



**REPUBLIC OF TURKEY**  
**VAN YUZUNCU YIL UNIVERSITY**  
**INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
**ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE DEPARTMENT**

**ANALYSING THE POETRY OF LANGSTON HUGHES IN THE SENSE OF  
HARLEM RENAISSANCE AND JAZZ MUSIC**

**POST-GRADUATE THESIS**

**HARUN BEYDE**

**VAN - 2019**

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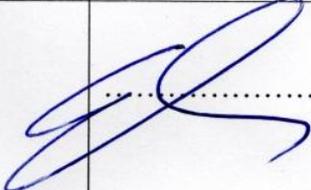
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## KABUL VE ONAY

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Harun BEYDE

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(M.Sc. Thesis)  
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(ANALYSING THE POETRY OF LANGSTON HUGHES IN THE SENSE OF  
HARLEM RENAISSANCE AND JAZZ MUSIC)

**ABSTRACT**

Langston Hughes is accepted as one of the pioneers of African American writers due to the fact that he wrote many poems against racism, discrimination, and prejudices by harmonising jazz elements in his poetry. Hughes, one of the most important names of the Harlem Renaissance as a poet, playwright, social critic, activist, and composer, was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1961, the highest distinction in America for an artist.

The aim of this study is to examine how the poet contextualises racism and experiences of African Americans in jazz poetry which he wrote during the Harlem Renaissance, a crucial period of cultural change and in the development of twentieth century African American literature.

Langston Hughes has inspired other activists, poets, and musicians with his works such as “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”, “I, Too, Sing America”, and “The Weary Blues”. Hughes has been entitled as “the poet laureate of the man in the ghetto street” in the *Washington Post*.

The main aim of this study is to evaluate jazz poetry of Langston Hughes within the frame of racism and jazz elements.

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**(LANGSTON HUGHES ŞİİRLERİNİN HARLEM RÖNESANS VE CAZ  
MÜZİK AÇISINDAN İNCELENMESİ)**

**ÖZET**

İrkçılığa, ayrımcılığa ve önyargılara karşı caz öğelerini şiirlerinde bütünleştirdiği için, Langston Hughes Afro-Amerikan yazarlarının öncülerinden biri olarak kabul edilmektedir. Amerika’ da bir sanatçı için en yüksek unvan olarak kabul edilen Amerika Sanat ve Edebiyat Akademisi’ne 1961’ de seçilen Hughes şair, oyun yazarı, sosyal aktivist ve bestekâr olarak Harlem Rönesans döneminin önemli isimlerinden biridir.

Bu çalışmanın amacı şairin yirminci yüzyıl Afro-Amerikan edebiyatının gelişimi ve en önemli kültürel değişim dönemi olan Harlem Rönesans döneminde yazdığı caz şiirlerinde Afrika kökenli Amerikalıların deneyimlerini ve ırkçılığı nasıl ele aldığını incelemektir.

Langston Hughes “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”, “ I, Too, Sing America”, ve “The Weary Blues” gibi çalışmalarıyla diğer aktivist, şair ve müzisyenlere ilham kaynağı olmuştur. Hughes, *Washington Post*’da “getto bölgesinin ödül kazanmış şairi” olarak adlandırılmaktadır.

Sonuç olarak bu tezin temel amacı caz şiirini ırkçılık ve caz öğeleri çerçevesinde değerlendirmektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler : Caz Şiiri, Langston Hughes, Harlem Rönesans, Önyargılar, İrkçilik.

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Tez Danışmanı : Dr. Öğretim Üyesi M. Metin BARLIK

## INTRODUCTION

*Hold fast to dreams  
For if dreams die  
Life is a broken-winged bird  
That cannot fly.*

(Hughes, Dreams)

Discrimination, racism, and complexity of identity are the terms that have been imprinted on the memory of humanity for centuries. Unfortunately, we have faced these terms as chronic diseases in spite of changing order of the world, social conditions, and war experiences. Although the world is based on laws and democratic principles, the shadow of racism has shown up as the acts of “modern” societies. Taking away social rights of black people and disregarding the existence of other communities have been the main sources of many violent conflicts such as uprisings and civil war throughout the history. Black communities especially African American people have been the victims of racism in recent years. Barack Obama made a statement after a youth black American named Trayvon Martin was killed by a watcher of white-hispanic street in 2013. This statement emphasizes shadow of racism that has been felt by black people in America throughout the years.

There are very few African American men in this country who haven't had the experience of being followed when they were shopping in a department store. That includes me. There are very few African American men who haven't had the experience of walking across the street and hearing the locks click on the doors of cars. That happens to me -- at least before I was a senator. There are very few African Americans who haven't had the experience of getting on an elevator and a woman clutching her purse nervously and holding her breath until she had a chance to get off. That happens often. (Capehart, 2015)

The main question is how black people who have suffered from such racist behaviours should react to these inequalities. Either resorting to violence by rebelling against inequalities or surviving by giving into the pressures could be a solution.

A vicious circle emerges at this point because neither violence nor giving in would realise the aim for African Americans. In this respect, artists, writers and musicians can play an effective role and create awareness against racism that is mentioned as a shame of humanity. Dylan Thomas says: “A good poem is a contribution to reality. The world is never the same once a good poem has been added to it. A good poem helps to change the shape of the universe, helps to extend everyone's knowledge of himself and the world around him.”<sup>1</sup>

During the Harlem Renaissance black writers fought against prejudices with the power of the pen despite of all prohibitions. In this sense, Langston Hughes has expressed the African American experiences variety and complexity realistically as far as possible in his jazz poetry. As a source of inspiration in Hughes's spontaneous writing, jazz music is a natural reaction of black experiences and a manifestation of racism. In this context, jazz is a composition of sorrows, resistance and dreams of an equal life. W.E.B Du Bois states in his article “The Souls of Black Folk”:

What are these songs, and what do they mean? I know little of music and can say nothing in technical phrase, but I know something of men, and knowing them, I know that these songs are the articulate message of the slave to the world. They tell us in these eager days that life was joyous to the black slave, careless and happy. I can easily believe this of some, of many. But not all the past South, though it rose from the dead, can gain say the heart-touching witness of these songs. They are the music of an unhappy people, of the children of disappointment; they tell of death and suffering and unvoiced longing toward a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways. (Shaw, 2013: 131)

The aim of this study is to analyze debates during The Harlem Renaissance that centered on how African Americans struggled against inequality and represented their existence in art. Langston Hughes who is one of the pioneers of this struggle, his jazz poetry and Harlem Renaissance will be the main lines of the thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/4221-a-good-poem-is-a-contribution-to-reality-the-world> (Accessed: 10.01.2019).

African American people from all strata especially artists took action during the Harlem Renaissance period and they showed that what they have been able to change with the power of art. Not only will this thesis express existing inequality, injustice and racism against black people but also emphasize how black artist uses literature, music and art in the context of the jazz poetry of Langston Hughes. The jazz poetry of Hughes has different qualities that attracts notice of people who are “unaware” of existence of African Americans.

All changes form in the mind, continue with determination and the effects of this change lasting forever with the art. This thesis shows that jazz poetry does not rewrite racism; rather, it makes hearable the voice of black men for “ the deaf ” in every part of the world.

Deep gratitude goes to my supervisor Assist. Prof. Dr. M.Metin Barlık for his advice, feedback, and useful criticism during the preparation of the thesis. To my beloved wife, Elif Beyde, I would like to express my gratitude for her support and understanding during the writing of this thesis.

Lastly, I want to convey my best regards to all people who work for democracy, equality, and the benefit of humanity.

## CHAPTER I- THE BIOGRAPHY OF LANGSTON HUGHES

### 1.1 Life and Career

Life is a big sea full of many fish. I let down my nets and pull.

