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ASPECTS OF NEGRITUDE IN THE WORKS OF TWO HARLEM RENAISSANCE AUTHORS: CLAUDE MCKAY AND LANGSTON HUGHES

Asselin Charles

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in

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ABSTRACT

ASPECTS OF NEGRITUDE IN THE WORKS OF TWO HARLEM RENAISSANCE AUTHORS: CLAUDE MCKAY AND LANGSTON HUGHES

Asselin Charles

Historically, Negritude refers to the cultural, political, and literary movement that swept the French-speaking Black world from Africa to the Caribbean during the period extending from the 1930's to the 1960's. The movement purported to reexamine the relationship between African and African-related cultures and Western civilization, and to redefine the racial and cultural identity of Blacks.

Although the term Negritude was coined in 1939 by the Martinican poet Aime Cesaire, and is identified primarily with Black literature in French, the political and esthetic ideas of Negritude pervade the fiction, poetry, and discursive prose of the Afro-American Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's and the 1930's, in particular the works of Langston Hughes and Claude McKay. In fact, these two authors influenced the founders of Negritude who were familiar with their works, and with whom they collaborated during the formative period of the movement in Paris.

While students of Negritude generally acknowledge the historical link as well as the similarities between the Harlem Renaissance authors and Negritude, no detailed study of the political and literary ideas of Negritude in the works of McKay and Hughes has been done. This thesis proposes to bring forth the aspects of Negritude in the works of the two

Harlem Renaissance poets and novelists, and by implication to tighten the ideological link between Negritude and the Harlem Renaissance.

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CHAPTER I

The Harlem Renaissance: Negritude Before the Word

The Harlem Renaissance refers to the period in Afro-American cultural history that extends roughly from the end of the first World War to the first years of the Depression, a period of unprecedented creativity on the part of Black intellectuals and artists. The term is somewhat hyperbolic, but then this renaissance occurred at a time when the least social, political, and cultural phenomena assumed an importance beyond their immediate dimensions because of links to a number of factors peculiar to the history of the era.

The tumultuous interval between the two world wars witnessed the occurrence of a series of events whose repercussions were felt the world over, and which spectacularly changed or affected the established order of several societies. Foremost in mind is the Russian Revolution which captivated the minds of workers and intellectuals across national borders, presaging for many the advent of a new age. A decade later there was the Great Depression which forced even a conservative society like that of the United States to reexamine its social arrangement. In the shadow of these two great events of immeasurable disruptive influence, various political and cultural movements came to life with the aim of effecting changes in all aspects of society considered to be part of the archaic legacy of the previous century. The period was indeed one of intellectual dissatisfaction with the past, and of reevaluation of established truisms.

The end of the war had brought disillusion to quite a few European intellectuals, a disillusion which explains in part their deep mistrust of the preceding century's scientism, rationalism, and political concepts, and the corresponding attraction of Freudian psychology and Marxism, as well as the widespread interest in non-Western cultures. Out of the artists' and writers' search for alternatives, came cultural phenomena such as the iconoclastic Dada movement and the challenge of surrealism formulated in André Breton's 1924 Surrealist Manifesto.

While a sector of the European intelligentsia was rebelling against a cultural legacy rooted in the nineteenth century, a similar atmosphere of intellectual ferment reigned in America. Its focus was essentially the oppressive materialism and restrictive rationalism of industrial America. This intellectual discontent actually goes back to the pre-war years and was already evident in the works of writers like Van Wyck Brooks and Max Eastman.[1] The disillusion brought by the war, the political corruption and the social decadence of the times only exacerbated the alienation of a generation of men yearning after change. These men were convinced that their society could no longer provide meaningful answers to contemporary problems, and consequently they looked elsewhere for those answers. Some, for instance, chose expatriation in Europe which they believed to be more conducive to creative answers than America.[2] But this basic dissatisfaction and the concomitant search for alternatives are most apparent in the works of the major writers of the period. They underline Fitzgerald's criticism of materialism in The Great Gatsby (1925), Sinclair Lewis's ferocious attack on the American bourgeoisie in Babbitt (1922), and H. L. Mencken's unrelenting assault on middle-class culture. Turning away from

traditional rationalism, others such as Eugene O'Neill in The Emperor Jones (1920), and William Faulkner in The Sound and the Fury (1929), explored the subconscious and irrational impulses behind human behavior.

The growing interest in Afro-American culture was another symptom of the general dissatisfaction with mainstream American culture. Whereas European intellectuals and artists turned to the cultures of the colonies for inspiration, Americans had their own home-grown exotic culture to explore. This sudden interest in Black culture was at once a mass phenomenon and one associated with a sizable sector of the social and intellectual elite.[3] While poets like Vachel Lindsay in The Congo and Other Poems (1914), playwrights like Eugene O'Neill in the previously cited The Emperor Jones, and novelists like Carl Van Vechten in Nigger Heaven (1926), felt attracted to what they considered the primitive in Black culture, the rest of America indulged itself in the infectiousness of jazz and the inebriating effects of the charleston and the cakewalk. While the timid went to Broadway to view plays and musicals by and about Blacks, the more daring flocked to the whirling cabarets and speakeasies of Harlem, the largest Black community in the country.

This general infatuation with popular Black culture was matched by an equal interest in Afro-American poets and novelists who, as a group, had thus far been largely ignored. As White philanthropists, intellectuals, and publishers sought out Black talents to nurture, Afro-American authors of the period came to enjoy an unprecedented status as artists and spokesmen for their people.

The 1920's are known metaphorically as "the jazz age." It is significantly ironic that this age of spiritual malaise and intellectual questioning evolved to the sound of the music of America's most oppressed

minority, a music which appeared most liberating to the participants in the dominant culture. At the same time Afro-American artists and intellectuals found the age particularly propitious to critically question their place in the American scheme, redefine themselves in relation to the dominant culture, and reevaluate their own subculture.

At the time, no social and cultural group in America had more reasons to challenge mainstream American culture than Blacks. Completely alienated from the political process, and occupying the lowest economic echelon, they were the social pariahs of America. They were kept subservient to the White majority through an efficient system of subtle and not so subtle social discrimination. Jim Crow reigned supreme in the South, enforced by the Ku Klux Klan when necessary through lynchings and other brutal forms of intimidation. In the North, a system of de facto segregation had evolved, and discrimination very often took the more benign but no less devastating form of paternalism.

The perception of Afro-Americans by their White countrymen was as devastating as this material situation. The vehicles of culture which addressed themselves to the popular imagination, literature and theatre in particular, painted a picture of Blacks that had been consistently negative from the days of slavery, through Emancipation, to the presumably enlightened period immediately following a war fought to preserve democracy and human dignity. "The study of the Negro in American literature," writes Seymour L. Gross, "seems to indicate that he has been depicted more as a stereotype than as a human being."[4] Gross goes on to catalogue the whole spectrum of negative stereotypes that composed the image of Blacks in the American mind, as reflected in three centuries of writings by White authors. To these authors, Blacks were of barbaric

origins and with no culture of their own, for whatever veneer of civilization they had was due to Western influences. Of inferior intellectual abilities, they had produced nothing worth mentioning in the way of "high culture," certainly no literature. At the most, they were granted something called "natural rhythm" which gave them a certain talent for dance and music, and possibly some sort of poetry. They were generally considered good story tellers, humorous rather than witty. As a race, they were described as lazy, indolent, primitive children of nature. All these sui generis characteristics expounded upon in essays and analytical works were embodied in fiction by certain stock characters. As listed by Sterling Brown, those characters fell under the following categories: the Contented Slave, of which Uncle Tom is the best known example, the Tragic Mulatto, the Exotic Primitive, the Brute Nigger, and the Comic Negro.[5] As different from one another as these characters might be, they have one thing in common: they are all unidimensional and demeaning.

The debilitating material and social situation of Afro-Americans embodied in these racial stereotypes had historically elicited various responses on their part. First, the several race riots, a staple of American social history, constitute the violent reaction of the masses. On another plane, Black cultural phenomena such as jazz, the spirituals and the blues, carried a clear element of protest and the assertion of self-worth. On a political level, certain individuals had come to symbolize particular ideological tendencies at times reflective of mass sentiments and at times not. Thus in the mid-nineteenth century Frederic Douglass, the fiery abolitionist orator, emerged as a symbol of the Black struggle for emancipation from slavery. Around the end of the

century, when Blacks were pressing for social and economic integration, Booker T. Washington propounded the compromise solution of social segregation and economic cooperation with Whites, mainly as skilled laborers, all presumably for the common good. The compromise brought Washington the support of Southern White segregationists, of Northern philanthropists and industrialists in need of qualified workers for their new industrial ventures in the South, and finally of a large number of Blacks who saw in his practical economics a hope for material improvement. Washington's ideas prevailed until W. E. B. Dubois's Niagara Movement helped discredit them. In opposition to Washington's doctrine of compromise, Dubois proposed total integration and civil equality. While Washington advocated a utilitarian education for Blacks, Dubois demanded liberal education to the highest level for those he called "the talented tenth." In Dubois' view, freedom and opportunity for Blacks would come only when Whites recognize the unique contributions of Blacks to the formation of American society. As he argues in The Souls of Black Folk (1903), America would not have been America without her Negro people whose gifts "of story and song," "of sweat and brawn," and "of the Spirit," pervade the very fabric of American civilization.[6] His final hope was for the eventual advent of a sort of cultural pluralism in America according to which Blacks and Whites would live together in mutual respect.

Inadequate as the responses described above have proved historically to be, they have the positive merit of implying action or resistance of some sort. But in countless instances Blacks reacted in ways that implied willing or involuntary acquiescence to their situation. Thus, through a psychological process so brilliantly analyzed in

Frantz Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks, some Blacks had come to unconsciously internalize the various negative images of them found in the dominant culture, so that their behavior and self-identity reflected these images.[7] At times also, they deliberately assumed these negative images of them as a form of protective mimicry. By and large, the bourgeoisie's answer was assimilation, the unconditional adoption of the ways, world view, and values of mainstream America, and concomitantly the rejection of their own culture. This attitude is particularly reflected in the literature produced by writers from this class, from Phyllis Wheatley's 18th-century apologia for the civilizing influence of slavery,[8] to the earnest and sympathetic treatment of the theme of passing in novels such as James Weldon Johnson's Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man (1912).[9] The lack of racial and cultural consciousness sometimes went to the extreme of endorsing all the stereotypes invented by White writers and completely ignoring the Black reality.[10]

In the aftermath of World War I, as we have seen, the general atmosphere in America was particularly favorable to the disruption of traditional attitudinal patterns. The time was then ripe for Afro-American writers to offer a different response to the social, political, and cultural situation of Blacks. First, the war experience had to a great extent radicalized the younger generation and forced them to reconsider their views on America: they could not fail to appreciate the ironic contradiction of a nation which would fight a war in the name of freedom while holding its Black minority in virtual bondage. In addition, while their attitude toward the rest of America was changing and the realization of their alienation was taking place, a corresponding esprit de corps among Blacks had emerged. This spirit of solidarity was, on the one hand, the result of the interaction between Blacks of different

social and national backgrounds for the first time assembled in considerable numbers in large communities such as Harlem. On the other hand, this new spirit was due in part to the awareness, especially on the part of young intellectuals, of the awakening of the colonized peoples. It was during this period that Dubois organized the first Pan-African Congress, a little noticed event at the time, but one that would gain extreme significance with the rise of Pan-Africanism as an ideology in the 1950's and 1960's. Finally, there was a certain amount of receptivity on the part of a sector of the liberal and radical White intelligentsia who would encourage the young dissident Black writers to voice their new attitudes. And the stage was set for the emergence of the Harlem Renaissance.

In the introductory article to his 1925 anthology entitled The New Negro, Alain Locke formally presents the movement to the public.[11] As Locke states in his "Foreword," the volume of poems, essays and plays by young Black writers mostly from Harlem, proposed to "document the new Negro culturally and socially, to register the transformations of the inner and outer life of the Negro in America that have so significantly taken place in the last few years."[12] Locke then contrasts this new Negro, self-assertive, proud and independent, to the old Negro, a creature of White society as well as a victim of self-created myths, who sees himself "in the distorted perspective of a social problem," to the extent that "his shadow, so to speak, has been more real to him than his personality."[13] But just when this false image had apparently ensconced itself permanently in his own mind and in the minds of friends and foes alike, the old Negro had shaken off the shackles of his stereotypes to emerge as a new individual. Locke sums up the outcome of this transformation thus:

> By shedding the old chrysalis of the Negro problem, we are achieving something like a spiritual emancipation. . . . The migrant masses, shifting from the countryside to the city, hurdle several generations of experience at a leap, but more important, the same thing happens spiritually in the life attitudes and self-expression of the young Negro, in his poetry, his art, his education and his new outlook, with the additional advantage, or course, of the poise and greater certainty of knowing what it is all about.[14]

This new spirit, according to Locke, was most visible in Harlem, the Black metropolis, the melting pot where Blacks of different origins--Afro-Americans, Africans, West Indians--huddled together to share a common experience and make Harlem a new race capital for Blacks, like Dublin for the Irish, and Prague for the Czechs. It was in the Harlem crucible that the new spirit had coalesced, then bloomed into race consciousness. Before the development of Harlem, "the chief bond between them [Blacks] has been that of common conditions rather than a common consciousness: a problem in common rather than life in common."[15] It is precisely this new race consciousness that the young Black writers were expressing in their works. Locke welcomes the fact that at last "the Negro is being carefully studied, not just talked about and discussed. In art and letters, instead of being wholly caricatured, he is being seriously portrayed and painted."[16]

Pointing out that the new consciousness reflected in the works contained in the anthology is "more a consensus of feeling rather than of opinion, of attitude rather than of program,"[17] Locke nevertheless detects the outlines of certain objectives including the sustained attempt to repair a damaged group psychology, a more realistic, unsentimental self-appraisal, as well as an assertion of self-worth and race pride. The ultimate aim of this loose program is complete integration

into America, for, Locke concludes, the new Negro is in no way a revolutionary nationalist:

> The Negro mind reaches out as yet to nothing but American wants, American ideas. But this forced attempt to build his Americanism on race values is a unique social experiment, and its ultimate success is impossible except through the fullest sharing of American culture and institutions.[18]

With some reservations, Alain Locke's essay sums up accurately the ideas and attitudes of the young Harlem Renaissance authors, from James Weldon Johnson, to Langston Hughes and Claude McKay. In the main, the young poets and novelists associated with the movement really saw themselves as the interpreters and the representatives of the ideals of the new Negro. In translating these ideals into literature, they tried to conform to some more or less definite canons thus summarized post-facto by Sterling Brown, a prominent poet of the Renaissance:

> 1) Discovery of Africa as a source of racial pride; 2) Exploitation of the colored heroes and the heroic episodes in American history; 3) Propaganda of protest; 4) Treatment of the Black masses (often rural, less frequently urban) with more understanding and less excuses; and finally, 5) A more open revelation of the qualities of the race. A romantic method was needed to resolve some of those questions, and a realistic method for others.[19]

The tidiness of this program does not necessarily imply that it was consistently followed by the writers of the Renaissance, nor does it mean that the movement was a cohesive one. In fact, as Janheinz Jahn points out in Neo-African Literature,

> the Afro-American poets, dramatists and novelists stood at the cross-roads of different trends; erratically and irresolutely they supported now one trend, now another. The era of the Harlem Renaissance gave an impulse to many movements, but was not a unity and so they created no literary style of their own.[20]

Beyond Jahn's accurate, though sweeping assessment of the literature of the Renaissance, a number of unifying elements link authors as diverse in style and character as Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, and James Weldon Johnson. What these various poets and novelists share in common is the exploitation of several themes that include Africa, racial pride, social protest, and traditional aspects of Black folk culture, from the point of view of an ideology which can be referred to, in the words of Raymond F. Betts, as "the ideology of Blackness."[21]

"Manifested wherever the Black experience has occurred," Betts further explains, "the ideology necessarily places in opposition the White and Black worlds. In great part it is a calculated reversal of values and an overturning of old myths."[22] What Betts is essentially asserting is the historical inevitability of movements similar to the Harlem Renaissance in any part of the Black world at every historical juncture characterized by acute social and cultural contradictions. The emergence of the Negritude movement among African and Caribbean writers of French expression less than a decade after the demise of the Harlem Renaissance bears him out. The social, political and cultural circumstances surrounding the advent of Negritude bear striking similarities to those under which the Harlem Renaissance was born.

