AN ORAL INTERPRETER'S APPROACH TO SELECTED POETRY
OF LANGSTON HUGHES

APPROVED:

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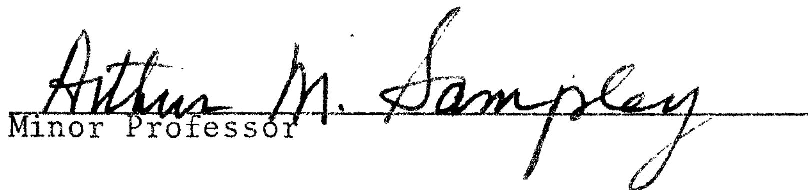
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The purpose of this study was to analyze for oral presentation a selected body of poetry by Langston Hughes. Because Hughes read his own poetry in lecture recitals throughout his career, which spanned more than four decades, it is appropriate that he be considered for such a study.

Hughes's place in American literature has been clearly established. More than fifteen collections of his poetry have been published. He also contributed several volumes of fiction, plays, books for children, Negro history books, as well as an anthology of his work. He also wrote two autobiographies and three biographies of outstanding Negroes. His election to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1961 attests his distinct place in American literature.

In order to fully appreciate Hughes's work, it is necessary to know something about his life. Chapter II of the study is devoted to a biography of Hughes. Hughes's works reflect his life. He was a poor Negro who was very much aware of racial prejudice, but he also enjoyed life. His works not only mirror the problems encountered by many blacks, but they also show their joys. In his writing

Hughes presents an accurate picture of the racial situation from the twenties through the middle sixties, when he died.

The third chapter of the study is concerned with the analysis of six poems. The poems were selected to represent the changing racial situation about which Hughes wrote. "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "The Breath of a Rose," and "Mulatto" represent Hughes's earliest writings. "Evenin' Air Blues" and "Harlem" represent a middle portion of his career. "Militant" represents his latest writings in the sixties. The poems were also selected to show Hughes's versatility as a poet. He wrote in various styles. "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" and "Harlem" are written in free verse. "The Breath of a Rose" is a lyric. Hughes is also noted as a "blues" poet, and "Evenin' Air Blues" represents this form. Dramatic poetry was also presented by Hughes, and in this study "Mulatto" and "Militant" represent this poetic form. Another criterion for selecting the poems was the critics' evaluation; poems were selected in an attempt to show Hughes's most outstanding works.

Charlotte Lee, an outstanding figure in the field of oral interpretation, provides the criteria by which the poems are analyzed. Characteristics considered in the analysis include the poet's meaning and attitude, the poetic form, the use of imagery, tone color, and the extrinsic and intrinsic qualities of poetry.

Hughes's poetry is particularly rich in figurative language and sensory appeal. He has the ability to catch the mood and rhythm of the man in the ghetto street and to reflect this vividly in his works. His discussion of racial problems and the plight of the common man has universal appeal and his approach is fresh and entertaining. The interpreter, by careful analysis, will be able to fully appreciate Hughes's poetry and then may more effectively present it to an audience for their appreciation.

The final chapter of the study offers certain conclusions about Hughes's poetry, as well as suggestions for additional studies. This prolific black writer provides innumerable possibilities for further studies in oral interpretation. Hughes's works provide such a clear picture of the racial situation that much can be learned and understanding may be broadened by additional study of this "darker brother."

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THESIS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Langston Hughes is perhaps the most widely recognized black poet of the twentieth century. In his lifetime from 1902 until 1967, he wrote and published nearly eight hundred poems. These poems are found in more than fifteen collections of Hughes's poetry and in numerous periodicals. He also published five volumes of fiction and one book of drama, Five Plays by Langston Hughes. His humorous publications include six books concerning the adventures of Jesse B. Semple, a black man who also appeared as the central figure in Hughes's popular columns in the Chicago Defender in the fifties and in the New York Post in the early sixties. The books and columns about this man are sometimes referred to as the "Simple Series."

Hughes also wrote six books for young people, three books concerned with black history, and three biographies of outstanding Negroes. In 1940 Hughes's first autobiography, The Big Sea, was published. In 1956, I Wonder as I Wander, a second autobiography concentrating on Hughes's world travels, was presented. An anthology, The Langston Hughes Reader, was published in 1958 and, among other things, includes short stories, poetry, articles, speeches, and song lyrics by

Hughes. During his prolific career Hughes also wrote the libretto for operas, which included Troubled Island and Street Scene. Hughes's works have been translated into more than twenty-five foreign languages. Hughes himself has also translated several works of other writers into English, and he has also edited eight books. Hughes wrote humorous selections, children's books, history books, plays, lyrics, biographies, and autobiographies, but he is most widely known as a poet. His literary contributions have established for him a distinct place in American literature. David Littlejohn says of Hughes:

> Langston Hughes . . . remains the most impressive, durable, and prolific Negro writer in America. . . . He is the one sure Negro classic, more certain than even Baldwin or Ellison or Wright. By molding his verse always on the sounds of Negro talk, and rhythms of Negro music, by retaining his own keen honesty and directness, his poetic sense and ironic intelligence, he has maintained through four decades a readable newness distinctly his own (8, p. 55).

Langston Hughes first gained attention as one of the leaders of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920's. John Parker says

> A corresponding change in Negro literature dates from around the 1920's, when a movement popularly known as the 'Negro Literary Renaissance' got under way; . . . Langston Hughes became perhaps the most representative exponent of the new spirit in Negro Literature (10, p. 439).

Arna Bontemps in an article entitled "The Harlem Renaissance" says this of Hughes's poetry:

> His poems were set to music, they were painted, they were danced. They were recited, they were interpreted, they were translated--the Latin Americans are particularly fond of them. They were dramatized, they were recorded, they were imitated (2, p. 13).

This was true during the Harlem Renaissance, and it was true throughout Hughes's career.

From the early twenties until his death, Hughes wrote of the working man, of the poor man, and of race relations. He wrote about the life he knew. Arthur P. Davis says of Hughes,

> From the very beginning of his literary career, he was determined to forge his art, not of the secondhand material which came from books, not out of fads dictated by a demanding patron, but out of the stuff of human experience as he saw it. He remained faithful to this decision (3, p. 281).

According to Irma Jackson Wertz, "His best teacher was the world. He has traveled widely and has brought together in his varied and colorful writings the experience of a profitably restless life" (14, p. 146). Bontemps says:

> Few people have enjoyed being Negro as much as Langston Hughes. Despite the bitterness with which he has occasionally indicted those who mistreat him because of his color . . . there has never been any question in this reader's mind about his basic attitude. He would not have missed the experience of being what he is for the world (1, p. 17).

The life Hughes led and the conditions which he observed are represented in his books. He was a writer of protest, "but he never became personally embittered and his work never

showed hatred or venom" (13, sec. B, p. 12). At the time of his death, a Publisher's Weekly note said, "Unlike the generation of Negro writers that came after him, Mr. Hughes' approach to racial matters was more wry than angry, more sly than militant" (12, p. 37). Hughes's latest poetry is more militant than most of his earlier works, but these later works are reflecting the racial situation in America in the sixties. This does not mean Hughes became a militant man; it does mean he kept abreast of the times and was able to record the situation in his poetry. Littlejohn says of Hughes:

> On the whole, Hughes' creative life has been as full, as varied, and as original as Picasso's, a joyful, honest monument of a career. There is no noticeable sham in it, no pretension, no self-deceit; but a great, great deal of delight and smiling irresistible wit (8, p. 147).

Hughes in his writings spoke for millions of working men and women and particularly Negroes. His works are also read by millions. According to MacLeod, ". . . Langston Hughes, as few modern American writers do, reaches both intelligentsia and proletariat" (9, p. 358). Littlejohn says, "His voice is as sure, his manner as original, his position as secure as, say, Edwin Arlington Robinson's or Robinson Jeffers'" (8, p. 54). Hughes's election to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1961 attests that Hughes's place in American literature is clearly established.

The purpose of this thesis is to study selected poems of Langston Hughes for oral interpretation. It is appropriate that Hughes's poetry should be considered for such a study not only because Hughes's place in American literature has been clearly established, but also because his poetry is particularly suited for oral presentation. Hughes supported himself for over four decades by his writings and his lecture tours. According to Wertz:

> His cross-country lecture tours which began a year after receiving his B.A. degree from Lincoln, have carried him all over the U.S., the West Indies, parts of Europe, and Africa. His lectures, to many, have been an introduction to poetry, particularly in rural areas. Any subject on poetry that he chooses for a lecture always includes the reading of some of his poems (14, p. 147).

He read his poetry to college students, high school students, black audiences, and white audiences. In an address delivered at the Public Meeting of The College Language Association's Eleventh Annual Conference, Hughes discussed ten ways to use poetry in teaching. Six of these ways involve the oral presentation of poetry. One example Hughes presented follows:

> And for poetry in English, there is lastly, THE SIMPLE CUSTOM OF READING IT ALOUD frequently to students, simply, plainly, and clearly, with understanding--but unless one is good at, _not_ with dramatics. Dramatics and 'the faraway voice' sometimes alienate young people from poetry. The simpler poetry can be made, the better (6, p. 278).

According to a _Senior Scholastic_ article, "Langston Hughes is a good speaker. Witty, genial, attractive, he makes his

audience laugh and wins their sympathetic interest" (11, p. 15). Records have also appeared with Hughes reading his own poetry and short stories. Another example of the oral presentation of Hughes's poetry was the 1960 presentation of *Shakespeare in Harlem*, which consisted of poetry by Hughes and James Weldon Johnson. One of the reviews says the two poets' works make "incandescent theatre" (7, p. 747).

The oral presentation of Hughes's work can effectively show the jazz overtones in the poetry: that is the tone or attitude of the poet, the rhythm, and the structure. These characteristics are concerned with sound as well as meaning and are therefore of interest to the oral interpreter. Furthermore, as do all poets, Hughes wanted his poetry to be read orally. It seems valid, therefore, that the poetry of Langston Hughes should be studied from an oral interpreter's point of view. Such a study may provide additional insight into the poetry of this prolific black writer of the twentieth century.

The approach in this thesis is to select a body of literature and analyze it for oral presentation. This type of thesis is not unique; there have been over fifty-five master theses and Ph.D. dissertations that have taken this approach, but none have dealt with Hughes's works. Any oral interpreter who presents literature must first analyze the work taking into account the literary form, the author's meaning, the intrinsic qualities, the appeals to imagery, the tonal qualities,

and the extrinsic qualities of the art. Hughes read his own poetry throughout his career, and in an introductory note to Shakespeare in Harlem, Hughes specifies that the poems are to be read aloud (5).

In order to fully appreciate and analyze Hughes's poetry, it is necessary to know something of his life. Chapter II in this study is devoted to a biography of Hughes. Hughes says, "Most of my own poems are racial in theme and treatment, derived from the life I know" (4, p. 694). According to MacLeod, "Indeed, in no surface way, one would say that the writing of Langston Hughes and the man himself are the same. What he lives and thinks and feels are warp and woof of his works" (9, p. 358). It is therefore appropriate to devote a portion of this study to a biography of Hughes.

Having discussed the poet's background and the influence it has had on his work, the next step is to analyze selected poems of the writer. This constitutes the main body of the thesis. The six poems included in the analysis have been selected not only as representative of various periods of his career but also to show Hughes's versatility as a writer and his ability to keep abreast of the times. Another basis for the selection of the poems is the critics' evaluation of his poetry; an attempt is made to select those poems which have found most favor with the critics. Having selected the poems, the next step is the actual analysis of the six works.

Charlotte Lee, an outstanding figure in the field of oral interpretation, provides the criteria by which the poems are analyzed. Elements to be considered in the analysis include a statement concerning the literary forms employed by the author. A discussion of the poet's meaning, both surface and in depth meaning, are also considered, as well as the feeling, tone, and intention. The intrinsic qualities which are easily discernible in the selections are also included. These include unity and harmony, variety and contrast, balance and proportion, and rhythm, both rhythm of content and structural rhythm. In order to fully appreciate the poet's works, an analysis must also include a study of the use of imagery. Appeals to imagery include both sensory appeal and figurative language. Analysis of the tonal qualities, which include onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance, and consonance, is also considered in the study. In addition to these qualities, a study of the extrinsic qualities of art manifested by the works is included. These extrinsic qualities are universality, individuality, and suggestiveness. Finally, any significant problems which the author's work presents for the interpreter are considered, and, when possible, some indication of the manner in which those problems may be overcome. Because this study is concerned with an analysis from an oral interpreter's approach, it is fitting that a sample script which includes the six works

analyzed be included in this study. At the conclusion of Chapter III a sample lecture recital script is included.

The concluding chapter of this study provides a summary of the investigation and also a statement concerning its significance to the oral interpreter. The primary objective of this study is to discover and relate all information which would help the oral interpreter effectively present the works of Langston Hughes, which often express "what it is like to be a Negro." Commenting on this fact, Littlejohn says, "One can, with care, learn something of 'what it is like to be a Negro' from the single-minded activist; but he can learn far, far more from calmer, more careful writers who try harder to tell the whole truth" (8, p. 18). Littlejohn cites Langston Hughes as one of the calmer and more careful black voices.

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CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHY

It is appropriate that a biography of the poet, Langston Hughes, be included in this study. The lives of most writers are reflected in their works, and this is particularly true of Langston Hughes. His associations and relationships with the men of the streets and his writings, which reflect these associations, earned for Hughes the title, "the poet laureate of the man in the ghetto street" (23, Sec. B, p. 12). And in Hughes's own words, "Most of my own poems are . . . derived from the life I know" (13, p. 694).

Hughes's family background did not necessarily dictate the empathy that Hughes had with the black man of the city ghetto street. His father, James Nathaniel Hughes, had no understanding of the ghetto Negro. In Hughes's words, "My father hated Negroes. I think he hated himself, too, for being a Negro" (9, p. 40). James Hughes had legal training as a young man but was not permitted to take the bar examination. He had much ambition, but, unfortunately, his ambitions could not be realized in a Jim Crow society. He left his wife, Carrie Mercer Langston, and son and traveled, finally settling in Mexico. Here he passed the bar examination and became a successful business man and rancher.

When young Hughes was six years old his father sent for him and his mother to come to Mexico. Upon their arrival, there was an earthquake, and the following day Carrie Hughes, much shaken by this, returned to her home in Kansas with her son.

Carrie Langston Hughes grew up in Kansas and received her education at the University of Kansas in Lawrence where her family lived. According to The New York Times (19, p. 32), Carrie Langston met James Hughes in Guthrie, Oklahoma, where she was a grammar school teacher and he was a storekeeper. Although Hughes did not think of writing as a child, perhaps his mother's activities influenced him. Hughes commented on this later in his life, "My mother . . . often read papers at the Inter-State Literary Society, founded by my grandfather in Kansas. And occasionally she wrote original poems, too, that she gave at the Inter-State" (9, p. 24). Carrie Hughes wanted to be a success and make money like James Hughes, but unlike her husband she wanted to make money to spend. After she and James Hughes were separated, she traveled extensively, always looking for a better job. Because of her traveling, her son's care was primarily in the hands of her mother, Mary Sampson Patterson Langston.

Hughes's grandmother attended college in Oberlin, Ohio, and then married Sheridan Leary. Leary was killed in John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry. Later, she married Charles Langston, Hughes's grandfather. They moved to Lawrence, Kansas, where he operated a grocery store, but Charles

Langston was more interested in politics. His brother, John Langston, had been a Congressman from Virginia, but Charles Langston was not so successful. When he died, he left his family with very little. Mary Langston was a very proud woman of Indian ancestry and never worked as a domestic. When it was necessary to pay interest on the mortgage on her house, she sometimes rented rooms in her house, but she never worked nor asked her more successful relatives for assistance.

Although Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri, February 1, 1902, he spent most of the first twelve years of his life with his grandmother in Lawrence, Kansas. He spent several short periods of time with his mother during his early years; one of these times was in Topeka, where Hughes began his education. Hughes was enrolled in Harrison Street School, but not without a battle. There were no other Negroes in the school, and, at first, Hughes was not admitted. But his mother went directly to the school board and permission was granted for Hughes to enroll. Carrie Hughes also took her son to see many plays that came to Topeka. It was also in Topeka that Hughes went to libraries and fell in love with books.

The time Hughes spent in Topeka was short, and he soon returned to Lawrence. When Hughes was twelve, his grandmother died. He then lived with some friends of his grandmother, Aunt Reedie and her husband. During his stay with them, he worked at odd jobs and sold papers. With the money

he earned, he attended movies until a No Colored Admitted sign was installed at the theatre. Then he waited for the road shows to pass through Lawrence.

When Hughes was thirteen, he moved to Lincoln, Illinois, to live with his mother, who had remarried. Hughes was elected class poet at the grammar school he attended. Later he commented on his election to this position,

> In America most white people think, of course, that all Negroes can sing and dance, and have a sense of rhythm. So my classmates, knowing that a poem had to have rhythm, elected me unanimously--thinking, no doubt, that I had some, being a Negro (9, p. 24).

Hughes had never thought about being a poet and said, "The only poems I liked as a child were Paul Lawrence Dunbar's and Hiawatha" (9, p. 26).

Hughes then moved with his family to Cleveland and, as a student at Central High School, wrote some poems for the Belfry Owl, the school newspaper. He was also introduced to the poetry of Carl Sandburg by his English teacher, Ethel Weimer. Hughes said, "Then I began to try to write like Carl Sandburg" (9, p. 28). Hughes further commented on the poems he was writing at this time:

> Little Negro dialect poems like Paul Lawrence Dunbar's and poems without rhyme like Sandburg's were the first real poems I tried to write. I wrote about love, about the steel mills where my step-father worked, the slums where we lived, and the brown girls from the South, prancing up and down Central Avenue on a spring day (9, p. 28).

