re-bop!
Mop!

Y-e-a-h!
(MOADD, p. 3)

The ironic attitude of this persona is protectively cool and sharper than Hughes' earlier personae. The fire of his hope for the fulfillment of his dream, a fire that flamed high and hot in "Freedom's Plow" (1943), has cooled to ashes. This irony, his ellipsis, and his nonsensical riffs ("scat talk" borrowed from jazz singing) are his responses to and express his relationship with America.

The narrator of "Parade" pokes holes in this ceremony of dream projections:

Seven ladies
and seventeen gentlemen
at the Elks Club Lounge
planning planning a parade:
Grand Marshal in his white suit
will lead it.
Cadillacs with dignitaries
will precede it.
And behind will come
with band and drum
on foot . . . on foot . . .
on foot . . .

Motorcycle cops,
white,
will speed it
out of sight if they can:
Solid black,
can't be right.

Marching . . . marching . . .
marching . . .
noon till night . . .

I never knew
that many Negroes
were on earth,
did you?

I never knew!

PARADE!

A chance to let

PARADE!

the whole world see

PARADE!

old black me!
(MOADD, pp. 4-5)

The poem is a kind of parade of the behavior and attitudes of differing peoples connected with the parade.

The persona of "Children's Rhymes" feels the pinch of change in the generation gap. He is disturbed by the racial and political awareness which informs the rhymes and the rhymers:

When I was a chile we used to play,
"One--two--buckle my shoe!"
and things like that. But now, Lord,
listen at them little varmints!

By what sends
the white kids
I ain't sent:
I know I can't
be President.

There is two thousand children
in this block, I do believe!

What don't bug
them white kids
sure bugs me:
We knows everybody
ain't free!

Some of these young ones is cert'ly bad----
One batted a hard ball right through my window
and my gold fish et the glass.

What's written down
for white folks
ain't for us a-tall:

"Liberty And Justice----
Huh--For All."

Oop-pop-a-da!
Skee! Daddle-de-do!
Be-bop!

Salt' peanuts!

De-dop!
(MOADD, pp. 5-6)

The poem contrasts the personal perspective of the older generation with the political as well as personal perspective of the younger.

The persona of "Necessity" reasons to a conclusion he initially questions while employing the verbal invective Black people call signifying:

Work?
I don't have to work.
I don't have to do nothing
but eat, drink, stay black, and die.
This little old furnished room's
so small I can't whip a cat
without getting fur in my mouth
and my landlady's so old
her features is all run together
and God knows she sure can overcharge----
Which is why I reckon I does
have to work after all.
(MOADD, p. 8)

The persona displays the "cool" stance (ll. 1-4) that shaped an attitude and expressed a life style that predominated within Black American communities during the decade of the Fifties. Through hyperbole the "cool" person expresses his rejection of involvement and commitment to that society. Being "cool" then is an expression of Black people's disillusionment with the American dream. The stance

is another Black survival motion of a nation, unknown to most of themselves, putting its social emotions on ice in order to wait. Hughes will follow this theme later; here, the speaker's signifying hyperbole against his landlady and her furnished room (ll. 5-9) leads him to the recognition (l. 10) that he must work (l. 11). But the speaker has not lost his cool: He does not consciously desire to work, but is forced to by the unfairness of a system the values and symbols he rejects.

The dramatic inter-relation of the poems of MOADD is exemplified in "Question" and "Figurine." The female persona of "Question" flippantly challenges her suitor:

Said the lady, Can you do
 what my other man can't do----
 That is
 love me, daddy----
 and feed me, too?
 (p. 9)

"Figurine," suggesting a sculptural analogy, uses an absurd riff as a poem itself in saucy and satiric narrative response to the query:

De-dop!

Scat talk developed in be-bop jazz singing during the Forties probably initially as playful imitation of the sounds of musical instruments. This imitation had long been part of the folk tradition and not merely a way of poor people producing musical instrument sounds. Even when Black people were allowed to play the instruments they could

both make and purchase, they found great joy in mocking those instruments sounds. But Black musicians and singers found that white audiences were overwhelmed by their scat talk. "What does it mean?" "Is it part of a secret ritual of a secret society or a gang?" "Is it connected with your mustache or goatee?" A great many Blacks found these questions reflected the attitudes of a dominant, exploitative, and oppressive white majority who were, no matter how innocently or ignorantly, committing one more act of cultural invasion. The response of many Blacks was to "put the squares on," that is, to feed their preconceived notions by telling them anything their questions reflected they wanted to believe as a means of ridiculing those questions. Other ways of ridiculing the questioning invaders were to "ig" (ignore) them with silence and other bodily behavior that simulated not having heard the question or to merely respond with more scat talk. This specialized behavior became more generalized to the many situations which involve confrontation between those who are "in" and those who are "out." "Figurine" then satirizes "daddy" who is definitely "out."

The second section of Montage, "Dig and Be Dug," collects nineteen poems, one which has been included in an earlier collection. The title, derived from the argot of Black jazz musicians, one of the attitudes of the "cool"

school. "Neon Signs" catalogues the cabaret names where some of those musicians worked and uses word play to suggest the closed set of fractured experiences within those cabarets:

WONDER BAR

WISHING WELL

MONTEREY

MINTON'S
(altar of Thelonious)

MANDALAY

Spots where the booted
and unbooted play

LENOX

CASBAH

POOR JOHN'S

Mirror-go-round
where a broken glass
in the early bright
smears re-bop
sound

The speaker of "Motto" describes and exemplifies the "hip" stance of urban Black folk expressed in the be-bop and "cool" jazz of the Forties and Fifties:

I play it cool
And dig all jive
That's the reason
I stay alive.

My motto,
As I live and learn,
is:

Dig And Be Dug
In Return.

(MOADD, p. 19)

He cultivates an open unruffled attitude toward new experiences, especially those that contrast or conflict with his previous assumptions and values. He is not merely tolerant but is nourished from the diversity of his experiences. In the first stanza he explains the necessity of this stance for his survival, emotionally and psychologically as well as physically. In the second, he indicates the reciprocal nature of his stance by formulating a "hipster's" golden rule.

"Advice" also expresses epigrammatically the wisdom of an urban folk people:

Folks, I'm telling you,
birthing is hard
and dying is mean--
so get yourself
a little loving
in between.

(MOADD, p. 22)

The sexual pun of the last two lines as well as the understatement render the poem's ending a surprise.

The last poem of this section, "Projection," is a Black apocalypse satirizing the class and caste divisions in the Black community:

On the day when the Savoy
leaps clean over to Seventh Avenue
And starts jitterbugging
with the Renaissance,
on that day when Abyssinia Baptist Church
throws her enormous arms around
St. James Presbyterian
and 409 Edgecombe
stoops to kiss 12 West 133rd,
on that day----
Do, Jesus

Manhattan Island will whirl
 like a Dizzy Gillespie transcription
 played by Inez and Timme.
 On that day, Lord,
 Willie Bryant and Marian Anderson
 will sing a duet,
 Paul Robeson
 will team up with Jackie Mabley,
 and Father Divine will say in truth,
 Peace!
 It's truly
 wonderful!
 (MOADD, p. 26)

The poem's central structural technique, besides its logical premise (ll. 1-9) and conclusion (ll. 10-23), is the joining of incongruous or incompatible allusions in loving and celebrating activities.

