



Trabajo Fin de Grado

**“Twoness” and Blues : The Negro Artist
Conveying a Different Picture of Reality in
Langston Hughes’s works**

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Abstract

‘The Negro Artists’ and their poetries had been confronted by consequential limitations, opposition, fear of death in the face of apocalyptic life in slavery. Thus, their lack of freedom and the challenges they were subjected to as a race in the early twenties inevitably led to the Black consciousness, awakening of pride and the need to deconstruct all racial stereotypes in order to co-exist alongside the WASP culture. This dissertation will examine some of the efforts of the early African Americans writing cultures from black writers’ point of view, and, more specifically, Langston Hughes, one of the most relevant writers from this movement. By means of questioning the American Dream, exploring black identity and “double consciousness” and contemporary jazz and blues music, he showed how dehumanizing slavery had been and the discrimination they were subjected to was and proved a lesson that African-American culture was to be respected if real equality was to be achieved. In order to do so, my analysis has included the comparison of Hughes poetry in terms of rhythm, structure and content with that of other authors from different periods, including W.E.B. DuBois and Martin Luther King’s famous speech.

Resumen

‘Los Artistas Negros’ y sus poesías se habían enfrentado a las consiguientes limitaciones, oposición, miedo a la muerte frente a la vida apocalíptica en la esclavitud. Por lo tanto, su falta de libertad y los desafíos a los que fueron sometidos como raza a principios de los años veinte llevaron inevitablemente a la conciencia negra, al despertar del orgullo y la necesidad de deconstruir todos los estereotipos raciales para coexistir con la cultura WASP. Esta disertación examinará algunos de los esfuerzos de los primeros afroamericanos escribiendo culturas desde el punto de vista de los escritores negros y, más específicamente, Langston Hughes, uno de los escritores más relevantes de este movimiento. Mediante el cuestionamiento del Sueño Americano, la exploración de la identidad negra y la “doble conciencia” y la música contemporánea de jazz y blues, mostró cuán deshumanizadora había sido la esclavitud y la discriminación a la que fueron sometidos y demostró una lección de que la cultura afroamericana debía ser respetados si se quiere lograr una igualdad real. Para ello, mi análisis ha incluido la comparación de la poesía de Hughes en términos de ritmo, estructura y contenido con la de otros autores de diferentes épocas, entre ellos W.E.B. DuBois y el famoso discurso de Martin Luther King.

Abstract	1
Introduction	4
Theoretical Framework	7
Double consciousness	13
Affirmation of the self through blackness	16
The American Dream	19
Musicality: Blues and Jazz	22
Conclusion	25
Bibliography	28
Annex I	30
Proem/Negro	30
I, Too	31
Annex II	32
As I Grew Older	32
The Song of the Smoke by W.E.B. Du Bois	33
The South	35
Annex III	37
I Dream a World	37
Dream Boogie	37
Annex IV	40
The Weary Blues	40
Lenox Avenue Midnight	41
Jazzonia	42

Introduction

‘The Negro Artists’ and their poetry were confronted by consequential limitations, opposition, fear of death in the face of apocalyptic life in slavery. Their lack of freedom and the challenges they were subjected to as a race in the early twenties inevitably led to the Black consciousness, awakening of pride and the need to deconstruct all racial stereotypes in order to co-exist alongside the WASP (White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant) culture. The white adhering to the power of “I speak and you keep quiet”, “I tell the story and I also interpret it” to manipulate ideas as a political weaponry, using language and literary techniques (symbols, parody, metaphors, metonymy, myth...), proved to be ineffective to many racialized artists who challenged these notions. They also created theories and myths, the power of names to add symbolism in order to create all kinds of pseudo reality, all types of master minding tricks and threatening black lives in the form of lynching and the KKK just to destroy and condemn this race they claimed is inferior to them, subjecting them to life in hell so that they themselves can live a life ever lasting which is nothing but an absolute grotesque.

This dissertation will examine some of the hindrances of the early African Americans writing cultures from Harlem Renaissance writers’ point of view and not from the perspective of a Western culture that tells a single story of a minority group, which on many occasions is a form of stereotyping, and thus incomplete, imperfect and dehumanizing. Feminist novelist Chimamanda Adichie stated in her Ted Talk “The Danger of a Single Story” that a single

story robs people of their dignity, it makes the recognition of human equality and humanity difficult, it emphasizes how we are different rather than similar. She said that stories have been used to dispossess but stories can also be used to empower and dehumanize. Stories can break the dignity of people but stories can also repair that broken dignity.