(Langston Hughes, Big Sea)

Throughout the history of literature, the words of writers are intertwined with their lives. To analyze works deeply, social background of the period and lives of writers must be scrutinised. Langston Hughes who presents sections from his life in his works, was born in Joplin, Missouri in 1902. Hughes tells context of his poems: “Most of my poems are derived from the life I know” (Hughes, 1940: 694). Because of family problems Hughes’s life is also separated like his mother and father. In his autobiography “Big Sea”, Hughes writes about his family: “I was born in Joplin, Missouri, in 1902, but grew mostly in Lawrence, Kansas. My grandmother raised me until I was twelve years old. Sometimes I was with my mother, but not often. My father and mother were separated” (Hughes, 1940: 13). Most of Hughes’s early childhood which was passed under hard conditions affects his writing:

The beginnings of Hughes’s poetic leanings around the age of fourteen are connected to his mother’s marriage to her second husband, Homer Clark, to Hughes’s new “baby brother,” to World War I, and to his move to Lincoln, Illinois, near Chicago. In Hughes’s telling, his designation as grammar school “Class Poet” is also a result of racial conceptions. (McLaren, 2002: int.)

Hughes experienced the harsh face of racism at very young age. He was forced to travel to a school across town because he was black. So, his mother struggled for finding a preferred school in which Hughes’s journey as a writer was started. Hughes writes about the sacrifices of his mother:

I didn’t want to return to Mexico, but I had a feeling I’d never get any further education if I didn’t, since my mother wanted me to go to work and be, as she put it, “of some use to her.” She demanded to know how I would look going off to college and she there working like a dog! (Hughes, 1940: 53)

His teacher ironically claiming that black people have “rhythm” chose Hughes as the class poet. Rather than denying this stereotype which was asserted by whites, Hughes used it as an opportunity to display his amazing writing talents. He writes about this experience proudly in his autobiography: “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”(Hughes, 1940: 24).

After graduation, Hughes returned to Mexico to spend the summer with his father. On the train trip to Mexico, Hughes wrote a poem entitled “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”. In this poem, Hughes reflects his feelings about his father, history, heritage, and identity as an African Americans:

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. (Hughes, 1940: 54)

### ***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.*

(Rampersad, 1995: 23)

Throughout his life, Langston Hughes did not deny the origins of his culture, on the contrary he has embraced his heritage and searched to find his own identity. In visiting Africa for the first time he says: “My Africa, Motherland of the Negro” (Hughes, 1940: 10). There was not a strong relation between Hughes and his father because Hughes thought that his father had denied the roots of his heritage. He writes in his autobiography: “My father hated Negroes. I think he hated himself, too, for being a Negro” (Hughes, 1940: 40). In his writings, Hughes not only mentioned about racial discrimination between the blacks and whites but also was grieved to note some negroes who are ashamed of their colors or think themselves superior to the other negroes because of the different shades of color and social statuses in his autobiography:

Yet, dark as he was, George always referred to himself as brownskin, and it was not until years later, when a dark-skinned minister in New Jersey denounced me to his congregation for using the word black to describe him in a newspaper article, that I realized that most dark Negroes in America do not like the word black at all. They prefer to be referred to as brownskin, or at the most as dark-brownskin – no matter how dark they really are. (Hughes, 1940: 103)

In this respect, Hughes did not adopt life standards of upper Negroes who underestimated and humiliated workers of Seven Street<sup>2</sup> despite of sharing same heritage. So, Hughes had the title: “the poet laureate of the man in the ghetto street” in *Washington Post* (Champion, 2004: 250).

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<sup>2</sup> Seven Street often known as the “great black way” stood for all that was handsome and best about Harlem. (Wintz, 2004: 5)

As mentioned above, Hughes's main difficulty in his life was facing increasing racial discrimination against black people. Another obstacle for him and other black writers was oppression by the publishing houses. The publishing houses did not allow black writers to write about what they chose. These white-governed publishing houses did not want the world to be aware of the power of words. They expected the black writers to write about issues which whites chose but Hughes resisted this hegemony. Arnold Rampersad states:

Hughes and, no doubt, some other young black writers had no literal desire to be white. Nevertheless, the domination of white poetic standards through the many unquestionably alluring volumes of white verse, backed ultimately by the domination of white culture, effectively made their dilemma forbiddingly close to that of a racial death-wish described by Hughes at the start of the essay. Because his will to solve this conundrum was so strong, however, Langston Hughes progressed where others stagnated. But he progressed only in stages. (Bloom, 2008: 8)

Hughes was aware of the importance of free writing for his people. To defend and bring into question equality and social rights, free publishing houses were an essential part of the democracy struggle. Hughes highlights in his article "Democracy, Negroes, and Writers" :

Negroes, like all other Americans, are being asked at the moment to prepare to defend democracy. But Negroes would very much like to have a little more democracy to defend. And democracy is achieved only through constant vigilance, struggle, and the educational processes of the written and spoken word. For Negro writers it is vital that the channels of free press and publication be kept open. It is necessary to the well-being of the creative soul that the harsh and ugly aspects of our life be exposed to public view in order that they might be changed and remedied in accordance with the democratic ideals for which we are urged to be ready to die. But ideals on paper mean very little. They must be put into practice. Writers must be free to call for and work toward the realization. (Rampersad, 2002: 211)

As time passed by, Hughes and his some contemporaries such as Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Toomer, and Claude McKay became aware of the politics of the whites which did not reflect the real life experiences of Negroes and they acted with this conscious: “the pen is mightier than the sword”<sup>3</sup>. This experience led him to reflect about his perspective and wrote various works about racial issues in his period. He thought that writing one of struggling ways to raise awareness against segregation. His pencil is sharp and fearless that makes him different from other writers in sense of writing about African American experiences. Harold Bloom writes about Hughes: “Hughes’s courage and his persistence made the man more crucial as a representative figure than his intrinsic strength as a writer by itself might have allowed him to have become”(Bloom, 2009: 2) and in “The Negro Artist and The Racial Mountain” Hughes writes: “An artist must be free to choose, certainly, but he must also never be afraid to do what he must choose” (Hughes, 1926). This decision of writing freely resulted in economic problems for Hughes but he did not give up writing about the roots of his culture and he started to read his poems to the public. In his autobiography “I Wonder as I wander” he explains his aim: “I wanted to write seriously and as well as I knew how about the Negro people” (Hughes, 1956: 5). Hughes wrote about the realites about African American people without exaggerating. He explains the contexts of his works and aims of writing in his essay “These Bad New Negroes: A Critique on Critics”:

1. White people will gain a bad impression of Negroes from my poems. This then implies that a Negro artist should create largely for the benefit of and for the approval of white people. In answering this I ask these questions: Does George Bernard Shaw write his plays to show Englishmen how good the Irish are? Do any of the great Russian writers write novels for the purpose of showing the perfections of the Russians? Does any true artist anywhere work for the sake of what a limited group of people will think rather than for the sake of what he himself loves and wishes to interpret?

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<sup>3</sup> “*The pen is mightier than the sword*” is a metonymic adage, coined by English author Edward Bulwer-Lytton in 1839, indicating that communication (particularly written language), or in interpretations, administrative power or advocacy of an independent press, is a more effective tool than direct violence.

It seems to me that there are plenty of propagandists for the Negro, but too few artists, too few poets, too few interpreters and recorders of racial life, whether of the masses or of the best people.

2. My poems are indelicate. But so is life.

3. I write about “harlots and gin-bibers.” But they are human. Solomon, Homer, Shakespeare, and Walt Whitman were not afraid or ashamed to include them.

4. “Red Silk Stockings.” An ironical poem deploring the fact that in certain southern rural communities there is little work for a beautiful colored girl to do other than the selling of her body,—a fact for one to weep over rather than disdain to recognize.