"Early Bright," the third section, includes sixteen new poems. Of these the enigmatic "Tomorrow" sandwiches the mundane directions on a cigaret machine between two paradoxical metaphors of the thematic deferred dream:

Tomorrow may be
 a thousand years off:

TWO DIMES AND A NICKEL ONLY

says this particular
 cigarette machine.

Others take a quarter straight.

Some dawns
 wait.
 (MOADD, p. 30)

The simile of "Mellow" (l. 4) develops into a surprise (ll. 5-6) which echoes the feelings that motivate white girls as well as their Black celebrities:

Into the laps
of black celebrities
white girls fall
like pale plums from a tree
beyond a high tension wall
wired for killing
which makes it
more thrilling.

(MOADD, p. 30)

"Live and Let Live" is a corollary of "Motto" (see above, p. 303):

Maybe it ain't right----
but the people of the night
will give even
a snake
a break.

(MOADD, p. 31)

"Gauge" is a catalogue of synonyms for marijuana:

Hemp. . . .
A stick. . . .
A roach. . . .
Straw. . . .

(MOADD, p. 31)

"Cafe: 3 A. M." reveals through observation the contradictions among the system's enforcers who fail to see that they ensnare and punish others for traits they themselves display:

Detectives from the vice squad
with weary sadistic eyes
spotting fairies.

Degenerates,
some folks say.

But God, Nature,
or somebody
made them that way.

Police lady or Lesbian
over there?

Where?
(MOADD, p. 32)

The satirical narrator of "Warning Augmented" (see also, MOADD, p. 11 for related poem) uses a reversal of situation expressed with chiasmus to chide and ridicule the hustler:

Don't let your dog curb you!
Curb your doggie
Like you ought to do,
But don't let that dog curb you!
You may play folks cheap,
Act rough and tough,
But a dog can tell
When you're full of stuff.
Don't let your dog curb you!
Watch your step----
Else before you're through
You're liable to find your dog's curbed you!
Them little old mutts
Look all scraggly and bad,
But they got more sense
Than some hustlers ever had.
Cur dog, fice dog, keary blue----
Just don't let your dog curb you!
(MOADD, p. 34)

The metaphors develop from the act and purpose for walking a dog, who should be curbed in order to eliminate wastes. The narrator warns the hustler that his hustling places him lower than a dog, who must walk him.

"Vice Versa to Bach," the fourth section of Montage, contains eleven new poems concerning identity, romantic love, class envy and fear, dreams deferred, democratic rights for Blacks, escape, underdeveloped historical awareness, and anti-war protest.

"Theme For English B" has a remarkably flat prosy

texture that imitates the prose essay:

The instructor said,

Go home and write
a page tonight.
And let that page come out of you----
Then, it will be true.

I wonder if it's that simple?

I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem.
I went to school there, then Durham, then here
to this college on the hill above Harlem.
I am the only colored student in my class.
The steps from the hill lead down into Harlem,
through a park, then I cross St. Nicholas,
Eighth Avenue, Seventh, and I come to the Y,
the Harlem Branch Y, where I take the elevator
up to my room, sit down, and write this page:

It's not easy to know what is true for you or me
at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what
I feel and see and hear. Harlem, I hear you:
hear you, hear me--we two--you, me, talk on this page.
(I hear New York, too.) Me--who?

Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.
I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.
I like a pipe for a Christmas present,
or records--Bessie, bop, or Bach.
I guess being colored doesn't make me not like
The same things other folks like who are other races.

So will my page be colored that I write?
Being me, it will not be white.
But it will be
a part of you, instructor.
You are white----
yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.
That's American.
Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me.
Nor do I often want to be a part of you.
But we are, that's true!
As I learn from you,
I guess you learn from me----
Although you're older--and white----
and somewhat more free.

This is my page for English B.
(MOADD, pp. 39-40)

This texture is quite suited to the persona's pursuit of the truth of his identity through the autobiographical essay. That the poem reveals a written and not a spoken persona is emphasized by the absence of Black vernacular.

The vernacular complaint of the speaker of "Low to High" is addressed to the "black bourgeoisie":

How can you forget me?
 But you do!
 You said you was gonna take me
 Up with you----
 Now you've got your Cadillac,
 you done forgot that you are black.
 How can you forget me
 when I'm you?

But you do.

How can you forget me,
 fellow, say?
 How can you low-rate me
 this way?
 You treat me like you damn well please,
 Ignore me--though I pay your fees.
 How can you forget me?

But you do.
 (MOADD, p. 42)

As with the speaker of "Theme for English B," the speaker of this poem feels that he shares something of his identity with his audience. His desire for upward mobility has not been realized despite the fact that he has helped those who have deserted him--an example of underdevelopment. After this poem Hughes places "Boogie: 1 A. M.," a variation of the dream deferred refrain; then comes the reply of "High to Low":

God knows
 We have our troubles, too----
 One trouble is you:
 you talk too loud,
 cuss too loud,
 look too black,
 don't get anywhere,
 and sometimes it seems
 you don't even care.
 The way you send your kids to school
 stockings down,
 (not Ethical Culture)
 the way you shout out loud in church,
 (not St. Phillips)
 and the way you lounge on doorsteps
 just as if you were down South,
 (not at 409)
 the way you clown----
 the way, in other words,
 you let me down----
 me, trying to uphold the race
 and you----
 well, you can see,
 we have our problems,
 too, with you.
 (MOADD, pp. 43-44)

*Emphatically
 have the best son
 etc.*

In this class confrontation the persona catalogues his complaints. The pair of poems forms a unique kind of argumentative balance that reveals Hughes' expanding sensitivity to struggling opposites.

Besides several variations in the dream deferred refrain in this section, the longer "Deferred" combines twelve voices expressing deferred dreams and one narrative evaluator to create a montage within Montage:

This year, maybe, do you think I can graduate?
I'm already two years late.
Dropped out six months when I was seven,
a year when I was eleven,
then got put back when we come North.
To get through high at twenty's kind of late----
But maybe this year I can graduate.

Maybe now I can have that white enamel stove
I dreamed about when we first fell in love
eighteen years ago.

But you know,
rooming and everything
then kids,
cold-water flat and all that.
But now my daughter's married.
And my boy's most grown----
quit school to work----
and where we're moving
there ain't no stove----

Maybe I can buy that white enamel stove!
(p. 48, st. 1 and 2)

The next speaker wants to study French although he feels that he will never go to France. The other speakers want "two new suits / at once," "one more bottle of gin," "to see / my furniture paid for," "a wife who will / work with me and not against me," heaven, "to pass the civil service" examination, "a television set," "a decent radio," and "to take up Bach" (pp. 48-49). "Deferred" makes concrete the effects of racism and capitalism on the lives of poor Blacks.