This work will deconstruct the idyllic myth in order to reveal the hypocrisy lying at the core of the values of a minority group who took advantage of a majority – That is, a paternalism mired in greed that succeeds through the enslavement of Blacks; the fostering of a double standard of behaviour and rendering them economically dependent; a form of systemic and internalized racism; using a religious fundamentalism that fails to recognize moral evil in the original sin of slavery and racism. There is also the issue of violence and nothing but barbarism relating to the exploitations, prototyping and the use of language to manipulate and for oppression of blacks both in Africa and in America in order to place themselves in the center of history, rendering Blacks as the *other*.

This will be a discussion in which to question the practices and consequences of domination and subordination from the perspective of Harlem Renaissance artists. As a meaningful combative critique, trying to contest the ideological and cultural arrogance of the empire from a critical position in order to satirize the atrocities of WASP against Blacks in North America. It will also be taken as a sort of postcolonial analysis, discussing the history of exploitation and enslavement, questioning the naming and myths which were used to invent differences. After all, Americans would not have succeeded without the Atlantic slave trades which endangered and forced the migration of millions of Africa people who were held

captive against their will and used in a cruelly barbaric complex way without their exertion, using the medium to advocate the deconstruction. After all, there is a need for it to be addressed and reversed.

Theoretical Framework

To try and defeat all this subjugating discourse, Langston Hughes (1902-1967), poet and essayist, decided to take a stand and deconstruct the pervasive WASP perspective by means of a ‘politically active’ literature. His essays and works have been studied in racial and literature studies, as he is not only an artist who writes for the sake of art and beauty but an author who wishes to have an effect on his race. In other words, to invite other ‘Harlem Renaissance’ artists to mobilise and challenge the discourse which had been imposed on them since slavery times. His poetry and sociological essays are the main standpoint around which the whole dissertation will revolve.

Before the textual analysis is undertaken and for a better understanding, it is best to provide the reader with some historical context. During the 1920s, the Harlem Renaissance movement appeared, heavily inspired by high Modernism and Romanticism. Although they took after these two movements, they would not consider themselves spiritual successors but a brand new, original and racialized way of interpreting reality from their very own African American experience. Harold Bloom, in his introduction to seminal work *The Harlem Renaissance* goes on to explain that Countee Cullen (1903-1946) “saw himself not as a black Keats but as a black poet who identified Keats both with nature and with poetry” (12). Langston Hughes went one step further as his writings were ardent and sincere on his love for his people, disregarding the development of a poetical form unlike Modernists, who were fixated on looking for new forms of experimentation. Moreover, as Warrington Hudlin states, “[t]he Harlem artists did not constitute a ‘school’ of literature in the traditional sense. These

individuals (Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, Zora Hurston, Rudolph Fisher, Wallace Thurman, Eric Walrond, Jean Toomer, among others) were drawn primarily by the metropolitan charisma of New York City and word that ‘something’ was happening” (14).

These artists were eclectic as they followed, according to Bloom, “no single literary philosophy guiding them, nor even a uniform perception of what phenomenon was taking place around them. They were linked together, however, by a common black experience” (5). Moreover, as eclectic as they were, they were to represent the past and the present, the low and the middle class - they meant to impersonate the black slaves from the past who could not write a single page as they were forced to work in the fields yet at the same time Harlem writers belonged to a middle class which allowed poetry to appear. Hudlin writes: “The Harlem writers constituted an intelligentsia rather than a middle class, the distinction being that the intelligentsia are individuals who have broken with their middle-class backgrounds to form a community of free intellectuals” (15). Thus, these *Negro* Artists were more focused on conveying a social message instead of writing poetry as a form of advancing art, although, as mentioned above, they would draw on past poetic influences. In sum, their foundation story lies in a sea of contradictions, which, on the other hand, does not lessen their effect on society.