It is generally agreed among historians of the Negritude movement, that its formal origin goes back to the 1932 publication of a manifesto entitled Légitime défense by a group of Caribbean students in Paris.[23] The manifesto appeared at a time of sustained intellectual agitation in Europe, an agitation that continued well into the post-war years. Thus, from its beginnings in 1932 through the years of its development, the Negritude movement coincided with and undoubtedly was influenced by

three main European intellectual currents, namely Marxism, Surrealism, and Existentialism. As one of the dominant ideologies in the Black world for a period of about thirty years, Negritude was appropriately born at a time when the whole past history of African civilization was being reevaluated thanks to the works of ethnologists such as Frobenius[24] and Delafosse,[25] and when all historical signs were pointing to the slow but certain awakening of the colonized.

The young intellectuals associated from the start with Negritude as well as those who would later join the movement were objectively in a situation similar to that of the Afro-American writers of the Harlem Renaissance. Colonial subjects living in a hostile environment, they suffered from the same political and economic impotence. Eager assimilés or reluctant partakers in the dominant culture, they were all living on the fringe of French society. Like their Afro-American cousins, they were seen in terms of similarly dehumanizing stereotypes. The prevailing view was that the descendants of slaves from the exotic West Indies and the barbaric Africans should really be grateful for the civilizing influence of France. And some were indeed grateful to the point of complete assimilation and the willing assumption of French cultural values. As Lilyan Kesteloot shows in Les Ecrivains noirs de langue française, nowhere was such assimilation more evident than in the literature of the colonies which was up to then, in substance as well as in style, only a bland carbon copy of French literature, with no relation to local realities.[26]

The young intellectuals of Légitime défense, conscious of their political and cultural alienation, deemed it necessary to reverse the situation. The writers of the manifesto, with the righteousness

implicit in the title of their text, declared themselves "suffocated" by this capitalist, Christian, bourgeois world." Scorning the "humanitarian hypocrisy of liberalism," they proposed to fight the very bourgeois and rationalist West with its own weapons, Marxism and Surrealism. If Légitime défense was hostile to colonialist France, it was even more so toward the complacent colonized West Indian bourgeoisie. It advocated the complete rejection of this bourgeoisie's "borrowed personality" apparent in the literature it produced, as the first step toward the conquest of their lost identity. Consequently, they considered it necessary on a political level to reject the colonial order, and on a cultural level to refuse to submit to European artistic canons.[27]

The claims of Légitime défense were later more fully amplified by another group of young intellectuals, contributors to the small journal L'Etudiant noir under the direction of the Martinican Aimé Césaire, the Senegalese Léopold Sédar Senghor, and the French Guyanese Léon G. Damas, the three young poets whose names would later become synonymous with Negritude.[28] Although it shared the basic ideas of its predecessor, L'Etudiant noir contributed two important ideas that would become central to the Negritude movement. As Senghor would later explain, L'Etudiant noir declared the primacy of culture over politics, politics being seen as part of culture, and asserted the basic unity of all Negro-African cultures.[29] With the foundation in 1947 of the journal Présence Africaine subtitled "the cultural review of the Negro world," these ideas became truisms and Negritude a solidly established cultural movement.[30]

Since the term was coined in 1939 by Aimé Césaire in his poetic masterpiece, Cahier d'un retour au pays natal,[31] Negritude has remained a controversial and elusive concept. Black nationalism, African humanism, ideology of Blackness, Black aesthetics, the definitions are numerous. The term, however, always implies on the one hand resistance to cultural assimilation and political and economic exploitation, and on the other hand the affirmation of cultural authenticity and the assertion of the will to political freedom. It is this basic ideological position that underlines in varying degrees the analytical and imaginative works of Negritude writers. In addition, beyond certain particularities due to the national origins and individual characters of the authors, these works hold in common a multitude of thematic and stylistic similarities. For instance, the recurring myth of the African past, the pervasive anti-Europeanism and anti-colonialism, the deliberate subversion of the French language and of European poetic forms, the adoption of folklore to poetry and fiction, a common source for symbolism, all these are characteristics that give the literature its distinctive identity.

Though far more sophisticated in its expression, Negritude literature has its roots in Harlem Renaissance literature, particularly in its ideological and thematic aspects. The similarities are no doubt due in part to some sort of historical determinism which, as Raymond Betts suggests, would produce similar responses anywhere in the Black world.[32] But there is also a direct link between the two literary and cultural movements. Thus, the writers of Légitime défense from the beginning readily acknowledge the influence of the Harlem Renaissance on the formulation of their ideas by invoking the works of the Afro-American writers as an inspiring contrast to the sycophantic literature of the colonies.

"The wind blowing from Black America," reads the manifesto, "will soon, we hope, clean the Antilles of the aborted fruits of an antiquated culture."[33] Later, the triumvirate of Negritude, Senghor, Césaire and Damas, formally paid tribute to the Renaissance writers as the pioneers who helped make Negritude possible. Thus, in an interview with the Haitian poet René Dépestre, Césaire specifically mentions the Harlem Renaissance as one of the various literary movements that have influenced his poetry.[34] As for Dépestre, a later contributor to the Negritude movement, he implicitly links the Harlem Renaissance and Negritude as parts of the same school of thought:

> Negritude, in its most accurate sense, was the cultural operation by which intellectuals from Africa and the <u>two Americas</u> [emphasis added] became conscious of the validity of the originality of Negro-African cultures, of the aesthetic value of the Black race and the respective ability of their people to exercise their right to the initiative of history.[35]

Finally, referring to the poets and novelists of the Renaissance in her comprehensive study of Negritude literature, Lilyan Kesteloot emphasizes:

> . . . This American literature already contains the seeds of the principal themes of "Negritude" and, as such, one can assert that the true fathers of the Negro Renaissance in France were neither the surrealist poets nor the French novelists of the years between the wars, but the Black authors of the United States.[36]

The names of Claude McKay and Langston Hughes are as inextricably linked to the Renaissance as those of Senghor, Césaire and Damas are to the Negritude movement. As McKay is the recognized pioneer and Hughes the poet-laureate, it is fitting that both be considered the most representative authors of the Renaissance. It is therefore in their works that one must search for the clearest early expressions of the ideas of Negritude. As the examination of the works of these two poets reveals

the aesthetic and revolutionary potential of a literature based on such ideas, it also brings forth the same aesthetic and ideological contradictions later observed in Negritude literature. On the whole, the accomplishments of these two Harlem Renaissance writers as well as their failures presage those of their literary and ideological heirs.

CHAPTER II

Theory of Negritude in Claude McKay

Reduced to its most direct and simple expression, Negritude is a world view based on the consciousness of race. Thus defined, its clearest and most explicit early expression is to be found in the expository prose of Claude McKay. However, McKay did not erect this most important element of his thought into a cohesive system. Generally, his various analytical writings reveal more of the polemicist than the systematic social philosopher.[1] But, it is clearly possible to discover the guiding concept, the heuristic tool McKay uses to apprehend the social, political, historical, and cultural reality of Blacks. Consciousness of race, then, is one of the cornerstones of McKay's thought.

It is perhaps not by chance that the consciousness of race in McKay is tuned to the same high pitch as in the francophone writers of Negritude. Attention has been drawn to the objective circumstances and the subjective causes that contributed to the emergence of Negritude.[2] A comparison between the situation of the African and Caribbean writers, and that of Claude McKay may shed some light on the similarity of their assumption of race consciousness. Both McKay and the Negritude writers came from essentially traditional cultures, and spent their formative years in relatively racially homogenous societies in which the individual was totally integrated, and where cultural and racial alienation did not exist. In such an environment, they had a natural sense of self

and of community. Transported into the hostile environment of Europe, in the case of the Negritude writers, and of America, in the case of McKay, they understandably developed a sense of alienation which compelled them to withdraw into themselves and to stress all the elements that differentiated them from the surrounding cultural milieu. At the same time they sought to close ranks with those individuals in a similar situation, in search of a community. The writers were fully conscious of this phenomenon. Léopold Sédar Senghor, for instance, has described in detail this dual process of alienation and assumption of race and culture as a logical reaction on the part of these Black individuals cut off from the comforting cultural spring, their identity and worth continually questioned by the surrounding culture.[3] Alienation at the contact with White culture, or "nothingness of the present" in Senghor's phrase, is the catalyst for race consciousness.[4] It remains, as Sartre explains in "Orphée Noir," the very source of the dynamics of Negritude in the individual:

> . . . It is under the shock of White culture that this Negritude has passed from immediate existence to reflected state. But at the same time he has more or less ceased to live it. By choosing to see what he is, he has split himself, he no longer coincides with himself. And reciprocally, it is because he was already exiled from himself that he found it necessary to manifest himself.[5]

Claude McKay's passage from the integrated Jamaican milieu to the alienating American cultural environment, and his consequently acute consciousness of race, follows the pattern described by Sartre and Senghor to such an extent that he can be considered an early prototype of the Negritude figure. Like his Negritude successors he also was aware of the change in his world view precipitated by the new social and cultural forces he had to face. In fact, in an early autobiographical

article[6] and later in A Long Way From Home,[7] McKay relates his experience in the United States and his first acquaintance with race as a potent social and ideological factor in terms strikingly evocative of those later used by Senghor and Sartre in the context of Negritude.

Notwithstanding the subjective basis of racial consciousness, McKay sees the concept of race as a valid tool for an understanding of society. To him, the concept is as valid as those of class and nationality because humanity is naturally fragmented into groups distinguished not only by their physical characteristics, but also by certain shared cultural and temperamental traits.[8] Afro-Americans, in McKay's view, constitute such a group on the basis of race and color, and broad similarities of interests. This fact, he believes, should not only be recognized, but also stressed and reinforced. For the defense of their interests and for common survival, Blacks should consciously assume their racial singularity and, literally closing their ranks, use their collective powers.[9] Thus, racial solidarity becomes the foundation of social organization, and consciousness of race a tool in the political struggle.

Because of its nationalistic and separatist overtones, McKay's advocacy of race as a starting point for political organization runs counter to the political outlook of the contemporary established Black leadership. Indeed, the main thrust of the political activism of the Black middle-class spearheaded by the N.A.A.C.P. was defined by a desire for social, racial, and political integration.[10] In several polemical articles in defense of his views, McKay attempts to clarify his position.[11] He argues first that the consciousness of race arises from the very oppressive social and political condition of Blacks, because "all suppressed minorities develop naturally some ego of racialism."[12]

In this sense, this racialism is only a defense mechanism of the sort Sartre defines as "anti-racist racism" in referring to the racial tenets of Negritude.[13] Racialism ultimately is intended to spur "group aggregation" necessary to effectively muster collective strength, rather than voluntary social segregation which can only be suicidal.[14]

McKay's theoretical position on race contains two major contradictions which some Negritude theorists would later confront. First, beyond the difficulty of distinguishing between "group aggregation" and voluntary social segregation, it is based on the assumption that race is sufficient for social and political consensus, overlooking the diversity of views and multiplicity of interests among the Black population. Second, this position is at variance with McKay's own socialist convictions according to which class, and not race, constitutes the fundamental socio-political unit. To resolve this contradiction McKay musters all his considerable talents for polemics, and his arguments in this respect establish him as a precursor of some of the theorists of a Negritude of the left, notably Frantz Fanon and René Dépestre.

McKay reasons that race consciousness and Black nationalism are not ends in themselves, but the first step in the struggle for liberation, and must necessarily lead to class struggle in socialist terms. In his view, far from being contradictory, Black nationalism and socialism are complementary, for the broad demands of socialism can only be fulfilled after the needs of national liberation have been met.[15] While McKay's socialist contemporaries understood the Black situation in terms of class struggle, and the majority of Blacks saw it only as a racial problem, McKay conceived it as a combination of both. Since Blacks constituted the lower strata of the working class, it was obvious to him that

of all the exploited they were the most oppressed because the Black worker's "disabilities as a worker are relatively heavier than those of the White worker."[16] Doubly exploited and oppressed because of their class and because of their race, Blacks are also doubly alienated, again as workers and as Blacks, and are in fact "a race outcast from the outcast class."[17]

McKay's analysis of the situation of Blacks is in a way a theoretical breakthrough, and is more comprehensive than an approach based on race or class alone. Two decades later, Sartre in his insightful interpretation of Negritude reaches virtually the same conclusions:

> The Negro, like the White worker, is a victim of the capitalistic structure of our society . . . The Black man is its victim as a Black, as a colonized native or an exiled African. And since he is oppressed in his race and because of it, he must of necessity become conscious first of his race. He must force those who, for centuries, have vainly attempted to reduce him to the level of a beast because he was Black, to acknowledge him as a man.[18]

This double operation by which Blacks first become conscious of their oppression and alienation as Blacks and then as workers, initially described by McKay and later analyzed by Sartre, constitutes for some advocates of Negritude the very definition of the term. Thus, we hear clear echoes of Claude McKay in René Dépestre's interpretation of Negritude as

> . . . the consciousness of the fact that the Black proletarian is doubly alienated: alienated on the one hand (like the White proletarian) as a being whose labor is sold on the capitalist market place, and alienated on the other hand as a black-pigmented being, alienated in his epidermic singularity. Negritude was the assumption of the consciousness of this double alienation and of the historic necessity to overcome it through revolutionary praxis.[19]

Similarly, there are echoes of McKay in Fanon who, writing in the context

of the African struggle for liberation, sees Negritude as the assumption of national identity and culture with a direct correlation with the fight for freedom. Just as McKay considers racial consciousness as a pre-condition to the fulfillment of the internationalism demanded by socialism, Fanon argues that, far from circumscribing the bases of the colonized's struggle, national consciousness is on the contrary the open door to internationalism.[20] To McKay's lasting credit, it must be remembered that Sartre's careful and objective study of Negritude, as well as the conclusions of Fanon and Depestre, were drawn with the benefit of observation of the emerging triumph of African nationalism in tandem with experiments in socialism, which in fact validate McKay's early insights.