Hughes' anti-war poem, "World War II" seems to be out of place in this volume, but it may indicate that Hughes was much further removed from his poetic speakers than is readily apparent if this speaker would also be complaining about his deferred dreams:

What a grand time was the war!
Oh, my, my!
What a grand time was the war!
My, my, my!

In wartime we had fun,
Sorry that old war is done!

What a grand time was the war,
My, my!

Echo:

Did
Somebody
Die:
(MOADD, p. 51)

The ironic question that tags the poem produces in the reader awareness of the satirical intent.

"Dream Deferred," the fifth section of Montage, collects twenty-two poems covering seven themes: religion, racial pride and shame, deferred dreams, the blues, criticism of social institutions, brotherhood, and art and the artist.

"Passing" is important among these for its focus on the northern mulatto:

On sunny summer Sunday afternoons in Harlem
when the air is one interminable ball game
and grandma cannot get her gospel hymns
from the Saints of God in Christ
on account of the Dodgers on the radio,
on sunny Sunday afternoons
when the kids look all new
and far too clean to stay that way,
and Harlem has its
washed-and-ironed-and-cleaned-best out,
the ones who've crossed the line
to live downtown
miss you,
Harlem of the bitter dream,
since their dream has
come true.

(MOADD, p. 57)

The tragic mulatto has come up South where his racial ambiguity enables him to pass yet not without nostalgia. The observer lists mundane details of experience to suggest

and evoke that nostalgia. The dream like quality of the nostalgic details of reality are set in contrast to both Harlem's deferred "bitter dream" and the mulatto's dream realized at the expense of longing.

"Argument" records a set of attitudes known as "low ratin' the race" that reflect the conditioning of many Blacks who remain in the ghetto as well as those who escape:

White is right,
Yellow mellow
Black, get back!

Do you believe that, Jack?

Sure do!

Then you're a dope
for which there ain't no hope.
Black is fine!
And, God knows,
It's mine!

Although his blues poems of this volume don't reflect any style development, his social criticism poems do. "Night Funeral in Harlem" focuses on the behavior that surrounds death:

Night funeral
In Harlem:

Where did they get
Them two fine cars?

Insurance man, he did not pay----
His insurance lapsed the other day----
Yet they got a satin box
For his head to lay.

Night funeral
In Harlem:

Who was it sent
That wreath of flowers?

Them flowers came
 from that poor boy's friends----
 They'll want flowers, too,
 When they met their ends:

Night funeral
 In Harlem:

Who preached that
Black boy to his grave?

Old preacher-man
 Preached that boy away--
 Charged Five Dollars
 His girl friend had to pay.

Night funeral
 In Harlem:

When it was all over
 And the lid shut on his head
 and the organ had done played
 and the last prayers been said
 and six pallbearers
 Carried him out for dead
 And off down Lenox Avenue
 That long black hearse done sped,
 The street light
 At his corner
 Shined just like a tear----
 That boy that hey was mournin'
 Was so dear, so dear
 To them folks that brought the flowers,
 To that girl who paid the preacherman----
 It was all their tears that made
 That poor boy's
 Funeral grand.

Night funeral
 In Harlem.
 (MOADD, pp. 59-61)

Despite their poverty his loved ones provide the dead boy with not merely the images of respect but also the sympathy and grief. The strength of their feelings renders their efforts magnanimous and their small effect great. But most

of all the sentimentality of the funeral is crystallized in the street light shining like a tear simile (ll. 35-37). And the subjective intentions of the mourners collide with the objective situation of poverty and death. It is the grief and sentimentality of the survivors of oppression who feel some need to make up for the passing of life not yet lived.

The poems of brotherhood show some thematic development: For example, the epigrammatic and periodic "Subway Rush Hour" observes the breakdown of racial fear in spite of and not because of the people:

Mingled
breath and smell
so close
mingled
black and white
so near no room for fear.
(MOADD, p. 65)

The observer focuses on the role of environment in shaping consciousness.

"Dream Boogie: Variation" draws a portrait of an "oppressed artist":

Tinkling treble,
Rolling bass,
High noon teeth
In a midnight face,
Great long fingers
On great big hands,
Screaming pedals
Where his twelve-shoe lands,
Looks like his eyes
Are teasing pain,
A few minutes late
For the Freedom Train.
(MOADD, p.68)

The piano player/artist, an image that goes back to the pianist of "The Weary Blues," is the personification of the tension between the oppressed and their deferred dreams. Punning on CPT (Colored Peoples' Time) Hughes' metaphor draws the pianist a few minutes late for freedom to suggest his disillusionment by ironic understatement. Reversal adds sardonic wit to the simile of his anguish (ll. 9-10), a reversal that poses him in pursuit of pain. Each of the first four pairs of descriptive lines draw together contrasting yet complimentary images to suggest the dynamic opposites unified within the artist and his instrument during the process of playing.

The sixth section, "Lenox Avenue Mural," includes six variations of the dream deferred theme. "Harlem" is the most widely known of these poems. Its poetic observer develops verbal metaphors and adverbial similes in six suppositions--five questions and one statement--to answer the initial question:

What happens to a dream deferred?
 Does it dry up
 like a raisin in the sun?
 Or fester like a sore----
 And then run?
 Does it stink like rotten meat?
 Or crust and sugar over----
 like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
 like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

(MOADD, p. 71)

The poem's esthetic force comes from the catalogue of possibilities that project images of deferred dreams of which not any one but all are valid projections of the experiences of oppression.

"Same in Blues" employs two narrative and three persona voices separated by a varying refrain to express the deterioration of the relationship between Black men and women caused by deferred dreams:

I said to my baby,
 Baby, take it slow.
 I can't, she said, I can't!
 I got to go!

There's a certain
 amount of traveling
 in a dream deferred.

Lulu said to Leonard,
 I want a diamond ring.
 Leonard said to Lulu,
 You won't get a goddamn thing!

A certain
 amount of nothing
 in a dream deferred.

Daddy, daddy, daddy,
 All I want is you.
 You can have me, baby----
 but my lovin' days is through.

A certain
 amount of impotence
 in a dream deferred.

Three parties
 On my party line---
 But that third party,
 Lord, ain't mine!

There's liable
 to be confusion
 in a dream deferred.

From river to river,
 Uptown and down,
 There's liable to be confusion
 When a dream gets kicked around.
 (MOADD, pp. 72-73)

And Hughes expresses the deferred dreams of both
 Joe and his mama in epistolary form:

Dear Mama,
 Time I pay rent and get my food
 and laundry I don't have much left
 but here is five dollars for you
 to show you I still appreciate you.
 My girl-friend send her love and say
 she hopes to lay eyes on you sometime in life.
 Mama, it has been raining cats and dogs up
 here. Well, that is all so I will close.
 Your son baby
 Respectively as ever,
 Joe

Joe, with great expectations, made the migration up South
 (North). He shows respect to his mother despite the distance,
 poverty, and disillusionment. His girlfriend's hope to see
 his mother reveals an optimism that looks forward to thriving.