This group, however, did not mean to show an opposition to white culture but some sort of differentiation instead. They knew they had to cohabit with whites, not opposing them, but becoming something different which was complementary. In Hudlin’s words: “The assimilation was rejected, the separation was rejected, the accommodation, the agitation were all discarded, or rather transcended, for a new perspective of themselves and their

relationship to the rest of society, hence a ‘New Negro’ (7). Having dealt with the assimilationist-separationist dichotomy, the political philosophy of the Harlem artist was what one might best call “conditional integration” (Hudlin 16). This philosophy allowed them to thrive on their so-long canceled culture while at the same time not showing any contempt to WASP culture, as if trying to overcome past grudges and eager to become a “New Negro”, who, in Alain Locke’s words, “wishes to be known for what he is, even in his faults and shortcomings, and scorns a craven and precarious survival at the price of seeming to be what he is not” (11). In other words, a new kind of black African American who revered their African roots without disregarding their belonging to the American culture they had been part of for centuries, wishing to become an active element in democracy and middle-class culture of their own, separate from, but complementary to the WASP culture.

Although many artists belonged to this somewhat ‘chaotic’ movement, with no apparent identity, Langston Hughes best represents Harlem Renaissance, if only for his ardent appreciation for his racial culture and prolificity. After all, Alain Locke dubbed him “the new voice” of their people: “A true people’s poet has their balladry in his veins; and to me many of these poems seem based on rhythms as seasoned as folksongs and on moods as deep-seated as folk-ballads. Dunbar is supposed to have expressed the peasant heart of the people. But Dunbar was the showman of the Negro masses; here is their spokesman” (Locke in Smith 35). By 1967, the date of his death, Hughes had published more than a dozen volumes of poetry together with a body of works which were meant to address African-American life. Smith explains that the tumultuous Depression period made Hughes reconsider the relation between his poetry and 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?" (36). Therefore, as the empowering and uplifting voice he was supposed to be, he wrote a vast number of works trying to derive the true message he was 'chosen' to convey.

In the following pages, an extensive and comprehensive analysis will be performed on several poems by Langston Hughes, while exploring four concepts which are meant to exemplify the African-American experience during the 1920s: double consciousness, affirmation of blackness, the American Dream, and the musicality of jazz and blues in his poems, which Hughes considered 'black' genres proper.

The concept of double consciousness had been first explored by W.E.B. Du Bois in *Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Du Bois explains that it is similar to "looking at oneself through the eyes of others" (8). That is, to be in constant perusal of one's identity. Eventually, the African-American doing self-examination concludes that he is comprised of a "twoness" (hence the term "Double Consciousness") which puts the individual into a disjunction: being both American and a "Negro".

"Blackness" is a concept which, instead of hindering literary and social possibilities, empowers the poet and means to do so with their contemporary race. Thus, as it will be seen in the analysis of some poems such as "The South", blackness is a quality that is despised by the WASP culture but which proves to be as humane and equal as any other or as in "I, Too", where the poetic voice rejects being sent to eat alone in the kitchen just because of the colour of his skin.

In his 1926 essay “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain”, Langston Hughes further discussed the concept of double-consciousness:

But this is the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America—this urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible.

The American Dream is at the same time an ideal and a dream, something unattainable, belonging to the oneiric world in Hughes. In providing an appropriate definition for the term “American Dream”, one may as well have to include the words “opportunity” and “freedom to achieve such”. Unfortunately, African American people were dragged into a ‘dream’ which was not their own and at the same time deprived from achieving it — they had only been brought to the new continent to perform extenuating physical enterprises in the fields and to serve the landlords as slaves. Hence, for the people for whom Hughes sang as a poet, such a dream had been corrupted from the very beginning since they were torn apart from this national project. However, as African Americans seemed to gain citizen status after the Civil War, they felt like they belonged to that Dream, even if that meant having to renegotiate the meaning with the impending WASP culture. Nevertheless, this compromise was difficult to reach as there was the burden that whites carried and the resentment for centuries of slavery. Thus, if giving an accurate definition which included both cultures was difficult and opened up scars from the past, trying to compose poetry which was harmonious for both proved to be even more challenging. Hughes persevered in creating art that enabled the ‘black man’ to pursue such a Dream, free of animosity, in communion with his ideals.

To finish, the last part of our analysis will deal with musicality, a transversal part of Hughes’s

poetry. As a logical consequence of his affirmation of the movement's black identity, jazz and blues were integral parts of the Harlem Renaissance. They were musical styles which mimicked the African rhythms and tunes but incorporated the metropolitanism of New York City. Experimentation and improvisation are the key words in both Hughes' poetry and in these music styles, together with an emotional element which seems to evoke some sort of collective, brethren-like identity which harks back to a mythical land they were forcefully detached from somewhere in Africa.