The summer after his junior year at Central High School, Hughes went to Mexico and spent the summer with his father, whom he learned to hate. His father was constantly telling his son of the inadequacies of the poverty-stricken Negroes of the United States. All this made Langston Hughes physically ill, and he was anxious to return to Cleveland.

During his senior year at Central High School in Cleveland, Hughes was elected class poet and served as editor of the yearbook. He was the first Negro to be editor of the yearbook since 1901, when Charles W. Chestnut's son held the position (5, p. 9). He also dated a girl from the South during this time and wrote a poem entitled "When Sue Wears Red" about this girl.

After graduation Hughes again went to Mexico to spend the summer with his father. He did not go because of any admiration or love for his father, but because he felt his father was the only individual who could provide funds for furthering his education. On the train trip to Mexico, Hughes wrote a poem entitled "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." Hughes explained how the idea for the poem was conceived:

> It came about in this way. All day on the train I had been thinking about my father and his strange dislike of his own people. I didn't understand it, because I was a Negro, and I liked Negroes very much. . . . Now it was just sunset, and we crossed the Mississippi, slowly, over a long bridge. I looked out the window of the Pullman at the great muddy river flowing down toward the heart of the South, and I began to think what that river, the old Mississippi, had meant to Negroes in the past. . . .

> Then I remembered reading how Abraham Lincoln had made a trip down the Mississippi. . . . Then I began to think about other rivers in our past--the Congo, and the Niger, and the Nile in Africa--and the thought came to me (9, pp. 54-55).

During his stay in Mexico, Hughes was very unhappy and he spent much of his time writing. Some of his work he sent to the Brownie's Book. The publication of his material in this periodical led to the publication of the "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" in The Crisis in 1921.

Hughes's father wanted his son to attend school in Europe in order to escape the Jim Crow society in the United States. He also wanted his son to become an engineer. Hughes wanted to attend Columbia and become a writer. Finally, his father agreed to provide funds for his son's education at Columbia. Hughes enrolled in Columbia in September, 1921, but he spent only a year at this university. Hughes was not particularly interested in his courses and spent more time in Harlem than he did on his studies. Following his year at Columbia, Hughes worked at various jobs in the New York area. During this year he wrote the poem, "The Weary Blues."

In the spring of 1923, Hughes secured a job on the S.S. Malone, which was bound for Africa. During this trip he talked with a young mulatto boy in Africa; the boy's father was English and had left the boy and his mother. This incident inspired Hughes to write the story, "African Morning." Hughes also wrote a poem entitled "African Fog," which is concerned with the black oarsman at Kekondi.

Hughes returned to America to visit his family briefly and then boarded another ship for more traveling. He left the boat at Rotterdam and took a train to Paris. In Paris Hughes had an extremely difficult time finding employment, but he eventually was hired at the Grand Duc restaurant in Paris. While he was in Paris, he fell in love with an English-African girl, but this relationship was brief because of her father's consternation and her father's insistence that she leave Paris. After her departure, Hughes wrote "The Breath of a Rose," which is a poem about his relationship with the girl.

Hughes decided to leave Paris and visit some friends in Italy. In Italy, however, he met misfortune when his money was stolen. He had no income and could not get work; so he was stranded in Italy until he was finally permitted to board a ship bound for the United States with the provision that he work without pay.

Hughes arrived in the United States in November of 1924 and went to Washington, D.C., where his mother and half-brother were living. He worked at a wet-wash laundry and at the Wardman Park Hotel. Hughes commented on his life during this first winter in Washington:

> I felt very bad in Washington that winter, so I wrote a great many poems. (I wrote only a few in Paris, because I had such a good time there.) But in Washington I didn't have a good time. I didn't like my job, and I didn't know what was going to happen to me, and I was cold and half-hungry, so I

> wrote a great many poems. I began to write poems in the manner of the Negro blues and the spirituals (9, p. 205).

Hughes was dissatisfied and disgusted by the supposedly "better class" Negroes in Washington, who showed snobbishness and prejudice toward the poorer working class Negroes of Seventh Street. Hughes associated with the Negroes of Seventh Street and wrote about them. In Hughes's words:

> 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 (9, p. 209).

While Hughes was working at the Wardman Hotel, he left several poems at the table of Vachel Lindsay one evening. The poems, "Jazzonia," "Negro Dancers," and "The Weary Blues," were read by Lindsay that evening at a small theatre in the hotel. This reading gave Hughes much publicity. He was billed as a bus boy poet, and his picture appeared in newspapers across the nation. When Lindsay left the hotel, he left a letter for Hughes, which said in part, "Do not let any lionizers stampede you. Hide and write and study and think. I know what factions do. Beware of them. I know what flatterers do. Beware of them. I know what lionizers do. Beware of them" (9, p. 213).

Although Hughes's meeting with Lindsay gave him much publicity, it was probably Carl Van Vechten who helped Hughes

more. Dickinson supports this idea also: "The help provided by Van Vechten in the spring of 1925 was far more important to the advance of Hughes's career than the widely publicized 'discovery' by Vachel Lindsay" (4, p. 24). Hughes also commented on Van Vechten's assistance:

> What Carl Van Vechten did for me was to submit my first book of poems to Alfred A. Knopf, put me in contact with the editors of *Vanity Fair*, who bought my first poems sold to a magazine, caused me to meet many editors and writers who were friendly and helpful to me, encouraged me in my efforts to help publicize the Scottsboro case, cheered me on in the writing of my first short stories, and otherwise aided in making life for me more profitable and entertaining (9, p. 272).

During Hughes's stay in Washington, D.C., he won his first poetry contest with "The Weary Blues" in 1925. The contest was sponsored by *Opportunity* magazine and netted Hughes forty dollars. During the same year he won the Spingarn prize offered by *The Crisis*. He also sold poetry to *Vanity Fair* and *New Republic* in 1925.

Hughes enrolled at Lincoln University in Oxford, Pennsylvania, in January, 1926. During his first year at Lincoln, he won first prize in the Witter Bynner's Intercollegiate Undergraduate Poetry Contest with his poem, "A House in Taos" (6, p. 30). This garnered one hundred and fifty dollars for Hughes. Hughes commented, "It was a strange poem for me to be writing in a period when I was writing mostly blues and spirituals" (9, p. 261).

During Hughes's first year at Lincoln University, his first volume of poetry, The Weary Blues, was published. Dickinson commented on the volume:

> The collection is worthy of serious analysis . . . as it provides an enlightening view of Hughes's literary objectives and foreshadows much of his later work. Here in these early poems are reflected the author's love of life, his appreciation for the rhythms of Negro music, and his enjoyment of Harlem and its people (4, p. 36).

A second volume of poetry, Fine Clothes to the Jew, appeared in 1927. Hughes commented, "My second book of poems, Fine Clothes to the Jew, I felt a better book than my first, because it was more impersonal, more about other people than myself, . . ." (9, p. 264).

In the summer of 1926 Hughes lived in New York. He, along with Wallace Thurman, Zora Neale Hurston, Aaron Douglas, John P. Davis, Bruce Nugent, and Gwendolyn Bennett, decided to publish a quarterly Negro arts magazine, Fire. Thurman edited the quarterly, but unfortunately the cost exceeded the financial backing that these young writers provided. Fire did not fare well with the critics and its existence was short-lived. Ironically, a fire destroyed several hundred copies in an apartment where Fire was stored.

During this summer Hughes made his living writing lyrics and sketches for an intimate musical Negro revue for Caroline Dudley. Hughes often came to New York during the following winter from Lincoln University to work on the show. The show,

however, never opened because Paul Robeson, who was to play the lead, was a hit in Showboat in London and refused to return.

In the summer of 1927, Hughes traveled throughout the South. It began when he was invited to read some of his poems at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, during commencement week. Hughes said of his appearance at Fisk:

> My visit there was a delightful one. For the first time I stood before a large audience of my own people, reading my poems, and I was thrilled, because they seemed to like those poems--poems in which I had tried to capture some of the dreams and heartaches that all Negroes know (9, p. 285).

From Fisk University, Hughes went to Nashville, then to Baton Rouge and New Orleans; it was in these cities that Hughes heard many of the blues verses he used in later short stories and novels. He saw his friend Zora Hurston while he was traveling in the South, and since she had an automobile, he traveled with her on the return trip North. They stopped at Tuskegee Institute on their return trip and made speeches on writing to the summer school students there.

During Hughes's college days at Lincoln University, he contributed to the school paper and also read his poems accompanied by the Lincoln University Glee Club. Emanuel says of this activity, "He began a technique for which he was to become widely known: he read his poems at Princeton to the background music of the Lincoln University Glee Club" (6, p. 32). During this time, he also met his patron in New

York, a woman who provided Hughes with much financial support for several years. His patron provided him with enough financial security so that he spent the summer between his junior and senior year working on a novel, *Not Without Laughter*. At the time of his graduation from Lincoln in 1929, he was given a generous monthly allowance by his patron. The years at Lincoln University were happy years for Hughes, who commented, "Maybe everybody is sentimental about his college days. Certainly I loved Lincoln. My years there were happy years, jolly and full of fun. Besides I learned a few things. And I wrote *Not Without Laughter*" (9, p. 303).

The generous allowance provided by Hughes's patron enabled him to enjoy a year of economic freedom. In the fall he spent a few weeks with Jasper Deeler at the Hedgerow Theatre writing his first play, *Mulatto*. Then he settled in Westfield, New Jersey, to make final revisions on his novel, *Not Without Laughter*. The financial support he received also enabled his brother to attend school in New England. Hughes was provided with fine clothes and tickets to plays, musicals, the Metropolitan and concerts at Carnegie Hall. Hughes did not do much writing during this winter; he said of this particular time:

> That winter I did not feel like writing because I was happy and amused. (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

> winter I didn't seem to need to say anything. I had had my say in the novel--spread over almost two years in the saying. Now I was ready for the first time in my life really to enjoy life without having to be afraid I might be hungry tomorrow (9, p. 317).

Hughes worked with Zora Hurston during the winter of 1930 on a Negro folk comedy entitled Mule Bone. The Gilpin Players were to present the play later in the winter in Cleveland, but Miss Hurston and Hughes had a literary quarrel and the show never opened. During December of 1930, Hughes's association with his patron ended. Hughes commented:

> 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 (9, p. 325).

Not Without Laughter won for Hughes the Harmon Gold Award, which gave him four hundred dollars. With this money Hughes decided to go to Haiti and Cuba and lie in the sun in order to forget about the break with his patron. On his way to the Florida coast, he stopped at Bethune-Cookman College and visited Mary McLeod Bethune, the president of the college. He read some of his poems on the campus and he said of this visit,

> That was the beginning of my learning how to make a living from writing--for it was Mrs.

> Bethune who said . . . 'Why don't you tour the South reading your poems? Thousands of Negro students would be proud and inspired by seeing you and hearing you'" (11, p. 6).

It was during the time he spent in the Carribean that Hughes had time to relax and to make an important decision. Hughes said, "I'd finally and definitely made up my mind to continue being a writer--and to become a professional writer, making my living from writing. So far that had not happened" (9, p. 335).

Hughes returned to the United States and began a nine month poetry reading tour across the country, aided by a grant of one thousand dollars from the Rosenwald Fund. Also, according to Dickinson, "To support this project Knopf issued a special dollar edition of _The Weary Blues_ and the Golden Stair Press in New York produced an inexpensive pamphlet of poetry called 'The Negro Mother'" (4, p. 60). At Straight College in New Orleans, Hughes spent an hour with a teenage girl who thrust some of her poems into his hand. The teenager was Margaret Walker, who ten years later won the Yale University Younger Poets Award.

Hughes canceled the last few reading dates on this nine month tour in order to join a Harlem group of Negroes on a movie-making tour in Russia. The group was composed primarily of writers and students who were to make a movie in Russia entitled _Black and White_. The script was of poor quality and the movie was never produced. After the script

was abandoned, Hughes traveled extensively throughout Russia with Arthur Koester. He also spent a month with Walt Carmon, the American editor of the English language edition of _International Literature_.

Hughes continued writing during his stay in Russia and more of his works were published. Another collection of poetry, _The Dream Keeper_, was published in the United States while Hughes was in Russia. Also, the State Publishers in Russia were having _The Weary Blues_ translated into Uzbek. According to Hughes, "When in Moscow I started writing intensively . . ." (11, p. 214). Hughes also said, "I did a number of articles on my trip to Central Asia for _Izvestia_, _International Literature_, and other Moscow publications" (11, p. 195).

While Hughes was in Russia, Marie Seaton loaned him a copy of _The Lovely Lady_, by D. H. Lawrence. This inspired Hughes to write short stories at that time. Hughes had earlier been inspired by de Maupassant, for he said, "I think it was de Maupassant who made me really want to be a writer and write stories about Negroes, so true that people in far-away lands would read them--even after I was dead" (9, p. 34). The elderly lady in Lawrence's book reminded Hughes of his patron and perhaps this is why the book had such an effect on him. Hughes also was reminded of an incident related to him by Loren Miller, a young California lawyer, about a Negro

girl in Kansas. Hughes then wrote "Cora Unashamed," a story somewhat similar to this incident.

Hughes earned a considerable amount of money from his writing while in Russia, but it was extremely difficult to collect the earnings. In Hughes's words:

> I made more money from writing in Moscow in terms of buying power than I have ever earned within the same period anywhere else. I made enough to travel all over the Soviet Union, to come home via Japan and China, and to live . . . at what were equivalent to eight- or ten-dollar-a-day hotels in America. Writing in the USSR was one of the better-paid professions. But it often took more time to collect for an article than it did to write the article itself (11, p. 196).

In Russia, Hughes met a number of interesting people, including Sergei Tretiakov, the playwright, and Boris Pasternak, the lyric poet. He also met Julian Annisimov, a writer, critic, and lyric poet, who translated a number of Hughes's works into Russian. Hughes also attended Oklapkov's Krasni Presnia Theatre and was impressed with the staging techniques he saw. Hughes used some of these ideas in the staging of his play <u>Don't You Want To Be Free?</u> in Harlem several years later.

Hughes decided to leave Asia by way of the Orient in the summer of 1933. In Japan, however, he was questioned extensively by the police, who suspected him of communicating with the Japanese Communist Movement (18, p. 7). Hughes related the incident in <u>I Wonder As I Wander</u>:

> 'I must tell you before you go,' said the young officer staring at me, 'that you are persona non grata in Japan, and the police request that you please go home. Meanwhile do not speak with or communicate with any Japanese citizens in Tokyo. You will leave as soon as possible, and I inform you that you are not to return to Japan' (11, p. 27).

Although Hughes may have been sympathetic with the socialistic views of the Communist party, he denied being a member. In his second autobiography he commented on the Communist party:

> Arthur Koestler asked me one day why in Moscow I did not join the Communist Party. I told him that what I had 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 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 and often temporary political objectives (11, p. 122).

As soon as possible after the questioning in Japan, Hughes left for the United States. He arrived in San Francisco and was a house guest of Noel Sullivan, who offered Hughes the use of his cottage at Carmel-by-the-Sea. Hughes eagerly accepted because he was anxious to do more writing. Hughes said, "To Noel Sullivan I am indebted for the first long period of my life when I was able, unworried and unhurried, to stay quietly in one place and devote myself to writing" (11, p. 285). During Hughes's stay at Carmel, he

wrote a number of short stories. He said of these stories, "My short stories written at Carmel all dealt with some nuance of the race problem. Most of them had their roots in actual situations which I had heard about or in which I had been myself involved" (11, p. 284). Nine of the stories written during this Carmel period along with five written in Moscow comprised The Ways of White Folks, which was published in 1935 (6, p. 36). The time spent at Carmel proved to be very productive for Hughes, who worked ten to twelve hours a day and completed at least one story or article a week.

Hughes was in Reno, Nevada, in the fall of 1934 when he learned of his father's death. The night that Hughes's father died, Hughes wrote the first draft of a story entitled "Mailbox for the Dead." He thought of his father while writing the story, which was very unusual. It was the following morning when Hughes learned that his father had died, and he was summoned to Mexico. He had no money; so an aunt loaned him three hundred dollars for the trip, since she thought she would be included in her brother's will. Hughes had no optimistic views about being included in his father's will, and he was not. During Hughes's visit to Mexico, he spent some time with the elderly Patino sisters, who had inherited James Hughes's wealth.

Hughes spent the winter of 1934-1935 in Mexico translating into English a number of Mexican short stories and

poems by young writers for publication in the United States. He also read *Don Quixote* in the original, which was, according to Hughes, "a great reading experience that possibly helped me to develop many years later in my own books a character called Simple" (11, p. 291).

Jose Antonio, a journalist friend whom Hughes met in Havana, learned that Hughes was in Mexico and immediately announced to the Mexican press that Hughes was a great writer. Hughes's poetry was then published in the *El Nacional*, a widely circulated newspaper, and Hughes was bombarded with requests for interviews. After all the publicity, Hughes began to think about returning to the United States to find some peace and to do more writing.

In June, 1935, Hughes returned to California and visited Arna Bontemps in Watts. The two of them decided to write another juvenile. In 1932 they had co-authored *Popo and Finfina*, a little story of Haiti. After his visit with the Bontemps, Hughes traveled to Oberlin to visit his ailing mother, whose medical expenses consumed nearly all the Guggenheim Fellowship, which Hughes had been awarded earlier in the year.

In September Hughes traveled to New York and discovered that *Mulatto* was in rehearsal. Hughes's agent had not bothered to inform his client, and Hughes discovered that the play had been altered from the original. The play, however,

ran for a year on Broadway and then toured the country for an additional two years. The play was banned in Philadelphia because of a rape scene, which the director had added to Hughes's original play. And it was nearly banned in Chicago for the same reason. Although the play was a success, Hughes had many problems collecting the royalty.