N. SELECTED POEMS

Selected Poems, SP (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959) collects one hundred eighty-six poems, twenty of which have not been included in Hughes' earlier collections. About half of these indicate some development in Hughes' style. (With so few poems we will disregard section headings.)

The narrator of "Tambourines" consciously records and identifies a gospel shout that testifies of God's glory:

Tambourines!
Tambourines!
Tambourines!
To the glory of God!
Tambourines
To glory!

A gospel shout
And a gospel song:
Life is short
But God is long!

Tambourines!
Tambourines!
Tambourines
To glory!
(SP, p. 29)

The speaker of "As Befits a Man" reveals his ironic preoccupation with projecting his image as a rounder and hustler at his funeral:

I don't mind dying--
 But I'd hate to die all alone!
 I want a dozen pretty women
 To holler, cry, and moan.

I don't mind dying
 But I want my funeral to be fine:
 A row of long tall mamas
 Fainting, fanning, and crying.

I want a fish-tail hearse
 And sixteen fish-tail cars,
 A big brass band
 And a whole truck load of flowers.

When they let me down,
 Down into the clay,
 I want the women to holler:
 Please don't take him away!
 Ow-ooo-oo-o!
 Don't take daddy away!
 (SP, p. 46)

In contrast to "Night Funeral in Harlem" (see above, pp. 313-14) this poem has both a comic and a serious intent. The speaker's hyperbolic fantasies reflect the grossly materialistic environment that feeds off ghettos and that projects the player/hustler as the ghetto's king or hero. The poem satirizes its speaker who could be a poor Black everyman or a hustler. He is afraid of death, and all the living that his hyperboles reflect he should have done has not prepared him for death.

"Catch" is an ironic epigrammatic fable of incompatibility:

Big Boy came
 Carrying a mermaid
 On his shoulders
 And the mermaid
 Had her tail
 Curved

why does it
 so

Beneath his arm.

Being a fisher boy,
 He's found a fish
 To carry--
 Half fish,
 Half girl
 To marry.
 (SP, p. 50)

The speaker of "To Artina" "raps" to his lover using hyperbole to express how much she will love him:

I will take your heart.
 I will take your soul out of your body
 As though I were God.
 I will not be satisfied
 With the little words you say to me.
 I will not be satisfied
 With the touch of your hand
 Nor the sweet of your lips alone.
 I will take your heart for mine.
 I will take your soul.
 I will be God when it comes to you.
 (SP, p. 62)

Love is not love

This is one of Hughes' strangest love lyrics. In contrast to the mutuality of other lyrics such as "Silence" or "Fulfillment" (see above, p. 267), this persona is possessive to the point of vampirism, and that possessiveness remains unameliorated despite his assumption of the role of God. The parallelism and hyperbole reveal the emotional intensity of the speaker's preoccupation with his self. With certainty this is one of love's real stances; with almost as much certainty Hughes is satirizing the selfish chauvinism that has conditioned this stance.

W

In a contrasting situation the speaker of "No Regrets" has not yet resolved his ambivalent emotions:

Out of love,
 No regrets--
 Though the goodness
 Be wasted forever.

Out of love,
 No regrets--
 Though the return
 Be never.

(SP, p. 76)

Each of the balanced stanzas is antithetical and elliptical. The ellipsis suppresses the resolution of the contradiction of each antithesis, all allusions to the persona's self, and all allusions to the identity of his lover. These suppressions support an ironic interpretation of the poem-- the speaker is overwhelmed by his regret.

This identity suppression dominates "Uncle Tom" and ironically contrasts with its portrait form:

Within--
 The beaten pride.
 Without--
 The grinning face,
 The low, obsequious,
 Double bow,
 The sly and servile grace
 Of one the white folks
 Long ago
 Taught well
 To know his
 Place.

(SP, p. 168)

The narrator of "To Be Somebody" balances the dreams of a Black boy and a Black girl searching for a place to know.

Little girl
 Dreaming of a baby grand piano
 (Not knowing there's a Steinway bigger, bigger)

Dreaming of a baby grand to play
That stretches paddle-tailed across the floor,
Not standing upright
Like a bad boy in the corner,
But sending music
Up the stairs and down the stairs
And out the door
To confound even Hazel Scott
Who might be passing!

Oh!

Little boy
Dreaming of the boxing gloves
Joe Louis wore,
The gloves that sent
Two dozen men to the floor.
Knockout!
Bam! Bop! Mop!

There's always room,
They say,
At the top.
(SP, p. 189)

Not yet deferred, these dreams, but one knows how little
room there is at the top, always.

O. ASK YOUR MAMA

Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz, AYM (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961) is a book poem like Montage, but its twelve moods instead of ninety-one variously inter-related poems give it more cohesion and unity. Hughes used the concept of mood to organize sections of his earlier collections; it now designates each of this book's twelve poems. The central, unifying, formal technique is the satirical persona/narrator, a Black middle-class participant, observer, and critic of Blacks including himself but especially of those striving for upward mobility through integration. His flippant yet defensive "signifying" against white, middle-class racism provides the title--Ask Your Mama--a slur that alludes to an intimate familiarity between the speaker and the mama. Those unfamiliar with Black culture's "signifying" and "playing the dozen" have little appreciation for the nuances of this figure of speech. Yet the speaker addresses his poem to whites as well as Blacks, exploiting the ignorance of aliens in order to ridicule them and exposing the hopelessness and helplessness of Blacks both to ridicule and correct. The speaker is forced to ask his own mama despite his awareness that

IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGRO
ANSWER QUESTIONS ANSWER
AND ANSWERS WITH A QUESTION
(AYM, "Shades of Pigmeat," p. 20, ll. 21-23)

Another of his questions forms the central theme:

TELL ME HOW LONG--
MUST I WAIT?
CAN I GET IT NOW?
ÇA IRA! ÇA IRA!
OR MUST I HESITATE?
(AYM, "Ride, Red, Ride," pp. 13-14, ll. 5-10)

This question, alluding to Blacks waiting for the end of American racism, is reinforced by the

traditional folk of the "Hesitation Blues" [which] is the leitmotif for this poem. In and around it, along with other recognized melodies employed, there is room for spontaneous jazz improvisation, particularly between verses, where the voice pauses.
(AYM, unnumbered p. 7)

As in The Negro Mother Hughes uses the margin of this text for directions of the musical accompaniment. At the end of the poem Hughes includes a section, "Liner Notes: For the Poetically Unhep," that gives a creative and sometimes oblique analysis of each mood.