For Langston Hughes, as he himself claims in his essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1926), the musicality and tones of jazz are present in most of his poetry as "jazz to me is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America: the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul - the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world, a world of subway trains, and work, work, work; the tom-tom of joy and laughter, and pain swallowed in a smile". As Kim (2021) explains in her insightful essay exploring the influence of jazz and blues on Hughes, in Blues, "depression, ominousness and negative aspects", in other words, the true emotions of the blacks become the main theme whereas jazz showcases more vivid and "colourful emotions" and since it merges different regional styles, it also encompasses whites' spirit hence making it more accepting and varied of other cultures. As a result, Hughes used both musical genres indistinctly in his works as he strived to show both sides of African-American experience.

Double consciousness

(See Annex I)

Double consciousness, this belonging to two opposing cultures at the same time, is a concept which also appears on his poems titled “Proem” and “Epilogue” (“I, Too”) respectively, included in the *The Weary Blues* collection. This concept is strongly connected to the affirmation of oneself through blackness, a term derived from this double consciousness. In this case, the analysis will be performed taking into account the “African” part of the twoness that “African-American” entails, as explained above.

In “Proem”, the poetic voice asserts his identity from the very beginning: “I am a Negro”. The structure of the poem is that of asserting that, on the one hand, he is African but on the other, he is American in his own right. A clear example of this is in the third stanza: “I’ve been a worker:/Under my hand the pyramids arose./ I made mortar for the Woolworth Building.” He refers back to his origins in Egypt (“Under my hand the pyramids rose”) while at the same time referring to Africans contributing to the formation of the United States (“I made mortar for the Woolworth Building”). Another example is in the fifth stanza: “I’ve been a victim:/ The Belgians cut off my hands in the Congo./ They lynch me now in Texas.” The literary voice has been in both places as a victim of slavery and racial violence. Michael Rothberg’s notion of multidirectional memory sheds some further light on the interpretation of this stanza. According to Rothberg (2014), it is through learning about traumatic events that can help us better understand a different experience which somehow shares a common element -In this case, racial violence on the part of the whites as part of the colonizing history of Europe and America. Hughes refers to the ancestral memories of being first held captive in ancestral Africa yet at the same time brings the reader back to contemporary

events, such as lynchings and hangings. This moving to and fro in time and history is a vindication of their rights as they were also responsible for the way contemporary America was - African Americans were an active part in the scaffolding of the country and shan't be overlooked and underrated.

Strongly vindictive is the poem “I, Too”; probably the most famous of his collection and one of the best known poems on African-American literature. In this piece of writing, he shows the discrimination he is subjected to (he is sent to eat in the kitchen, set apart from the rest of the whites) but at the same time he rebels against it by emphasizing his own value and beauty as a person, disregarding the colour of his skin, which eventually they will realize:

I am the darker brother./They send me to eat in the kitchen/When company comes,/But I laugh,/And eat well,/And grow strong.../Besides,/They'll see how beautiful I am/And be ashamed—

Finally, the poem presents a circular structure with just a word changing in the beginning and ending lines, but a significant change at that: “I, too, sing America” and “I, too, am America”. The former is a crystal-clear intertextual allusion to Walt Whitman’s seminal poem “I Hear America Singing”. Hughes replies to Whitman as if saying that he, as a “Negro” poet, deserves to participate in this multiracial and multicultural choir that makes up the nation’s identity. Moreover, his identity as a poet is an extension of his American self, of the US as a whole. Langston Hughes reached the conclusion in “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” that the only way to finally attain a merging of the two identities (African and American) was by means of becoming a poet as it was the duty of the Negro artist. The poet, however, shall not forget their identity as “Negro”: “So I am ashamed for the black poet who says, ‘I want to be a poet, not a Negro poet,’ as though his own racial world were not as

interesting as any other world.”. In sum, an African-American poet should not be ashamed of themselves for fear of not being accepted by white culture and instead celebrate this ‘blackness’.

In other words, by becoming a poet, one would sing for America (and African-Americans’ rights) and as America (indivisible part of the country) as he himself explicitly states in “I, Too”. The Negro artist would not be any different or inferior to his WASP counterparts but instead would combine both identities satisfactorily.