Hughes spent much of 1936 and 1937 in Cleveland to be with his ailing mother, who had moved to Cleveland to be near a Negro physician. During his stay in Cleveland, Hughes wrote some plays for Karamu, a Negro Theatre in Cleveland. In the 1936-37 season, Karamu staged six of Hughes's works, three of which were *Drums of Haiti*, *Joy to My Soul*, and *Soul Gone Home*. Some of the people of Cleveland were not happy with Hughes's works. According to Meltzer:

> When he wrote plays about contemporary life, some Negroes resented it. *Joy to My Soul* and *Little Ham* . . . came right out of a raffish local hotel, the Majestic [in Cleveland]. Langston knew the people in its rooms and lobby and wrote them down sharply, often humorously, but always honestly (17, p. 201).

In the spring of 1937 Hughes was offered a position by the Baltimore *Afro-American* newspaper to go to Spain for four to six months to cover Negro activities in the International Brigades. The *Cleveland Call Post* and the *Globe* magazine also offered to pay him for articles. In June Hughes departed from New York and first traveled to Paris, where he spent some time with former acquaintances and made some new friends. He then traveled with Nicolas Guillen, a Cuban correspondent, to

Barcelona and Valencia. While in Valencia, Hughes corresponded with Elsie Roxborough in the United States. Miss Roxborough had staged Hughes's play, Emperor of Haiti, and Hughes said he was in love with her. She, however, later crossed the color line and their relationship ended.

From Valencia, Hughes traveled to Madrid and wrote several poems about the activities of Negroes in the International Brigade. One of these was "International Brigades, Lincoln Battalion, Somewhere in Spain, 1937," which was written in the form of a letter and shows some of the feelings of the Negro fighting men in regard to the irony of the Moors fighting. Hughes read some of his poetry to the fighting men. He said, "At Pueblo de Hijar in an abandoned mill the night before I left the front, I gave a program of my poems for a group of the Brigaders, and I read some of the Letters from Spain in verse that I had written" (11, p. 378).

Hughes became acquainted with many writers during his stay in Spain. These included Ernest Hemingway, Dorothy Parker, Malcolm Cowley, Lillian Hellman, and also non-English-speaking writers. Hughes left Madrid in mid-December, 1937, and spent a few days in Barcelona before going to Paris. He arrived in Paris just in time for Christmas and spent New Year in Paris also. Hughes commented on his many activities:

> I liked being a writer, traveling, meeting people, and looking at main events--like the depression in America, the transition from serfdom to manhood in Soviet Asia, and the Civil War in Spain--in it all, but at the same time apart from

> things, too. In the Soviet Union I was a visitor. In the midst of a dreary morale-breaking depression in America, I lived in a bright garden cottage at Carmel with a thoroughbred dog and a servant. In the Civil War in Spain I am a writer, recording what I see, commenting upon it, and distilling from my own emotions a personal interpretation (11, pp. 400-401).

Hughes returned to New York in January and immediately began plans to open a theatre in Harlem. The Harlem Suitcase Theatre was founded with Hughes as executive-director. The first show of the season was Hughes's play <u>Don't You Want To Be Free?</u>, which opened in April. Meltzer commented on the make-up of the production, "He [Hughes] used about a dozen of his poems for it, writing dramatic sketches that built up to them. Into the action he wove spirituals, blues, work chants and jazz. His goal was to entertain the audience and, at the same time, to educate it" (17, p. 221). Hughes implemented many ideas he had seen in the Russian theatres, one of which was theatre-in-the-round. The play was presented only on weekends and ran for one hundred and thirty-five consecutive performances.

Economically, this year was very difficult for many Harlemites, and Hughes was often so involved in day-to-day struggles that he did little writing. Some of the poems that he did write during this period were included in an inexpensive pamphlet entitled "A New Song." In addition to economic problems, Hughes's mother died in 1938.

The year was not entirely dismal, for in July Hughes attended the International Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture, in Paris, as one of the two representatives from the United States. Hughes also collaborated with James P. Johnson in 1938 writing a short blues opera, The Organizer.

Hughes went to Los Angeles in the winter of 1939 and founded the New Negro Theatre. Don't You Want To Be Free? opened the season along with Em-Fuehrer Jones and Limitations of Life, two satirical skits by Hughes. He also spent some time with Clarence Muse writing the scenario and some of the songs for the movie Way Down South while he was in California.

In the summer Hughes went to Chicago and spent several months working on his autobiography. In September he returned to California and to Neil Sullivan's Hollow Hills Farm to complete work on The Big Sea, his autobiography through the age of twenty-eight. The book was completed in November, and following this, Hughes embarked on a winter lecture tour. When The Big Sea appeared, it received good reviews. Oswald Garrison Villard said:

> He [Hughes] looks at his White and Negro world with rare objectivity and paints it exactly as he sees it. He is not a propagandist, nor a too bitter critic. When he records some of the discriminations from which he has suffered and insults to which he has been subjected he does so almost like an outsider looking in . . .
>
> Yes, this is a moving, a well worthwhile book which should have been written; a most valuable contribution to the struggle of the Negro for life and justice and freedom and intellectual liberty in America (22, p. 12).

In addition to The Big Sea, Hughes also wrote short stories and several poems during his stay at Hollow Hills Farm. He also received a Rosenwald Fellowship to write historical plays suitable for use in Negro schools and colleges (17, p. 227). He took one of these plays, The Sun Do Move, with him to Chicago in 1941 where he founded The Skyloft Players at the Good Shepherd Community House.

The United States was now involved in World War II, and Hughes, who was too young to fight in World War I and too old for World War II, helped the war cause by writing. He moved back to Harlem in the summer of 1942 to live with an adopted aunt and uncle, Toy and Emerson Harper, and began writing verses, slogans, and jingles for the United States Treasury Department. Hughes wrote these slogans for the drive to sell defense bonds and one contribution was "Defense Bond Blues." Hughes also contributed musical lyrics for the soldiers, which included Go and Get the Enemy Blues, That Eagle, and Freedom Road, which became the official troop song for several units. Radio material, such as, "Brother" and "We Fight," were also contributed by Hughes; he also wrote his poem "Freedom Plow" during this time. Although Hughes was not directly responsible for the following contribution, he must receive some of the credit. Emanuel related the incident: "In 1944 Dutch Underground forces fighting the Nazis produced anonymously three hundred copies of

his poems in the form of a forty-six-page book, Lament for Dark Peoples and Other Poems" (6, p. 41).

Hughes's literary activities during the 1940's were much broader than the war effort. He translated with Ben Carruthers Nicolas Guillen's Cuba Libre, and with Mercer Cook he translated Roumain's Master of the Dew in 1947. During this time, many of Hughes's stories and essays appeared in numerous magazines, and he also collaborated with several composers in writing musicals. In 1947, Hughes wrote the lyrics for Street Scene from the book by Elmer Rice; Kurt Weill composed the music. William Still wrote the music and Hughes wrote the libretto for Troubled Island, a four-act opera which was presented in New York in March, 1949. Hughes worked from the text of his Emperor of Haiti to write this libretto.

Several of Hughes's volumes of poetry were also published during the 1940's. Shakespeare in Harlem appeared in 1942, and Hughes introduced the book in this way:

> A book of light verse. Afro-American 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 (15, p. iii).

Fields of Wonder appeared in 1947. It is composed of selected lyrics, which are nonracial in theme. Many critics felt this volume did not have the impact some of Hughes's earlier poetry had. A third volume, One-Way Ticket, was

published in 1949 and did not fare well with the press. Hughes, along with Arna Bontemps, edited The Poetry of the Negro, 1746-1949, which was published in 1949.

The first Simple stories also appeared in the 1940's in the Chicago Defender. According to Meltzer, "The Simple stories, like Langston's poems, document how the Negro people feel" (17, p. 244). The idea for Simple came during the war, and according to Hughes, "His [Simple's] first words came directly out of the mouth of a young man who lived just down the block from me" (8, p. vii). Simple is a character who lacks formal education, but who has a great deal of common sense. In the Simple stories, the character talks about everything from love to lynching and from intermarriage to international affairs. According to Dickinson,

> Simple is a well developed character, both believable and lovable. The situations he meets and discusses are so true to life everyone may enter the fun. This does not mean that Simple is in any way dull. He injects the ordinary with his own special insights (4, p. 99).

In the 1940's Hughes continued his poetry-reading tours, and appeared in as many as seventeen states during a season (17, p. 231). These lecture tours, which began in 1931, were an important source of income for Hughes. His first cross-country tour was underwritten by the Rosenfeld Fund, as has been previously mentioned. He booked his own tours until 1940 when he began lecturing under the management of W. Colston Leigh, Inc. (1, p. 290). Hughes was usually accepted

cordially and sometimes enthusiastically by his audience. Sometimes, however, this was not the case. During a performance in an Atlantic City church, Hughes was handed a note, which he did not bother to read until the performance was completed. The note was from the minister of the church who said, "Do not read any more blues from my pulpit" (1, p. 290).

At a Los Angeles YMCA he was not allowed to read his poems, and the Vallejo Council for Civic Unity canceled his talk in April of 1948. During the same month, a Palo Alto, California, high school barred the use of its building for his speaking engagement. Much of this reaction was due to suspicions that Hughes was associated with the Communist Party. Meltzer relates an incident that occurred in Pasadena at a Book and Author luncheon:

> Somebody malicious gave Aimee Semple McPherson, the highly publicized evangelist, a copy of Langston's youthful poem "Goodbye Christ." It was ironic in tone and meant to be a poem against those he felt were misusing religion for profit. In it he mentioned Miss McPherson. She was furious and claimed the poet was anti-Christian. From her pulpit she preached against Langston, saying, 'There are many devils, but the most dangerous of all is the red devil. And now there comes among us a red devil _in a black skin_' (17, p. 236).

Even though Hughes sometimes met difficulties in his lecture tours, he was successful. As Boulware says, "For more than thirty-five years, Langston Hughes lectured upon literature and racial problems and read his poems" (1, p. 289).

During the 1940's Hughes gained more recognition as a literary figure. In 1946, he received a one thousand dollar grant from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He also received a Doctor of Letters degree from Lincoln University during this decade. He held the poet-in-residence position at Atlantic University in 1946 and was a teacher and counselor at the Laboratory School of the University of Chicago in 1949.

Hughes's career was even more varied in the 1950's. He continued his lecture tours, which spread his reputation as a poet. According to Emanuel, "He made sixteen appearances in ten weeks . . . in 1951, followed by twelve more in the fall" (6, p. 47). Hughes's readings were now backed by piano accompaniment and jazz orchestration. His lecture tours were curtailed somewhat by his appearance before the Congressional Investigating Committee in March of 1953. He was charged with having belonged to several Communist front organizations, and several of his books were removed from United States information service libraries. Hughes's reaction to this was discussed in a Publisher's Weekly article:

> Characteristically, Mr. Hughes' reaction to this was, first, to express surprise that his books had been there at all and, second, to suggest that since the USIS librarians had removed some of his older books, they might replace them with some of his newer books (21, p. 37).

"Un-American Investigators," a poem that appears in The Panther and the Lash, shows Hughes's attitude toward such investigations:

The committee's fat
Smug, almost secure
Co-religionists
Shiver with delight
In warm manure
As those investigated--
Too brave to name a name--
Have pseudonyms revealed
In Gentile game
    Of who,
    Born Jew
    Is who:
Is not your name Lepshitz?
    Yes
Did not you change it
For subversive purposes?
    No
For nefarious gain?
    Not so.
Are you sure?
The committee shivers
With delight in
Its manure (14, p. 76).

In 1951 another volume of Hughes's poetry appeared, Montage of a Dream Deferred. The collection, which is actually one long poem, was introduced by Hughes:

> 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 disc-tortions [sic] of the music of a community in transition (12).

Emanuel says of Montage of a Dream Deferred, "The poet catches the talk, song, and action of Harlem by forsaking blues patterns and smooth jazz rhythm for the shifting, broken cadences of boogie-woogie and be-bop" (6, p. 47). Another collection

of Hughes's poetry, Selected Poems of Langston Hughes was published in 1959. This volume includes some poems that had been published previously and several new poems.

Hughes continued his musical collaboration activities in the 1950's. He wrote the libretto and Jan Meyerowitz wrote the music for Esther, which was produced in 1957. Hughes also wrote the libretto for Barrier, which is based on his earlier story, "Father and Son," and on his play Mulatto. A musical folk comedy Simply Heavenly, which is based on the book Simple Takes A Wife, encountered much success in this decade. It appeared on Broadway in August, 1957, was produced in Hollywood in 1957 and in London in 1958. It was also televised for a week in the United States in December of 1959.

The character of Jesse B. Semple, who until this decade had appeared only in newspaper columns, now was published in three Simple books during the 1950's. Simple Speaks His Mind was published in 1950; Simple Takes A Wife, for which Hughes won the Anisfield-Wolf Award, was published in 1953; and Simple Stakes A Claim appeared in 1957.

Hughes also became interested in history and contributed several history books during this decade. He collaborated with Milton Meltzer in writing A Pictorial History of the Negro in America, which was published in 1956. He collaborated with Roy De Carova in 1955 to produce The Sweet Flypaper of Life. Meltzer says of this publication,

> Its approximately one thousand high-quality illustrations presented the first authoritative panorama of the Negroes' total participation in American life, from the bringing of the first slaves to Virginia in 1619 to the Montgomery bus boycott (17, p. 44).

Hughes also contributed three history books for children, which include *The First Book of Negroes* in 1952, *The First Book of Jazz* in 1955, and *The First Book of the West Indies* in 1956. Other historical contributions were *Famous American Negroes* in 1954, *Famous Negro Music Makers* in 1955, and *Famous Negro Heroes of America* in 1958.

I Wonder as I Wander, Hughes's second autobiography, relates Hughes's life as a traveler through 1938. It was published in 1956. According to Otterley in the *Saturday Review*:

> *I Wonder as I Wander* is actually Hughes's personal history intertwined with personal narratives of his travels--a sort of vagabondia, with a dash of racialism. As such it proves excellent fare as he recalls dramatic and intimate moments in a life well and vigorously spent (20, p. 35).

Another important contribution in 1958 was *The Langston Hughes Reader*, which includes a collection of poems, sample stories, translations, and essays.

Hughes continued to live in Harlem during the 1950's and published several other works. These included *Laughing to Keep From Crying*, a collection of short stories, in 1952; *Tambourines to Glory*, a novel, in 1959; and *The First Book of Rhythms*, a book for children, in 1954. This book of rhythms

Laboratory School at the University of Chicago. Hughes also edited _The Book of Negro Folklore_ with Arna Bontemps in 1958. During this decade, Hughes translated some of Mistral's poetry, which makes up the collection _Selected Poems of Gabriela Mistral_, published by Indiana University in 1957.

In the 1960's Hughes gained even more recognition for his literary contributions, and his position as a literary figure was clearly established. According to Emanuel, "On the threshold of the 1960's, Hughes could feel confidently that his world-wide fame as a poet of the people, as innovator, and as literary spokesman of Negro Americans would endure" (6, p. 49).

During the 1960's Hughes did not devote as much time to poetry as he did earlier in his career. Two volumes of poetry were published, however, one of which was _Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz_, published in 1961. Speaking of this collection, Meltzer says, "The poems were written for the ear, as one voice of a jazz ensemble given directions on what to play through his notes in the margin" (17, p. 251). The ending of "Ask Your Mama," the title poem in this collection, is given to exemplify Hughes's directions for musical accompaniment:

IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES
WHERE NO SHADOW WALKS ALONE
LITTLE MULES AND DONKEYS SHARE
THEIR GRASS WITH UNICORNS.

Repeat high
flute call
to segue into
up tempo blues
that continue
behind the
next sequence . . . (7, p. 65)

A second volume of poetry, The Panther and The Lash, was published two months after Hughes's death in 1967. This collection includes approximately seventy poems, some of which, like "Christ in Alabama," appeared previously.

Hughes also wrote The First Book of Africa, which was published in 1960. Emanuel says of this book, "Written with a simple grace and power attractive to the young, it outlines the exploration and colonization of Africa" (6, p. 170). In 1962 Fight for Freedom: The Story of the NAACP was published. This informative book tells of founding of the NAACP and tells of its development and its activities since World War II. Hughes also collaborated with Milton Meltzer to write Black Magic: A Pictorial History of the Negro in American Entertainment, which was published in 1967. The publication traces the entertainment activities of the Negro from the early minstrel shows. It does not necessarily praise the race, but it does describe the accomplishments of important personalities.

Two additional Simple stories also were published in the 1960's. These included The Best of Simple in 1961 and Simple's Uncle Sam in 1965. The New York Post began publishing the Simple series in a column in 1962. Another collection of stories, Something in Common and Other Stories, was published in 1963.

In addition to the poetry and prose contributions of this decade, Hughes also made some significant contributions

in the area of drama. Black Nativity which dramatizes the Christmas Story in dialogue, narrative, pantomime, gospel song, folk spirituals, and dance was presented in New York in 1961. In 1964 Jerico-Jim Crow was presented in Greenwich Village, and in 1965 The Prodigal Son was presented. Emanuel says of this production, "In May, The Prodigal Son made the Greenwich News Theatre resound to the booming song and hand clapping and foot stomping as the forces of sin and virtue took sides in acting the biblical parable" (6, p. 169). Five Plays by Langston Hughes was edited by Webster Smalley and was published in 1963. In Smalley's introduction, he says, "Negro drama, heralded in the twenties by such men as W.E.B. DuBois, Alain Locke, Montgomery Gregory, and Ridgely Torrence, has been, until recently, enriched almost single-handedly by Langston Hughes" (10, p. ix).

Hughes also edited several works during this period, including An African Treasury in 1960. The volume includes a group of essays, speeches, folk tales, stories, and poems by black Africans. Emanuel says of the book, "The first truly indigenous group expression of its kind to be printed" (6, p. 170). Hughes edited several volumes of poetry which included Poems From Black Africa in 1963. This volume represents some thirty-eight poets from eleven countries. New Negro Poets: U.S.A. was edited by Hughes and published in 1964, and it represents thirty-seven post-war poets. The

reputation of Negro poets was enlarged by La Poesie Negro-Americaine which Hughes edited in 1966. In the same year, The Book of Negro Humor was published with Hughes as its editor.