In the first mood, "Cultural Exchange," the narrator reveals his ambivalence by satirizing middle-class Blacks who "slum" or return to visit the ghetto on the one hand and fantasize exchanging roles with Southern white oppressors on the other. This surrealistic fantasy is a new technique for Hughes; it reflects a variation of the deferred dreams of his earlier works:

DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES . . .
 NIGHTMARES . . . DREAMS! OH!
 DREAMING THAT THE NEGROES
 OF THE SOUTH HAVE TAKEN OVER--
 VOTED ALL THE DIXIECRATS
 RIGHT OUT OF POWER--
 COMES THE COLORED HOUR:
 MARTIN LUTHER KING IS GOVERNOR OF GEORGIA,
 DR. RUFUS CLEMENT HIS CHIEF ADVISOR,
 ZELMA WATSON GEORGE THE HIGH GRAND WORTHY.
 IN WHITE PILLARED MANSIONS
 SITTING ON THEIR WIDE VERANDAS,
 WHITE SHARECROPPERS WORK THE BLACK PLANTATIONS,
 AND COLORED CHILDREN HAVE WHITE MAMMIES:

MAMMY FAUBUS
 MAMMY EASTLAND
 MAMMY PATTERSON.

DEAR, DEAR DARLING OLD WHITE MAMMIES--
 SOMETIMES EVEN BURIED WITH OUR FAMILY!

DEAR OLD
 MAMMY FAUBUS!

CULTURE, THEY SAY, IS A TWO-WAY STREET:
 HAND ME MY MINT JULEP, MAMMY.

MAKE HASTE!

(AYM, pp. 8-9, 11. 88-112)

The topical allusions in which much of the poem's meaning is embedded form a technique central to Hughes' documentary intention. Characteristically, Hughes employs many forms of repetition, including gradatio or climax, alliteration, rhyme, refrain, and augmenting and diminishing variations.

In the second mood, "Ride, Red, Ride," the narrator satirizes Latin Americans who try to hide their Black ancestry and relatives. In an apostrophe to Santa Claus he ridicules the McCarthyism of the Fifties and suggests the heroism of Adam Clayton Powell. The fantasy of a segregated heaven where Blacks must continue to wait for equality and democracy suggests the bitterness that controls

this mood.

The title of the third mood, "Shades of Pigmeat," is a pun (paronomasia) alluding to the term pigmeat, the food and the famous Black comedian, Pigmeat Markham (who has made his reputation by satirizing the prejudicial injustice of the American legal system with his "Here comes de judge" skits). The persona also satirizes the stereotyped image of Black people that applies despite the international significance of Black people's political position in America. Oppressed Blacks live in worlds of absurd relationships and unanswered questions

IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES
ANSWER QUESTIONS ANSWER
AND ANSWERS WITH A QUESTION
AND THE TALMUD IS CORRECTED
BY A STUDENT IN A FEZ
WHO IS TO JESUIT
AS NORTH POLE IS TO SOUTH
OR ZIK TO ALABAMA
OR BIG MAYBELL TO
THE MET.

(AYM, p. 20)

from which their escape lies in such things as living the blues and extravagant grooming:

HIP BOOTS
DEEP IN THE BLUES
(AND I NEVER HAD A HIP BOOT ON)
HAIR
BLOWING BACK IN THE WIND
(AND I NEVER HAD THAT MUCH HAIR)
DIAMONDS IN PAWN
(AND I NEVER HAD A DIAMOND
IN MY NATURAL LIFE)
ME
IN THE WHITE HOUSE
(AND AIN'T NEVER HAD A BLACK HOUSE)

DO JESUS!
 LORD!
 AMEN!
 (AYM, p. 21)

The fourth mood, "Ode to Dinah," alludes to the late Dinah Washington (a Black jazz-blues-pops singer). Like Dinah, the persona tells of the conditions of life in the ghetto where all Blacks, including many of the artists who project their lives, are exploited:

IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES
 WHERE THE PENDULUM IS SWINGING
 TO THE SHADOW OF THE BLUES,
 EVEN WHEN YOU'RE WINNING
 THERE'S NO WAY NOT TO LOSE.
 (AYM, p. 31)

In the fifth mood, "Blues in Stereo," the narrator compares the plight of colonized and culturally exploited Africans to that of American Blacks:

YOU BAREFOOT, TOO,
 IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES
 WHERE AN ANCIENT RIVER FLOWS
 PAST HUTS THAT HOUSE A MILLION BLACKS
 AND THE WHITE GOD NEVER GOES
 FOR THE MOON WOULD WHITE HIS WHITENESS
 BEYOND ITS MASK OF WHITENESS
 AND THE NIGHT MIGHT BE ASTONISHED
 AND SO LOSE ITS REPOSE.

IN A TOWN NAMED AFTER STANLEY
 NIGHT EACH NIGHT COMES NIGHTLY
 AND THE MUSIC OF OLD MUSIC'S
 BORROWED FOR THE HORNS
 THAT DON'T KNOW HOW TO PLAY
 ON LPs THAT WONDER
 HOW THEY EVER GOT THAT WAY.
 (AYM, p. 36)

He ends this mood by suggesting the anxiety and frustration

created by fantasies of freedom and prosperity through
the use of non-sequitur:

DOWN THE LONG HARD ROW THAT I BEEN HOEING
I THOUGHT I HEARD THE HORN OF PLENTY BLOWING
BUT I GOT TO GET A NEW ANTENNA LORD--
MY TV KEEPS ON SNOWING.

Hughes not merely interweaves his images, but their symbolism changes in punning complexity. Seemingly unrelated images find contact (such as electronic "snow" behaving like natural snow, as well as both of those "snows" suggesting the vernacular "snow job" of illusion creating.

Picking up an earlier strand, the title of the sixth book, "Horn of Plenty," exploits the pun (syllepsis), Cornucopia and trumpet, to satirize the escape from the ghetto to suburbia by the Black middle class. The persona catalogues the occupations and names of those who can afford to escape--entertainers (singers, dancers, jazz musicians) and athletes--and their reasons for escaping. To heighten the satire he fills out many of the lines to the margin with dollar signs (ll. 5-24). In lines that deal with the ghetto he uses cent signs. In the remainder of this mood the persona testifies to and satirizes his own escape (ll. 30-98) by contrasting the fulfillment of his fantasies with the threatening disturbance of his new found position: the racist questions of his naive neighbors force him to "play the dozens."

THEY RUNG MY BELL TO ASK ME
 COULD I RECOMMEND A MAID.
 I SAID, YES, YOUR MAMA.
 (AYM, p. 46)

The seventh mood, "Gospel Cha-Cha," focuses on Blacks of Haiti, Cuba, and Brazil. Hughes satirizes the roles of religion and historical and natural culture in the lives of the oppressed poor: despite whatever, death is the only release. This mood records Hughes' awareness of the limited role of historical nationalistic heroes that is counterpoise to his literary principle of the importance of contemporary heroes.