Affirmation of the self through blackness

(See Annex II)

“Proem” starts with “I am a Negro/Black as the night is black,/ Black like the depths of my Africa”. “As I Grew Older” also reflects this assimilation of the truth: “Shadow. /I am black. ... My hands!/My dark hands!”. The message the poetic persona tries to convey here is that in his “dream” he realized he was somehow different from the others. There is a “wall” which he cannot shatter (discrimination) and wishes he could. It is a poem set in an oneiric setting, a commonplace in Hughes poetry as explored in the following section, and conveys the despair of the voice feeling trapped because of this “shadow” he is in.

This acceptance of one’s blackness was also present in W.E.B. Du Bois’ “The Song of the Smoke” (1907). “I am black” is repeated several times throughout the poem and there is an emphasis on the colour black and its hues: “I am darkening with song,...I will be black as blackness can—/The blacker the mantle, the mightier the man!/For blackness was ancient ere whiteness began.”. Also, there is a dichotomy between white and black and how fluid these differences are: “I whiten my black men—I blacken my white!/What’s the hue of a hide to a man in his might?”. Du Bois is trying to convey that there are no real differences in colour, only the ones that mental structures give to it and thus for him there is this possibility of change from white to black and viceversa.

Langston Hughes explores this white-black dichotomy in the form of a subjugation versus

dominance relation, as seen in “I, Too”. The poetic persona is sent to the kitchen by the whites - while the whites are together. However, the protagonist is unaffected by this treatment as it makes him feel stronger. He pities them for not appreciating his beauty. He also explores this racial difference in the form of a man-woman relationship in “The South”. The speaking voice, the “I” is rejected by a personified South, who could represent the enslaving whites of 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.” This feminized South is described as “Beautiful, like a woman,/Seductive as a dark-eyed whore,/Passionate, cruel,/Honey-lipped, syphilitic/ ” as opposed to the North, which is a “kinder mistress”. As we can see, Hughes uses personification in a very creative way, making a difference between two kinds of white people: the cruel Southerners and the kinder Northerners, who offered an escape for many slaves and the possibility of a life in freedom. In a way, he acknowledges that not all whites are the same, as not every African American is the same in line with his pacifist message that by being an American the colour of the skin does not make a difference and that if this “South” was nicer, black Americans would appreciate them more and establish an equal relationship in peace.

Nevertheless, in no way can Hughes or Du Bois’s poems be seen as some sort of hatred towards the self but as a means of saying “here I am the way I am” or, in other words, self-affirmation of this new persona. Smith sheds some light on a possible interpretation of this poem: “In order for the poet to transcend his temporal despair, he must accept the condition of his blackness completely and unequivocally. The poem thus ends, not in despair, but rather in a quest for self-liberation, dependent on the affirmation “I am black!”” (41). The

image of the “dream” may urge others to ‘wake up’ from it - to destroy the ‘mental’ wall by accepting one’s blackness. This fluidity and irreality of racial discrimination was already explored in “The Song of the Smoke” by Du Bois. Then one should take on an active role - to become a poet and sing for others, to make a shift between the African American slave with no voice whatsoever to the middle-class artist who wants to take a stand.

On the other hand, the first person pronoun in both poems are but an extension of the poetic persona’s own self to other African Americans. The “I” does not only refer to Hughes or Du Bois personally and exclusively, as it is easy to fall into the lack of distinction of the narratorial voice and the real author behind the poem. Instead, as “the voice” of his generation and of Harlem Renaissance, Hughes is just an amplifier of the African-American experience. Unlike Walt Whitman, whose poetry revolved around the self (“Song of Myself”), Hughes affirms his identity through the affirmation of the rest of his people.

The American Dream

(See Annex III)

Christine Dualé in her 2018 essay "Langston Hughes's Poetic Vision of the American Dream: A Complex and Creative Encoded Language.", argues that it is through Hughes's writing technique that the pursuit of an African American Dream is favored by actively questioning reality and being urged to sail through different layers of meanings to "rebuild African-American history" and its musical forms of jazz, blues and be-bop, which was in the spirit of this renewal. Indeed, just to name two of his poetry collections which explicitly lead to dreaming and the oneiric: *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems*, (1932), and *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951). It is interesting to see how these two titles work together. Hughes keeps his hopes high in achieving full assimilation in society (*The Dream Keeper*) but at the same time he is aware that this is to be 'deferred', as in postponed because such integration does not seem possible at the time. In Dualé's words: "The theme of the dream is a central motif of Langston Hughes's poetry that established the continuity between the depictions of simple African Americans and their "deferred" expectations." (4). Thus, this dream could become true or not, but his poetic efforts were set forth in the direction of obtaining such reality, breaking away from the imaginative or irreal dimension.