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

6. I am prostituting my talent. But even the income from a very successful book of poems is not worth the prostitution of one’s talent. I make much more money as a bell-hop than as a poet.

7. I deal with low life. But I ask this: Is life among the better classes any cleaner or any more worthy of a poet’s consideration?

8. Blues are not poetry. Those who have made a more thorough study of Negro folk verse than I, and who are authorities in this field, say that many Blues are excellent poetry. I refer to James Weldon Johnson, Dorothy Scarborough, Carl Van Vechten and H. O. Osgood in their published writings.

9. I am “supposed to be representative of Negro progress in the literary arts.” To which I can only answer that I do not pretend, or ask anyone to suppose, that I officially represent anybody or anything other than myself.

My poems are my own personal comments on life and represent me alone. I claim nothing more for them. (Rampersad, 2002: 39-40)

After attracting attention from his performances, Hughes's books were published. In 1925 Hughes's poem "The Weary Blues" won first prize in the *Opportunity* magazine literary competition. His first book of poetry *The Weary Blues* was published in 1926 and after graduation in 1929, he published his first novel *Not Without Laughter*. Hughes has a variety of works such as poems, novels, plays, opera songs, and autobiographies. In *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes* Arnold Rampersad expresses Hughes's talent as a playwright: "Hughes was a master dramatist whose plays alone would earn him a place in African American literary history" (Rampersad, 2002: int.).

As a result of the circumstances of the period, the struggle of Black writers did not remain unresponsive to political issues. So, Hughes tried to balance between policy and art in his works. R. Baxter Miller writes: "He is very much an author for the African American masses and of democrats throughout the world" (Baxter, 1976: 25). Hughes was close to socialist opinion but he did not become a member of any parties. In his autobiography he comments 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. (Hughes, 1956: 122)

Hughes travelled many places throughout the world and this had a great effect on his writing. In the midst of the journey, Hughes became aware of the gaps between blacks and whites in different places and life standards of different cultures. Hughes writes:

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. (Hughes, 1956: 400)

Langston Hughes received many rewards and became popular throughout the world. In 1960 he received the NAACP<sup>4</sup> 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.

Langston Hughes's unique career of writing ended on May 22, 1967 in Polyclinic Hospital because of chronic heart and kidney problems. Throughout his lifes Hughes spoke of difficulties, problems and sorrow times ironically. In his last poem "Wake" Hughes shows his last humor and tenacious of his spirit:

*Tell all my mourners*

*To mourn in red-*

*Cause there ain't no sense*

*In my bein' dead.* (Rampersad, 1995: 250)

Overcoming stereotypes and prejudices was a very difficult task for an African American writer in the twentieth century. The only way to hold on to life and shout the injustice was by using power of the words for African American people who had not equal the right to life in every part of social order and were exposed to racist oppressions. Langston Hughes did not hide the faults of the black man but attempted to reflect the real picture of the ghetto streets.

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<sup>4</sup> Founded in 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was one of the earliest and most influential civil rights organization in the United States.

In this context, Langston Hughes was one of the inspirational and persistent African American writer in the twentieth century who believed that the real representative of Negroes is reflection of the black soul. His poem “The Proem” symbolizes this soul:

*I am a Negro:*

*Black as the night is black,*

*Black like the depths of my Africa.*

*I've been a slave:*

*Caesar told me to keep his door-steps dean.*

*I brushed the boots of Washington.*

*I've been a worker:*

*Under my hands the pyramids arose.*

*I made mortar for the Woolworth Building.*

*I've been a singer:*

*All the way from Africa to Georgia*

*I carried my sorrow songs.*

*I made ragtime.*

*I've been a victim:*

*The Belgians cut off my hands in the Congo.*

*They lynch me now in Texas.*

*I am a Negro:*

*Black as the night is black,*

*Black like the depths of my Africa.*

(Rampersad, 1995: 24)

## CHAPTER II- HARLEM RENAISSANCE

Making a description of any movement limits its content, but analysing its aims and its origins leads to a deep understanding about the movement that constitutes the main lines of this chapter. Being one of pioneer writers of uprising African-American literature Langston Hughes who wrote essays, short stories, plays, and novel, is known for bringing about revival of the poetry of Black Americans in the 1920s which is described as Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Age or New Negro Movement. The Harlem Renaissance is the most remarkable movement for revival of the Black culture which consisted of theatre, art, music, and literature works. The Harlem Renaissance is a position of art, literature and music against social, political and cultural inequalities. The Renaissance is associated with African-American musical folklore, so this period is also called as Jazz Age. The emergency of Harlem Renaissance is a necessity of conditions of the period linked with social and political thought. In this part of the thesis, the Harlem Renaissance will be analysed through many aspects such as place, economic and social changes, cultural differences.

Economic and social changes in white society were the key factors in the emergence of the Harlem Renaissance. Booker T. Washington who was adviser to the presidents of United States set up a program centered on economic nationalism. His ideas were based on black and white Americans remaining “separate as the fingers but United as the fist<sup>5</sup>”.

W.E.B Du Bois who was one of the co-founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909 constituted his own anti-thesis. He defended the same idea of group economy but had further demands for blacks as equality for all blacks from different stratas.

Being a black writer meant making sacrifices for their heritage because being a writer did not earn money to the writers of the Harlem Renaissance.

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted from Booker T. Washington Delivers the 1895 Atlanta Compromise Speech.

Hughes's father wanted to persuade him to be a businessman but his real desire was to be a writer. In the following conversation Hughes expresses his real desire in dealing with his heritage:

"What do you want to be?"

"I don't know. But I think a writer."

"A writer?" my father said. "A writer?"

Do you think they make money? ... Learn something you can make a living from anywhere in the world, in Europe or South America, and don't stay in the States, where you have to live like a nigger with niggers." "But I like Negroes," I said. (Hughes, 1940: 61-62)

Most of the black literature was written in the Romanticist tradition which was shaped by Victorian ideals which made it difficult to create their own literature identity for Afro-American identity. Warrington Hudlin mentions about this force: "Their black experience was considered a plague from which they wished to escape. Having ignored the depth of their own experience, they wrote escapist literature that was usually shallow and artificial"(Bloom, 2004: 7). African American writers wanted to express the world separation, assimilation and desired of creating a new perspective of themselves which led to a "New Negro". They did not describe whites as all bad or all good but they gave a priority to their own relations with whites.

The relationship between Harlem writers and white highbrows can be analysed on two sides: First, white highbrows opened a door for black writers in the sense of using their experience about literature and publishing. Second, these highbrows had different motivation than black writers. The white highbrows evaluated works of black writers as just exotic stories which attract the interest of white people. This perspective can be linked with orientalism<sup>6</sup> in which the lives and cultures of East are seen as exotic by those from Western Literature. Langston Hughes expressed this in *Fighting Words*;

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<sup>6</sup> Orientalism is the study of Near and Far Eastern societies and cultures, languages, and peoples by Western scholars. It can also refer to the imitation or depiction of aspects of Eastern cultures in the West by writers, designers, and artists.