In the eighth mood, "Is It True," the words and ways of Blacks are influencing and being exploited by the world, yet Black people still have to wait. Their certain knowledge of the coming collapse of the bourgeoisie is balanced against their own premature dying.

The ninth mood, "Ask Your Mama," explores the shadows of the ghetto shadows, those who visibly exploit its resources; the mood also focuses on those who try to escape. It suggests the international organization of oppression of darker people.

In the tenth mood, "Bird In Orbit," the narrator continues his self-conscious satire of middle-class aspirations. He desires to meet entertainers and civil rights activists (ll. 1-14), yet he is aware of the bankruptcy of Black intellectuals, entertainers, and politicians (ll.

18-29).

In the eleventh mood, "Jazztet Muted," the narrator explores the tendency to riot among the oppressed.

In the twelfth mood, "Show Fare, Please," the persona narrates the unanswered questions of a child that expresses his awareness of oppression:

TELL ME, TELL ME, MAMA,
ALL THAT MUSIC, ALL THAT DANCING
CONCENTRATED TO THE ESSENCE
OF THE SHADOW OF A DOLLAR
PAID AT THE BOX OFFICE
WHERE THE LIGHTER IS THE DARKER
IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES
AND THE TELL ME OF THE MAMA
IS THE ANSWER TO THE CHILD.

(AYM, p. 82)

P. THE PANTHER AND THE LASH

The Panther and the Lash, TPATL (New York: Alfred K. Knopf, 1967) is Hughes' last published collection of poems, seventy in number of which forty-five have not appeared in earlier collections. The poems are distributed among seven sections, each grouping related poems except the last.

The fifteen poems, eight of which are new, of "Words of Fire," the first section, protest the racial situation in American ghettos. "Crowns and Garlands" is significant of these for it develops Hughes' critical view of Black entertainers and athletes and the role they're assigned by the white establishment:

Make a garland of Leontynes and Lenas
And hang it about your neck
Like a lei.
Make a crown of Sammys, Sidneys, Harrys,
Plus Cassius Mohammed Ali Clay.
Put their laurels on your brow
Today--
Then before you can walk
To the neighborhood corner,
Watch them droop, wilt, fade
Away.
Though worn in glory on my head,
They do not last a day--
Not one--
Nor take the place of meat or bread
Or rent that I must pay.
Great names for crowns and garlands!
Yeah!
I love Ralph Bunche--
But I can't eat him for lunch.
(TPATL, p. 6)

This working-class speaker voices attitudes similar to those of the middle-class observer of Ask Your Mama, but he is less indirect. This speaker also uses surrealistic fantasies to suggest the insufficiency of vicarious satisfaction derived from worshipping heroes. The voice of the vernacular, at its moment of insight and wit, heightens the contradictions between the classes.

"Elderly Leaders" satirizes the Uncle Tom by describing and evaluating their actions and values:

The old, the cautious, the over-wise--
 Wisdom reduced to the personal equation:
 Life is a system of half-truths and lies,
 Opportunistic, convenient evasion.

Elderly,
 Famous,
 Very well paid,
 They clutch at the egg
 Their master's
 Goose laid:
 \$\$\$\$\$
 \$\$\$\$
 \$\$\$
 \$\$
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The funneling dollar symbols focus attention on the capitalistic values that shape the Tom's behavior.

Another kind of description is used in "Lenox Avenue Bar," a portrait employing a weaved cloth metaphor to suggest the interracial texture of the place:

Weaving
 Between assorted terrors
 is the Jew
 who owns the place--
 one Jew,
 fifty Negroes:

embroideries
 (heirloomed
 from ancient evenings)
 tattered
 in this neon
 place.
 (TPATL, p. 10)

"Junior Addict" represents Hughes' attempt to focus on the drug problem as a nefarious escape from the oppression of ghetto life. The poem collects some of Hughes' most characteristic techniques such as rhyme, repetition, parallel grammatical construction, metonymy, epithet, apostrophe, sun and water imagery, the symbol of Africa as a promise land for Black people and the world; and dream imagery:

The little boy
 who sticks a needle in his arm
 and seeks an out in other worldly dreams
 who seeks an out in eyes that droop
 and ears that close to Harlem screams,
 (TPATL, p. 12, ll. 1-5)

Paralleled and balanced dependent clauses serve to both describe and isolate the addict. The theme of dreams, of which Hughes describes both the hope and despair of Blacks, returns now as the drugged state of the addict. This state blinds the addict to the future the narrator conveys with the sunrise metonymy:

cannot know, of course,
 (and has no way to understand)
 a sunrise that he cannot see
 beginning in some other land--
 but destined sure to flood--and soon--
 the very room in which he leaves
 his needle and his spoon,

the very room in which today the air
 is heavy with drug
 of his despair.
 (Ibid., ll. 6-15)

The alliterative epithet "drug on his despair" reveals the cause of the addiction. The narrator indicates parenthetically, the results of that addiction:

(Yet little can
 tomorrow's sunshine give
 to one who will not live.)
 (Ibid., ll. 16-18)

Then in an apostrophe he urges his metonymy to retrieve the dying youth:

Quick, sunrise, come--
 Before the mushroom bomb
 Pollutes his stinking air
 With better death
 Than is his living here,
 With viler drugs
 That bring today's release
 In poison from the fallout
 Of our peace.
 (Ibid., pp. 12-13, ll. 19-27)

The functional rhyme reinforces thematic concerns (release / peace, dreams / screams, understand / land, soon / spoon, air / despair). Balancing his earlier parenthetical evaluation, the narrator quotes a voice that epigrammatically asserts and capsulizes the relationship between escape and employment:

"It's easier to get dope
than it is to get a job."
 (Ibid., p. 13, ll. 28-29)

The narrator signals his agreement through repetition and opposition:

Yes, easier to get dope
 than to get a job--
 daytime or nighttime job,
 teen-age, pre-draft,
 pre-lifetime job.

(Ibid., ll. 30-34)

In the final stanza the narrator returns to his apostrophe,
 now a refrain in which he identifies the metonymy:

Quick, sunrise, come!
 Sunrise out of Africa,
 Quick, come!
 Sunrise, please come!
 Come! Come!

(Ibid., ll. 35-39)

This is political Africa as in Ask Your Mama and not the
 exotic Africa which characterized Hughes' earliest publi-
 cations. And yet Hughes dream of its possibility, that is
 the possibility that Africa represents the coming end of
 the political oppression of Black Americans, a dream
 stirred by the political awakening of the Fifties, recorded
 in Ask Your Mama; that dream that lived up to his death in
 1967 was no less a dream than the exotic Africa of the
 Twenties.

"Death in Yorkville" (New York City) reveals Hughes'
 unwavering purpose of being a documentary poet:

How many bullets does it take
 To kill a fifteen-year-old kid?
 How many bullets does it take
 To kill me?

How many centuries does it take
 To bind my mind--chain my feet--
 Rope my neck--lynch me--
 Unfree?