Hughes received more rewards and recognition in the early 1960's. In 1960 he received the NAACP Spingard Medal for his contributions to interracial relations, and in 1963 Howard University conferred upon him a Doctor of Letter degree. Hughes was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1961, the highest distinction in America for an artist. In addition to the awards, Hughes gained recognition in America when he read at the first National Poetry Festival at the Library in Congress in 1962. He also lectured in American Houses in Europe for the United States Information Agency in 1965.

Hughes's prolific career ended suddenly May 22, 1967. He had entered Polyclinic Hospital in Manhattan on May 6 with a heart ailment. None of Hughes's friends imagined that his condition was serious, but after minor surgery, his condition worsened, aggravated by chronic heart and kidney conditions. On the evening of May 22, he died alone with only a nurse in attendance. The memorial service in Harlem held several days after Hughes's death showed his humor and toughness of spirit (17, p. 258). His poem "Wake" was read:

> Tell all my mourners
> To mourn in red--
> Cause there ain't no sense
> In my bein' dead.

Speaking of the memorial service, Meltzer says, "And at the very end, by Langston's own request, as a parting joke for his friends, a jazz trio played the old tune 'Do Nothing Till You Hear from Me'" (17, p. 258).

Hughes's death was a shock to his friends and to the world. Kenneth Kinnamon said Hughes's death, "was a death that seemed oddly premature for a writer so perennially and ebulliently youthful" (16, p. 399). A New York Times article quoted Roy Wilkins, executive director of the NAACP, who expressed "profound sorrow upon the passing of a man who in his own remarkable way was a crusader for freedom for millions of people" (19, p. 32). Whitney M. Young, executive director of the National Urban League, referred to Hughes as a courageous fighter for human rights and dignity" (19, p. 32). Gwendolyn Brooks, the Pulitizer prize winning poetess, said of Hughes:

> Langston Hughes loved literature. He loved it not fearfully, not with awe. His respect for it was never stiff nor cold. His respect for it was gaily deferential. He considered literature not his private inch, but great acreage. The plantings of others he not only welcomed but busily enriched.
>
> He had an affectionate interest in the young. He was intent, he was careful. The young manuscript-bearing applicant never felt himself an intruder, never went away with oak turned ashes in the hand.
>
> Mightily did he use the street. He found its multiple heart, its tastes, smells, alarms, formulas, flowers, garbage and convulsions. He brought them all to his table-top. He crushed them to a writing-paste. The pen that was himself went in . . . (2,

Langston Hughes put his "soul" into his writing. He did not attempt to portray the black man as faultless, but attempted to portray an accurate picture of the black man of the ghetto streets with his joys and frustrations. Many of these emotions that appear in Hughes's literary works are reflections of feelings he experienced in his own life. It is essential, therefore, for an individual to have an understanding of Hughes's life in order to analyze his works. Langston Hughes, in the early years of his career, said,

> We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. . . . We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves (13, p. 694).

Hughes did express his dark-skinned self for more than four decades. In Arthur P. Davis's words, "Langston Hughes is an American classic and will outlast his century" (3, p. 296).

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CHAPTER III

AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED POEMS FOR ORAL INTERPRETATION

One of the first problems in conducting a study in the analysis of selected poems of Hughes is the choice of poems for analysis. Hughes's career spanned more than four decades and he wrote many works. Most of the poems which are included in this study have been widely recognized by the critics as Hughes's outstanding works. James Emanuel in his critical study says:

> Among his hundreds of poems written over a forty-five-year period, the following ten, ranked in their apparent order of excellence, are his best: "Mulatto," "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "Song for a Dark Girl," Jazzonia," "The Negro Mother," "Dream Variations," "The Breath of a Rose," "Minstrel Man," "Evenin' Air Blues," and "Dream Boogie" (7, p. 173).

From this list, four poems have been selected for analysis, "Mulatto," "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "The Breath of a Rose," and "Evenin' Air Blues."

Poems in the study have also been selected to represent works from his earliest writing through his latest writing. "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," which is often anthologized, was written when Hughes was only eighteen years old. "The Breath of a Rose" was written in Paris when Hughes was twenty-two years old. Another selection written during the early

portion of Hughes's career is "Mulatto," which was first published in 1927. Most critics agree that Hughes's best poetry was written during his early period.

Other poems, written later in his career, are selected, however, to show Hughes's ability to record various attitudes of Negroes. "Evenin' Air Blues" was published in 1942 and shows the problems of Negroes who migrated to the North searching for success. "Harlem," which was included in Hughes's 1951 collection _Montage of a Dream Deferred_, shows the problems of people who came to Harlem because they thought the city offered them many opportunities. Hughes spent much time in Harlem because he was fascinated by the city; so it is understandable that he depicted the life of Harlem in his poetry.

"Militant" is included in the study because it is an example of Hughes's latest work. It was probably written in 1966 and was published in Hughes's posthumous collection, _The Panther and the Lash_. Melton Meltzer, who collaborated with Hughes in writing a book and who wrote a biography of Hughes, says of this collection, "The mood of the book is militant, angry, defiant. It is today's voice, yet much of it came out of experience suffered long ago. Perhaps the book . . . was his way of saying to the young generation, I'm still here, by your side" (23, p. 252). Hughes's poetry throughout his career reflected the attitudes and aspirations

of Negroes, and his latest works exhibit the protest that was prevalent during the sixties.

The poems in the study were also selected to exemplify Hughes's versatility as a poet. He often wrote free verse poetry, and he also wrote lyrics, for example "The Breath of a Rose." Hughes's versatility is also shown in "Mulatto," which is a dramatic dialogue. Another form of poetry at which Hughes was adept was the blues form, which is represented in this study by "Evenin' Air Blues." "Militant" is a dramatic monologue and exemplifies Hughes's ability to keep abreast of the changing racial situation and to accurately record the situation in his poetry.

After poems have been selected for analysis, it is necessary to select a criterion by which to analyze the poetry. Charlotte Lee is an outstanding figure in the field of oral interpretation. Her book *Oral Interpretation* is used widely in the teaching of oral interpretation; the fact that the book is now in its fourth edition attest this. In this study Charlotte Lee's *Oral Interpretation* is used as the criterion by which the poems are analyzed.

In this study of Hughes one of the first elements considered is the literary form that the poet uses. These forms include free verse which Lee defines as follows:

> Free verse differs in many ways from conventional poetry. If the free-verse poem is divided into stanza units at all, they are often irregular in length, although a free-verse poem

> *may* have quite regular stanzaic division. The free-verse line may vary in length from a single syllable to fifty or more--if the author feels that he needs to use so long a line and that he can bring it off successfully. Free verse often makes no use of rhyme, though the poet may choose to introduce it in order to achieve some special effect (20, p. 444).

Other forms considered include dramatic poetry and lyric poetry. Lee says that dramatic poetry may include "a character in conflict with a force within or outside himself, whose development is revealed without a third-person narrator" (20, p. 392). The dramatic narrative, dramatic lyric, dramatic monologue, and the soliloquy are all examples of dramatic poetry. Lee also defines the lyric poem:

> The lyric is most typically a short poem, though it may be a long sustained emotional utterance. It is strongly unified poetry, for all aspects of content are shaped toward the emotional focal point. The *persona* in a lyric poem is usually a single speaker whose primary purpose is to share an emotional experience . . . (20, p. 389).

Another consideration in the analysis in this study is the attitude and meaning the poet presents, as well as tone and intention. Lee says, "It is extremely important that the interpreter be willing to let the poet have his way. He must examine every word of the poem in its relationship to every other word and let them operate as they must within the whole--not as he wishes they did . . ." (20, p. 395).

The intrinsic qualities of the poetry are also considered in this study. These qualities include unity and harmony. Lee says, "*Unity* is the combining and ordering of all parts

that make up the whole" (20, p. 25). She says, "Harmony is the appropriate adjustment of parts to one another to form a satisfying whole" (20, p. 26). Another intrinsic quality considered is variety, which "is provided when two things of the same general kind differ from each other in one or more details" (20, p. 26). Contrast is similar to variety but it "implies a sharper differentiation" (20, p. 26). Balance and proportion are other intrinsic qualities that are considered in the analysis of poetry in this study. Since proportion provides balance, the two are considered together in the analysis. According to Lee, "Balance . . . is brought about by the intensity or the proportion of content on either side of the point at which the entire selection seems to pivot and change directions . . ." (20, p. 27). This point of balance is called the fulcrum. Rhythm of content and structural rhythm are also considered in this study and are examples of intrinsic qualities. Lee says of intrinsic qualities in Oral Interpretation:

> They have been termed 'intrinsic' because they are clearly discernible within the selection on the printed page and because they appear the same to all qualified judges; appreciation of them does not depend on the uniqueness and range of personal experience but on judgment of the thing itself. Since they are evident in content and structure, particularly in the relationship between the two, the interpreter will need to know exactly how they function within his own selection (20, pp. 24-25).

An analysis of poetry for oral interpretation must also include a study of imagery, which includes sensory appeal and

figurative language. The sensory appeals include visual appeal, auditory appeal, gustatory appeal, which refers to the sense of taste, and olfactory appeal, which is concerned with the sense of smell. Another sensory appeal is tactual appeal, which appeals to the sense of touch and which, according to Lee, "evokes a sensation of physical contact, pressure or texture . . ." (20, p. 189). Thermal imagery also appeals to the sense of touch and "refers to the feeling of heat and cold" (20, p. 189). According to Lee, "Imagery can also appeal to the so-called motor sense" (20, p. 189). Kinetic imagery appeals to the motor sense and is represented by a very open and broad action. Another imagery that appeals to the motor sense is kinesthetic imagery which is concerned with muscle tension and relaxation. Lee says of kinesthetic imagery,

> It is closely related to empathy and is likely to be present in any particularly rich sense appeal, although it can also stand alone and is found in references to height and distance, for example, or in qualified kinetic imagery, . . . (20, p. 189).

Imagery is also presented in figurative language. One of the most common figures of speech is the simile, which makes a comparison that often uses the word "like." Lee says, "It simply compares two objects of common nature or the particular qualities of one thing to the general qualities of another . . ." (20, p. 397). A second figure of speech is the metaphor, which makes a more direct comparison by saying

something "is" something else. An analogy is a metaphor that is more broadly developed. Another example of figurative language is personification, which is giving human qualities to inanimate or abstract objects. Synecdoche is yet another figure of speech, which Lee defines as "the use of a part of a whole" (20, p. 398). Lee comments on figures of speech:

> But the interpreter's concern, as always, is not with putting a name to what the poet did or classifying a figure of speech, but with understanding why that figure was used, what it is intended to convey, and what it demands of him when he presents the material to an audience. The poet achieves concreteness and vividness of suggestion by using figures which indicate or imply a comparison or an association. They must be understood for what they are and for the purpose they serve before the interpreter can proceed with his job of doing justice to the poetry (20, pp. 398-399).

The interpreter in his analysis must also be concerned with the poet's use of tone color, which Lee defines as "the combination of vowels and consonants to help achieve a total effect" (20, p. 407). Tone color includes alliteration, which is "the close repetition of identical or nearly identical sounds, usually consonants, at the beginning of adjacent words . . ." (20, p. 408). Lee identifies other examples of tone color, "The use of identical or closely approximated vowels within words is called assonance, while the close repetition of identical or approximate consonants within or at the ends of words is called consonance" (20, p. 408).

Again the important thing is not merely to identify examples of tone color but to use them to enhance the words of the poet. Lee advises:

> To make full use of tone color, the interpreter must be sure that he is enunciating clearly and that he is forming all sounds properly. The poet had a purpose in combining the sounds as he did, and the interpreter must accept the responsibility of reproducing them accurately (20, pp. 407-408).

Another important consideration in an analysis of poetry is the study of the extrinsic qualities. One of these extrinsic qualities is universality. Lee says of universality,

> It means . . . that the idea expressed is potentially interesting to all people because it touches on a common experience. The emotional response it evokes is one most readers (or listeners) have felt . . . (20, p. 9).

Another extrinsic quality is individuality. This is concerned with the poet's fresh approach to the material. A third extrinsic quality is suggestiveness. According to Lee:

> It leaves the reader something to do: it does not tell him quite everything. This does not mean that the writing is obscure. It means rather, that the author has chosen references and words which allow the reader to enrich the subject matter from his own background (20, p. 9).

The poems selected in this study of Hughes are analyzed using Lee's criteria. For the convenience of the reader, the poems are reproduced in their entirety in the study, and the analysis follows each respective poem. At the conclusion of this chapter a sample lecture recital script, which includes the six poems analyzed, is provided.

The Negro Speaks of Rivers

I've known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than
the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers (16, p. 4).

It is appropriate that the first selection to be analyzed be "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," written in the summer of 1920 when Hughes was eighteen years old. The poem was first published in The Crisis in June, 1921, and later appeared in Hughes's volume, The Weary Blues. In this collection Hughes dedicated "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" to W. E. B. DuBois, a man who fired the imaginations of the Negro intellectuals in the early part of the twentieth century. This poem of free verse is often anthologized and was one of six Hughes poems included in the Emmy Award-winning television show, "Beyond the Blues," in 1964. In 1965 Marian Anderson included "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" in her farewell concert at Carnegie Hall.

Hughes explains the circumstances concerning the writing of the poem in his autobiography, The Big Sea. He was traveling to Mexico to visit his father and had been thinking about his father's dislike for the Negro, which Hughes could not understand. Hughes said:

> I had been in to dinner early that afternoon on the train. Now it was just sunset, and we crossed the Mississippi, slowly, over a long bridge. I looked out the window of the Pullman at the great muddy river flowing down toward the heart of the South, and I began to think what that river, the old Mississippi had meant to Negroes in the past--how to be sold down the river was the worst fate that could overtake a slave in times of bondage. Then I remembered reading how Abraham Lincoln had made a trip down the Mississippi on a raft to New Orleans, and how he had seen slavery at its worst, and had decided within himself that it should be removed from

> American life. Then I began to think about other rivers in our past--the Congo, and the Niger, and the Nile in Africa--and the thought came to me: 'I've known rivers,' and I put it down on the back of an envelope I had in my pocket, and within the space of ten or fifteen minutes, as the train gathered speed in the dusk, I had written this poem, which I called 'The Negro Speaks of Rivers' . . . (10, p. 55).

Hughes uses "I" which personalizes the poem, but he actually is representing the entire Negro race and its history. Lee says of the poem, "Langston Hughes is able to condense the history of his race from its beginnings through the first quarter of the twentieth century in this brief poem" (20, p. 84). According to Dickinson, "This poem is an epic tribute to the Negro race, rich in expression and moving in its message" (6, p. 14). Hughes expresses a great sense of pride in his race in this poem.

This sense of pride exhibited by the speaker in the poem helps to unify the selection. Unity is also achieved by the repetition of "I." Each sentence in the poem begins with "I" or "my," and lines one, two, and eleven begin with "I've known rivers." The repeating of line four, "My soul has grown deep like the rivers," as line thirteen also aids in unifying the selection, as does the chronological tracing of the Negro race.

Although there is considerable repetition in the poem, Hughes does provide contrast and variety. He uses rivers as the means by which he proclaims the pride and history of his race. In lines two and three, he says, "rivers ancient as

the world and older than the/flow of human blood in human veins." In lines five, six, and seven, the Euphrates, Congo, and Nile rivers are mentioned, rivers in the area where early recorded history began. In line eight, however, Hughes contrasts these rivers to the Mississippi River and to the nineteenth century when he mentions Abraham Lincoln. Within this sentence, which includes lines eight, nine, and ten, Hughes presents another example of contrast. In speaking of the Mississippi, he says, "I've seen its muddy bosom/ turn all golden in the sunset." The dull and turbid river can become golden and this is how Hughes saw the Mississippi as he traveled over it by train at sunset.

In addition to the intrinsic qualities of unity and harmony, and variety and contrast, Hughes also provides balance and proportion in the organization of "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." The first three lines provide an introduction to the poem, and line four, "My soul has grown deep like the rivers," provides the central idea. Lines five through ten trace the history of the race, and lines eleven and twelve restate, more briefly, the introduction. The final line again states the theme.

Balance and proportion are related to rhythm of content and are important considerations for the oral interpreter. In this poem the first four lines provide great intensity in emotional rhythm. Tracing the history of the race in lines five through ten provides some relaxation of the emotional

intensity. Lines eleven through thirteen present greater emotional intensity with the peak being in line thirteen, the final line:

> I've known rivers:
> Ancient, dusky rivers.
>
> My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

The chief sensory imagery evident in "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" is kinesthetic imagery, which refers to muscle tension and relaxation. The theme of the poem exhibits a pride in the Negro race, and this should affect the reader's muscle tone and help establish empathy between the reader and the audience. In addition to the pride expressed throughout the poem, there are other, more specific, examples of kinesthetic imagery. For example, "bathed," in line five, "I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young," provides an impression of soothing relaxation. In line six, "I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep," "built" and "lulled" provide additional examples of kinesthetic imagery. Hughes provides other sensory appeal in the poem when he says of the Mississippi, "I've seen its muddy/bosom turn all golden in the sunset." This passage, of course, appeals to the visual sense, as does "dusky" in line twelve:

> I've known rivers:
> Ancient, dusky rivers.

It is interesting to note that "dusky" is also used to describe the color of the Negro's skin. Hughes also presents

auditory appeals when he says, "I heard the singing of the Mississippi . . ." in line eight.