Ultimately, for McKay, consciousness of race among Blacks is only a tactical step toward a higher goal which is group survival in the community of man. This burden of salvation of Blacks as an entity, McKay reiterates time and again, rests primarily on their shoulders, and depends on their recognition of their collective singularity which is not simply racial, but also cultural.[21] Consciousness of race is thus directly linked to consciousness of culture or the awareness that Blacks possess, in McKay's words, "a group soul."[22] It must be noted in passing that this concept of a "group soul" which evokes Dubois's "Souls of Black Folk,"[23] also clearly presages the Negritude concept of "l'âme noire" used to explain the unique qualities of Black culture.[24]

Just as McKay's political outlook on race generally runs counter to prevailing contemporary views, his perspective on the singularity of Black culture, and his insistence on the absolute necessity to preserve it, contradict the trends of the time.[25] Indeed, despite the actual

existence of various ethnic and cultural minorities in America constantly reinforced by the influx of immigration, normal social evolution as well as official policy favored cultural homogenization. Understandably, the claims to the existence of a separate Black culture in the United States made by a sector of the Harlem Renaissance, notably by Hughes and McKay, appeared preposterous to many observers. Even a perceptive ethnologist like Melville Herskovits, sensitive to the least social and cultural nuances, concluded from his observations that Afro-American culture is no different from mainstream American culture, "the same pattern, only a different shade."[26] Alain Locke, the very publicist of the New Negro, stressed that the Afro-American strove only to assert his Americanism. Even his new assertiveness, in Locke's opinion, was but "a forced attempt to build his Americanism on race values . . . , a unique social experiment . . . whose ultimate success is impossible except through the fullest sharing of American culture and institutions."[27] In other words, if they had not done so already, Afro-Americans, like all their countrymen of different backgrounds, would eventually become assimilated in the great American cultural melting pot.

In McKay's premise of an actual and ideal distinctive Black culture, and in the contrary views of some of his contemporaries, we already have the main terms of the great Negritude issue of authenticity and assimilation. But for the difference in terminology, it is indeed from this angle that McKay approaches the question of culture. To him, not only is assimilation not advisable, it is also impossible since history has irrevocably made of Afro-Americans cultural hybrids of the West and Africa. It is on the strength of this argument that he justifies his vision of Blacks as being in contact with Western culture and yet not

wholly integrated in it:

> I am as conscious of my New World birthright as of my African origin, being aware of the one and its significance in my development as much as I feel the other emotionally.[28]

In McKay's view, under the veneer of Western cultural conventions followed by Blacks, the African essence comprising contagious warmth, unbounded exhuberance, and unrepressed vitality, is ever present and manifests itself in all their cultural activities. It is, in fact, this African element that gives Black culture in the United States its original flavor and distinguishes it from mainstream American culture.[29]

Significantly, although he stresses the importance of the African contribution to Afro-American culture, McKay also denies its supremacy. For him, there is no timeless, unchanging, abstract "African negroness" that would be found intact among Afro-Americans, nor among Africans for that matter. While Afro-Americans are not Anglo-Saxons, they are no longer traditional Africans either. "The chastisement of civilization," McKay argues, "has sobered and robbed them of these unique cultural manifestations. American Negroes have not the means and leisure to tour Africa for ancestral wonders."[30]

For McKay, then, there can be no literal, Garvey-style, or even metaphorical, Negritude-style, return to an African past which has ineluctably vanished for Black Americans. It is perhaps because of this conviction that, unlike the Negritude writers, he never finds it necessary to dwell on African history and civilization. However, like Fanon, McKay seems to have clearly understood that

> the Negro, never so much a Negro as since he has been dominated by the Whites, when he decides to prove that he has a culture and to behave like a cultured person, comes to realize that history points out a well-defined path to him: He must demonstrate that a Negro culture exists.[31]

And since, in Fanon's words, the culture which is affirmed is African culture rather than a local derivative, "the unconditional affirmation of African culture has succeeded the unconditional affirmation of European culture."[32] Thus, it is when the worth and originality of Black culture is challenged by the dominant Western mainstream that McKay looks back to Africa. In such cases he is capable of penning a defense of the African past as passionate as any that can be found in the works of a Cheikh Anta Diop, for instance.[33] Thus, when an English critic insinuatingly and condescendingly professes quiet satisfaction that "Claude McKay never offends our sensibilities," and that "his love poetry is clear of the hint which would put our racial instinct against him, whether we would or not,"[34] McKay jumps to the defense of his cultural heritage with a passion equalled only by the unconditional apologists of African culture among the Negritude writers.[35]

Yet, beyond his occasional passionate apology of the African heritage, McKay always maintains an objective perspective on the cultural formation of Afro-Americans, a perspective which is based on an awareness of history that molds man, conditions his responses, and compels him to adjust to new circumstances. As a race transplanted from its original cultural milieu, Afro-Americans remain the product of a peculiar history, which is reflected in all their artistic and creative cultural manifestations:

> The Aframerican [sic] may gain spiritual benefit by returning in spirit to this African origin, but as an artist he will remain a unique product of Western civilization, with something of himself to give that will be very different from anything that may come out of a purely African community.[36]

This original "something of himself" which underscores the Black

American's essentially syncretic culture is, according to McKay, his singular sensibility resulting from the very position in which history has placed him. It is the sensibility of the funambulist walking the tight rope between two cultures, between the West and Africa. To use the language of Negritude, this sensibility is governed by a constant tension between authenticity or closeness to the African core, and assimilation or complete assumption of Western cultural values. From this understanding McKay derives his definition of the ideal Black as one who manages to retain "the instinctive and animal and purely physical pride of a Black person resolute in being himself and yet living a simple civilized life."[37] His cultural response to his socio-historical situation in America is that of "the clown in the circus of hell, the clown slapped on every side by the devil's red-hot tongs, yet growing wiser, stronger and firmer in purposeful determination, seeking no suicide, but bearing it out to the bitter end."[38]

According to George Kent, Claude McKay's main contribution to the Harlem Renaissance was "the attempt to project a positive niggerhood."[39] This colorful phrase sums up accurately McKay's all-inclusive conceptualization of the Black reality in all its aspects--racial, social, historical, cultural, symbolic, and psychological. Fragmentary though the expression of his perception may have been, it represents one of the first comprehensive attempts before Negritude at a complete understanding of the symbolic and real meaning of what George Kent calls "Blackness and the adventure of Western culture."[40]

Since McKay was above all else a novelist and a poet, his intellectual apprehension of "Blackness and the adventure of Western culture" predictably goes hand in hand with its literary and artistic expression.

In fact, it is solely in this perspective that he understands the purpose of the Harlem Renaissance--as a concerted effort to create an art truly reflective of the Black experience and rooted in Black culture:

> For my part I was deeply stirred by the idea of a real Negro Renaissance. . . My idea of a renaissance was one of talented persons of an ethnic or national group working individually or collectively in a common purpose and creating things that would be typical of their group.[41]

But although he understood both the typicality of the Black experience and the necessity to appropriately express that experience in imaginative works, McKay was not too successful in the formulation of a relevant theory that would clearly outline some effective ways of translating this typicality into literature. His attempt at developing a consistent and suitable literary theory is marred by irreconcilable contradictions and equivocation. As it is expressed in a few articles and passages of his autobiography, his theory of literature amounts to a number of statements in which subjective romanticism and social realism are at once embraced and rejected, and traditionalism and a sort of avant-gardism are at the same time urged and discouraged. This somewhat baffling ambivalence is evident in McKay's perception of almost every aspect of literature.

McKay's vague and conventional definition of literature reduces literary creation to a philosophical reflection on life in general in pursuit of some inspired insight, some great truth. Consequently, the fruit of the writer's creative activity, "literary truth," is "nothing more than a 'wise saying' or a beautiful phrase delivered in a unique manner--an addition to the sum of universal wisdom of mankind."[42] The artist is thus given only a contemplative role, and his task is to unravel the mysteries of life, to comprehend life. It is only by

properly fulfilling this task that the artist is assured of an audience, and that his work has a lasting impact. And McKay emphasizes:

> They [artists] should and only so far as they do comprehend life in its universal aspects will their work have more than a contemporary interest and take rank and stand the test of time.[43]

McKay's insistence on a vague universalism as the end of literature, his expansion of the writer's field of interest to some abstract life, and his definition of literary creation as the pursuit of some metaphysical truth, contradict the very premises of the Harlem Renaissance and his own understanding of these premises. As previously indicated, the Renaissance, like Negritude, views literature not merely as philosophical contemplation of "life in its universal aspects," but rather precisely as an exploration of the life and experience of the writer's people as they are defined socially, historically, and culturally. Such a literature puts primary emphasis on social realism rather than on philosophical speculation. Consequently, and also paradoxically, it is only by narrowing his focus of vision that the writer can gain some insight into "life in its universal aspects."

The idea of literary universalism is to a certain extent an implicit negation of the conventional classification of literature according to national traditions. By the same token, it is also a negation of the Renaissance efforts to create a literature that reflects Black culture and artistic traditions. McKay's position is even more explicit in a passage of his autobiography in which he criticises the Marxist premise according to which art reflects the class values and traditions of the artist. To him literature and art transcend class and culture, and their intrinsic value is independent of any restrictive temporal and social factor:

> . . . I preferred to think that there were bad and mediocre, and good and great, literature and art, and that the class labels are incidental . . . I believe that whenever literature and art are good and great they leap over narrow group barriers and period to make a universal appeal.[44]

The intrinsic value of literature, McKay contends, is primarily esthetic, and its characteristics as a reflection of society are ultimately of secondary importance. Thus, he establishes a sharp dichotomy between formal beauty and content:

> In any work of art, my natural reaction was more for its intrinsic beauty than for its social significance. My social sentiments were strong, definite, and radical, but I kept them separate from my esthetic emotions, for the two were different and should not be mixed up.[45]

Once again, McKay implicitly takes exception to the Harlem Renaissance and Negritude ideal of the committed artist for whom literary creation is also an extension of his social and political activism, and whose work is intended to further a given social, political and cultural ideology. This difference of views concerning the function of literature entails another divergence regarding both the writer's source of inspiration and intended audience. While for the Renaissance and for Negritude the collectivity is at once the source and the target of literature, for McKay the writer's work which appeals primarily to the individual's sense of beauty, is equally inspired by his subjective experience. This is precisely the view McKay expresses as he emphasizes that "my poetry expresses my feelings" to answer criticism that his work is not sufficiently "proletarian."[46]

The preceding citations and comments admittedly do not amount to a proper literary theory. However, despite their fragmentary character, they do provide a clear idea of McKay's conception of literature and its function. This conception is admittedly conservative, subjective, and

romantic. Most of all, it is the exact opposite of the views on literature and art proposed first by the Harlem Renaissance, and later by the theories of Negritude. And yet, in several instances, McKay expresses progressive ideas on literature that are well in harmony with the spirit of the Renaissance and which in effect contradict his other pronouncements.

Notwithstanding his other statements on literature as timeless in its expression and universal in inspiration, McKay does also accept the concept of a literature characteristic of a particular social group and reflective of its collective experience. Thus, in a polemical article in defense of his writing on the Black lower class, he strongly supports the idea of an Afro-American literary tradition, and sees his own works as exemplary of this tradition.[47] He stresses that Afro-American literature may not "be created out of evasion and insincerity," but must be rooted in the culture and faithfully reflect the Black social and historical reality.[48] In this respect, the writer's task is to strive to render "the fundamental rhythm of Aframerican sic life."[49]

McKay now appears as an uncompromising advocate of social realism, a position far removed from his other idealistic esthete's view of art and literature. From this present perspective content becomes more important than form, and the writer's preoccupation must no longer be to beautifully express an original insight into "life in its universal aspects," but rather to use his creative talents for

> the artistic exploitation of the homely things--of Maudy's washtub, Aunt Jemima's White folks, Miss Ann's old clothes for work-and-wages, George's Yessah-boss, dining car and Pullman services, barber and shoe shine shop, chitlin and cornpone joints,--all the lowly things that go to the formation of the Aframerican soil in which the best, the most pretentious of Aframerican society still has its roots.[50]

The artist's source of inspiration is very specifically the life of the Black masses, their daily concerns, their oppression, in brief the collective experience. Its expression must also bear the imprint of the singularity of Blacks which results from that experience, the mark of their sensibility.[51]

Such a realistic literature rooted in the collective social, political, and cultural experience, must also address itself to the collectivity not to flatter its sense of esthetics, but to modify its world view. In this respect, Sartre's remark concerning Negritude literature is very appropriate to McKay's new conception of the role of literature.[52] To paraphrase Sartre, it is primarily functional, unconcerned with the outpourings of the heart. It aims not at eliciting an esthetic response, but at inspiring action. Consequently, the artist's role does not limit itself to mere comprehension of life, but also includes the modification of life. As McKay stresses, the artist's calling is one of action instead of contemplation:

> Negro artists will be doing a fine service to the world maybe greater than the combined action of all the White and Black radicals yelling revolution together, if by their efforts they can spirit the Whites away from lynching and indeed prejudice to the realm of laughter and syncopated motion.[53]

While it is difficult to reconcile McKay's two conflicting sets of ideas on literature, or at least to justify them, it is possible to explain their coexistence. His conservative aesthetic views are undoubtedly due to the lingering influence of the 19th century English authors whose works he studied during his formative years in Jamaica and which provided him a conception of literary art.[54] His progressive ideas, on the other hand, are part of the modernist current in American letters in which McKay participated as an editor of the avant-gardist

socialist cultural journal The Liberator.[55] McKay's views are also symptomatic of his sometimes divided political and racial loyalties which often caused him to oppose the editorial policies of The Liberator, and finally led to his resignation from the journal following a clash with Michael Gold, the uncompromising advocate of proletarian literature.[56] In a larger context, McKay's apparent confusion and inconsistencies reflect those of the artists and intellectuals of his time involved in the protracted and irresolvable controversy over literature and politics.[57]

Although McKay's conflicting positions on literary matters can be clearly understood in terms of personal background and contemporary intellectual trends, his ambivalence makes it more difficult to determine his true contribution to a theory of literary Negritude. His conceptualization of the political, social, and political reality of Blacks, is sharp enough, and undoubtedly announces later Negritude ideas. But as for a theory for the application of these ideas to literary creation, it is more pertinent to look elsewhere than in McKay's expository prose. This is, in fact, the same conclusion Senghor reaches after considering the writings of the Harlem Renaissance writers in general, and their relevance to Negritude literature:

> It remains that . . . it is perhaps less the theory than the practice of Negritude, I mean the novel and particularly the poetry of the Negro Renaissance that influenced us as models.[58]

To follow Senghor's pertinent observation, it is in the novels and the poetry of Claude McKay that we must look for the ideas, styles, and modes of expression characteristic of Negritude literature.