In our analysis of the deterred American Dream, I have chosen "I Dream a World" and "Dream Boogie". The former envisions an idyllic future where peace and happiness abound and "where black or white,/ Whatever race you be,/ Will share the bounties of the earth/ And every man is free". In other words, Hughes and his poetic persona acknowledge that this Eden-like reality is only possible if effective racial equity is achieved, forcing the

reader to actively question contemporary policies. Some decades later, on August 28th 1963 in Washington D.C., Martin Luther King would, probably as a reference to Hughes' poem, deliver his quintessential speech "I have a Dream". His dream, as Langston's ("I dream a world where all/ Will know sweet freedom's way"), is to achieve total freedom, not accepting a partial concession of such and to work together as a united nation:

With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith, we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

Due to Martin Luther King's eminent religious background as a baptist pastor, he keeps insisting on freedom as a matter of faith in God, whereas Hughes plays with the oniric tone in his piece. If we accept Freudian philosophy on the interpretation of dreams, dreams are but an expression of an intense desire. Martin L. King would elaborate on the concept of freedom not as a desire but a wish for God to render it possible. In other words, Hughes puts forward an ardent wish that is to be fulfilled somehow in an active and practical way whereas Martin Luther King proposes that such vindication is made through a passive act, that of faith.

On the other hand, "Dream Boogie" does not reflect such a deep message in an explicit fashion, but instead is structured like a be-bop song. However, the title "Dream Boogie" and the first stanza ("Good morning, daddy!/Ain't you heard/The boogie-woogie rumble/Of a dream deferred?") show the counterpart to "I Dream a World" –Hughes wonders whether blacks will still be living in a 'nightmare', 'deferring' their very-sought

dream but at the same time, celebrates their spirit with music. In conclusion, it is no use to be feeling melancholic if this dream has not come yet and even if they are still in a ‘nightmare’. Instead, the upbeat tone of the poem, together with the use of the vernacular (“Ain’t you heard”) urges African-Americans to celebrate their identity in the meantime since the myth of the American Dream in essence seems not to be functioning for both parties.

Musicality: Blues and Jazz

(See Annex IV)

To begin with, “The Weary Blues” is a clear example of how this blues musicality, the deep insight into black people’s emotions, is conveyed in a poem. First, in order to express oneself as faithfully as possible, it would be illogical to use a convoluted form of poetry. Instead, the use of popular language and dialect are present throughout the poem sang by the protagonist of the poem:

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. ... 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.

Thus, the vernacular is not a means to stereotype the singing voice of the poem as the way black people spoke, as in Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*, where Jim uses this kind of language and is set apart from the rest of the characters as the token black friend of the protagonist. Instead, Hughes is trying to express here that this use of the language is just a way of expressing the deepest corners of the souls of these musicians and not the only way African-American people can show their true selves. Blues music is all about liberating oneself of social constraints and of speaking through emotions: “In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone”.

If blues was the expression of the darkest corners of black identity, then jazz is the celebration of life, as tough and depressing as it may be. In “Lenox Avenue: Midnight”, Hughes states that

“The rhythm of life / Is a jazz rhythm”: this is to say, that life is full of ups (“overtones”) and downs (“undertones”) - as there is ”joy and laughter” there is also “pain swallowed in a smile”. Hughes mentioned in his essay that jazz is all about “the world of subway trains and work,work,work”. In the case of this poem, it is the world of “the rumble of street cars,/ To the swish of rain”. In other words, the cosmopolitan atmosphere engulfs the African American experience. Instead of just resorting to African folklore, admiring a tribal past, this new African identity was to be found in hectic American cities.