From the slave chain to the lynch rope
 To the bullets of Yorkville,
 Jamestown, 1619 to 1963:
 Emancipation Centennial--
 100 years NOT free.

Civil War Centennial: 1965.
 How many Centennials does it take
 To kill me.
 Still alive?

When the long hot summers come
 Death ain't
 No jive.
 (Ibid., p. 15)

The poem is controlled by a series of rhetorical and unanswerable questions that suggest that like James Powell killed in the summer disturbances of 1964, all Black people are psychologically dead as the result of their long history of oppressive racism.

The narrator of "Black Panther" uses parallelled, progressively developed clauses to indicate the transformation from passive complacency and resistance through desperation, to active militance:

Pushed into the corner
 Of the hobnailed boot,
 Pushed into the corner of the
 "I-don't-want-to-die" cry,
 Pushed into the corner of
 "I don't want to study war no more,"
 Changed into "Eye for eye,"
 The Panther in his desperate boldness
 Wears no disguise,
 Motivated by the truest
 Of the oldest
 Lies.
 (Ibid., p. 19)

The pushing brings about the change in the panther who sees that racism and imperialism are the pushers or

oppressors or conditioners.

"American Heartbreak," the second section, focuses on the history of American racism. "Ghosts of 1619" suggests that contemporary Black militancy represents America's inability to escape her history of racism:

Ghosts of all too solid flesh,
 Dark ghosts come back to haunt you now,
 These dark ghosts to taunt you--
 Yet ghosts so solid, ghosts so real
 They may not only haunt you--
 But rape, rob, steal,
 Sit-in, stand-in, stall-in, vote-in
 (Even vote for real in Alabam')
 And in voting not give a damn
 For the fact that white was right
 Until last night.

Last night?
 What happened then?
 Flesh-and-blood ghosts
 Became flesh-and-blood-men?
 Got tired of asking, When?
 Although minority,
 Suddenly became majority
 (Metaphysically speaking)
 In seeking authority?

How can one man be ten?
 Or ten be a hundred and ten?
 Or a thousand and ten?
 Or a million and ten
 Are but a thousand and ten
 Or a hundred and ten
 Or ten--or one--
 Or none--
 Being ghosts
 Of then?

(TPATL, pp. 26-27)

The ghost metaphor conveys the historical burden of slavery carried by white America. The paradox of fleshy ghosts suggests that the descendents of slaves (and slave masters)

bear attitudes conditioned by slavery and live in an environment produced by slavery. The political demonstrations by Black people are the nemesis to the institution of slavery and all of its manifestations.

Rhetorically, the voice turns phrases and cliches to ridicule his enemy while defining or describing the motivational and historical influences of the civil rights movement. The first stanza generalizes this description; the second moves to a particular night. To the paradox of fleshy ghosts two other paradoxes are added: ghosts becoming men and a minority becoming a majority. Instead of descriptive statements as in the first stanza, the second is phrased in questions that heighten the satirical effect of ridicule. The third stanza explores how the minority becomes the majority through more questions that reveal the transformation brought about by, in the ascending direction, the unity of the oppressed seeking retribution and justice, and, in the descending direction, the fear of the oppressor.

In "Long View: Negro" Hughes uses the metaphor of the telescope to convey the reversal or transformation process that enables one to see from a different point of view:

Emancipation: 1865
Sighted through the
Telescope of dreams
Looms larger,
So much larger,

So it seems,
That truth can be.

But turn the telescope around,
Look through the larger end--
And wonder why
What was so large
Becomes so small
Again.

(TPATL, p. 30)

The reversal of the telescope presents a view symbolic of the disillusionment with the dream of freedom and democracy for Blacks.

The third section, "The Bible Belt," focuses on the racism of the South. "Birmingham Sunday" reveals Hughes' continuing concern for documenting. It is an elegy for four young Black girls dynamited in a Sunday School of Birmingham, Alabama during a period of civil rights activity. (TPATL, pp. 46-47)

The fourth section, "The Face of War," includes six new poems that protest against war and violence. "Official Notice" is an experiment in epistle form in which a mother of a dead soldier addresses her personification of death:

Dear Death:
I got your message
That my son is dead.
The ink you used
To write it
Is the blood he bled.
You say he died with honor
On the battlefield,
And that I am honored, too,
By this bloody yield.
Your letter
Signed in blood,
With his blood
Is sealed.

(TPATL, p. 55)

This apostrophe's metaphor of the epistle in reply to an earlier message written by death in blood carries the weight of the mother's grief.

"African Question Mark," the fifth section of Panther, examines the issues and problems of the African countries moving from Colonialism to Neo-colonialism. Each of the questions of "Question and Answer" is answered by a refrain:

Durban, Birmingham,
Cape Town, Atlanta,
Johannesburg, Watts,
The earth around
Struggling, fighting,
Dying--for what?

A world to gain.

Groping, hoping,
Waiting--for what?

A world to gain.

Dreams kicked asunder,
Why not go under?

There's a world to gain.

But suppose I don't want it,
Why take it?

To remake it.
(TPATL, p. 68)

The ten poems of the sixth section, "Dinner Guest: Me," satirize both the Black and white middle-classes and the striving of others to enter these classes. All of its themes were dealt with in Ask Your Mama.

The last section, "Daybreak in Alabama," has no unifying theme as may be suggested by its title. Although six of its twelve poems are new, none of them is thematically or technically outstanding.

CHAPTER III

A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN LANGSTON HUGHES'
POETIC THEORY AND PRACTICE

This research and analysis concludes that Langston Hughes' theories of poetry are congruent with his poetic practice. His theories both influenced and developed from his writing, but more often they were the result of his analysis of his own work.

Hughes wrote best and most prolifically while in unpleasant emotional states. He watched and recorded the movements and textures of his experiences and memories. In his poet's ear he could hear the voices of his people, their vernacular. With that sound he recorded many variations of their lives.

Hughes' personae, as well as his poetic observers and narrators, are Black personalities speaking of the "emotion and rhythm" of Black experiences. Both the audiences that look over Hughes' shoulder and that listen to what he says are Black. Thus Hughes had little difficulty in expressing the behavior, attitudes, and values of Black reality.

Hughes' poetry reveals himself only indirectly. He considered that his poetry should be the unravelling of not his private but his public consciousness.

Although he travelled most of his life, seeing America, the USSR, Asia, Japan, China, Africa and Europe, the Caribbean Islands, and Central America, home base was always among the poor Black people of Harlem, Chicago, Cleveland or Atlanta. Hughes took peculiar interest in

Black creative expression wherever he found it and whether it was folk or fine art. In the last decade of his life he became more concerned with the problems of the Black middle class as revealed by his last two books.