CHAPTER III

Theory of Negritude in Langston Hughes

As several critics, Janheinz Jahn[1] and Harold Cruse[2] among them, have pointed out, the major weakness of the Harlem Renaissance was the absence of a comprehensive theoretical foundation, a system of thought that would have put in a clear perspective and a recognizable framework the various strands of ideas scattered in the discursive and imaginative works of the authors. Whereas, historically, most political and literary movements of any effectiveness have usually rested on clearly defined and enunciated theoretical concepts, the Renaissance produced no central concept around which the participants could have rallied. The movement issued no all-inclusive manifesto and created no theoretical masterwork to present the conception of art and culture of the poets and novelists as a group. The theoretical background of the Renaissance instead is composed of a number of scattered key ideas from various acknowledged and non-acknowledged influences. Among these influences, we can cite W. E. B. Dubois's The Souls of Black Folk, the pioneering examination of the peculiar social, cultural and political situation of Afro-Americans;[3] the popular Garvey movement with its focus on race and its advocacy of a literal return to Africa; and the persistent current of social radicalism in American literature. It must also be stressed that none of these currents of ideas commanded the unconditional allegiance of any single author.

In line with his contemporaries of the Renaissance, Langston Hughes also neglected to lay a systematic theoretical foundation for his poetry and fiction. This, however, does not necessarily imply that his imaginative works are constructed haphazardly without the benefit of some guiding principles, even though these are not stated a priori. In the absence of any formal political, cultural, and literary theories in the discursive works of Langston Hughes, it is nevertheless possible to extrapolate from a number of essays, articles, and his two autobiographies,[4] the basic ideas that constitute the starting point for his fiction and poetry. Cumulatively, these ideas outline a political and cultural world view, comprising a literary theory which includes a definition of the function of literature and the role of the writer, and of a Black aesthetics. In addition, despite their incohesiveness, it will be shown that they are clearly the harbingers of the Negritude system of ideas.

While Hughes may very well not have been a systematic theoretician, he was, to concur with Eugene C. Holmes, "a philosopher in the accepted sense because he developed a Welstanchauung, a cultural pluralism and commonality which endure because of his spokesman role as a freedom fighter in the long and checkered history of the struggle for human freedom."[5] If he failed to systematize his world view as an Afro-American in a peculiar social and cultural position, it is because he believed that this position could be apprehended better subjectively than objectively, lived rather than studied. That is certainly what Hughes was alluding to in this comment to Cuban poet Nicolas Guillen: "Yo no estudio el negro. Lo siento. [I do not study the Negro. I feel him.]"[6] Here is the voice of the poet, a man who prefers to live his

philosophy spontaneously rather than reflect on it from an objective distance, to express it in the organic fluidity of poetry rather than in the structural solidity of prose. And it is this attitude that explains Hughes's characteristic anecdotal style, that masks the import of the ideas and the depth of the insights scattered in his discursive works in such apparently nonchalant manner.

In 1926 Hughes published in The Nation one of his best known essays, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," the one text of the period that can be considered a Harlem Renaissance manifesto.[7] From the start, Hughes posits as a basic premise a dichotomy between the Black writer and the White writer, between Black art and White art. In his view, the Black artist's ability to create is contingent upon his fidelity to his racial and cultural identity, and his primary duty is to protect this identity against cooptation by the dominant culture:

> One of the most promising of the young Negro poets said to me once, "I want to be a poet--not a Negro poet," meaning, I believe, I want to write like a White poet; meaning subconsciously, "I would like to be a White poet;" And I was sorry the young man said that, for no great poet has ever been afraid of being himself. And I doubted then that, with his desire to run away spiritually from his race, this boy would ever be a great poet. [Emphasis added] 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 be as little Negro and as much American as possible.[8]

Here Hughes anticipates two major preoccupations of later Negritude theorists: authenticity and its antithesis, assimilation. Authenticity is defined as the complete assumption of Black racial characteristics and cultural values, while assimilation refers to the passive acceptance or the active acquisition of the values and ideals of Western culture.

For Senghor in particular, authenticity and assimilation are linked in a permanent antagonism that constitutes the very essence of Negritude:

> It is with independence as with Negritude. It is first a negation, I have said it, more precisely the affirmation of a negation. It is the necessary stage of a historical movement: the refusal of the Other, the refusal to be assimilated, to lose one's self in the Other. But because this movement is historical, it is at the same time dialectical. The refusal of the Other is the affirmation of the self.[9]

There is then among Hughes and the Negritude writers a certain consensus that assimilation is a totally negative phenomenon, and the common conviction that the assimilated artist can produce no original art, no work that is not a copy of the art of the dominant culture.

Hughes also gives a succinct analysis of the phenomenon of assimilation in the Black artist. He sees it as the end result of a process of psychological reinforcement by which the Black individual is taught to select, in a manicheistic esthetic and moral system, Western ideals as superior to and more desirable than Negro-African standards which are to be shunned at all costs:

> And the mother says, "Don't be like niggers" when the children are bad. A frequent phrase from the father is, "Look how well the White man does things." And so the word white comes to be unconsciously a symbol of all virtues. It holds for the children beauty, morality and money. The whisper of "I want to be White" runs silently through their minds. This young poet's home is, I believe, a fairly typical home of the colored middle-class. One sees how difficult it would be for an artist born in such a home to interest himself in interpreting the beauty of his own people. He is never taught to see that beauty, or if he does, to be ashamed of it when it is not according to Caucasian patterns.[10]

Frantz Fanon, the Martinican psychologist and revolutionary theorist associated with the Negritude movement, later did a more elaborate and scientific analysis of this phenomenon in his classic Black Skin, White

Masks (1952), essentially substantiating Hughes's preliminary insight.[11] Generally, the Negritude writers have all understood the complex workings of assimilation in similar terms. Leon G. Damas's "Hiccups" for instance is a poetic paraphrase of Hughes's illustration of the process.[12] In this powerful little satire, Damas recounts his mother's persistent efforts to inculcate in him "civilized" French social manners and tastes in everything from human relations to religion, language and music. The basic manicheistic premise of assimilation already hinted at by Hughes is particularly stressed in the last stanza of Damas's poem:

> I see you haven't been to your vi-o-lin lesson
> a banjo
> did you say a banjo
> what do you mean
> a banjo
> you really mean
> a banjo
> no indeed young man
> you know there won't be any
> ban- or
> jo
> or
> gui- or
> tar
> in our house
> They are not for colored people
> Leave them to the Black folks.[13]

Assimilation, in Hughes's as in Damas's view, is defined as a middle-class, bourgeois phenomenon. In opposition to the self-destructive qualities of assimilation, Hughes asserts the value of authenticity which is to be found only in the Black masses, the collective depository of Black cultural originality. Consequently, in his search for sources of inspiration, the Black artist must turn his attention to the social, religious, political, and artistic elements of his own culture, particularly as they are reflected in the masses:

> Certainly there is, for the American Negro artist who can escape the restrictions the more advanced

> among his group would put upon him, a great field of unused material ready for his art. Without going outside his race, and over among the better classes with their "White" culture and conscious American manners, but still Negro enough to be different, there is sufficient matter to furnish a Black artist with a life time of creative work. And when he chooses to touch on the relations between Negroes and Whites in this country, with their innumerable overtones and undertones, surely, and especially for literature and the drama, there is an inexhaustible supply of themes at hand.[14]

But it is not sufficient that the themes chosen by the artist must be from his culture. They must also be given a literary expression that is distinctly Black:

> To these the Negro artist can give his racial individuality, his heritage of rhythm and warmth, and his incongruous humor that so often, as in the Blues, becomes ironic laughter mixed with tears.[15]

Most Negritude theories rest on this assumption of the singularity of Blacks, on the belief that they have certain exclusive qualities. Like Hughes, Senghor has repeatedly asserted that any work of art by the Black artist conscious of his Negritude inevitably exhibits these qualities, in particular rhythm and humor. In his introduction to his anthology of Negritude poetry, he stresses that what constitutes the Negritude of a poem is less its theme than its rhythm.[16] He is even more emphatic in his essay "Comme les lamantins vont boire à la source," where he states that rhythm is inherent to a Negritude poem as "it is proper for the zebra to wear zebra stripes."[17] The Negritude artist, then, only has to follow his natural propensity since "the Negro is singularly from a world where the word spontaneously becomes rhythm as soon as the man is moved, returned to himself, to his authenticity."[18] And further defining the characteristics of Negritude and their reflection in the poetry, Senghor states: "The very umbilical cord of the

poem, rhythm, which is born of emotion, gives birth in turn to emotion. And humor, the other face of Negritude."[19]

Rhythm, emotion, humor, these attributes of Senghor's Negritude are the very same ones that characterize Hughes's "Negro soul." Like the later Negritude concept, this Negro soul is an almost undefinable concept, one better understood intuitively than cognitively. However, if the Negro soul is not easily apprehended, its manifestations are unmistakably sui generis. For Hughes, nowhere is the expression of the Negro soul more striking than in Black music, particularly jazz:

> . . . Jazz, to me is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America: the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul--the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a White world, a world of subway trains and work, work, work; the tom-tom of joy and laughter and pain swallowed in a smile.[20]

Here Hughes once more emphasizes the antithetical relationship between the cultural expressions of the Negro soul and the manifestations of mainstream American culture. This opposition between the two cultures is made evident enough by the images with which each is characterized. There is on one side the hard, mechanical, painfully palpable world of technological America, a subterranean "world of subway trains," an economic sledge hammer destroying the spirit under the repeated blows of "work, work, work." On the other side stands the Negro soul in heroic opposition, in "revolt against weariness in a White world," impalpable and yet real as the sound of the drum of its music, as utterly human as its laughter and its pain. While the White world is disruptive of the natural order in its essential manifestations, the Black world on the contrary blends with organic nature and moves to the eternal rhythms of the cosmos. Writes Hughes in The Big Sea (1940):

> Like the waves of the sea coming one after another, like the earth moving around the sun, night, day--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.[21]

The stress on rhythm as one of the singular attributes of Black artistic creations is again evident in this citation. As we have seen, for Senghor, as for Hughes, it is the very expression of the Negro soul, the mark of Negritude. To Senghor also, it is what makes Black culture more human and holds it in harmony with the cosmos. And when he discourses on this elusive aspect of Negritude, his language is strikingly similar to Hughes's poetic, almost mystical accents:

> Rhythm is, beyond the sign, the essential reality of this thing that animates and explains the universe, of this thing which is life. It is the flux and the reflux, day and night, inspiration and expiration, death and birth. Rhythm is this spirituality which is expressed by the most material means: volumes, surfaces and lines in architecture and sculpture, accents in poetry and music, movements in dance.[22]

Unlike the Negritude theorists, Hughes does not seem to believe simply in the existence of an abstract universal Negro soul of which all Blacks would partake. Senghor in particular is an advocate of this near mystical notion of a "collective soul" which, along with instinct and cosmic rhythm, is at the core of his conception of Negritude:

> Negritude is the whole of the values of civilization--cultural, economic, social, political--which characterize the Black people, more exactly the Negro-African world. It is essentially <u>instinctive reason</u>, which pervades all these values. It is reason of the impressions, reason that is "seized." It is expressed through an abandonment of self and a complete identification with the object; through the myth of the archetype of the collective soul, and the <u>myth primordial</u> accorded to the cosmos. In other terms, the sense of communion, the gift of imagination, the gift of rhythm--these are the traits of Negritude, that we find like an indelible seal on all the works and activities of the Black man.[23]

This monolithic, abstract vision of Blacks neglects their cultural diversity both in Africa and in the Diaspora, a diversity resulting from geography as well as from the variety of their individual responses to distinctive historical experiences. Frantz Fanon was well aware of this fact when, his sympathies with Negritude notwithstanding, he took exception to the Senghorian view to protest: "Negro experience is not a whole, for there is not merely one Negro, there are Negroes."[24] Hughes had already reached a similar conclusion, and in his writings "Negro" or "Black" generally refers not to all Blacks under the sun, but specifically to the Afro-American. And what had shaped this Afro-American, what had given him his unique identity is not some universal primitive essence, but a specific socio-historical experience. In his autobiography The Big Sea, Hughes illustrates this point with an anecdote about his break with a White patron disappointed by the lack of primitivism in his poetry:

> 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 as though I did. I was only an American Negro--who had loved the surface of Africa and the rhythms of Africa. I was Chicago and Kansas City and Harlem. And I was not what she wanted me to be.[25]

Another fundamental difference between Hughes and the majority of Negritude theorists is that for the latter the essential cultural commonality of Blacks transcends and blurs all social distinctions. As some Marxist critics of Negritude have pointed out, beyond their recognition of assimilation as a bourgeois phenomenon, most of the writers, with the exception of those with socialist convictions like Aimé Césaire, have failed to make any sociological considerations in their analysis of the condition of Blacks.[26] Langston Hughes, on the

contrary, is consistently aware of the social divisions within the Black population. He condemns the Black bourgeoisie as a class, not only for their assimilationist attitudes, but also for their political and cultural sterility. For him, whatever political and cultural dynamism exists among Blacks is to be found only in the lower classes. Such is the conviction expressed in no uncertain terms in the "Washington Society" chapter of The Big Sea in which he paints a most unflattering portrait of the Black bourgeoisie, and asserts his determination to base his art only on the culture of the masses.[27]

If Hughes takes into consideration the diversity of cultures within the world Black community and the social division among Blacks, he nevertheless is aware of a certain commonality among them, one based on a shared experience of slavery and the oppression of colonialism, with the resulting desire for freedom from exploitation. This same awareness pervades the chapter on Africa in The Big Sea in which Hughes describes the most blatant aspects of colonialist exploitation of Africans, and draws attention to the fact that in the final analysis the objective situation of Africans and Afro-Americans is the same.[28]

In Hughes's view, the commonality of Blacks also rests on the objective existence of a single cultural heritage, the original spring from which the various cultures of the Black Diaspora flow. The recognition and assumption of this heritage are two of the most important aspects of Negritude. In this respect, Hughes's agreement with the position of the Negritude theorists is so complete that forty years after the Harlem Renaissance he naturally borrowed the concept of Negritude to reaffirm his views. Thus in a 1966 article significantly titled "Harlem and Its Negritude," Hughes writes: "To us, Negritude was an

unknown word, but certainly pride of heritage and consciousness of race was ingrained in us."[29] And elsewhere, he establishes a correspondence between the concept of Negritude and that of the Negro soul he had used in the days of the Renaissance: "As I understand it, . . . Negritude has its roots deep in the beauty of Black people--in what younger American writers and musicians call soul . . ."[30] The stress on the existence of a common original culture does not in any way contradict Hughes's previous expression of his belief in the uniqueness of Afro-American culture and the specificity, in fact, of each Black culture. The underlying argument is that Afro-American culture and the other cultures of the Diaspora are branches of a single tree, that each is the result of a syncretism that includes elements of the original civilization as well as those acquired through the particular experience of each local population. The common link is Africa.