Here are our problems; in the first place, Negro books are considered by editors and publishers as exotic. Negro materials are placed, like Chinese materials or Bali materials into certain classifications. Magazine editors tell you, 'we can use but so many Negro stories a year.' (That 'so many' meaning very few). Publishers will say, 'We already have one Negro novel on our list this fall.' When we cease to be exotic, we do not sell well. (Rampersad, 2002: 203)

Analysing of Harlem Renaissance without having information about lives of blacks and streets of Harlem would block to see the big picture. Alain Locke mentions the importance of the place:

The Negro today wishes to be known for what he is, even in his faults and shortcomings .... The pulse of the Negro world has begun to beat in Harlem .... Our greatest rehabilitation may possibly come through such channels, but for the present, more immediate hope rests in the revaluation by white and black alike of the Negro in terms of his artistic endowments and cultural contributions, not only in his folk-art, music especially, which has always found appreciation, but in larger, though humbler and less acknowledged ways .... A second crop of the Negro's gifts promises still more largely. He now becomes a conscious contributor and lays aside the status of a beneficiary and ward for that of a collaborator and participant in American civilization. The great social gain in this is the releasing of our talented group from the arid fields of controversy and debate to the productive fields of creative expression. (Bloom, 2004: 14)

The main works of Harlem Renaissance literature are jazz, free verse, depictions of African American life with satire, history and folklore which are written by Hughes's contemporaries such as Claude McKay, Jean Tommer, Countee Cullen, Jessie Fauser, Larsen Eric Walronnd, Rudolph Fisher, Gwendolyn Benner, Arna Bontemps, Wills Richardson, Helene Johnson, and Zora Neale Hurston.

It is inarguable that this period is an awakening for the black community but ignores the female writers because of periodization and hierarchy of colonial forms.

The female writers had double handicaps in comparison to men with the sense of their black heritage and being woman. Determination of women writers and their esthetic perspectives are very valuable for the history of Renaissance and in a literary sense. Harold Bloom expresses:

Without a successful capture, Without women writers, the Harlem Renaissance would have been a bleaker place. Though not blindingly vivid, the color they added completed the total spectrum. Not only did women play their usual and some additional special roles, but the work that they produced clearly—if sometimes “slantwise”—embodied the female half of human experience and swelled the ranks of the New Negro artists. Poetry, in particular, would have suffered had they not been writing. (Bloom, 2004: 94)

Black women writers were able to show their skills in the song lyrics because of gender-class literary. Critic Barbara Christian expresses:

It might be said that the genuine poetry of the black woman appeared not in literature but in the lyrics of blues singers like Bessie Smith... Perhaps because the blues was seen as “race music” and catered to a black audience, black women were better able to articulate themselves as individuals and as part of a racial group in that art form. (Bloom, 2004: 88)

Being an American Negro writer is an imposed dilemma for the black writers. The works of the black writers are restricted with the terminology of identity. Hughes mentions about this dilemma in his essay “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain”: “But this is the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America—this urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible” (Hughes, 1926)

According to Hughes, a writer must fight to maintain his objectivity and artistic vision without force. In speech, Hughes advised his fellow black writers:

“Step outside yourself, then look back— and you will see how human, yet how beautiful and black you are. How very black—even when you’re integrated.”<sup>7</sup> Despite the fact that the works of the Harlem Renaissance were under the influence of forces and prejudices, black writers were able to reflect their real perspective instinctively. In “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” Hughes expresses the motivation of Negroes;

It is the duty of the younger Negro artist if he accepts any duties at all from outsiders, to change through the force of his art that old whispering ‘I want to be white’ hidden in the aspirations of his people, to ‘Why should I want to be white? I am a Negro—and beautiful! (Hughes, 1926)

The thoughts and experiences of a writer must be represented freely without the expectations of blacks and whites. In Hughes’s poetry the main factor is based on the existing of blackness. Musical idioms, jazz rhythms, and manifestos are based on existing of blackness;

*I am a Negro*

*Black as the night is black*

*Black like the depths of my Africa. (Rampersad, 1995: 24)*

The reason why Hughes is an important figure in the Harlem Renaissance is because his ideas are based on a community not an individual. In “As I Grew Older” his black hands represent his community:

*My hands!*

*My dark hands!*

*Break through the wall!*

*Find my dream!*

*Help me to shatter this darkness,*

*To smash this night,*

*To break this shadow*

*Into a thousand lights of sun,*

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/01/langston-hughes-showed-me-black-writer> (Accessed: 10.03.2018).

*Into a thousand whirling dreams  
Of sun!*

(Rampersad, 1995: 93)

Hughes reflects uniqueness and various characteristics of his black culture instead of spreading despair about the existing conditions. Hughes and W.E.B Du Bois support same idea which expresses richness of black culture. The relationship between Hughes and W.E.B Du Bois is important for black culture because they raise awareness of black people and whites. In his essay “The Negro in Literature and Art” Du Bois notices the power of blacks: “Never in the world has a richer mass of material been accumulated by a people than that which the Negroes possess today and are becoming conscious of. Slowly but surely they are developing artists of technic who will be able to use this material” (Du Bois, 1913). Du Bois represents the Harlem Renaissance as the inner world of blacks and shows the reflections of black creativity in the literature, music and art.

Identity dilemma which was experienced during the Renaissance became the basis dynamic of Hughes’s poetry. African American people experienced all kinds of pressure and inequality during this period but Hughes’s attitude towards whites became different than expected. In “The White Ones” Hughes does not criticize all whites but he speaks directly to strong ones:

*I do not hate you,  
For your faces are beautiful, too.  
I do not hate you,  
Your faces are whirling lights of loveliness and splendor,  
too.  
Yet why do you torture me,  
O, white strong ones,  
Why do you torture me? (Rampersad, 1995: 106)*

Martin Luther King made a speech “I Have a Dream” which is very important for all black people. This speech symbolizes freedom of blacks and equal rights for everyone. The first steps of this dream were taken during the Harlem Renaissance by Langston Hughes and his contemporaries. Hughes put into words his ideal America in his poem “ America.” in 1925:

*America is seeking the stars,  
America is seeking tomorrow,  
You are America,  
I am America America—the dream,  
America—the vision. America—the star-seeking I.  
You of the blue eyes  
And the blond hair,  
I of the dark eyes And the crinkly hair,  
You and I Offering hands ...*

(Rampersad, 1995: 52)

African American writers were aware that they were not accepted as real participations of America, but this rejection allowed them to have a deeper perspective in racial matters. This period showed a light in the darkness for blacks. The works of the Harlem Renaissance are like holding a bough in marsh. Determination and persistence of writers against all kinds of difficulties provided them a motivation for their works. In “The Negro Artist and The Racial Mountain” Hughes explains intentions of Harlem writers:

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. (Hughes, 1926)

Hughes mentions his sources of motivation in his autobiography: . “My best poems were all written when I felt the worst. When I was happy, I didn’t write anything” (Bloom, 2004: 49). The natural source of inspiration of black writers was restricted with undesired pressures. The sources of works in the Harlem Renaissance are black rhythms, origins of the black culture, and black dialect.



## CHAPTER III- JAZZ POETRY

### 3.1. As a cultural part of Black Culture: Jazz Music

“If you have to ask what jazz is, you'll never know.”

Louis Armstrong

Jazz is not just a music genre for black people who live in America. Jazz is a manifestation of inequality, racism, alienation, and free voice of real identities. In “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” Hughes writes about the importance of jazz for black people who are not from the upper class: “These common people are not afraid of spirituals, as for a long time their more intellectual brethern were, and jazz is their child” (Hughes, 1926). In “Lullaby” which is about relationship a black woman has with her baby, Hughes writes that even the subject of lullabies are about the songs. So, we can say that African Americans are born with music.

*My little dark baby,  
My little earth-thing,  
My little love-one,  
What shall I sing  
For your lullaby?  
Stars,  
Stars,  
A necklace of stars  
Winding the night.  
My little black baby,  
My dark body's baby,  
What shall I sing  
For your lullaby?  
Moon,  
Moon,*

*Great diamond moon,  
Kissing the night.  
Oh, little dark baby,  
Night black baby,  
Stars, stars,  
Moon,  
Night stars,  
Moon,  
For your sleep-song lullaby.*

(Rampersad, 1995: 54)

The key elements of black culture are represented in jazz music. Lawrence Levine expresses the potentiality of jazz music: “free of its repressions”(Levine, 2007: 293). Langston Hughes states jazz is the representation vehicle in “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain”: “[o]ne of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America: the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul –the tom-tom<sup>8</sup> of revolt against weariness in a white world” (Hughes, 1926). The roots of jazz belongs to America and development of blues folk music is directly created by Africans brought to America as slaves. African people who were worked as slaves under the hard working conditions signed blues together to gain resistance and to emphasizes their identities. Ralph Ellison’ jazz definiton in “The Charlie Christian Story” proves this: “Each true jazz moment...each solo flight, or improvisation represents...a definition of identity, as member of the collectivity and as a link in the chain of tradition” (Werner, 2006: 234).