As a social poet Hughes found the world in himself rather than himself in the world. He wrote about the world he found rather than the self that did the looking. The central theme shaping that world he found to be the Black man's struggle between the controls of economic and political oppression and the freedom of creative expression of Black experience. As a documentary poet Hughes recorded the struggle against racist oppression; as a Folk poet he kept his fingers on the pulse of Black creativity. For him there was no chance of a gulf between literature and life. Rather he knew that any gulf would be one between the poet and his audience, so he avoided esoteric writing especially in the form and structure of his work. For the most part the language of Langston Hughes is the language of the majority of Black people. It is not merely a word list, although there is that too. But it is also all the tricks that a mass of folks accumulates.

Langston Hughes' satire was one of the chief mediators of his social intent, for it renders his writing not merely a reflection but a critical reflection of the Black experience. Hughes' satirical tone is revealed most often in his gentle but thorough satire of the foibles

and vices of Black people. Much of his satire involves letting a voice speak for itself and thereby establish the distance between itself and the audience. Sometimes the satire is obviously directed against the society that has conditioned the voice; at other times the voice carries its own load.

The topical content of much of Hughes' poetry beginning in the 1930's and continuing until his death satisfies his documentary intentions. These intentions are inextricable from his image of himself as a social poet. The texture of this topicality varies from the poems written concerning the Scottsboro "boys," Ozzie Powell, and Angelo Herndon to the pattern of myriad allusions to the "heroes" of Black Americans found in Ask Your Mama. For Hughes there was little sacrifice in foregoing what must have seemed for him a bland timelessness in order to be the many voices of Black people and to gain the platforms those voices were denied. Hughes wanted to sensitize America and the world to the conditions of racism, or more accurately institutionalized racism, and to how that racism was part of a systematic oppression of both the poor and the middle classes. He intended to change the human heart with language and techniques that support and heighten both rational and conscious awareness.

The foundation for that language and those techni-

ques was Hughes' rich inheritance of Black oral and musical folk art, shipped in chains from Mother Africa to flourish in the South despite the considerable fearful cultural suppression until forces such as the Black Diaspora insured its nourishment on not merely a national but also an international market. Within the tradition of that heritage it might be fair to distinguish that Hughes was a formal poet, for he recorded, preserved, distilled, and imitated or satirized the behavior, creative forms, values, attitudes, and vernacular of his people. After the sound of the Black voice Hughes is next most adept in projecting what Black eyes see. And of course the voices condition what those eyes see. His visual imagery includes not merely the natural images from the settings of his poems but also the actions and processes to which Blacks are or need be sensitive. He gathers the imagery through which Black people perceive experience.

Langston Hughes' poetry has taken a number of characteristic forms--free verse, ballads, songs, blues, shouts, moans, spirituals, jazz, lullabies, blues sonnets, elegies, laments, sermons, prayers, portraits, montages, still-lives, photographs, and epigrams. He used three characteristic voices predominantly--"objective" narrators, personae, and emotionally involved poetic observers.

Hughes used individual persona voices, collectively representative persona, a multi-dimensional persona voice, and a choir of voices. Monologues and dialogues were the two most characteristic ways of presenting those voices. Testifying and reporting gossips' rumors occurred with a greater frequency than his apostrophes or visions. Three other shapers of form were the epistle, an autobiographical essay poem, and query and reply.

In his topical and social poetry Hughes found enduring subjects--working men and women, elevated and fallen women, heroic men and rounders and hustlers, stereotyped characters such as the mammy, the Tom, the tragic mulatto, and scapegoats. Both Jack and Madam Alberta K. Johnson are serio-comic creations of Black urban folk.

Hughes was preoccupied with the feelings of his subjects as well as their problems. The pursuits of joy or enjoyment is recorded as faithfully as the flights from loneliness and despair. The struggle to maintain hope represented with dreams, fantasies and illusions is overcome by the early Fifties with disillusionment, and bitter alienation. His attempts to express love were more serene just before the disillusionment settled in. Then the fears that dominate produce protective behavior such as being "cool" or being cynical. These fears are probably inseparable from the death-wish that haunts so many of

Hughes' speakers. Poverty and boredom, like twin horns of doom, have overcome many of Hughes' subjects, yet they protest, seek communion with their kind and God, and plead for brotherhood with its broad alliances, solidarity, and unity.

Hughes was also concerned with the effects of racism and Capitalism on the lives of the people. He documented Jim Crow, protested lynching and police brutality as well as war. He looked at intra-racism, and integration, at oppression and liberation, and at Uncle Tomism and militancy. Africa was a symbol that Hughes constantly re-evaluated in a striving to understand both its realities and the myths and dreams that focused on it.

To serve his didactic ends Hughes used examples, definition, supposition, description, illustration, argumentation, and syllogistic reasoning including enthymemes, as well as the wisdom and common sense of the folks. It is probably in his sense of humor that one would find his most irresistible didactic technique. To convey that humor he used ridicule, levity, paradox, indirection, irony, satire, antithesis, absurdity, ambiguity, hyperbole, understatement, caricature, contradictions, reversal of expectations, and surprise.

Hughes' didactic goals included weaving the character of Black experience and existence. The technique that

Hughes was most adept at was rendering the Black vernacular voice with its syntax, word-list, neologisms, slang, colloquialisms, regionalisms, and cliches. Hughes sometimes used orthographical variations to suggest the sound of that voice.

Dominating the design and pattern of the Black speech that Hughes records and preserves are rhythmical and comparative figures of speech. The rhythm of the language is conveyed through repetition, refrain, incremental repetition, parallelism, balance, antithesis, variation, catalogue, functional rhyme, alliteration, augmenting and diminishing variations, echo, chiasmus, amplification, and recapitulation. Framework stanzas or the repetition of a stanza at the beginning and end of a poem and often through the body of longer poems is a characteristic technique of repetition that gives also a circular motion to much of Hughes' work. Hughes' comparative figures show the imagination, creativity, and insight of his people. They include simile, metaphor, allegory, comparison and contrast, analogy, metonymy, synecdoche, epithet, pun, anecdote, fable, oxymoron, onomatopoeia, and objective correlative.

Hughes' imagery is drawn from both the rural and urban settings of his poems, as well as the human body and light and darkness. He seldom strains his images for

meaning or relevance although when he did he achieved impressive patterns of interrelationships. Some of the most characteristic actions within these settings are laughing, crying, singing the blues, working, protesting against society, complaining of one's personal predicament, and different forms of escape such as drinking, drugging, partying, dancing, and fantasizing a better future. And, of course, there is a lot of "rapping" in Hughes' poetry, a lot of well-wrought and well-timed words from speakers more interested in persuasion than reality or truth.

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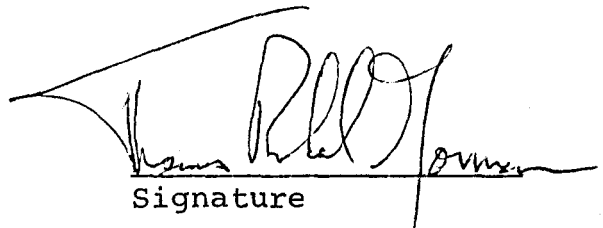
APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation of Philip M. Royster has been read and approved by members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Date


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