This link which assimilation had taught Blacks to deny, Hughes believes should be reclaimed. In this respect, the duty of the Black artist is to initiate a reversal of values by rejecting the negativity associated with Black culture and reaffirm its essentially positive aspects. Black art should be, in Hughes's opinion, a statement of the transcending beauty of the artist's culture and an assertion of the validity of Negro-African esthetic values. Such is the task Hughes assigns to the artist in unambiguous terms in "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain":

> But, to my mind, it is the duty of the younger Negro artist, if he accepts any duty at all from outsiders, to change through the force of his art that old whispering, "I want to be White" hidden in the aspiration of his people, to "Why should I want to be White? I am a Negro--and beautiful."[31]

The task assumed later by Negritude writers is basically the same: to reclaim and express in their art the positive values of Black reality. With his usual precision of language, Senghor describes the goals of the Negritude writers thus:

> . . . to assume the values of the civilizations of the Black world, to actualize and fertilize them, if need be with foreign elements, in order to live them by and for oneself, but also to make them come alive by and for others, thus bringing the contribution of the new Negroes to the Civilization of the Universal.[32]

Senghor's vision is broader, and the task attributed to his colleagues is indeed an ambitious one requiring a universal outlook and a proselytizing spirit. Hughes, for his part, is more modest and restricts himself to the American scene. His missionary spirit is as intense, though it is expressed in somewhat more ambiguous terms. Indeed, in the conclusion to "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," Hughes appears to profess indifference to the reception of his message of Negritude:

> 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.[33]

This statement is ambiguous enough to have caused a perceptive critic such as Samuel Allen to see in it a departure from the missionary goals of Negritude and its concern with the collective. In "Negritude and its Relevance to the American Writer," Allen acknowledges the presence of various Negritude ideas in Hughes, but he opines that his apparent advocacy of artistic individualism differs from the canons of Negritude.[34] Negritude conceives the artist as being a spokesman for his

community, an interpreter of the collective who addresses himself first to the community and in the language of his people. "I write first," says Senghor, "for my people. And they know that a kora is not a harp, nor a balafong a piano."[35] Whereas Hughes seems to believe in the primacy of the artist's subjective freedom, Senghor categorically insists that he must strive after a transcending objective realism. Quoting Henri Hell, Senghor emphasizes that "he [the artist] must get rid of an illusory individuality for the sake of a superior Ego situated beyond personality. The Ego lets itself be destroyed in order to open up on the ultimate Reality."[36]

On the surface, Hughes and Senghor appear to hold conflicting positions. But Hughes's well established sympathy with the masses and his advocacy of an art rooted in the masses implicitly precludes any merely subjective individualism. Consequently one must take exception to Allen's opinion and reinterpret Hughes's position in the perspective of Negritude. It must be assumed then that he speaks in the name of the collective, that his indifference to the reception of his message is aimed rather at the assimilated Black bourgeoisie and Whites of bad faith, and that far from advocating a subjective individualism he proclaims instead the artist's victory over alienation and his availability for objective action. These assumptions are substantiated in two later essays in which Hughes expresses more explicitly his views on the function of literature and the role of the artist.[37]

Jean-Paul Sartre has observed that "Black poetry has nothing to do with the effusions of the heart: it is functional, it answers to a need that defines it precisely."[38] This observation about Negritude poetry coincides perfectly with Hughes's conception of the purpose of Black

literature. For him, the function of literature is first, and inevitably, a social one. It must not only reflect the writer's society, but also be a catalyst for social action. "There are," says Hughes in a 1935 speech to the American Writers' Congress, "certain practical things American Negro writers can do through their works."[39] Addressing itself first to the Black masses, Black literature purports to raise their political consciousness and make them aware of the possibility of effecting social change, "to reveal to the Negro masses from which we come, our potential power to transform the now ugly face of the Southland into a region of peace and plenty."[40] In the same breath, Black literature also addresses itself to the White masses, with the aim of shattering in their minds their stereotypical views of Blacks, to impress upon them the multi-dimensionality of Black culture and its integration in American culture.[41] Finally, Hughes's conception of the social thrust of literature goes beyond merely raising racial consciousness and promoting racial and cultural understanding. Broadening his vision, he sees literature as a tool in the social struggle that could ideally unite all workers regardless of race:

> Negro writers can seek to unite Blacks and Whites in our country, not on the nebulous basis of an interracial meeting, or the shifting sands of religious brotherhood, but on the <u>solid</u> ground of the daily working-class struggle to wipe out, now and forever, all the old inequalities of the past.[42]

Here Hughes's words echo the views of the contemporary school of proletarian literature. As a "fellow traveler," his view of the ultimate function of art and literature is unsurprising. But while he may well have been influenced by the pervasive American literary radicalism, his convictions actually precede the proletarian movement by a few years, as a cursory reading of his early poetry shows.[43] Referring to his own

literary creations in his essay "My Adventures as a Social Poet," Hughes again emphasizes that the conscious writer should in fact feel compelled to go beyond mere romantic individualism, and be, instead, a radical social critic who would not be content to "write mostly about love, roses and moonlight, sunsets and snow . . ."[44] Like Senghor, then, Hughes advocates the relinquishing of the writer's self-absorbtion and the substitution, in its place, of a consciousness of the collective, be it defined as race or as class.[45]

As this brief comparative survey of Langston Hughes' discursive prose shows, there are many points of agreement between his views and those of the Negritude school, especially as they are expressed by its chief theorist, Senghor. Fragmentary as the expression of his theoretical ideas are, the main points of Hughes's early Negritude are clear. They include his emphasis on racial and cultural consciousness complemented by class consciousness, and his insistence that literature should not only reflect racial, cultural, and class consciousness, but should contribute to its arousal in others. His imaginative works, as he writes in "My Adventures as a Social Poet,"[46] are the fruits of his efforts to put these views into literary practice.

CHAPTER IV

The Poetry of Claude McKay: Exploring the Mystical Geography of Negritude

In "Orphée Noir," Jean-Paul Sartre observes that thematically and symbolically the poetry of Negritude explores a "mystical geography" analogous to

> an hemisphere: at the bottom, as the first of three concentric circles, lies the land of exile, colorless Europe; then comes the dazzling circle of the islands and of childhood dancing the beat around Africa; Africa, the last circle, navel of the world, pole of all Black poetry, . . . imaginary continent.[1]

Insofar as his verse follows the meander of a similar geography, McKay's works presage the poetic world of the West Indian and African bards of Negritude. Not without reason, his "mystical geography" differs in several aspects contingent on his personal background and experience. For him, America, and not Europe, represents the outermost circle, the colorless land of exile and of social and racial alienation. Africa, the next circle in his hemisphere, is the same imaginary continent sung by the Negritude poets, but for McKay the Black continent is not "the navel of the world" nor the pole of his poetic universe. Jamaica, the dazzling island of his childhood, is the pole toward which the poet's consciousness and imagination gravitate, a very real land symbolizing the ideal of harmony in his personal and racial experience.

Two currents run simultaneously through McKay's poetry. There is first the movement of his consciousness between the three circles of his mystical geography: Jamaica, where he lingers lovingly in two volumes of dialect verse,[2] Songs of Jamaica (1912) and Constab Ballads (1912), and to which he constantly returns in the poetry of his American period,[3] Spring in New Hampshire (1920)[4] and Harlem Shadows (1922);[5] Africa, the distant symbol of his racial and cultural past which he evokes in an occasional poem; and finally America, the antithesis of his island home and the catalyst for the alienation that is an integral part of his later poetry. At the same time, there is the racial dialectic implied symbolically and metaphorically in most of the poems, but more explicitly in the protest poetry responsible for his popularity.

As observed earlier, Africa occupies a minimal place in the poetry of Claude McKay. This is somewhat paradoxical in view of contemporary trends and influences. Indeed, as Alain Locke stresses, the Renaissance ferment was "the most sophisticated of the race motives--the conscious and deliberate threading back of the historic sense of group tradition to the cultural backgrounds of Africa."[6] This metaphoric return was paralleled on a popular level by Marcus Garvey's mass movement for a literal return to Africa. Although McKay initially gave his lukewarm support to the movement, he was generally impervious to the appeals for either a literal or a symbolic return to the continent. His final assessment of his compatriot Garvey and his ideology is particularly revealing in this respect. To him, Garvey was only "a West Indian charlatan . . . full of antiquated ideas."[7] McKay's position vis-a-vis Africa establishes a major difference between him and the Negritude poets who had considerable sympathy for the aims of the Garvey movement,[8]

and in whose poetry Africa represents, without exaggeration, the alpha and the omega. Such an idealization of the Black continent is totally absent from the poetry of Claude McKay, and his treatment of Africa is underscored rather by an attitude of ambivalence toward the land of his ancestors. The poetry of his African circle generally follows a set pattern according to which McKay acknowledges Africa as the cradle of the race, then contemplates her glorious cultural and political past, and finally reflects on her present destitution. The contrast between the past and the present stirs up in the poet various sentiments of irreparable loss, despair, and the persistent sense that the decadence and fall of Africa is due to some undefined sin.

The sonnet "Africa" is typical of McKay's treatment of the theme.[9] After evoking the antiquity of the continent and its history as a marvelous land of builders and inventors of the sciences, in brief as "the cradle of civilization" as the writers of Negritude are fond of calling Africa, the poet observes the fallen state of the continent and concludes dejectedly:

> Cradle of power! Yet all things were vain!
> Honor and Glory! Arrogance and Fame!
> They went. The darkness swallowed thee again.
> Thou art the harlot, now thy time is done,
> Of all the mighty nations of the sun.[10]

The poem "The Wise Men of the East" makes the same point of measuring the brilliant historical past against the depth of the destitution of the present.[11] The sonnet ends with the suggestion that Blacks have fallen from their privileged position as a chosen people since the mythical Magi of the New Testament visited the infant Christ, because of their intemperate use of their power. The decline and fall of his people draw from the poet this cry of despair and pity:

From the high place where erstwhile they grew drunk
With power, oh God, how gutter-low have black men sunk.[12]

While in the poems on Africa of this type there is a certain sense of detachment and objective observation underlying the apparently more subjective despair, in other instances McKay frankly identifies with the historical fate of his ancestors and their land.[13] Their decline and fall become his own, and the uprooting of his race coincides with his own exile. In exile in the West like his ancestors, he longs for the unknown past and the land he has never seen. Atavistic memories strive to be expressed, and an undefined spiritual bond with the old land is felt in a confused way. But, the poet implies, the influence of Western culture, assimilation in a word, represses the authentic core that constitutes his true identity. Consequently, his experience is one of alienation, dispossession, displacement, and frustration, which is summed up most strikingly in the concluding lines of the evocatively titled sonnet "Outcast":

For I was born, far from my native clime,
Under the white man's menace, out of time.[14]

As Sartre points out, the motifs of exile and alienation, and atavistic attraction to the ancestral heritage, are typical of the poetry of Negritude.[15] Their recurrence in several of McKay's poems on Africa constitutes one more link with his successors. While his tone and language may vary, the fundamental idea of an unresolved alienation and disruptive exile remain the focus of these poems. Sometimes the idea is expressed subtly and symbolically, as in "On a Primitive Canoe" in which a wooden canoe evokes in the poet thoughts of his racial and cultural past, and spurs in him vague yearnings for something lost.[16] Though Africa is for him "a dim and unknown land,"[17] he intuitively grasps its significance.

The imaginary continent, unlike the Western world around him, fits harmoniously into the cosmic order suggested by the primitive canoe, "symbol of the tender moon."[18] His longing for Africa is then a longing for a lost order according to which man was at one with the cosmos. To the poet, this remote past is definitely more appealing than a present consisting of anxiety and psychic chaos;

> Why does it thrill more than the handsome boat
> That bore me o'er the wild Atlantic ways,
> And fill me with rare sense of things remote
> From this harsh life of fretful nights and days.[19]

In the above poem, McKay indirectly posits a racial and cultural dialectic whose two terms, Africa and the West, are represented by the opposing symbols of the primitive canoe and the handsome boat. In other poems, this implicit opposition is stated more clearly as a manicheistic scheme. In the sonnet "Invocation," for instance, the poet calls to the "Ancestral Spirit" and prays for a mystical union with the old land in order to exorcise the "evil powers" of the West so that he can emerge to the light and music of Africa and become "the worthy singer of my world and race."[20]

One of the most obvious characteristics of the poems on Africa considered so far is the abstraction of the language which at times borders on the mystical, as in the preceding sonnet. Also remarkable is the considerable distance between the poet and his subject. His malaise as a Black man in the West may be real enough, and no doubt is the prime inspiration of the poems. However, McKay's longing for a distant homeland which he has never seen is less certain, and remains only a poetic stance. The anxiety of his exile from traditional African culture is purely intellectual, and consequently the Africa of these poems must necessarily be vague and abstract.

Another group of poems inspired by a more direct experience of Africa presents an interesting contrast. Written during an extended stay in Morocco, these poems are characterized by a spontaneity of tone and expression, a vividly concrete imagery, and unabashed feelings that are clear indications that for McKay this part of the continent was a true epiphany. The sonnet "Tetuan," for instance, is a vision of a successful marriage between Africa and Europe:

> Morocco conquering homage paid to Spain
> And the Alhambra lifted up its towers!
> Africa's fingers tipped with miracles,
> And quivering with Arabian designs,
> Traced words and figures like exotic flowers,
> Sultanas' chambers of rare tapestries,
> Filigree marvels from Koranic lines,
> Mosaics chanting notes like tropic rain.
> And Spain repaid the tribute ages after:
> To Tetuan, that fort of struggle and strife,
> Where chagrined Andalusian Moors retired,
> She brought a fountain bubbling with new life,
> Whose jewelled charm won even the native pride,
> And filled it sparkling with flamenco laughter.[21]

The poet's contemplation of the past glory of Africa is not an occasion for gloom, but for the joyful realization of its survival in all its splendor enriched by contacts with Europe. McKay here implicitly agrees with Césaire's argument that encounters between the two cultures do not necessarily have to be under exploitative conditions.[22] His vision of a fruitful exchange between Europe and Africa also corresponds to Senghor's idea of a possible synthesis of the two cultures pitted against each other by the forces of history.[23] It is, then, with a certain satisfaction that McKay observes in North Africa concrete signs of not only coexistence, but also of interaction between the West and Africa.[24] It is undoubtedly these signs of cultural harmony that inspire the optimism of "Tetuan" and suffuse the poem with a music and fluidity of rhythm absent from the other works on Africa cited earlier.

The North Africa poems also show a more frank, more plausible identification with the land and the culture. McKay writes at length in his autobiography of this sense of self regained, and integration with the land and the people.[25] All this is apparent in his long poem "A Farewell to Morocco,"[26] a parting song to an earthly paradise of light, color, and music, a painful farewell to a magic land that has impregnated all the poet's senses:

> Notes soaked with the dear odor of your soil
> And like its water cooling to my tongue,
> Haunting me always like a splendid dream,
> Of vistas opening to an infinite way
> Of perfect love
> That angels make
> In Paradise.
>
> Habeeb, Habeeba, I may never return
> Another sacred fast to keep with you,
> But when your Prince of months inaugurates
> Our year, my thoughts will turn to Ramadan,
> Forgetting never
> Its tokens
> Unforgettable.[27]

Undoubtedly, a certain romanticism colors McKay's poetic rendition of his Moroccan experience. To a certain extent, as evident in his narration of the experience in his autobiography, he was responding mostly to the lure of the exoticism of his cultural and material surroundings. It is therefore understandable that the romantic inspiration of the poems has bypassed unpleasant social realities such as the colonial situation of Morocco. It is not that McKay ignores these realities, since he examines them both in A Long Way from Home[28] and in several articles.[29] If the poems are devoid of political awareness, it is because one aspect of the poet's experience, namely his new sense of racial and cultural integration, outweighs all other considerations in his immediate subjective consciousness.