New Orleans has social diversity such as European, African, Catholic, Protestant, and Non Christian which are the sources of jazz context. Jazz music is like a communication among these creole communities which are consisted of racial mixing between European and non European people. Emergence of jazz music is not dependent upon pure entertainment but result from existing conditions.

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<sup>8</sup> In African folklore, the tom-tom is not only a musical instrument, but also a communication device that transmits messages through encoded rhythmic structures.

Jazz music is reflection of unheard experiences and cultural components of black people, so jazz musicians are accepted as innovators and inventors. According to Jack Wheaton: “An innovator’s job is not to entertain, but rather, to make the listener aware and to force the audience to confront often disturbing realities and hidden truths about themselves, their society and their world” (Wheaton, 1994: 143).

Stereotypes, prejudices, and prohibitions prevented black folks from entering the mainstream of American life. They struggled to find their own identity through the music, life styles, and culture which are special to black community. Jazz is one of the most significant factors of this struggle. The inspirational source of jazz music is emotions drawn from hopes, sorrows, pains, joys, and angers of black people. Hughes states: “Jazz is a great big sea. It washes up all kinds of fish and shells and spume and waves with a steady old beat, or off-beat” (Hughes, 1940: 213). In a word, jazz is life itself for blacks. Martin Luther King expresses: “Jazz speaks for life. The Blues tell the story of life's difficulties, and if you think for a moment, you will realize that they take the hardest realities of life and put them into music, only to come out with some new hope or sense of triumph”.<sup>9</sup> The roots of jazz music cannot be understood without analysing the experiences of black people in the sense of racism and inequality. Ira Gitler states that: “Jazz was not a music; it was a social force in this country, and it was talking about freedom and people enjoying things for what they are and not having to worry about whether they were supposed to be white, black and all this stuff. Jazz has always been the music that had this kind of spirit” (O’Meally, 1995: 44). Jazz listeners are not only black folks but also whites who listen to and enjoy jazz music. So, whites started to understand that black people have their own differences and accepted blacks as the human beings that they are. In this sense, jazz led to a significant changes in American history as a gap between blacks and whites. Martin Luther Kings expresses that: “... And now, Jazz is exported to the world. For in the particular struggle of the Negro in America there is something akin to the universal struggle of modern man.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://jazzineurope.mfmmedia.nl/2019/01/martin-luther-king-at-the-berlin-jazz-fest-in-1964/> (Accessed: 10.01.2019).

Everybody has the Blues. Everybody longs for meaning. Everybody needs to love and be loved. Everybody needs to clap hands and be happy. Everybody longs for faith”<sup>10</sup>

As jazz music became popular, it was accepted as the symbol of new age by many Americans. Charles Nanry states: “jazz as a child of the new order uniquely represents both its own development as an art and, at the same time, reflects the eclectic coming-of-age of all of America”(Nanry, 1979: 149). This spreading of jazz to a larger audience through radio broadcasts also became a threat for many American critics. They argued that jazz has negative impacts on traditional American values of morality and they based on this criticism jazz’ relationship to sex, drug and alcohol. There were many unfair comments about jazz music in newspapers as jazz kills the people and it promotes lust and bohemia. John Philips Sousa who was an American composer took up a position: “Jazz will endure just as long people hear it through their feet instead of their brains”<sup>11</sup>. Another criticism is that jazz is accepted as primitive by some white musicians and art critics. In a *New York Times* article in 1922, Dr. E. Elliot Rawlins expresses bad effects of jazz music:

Jazz is killing some people; some are going insane; others are losing their religion. The young girls and boys, who constantly take jazz every day and night, are becoming absolutely bad, and some criminals. Jazz [...] should not be used by the very young, or in copious amounts by the old. Jazz, like any other drug, should be used only when needed, in a specific dose, and by those who know how it should be used. A little jazz is all right an proper; an overdose is harmful. (Rawlins, 1922)

In fact these criticisms can be seen as a strategy for people who are against development of jazz. The main aim is preventing development of jazz and determining its frame. These critisms have no basic foundation because of diverse context of jazz music.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.apassion4jazz.net/martin-luther-king-on-jazz.html> (Accessed: 10.01.2019).

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/1978/01/22/archives/connecticut-weekly-music-john-philip-sousa-on-the-march.html> (Accessed: 10.01.2019).

Some jazz musicians continued to perform their art by not objecting to unfair criticisms on the contrary accepting them as diversity of jazz but some other jazz musicians as Duke Ellington defends that the context of jazz is not only about race issues but also about inner worlds of people.

Jazz is a symbol of black people as a connector with the modern world. As jazz became more widespread, black people got closer to the American dream. In this sense, jazz musicians have a responsibility which is promoting African American culture and showing diverse extent of jazz music like spiritual hymns because musicians, writers and poets are conscious of importance of jazz for political and social issues. White and black communities were able to have a common sense by means of music. Jazz musicians like James Reese Europe performed jazz music abroad that contributed to widespread effects of jazz music and changing social positions of African Americans. An article from the *Chicago Defender* states: “James Reese Europe has the white man’s ear because he is giving the white man something new. He is meeting a popular demand in catering to this love of syncopated music he is jazzing away the barriers of prejudice”.<sup>12</sup>

In conclusion, jazz has many factors to be analyzed in separated issues such as racial equality, social norms, and cultural aspects. In his essay, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” Hughes expresses the function of jazz:

... let the blare of Negro jazz bands and the bellowing voice of Bessie Smith singing the Blues penetrate the closed ears of the colored near intellectuals until they listen and perhaps understand” and [...] “cause the smug Negro middle class turn from their white, respectable, ordinary books and papers to catch a glimmer of their own beauty. (Hughes, 1926)

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<sup>12</sup> <https://jerryjazzmusician.com/2014/07/jazzing-away-prejudice/> (Accessed 10.01.2019).

### 3.2. Music and Poetry: The Jazz Poetry of Langston Hughes

“Like the waves of the sea coming one after another, always one after another, like the earth moving around the sun, night, day—night, day—night, day—forever, so is the undertow of black music with its rhythm that never betrays you, its strength like the beat of the human heart, its humor, and its rooted power” (Hughes, *The Big Sea*).

Art has been manifesto of experiences, sorrows, and happiness throughout the human history. Societies use their own representation styles via the art. Houston A. Baker states: “Both the literary and cultural investigator must, in their own way, strive to interpret the manifestations of a culture in accordance with the unique, richly symbolic, and meaningful contexts within which such manifestations achieve their effects”(Marcoux, 2009: 5). Music, painting, literature, and the other art forms are linked to each other strongly. In particular, the relationship between literature and music is stronger than the other art forms. Jean Paul Richter emphasizes this relation: “Music is the poetry of air”<sup>13</sup>. Also Hughes states: “Poems employ rhythm, often rhyme. These two devices help greatly to fix in the mind what is being said. Long after school days are passed, a line or two, or a verse of poetry learned and loved will remain in the memory” (Rampersad, 2002: 319).

*To make words sing  
Is a wonderful thing—  
Because in a song  
Words last so long.*

(Rampersad, 1995: 602)

Undoubtedly black poetry can not be analyzed deeply without dealing with jazz music elements. The elements which constitutes jazz poetry are work songs, shouts, and ballads of black people who lived under American slavery. Jazz poetry is expressing of Black aesthetic integrated with music elements.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/292579-music-is-the-poetry-of-the-air> (Accessed: 01.03.2019).