The sense imagery in poetry is aided by the literary imagery and in this poem Hughes has made use of the simile. In line two the poet begins, "I've known rivers ancient as the world." The longevity of the world is compared to rivers found in areas where early culture began. Line four, "My soul has grown deep like the rivers," is another example of simile. It speaks of the soul of the Negro, which according to Emanuel, "is not a subject, but a complex of feelings" (7, p. 137). Emanuel goes on to quote Hughes, who on his second trip to Cuba said to Guillen, "_Yo no estudio al negro. Lo siento_" (7, p. 137). The translation is, "I don't study the negro. I'm sorry." This implies that the Negro treated in Hughes's work is not a study of a race, but rather an expression of feelings. This soul and its depth are compared to the continual deepening of the rivers as natural erosion occurs. This "soul" which was relatively young when history began has gained breadth and depth as it existed throughout history. As years pass, rivers also become deeper as the soil is worn away. This comparison is developed throughout the poem, the comparison of the soul of the Negro race and rivers. Hughes uses rivers to trace the history of the black man, and since the comparison is developed throughout the poem, it could be considered an anal-

previously as a unifying factor of the poem, is the use of "I" by which Hughes represents the black race. This could be defined as synecdoche, which Lee defines as "the use of a part of a whole" (20, p. 398).

Hughes presents additional imagery in the form of personification. This is evident in lines five through ten. In line five, he refers to "when dawns were young," meaning the early years of history. He says of the Congo in line six, "it lulled me to sleep." In line eight he mentions, "the singing of the Mississippi," and later in lines nine and ten, "I've seen its muddy/bosom turn all golden in the sunset."

Hughes's use of imagery is important to the oral interpreter because it enables the reader to vividly describe the universal theme which Hughes presents. This theme is a pride in race. This is an emotion with which most audience members, white and black, can empathize. Hughes presents this emotion by tracing the history of his race, which earlier Negro intellectuals encouraged black writers to do. The poem shows the influence of Sandburg, but Dickinson says, "Hughes's poem has a beauty and distinction all its own" (6, p. 14). The poet's use of "I" shows the influence of Walt Whitman, whom Hughes greatly admired. Hughes said of Whitman, "One of the greatest 'I' poets of all time" (11, p. 15).

The poem, although exhibiting the influences of other writers, is meritorious as an individual selection and an

excellent poem for oral interpretation. The use of imagery and the pride shown by the speaker in the poem are of particular interest to the oral interpreter. The repetition in the poem must be handled carefully, so that the listener can empathize with the poem and can appreciate the poet's message. The interpreter in approaching the poem must be aware of the attitude presented. The speaker of the poem is reflective; he looks at the history of his race with pride, and the oral interpreter must assume this pensive attitude in his presentation. The poem should be approached rather quietly and with sympathetic introspection.

The Breath of a Rose

Love is like dew
On lilacs at dawn:
Comes the swift sun
And the dew is gone.

Love is like star-light
In the sky at morn:
Star-light that dies
When day is born.

Love is like perfume
In the heart of a rose:
The flower withers,
The perfume goes--

Love is no more
Than the breath of a rose,
No more
Than the breath of a rose (10, pp. 170-171).

"The Breath of a Rose" is a short lyric which Hughes wrote during his stay in Paris in 1924. The poem is included in this study because its inclusion along with the other five poems exemplifies the wide range of Hughes's talent. Not only is Hughes able to reflect the position of the black man in verse, he is also able to express personal emotion in lyrics. Hughes included the poem in his autobiography <u>The Big Sea</u> and explained the conditions that resulted in the writing of "The Breath of a Rose."

While working in the Grand Duc restaurant in Paris, Hughes met an English-African girl, Mary. Hughes says, "We became good friends and often went dancing together and to the theaters, and shortly we began to be in love. It was spring in Paris" (10, p. 165). The girl had been educated in London and had been sent to Paris for a season by her wealthy father. She wanted to elope with Hughes, and the idea appealed to him. But he had no money, and shortly there was no opportunity for marriage. The girl's father sent a family friend to bring Mary back to London. Hughes comments in <u>The Big Sea</u>, "Sitting in my little attic room that spring, I thought a lot about Mary after she went away. Then after a while, I didn't think about her so much. But when I did, I felt sad. So one day I wrote this poem . . ." (10, p. 170).

The poem's first publication was its appearance in <u>The Big Sea</u> in 1940. In 1944 it was included in <u>Thirteen Against the Odds</u> by Embree (8, p. 118). The poem has also been set

to music by Grant Still. Although the poem is not widely published, Emanuel in his critical study places it among the top ten poems Hughes wrote in his career.

"The Breath of a Rose" is a lyric poem, strongly unified by the emotion expressed. The poem is short, a characteristic often discernible in lyric poetry. Another characteristic of lyric poetry is that there is no information presented in the poem that gives us a clue to what has preceded this emotional experience or what follows. Fortunately, Hughes has provided some information which helps the interpreter understand why the poet wrote the selection. Understanding why Hughes was motivated to write the poem and understanding what was written enable the interpreter to appreciate the sensitivity of Hughes and present this feeling to the listener.

The speaker in the poem is despondent and sad because of the realization that love is short-lived, but he is not grief-stricken. The title gives the interpreter a clue that what is to transpire in the poem will be short. The life or "breath" of a rose spans a few short weeks. By using a rose as the primary vehicle to explain his experience of being in love, Hughes implies that the relationship was very beautiful. It was an experience that was short, delicate, meaningful, and beautiful. This is implied by the figurative language Hughes uses to explain his relationship in the poem.

Unity is achieved in the poem by the words, "Love is like . . . ," which introduces stanzas one, two, and three, and "Love is . . . ," which introduces the last stanza. The last stanza is strongly unified and is given additional emphasis by repetition:

> Love is no more
> Than the breath of a rose,
> No more
> Than the breath of a rose.

Another factor which contributes to the unity and harmony in the selection is the comparisons that Hughes makes between love and various aspects of nature.

These comparisons also provide variety in the poem. All the examples from nature provide a delicate and gentle impression. In lines one and two:

> Love is like dew
> On lilacs at dawn:

In lines five and six:

> Love is like star-light
> In the sky at morn:

In lines nine and ten:

> Love is like perfume
> In the heart of the rose:

It is important that the interpreter approach these aspects of nature with a pensive, moderate voice.

The interpreter should also be aware of the contrast presented in the first three stanzas. In the first stanza Hughes speaks of dew on lilacs at dawn, but this is followed by:

> Comes the swift sun
> And the dew is gone.

Hughes uses the same method of contrast in the second stanza. In the first two lines of the stanza, he speaks of star-light in the early morning sky, followed by:

> Star-light that dies
> When day is born.

The presence of starlight is contrasted to its sudden absence. The last two lines of the second stanza, mentioned above, provide another contrast with the words "dies" and "born." As something passes away, something else comes forth. This provides some similarity to the evaporation of the dew in stanza one. The "swift sun" comes forth, and the dew disappears.

In stanza three another example of contrast is apparent. Love is compared to the perfume of a rose in lines nine and ten, but in lines eleven and twelve all this passes away:

> The flower withers,
> The perfume goes--

In addition to variety and contrast, other intrinsic qualities found in the poem are balance and proportion. These two qualities must be considered together since one, proportion, provides the other, balance. Throughout the poem Hughes compares love to aspects in nature, but there is a pivot point, or fulcrum, found at the end of the third stanza. In stanzas one, two, and three Hughes uses similes to make his comparisons; in the final stanza he uses a metaphor:

> Love is no more
> Than the breath of a rose,
> No more
> Than the breath of a rose.

Since the fulcrum is not located in the middle of the poem, there is not symmetrical balance. This does not mean, however, that the poem lacks balance. The first three stanzas with their similes provide a certain amount of substance to the definition of love. But Hughes, by the very use of similes, says love is only <u>like</u> dew, star-light, and perfume. In the last stanza he says that love actually <u>is</u> "no more than the breath of a rose." The metaphor gives a stronger impression than the similes do, and by repeating most of the line, Hughes provides sufficient substance in stanza four to balance the selection.

The similes and metaphor that Hughes has included in this selection not only provide balance and proportion but also are examples of figurative language. Figurative language is also represented by personification; two examples are found in lines seven and eight:

> Star-light that dies
> When day is born.

An inanimate thing like starlight is given the human quality, death, and this makes the passage more vivid. The birth of a day also provides personification which enhances the vividness. Another example of personification is seen in line ten, "In the heart of a rose." By using the heart, Hughes gives the impression that this is the very center or vital

organ of life within this flower. The perfume found in this center of life might be thought of as the heartbeat of man. For as the flower wilts, "The perfume goes--." In the final stanza, Hughes gives the human quality, breath, to the rose. This use of personification will help the interpreter vividly describe the theme.

By using figurative language, Hughes gives concreteness to the abstract idea of love. This enables the listener to better understand the theme of the poem. It is important that the interpreter skillfully present the figurative language so that its fullest potential will be realized by the listener.

Hughes in this selection uses stress prosody, which provides a rhythmic pattern by the number of stresses in each line regardless of their position in relation to one another. In each line of "The Breath of a Rose" there are two stressed syllables:

> Love is like dew
> On lilacs at dawn:
> Comes the swift sun
> And the dew is gone.
>
> Love is like star-light
> In the sky at morn:
> Star-light that dies
> When day is born.
>
> Love is like perfume
> In the heart of a rose:
> The flower withers,
> The perfume goes--

Love is no more
Than the breath of a rose,
No more
Than the breath of a rose.

The interpreter should look closely at line fifteen, "No more," It has only two syllables, but both receive a heavy stress. Because both words are stressed, they have nearly the same weight as the other lines in the poem. The interpreter should take as much time vocalizing this line as he does any other line in the poem. By sustaining the sounds of these two syllables and by pausing between them and after them, the importance and weight of the line should be obvious to the listener. The interpreter should also note the use of "star-light" in lines five and seven. "Star" receives the heavy stress, but "light" also receives a lesser degree of stress.

The flow of sound, or cadence, in "The Breath of a Rose" is closely related to the stress prosody. According to Lee, "A primary cadence is the number of syllables in each sentence" (20, p. 453). In this poem each stanza is a complete sentence, and stanzas one, two, and four contain eighteen syllables. Stanza three presents a variation with twenty syllables. The awareness of cadences and stress prosody in the poem not only provides a rhythm that enhances the emotion expressed but also provides unity and variety. These qualities are also aided by the rhyme scheme presented in the selection. In each stanza the second and fourth lines rhyme. In the first stanza, "dawn" and "gone" rhyme; in the

second stanza, "morn" and "born;" in the third stanza, "rose" and "goes;" and in the final stanza, "rose" is the final word in both the second and fourth lines.

In addition to the intrinsic qualities in the poem, there is a variety of sensory appeal. In stanza one when Hughes compares love to "dew on lilacs at dawn," a visual appeal is apparent. This is followed by "comes the swift sun" and the disappearance of the dew. This also appeals to vision, but in addition, it possesses thermal imagery or a feeling of warmth. Stanza two follows much the same pattern with love compared to star-light in the early morning sky. This presents visual appeal as do the last two lines in the stanza:

> Star-light that dies
> When day is born.

The birth of a day, which can be associated with the rising of the sun, also presents a feeling of warmth or thermal imagery.

In stanza three an olfactory image is provided when Hughes compares love to the perfume of a rose. The rose in line ten and the withering of the rose in line eleven also provide an example of tactual imagery, which refers to texture. The final stanza of the poem is also rich in appeal. The breath of a rose can refer to the fragrance which is an olfactory appeal. A feeling of sadness and loneliness is also expressed in the final stanza, and this will affect the muscle tension of the interpreter. The passage dictates a body

tension and posture that relate such a feeling of sadness during the concluding stanza of the poem. The phrases Hughes uses to appeal to the senses do not always show originality. The phrase "dew on lilacs at dawn" is overworked in literature. "Star-light in the sky at morn" is also a rather trite phrase. Probably the most originality is expressed when Hughes compares love to "the breath of a rose."

"The Breath of a Rose" will be enriched for the listener if the interpreter clearly enunciates the tone color which Hughes has provided. The most prevelant example of tone color in the selection is alliteration. In lines one and two the "l"-sound in the initial position in "love," "like," and "lilacs" provides alliteration. In line three "swift" and "sun" present another example. In line five the "l"-sound is used again in "love," "like," and "light;" in line nine the "l"-sound is again represented in "love" and "like." Hughes also provides assonance in the selection by the use of closely approximated vowel sounds within words. The vowel sound in the selection that provides assonance is the long "i"-sound. In stanza one the "i"-sound is found in "like" and "lilacs;" in stanza two it is found in "like," "light," "dies," and a second "light." The long "i"-sound also appears in the final position in "sky." The first line in stanza three also has the long "i"-sound in "like."

The combination of sounds within a poem makes it more satisfying for the listener and helps intensify empathy; therefore, the interpreter must clearly enunciate these sounds. The combination of sounds in the poem also provides for pauses; for example, the "th"-sound in the final position in "breath" requires the interpreter to pause briefly before the word "of" can be pronounced. The poet has planned the combination of certain sounds in a poem, and the interpreter must be aware of this and clearly relate these sounds to the listener.

This poem will appeal to most listeners because it possesses universality. Nearly all audience members will be able to relate to the theme of the selection because most listeners at some time in their lives will have been in love or have had meaningful relationships that ended quickly. The attitude of the speaker is one of sadness, and most audience members will empathize with this emotion because it is the same feeling they experienced in a similar situation. Hughes's approach in dealing with this universal idea is not new. Many writers have expounded on the similarities of love and nature, but the title and his use of it in stanza four does offer an individualized approach that provides a very satisfying conclusion to the selection. The last stanza also possesses the quality of suggestiveness, for it allows the listener to add details and images from his own background.

The oral interpreter must be aware of the rich sensory appeal in the poem and the use of tone color. He must clearly present the selection so that the listener can fully appreciate Hughes's poem. Another concern for the oral interpreter is the repetition in the poem. The poem is short, so the repetition probably will not bore the listener, but the interpreter must strive to present each stanza vividly and with some variation in his voice and body tension.

Mulatto

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.
What's a body but a toy?
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.

<u>I am your son, white man</u>!

A little yellow
Bastard boy (16, pp. 160-161).

Hughes wrote "Mulatto" in the summer of 1926 in New York. It was first published in January, 1927, in _Saturday Review of Literature_ and appeared in the collection _Fine Clothes to the Jew_ in the same year. Hughes said of this poem:

> I worked harder on that poem than on any other that I have ever written. Almost every night that summer I would take it out of the table drawer and retype it and work on it, and change it. When I read it one night at a gathering at James Weldon Johnson's Clarence Darrow said it was more moving than any other poem of mine he had read (10, p. 262).

Reviewers consider "Mulatto" one of the best poems in _Fine Clothes to the Jew_, and Emanuel in his critical study rates it as the best poem Hughes wrote throughout his career (7, p. 173).

The mulatto is treated in several works by Hughes. The poem "Cross," which appeared in _The Weary Blues_, vaguely relates the rejection of a mulatto. Hughes used "Cross" at many poetry readings and referred to it as his "ace in the hole" because he could always get the attention of his audience with it. Hughes also wrote a play entitled _Mulatto_, which was produced on Broadway in 1935 and then toured the country for two years. "Father and Son," a short story included in _The Ways of White Folks_, also deals with the mulatto. In 1949 the miscegenation theme appeared in _The Barrier_, an opera for which Hughes wrote the libretto. Arthur P. Davis says of Hughes's use of this theme,

> For over a quarter of a century, the author has been concerned with this theme; returning to it again and again, he has presented the thesis in four different genres, in treatment varying in length from a twelve-line poem to a full-length Broadway play (5, p. 195).

The poem "Mulatto" is a dramatic dialogue presented in free verse. The conversation of the characters in the poem is distinguished by italics. "Mulatto" has both surface and depth meaning. It is concerned with the conflict between a Southern white father and his mulatto son. Prowl speaks of the play Mulatto and the poem "Mulatto" and says, "Both the poem and the play are angry testimonies to the barbarity of the South" (26, p. 79). Hughes knew several mulattoes and was concerned about their difficult position in society. In The Big Sea he mentioned a mulatto boy in Lawrence, Kansas, who was his friend and who later crossed the color line and passed for white. Hughes was also impressed with a mulatto boy he met in Africa who had been rejected by his white English father. Hughes wrote the short story "African Morning" about this African mulatto. The poem "Mulatto" is concerned with the difficult position of the mulatto, but even more than this, the poem is concerned with a conflict between a father and a son. This conflict was very "real" to Hughes. Although he was Negro as his father was, Hughes was rejected by his father, a successful lawyer and businessman in Mexico. Because of this rejection by his father, it is possible that Hughes is placing himself in the mulatto's

Since the poem is a dialogue interspersed with narrative description, there are several speakers expressing varying attitudes. The mulatto shows feelings of despair and anger; the white father also shows anger, reflective pleasure, and coldness. The first speaker in the poem is the mulatto who says, "*I am your son, white man!*" This is said with strong feeling and anger, but there is also a feeling of despair expressed. In lines five and six the father's attitude is shown:

> *You are my son!*
> *Like hell!*

The father rejects the idea that he is responsible for the mulatto's existence. In line nineteen, "*What's the body of your mother?*," the father's attitude of irresponsibility is further shown. Davis says of this line:

> The most insulting of these slurring expressions in the mouths of the white speakers is the line thrice repeated in the poem: "*What's the body of your mother?*" This slur, the *rankest form of "the dozens,"* degrades the rejection of the yellow bastard past all hope of reconcilement (5, p. 198).

The final words expressed by the father in lines thirty-seven and thirty-eight relate his anger and his detachment from his activity with the mulatto's mother:

> *Git on back there in the night,*
> *You ain't white.*

The attitude expressed by the father is carried to the next generation by his white son. This is apparent in lines twenty-seven through thirty:

> _Naw, you ain't my brother._
> _Niggers ain't my brother._
> _Not ever._
> _Niggers ain't my brother._

Emanuel says, "'Niggers ain't my brothers' is the rebuff so ungrammatically worded as to show the displacement of reason and truth by blind social restrictions" (7, p. 111).