McKay's awareness of the political situation of Africa does however find expression in other poetic works.[30] In these he evokes the history of the oppression of his people by the West, and the rape of Africa by colonialism. His tone varies from the calm objectivity of the historian, to the anger of an individual conscious of his history, to the evangelical cry of revolt of the militant, committed poet. Among these poems of protest, "Exhortation: Summer 1919," a call to revolt addressed to Africa and the Black Diaspora, is one of the most effective.[31] Written in the atmosphere of the 1919 riots, and amidst the still loud rumbles of the Russian revolution to which it alludes, and the more subtle signs of the awakening of the African continent, the poem has an urgency and a directness that move the reader in the desired direction as a truly political poem should. With its sweeping rhythm, its striking metaphors, its exhortatory tone, it has the qualities of the great revolutionary anthems penned in the heat of action:

> Through the pregnant universe rumbles life's
> terrific thunder,
> And earth's bowels quake with terror; strange
> and terrible storms break,
> Lightning torches flame the heavens, kindling
> souls of men thereunder:
> Africa! long ages sleeping, O my motherland,
> awake!
>
> In the East the clouds grow crimson with the new
> dawn that is breaking,
> And its golden glory fills the Western skies.
> O my brothers and my sisters, wake! arise!
> For the new birth rends the old earth and the
> very dead are waking,
> Ghosts are turned flesh, throwing off the grave's
> disguise,
> And the foolish, even children, are made wise;
> For the big earth groans in travail for the strong,
> new world in making--
> O my brothers, dreaming for dim centuries,
> Wake from sleeping; to the East turn, turn
> your eyes![32]

Two conceptions of Africa emerge from the poetic work of Claude McKay. Africa is first seen as an imaginary continent, the mythic cradle of the race and the abstract symbol of the culture. At the same time, it is a real political entity and the seat of a dynamic culture. These two views are symptomatic of McKay's ambivalence toward the continent, the mixed pride and shame, despair and hope, that are so apparent in the poems. Ultimately, Africa remains in the poetry of McKay a distant entity, mythic, symbolic, exotic, with which, for all practical purposes, he has no direct, immediate link. It is only natural, then, that Africa be superseded in his poetry by a land that is more palpably real and more relevant to his immediate experience, namely his native Jamaica.

The pole of McKay's mystical geography, the navel of his poetic world, thus shifts from the imaginary continent to his real native land. Indeed, from the dialect poetry of Songs of Jamaica and Constab Ballads, to the several poems gathered in the "Songs for Jamaica" section of the Selected Poems,[33] more than half of his poetic work is directly inspired by his dazzling island. In these works, Jamaica is not only the direct source of McKay's themes, diction, and imagery, but more importantly it is at the origin of his social, political, and philosophical outlook.

As a young poet, McKay's ambition was to become "the Jamaican Bobby Burns."[34] This self-identification with the Scottish national poet expresses his youthful aspiration to be a truly national poet, one who sings the very soul of his land and his people. And McKay's people were the peasant majority of Jamaica whose musical dialect he chose as the medium of his poetry. McKay's intimate knowledge of the peasantry's

traditions and language, and his respect and admiration for their values, combine to transform his poetry into a paean to the culture.

The fifty poems of Songs of Jamaica are a collection of loving portraits and vignettes of the peasantry he knew so well, and of laudatory verse to the land he loved so much.[35] In his study of McKay's poetry, Jean Wagner stresses the respectful realism of his treatment of the peasants.[36] But underneath the realism that derives as much from the authentic language as from the faithful portrayal of a way of life, lies an unabashed partiality that leads McKay to idealize both the peasantry and the land. For him, the Jamaican peasant embodies ideal values, a correct philosophy of life, and an accurate perception of society. And the land, blooming in the splendor of a fecund and generous nature, is a Garden of Eden.

In a series of short edifying vignettes, and in a number of frankly didactic poems in the peasant's own words, McKay praises the quiet dignity, pride, self-confidence, sense of duty, and purposefulness that reflect the peasant's system of values.[37] The opening poem of the volume, for instance, "Quashie to Buccra,"[38] sums up McKay's perception of the peasant's values, social perspective, and relationship to the land. In this poem, a peasant reproaches a White man for underestimating the value of his work in wanting to purchase his potatoes for a low price. And he catalogues for his edification all the painful labor between planting and harvest. If the harvest is plentiful, it is, he declares, thanks to his hard work and nature's generous disposition:

> De fiel' pretty? It couldn't less an' dat.
> We wuk de bes, an' den de lan' is fat.[39]

His reward is as much a good harvest as the satisfaction of a job well done despite the hardships, and the just recognition by others of the

value of his work:

> You tas'e petater an' you say it sweet,
> But you no know how hard we wuk fe it;
> Yet still de hardship always melt away
> Wheneber it come roun' to reapin' day.[40]

The peasant's outlook on life is based on an unflagging stoicism, self-discipline, harmony with others, and the constant search for the golden mean. This whole approach is illustrated most succinctly in the suggestively titled "Whe' Fe Do?,"[41] one of several poems exposing the peasant's philosophy. His is not simply the joyfully stoic acceptance of the vicissitudes of life, but the eager and active embracing of his world, supported by his firm optimistic belief in a better tomorrow and his trust in his and his fellow men's fundamental dignity:

> We'll try an' live as any man,
> An' fight de wul' de best we can,
> E'en though it hard fe understan'
> Whe' we must do.[42]

Just as McKay idealizes the peasant as the embodiment of certain virtues, he also idealizes his natural environment. Nature is the superlative reflection of the peasant with whom she constantly interacts. She is the generous nurturer who eagerly yields to the peasant's labor, and the poet ceaselessly praises her for her thoughtful gifts, as in "King Banana,"[43] one of several poems about typical agricultural products of Jamaica. As nature provides for the peasant's material needs, she also nurtures his spirit, acting as a protecting shield against the nefarious influences of the outside world while encouraging the development of the positive values which constitute the ideals of the country. As he says in "The Hermit," the poet's transcending desire is to retreat behind this shield to commune with nature and thus preserve the peace of mind and wisdom threatened by a world in turmoil:

Far in de country let me hide myself
From life's sad pleasures an' de greed of pelf,
Dwellin' wid Nature primitive an' rude,
Livin' a peaceful life of solitude.[44]

This romantic view of nature has its antithesis in McKay's apprehension of the city as a place of greed, idleness, corruption and immorality, of which the individual, like the young prostitute of "To a Country Girl,"[45] easily becomes a victim. The opposition between country and city is in fact a recurring theme in McKay's poetry. In the dialect poetry, the opposition expresses two aspects of his Jamaican world: the country, where the morally and culturally healthy peasantry resides, and the city where "aimlessly, foolishly roam"[46] all those who have abandoned the authentic moral and cultural values of the peasantry. In the poetry of McKay's American circle, as we shall see further, the opposition acquires a wider significance as the country is identified with the whole of Jamaica, and the city becomes the negative symbol of an oppressive and alienating America. Meanwhile, in Songs of Jamaica, McKay transcends the opposition between the city and the country to extend his approval and love to his native land as a whole. This all-embracing love inspires such a poem as "My Native Land, My Home,"[47] a most patriotic ode that unambiguously establishes Jamaica as the center of the poet's racial and cultural universe:

Dere is no land dat can compare
Wid you where'er I roam;
In all de wul' nope like you fair,
My native land, my home.[48]

McKay's acceptance of his land is not so total, however, as to blind him to some negative aspects of his society. Underlying his spontaneous and enthusiastic utterances of love for his country, there is in the Songs of Jamaica a clear, though muted consciousness of the

economic and social injustice oppressing his fellow peasants. Thus, his romantic idealization of the peasantry is balanced by the realism and social awareness expressed in poems such as "Fetching Water,"[49] "Hard Times,"[50] "Two-an'-Six,"[51] and "Compensation."[52] The poet, however, remains optimistic that social oppression will eventually disappear, and justice will reign in his native land:

> For every smallest wrong dere is a right,
> An' t'rough de dark shall gleam a ray of light:
> Oppression for a season may endure,
> But 'tis true wud, "For ebery ill a cure."[53]

McKay's awareness of the shortcomings of his society is voiced more forcefully in the Constab Ballads.[54] While this second volume of dialect poetry in general treats the same themes as the Songs of Jamaica--nature, the works and days of the peasantry--its emphasis is rather on social criticism. Inspired by McKay's brief experience as a policeman in Kingston,[55] the poems of this volume show an abhorrence of oppression which in spirit, if not in expression, announces McKay's later protest poetry. The following stanza from "An Apple Woman's Complaint" aptly sums up McKay's view of the social situation from his standpoint as a reluctant representative of the forces of oppression:

> Black nigger wukin' laka cow
> An' wipin' sweat-drops from his brow,
> Dough him is dyin' sake o' need,
> P'lice an' dem headman boun' fe feed.[56]

The Ballads also introduce the first discreet notes of alienation in his works, particularly in these poems of nostalgia such as "A Labourer Life Give Me,"[57] or "The Heart of a Constab"[58] in which he complains about his separation from his fellow peasants and his beloved country:

> 'Tis grievous to think dat, while toilin' on here,
> My people won't love me again,
> My people, my people, me owna black skin,--
> De wretched t'ought gives me such pain.

But I'll leave it, my people, an' come back to you,
I'll flee from de grief an' turmoil;
I'll leave it, though flow'rs here should line my
path yet,
An' come back to you an' de soil.[59]

Within the context of Negritude, the significance of McKay's dialect poetry goes beyond its exploration of one level of the mystical geography of the poet. One of the most striking aspects of the poetry is paradoxically the relative absence of the consciousness of Negritude, a consciousness which derives from the acute awareness of racial and cultural singularity, of individual alienation. On the contrary, there is in the poetry a sense of total integration, a matter-of-fact, unconscious, spontaneous acceptance by the poet of his racial, cultural, and social identity. Consequently, the usual themes of Negritude poetry--exile, nostalgia, alienation, Africa, the past--are virtually not treated in the Songs of Jamaica and the Constab Ballads. More significantly, consciousness of race plays no role in the two volumes except for a few cursory references. In the final analysis, as we will show further, the dialect poetry is significant not so much because of its focus on the dazzling island of the poet's youth, but because it illuminates the process of McKay's assumption of the consciousness of Negritude by the sharp thematic, tonal, and stylistic contrast it presents in comparison with the poetry of the circle of America.

The circle of Jamaica embraces not only the Songs and the Ballads, but also encompasses the poems of exile collected under the title "Songs for Jamaica" in the Selected Poems.[60] These works once more confirm Jamaica as the basis of McKay's poetry, and more importantly introduce formally the themes of Negritude. While the collective title of the poems evokes that of the first volume of dialect verse, the themes of the "Songs for Jamaica" as well as their modes of treatment are entirely

different. The recurring themes of childhood, the past, nature, and the return to the native land, are constantly intertwined so as to constitute a collective metaphorical antithesis to the land of exile. The happiness and innocence of childhood, the warmth and color of the poet's tropical paradise, his former privileged relation with nature, all these symbols of his previous social, racial, and cultural integration, of the integrity of the self, stand in explicit contrast to the cold, the dreariness, the turmoil of America, "the colorless land of exile"[61] and the catalyst for his alienation. Collectively, McKay's poems of exile constitute an imaginary journey into the past, an attempt to recapture his former self and to reconstruct a lost world of harmony and integration.

"Flame-Heart," the first of the twenty "Songs for Jamaica," is also one of the most typical of the poems of exile, and combines all the aspects of Negritude poetry outlined above in its themes, tone, and imagery.[62] A most lyrical poem of remembrance, it opens with these obviously ironic lines as the poet turns his thoughts to the faraway homeland:

> So much I have forgotten in ten years,
> So much in ten brief years! . . .[63]

And the poet proceeds to bring back the past in striking images as all his senses unite to conjure up his former closeness with nature, his intimate union with the flora and the fauna of his tropical paradise:

> . . . . . I have forgot
> What time the purple apples come to juice,
> And what month brings the shy forget-me-not.
> I have forgot the special, startling season
> Of the pimento's flowering and fruiting;
> What time of year the brown doves brown the fields
> And fill the noonday with their curious fluting.
> I have forgotten much, but still remember
> The poinsettia's red, blood-red, in warm December.[64]

The picture emerging from this nostalgic evocation of the nature of the poet's land is one of harmony and peace suggested by the colorful images of fruits and flowers, and the soothing song of the doves. The closing couplet of the stanza frames this picture as if the poet wanted to preserve forever the memories of the past. The dominant image of the red poinsettia, the symbolic focus of his remembrance, evokes the warmth, the love, and the sensuality of the past, while the unexpected juxtaposition of "warm" and "December" establish a connotative contrast between the perennial warmth of the poet's native island and the wintry cold of the land of exile.

The second stanza continues this evocation of the poet's sensual memories of nature, and introduces us to the third stanza which focuses on the memories of the carefree games and happy wanderings of a childhood "all innocent of passion, uncorrupt."[65] These long gone times of innocence, purity, and happiness, are so precious because they symbolize a period in which his union with his land, and his integration in his society were complete. Though his poetry recreates vividly this past reality, he endows it with a certain fragility. The poet's memories are as colorful, delicate, and fragrant as the flower which symbolizes them, but they are also as perishable. The contrast between a happy, harmonious, and innocent past, and a dispirited, alienated present, is further emphasized by the "flame-heart," the central floral symbol of the poem. The connotation of ritual purity and comforting warmth of the flame is counterbalanced by the turmoil suggested by the heart, the seat of often contradictory emotions. The idea is also contained in the paradox of the recurring leitmotif at the end of each stanza: "I have forgotten, but still remember." While the harsh reality of the poet's new

milieu conspires to obliterate his past, like an eternal flame this past remains alive in his heart. Thus, the poet finally proclaims the triumph of his authentic self over the forces of alienation and assimilation. This constant awareness of his identity is the successful result of his orphic adventure.

The nostalgic mood, and the basic pattern of ideas, sentiments, and imagery, are typical of all the poems of exile of McKay. From "Home Thoughts,"[66] to "Adolescence"[67] and "The Tropics in New York,"[68] they all metaphorically juxtapose Jamaica and America, usually in terms of their contrasting climate and nature. They also evoke a happier past and affirm the poet's determination to return to that past. Significantly, the last poem of the group entitled "I Shall Return"[69] most explicitly restates the poet's intention to engage in the final journey that would put an end to his dual physical and psychological exile, to accomplish the ultimate reunion of his self with his land, his people, his culture:

> I shall return. I shall return again
> To ease my mind of long, long years of pain.[70]

Placed against a biographical background, these concluding lines of the poem contain the ultimate irony in McKay's adventure of exile. Contrary to the implication of the "Songs for Jamaica," the painful exile which inspires the poems was essentially voluntary, and there was in fact no objective obstacle to McKay's return to his island. The contradiction between the objective circumstances of McKay and the sentiments expressed in the poems of exile has already attracted the attention of at least one McKay critic who has not convincingly explained this contradiction.[71] In the final analysis, the poetic truth must supersede the objective facts: McKay was an exile because he felt like one, and the

metaphorical return to his native land is as significant as an actual return would have been. If the idea of Jamaica dominates his poetry, it is not because of simple nostalgia. As McKay stresses in the autobiographical essay "Boyhood in Jamaica,"[72] the island of his youth is so important because it had given him the vision of a world in which it is possible for Blacks to live with a natural sense of identity, and for different ethnic groups to live together without the devastating racial antagonism he witnessed in America. It is precisely this ideal vision of Jamaica and its people as "an exotic garden planted by God" that conjures up in McKay's poems of America the opposite vision of that country as hell.