Denying white hegemony and presenting elements special to black culture underlie this aesthetic. In this sense, main aim is to provide a dynamic poetry language by using jazz elements. sayings, writings, and daily languages of black people consist of rhythms and harmony like drums. John Miller Chernoff states that:

There are two reasons why Africans can talk with their drums. First, African languages are what are called “tonal” languages. In tonal languages, the pitch of a spoken word is important in determining its meaning, and the “same” sound pronounced at different pitches can mean entirely different things. Second, a drum is not just an instrument to play rhythms: it plays a melody. By using two drums or by striking a drum in different ways, a drummer can duplicate the speech patterns of his language: African music is derived from language. (Marcoux, 2009: 75)

Analysing of jazz poetry in terms of structural elements such as rhyme, scheme and meter is not one of main aims of this study, but it is necessary to explain differences between jazz and blues poetry. Jazz and blues poetry have similarities but in terms of structure there are some differences between them. Jemie Onwuchekwa explains this difference in the poetry:

Unlike classic blues, the blues poem has no fixed form: it is a species of free verse which attempts to approximate some of the qualities of jazz. The dynamic energy of jazz is to be contrasted with the relatively low-keyed and generally elegiac tone of the blues. Blues is for the most part vocal and mellow, jazz for the most part instrumental and aggressive. The jazz poem attempts to capture that instrumental vigor. [...] Jazz poetry [...] moves with the bouncy rhythms and exuberance that characterize the music. (Bloom, 2008: 61)

Literature, history, and music are integrated into the jazz poetry of Langston Hughes. Hughes represents the first examples of jazz poetry which are verified by many critics. According to one of these critics Barry Wallenstein: “Langston Hughes (...) blazed the trail for jazz poets who would follow. All of his verse expresses the influence of the American music that was growing up simultaneously with him” (Wallenstein, 1991: 603). Hughes expresses the origin of poetry is rhythm:

Poetry is rhythm--and, through rhythm, has its roots deep in the nature of the universe; the rhythms of the stars, the rhythm of the earth moving around the sun, of day, of night, of the seasons, of the sowing and the harvest, of fecundity and birth. The rhythms of poetry give continuity and pattern to words, to thoughts, strengthening them, adding the qualities of permanence, and relating the written word to the vast rhythms of life. (Rampersad, 2002: 47)

Langston Hughes's poem "The Weary Blues" is one of the best examples of jazz poetry which is written in free verse with an irregular scheme. The structure of this poetry is in natural harmony with musical elements. The poem which is performed by individuals expresses the loneliness of the sorrowful, deep pains, and melancholic atmosphere of black soul. Also, it reflects the complicated emotions with opposite words like writing laughing, crying, the weariness, and entertainment in the same poem is another feature of the jazz poetry.

*Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,  
Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,  
I heard a Negro play.  
Down on Lenox Avenue the other night  
By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light  
He did a lazy sway. . . .  
He did a lazy sway. . . .  
To the tune o' those Weary Blues.  
With his ebony hands on each ivory key  
He made that poor piano moan with melody.  
O Blues!  
Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool  
He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool.  
Sweet Blues!  
Coming from a black man's soul.  
O Blues!  
In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone  
I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan—*



*“Ain’t got nobody in all this world,  
Ain’t got nobody but ma self.  
I’s gwine to quit ma frownin’  
And put ma troubles on the shelf.”  
Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor.  
He played a few chords then he sang some more—  
“I got the Weary Blues  
And I can’t be satisfied.  
Got the Weary Blues  
And can’t be satisfied—  
I ain’t happy no mo’  
And I wish that I had died.”  
And far into the night he crooned that tune.  
The stars went out and so did the moon.  
The singer stopped playing and went to bed  
While the Weary Blues echoed through his head.  
He slept like a rock or a man that’s dead.*

(Rampersad, 1995: 50)

The contributions of Langston Hughes to African American music occur in a several ways: First, as a writer of lyrics for songs to support of worker rights in 1930s and second, as a writer of lyrics for musical reviews, third as a libretto for opera and finally as a poet of art song settings. In 1930, he wrote the lyrics for the workers entitled “Park Bench” that was published as a poem in Hughes 1938 Collection *A New Song*:

*I live on a park bench.  
You, Park Avenue.  
Hell of a distance  
Between us two.  
I beg a dime for dinner-  
You got a butler and maid.*

*But I'm wakin' up!  
Say, ain't you afraid  
That I might, just maybe,  
In a year or two,  
Move on over  
To Park Avenue?*

(Rampersad, 1995: 49)

The language of jazz poetry is vernacular which reacts to culture of racism and oppressions in America. The poem by Langston Hughes, "Is It True?" describes unknown black vernacular:

*FROM THE SHADOWS OF THE QUARTER  
SHOUTS ARE WHISPERS CARRYING  
TO THE FARTHEST CORNERS SOMETIMES  
OF THE NOW KNOWN WORLD  
UNDECIPHERED AND UNLETTERED  
UNCODIFIED UNPARSED  
IN TONGUES UNANALYZED UNECHOED  
UNTAKEN DOWN ON TAPE –  
NOT EVEN FOLKWAYS CAPTURED  
BY MOE ASCH OR ALAN LOMAX  
NOT YET ON SAFARI. (Rampersad 507)*

This poem is a reflection of this experience: surviving under pressure and coming to light by denying to place in a narrow frame. "SHOUTS" used in jazz poems of Hughes is a symbol of surviving in African ritual. "SHOUTS" are carriers of vernacular language, culture, sorrows, music of unknown (black) people to the known world.

“In Ask Your Mama” Hughes revives the cultural memory:

*GRANDPA, DID YOU HEAR THE  
HEAR THE OLD FOLKS SAY HOW  
HOW TALL THE CANE GREW  
SAY HOW WHITE THE COTTON COTTON  
SPEAK OF RICE DOWN IN THE MARSHLAND  
SPEAK OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS'S BEARD  
AND JOHN BROWN'S WHITE AND LONGER  
LINCOLN'S LIKE A CLOTHESBRUSH  
AND HOW SOJOURNER HOW SOJOURNER  
TO PROVE SHE WAS A WOMAN WOMAN  
BARED HER BOSOMS, BARED IN PUBLIC  
TO PROVE SHE WAS A WOMAN?  
WHAT SHE SAID ABOUT HER CHILDREN  
ALL SOLD DOWN THE RIVERS.  
I LOOK AT THE STARS,  
AND THEY LOOK AT THE STARS,  
AND THEY WONDER WHERE I BE  
AND I WONDER WHERE THEY BE.  
STARS AT STARS STARS....  
TOURÉ DOWN IN GUINEA  
LUMUMBA IN THE CONGO  
JOMO IN KENYATTA... STARS... STARS.*

(Rampersad, 1995: 517)

In spite of the pressure of slavery and superiority of whites which is told as “SPEAK OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS’S BEARD/AND JOHN BROWN’S WHITE AND LONGER” in the poem, Hughes keeps on saying hope of his people: “I LOOK AT THE STARS/ AND THEY LOOK AT THE STARS”.