A more optimistic take on life is seen in “Jazzonia”, where Hughes is describing a Harlem cabaret with six jazz players and a dancing girl. Unlike “Lenox Avenue: Midnight”, which was not as musical to the ear as this one, musicality is emphasized by the use of exclamation and refrain: “Oh, singing tree!/Oh, shining rivers of the soul!”. Rhythm and repetition are present in the poem with two questions following each other: “Were Eve’s eyes/In the first garden/Just a bit too bold?/Was Cleopatra gorgeous/In a gown of gold?”. Finally, there is an alteration in the final line of the opening line; compare “In a Harlem cabaret/Six long-headed jazzers play” with “In a whirling cabaret/Six long-headed jazzers play”. The word “whirling” could express the increasingly rapid pace of the jazz song they are playing, together with its characteristic joyfulness. To finish, alliterations are found in the poem, which enhance the rhythmic effect on the reader/listener: “singing”, “soul”; “garden”, “gorgeous”, “gown”, “gold”.

In sum, Hughes showed great versatility not only in poetry but in portraying the essence of music in his writing by means of alliterations, repetitions, refrains, exclamations and the use

of the vernacular which allowed for his poems to be read aloud as songs even. This goes on to show his mastery of language and how he truly believed he were to express the new Negro identity through different media.

Conclusion

In summary, the Harlem Renaissance emerged as a movement not contrary to American culture, even though they had been brutally vexated over time and as history shows in the outrageous depictions of slavery and racial discrimination, but instead as trying to complement the two identities: the African American and the American.

Hughes instilled his poetry with this concept of double consciousness but he did not disregard his reaffirmation of what made him a black individual, different from the WASP culture and also different from the myths that the whites had elaborated in order to label them as the other and retain their position of superiority. In the same line of black identity, we find the musicality of jazz and blues, which permeated Hughes poetry and was not only a literary resource but a way of reaffirming this new Negro identity who enjoyed art in all its forms, breaking with the stereotypes which had been created by the mainstream culture.

Finally, Hughes could not discuss blacks' reality without considering how the American Dream had been truncated and how he wished for such a dream to come true. Langston Hughes concluded that the best way to integrate all of these elements was by trying to become a poet - a singer ("I, too, sing America") of the tribulations of his people. After examining his poetic talent in a series of poems, it is safe to say that he is one of the best exponents of the Harlem Renaissance. Just to name a few of the resources he used we could explore how he swiftly used the vernacular language as a means to express the emotions of the blues; the personification of the South in the form of a woman who rejects the blacks, who is oblivious to their attempts to reconcile; alliteration, metaphors, oneiric images and of course the rhythm and tone of the musical genres which were part of the Harlem culture at the time. His prolific writing did not diminish the main idea he wanted to convey: the ideal of a *new Negro* overcoming contemporary hurdles by amplifying his voice and not only

vindicating oneself but the group.

Furthermore, Hughes was not alone in his quest to fight for racial rights as The Harlem Renaissance was composed of musicians, essayists, poets and writers. All of them complemented and praised each other, even though their movement was not a uniform one and drew on different trends in literature and philosophy. In our dissertation, we have relied on W.E.B. Du Bois's works and ideas as he could be considered one of the predecessors to this movement. After the roaring twenties, all this ecstasy that enabled the Harlem Renaissance to bloom was unfortunately interrupted by the 1929 stock market crash. The Great Depression ensued and all the musical and artistic talent were to be overshadowed by an imperative crisis at every level in American society: the domestic economy and social values were at stake. Indeed, by 1935, many residents of Harlem sought out new job opportunities and much of the hustle and bustle we would see in the heist of the Renaissance was nowhere to be seen, although some authors such as Leroi Baraka or Maya Angelou perpetuated this tradition. This economic event marked the end of a glorious era for African American creativity.

Looking at the present of black culture in America, we can see that their search for identity was not a thing of the past, finally eclipsed by WASP culture. Moreover, contemporary African-American artists, media representation and social movements are still alive and kicking. We see this in Black Lives Matter, in the increasing inclusion of racial minorities in media and in how black people are trying to find their place in politics and society.

However, it is true that nowadays there is still the double-consciousness in African-Americans that they belong righteously to the country but unfortunately at the same time still get discriminated, especially by the forces of order and lag behind in readily access

to higher education levels. Du Bois already mentioned in his essay “The Negro Problem” (1903) that black communities needed highly educated leaders - the so-called Talented Tenth and this is only attainable if black individuals can access University settings in the same conditions as their white peers.