The poems of exile considered earlier open the door to the last circle of McKay's mystical geography, America, "the colorless land of exile," to repeat the Sartrean phrase.[73] These poems indicate several changes in McKay's world view which bring the content of his work, if not the form, closer to Negritude. The most obvious sign of these changes is his abandonment of the dialect for formal English and more conservative verse forms. Although this can be explained as a natural return to the literary models of McKay's British education, his adoption of a new poetic language may have been in response to the new reality of America and to a new audience. The second change in the poetry occurs at a more profound level and involves the passage from the basically pastoral mood of the Songs of Jamaica and the Constab Ballads characterized by the systematic use of gentle images of nature, to a harsh realism evoked by images of corruption and destruction. Furthermore, the didactic and moralising tone of the dialect poetry, and the nostalgia of the poems of exile, have given way to a predominantly belligerent and

hateful tone accompanied by a hardening of the stoic attitude already evident in the early poetry. Finally, what most distinguishes the poems of this last circle is the sharpening of the racial and cultural dialectic through the systematic opposition of Jamaica and America.

Whereas the poet's native land represents the essence of his racial and cultural identity, the land of exile symbolizes everything that threatens that identity. This manichean dichotomy is constantly underscored in the poems of "Baptism"[74] and "Americana"[75] by the pervasive use of contrasting symbols and metaphors. In general, the opposition between Jamaica and America is expressed through the contrast between the rural, idyllic aspects of the island, symbols of harmony, freedom, and wholeness of the self, with the urban aspects of America, representing disharmony, oppression, and alienation. The poem "In Bondage" is typical of McKay's treatment of the theme.[76] As the poet's thought nostalgically turns to his native land, he evokes an Eden of music and color, a land of freedom and harmony between man and nature, of generosity and innocence "where life is fairer, lighter, less demanding."[77] The land of exile is antithetically the realm of strife, war, destruction, greed, and death itself, a land in which the poet survives only because he is convinced that

> . . . life is greater than the thousand wars
> Men wage for it in their insatiable lust,
> And will remain like the eternal stars
> When all that shines today is drift and dust.[78]

The terms of the opposition between Jamaica and America coincide with the stated Negritude alternatives between authenticity and assimilation, and concomitantly with the pursuit and assertion of a Black identity. By painting a totally negative image of America and stressing its destructive powers, McKay means to equate assimilation or identification

with America with destruction of the self. By contrast, the assumption of the identity originally defined and molded by the native land guarantees the salvation of the spirit and integrity of the self. This dual message is always implicitly or explicitly present in all the poems focusing on America. Works with evocative titles such as "The Lynching,"[79] "Enslaved,"[80] and "Outcast"[81] present the portrait of a culture bent on destroying Blacks psychologically and physically. In "The Desolate City," McKay suggests that the supreme danger of assimilation is the corruption of the spirit of Blacks by the surrounding destructive cultural values.[82] Using once more the metaphor of the city as a symbol of America, he observes, appalled, the impending death and corruption of his own spirit. With an abundance of images of death and putrefaction strewn on every line, he evokes the progressive contamination of his self to the point where his spirit becomes "a pestilential city." But in the gloom of the pervasive corruption the poet's spirit survives because he holds on to the forces of life, to his identity rooted in his distant island, stronger than death:

> Yet life still lingers, questioningly strange,
> Timid and quivering, naked and alone,
> Against the cycle of disruptive change,
> Though all the fond familiar forms are gone,
> Forever gone, the fond familiar forms;
> Blown worlds beyond by the destroying storms.[83]

The necessity to preserve this precarious life, this sense of identity threatened from every quarter by an oppressive society, inspires most of McKay's protest poetry. The poems do not simply denounce oppression, but consistently stress resistance to both physical oppression and cultural assimilation. Thus, the recurring motif in works such as "Baptism,"[84] "Tiger,"[85] "America,"[86] The White City,"[87] and "The White House,"[88] is that of a lone Black man facing with unbending stoicism the

hostile forces of White America, and triumphing through sheer strength of character. As it is stressed in "Baptism," confrontation with America is a salutary experience, almost a religious trial, a rite of passage that purifies the spirit and from which the individual emerges as a new man:

> Into the furnace let me go alone;
> Stay you without in terror of the heat.
> I will go naked in--for thus 'tis sweet--
> Into the weird depths of the hottest zone.
> I will not quiver in the frailest bone,
> You will not note a flicker of defeat;
> My heart shall tremble not its fate to meet,
> My mouth give utterance to any moan.
> The yawning oven spits forth fiery spears;
> Red aspish tongues shout wordlessly my name.
> Desire destroys, consumes my mortal fears,
> Transforming me into a shape of flame.
> I will come out, back to your world of tears,
> A stronger soul within a finer frame.[89]

As important as individual resistance is collective confrontation in which McKay sees an inherent saving grace. His best known protest poem, "If We Must Die," urges resistance and confrontation on principle as an assertion of the collective self, even if the outcome is death:

> What though before us lie the open grave?
> Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
> Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back.[90]

The theme of resistance and confrontation is thus linked to the twin themes of the search for and assertion of a Black identity, which again is one of the main concerns of Negritude poetry. The external journey through the poet's mystical geography takes place simultaneously with an internal, orphic exploration of the self. The sonnet "Like a Strong Tree" marks the end of McKay's dual journey, the ultimate purpose of which was the discovery of the self, the definition of his identity and his place as a Black man in the world:

Like a strong tree that in the virgin earth
Sends far its roots through rock and loam and clay,
And proudly thrives in rain or time of dearth,
When dry waves scare the rain-come sprites away;
Like a strong tree that reaches down deep, deep,
For sunken water, fluid underground,
Where the great-ringed unsightly blind worms creep,
And queer things of the nether world abound:
So would I live in rich imperial growth,
Touching the surface and the depth of things,
Instinctively responsive unto both,
Tasting the sweets of being, fearing no stings,
Sensing the subtle spell of changing forms,
Like a strong tree against a thousand storms.[91]

To McKay, this identity ideally rests on harmonious interaction between man and nature, a symbiotic relationship based on mutual sympathy between the individual and his physical and social world, and finally on the continuity and integrity of cultural traditions standing against the forces of assimilation. All these characteristics of the Black self are evocatively summed up in the extended simile likening the Black race to "a strong tree" deeply rooted in the fertile soil, indestructible.

At the end of his successful orphic journey, his identity discovered, defined, and asserted, the poet triumphantly revels in this regained sense of self. Thus, the concluding sonnet of the "Baptism" section of the Selected Poems, "I Know My Soul," is a climactic work which most appropriately sums up the poet's itinerary, and exultantly proclaims its felicitous completion:

I plucked my soul out of its secret place,
And held it to the mirror of my eye,
To see it like a star against the sky,
A twitching body quivering in space,
A spark of passion shining on my face.
And I explored it to determine why
This awful key to my infinity
Conspires to rob me of sweet joy and grace.
And if the sign may not be fully read,
If I can comprehend but not control,
I need not gloom my days with futile dread,
Because I see a part and not the whole.
Contemplating the strange, I'm comforted
By this narcotic thought: I know my soul.[92]

From the dialect verse of the Songs of Jamaica to the classical sonnets of the Selected Poems, the evolution of Claude McKay's thought follows the pattern delineated by Sartre in his study of the Negritude poets. It is not simply that his poetic world is mirrored in the mystical geography of Negritude, but that the development of his poetry conforms so well to the Sartrean analysis formulated at a later date. In this respect, the most striking aspect of McKay's poetic thought is the progression from the Negritude "of immediate existence" of his Jamaican period, to the "reflected Negritude"[93] of his American period when his poetry focuses more explicitly on the questions of race, culture, and identity. But dormant or explicit, Negritude ideas and issues remain the foundation of McKay's poetry. As such, their expression is more cohesive and consistent than their theoretical development examined earlier. Certainly, there exist as well certain contradictions and limitations in their poetic expression which manifest themselves in several aspects of both content and style. These, however, are inherent to the very thought of Negritude and will be addressed in a later chapter. Ultimately, because of the ideas it expresses, of the issues it explores, and sentiments it espouses, McKay's poetry must be valued primarily as the prototype of later Negritude poetry, as his novels are early models of later Negritude fiction. Whatever his limitations, his pioneering role as a Negritude poet cannot be overestimated.

CHAPTER V

The Novels of Claude McKay: Blackness and the Adventure of Western Culture

Claude McKay's fiction,[1] like his poetry, is basically concerned with the fundamental question of Black identity. McKay's three novels, Home to Harlem (1928),[2] Banjo (1929),[3] and Banana Bottom (1933),[4] are so many steps in the continuing search for a definitive formulation of "the being-in-the-world of the Black man."[5] In this respect, he clearly anticipates once more the questions raised by later Negritude writers. Is Black identity the emanation of some unchanging universal essence related to the race? If there is a definable Black African identity, how does it differ from a White Western identity? If Blackness is defined as culture, what is its relationship to Western culture? Could it have been transformed by continuing contacts with the West? Ultimately, all these issues parallel the classic Negritude question of authenticity and assimilation, and consideration of the viability of cultural syncretism.

Because McKay's poetry approaches these issues from a subjective viewpoint, and presents their ramifications mainly through symbols and metaphors, it offers no definitive conclusion. The novels, realistic in form and technique, proceed from a more objective perspective to amplify and sharpen the points and arguments presented in the poetry, and to propose a clearer resolution to the dilemma of authenticity and

assimilation. Through characterization, situations, plot, and direct authorial voice, they systematically explore the various aspects of "Blackness and the adventure of Western culture."[6]

The three novels differ in tone, style, technique, and setting, and vary from the biting humor, reckless pace, and cruel imagery of the picaresque Home to Harlem and Banjo, to the amused irony, tight structure, and luxuriant imagery of Banana Bottom. All three, however, constitute a trilogy unified not only by common themes, but even by common characters in the case of the first two novels in which Jake of Home to Harlem and Banjo of Banjo, mirror images of each other, are formally and symbolically brought together in the concluding part of the latter novel, and the major protagonist Ray acts as the novelist's spokesman in both. Furthermore, while the three works have different settings--Harlem for Home to Harlem, Marseille for Banjo, and Jamaica for Banana Bottom--they cover the same mystical geography as the poetry, incorporating the triple symbolic background of Africa, the West (America and Europe), and the island of Jamaica. Finally, the three works are successive steps toward the resolution of the single issue of authenticity and assimilation, which is presented as a choice for the major protagonists. The first two novels pose the various sides of the problem, and a tentative solution is offered in Ray's choice in the conclusion of Banjo. Banana Bottom reformulates the terms of the problem, and proposes a conclusive resolution in the decision of the heroine, Bita Plant.

As much as in his poetry, McKay's approach to the issue of authenticity and assimilation is governed by a manicheistic vision which opposes Black and Western cultures and defines them in polarized terms.

The novels' characterization, plots, situations, and language, are designed to represent this cultural dichotomy by stressing the opposition between the individual and collective attitudes and behavior, the moral and social values, and the superstructure developed and upheld by each culture. McKay's point of departure is an ideal of quintessential Blackness similar to Senghor's mystical version of Negritude.[7] To him, this essence is composed of physical, intellectual, and psychic traits which manifest themselves in the attitudes, modes of behavior, values, and artistic creations of Blacks. The degree to which the individual approaches this ideal determines his level of authenticity, and by the same token the degree to which he moves from it and toward Western norms establishes the measure of his assimilation. It is this idea that controls characterization and the development of the protagonists and major figures of the three novels. Since the motives, thoughts, and actions of the characters are generally centered around the consciousness of race and culture, they often lack psychological nuances and depth. Ultimately, they are to be perceived as models, positive or negative idealizations of various attitudes toward race and culture.

McKay's gallery presents two models of authenticity in the characters of Jake, the hero of Home to Harlem, and Banjo, the protagonist of Banjo. Together they form the composite profile of the ideal Black defined by McKay as "the primitive child of civilization,"[8] and they personify values, attitudes, and behavior which constitute some unspoiled essence of Blackness. Both Jake and Banjo have an all-embracing approach to life, an optimistic acceptance of existence. Guided by their instinct, they live spontaneously as in "a sensual dream,"[9] relating to surrounding reality with an irrepressible appetite fueled by "an intense emotional

energy."[10] Thus, for Jake life is a succession of sensual experiences innocently and unreflectively enjoyed.

McKay's authentic Black does not simply rely on blind instinct to relate to surrounding reality. Aspects of this reality that do not agree with his own being are simply rejected, for ideally he must be in harmony with his human and material environment. Jake, for instance, "possessed a sure instinct for the right rhythm. He was connoisseur enough. But although he had tasted such a varied many [sic] , he was not raw animal enough to be undiscriminating, nor civilized enough to be cynical."[11] His attraction for Felice rests on the fact that she is a kindred soul, one in whom he recognizes his own authentic essence. Similarly, he rejects the mulatress Rose because she is of a different essence.

Just as he relates harmoniously to kindred spirits, the authentic Black lives in harmony with his natural milieu. Jake and Harlem are one, mirror images of each other. Alienated in Europe, Jake regains his sense of identity as soon as he sets foot in Harlem. As all his senses vibrate in unison with this most familiar environment, he exults:

> Harlem! Harlem! Where else could I have all this life but in Harlem? . . . . . .
> Oh, the contagious fever of Harlem. Burning everywhere in dark-eyed Harlem . . . Burning now in Jake's sweet blood.[12]

Banjo also is attuned to the rhythm of his world. His relation to his surroundings is one of harmony rather than confrontation: "The wul' goes round and round and I keeps right on gwine around with it."[13] And when the world moves to a beat different from his own, he draws from his cultural resources to change it to his liking. For instance, his first impulse as he gets acquainted with the depressing and joyless quarters of Marseille is to use his banjo to spread the joy of his music.

An irrepressible passion for life and an ability to adjust to the most adverse circumstances or to transcend them when necessary, there lies the secret of the survival of McKay's heroes. Their endurance and their resilience sustain them through all sorts of adversity which they face with irreproachable stoicism. There is a price to pay for living their lives contrary to the standards of White society, but they pay without complaining. Banjo, lying ill and penniless in a hospital,

> bore his punishment like a man--one who knows that he must take the consequences of spurning the sheltered, cramping ways of respectability to live like a restless vagabond, who bums his numbered days gloriously and dies blazing.[14]

This stoicism is supplemented by an unwavering optimism rooted in the knowledge of the certainty of survival. "I dont care how I falls," says Banjo, "may be evah so long a drop, but it's always on mah feet."[15]

Banjo's disregard for "the cramping ways of respectability"[16] is motivated primarily by his love for individual freedom and his mistrust of social regimentation. This attitude is also shared by Jake whose "primitive passion for going against regulations"[17] alienates him from accepted social organization, even a labor union. Jake's sense of freedom is the corollary of an equally passionate abhorrence of oppression and exploitation. If he rejects Congo Rose's offer to make him her "sweet man" and support him financially, it is as much because he is "one independent cuss"[18] as because he recognizes the exploitative nature of such a situation. Similarly, he understands that to scab is to contribute to the exploitation of other workers, and he is able to surmount his racial consciousness to vow: "I won't scab on nobody, not even the orneriest crackers."[19]

This summary profile of the two heroes of Home to Harlem and Banjo sums up the basic elements of what constitutes Blackness for McKay: an instinctual apprehension of reality, spontaneity of behavior, disdain for surrounding social norms, a sense of community evident in Jake's attachment to Harlem and the spirit of solidarity which binds Banjo's friends, a love of freedom and rejection of oppression. Notwithstanding McKay's purpose, there is nothing singular in these traits of his ideal authentic Black. Like later adherents of Negritude, McKay found it difficult indeed to express in the concreteness of a character the abstractions of the concept of Blackness. Consequently, he resorts to other techniques to convey the idea of the singularity of Blacks he purports to illustrate in his protagonists. In numerous discursive passages, and by the systematic use of symbols--mainly music and color--, he insists again and again on this racial and cultural singularity.