In addition to the dialogue, there are other clues presented that help the interpreter understand the attitude expressed in the poem. Lines eleven through seventeen, which are not presented as dialogue, can be considered thoughts of the father:

> What's a body but a toy?
> Juicy bodies
> Of nigger wenches
> Blue black
> Against black fences
> O, you little bastard boy,
> What's a body but a toy?

These lines show the father reflecting on his relationship with the black mother with a degree of pleasure, but again the rejection of the mulatto is apparent in lines eleven and seventeen, "What's a body but a toy?." Lines twenty-three through twenty-six can also be considered the musing of this white father about his actions in the Negro quarters:

> A nigger night
> A nigger joy
> A little yellow
> Bastard boy.

In lines thirty-three through thirty-six, a parallel to the above is seen:

O, sweet as earth,
Dusk dark bodies
Give sweet birth
To little yellow bastard boys.

In the last line, line thirty-six, however, "bodies" and "boys" present a more detached feeling than was apparent in lines twenty-five and twenty-six, "A little yellow/Bastard boy." The poem is concluded by the repetition of line twenty-three through line twenty-six, but these lines are interrupted by the mulatto's voice saying, "I am your son, white man!" Even though this father, who in line four is referred to as "one of the pillars of the temple . . . ," rejects his mulatto son and assumes no responsibility for him, the fact remains that he is the actual father of this mulatto.

Unity is achieved in "Mulatto" by the singleness of setting which is the South. This is indicated in line two, "Georgia dusk," and by references to Southern nights throughout the poem. There is progression of time in the poem, and this also provides unity. In the first portion of the poem the father is reminded of the past and of his relationship with "nigger wenches" in the Negro quarters. His rejection of the resultant, "little yellow bastard boy," is also presented. This rejection is carried to the next generation to his white son who says, "Niggers ain't my brothers." In the final portion of the poem, the father shows detached reflection of his behavior. As time passed, he feels removed from

his activity with the "nigger wenches" years before. The tracing of the father's attitude and the attitude of his white son helps provide unity in the poem.

Hughes's description of the setting also provides unity and harmony in "Mulatto." The mention of turpentine woods in lines three and seven provides unity. Lines eight through ten,

> The Southern night
> Full of stars,
> Great big yellow stars,

are repeated as lines thirty-one and thirty-two with a slight variation, and this helps to unify the poem. The mention of the moon in line seven and moonlight in line twenty provide an example of harmony. Harmony is also achieved by the reference to woods in lines three and seven and then the reference to pine wood in line eighteen, pine scent in line twenty-two, and pine wood scent in line forty. Unity is achieved in "Mulatto" by the repetition of "body" in lines eleven, seventeen, nineteen, and twenty-one. The plural, "bodies," in line thirty-four provides harmony.

Another intrinsic quality evident in the poem is variety. This is achieved by showing a slight change of attitude by the father throughout the poem. The father rejects his mulatto son throughout the selection, but he exhibits a more detached attitude in the latter portion of the poem. When the presence of the mulatto son refreshes the memory of the

father too vividly, the father feels threatened. He says to the mulatto in lines thirty-seven and thirty-eight:

> *Git on back there in the night,*
> *You ain't white.*

Hughes's use of contrast is more evident in this poem than his use of variety. The most significant example of contrast is Hughes's quiet and peaceful description of the setting juxtaposed to the lustful relationship he had with the mulatto's mother. This contrasting is found throughout the poem, but the best example is found in lines eighteen through twenty-two:

> 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.

Contrast is also achieved in the poem when Hughes uses "yellow" to describe the stars in lines ten and thirty-two and then uses "yellow" to describe a bastard boy in lines twenty-five, thirty-six, and forty-four.

"Mulatto" exhibits a recurrent shift of attention, and therefore, the poem possesses rhythm of content. Line one is dialogue; the mulatto is speaking. Lines two through four contain a description of the setting. In lines five and six, the poet returns to dialogue with the words of the white father. Another description of the setting in lines seven through ten follows this dialogue. Next, thoughts of the father are presented in lines eleven through seventeen; this

collection of thoughts begins and ends with, "What's a boy but a toy?." Lines eighteen through twenty-two show a juxtaposition of setting description and the white father's words, "What's the body of your mother?." The white father's activity in the Negro quarters is related in lines twenty-three through twenty-six in an innocent, almost child-like way:

> A nigger night
> A nigger joy,
> A little yellow
> Bastard boy.

Then in lines twenty-seven through thirty, the ungrammatical cruel rebuff is expressed by the white half-brothers. Immediately following this rebuff, Hughes includes a peaceful description of the setting:

> The Southern night is full of stars,
> Great big yellow stars.

Lines thirty-three through thirty-six are similar to lines twenty-three through twenty-six, mentioned above, but the white father's activity is more detached. It is almost as if the father is afraid of being reminded of his relationship with the black woman. He forcefully speaks to the mulatto in lines thirty-seven and thirty-eight,

> Git on back there in the night,
> You ain't white.

Immediately following this in lines thirty-nine and forty is additional description of the setting. The final segment of the poem begins with the same innocent child-like verse seen

in lines twenty-three through twenty-six, but in the middle of these four lines, the mulatto says, "I am your son, white man."

Because rhythm of content is used extensively in this selection, it may cause some problems for the interpreter. It is essential that he be aware of the many shifts, so that in presenting the selection the meaning will be made clear to the listeners.

Related to rhythm of content is structural rhythm. Since the poem is presented in free verse, there is no structural rhythm that is discernible throughout the poem, but there are segments within the poem that possess structural rhythm. Line one's foot prosody is irregular, "I am your son, white man!" However, lines five and six, considered together, provide an identical pattern. The most pronounced metrical pattern is discovered in lines twenty-three through twenty-six. These lines are repeated as lines forty-one, forty-two, forty-four, and forty-five. The lines are made up of eight iambic feet. Lines twenty-three and twenty-four are iambic dimeter. Line twenty-five contains two feet with an additional lighter stress, which is carried to line twenty-six; this is an example of an override. The lines read as follows:

A nigger night,
A nigger joy,
A little yellow
Bastard boy.

The rhythm of this segment is similar to a child-like chant. It expresses a feeling of innocence and sharply contrasts the lack of a specific rhythm pattern elsewhere in the poem. The important thing for the interpreter to be aware of is the over-all effect. It is important that he understand rhythm of content as well as structural rhythm so that he can effectively relate the poet's meaning to the listener.

In "Mulatto" Hughes describes the setting throughout the poem, and this description is rich in sensory appeal. This is of importance to the oral interpreter. Sensory appeal makes the description more vivid to the listeners, and it is the responsibility of the interpreter to relate this vividness. The first example of sensory appeal is in lines two and three:

> Georgia dusk
> And the turpentine woods.

The appeal in the above is primarily visual as it is in lines seven through ten:

> The moon over the turpentine woods.
> The Southern night
> Full of stars,
> Great big yellow stars.

In line twenty, Hughes uses visual appeal again, "Silver moon-light everywhere." In lines thirty-one and thirty-two another visionary reference is made to stars; line thirty-nine provides still another example of visionary appeal with stars, "The bright stars scatter everywhere." The description of the setting also presents olfactory appeal; line eighteen includes

an example, "The scent of pine wood stings the soft night air." This line is perhaps richer in sensory appeal than any other line in the poem. Not only is olfactory appeal apparent, but also there is tactual imagery in "soft night air." Night air sometimes refers to coolness, and, if coolness is implied, there is also thermal imagery.

The lines describing the white father's activity with the Negro women also present examples of sensory appeal. Lines twelve through fifteen are an example:

> Juicy bodies
> Of nigger wenches
> Blue black
> Against black fences

Tactual and visual imagery are provided in this short passage. Line thirty-four also contains visual imagery, "Dusk, dark bodies."

Appeal to imagery is also provided by figurative language. The first example of figurative language is in line four, "One of the pillars of the temple fell." This line refers to the white father and compares him to a staunch pillar supporting a temple. A simile is seen in lines thirty-three through thirty-five:

> O, sweet as earth,
> Dusk dark bodies
> Give sweet birth

In line eighteen, "The scent of pine wood stings the soft night air," "stings" shows personification. Hughes's use of imagery provides videness and helps accentuate the contrast

between the beauty and softness of the setting and the depravity and harshness of the activity that took place in this setting. It is imperative that the interpreter be aware of the poet's intention and be able to present the contrast in the poem in such a way that the poem's vividness is enhanced. If the interpreter accomplishes this, the listener will experience a greater understanding of the selection.

Another important consideration for the oral interpreter is that of tone color. Tone color is concerned with the sound of words individually and in combination with other words. The most pronounced use of tone color in "Mulatto" is by alliteration. This is the close repetition of consonant sounds in adjacent words or words separated by a few words. Lines eighteen through seventeen show Hughes's use of alliteration with the vehicle being the consonant "b:"

> What's a body but a toy?
> Of nigger wenches
> Blue black
> Against black fences
> O, you little bastard boy,
> What's a body but a toy?

The consonant "b" is a plosive, and by its very pronunciation a feeling of rejection is presented. Hughes uses the consonant throughout the poem in the form of "bastard boy" to enrich the tone color. Line eighteen also presents tone color, "The scent of pine wood stings the soft night air." Not only does the "s" in "scent," "stings," and "soft" provide alliteration, but also the "t" in these same words and in

"night" provides an example of consonance. Alliteration is also seen in lines twenty-three and twenty-four:

> A nigger night
> A nigger joy

"N" also begins lines twenty-seven through thirty in the form of "naw," "niggers," "not," and "niggers." Line thirty-four provides another example of alliteration, "Dusk, dark bodies." In describing the setting, Hughes refers to stars several times. The "s" sound in "stars" and the "s" beginning "Southern" in line thirty-one form another example of identical consonant sounds in the initial position of words within one line. Line thirty-nine's "stars" and "scatter" provide another example of alliteration, "The bright stars scatter everywhere."

It is necessary to lift the words from the page in order to fully appreciate a poet's use of tone color. Since the oral presentation of a literary work is the function of the oral interpreter, it is of vital importance that the reader be aware of the poet's use of tone color. The poet has arranged the words in a specific way, and the interpreter can best artistically reproduce the literary work if he is conscious of the positioning of these words and of the reason for their placement.

The theme "Mulatto" expresses, the rejection of a mulatto boy by a white father, is not an experience with which many audience members can associate. But the feeling of

rejection is an emotion with which many listeners can identify, and some audience members will have experienced rejection by their fathers. Therefore, the poem possesses the quality of universality. The mulatto has been a character in writing throughout literary history from Cora Munro in Cooper's Last of the Mohicans to Faulkner's creations. Hughes's approach to the mulatto seems more personalized, probably because of the rejection he suffered at the hands of his father. Hughes's father always represented something stable and secure to Hughes in his youth, but when Hughes visited his father as a teenager, he began to hate his father. Some of this personal rejection and hate is apparent in "Mulatto."

In addition to Hughes's ability to personalize the theme in this poem, he also possesses the ability to include references that will give the listener an opportunity to enrich the poem with experiences in his own background. This quality is suggestiveness, and the description of the setting is particularly rich in this quality. Line four, "One of the pillars of the temple fell," gives the listener an opportunity to enrich the meaning by imagining the white father's position in his community. At no other time does Hughes refer to the father's position, but this line motivates a wide range of images in the minds of the listeners.

In presenting this selection to listeners, the oral interpreter must be fully aware of any difficulties the listener

might have in understanding and appreciating the selection. There is no word that needs definition, but Hughes's contrasting of dialogue and setting could present problems for audience members. It probably is not necessary to explain this contrasting before the selection is read, but it is necessary for the interpreter in his reading to show the contrast very clearly by the use of his voice, body tension, and placement of characters. The dialogue of the characters is tense, almost to a shouting level in volume. But the description of the setting is soft, pleasant, and romantic. The interpreter must be very careful in his presentation, so that he does not draw attention to himself when making the shift from dialogue to setting description. The attention of the listener must be focused on the literary work, and this must be the primary goal of the interpreter.

Evenin' Air 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
How de blues they come to be--
You wouldn't need to ask me:
Just look at me and see (17, pp. 38-39).

"Evenin' Air Blues" was published in <u>Common Ground</u> in the spring of 1942 and appeared in Hughes's collection <u>Shakespeare in Harlem</u> in 1942. Emanuel's critical study, <u>Langston Hughes</u>, ranks the poem among the ten best of Hughes's career. It is appropriate that this selection be included in this study because it represents the blues style which Hughes often used. The pattern of the blues is explained in <u>The Negro Caravan</u>:

> Most blues use a fairly strict form: a leading line, repeated (sometimes with slight variations), and generally a rhyming third line. Sometimes the first line is repeated twice; in the less developed blues, sometimes the last line does not rhyme. The form is simple, but well adapted to express the laments of folk Negroes over hard luck, 'careless' or requited love, broken family life, or general dissatisfaction with a cold and trouble-filled world (2, pp. 426-427).

Hughes defines the blues pattern as it applies to music in <u>The First Book of Jazz</u>: "A twelve-bar musical pattern--one long line of four bars which is repeated, then a third line of four bars to rhyme with the first two lines . . ." (12, p. 20).

In "Evenin' Air Blues" the blues pattern is apparent if the interpreter uses the sentences in the poem as the lines Hughes refers to in his musical definition. This musical definition is applicable to this selection because Hughes suggests in the introduction to <u>Shakespeare in Harlem</u> that the selections, among other things, may be sung. In the introductory comments to this collection, he says, "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" (17). Hughes in The First Book of Jazz also explains the content of the blues, "The blues are almost always sad songs, songs about being out of work, broke, hungry, far away from home . . . behind the sadness there is almost always laughter and strength" (12, p. 21). The pattern of the blues is found in "Evenin' Air Blues" and so is theme of the blues.

Hughes uses the blues in poems included in The Weary Blues, which was published in 1926, but the mood in the poems in Shakespeare in Harlem is different. In the twenties the Harlem Renaissance was in full swing and many New Yorkers flocked to the Harlem caberets. The stock market crash in 1929, however, affected Harlem more severly than any other section of New York and the Renaissance ended. Many people were out of work and discouraged. According to Davis, "By 1942 the black metropolis was a disillusioned city" (4, p. 204). Allen Prowl comments further on the conditions in Harlem as they are reflected in the poems in Shakespeare in Harlem,

> The note of social criticism is deceptively more incidental here than in some of the earlier poems. Financial survival and escapism have become the foundation of human relationships. One is left to infer the dehumanization (26, p. 83).

The blues in this later collection show the black man experiencing even more frustration than the blues in *The Weary Blues*.

The attitude expressed by the speaker in the poem is one of dejection. He left the South and came North because he thought he would find many opportunities. Instead, he says, "I'm about to lose my mind." He is lonely and hungry, so he escapes by doing the only thing he can do, dance. He dances because he can forget his problems or his "blues." The last stanza in the poem presents some additional meaning in the poem. The speaker says:

> But if you was to ask me
> How de blues they come to be,
> . . . .
> You wouldn't need to ask me:
> Just look at me and see!

The speaker implies that his very life and the situation he is in is the "blues." Prowl comments on these lines,

> The stark simplicity of these lines also goes to the heart of Hughes' intention as a writer: to focus on the Black American, not only in order to expose the truth of his situation but also to make him aware of himself and of his potential (26, p. 83).

The selection is unified by the attitude or feeling exhibited by the speaker and by his use of the personal pronoun "I" and its objective case form, "me." The use of "I" shows personalization in the poem; one of the characteristics of the blues is that they must be personal. Henry Townsend, a blues singer, expresses his feeling concerning the personalization of the blues,

> When you express yourself, how you felt, how you been mistreated, and the things that happened to you in life, that's the only thing you can say. If you sing anything else then you're singing something somebody else has felt, . . . (2, pp. 13-14).

He goes on to explain that blues singers can express the emotions or blues of someone else, "if you're sincere enough about taking sympathy with the fellow . . . " (3, p. 14).

This was Hughes's position in writing "Evenin' Air Blues." Hughes did not come to Harlem from the South, but he knew blacks from the South who came to the North. During his high school years in Cleveland, there was a great migration of Negroes from the South to the northern industrial cities, including Cleveland. He was aware of the problems these Southern Negroes experienced in Cleveland and later in Harlem when he lived there. Hughes is qualified to write the "blues" for the Southern Negroes who came North, and he is able to personalize their "blues."

The poem is unified not only by the personalization of the blues to the speaker in the poem but also by a progression of time. In the first stanza the speaker says that he came from the South about six months previously. In the second stanza, he relates his activities of the day, "This mornin' for breakfast/I chawed de mornin' air." He goes on to say, "This evenin' for supper,/I got evenin' air to spare." In the third stanza he tells what he will do in the near future, "Believe I'll do a little dancin.'" The final stanza

presents the idea that the life this speaker is living is the "blues."

This progression of time unifies the poem and also provides variety. Hughes presents contrast within several stanzas. In the first stanza the speaker came North, "Cause they told me de North was fine." But in the final line, the optimistic attitude of the speaker is gone, and the speaker says, "I'm about to lose my mind." Contrast is also apparent when the speaker refers to his breakfast and then to his supper in stanza two. Another example of contrast can be seen in the last stanza. The speaker implies that a question about the meaning of the "blues" may be asked and then says that it is not necessary to ask the question. The answer lies in the speaker himself, "Just look at me and see."

The pattern of the blues provides another intrinsic quality, rhythm. The basic pattern of the blues is to have the first line repeated and then to have a third line that rhymes with the first two. This pattern may vary in the blues style and "Evenin' Air Blues" shows some variation. Instead of the basic three line verse, Hughes has divided his stanza into six lines:

> 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.

It is apparent to the interpreter, however, that the first two lines are composed of one unit of thought or sentence.

The same is true of lines three and four and lines five and six. The repetition of the first sentence in stanza one shows slight variation. The first sentence begins with "Folks." This direct address to the listener should help establish empathy. When the interpreter repeats the sentence, he omits the direct address. Samuel Charters in The Poetry of the Blues comments on the repetition in the blues pattern, "As the line is repeated it takes on a new emphasis, and with the delayed completion of the phrase there is a suspense, even if only momentary, before the resolution of the final line" (3, p. 17).