The failure of American society to welcome minorities is a persistent problem. That is not to say that the efforts of Langston Hughes were unfruitful. Martin Luther King Jr.’s seminal discourse “I have a dream” was very probably heavily influenced by Hughes’s poem “I Dream a World” and as history demonstrated later on, his non-coercive, non-violent tactics proved to be effective in achieving civil rights for the African-Americans in the 60s. Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go in the obtaining of full-fledged rights as of today. It begs the question whether a new artistic movement, one similar to the Harlem Renaissance should emerge in the following years, allowing African-Americans to find their voice in American society once more. As Hughes mentioned in “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain”, it is the duty of poets to merge both worlds and fight against inequalities.

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Annex I

Proem/Negro

I am a Negro:

Black as the night is black,
Black like the depths of my Africa.

I've been a slave:

Caesar told me to keep his door-steps
clean. I brushed the boots of Washington.

I've been a worker:

Under my hand 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 still in Mississippi.

I am a Negro:

Black as the night is black,
Black like the depths of my Africa.

I, Too

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.

They send me to eat in the kitchen

When company comes,

But I laugh,

And eat

well,

And grow strong.

Tomorrow,

I'll be at the table

When company

comes. Nobody'll dare

Say to me,

"Eat in the

kitchen," Then.

Besides,

They'll see how beautiful I

am And be ashamed--

I, too, am America.

Annex II

As I Grew Older

It was a long time ago.

I have almost forgotten my
dream. But it was there then,

In front of me,

Bright like a sun,—

My dream.

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.

Shadow.

I am black.

I lie down in the shadow.

No longer the light of my dream before me,
Above me.

Only the thick
wall.

Only the shadow.

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!

The Song of the Smoke by W.E.B. Du Bois

I am the Smoke

King I am black!

I am swinging in the sky,

I am wringing worlds awry;

I am the thought of the throbbing mills,

I am the soul of the soul-toil kills,

Wraith of the ripple of trading rills;

Up I'm curling from the

sod, I am whirling home to

God; I am the Smoke King

I am black.

I am the Smoke

King, I am black!

I am wreathing broken hearts,

I am sheathing love's light darts;

Inspiration of iron times

Wedding the toil of toiling climes,

Shedding the blood of bloodless crimes—

Lurid lowering 'mid the blue,

Torrid towering toward the

true, I am the Smoke King,

I am black.

I am the Smoke

King, I am black!

I am darkening with song,

I am hearkening to

wrong!

I will be black as blackness can—

The blacker the mantle, the mightier the man!

For blackness was ancient ere whiteness began.

I am daubing God in night,

I am swabbing Hell in white:

I am the Smoke King

I am black.

I am the Smoke

King I am black!

I am cursing ruddy morn,

I am hearsing hearts unborn:

Souls unto me are as stars in a night,

I whiten my black men—I blacken my white!

What's the hue of a hide to a man in his

might? Hail! great, gritty, grimy hands—

Sweet Christ, pity toiling lands!

I am the Smoke King

I am black.

The South

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.

Annex III

I Dream a World

I dream a world where man

No other man will scorn,

Where love will bless the

earth And peace its paths

adorn

I dream a world where all

Will know sweet freedom's way,

Where greed no longer saps the soul

Nor avarice blights our day.

A world I dream where black or

white, Whatever race you be,

Will share the bounties of the

earth And every man is free,

Where wretchedness will hang its head

And joy, like a pearl,

Attends the needs of all mankind-

Of such I dream, my world!

Dream Boogie

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!

Annex IV

The Weary Blues

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 stool
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.

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.

Lenox Avenue Midnight

The rhythm of life

Is a jazz rhythm,

Honey.

The gods are laughing at us.

The broken heart of love,

The weary, weary heart of

pain,— Overtones,

Undertones,

To the rumble of street cars,

To the swish of rain.

Lenox

Avenue,

Honey.

Midnight,

And the gods are laughing at us.

Jazzonia

Oh, silver tree!

Oh, shining rivers of the soul!

In a Harlem cabaret

Six long-headed jazzers play.

A dancing girl whose eyes are

bold Lifts high a dress of silken

gold.

Oh, singing tree!

Oh, shining rivers of the soul!

Were Eve's eyes

In the first garden

Just a bit too bold?

Was Cleopatra

gorgeous In a gown of

gold?

Oh, shining tree!

Oh, silver rivers of the soul!

In a whirling cabaret

Six long-headed jazzers

play.