Jazz poetry allows to poet to write spontaneously which provides a basis to write freely. Hughes writes most of his jazz poems as a form of the Blues: “The blues poems I would often make up in my head and sing on the way to work.” (Rampersad, 2002: 217). During unbearable times for an African American poet, Hughes prefers to lose himself in rhythms of jazz and writes his jazz poetry. Hughes reflects his intensity of emotion in jazz: “For my best poems were when I felt the worst”(Rampoersad, 2002: 54). In the last stanza of “The Weary Blues”, Hughes tells inspiration of blues poetry:

*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!* (Rampersad, 1995: 225)

The important characteristics of Jazz Poetry is using “I” subject irruptively. The reason is that poet writes his personal experiences reflecting the whole community. So the subject “I” can symbolize African Americans. Henry Trownسد, a musician reflecting his personal feelings, states: “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, ...”(Charter, 2019: 8). The poem “I, Too, Sing America” is the best example of using “I” subject as a symbol for the black:

*I, too, sing America.  
I am the darker brother.  
They send me to eat in the kitchen  
When company comes,  
But I laugh,*

*And eat well,  
And grow strong.  
Tomorrow,  
I'll be at the table  
When company comes.  
Nobody'll dare  
Say to me,  
"Eat in the kitchen,"  
Then.  
Besides,  
They'll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed—  
I, too, am America.*

(Rampersad, 1995: 46)

Jazz poetry consists of sorrow and joy by integrating social injustices, economic difficulties with the sound of jazz. Hughes explains:

To modify a line from an old blues, this means that poetry possess [the] power of worriation. Poetry can both delight and disturb. It can interest folks. It can upset folks. Poetry can convey both pleasure and pain. And poetry can make people think. If poetry makes people think, it might make them think constructive thoughts, even thoughts about how to change themselves, their town and their state for the better. Some poems, like many of the great verses in the Bible, can make people think about changing all mankind, even the whole world. Poems, like prayers, possess power. (Rampersad, 2002: 67)

Hughes believes that the power of words are very strong when combined with music. So, he uses inspiring words to make people believe and struggle in his poetry. Black people meet on common ground with jazz poetry. In the poem "Sun Song" Hughes remarks about the unifying influence of jazz poetry on black people:

*Sun and softness,  
Sun and the beaten hardness of the earth,  
Sun and the song of all the sun-stars  
Gathered together-  
Dark ones of Africa  
I bring you my songs  
To sing on the Georgia Roads.*

(Rampersad, 1995: 122)

He knows that dangerous words which are used to make people hopeless can have negative impacts on lives of black people. In his poem “Sliver” he expresses potential of words:

*Cheap little rhymes  
A cheap little tune  
Are sometimes as dangerous  
As a sliver of the moon.  
A cheap little tune To cheap little rhymes  
Can cut a man's  
Throat sometimes.*

(Rampersad, 1995: 425)

In his jazz poems Hughes expresses the real potential of black people which is different from imposed features. Jazz music is like a breath or is like a bough in march to cling. Jazz songs are source of inspiration and poems are main items of the songs. So the subject of jazz poems is life itself for black writers. Hughes writes:

These common people are not afraid of spirituals, as for a long time their more intellectual brethren were, and jazz is their child. They furnish a wealth of colorful, distinctive material for any artist because they still hold their own individuality in the face of American standardizations.

And perhaps these common people will give the world its truly great Negro artist, the one who is not afraid to be himself. (Hughes, 1926)

In terms of Hughes's poems reflection on social realities, they can be accepted as documentaries or historical documents. Hughes played a role of griot<sup>14</sup> as a writer. He explains this role: "I do feel I am, I guess, what you might call 'a documentary poet. I kinda document the happenings of our time in relation to myself and my own people and of course, our democracy'"(Bloom, 2008: 4). In this context, the poem "Note on Commercial Theatre" refers to exploiting of black culture by white hegemony. In fact, this poem can be accepted as manifestation of secret admiration for black culture.

*You've taken my blues and gone —  
You sing 'em on Broadway  
And you sing 'em in Hollywood Bowl,  
And you mixed 'em up with symphonies  
And you fixed 'em  
So they don't sound like me.  
Yep, you done taken my blues and gone.  
You also took my spirituals and gone.  
You put me in Macbeth and Carmen Jones  
And all kinds of Swing Mikados*

*And in everything but what's about me —  
But someday somebody'll  
Stand up and talk about me,  
And write about me —  
Black and beautiful —  
And sing about me,  
And put on plays about me!*

---

<sup>14</sup>A member of a hereditary caste among the people of western Africa whose function is to keep an oral history of the tribe or village and to entertain with stories and poems.

*I reckon it'll be  
Me myself!  
Yes, it'll be me.*

(Rampersad, 1995: 215)

As stated previously jazz poetry is like the picture of African American people that consisted of possibilities as discrimination between blacks and whites. Hughes writes real potential of his people proudly in his poem “Me and My Song”:

*Black  
As the gentle night  
Black  
As the kind and quiet night  
Black  
As the deep productive earth  
Body Out of Africa  
Strong and black  
As Iron First smelted in Africa  
Song  
Out of Africa  
Deep and mellow song  
Rich  
As the black earth  
Strong  
As black iron  
Kind  
As the black night  
My song  
From the dark lips Of Africa  
Deep  
As the rich earth*

*Beautiful*  
*As the black night*  
*Strong*  
*As the first iron*  
*Black*  
*Out of Africa*  
*Me and my Song.*

(Rampersad, 1995: 296)

The context of jazz poetry reflects the dilemmas of black people. Struggle to live or to accept death by giving up. Hughes also thought about giving up one period of his life:

One day, when there was no one in the house but me, I put the pistol to my head and held it there, loaded, a long time, and wondered if I would be any happier if I were to pull the trigger. But then, I began to think, if I do, I might miss something. I haven't been to the ranch yet, nor to the top of the volcano, nor to the bullfights in Mexico, nor graduated from high school, nor got married. So I put the pistol down and went back-to my bookkeeping. (Hughes, 1940: 47)

In this context, themes, metaphors like “black laughter”, “sun’s settin’”, and ironies in jazz poetry reflect melancholy soul of black poeple:

*Hey!*  
*Hey!*  
*Sun's a settin',*  
*This is what I'm gonna sing.*  
*Sun's a settin',*  
*This is what I'm gonna sing:*  
*I feels de blues a comin',*  
*Wonder what de blues'll bring?*  
*Hey! Hey!*  
*Sun's a risin',*  
*This is gonna be ma song.*  
*Sun's a risin',*

*This is gonna be ma song.*

*I could be blue but I been blue all night long.*

(Rampersad, 1995: 112)

According to Hughes who wrote his poems for the public, the poem must be read loudly to attract notice of distorted facts. He writes in “Shakespeare in Harlem” : “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” (Bloom, 20018: 3) His audience is consisted of people from all strata. In “Laughs” he refers to this variety:

*Dream singers,*

*Story tellers,*

*Dancers,*

*Loud laughs in the hands of Fate-*

*My people.*

*Dish-washers,*

*Elevator-boys,*

*Ladies' maids,*

*Crap-shooters,*

*Cooks,*

*Waiters,*

*Jazzers,*

*Nurses of babies,*

*Loaders of ships,*

*Rounders,*

*Number writers,*

*Comedians in vaudeville*

*And band-men in circuses-*

*Dream-singers all,-*

*My people.*

*Story-tellers all,-*

*My people.  
Dancers-  
God! What singers!  
Singers and dancers.  
Dancers and laughers. Laughers?  
Yes, laughers... laughers... laughers-  
Loud-mouthid laughers in the hands Of Fate.*

(Rampersad, 1995: 27)

His poem “Silence” shows deep communication between the writer and his people:



*I catch the pattern  
Of your silence  
Before you speak  
I do not need  
To hear a word.  
In your silence  
Every tone I seek Is heard.*

(Rampersad, 1995: 234)

Hughes was criticised because of writing people of middle class but he did not give up writing values and live conditions of his people. In his autobiography Hughes refers to these critics:

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

So I didn't pay any attention to the critics who railed against the subject matter of my poems, nor did I write them protesting letters, nor in any way attempt to defend my book. (Hughes, 1940: 267-268)

Dance and music are indispensable in all fields of African Americans' lives. Hughes deals with many issues such as freedom, equality, and ordinary life of blacks by referring to jazz elements in his poems. In "Dream Variations" the speaker reflects his self expression by using dream as a metaphor:



*To fling my arms wide  
In some place of the sun,  
To whirl and to dance  
Till the white day is done.  
Then rest at cool evening  
Beneath a tall tree  
While night comes on gently,  
Dark like me,-  
That is my dream!  
To fling my arms wide  
In the face of the sun,  
Dance! Whirl! Whirl!  
Till the quick day is done.  
Rest at pale evening...  
A tall, slim tree...  
Night coming tenderly  
Black like me.*

(Rampersad, 1995: 40)

Hughes also wrote poems about the pains and hard life conditions of the black woman and her dignified struggle in his later poems. "Troubled Woman" is one of examples of these poems:

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

(Rampersad, 1995: 42)

Blues songs are the language of despair, slavery and surviving. It is the common voice that shouts, whimpers and beats the same soul In “Misery” Hughes writes the function of blues song for the black woman:

*Play de blues for me.  
Play de blues for me.  
No other music  
'Ll ease ma misery.  
Sing a soothin' song.  
Said a soothin' song,  
Cause de man  
I love's done  
Done me wrong.  
Can't you understand,  
O, understand  
A good woman's cryin'  
For a no-good man?  
Black gal like me,  
Black gal like me*

*'S got to hear a blues*

*For her misery. (Rampersad, 1995: 77)*

African American people have carpe diem soul which is reflected jazz music and jazz poetry. In Hughes's poem "Harlem Night Club" shows cabaret nights of black people who enjoy jazz music regardless of color skin:

*Sleek black boys in a cabaret.*

*Jazz-band, jazz-band,-*

*Play, play, PLAY!*

*Tomorrow... who knows?*

*Dance today!*

*White girls eyes*

*Call gay black boys.*

*Black boys' lips*

*Grin jungle joys.*

*Dark brown girls*

*In blond men's arms.*

*Jazz-band, jazz-band,-*

*Sing Eve's charms!*

*White ones, brown ones,*

*What do you know*

*About tomorrow*

*Where all paths go?*

*Jazz-boys, jazz,-*

*Play, PLAY, PLAY!*

*Tomorrow is darkness.*

*Joy today! (Rampersad, 1995: 90)*

Hughes also wrote religious themes in the jazz poetry that reflect prayers and seeking of peaces for his people. In his poem "Fire" it expresses the fear of the speaker about his sins that confirms his belief of Christianity:



*Fire,  
Fire, Lord!  
Fire gonna burn ma soul!  
I ain't been good,  
I ain't been clean,-  
I been stinkin', low-down, mean.  
Fire, Fire, Lord!  
Fire gonna burn ma soul!  
Tell me, brother,  
Do you believe  
If you wanta go to heaben  
Got to moan an' grieve?  
Fire, Fire, Lord!  
Fire gonna burn ma soul!  
I been stealin',  
Been tellin' lies,  
Had more women  
Than Pharaoh had wives.  
Fire,  
Fire, Lord!  
Fire gonna burn ma soul!  
I means Fire, Lord!  
Fire gonna burn ma soul!*

(Rampersad, 1995: 117)

## CONCLUSION

“...the only way to get a thing done is to start to do it, then keep on doing it, and finally you'll finish it...”

(Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea*)

This study does not consist only of simple structural analysis of works and bookish definitions because it is aimed to show how an art work can reflect experiences of the writer and change social values. The factors such as sociologic, politic, and individuals experiences composing jazz poetry show that it is not a product of a single art work. Jazz poetry is like a representation of the identity for African Americans. From the beginning to the end of this thesis, it can be said that the enormous influence of jazz poetry has led to much discussion about the racial issues and the living conditions of African Americans.

In the first chapter, anecdotes, comments, and analyses about Langston Hughes's life are a vital part of this thesis in terms of being one of the pioneers of this representation because individual experiences of the writer reflect common experiences of his society. In analyzing the background of poems, quotations from Hughes's autobiography, and reviews about him contributes to this chapter.

In the second chapter, The Harlem Renaissance takes an important role in the struggle against the white hegemony in art frame by using power of the pen. This New Black Movement is like the first step to raising awareness and give messages: proud of their color, live with your culture, and write without fear. This period is a black cultural revolution which combines art and propaganda. Evaluations of many critics and important sayings about the period show that prohibitions, hegemony, and restrictions are like changing up hands of a writer or inhibiting dreams and right to life of a society. In this respect, The Harlem Renaissance is a milestone not only for the blacks but also other societies who are suffered from any kind of racism.

In the third chapter, the place of jazz music in black culture and its relation with social life are very crucial to understand elements of jazz poetry. Jazz is like a part of soul for black people especially who are from middle-class of society. People who are slaves, beggars, housewives, and artists breath with the air of jazz. It is possible to live with rebellious, relaxing, and lively rhythm of the jazz music.

In this respect, analyzing the roots and social reflections of jazz music is very important to have a deep understanding about jazz poetry. The definitions of identity, racism, inequality, Harlem streets, and dance can be mentioned, in fact the life itself is the subject of jazz poetry. Audiences of jazz musicians are not only blacks but also whites that leads to comment black culture differently from wrong stories which are made up by fans of racism. The underlying reasons for the negative criticisms about jazz related its bad effects on social values is preventing widesparing of jazz. So, the main aim is presenting black culture as primitive. Negative criticisms about jazz music in magazines and newspapers take part in this chapter. They could not succeed because jazz music is not a denying discourse, on the contrary, it is proud of being black, being different, and being unique.

As a conclusion, in the fourth chapter which is the main part of this thesis, the jazz poetry of Langston Hughes is exemplified from *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* with individual comments. Dilemmas in Hughes's life, rising to prominence of black culture in Harlem Renaissance and birth of jazz music constitute this jazz poetry. In this chapter, jazz poems with different themes show how poetical elements are used in harmony with musical elements to attract audiences. To comprehend the jazz poetry in depth, some reviewers such as Jamie Onwuchekwa, John Miler Chernoff and Berry Wallenstein broaden the scope of the subject. Instead of analysing jazz poetry with a single perspective, the background of jazz poetry is emphasized in this chapter. Like every single note in music, every poem is analyzed through its theme and atmosphere.

As mentioned above, to understand the context and social background of these works, the structure of the poetry such as form, rhyme, and meter are consciously ignored but the use of vernacular language, differences between blues and jazz poetry and musical idioms are exemplified.

As other black people, Hughes also had dreams that singing and dancing with jazz songs, speaking their vernacular language, and working for their happiness not as slaves of whites, in short, living with the proud of being black. To make this dream real, Hughes bands people together by using the common voice of jazz poetry.

Hughes writes about sadness, laughter, dance, melancholy and propaganda with spontaneous improvisation without fear that gives the unique power to the words of jazz poetry. This approach has been approved by the black and white audiences alike. Hughes states this crucial effect of jazz that also summaries the motivation of this study:

Like the waves of the sea coming one after another, always one after another, like the earth moving around the sun, night, daynight, day—night, day—forever, so is the undertow of black music with its rhythm that never betrays you, its strength like the beat of the human heart, its humor, and its rooted power.  
(Hughes, 1940: 200)

As a final point of this thesis, Hughes' jazz poetry is not going to solve all racist problems but his poems keep alive the hopes and dreams of all black people.

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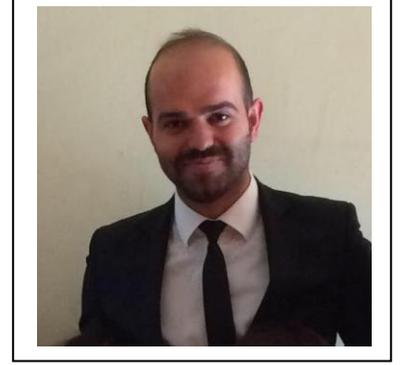
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