The repetition pattern of the blues is found throughout "Evenin' Air Blues," and in each stanza, Hughes presents a slight variation in the repeated first sentence. The first sentence in stanza two reads:

> This mornin' for breakfast
> I chawed de mornin' air.

When the sentence is repeated, the personal pronoun "I" is eliminated. Stanza three possesses greater variation in the repeated line than any other stanza. The stanza begins:

> Believe I'll do a little dancin'
> Just to drive my blues away--

When the sentence is repeated as lines fifteen and sixteen, it reads:

> A little dancin'
> To drive my blues away, . . .

Only slight variation is apparent in the final stanza, which begins, "But if you was to ask me." When the sentence is repeated, "But" is replaced by "Says."

The rhythm of the blues is also achieved by the rhyme scheme, which is an important characteristic of the blues. Charters says, "There is, however, a free use of near rhyme" (3, p. 16). Hughes uses near rhyme in the first stanza with "fine" and "mind." In the remaining stanzas he presents words that rhyme more closely. In stanza two the final word "spare" rhymes with "air," which concludes the first two sentences. In stanza three "stay" rhymes with "away;" in the final stanza "be" rhymes with "see." The rhyme scheme and the repetition in the blues pattern provide rhythm, and the interpreter must make full use of the rhythm within the selection if he is to be successful in presenting the theme in "Evenin' Air Blues."

Hughes's use of dialect in the selection also enhances the theme. The use of "come" for "came" in line one, "Folks, I come up North," is an example, as is "Cause" for "because" in line two. The use of "de" for "the" is another example. Stanza two provides a richer example of dialect:

> 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.

The omission of the final g in "mornin'" and "evenin'" makes the language more personal for the Southern Negro speaker because this is the way he actually talks. The second line in the stanza includes another example of Southern Negro dialect, the use of "de" for "the." "Chawed" for "chewed" is a picturesque word that gives personification to "air." The idea expressed in this stanza may mean that the speaker had nothing to eat for breakfast except air, or it may mean that in the morning he had someone with whom to talk. By evening there was no one, for the speaker says, "I got evenin' air to spare." Emanuel says this stanza "excellently explains laughter at sad blues" (7, p. 139). He continues:

> The humorous 'chawed de mornin' air' seems to reflect the imagination of a semiliterate folk Negro, but it has literary parallels. Yeats, in 'Among School Children,' sees Maud Gonne 'Hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind/And took a mess of shadows for its meat.' Thoreau, in 'Solitude' in Walden, prefers to the pills of quacks 'a draught of undiluted morning air.' And Emerson in 'The Transcendentalist,' praises idealists as 'terrible friends' who 'eat clouds, and drink wind' (7, pp. 139-140).

In the third and fourth stanzas there is additional use of dialect with "dancin'" and also "de" for "the." In line eighteen, "De blues forgets to stay," the singular form of the verb "forget" is used instead of the correct plural form. In the last stanza the poet uses "was" instead of "were," "But if you was to ask me."

The suggestion of dialect and the ungrammatical structure enhance the meaning of the "blues." The interpreter should pronounce the "de's" as they are written, but he should not read the poem attempting to re-create an actual dialect. But rather the interpreter should only suggest the dialect as Hughes does in the poem. Hughes's use of dialect in the poem is not consistent; for example, he presents "they" and "this" as standard American usage instead of the dialect forms, "da" and "dis."

Hughes's use of the blues pattern in "Evenin' Air Blues" is not unique. Many blues express the loneliness and despair of someone in a strange place. But "Evenin' Air Blues" has universal appeal because of its theme. Many blacks can empathize directly with the idea presented in the selection, and white members of an audience can also empathize if they are sympathetic with the Negro speaker in the poem.

The oral interpreter will find "Evenin' Air Blues" a challenge. He must carefully handle the repetition so that the poem is not boring to the listener. The repeat of the first sentence in each stanza should be emphasized. The interpreter should also pause more at the end of the second sentence in order to provide momentary suspense before the problem is resolved in the final sentence. The interpreter may also read the selection with the accompaniment of a piano or other musical instrument providing the twelve measure

blues pattern in the background. The interpreter must also be sympathetic with the Southern Negro and the problems he experiences in the selection if the meaning of the poet is to be related to the listener.

Harlem

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 (13, p. 71)?

"Harlem" was published in Montage of a Dream Deferred in 1951. The poem is also remembered as the source of the title for Lorraine Hansberry's 1959 Drama Critic Award winning play, A Raisin in the Sun. Hughes says in the introduction of Montage of a Dream Deferred:

> In terms of current Afro-American popular music and the sources from which it progressed . . . this poem on contemporary Harlem, like be-bop, is marked by conflicting changes, sudden nuances, sharp and impudent interjections, in the manner of the jam session, sometimes runs, breaks, and disc-tortions [sic] of the music of a community in transition (13).

Hughes considers the collection of approximately ninety selections one long poem reflecting contemporary Harlem. Arthur P. Davis says,

> This 1951 Harlem is a full and many-sided community. . . . It is a Harlem of some gaiety and of much sardonic laughter; but above all else, it is Harlem of a dream deferred; and a people's deferred dream can 'fester like a sore' or 'sag like a heavy load' (4, pp. 208-209).

The subject matter of the poem "Harlem" is concerned with the black man's deferred dream, which is a hope or ambition that the black man has strived toward for a century, but has not realized. The black man dreams of something more than existence; he wants to reap the benefits of a democracy like his white brother. But a bountiful existence that the black man dreams of has been postponed. Hughes presents in the poem "Harlem" some possible results that may occur because of this postponement. The same poem is entitled "Dream Deferred" in The Panther and the Lash (15, p.

14) published in 1967. Emanuel says of the poem, ". . . 'Harlem' traces in figurative language the long scar of psychic abuse which might, it emphasizes, develop a fatally eruptive itch" (7, p. 149).

This short free verse poem begins in line one with "What happens to a dream deferred?" Hughes then presents several possibilities: "Does it dry up like a raisin," "fester like a sore," "Stink like rotten meat," or "sugar over like a syrupy sweet?" These possibilities are all presented as questions. Then in lines nine and ten, the attitude of the poet becomes more apparent:

> Maybe it just sags
> like a heavy load.

These lines show a rather depressed and burdened mood. But the final line of the poem, line eleven, is the most powerful possibility that Hughes presents in answer to his initial question, "*Or does it explode*?" If the dream of the black man is repressed, Hughes is saying that there is a possibility the black man will take explosive action.

Unity is achieved in the poem by the use of questions. Every sentence in the poem is a question with the exception of the statement in lines nine and ten. Hughes's use of the personal pronoun "it" to refer to the deferred dream also provides unity in the poem. "Does it" introduces lines two, six, and eleven, and line nine is introduced by "Maybe it." Harmony is presented in lines four and seven when Hughes

omits the introductory words "Does it" in these questions. Lines four and five provide an example:

> Or fester like a sore--
> And then run?

Harmony is also presented in line nine and ten with the presentation of the only statement in the poem.

Hughes makes much use of variety and contrast in the questions in the poem. Lines two and three present this question:

> Does it dry up
> like a raisin in the sun?

In the following two lines a contrast is presented when Hughes compares the deferred dream to the festering of a sore. The raisin dries and wrinkles and becomes smaller in the sun, but a sore becomes inflamed and usually larger. A festering sore oozes and is moist; this also contrasts the drying of a raisin. The festering of the sore is presented in lines four and five and is followed in line six with, "Does it stink like rotten meat?" Line six provides variety, for the unpleasantness of a festering sore is also a characteristic of rotten meat. Rotten meat is sharply contrasted to a syrupy sweet in the following two lines:

> Or crust and sugar over--
> like a syrupy sweet?

The sharpest contrast in the poem is in the last portion of the poem. Lines nine and ten read as follows:

> Maybe it just sags
> like a heavy load.

The weight and drooping of the heavy load is contrasted to the rising of an explosion in line eleven, "Or does it explode?"

"Harlem" also contains the intrinsic qualities of balance and proportion. The poem does not contain symmetrical balance because the fulcrum point is not located in the middle of the poem. The fulcrum point is found between lines ten and eleven, which is the last line of the poem. The sharp contrast in the final line, which appears in italics, provides an action-packed possible answer to the question, "What happens to a dream deferred?" All the possible answers that Hughes presents up to this point have been inactive, but the fiery, explosive possibility offered in the final line counteracts the inactivity in the previous lines and balances the selection. The tightening of the rhyme scheme in the last two lines also provides intensity in the last portion of the poem and helps balance the poem.

Hughes uses rhyme in other portions of the poem, but because of the irregularity of the stanzas, the rhyme scheme is also irregular. The second portion or stanza of the poem is composed of lines two through eight. In this stanza the "sun" in line three rhymes with "run" in line five; "meat" in line six rhymes with "sweet" in line eight. The only other use of rhyme is with "load" in line ten and "explode" in line eleven. The rhyme scheme can be used effectively by

the interpreter to enhance the meaning and the rhythm presented by the poet in the selection.

In addition to the intrinsic qualities, rich sensory appeal is also discernible in "Harlem." The sensory appeals in the poem are presented in the form of similes. The first such example is found in lines two and three:

> Does it dry up
> like a raisin in the sun?

This example contains visual imagery, and there is also tactual imagery. The wrinkled raisin gives the reader and listener an idea of texture. The mention of the sun also presents a feeling of warmth or thermal imagery.

The second example of rich sensory appeal is found in lines four and five:

> Or fester like a sore--
> And then run?

Again in this sentence visual imagery can be seen. The festering of a sore is accompanied by infection, which makes the sore warmer than the body temperature, so there is also a suggestion of thermal imagery. If the interpreter closely empathizes with the words of the poet, these lines should affect his facial expression and body tension; because of this, the sentence also contains kinesthetic imagery. Line six is rich in olfactory appeal, "Does it stink like rotten meat?" Lines seven and eight provide additional sensory appeal:

> Or crust and sugar over--
> like a syrupy sweet?

These lines provide visual appeal, and "syrupy sweet" also presents gustatory appeal. In lines nine and ten kinesthetic imagery is apparent:

> Maybe it just sags
> like a heavy load.

These lines should affect the muscle tension of the interpreter. A relaxation of muscle tension and weariness is implied in these lines. The muscle tension should be sharply increased when the next line, "Or does it explode?," is read. This line provides sharp visual appeal in addition to kinesthetic imagery.

The vividness of the sensory appeal in "Harlem" is increased by the figures of speech Hughes uses. The poet has made use of the simile throughout the poem. He poses the question, "What happens to a dream deferred?," in line one. He then presents possible solutions, and in these the use of the similes is seen. The poet wonders if the dream deferred dries up "like a raisin in the sun," or perhaps festers "like a sore." He also presents the possibility that the dream deferred stinks "like rotten meat," or perhaps it crusts and sugars over "like a syrupy sweet." By comparing the deferred dream to concrete objects, the poet makes the idea more vivid and also makes it possible for the listener to readily grasp the idea. If the interpreter can vividly present the similes

and sensory appeals in the poem, the listener will empathize with the theme presented by the poet.

Hughes also uses tone color in the selection. The first such example is in line one with "dream deferred." The "d"-sound introducing these words presents alliteration. Another example of alliteration is in line eight with "syrupy sweet." This expression also presents assonance with the "e"-sound within the words. Consonance is represented by the "n"-sound in "raisin in the sun" in line three. Line four, "Or fester like a sore--," also has consonance with the final "r"-sound in "or," "fester," and "sore." The phrase "Does it stink like rotten meat?" in line six provides two examples of consonance. The "k"-sound in "stink" and "like" is the first example; the second example is the "t"-sound in "it," "stink," "rotten," and "meat." Another example of consonance with the "t"-sound is discernible in the expression, "it just sags," in line nine. The use of tone color in the poem is important to the interpreter, who must clearly enunciate these sounds so that their full value will be appreciated by the listener.

Although "Harlem" deals specifically with the deferred dream of the blacks in Harlem, the poem has universal appeal. Most listeners, black and white, will have dreams that have not been realized and ambitions that are extremely difficult to attain. Because of the frustrations audience members have

experienced in the struggle toward their individual goals, they will empathize with the deferred dream in "Harlem."

If this empathy is to be realized, however, the interpreter must make full use of the figurative language and sensory appeal presented by Hughes in "Harlem." The interpreter must carefully handle the contrast in the poem by his facial expression, vocal intensity, and body tension. He must be particularly observant of the final line, "*Or does it explode*?" which will require a body tension that expresses a threat. The interpreter may lean forward in order to better express this threat. The volume and intensity of the voice may also be increased when the final line is read in order to show anger. The facial expression must also mirror the threat and anger that the poet presents in the final line. Because Hughes presents nearly every sentence as a question, the interpreter must also vary his inflection in order to maintain the interest in the selection.

Militant

Let all who will
Eat quietly the bread of shame.
I cannot,
Without complaining loud and long,
Tasting its 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 (15, p. 39).

"Militant" appeared in Hughes's posthumous collection The Panther and the Lash published in 1967 shortly after his death. Kenneth Kinnamon says of the works in the collection,

> . . . his poetry is mostly that of racial protest, the snarl of the black panther under the lash--and backlash--of white oppression. Many of Hughes's poems catch the threatening mood of impending black retributive vengeance (19, p. 600).

Some of Hughes's later poems present a different attitude from that found in his earlier work. According to Laurence Lieberman, "Langston Hughes's new poems . . . catch fire from the Negro American's changing face" (21, p. 339). Hughes's works throughout his career reflect the attitudes and emotions of the black man of the time, so it is not surprising that his latest works reflect the protest of the sixties. According to Hudson:

> Although he wrote almost exclusively of the condition of being a Negro in America, Hughes was no racist in the current sense of the word. Seemingly incapable of acrimony, he was, nevertheless, militant in his own way. Dipping his pen in ink, not acid, his method was to expose rather than excoriate, to reveal rather than revile (9, p. 345).

The speaker in the poem "Militant" reflects an attitude that became common to some blacks during the sixties. The demonstrations in the early part of the decade that called attention to the racial problems were nonviolent. One of the most famous was led by Martin Luther King in Birmingham, Alabama, in the late spring of 1963. The nonviolent demonstrations called attention to the black man's plight, and

the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act secured more civil rights for the Negroes. There was, however, a more radical group arising which was discontented with the progress made by these nonviolent demonstrations. According to Meier and Rudwick,

> A major factor leading to the radicalization of the civil right movement was unemployment and poverty--and an important force awakening the protest organizations to this problem was the meteoric rise of the Black Muslims to national prominence (22, p. 13).

By 1966 the term "Black Power" became popular. Washington says of this term, "Black Power cannot be definitely defined because it is the multifaceted emergence of a whole people with all their varied experiences and achievements into a nearly common consciousness of a single destiny" (27, p. 63). The Black Panther movement was also organized in Oakland, California, in 1966. The term "Black Power" and the Black Panther movement reflected changing attitudes toward racial conditions on the part of some blacks. The changing attitudes included, among other things, a militant attitude.

It was the individual with this militant attitude that Hughes depected in the free verse poem "Militant," which was probably written the summer before Hughes died. Hughes in a radio discussion over WABI-FM in New York in 1961 said,

> I am, of course, as everyone knows, primarily a--I guess you might even say a propaganda writer; my main material is the race problem--and I have found it most exciting and interesting and intriguing to deal with it in writing, . . . (24, p. 82).

The race problems of the sixties included the militant attitude, and this is probably why Hughes wrote the poem. This does not necessarily mean that Hughes considered himself a militant. According to Lieberman, "He [Hughes] is less concerned with approving or disapproving of Black Power than with demonstrating the necessity and inevitability of the shift, in today's racial crisis" (21, p. 339).

The speaker in the poem is defined by the title as a militant. Joseph Washington in _Black and White Power Subreption_ speaks of the meaning of militancy in discussing the racial situation of the sixties, "Black Power simply takes _militant_ to mean what it implies. In his militancy, Dr. King [Martin Luther King] desired to change the society to rid it of 'racial injustice.' In their militancy, Black Power advocates intend no less" (27, p. 203). Washington also comments on the attitude of the militant black youth,

> To them Black Power was a call to manhood and the creation of a new humanity in this country. . . . Their dream is that of a united black front in America engaged in guerrilla warfare on a wide scale as to tie up the country (27, p. 175).

The speaker in the poem "Militant" is directly addressing someone, and, therefore, the selection is a dramatic monologue. It is possible in the first two sentences, lines one through seven, that the speaker is addressing both blacks and whites. The militant is addressing blacks with a reprimand to those who accept handouts. He says:

> Let all who will
> Eat quietly the bread of shame.

The first two sentences may also be addressed to whites; the militant is stating his position as a black man who cannot accept "the bread of shame" without bitterness and a feeling of guilt. This line presents many possible connotations. The "bread of shame" may refer to handouts through welfare; it may mean the token jobs offered to blacks during the sixties; it may mean passive acceptance of the civil rights extended to Negroes in the sixties, which the militant felt provided too little.

The second portion of the poem, lines eight through fourteen, seem directly addressed to whites. The speaker is angry, and he lashes at the white man for his shortcomings by saying:

> For honest work
> You proffer me poor pay,
> For honest dreams
> Your spit is in my face,

Because of the white man's actions toward the blacks, the militant is ready to retaliate, as he says:

> And so my fist is clenched
> Today---
> To strike your face.

The clenching of the fist by the black militant is a symbol that has become associated with the black man's defiance of society. The symbol is not new and has been a symbol of greeting in black communities for years. Its popularity as a symbol of defiance was increased in the 1968 Olympics in

Mexico City when Tommie Smith, a gold medal winner in the 200 meter dash, and Don Carlos, the bronze medal winner in the same event, raised black-gloved hands during the victory ceremony. According to Kieran and Daley:

> As the medals were being awarded, there were disturbed murmurs from the crowd. Smith was wearing a black glove on his right hand and Carlos was wearing a black glove on his left hand. When 'The Star-Spangled Banner' was played and the American flag rose up the mast, each held a black-gloved fist aloft. Each bowed his head, defiantly refusing to look at the flag (18, p. 431).

Unity is presented in the poem by the speaker who is identified in the title. He uses the personal pronoun "I," its possessive form "my," and its objective form "me" to unify the selection. "I" is found in line three; "my" is presented in lines five, six, eleven, and twelve; "me" is discernible in line nine. The personalization throughout the poem is an important unifying factor. Variety is presented by the parallel phrasing of line eight, "For honest work," and line ten, "For honest dreams." The selection is also unified by a graduating emotion intensity. The first sentence includes the word "quietly" to describe the eating of "the bread of shame." This graduates to "complaining loud and long" in line four. In line eleven the speaker says, "Your spit is in my face," and then the peak of emotional intensity is in lines twelve through fourteen when the speaker with his clenched fist is ready "To strike your face." This build of emotional intensity also unifies the poem.

Not only does the building of emotional intensity provide unity in the selection, but it also provides variety and contrast. "Quietly" in line two is contrasted with the loud and long complaining in line four. Lines eight and nine also present contrast:

> For honest work
> Your proffer me poor pay.

Line eight presents a pleasant connotative image for the listener, but this image is immediately replaced by a negative image evident in "poor pay." An even sharper contrast is seen in lines ten and eleven:

> For honest dreams
> Your spit is in my face.

"Honest dreams" are respectable and something to be encouraged and praised, but this image is contrasted to the distasteful and repulsive "spit is in my face" in line eleven.

Other intrinsic qualities found in the poem are balance and proportion. The fulcrum point or point of balance in the selection is immediately following line seven, which is exactly in the middle. The selection, therefore, has symmetrical balance. In the first portion of the poem, the speaker is expressing his position and perhaps indirectly reprimanding those who do not agree with his position. In the last portion of the poem, the speaker's comments are addressed more directly to the audience by the use of "you" and "your."

"Militant" exemplifies vivid imagery, which is presented as sensory appeal and figurative language. In line four, "Without complaining loud and long," an auditory appeal is presented. Immediately following this, line five, "Tasting its bitterness in my throat," exhibits gustatory appeal. Lines six and seven, "And feeling to my very soul/ It's wrong," are very emotional and will affect the body tension and facial expression of the interpreter. Therefore, the lines also contain kinesthetic appeal. Line eleven, "Your spit is in my face," contains two examples of sensory appeal. First, there is visual appeal; the poet has presented a picture of human saliva streaming down a black face. The line also presents tactual imagery, which is concerned with the sensation of physical contact. The wet human "spit" sharply striking and streaming down a black angry face is vividly presented. The last three lines in the poem contain visual appeal and kinetic imagery:

> And so my fist is clenched
> Today---
> To strike your face.

The clenching of the fist in preparation to strike a face presents vivid overt action and therefore kinetic imagery. The reader may also clench his own fist and raise it during the reading of these final three lines in the poem in order to enhance the words of the poet. The poet also presents a sharp visual picture in these lines. Because the last three

lines will greatly affect the body tension, voice volume, and facial expression, they also present kinesthetic imagery.

The vividness of the selection is also enhanced by the analogy Hughes presents in the first half of the poem:

> Let all who will
> Eat quietly the bread of shame.
> I cannot,
> Without complaining loud and long,
> Tasting its bitterness in my throat,
> And feeling to my very soul
> It's wrong.

"The bread of shame," which has been discussed earlier, may refer to a passive acceptance of Negroes by whites, or it may be concerned with a sympathy that whites feel for Negroes, but a sympathy without empathy. It may also be concerned with a lack of pride that some Negroes have, or the desire "to be white" that many Negroes possess. The militant says that there are some who readily accept handouts. He compares this to the physical act of "eating." He develops this more in line five when he speaks of "tasting its bitterness in my throat." This shameful acceptance is very unpleasant and distasteful for the militant. The presentation of this analogy is important to the oral interpreter because it enables him to more vividly and concretely present the attitude of the militant speaker in the poem.

Hughes also makes use of tone color in the poem. The first line of the poem, "Let all who will," presents an example of consonance with the "l"-sound in "all" and "will."

Consonance is also apparent in the "t"-sound in line five, "Tasting its bitterness in my throat." Alliteration is presented with the "l"-sound in "loud and long" in line four; this is also presented with the "p"-sound in line nine, "You proffer me poor pay." In lines thirteen and fourteen, alliteration is presented with the "t"-sound:

> Today---
> To strike your face.

Assonance is presented by the "o"-sound in the concluding word of line four, "long," and the concluding word of line five, "throat." Assonance is also apparent in the long "a"-sound in several words that conclude lines in the second portion of the poem. These include "pay" in line nine, "face" in lines eleven and fourteen, and "Today" in line thirteen. It is important that the interpreter carefully enunciate the words so that the richness of the tone color can be fully appreciated by the listener. It is also important that the interpreter clearly enunciate the word "spit" in line eleven. The use of this word with its plosive sound helps emphasize the distasteful image which the word presents in the poem.

Although the poem is concerned with a black militant, the selection has universal appeal. Many blacks who have been repressed will readily empathize with the position the militant takes in the poem. Other listeners will be able to empathize if they are sincerely sympathetic with the problems from which Negroes suffer. Many listeners will also emphathize

because of personal experiences of suppression. Some listeners will have worked honestly at a job for which they received poor pay. The listeners probably will not have been spat upon because of their dreams, but many will have had some of their dreams or ideas rejected by others. Hughes also presents suggestiveness in the poem, which enables the listener to draw from his own background for details to enhance the words of the poet. The "bread of shame" in line two is a good example of an expression that has suggestiveness. The qualities of universality and suggestiveness help the interpreter present the words and meaning of the poet.

"Militant" is a poem that presents a vivid expression of an angry man's attitude. It is a selection that challenges the ability of an interpreter, but if the interpreter carefully analyzes the selection and skillfully presents all the qualities found in the poem, the listeners will be able to empathize and richly experience the militant's position in the sixties, which Hughes records in "Militant."

This chapter has been concerned with an analysis of selected poems of Hughes, using an oral interpreter's approach. It therefore seems appropriate to include a script for a lecture recital that shows the scope and variety of Hughes's poetry. The program includes transitional material which presents background of Hughes's life, the setting in which the selections were written, as well as comments about Hughes.

The poems are not reprinted in their entirety in this script. The titles have been included to show where the poems are to be read.

A Lecture Recital of Langston Hughes

"I, Too, Sing America"

"We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves" (14, p. 694).

So said Langston Hughes at the beginning of his prolific career which spanned four decades. The dark-skinned selves are portrayed in the works; they sometimes laugh and they sometimes cry, but they do express themselves in the works of Langston Hughes.

"The Negro Speaks of Rivers" was written when Hughes was only eighteen years old. He was traveling by train to visit his father who lived in Mexico. Hughes's father disliked Negroes and this bothered Langston Hughes. He could not understand his father's attitude because he himself enjoyed life and felt no animosity toward his race. Hughes was thinking about his race and its history as he traveled to Mexico, and as the train crossed the Mississippi, he was inspired to write this poem:

"The Negro Speaks of Rivers"

Hughes spent some time with his father, attended Columbia University for a year, and then yearning for adventure, he decided to travel. His travels throughout his life took him around the world. In the spring of 1924 he was in Paris, and being spring in Paris, he fell in love. The relationship, however, was abruptly ended, and feeling lonely Hughes wrote of love in the short lyric, "The Breath of a Rose":

"The Breath of a Rose"

Hughes returned to the United States and lived with his mother and worked in Washington, D.C., for a year. But he was dissatisfied with his situation and enrolled in Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. During the summers Hughes came to New York, and it was here in the summer of 1926 that Hughes wrote the poem "Mulatto." Throughout his career Hughes was deeply concerned with the tragic mulatto theme. He used it in a play, an opera, short stories and poems, one of which follows:

"Mulatto"

Hughes was also concerned with the great masses of blacks who migrated from the South to the North seeking success. For many there was only disappointment. These disappointments were expressed in the blues, a form which Hughes used in many works in his career. "Evenin' Air Blues" depicts the situation of one Negro who came North:

"Evenin' Air Blues"

Many of those who migrated to the North came to Harlem, for here was a city of great opportunity. It was a city that Hughes loved and where he lived most of his adult life when he was not traveling. Harlem, however, could not provide opportunities for all its inhabitants, and many times the dreams of the people who came to Harlem were long deferred:

"Harlem"

Hughes has been called "the poet laureate of the man in the ghetto street" (28, Sec. B, p. 12). Many poems throughout his career reflect the joys, the needs, the desires and the frustrations of the down-trodden Negro in the ghetto. Hughes, who continued writing until his death in 1967, kept abreast of the changing racial situation. One of his latest poems, "Militant," reflects an attitude that became apparent during the protest of the sixties:

"Militant"

When Langston Hughes died May 24, 1967, the world was shocked. At the time of his death, Whitney M. Young, executive director of the National Urban League, called Hughes "A great human being" and "a courageous fighter for human right and dignity" (25, p. 32). Roy Wilkins, executive director of the NAACP, expressed "profound sorrow upon the passing of the man who in his own remarkable way was a crusader for freedom for millions of people" (25, p. 32). The Pulitzer Prize winner Gwendolyn Brooks said this of Hughes, "Langston Hughes

loved literature. He loved it not fearfully, not with awe. His respect for it was never stiff nor cold. His respect for it was gaily deferential. He considered literature not his private inch, but great acreage. The plantings of others he not only welcomed but busily enriched. . . . Mightily did he use the street. He found its multiple heart, its tastes, smells, alarms, formulas, flowers, garbage and convulsions. He brought them all to his tabletop. He crushed them to a writing-paste. The pen that was himself went in . . ." (1, p. 7).

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CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study, proposed in Chapter I, was to study selected poems of Langston Hughes for oral interpretation. Because Hughes read his own poetry for various audiences for nearly forty-five years, it is fitting that he be considered for such a study. Hughes wrote much of his poetry with the idea that it be read aloud, as he indicated by his suggestions to the reader in the introductory note to Shakespeare in Harlem.

Hughes's position as a figure in American literature has been clearly established. He is probably the most prolific black writer of the twentieth century and the most representative of his race. When his writing was first in vogue during the Harlem Renaissance, many Negro intellectuals were shocked and displeased with Hughes's works. Hughes recorded the life of the black man in the city ghettos, and many black intellectuals wished to ignore this faction of their race. Hughes did not ignore the ghetto man. He portrayed vividly the Negro's agony and anger, his ecstasy and happiness. Many of the agonies that Hughes depicted in his works were repugnant to the intellectuals who felt it was important for a black writer to reflect only the more pleasant aspects of

Negro life. These intellectuals hoped to be accepted by the white man by showing him they led the same life as he. Hughes wanted to show a true picture, not a distorted one that showed only the pleasant segment of life.

One of the merits of Hughes's writing is that it is so truthful. Davis says,

> If one were to arrange Langston Hughes' poetical works in chonological [sic] order he would have an excellent, penetrating, topical commentary on the American race issue since 1926---a commentary far more perceptive and meaningful than a library of sociological works (1, pp. 291-292).

He not only mirrored the happiness of the black man in the ghetto, but he also showed his problems with the "rent man," unemployment, loneliness, and "deferred dreams." Hughes's voice is not as militant as some of the contemporary poets like LeRoi Jones, for example. Some blacks today regard Hughes as a figure of the past because his writings are not as militant as they think black literature should be. But Hughes's latest works in the sixties reflect his ability to keep abreast of the changing racial situation, and some of his works do represent the militant attitude prevalent at this time. One theme that is apparent in most of Hughes's works is a pride in his race and a love of life. Hughes enjoyed being Negro, and he wanted other blacks to feel the same way. This pride in race is also evident in the later and more militant black writers' works that have been published in the last decade. For this reason, Hughes must be

considered not only a figure in the past, but a figure of the very real present, and probably the future also.

His appeal to and for the black man and for all who have been stifled and down-trodden is universal. The fact that Hughes's works have been translated into so many languages attest his universal appeal. The fact that he read his own poetry throughout the world also exemplifies this quality. The oral interpreter must realize that Hughes's works appeal to many; these works not only provide insight into the past, but they are also a vehicle for present and future understanding between races.

Because Hughes's works reflect the racial situation that Hughes was a part of, it is important for the interpreter to know something about his life. The second chapter of this study is devoted to Hughes's life and how it influenced his writings. Hughes was made aware of racial discrimination even as a child. He was made aware of the financial difficulties of many Negroes by witnessing the struggle of his own grandmother and mother. When he was a teenager in Cleveland, he viewed the problems many Southern Negroes encountered when they migrated to the industrial cities of the North. Hughes's extensive travels in the United States on lecture tours provided him with insight into the racial situation in the South. He also traveled in foreign countries; experiences he encountered during these travels gave him additional material for his works. Several selections

were inspired by his early travels to Africa, for example. His travels to Russia during the 1930's also inspired him to write. Because of his sympathetic position toward socialism, he was accused of being a Communist Party member and was called before the Senate investigating committees during the 1950's. Even this experience motivated him to write the poem, "Un-American Investigators."

Hughes's association with an elderly white female patron in the late twenties also had a profound influence on his career. He saw the vast gap between her life on Park Avenue and that of the poor blacks in Harlem. He wrote the poem "Poet to Patron," which was inspired by his relationship with this woman. His life in Harlem also had a great influence on his writing. This is particularly evident in his collections *Shakespeare in Harlem* and *Montage of a Dream Deferred*. Hughes wrote about the life he knew; therefore, it is important to include a biography of Hughes in this study. It is helpful to an oral interpreter to know something of a writer's life and to know where the selection under study fits into the context of this life. It is particularly important to know something about Hughes's life because his works are reflections of experiences he encountered or experiences related to him by acquaintances.

Hughes portrays these experiences in various poetic forms. He wrote lyrics, dramatic dialogues, blues,

dramatic monologues, and free verse poems. The poems analyzed in this study exemplify the versatility of Hughes. The lyrics he wrote are represented by "The Breath of a Rose" in this study; the dramatic dialogues are represented by "Mulatto"; "Evenin' Air Blues" is included to show Hughes's ability to write blues. The poem "Militant" is a dramatic monologue. His free verse style is represented by "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" and "Harlem." These poems were also selected to show Hughes's ability to reflect the racial situation of the changing times. Hughes's career spanned four decades, and poems included are representative of writings throughout his career. "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "The Breath of a Rose," and "Mulatto" are examples of Hughes earliest writings. "Evenin' Air Blues" and "Harlem" represent a middle portion of his career, and his latest writings are represented by "Militant."

A prominent theme that is noted in nearly all of Hughes's poetry is his accurate reflection of the racial situation. He portrays the situation vividly with much use of imagery. "Harlem" is particularly rich in sensory appeal, as is "The Breath of a Rose" and "Mulatto." Hughes also makes use of figurative language in his selections, particularly in "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" and "The Breath of a Rose." The works in this study also exhibit Hughes's adept use of intrinsic qualities in his poetry. Each of the selections is unified so that the listener's attention can be focused on

the theme. Hughes also ably provides variety and contrast in his works; "Mulatto" particularly exhibits these qualities. Hughes also presents emotional intensity, emphasis, and stress in correct proportions so that balance is achieved in his works. One of the outstanding qualities of Hughes's poetry is the rhythm of content; "Evenin' Air Blues" especially exhibits this quality. The extrinsic qualities of universality, individuality, and suggestiveness are also provided in Hughes's works. His discussion of racial problems and the plight of the common man has universal appeal and his approach is fresh and entertaining. He also provides references and words that allow the listeners to draw on their own background for details to enrich the selections.

It is important for an interpreter to make a thorough analysis of all aspects of poetry in order to adequately present it to his listeners. He must be aware of the use of imagery, the intrinsic qualities, the extrinsic qualities, the use of tone color, and the meaning expressed in the selection if he is to effectively present the literary work to an audience.

The interpreter may consider the possibility of reading the poetry with musical accompaniment. Hughes read his poetry with a musical background in some instances. His 1961 collection Ask Your Mama includes suggestions to the musicians in the margins beside the poems. The blues poetry of Hughes especially lends itself to musical accompaniment.

Because Hughes so truthfully presents the racial situation in his works, the oral presentation of his poetry is particularly timely since racial problems are running rampant in today's society. The oral presentation of these poems is not going to solve all problems or ease all the racial tension, but the reading of these poems will provide the white listener with insight into the Negroes' life and hope for the black listener.

The approach in this study has been to select poems that among other things show Hughes's versatility as a writer. Other studies in oral interpretation of Hughes's poetry could select a unifying theme, perhaps his more humorous poems, and concentrate on that aspect in a study for oral interpretation. Another approach could include only selections from his latest collection _The Panther and the Lash_, which reflects the racial situation in the sixties. A study for oral interpretation could concern itself with only the lyrics Hughes wrote. Another interesting study could concentrate on the blues form which Hughes used. A writer with musical background could show the relationship between Hughes's blues form in poetry and the blues form in music. All these possibilities for study are concerned primarily with Hughes's poetry.

Additional studies could be made that concentrate only on the oral interpretation of his short stories. A study in the field of English which concentrates on Hughes's short stories is James Emanuel's "The Short Stories of Langston

Hughes." The "Simple Series" provides ample material that is suitable for studies in oral interpretation. Hughes's fiction and drama provide additional possibilities for studies in the field of interpretation. Because of the variety in Hughes's works, a very interesting and worthwhile production thesis could be done using samples of Hughes's drama, fiction, humour, essays, short stories, and poetry.

It is hoped that this study of selected poems of Langston Hughes will motivate and inspire other studies concentrating on Hughes's works. The possibilities are innumerable and such studies may well provide insight into "the darker brother."

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