Like Senghor, McKay believes in the universality of Blackness, the pervasiveness of Negritude. For this reason, the various aspects of the personalities of his two ideal Black heroes, as well as their patterns of behavior and their values, are duplicated in various degrees by most of the minor Black characters and the faceless Black men and women that people Home to Harlem, Banjo, and Banana Bottom. Thus, the little coterie of Blacks around Jake exhibit the same reckless zest for life, the same sensitivity, spontaneity, and endurance. And it is certainly by design that McKay gives Banjo an international entourage, the more to emphasize the universality of Blackness. Throughout the Diaspora, he suggests, from Africa to the West Indies and America, the signs of authenticity are consistently similar. In Harlem and among Jake's friends, among Banjo's gang, and among the Jamaican peasants of Banana

Bottom, the same qualities manifest themselves. All these are best summed up in the concept of "soul" previously found in McKay's theoretical writings,[20] a concept in which Senghor recognizes the exact counterpart of Negritude:

> . . . Soul is the American version of African Negritude, a quality characteristic of Negroness, which is born from the experience of the Negro and not from his genes. Soul is the metaphorical evocation of the Negro's being, as it is expressed in the tradition. It is above all . . . a certain way of feeling, a certain way of expressing himself, a certain way of being.[21]

The Senghorian definition somewhat palliates the mystical connotations and vagueness of the concept by relating it to something more easily observable, namely, cultural traditions. In McKay's trilogy, the idea of Black singularity also includes the uniqueness of their cultural traditions, the all-pervasive symbol of which is their music. The streets and night clubs of Harlem resound with the blues and the syncopation of jazz; the drab boîtes of Marseille bounce to the sound of Banjo's instrument and Taloufa's guitar; and the Jamaican countryside peacefully pulsates to the rhythm of native melodies. Jamaican jammas, Afro-American blues and jazz, African burrus, it is consistently proclaimed in Banjo, all spring from the same creative sensibility made of atavistic sensuality and inherited sense of rhythm.

The music also symbolizes historical as well as cultural continuity. It constitutes the sensible bond between the past and the present, and it evokes the complexity of "Blackness and the adventure of Western culture."[22] Banjo's music expresses his whole experience and that of his people, from slavery to triumphant survival in a hostile environment, "an affirmation of his hardy existence in the midst of the biggest, the most tumultuous civilization of modern life."[23] There is, therefore,

total identification between this cultural manifestation and the race. If Lincoln Agrippa Daily takes the very name of his instrument, it is because "it is moh than a gal, moh than a pal; it's mahself."[24] Dance also makes the same affirmation of racial and cultural identity as the symbolic "key to the African rhythm of life,"[25] "the eternal rhythm of the mysterious, magical, magnificent . . . ."[26] The symbolic significance of dance is stressed in Home to Harlem and in Banjo, while it is also prevalent in Banana Bottom where it runs in filigree throughout the narrative, standing as the irrestible appeal of her culture for the heroine Bita. Significantly, Bita's first act of rebellion against the Craigs' English culture is to sneak out to a peasant tea meeting to give herself to the vertigo of native music.

Like music and dance, epidermic color plays a large symbolic role in the three novels. Most major and minor characters are introduced, however briefly, with a summary or a detailed reference to their color. And McKay revels in lyrical catalogues of color nuances in descriptions of crowds of Blacks. Beyond its descriptive purpose, color establishes a racial common denominator to further the idea of the universality of Blackness. In addition, it is the symbolic expression of an ethical and aesthetic dichotomy that parallels the opposition between authenticity and assimilation. Positive characters identified with authenticity--Jake, Banjo, and Ray, of Home to Harlem and Banjo, and Bita and Jubban of Banana Bottom--are assigned the color black, external sign of their fidelity to their cultural values. By contrast, negative figures, when they are not Whites like the Craigs symbolizing the appeal of assimilation, are described as morally deficient mulattoes such as Congo Rose and Yaller Prince of Home to Harlem, and Arthur Gengley of Banana Bottom, who have betrayed the ethics of their culture.

Color also has aesthetic connotations that are linked to the idea of authenticity and assimilation. The three novels consistently proclaim in one way or another that "Black is beautiful." By this McKay intends to reverse the aesthetic standards of the dominant society which ascribe negative values to Negroid characteristics. Recognition of racial beauty, McKay suggests, is another measure of the individual's authenticity. Thus, all positive figures such as Bita, Jubban, Jake, and Banjo, who are Black and conscious of their beauty, are described as physically attractive. On the other hand, negative characters with a poor self-image are depicted as repulsive. Among those there are Ginhead Suzy, the neurotic woman of Home to Harlem, who sees herself as "black and ugly and no-class and unejucated,"[27] and Lonesome Blue, the defeated ex-sailor of Banjo, who looms over Banjo's group and brings the men illness and misfortune at his every appearance. The psychological function of this form of racial consciousness is particularly stressed in one long scene of Banana Bottom.[28] After a spiteful Arthur Gengley fails in his attempted rape and calls her insultingly "only a nigger gal,"[23] Bita goes home and looks at herself nude in front of a mirror, reflects on her own beauty, and concludes that "she was proud to be a Negro girl."[30]

While McKay's main preoccupation is to encourage this consciousness of one's racial and cultural self, and to define this self, he is also concerned with defining what he considers as its antithesis, namely White Western culture. In this respect, the three novels are a critical examination of the values, attitudes, and human behavior upheld by Western civilization, as well as a panegyric to Black culture. In Home to Harlem and in Banana Bottom the criticism is largely indirect and

mostly from the contrast suggested by the description of the Black characters and their actions and thoughts. In Banjo, McKay generally uses frankly discursive prose or the utterings of his spokesman Ray to indict the West. From his perspective, all the values extolled by Western civilization and in whose name it asserts its superiority, are simply inhuman and dehumanizing. "Civilization is rotten," declares Ray categorically.[31] The corruption is much of the time open and unapologetic, and as often hidden behind a mask of pious ideals underneath which lies a core "all hollow inside, . . . false and dry. . . ."[32] The yardstick by which McKay measures the West is not only its own ideals, but also the contrasting ideals of Blackness and its treatment of non-Western peoples.

Banjo then becomes one long denunciation of the contradictions between the professed ideals of the West and its social and political realities. Page after page, in accents reminiscent of the Césaire of Discours sur le colonialisme,[33] Banjo and his friends in their forceful and pungent language, Ray in his passionate intellectual prose, expose the evils of racism, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism which is at the bottom of all. The relationship between the West and the rest of the world, they assert, is one of systematic global exploitation and oppression that denies the ideals of democracy, freedom, and human equality. And as Banjo concludes in his direct language, "according to my eyesight, and I'se one sure-seeing nigger, a wul' safe for democracy is a wul' safe for crackerism."[34] To reach this conclusion, McKay suggests, no capacity for universal vision is needed. While Banjo and his group invoke their personal experience, Ray argues from his self-assigned position as a studious observer of American and European societies.

Ray's perspective is not simply that of the outsider; but rather that of the individual at the bottom. And the bottom appears to be more revealing to the observer. As an international port city, Marseille, the setting of the novel, is seen as a microcosm of the West, and its red-light district a most unsavory hyperbolic metaphor for Western civilization evocatively nicknamed "the Ditch." To McKay, it is a place where all that is destructive, rapacious, immoral and corrupt in civilization coalesces. And the description of the place suggests just that:

> . . . infested with the ratty beings of the Mediterranean countries, overrun with guides, cocottes, procurers, repelling and attracting in its white-fanged vileness under its picturesqueness, the town seemed to proclaim to the world that the grandest thing about modern life was that it was bawdy. . . [35]

In his sweeping expose of modern civilization McKay stresses especially its effects on non-Western individuals. The civilizing machine, he contends in Home to Harlem, has reduced some to the state of animals, making of them "a great mass of black swine, hunted and cornered by slavering white canaille."[36] Others like Lonesome Blue of Banjo simply lose their minds, then their lives, because they do not have the stamina and spiritual strength to fight the onslaught of the machine. On a larger scale, the continuing advance of the West has disrupted traditional cultural patterns and ways of life. Men like the African Taloufa and the Indian of Banjo have been uprooted from their homeland, branded "Nationality Doubtful," and condemned to wander forever from their home. In the same line of thought, it is symbolically significant that the musical jam sessions in Banjo and the dances in Home to Harlem are often interrupted because of the intrusions of White policemen and patrons. More than the disturbance of traditional ways of life, the gravest sin

of civilization is its corruption of the traditional values of non-Westerners. The West, McKay asserts, "was robbing his people of many primitive and beautiful qualities,"[37] and "its general attitude toward the colored man was such as to rob him of his warm human instincts and make him inhuman."[38]

To escape these effects and retain his traditional values and qualities, to remain his authentic self, McKay suggests that the individual must draw instinctively on his cultural resources. Only the Jakes and the Banjos survive psychologically intact. But to do so, it must be pointed out that they also live in the margins of civilization, on the periphery of its social, economic, and political system. The central question remains: for the individual placed by his experience, or for a collectivity placed by its history between this hyperbolically negative West and an ideally positive original culture, what are the options? The adventures of Ray in Home to Harlem and in Banjo purport to give an answer.

Ray is essentially an alienated individual. A well-educated intellectual, an aspiring writer, a descendant of the Haitian bourgeois elite, well inculcated with Western cultural values, he defines himself as a "slave of the civilized tradition."[39] It is to escape this tradition that he associates himself with the Jakes and the Banjos, to work and live like them, to lose himself in the life of Harlem. But Ray finds himself in a true dilemma, thus revealing McKay's ambiguity about the whole issue. On the one hand, there are the bourgeois values and ideals of Ray's upbringing which he rejects categorically. On the other hand, there is the model offered by Jake and Banjo, and the community of Harlem. But is this model really ideal, can it be followed in practice?

In his less passionate and negative moods, Ray is not too certain of this. The Jakes and Banjos are really fine fellows with all the qualities attributed to them in the novels. Harlem is indeed a community offering a sense of belonging as well as an exciting atmosphere of music and dance. But despite Ray's admiration for Jake and Banjo, he realizes the gulf that separates him from them. It is in vain that he strains to find the common ideal Blackness that can fill the gulf. It is in vain that he strives to feel the same hypothetical atavistic impulses that govern the actions of his friends. He is forced to admit that their unstable way of life and their relativistic ethics would be frowned upon in any society. And their community, Harlem, is in no way an absolute ideal since it does have its serious drawbacks: endemic violence, instability, mutual exploitation, among others. Finally, Ray has no real choice. And this is precisely what the conclusion of Home to Harlem indicates. As he breaks his ties with Jake and his friends, and escapes from Harlem to go to Europe, his alienation is still unresolved. He finds no solution either in Marseille. McKay is unable to tell how Ray could construct a viable philosophy of life from the self-destructive way of life of Banjo and his group, and despite the inherent qualities they have as individuals. In this case, the ending of Banjo could only be ambiguous: with no firm answer to his dilemma, Ray casts his lot with Banjo after their group has dissolved from the very pressures of their vagabond life. The future only offers him more of the same.

The two novels are inconclusive because basically the terms of the central issue are ill defined. In many ways Ray's dilemma is a specious one. There is indeed no objective opposition between his intellectual

pursuits, a purposeful and constructive life, and fidelity to his cultural values and traditions. Furthermore, the alternatives offered can only lead to a dead end. On the one hand, from a certain perspective McKay has reduced Black culture to bohemianism. On the other hand, his passionate condemnation of the West leaves no room for an objective critique that would sort out the acceptable from the objectionable. Most of the criticism elicited by Home to Harlem and Banjo at the time of their publication centered precisely around these weaknesses of McKay's thesis.[40] Although McKay heatedly defends his approach to the problem in several articles as well as in his autobiography,[41] he must have been convinced of the necessity to revise it. And this he does in his last novel, Banana Bottom.

The terms of the issue are still dialectically defined as an opposition between authenticity and assimilation. But here McKay avoids the manicheistic overtones and shows more subtlety in his arguments. He also takes a more objective distance from his subject as evident in the predominantly ironic tone of the narration and the pervasive benign humor. In addition, Bita Plant, the character in whom lies the resolution of the issue, is more rational, less tortured, less emotional, and more sensitive than Ray. Ultimately, Banana Bottom presents a more balanced view of things even though McKay uses the same technical mixture of characters, symbols, situations, and the utterings of an author's spokesman, Squire Gensir.

The protagonist, Bita Plant, is a young girl of peasant background who has been raped by the crazy scion of an old family of the mulatto bourgeoisie of Jamaica. A couple of English missionaries, the Craigs, moved by their Christian ideals as well as by the traditional friendship

between the Plants and the Craig family, adopts Bita and sends her to England to be educated. Their aim is to transform Bita into an English lady, and erase not only her memory of the rape but also of her Jamaican culture. After a number of years Bita returns to the island to live at the mission and assume the role already designed for her: to help the Craigs in their missionary work, marry a young Jamaican minister as soon as one can be found, and take over the mission at the Craigs' retirement. What the Craigs want in fact is to turn Bita into a Jamaican version of themselves, to totally assimilate her. The question is, can and must Bita assume this new identity? If not, what are the options available to her?

On one side there is the mission of Jubilee, the local symbol of British culture. As it is observed in this setting, Western culture does not present the ominous, destructive facade it is given in the other two novels. The Craigs are well intentioned individuals, pious, dedicated, and they are sincere in their love for Bita and their friendship with her family. But from McKay's point of view, they are slightly silly in the exercise of their rigid Protestantism, their repressed social manners, and their inability to understand the local culture. At their worst, they have a condescending attitude that is a benign version of the proverbial White man's burden. The other prominent White figure in the novel, Squire Gensir, is also a sympathetic character, a broad-minded ethnologist who lives among the peasants and shows great sensitivity in his study of their culture. Overall, these representatives of Western culture represent for Bita not necessarily hostile forces, but simply an alien way of life, an obstacle to her desire to live the life of her people, in their environment. To be separated from her people

would mean to become like the assimilated bourgeoisie of the island, a snobbish and decadent lot.

Different from Jubilee and the bourgeois alternative is Banana Bottom, Bita's real home and that of her parents. This is a stable prosperous community of hard-working peasants, with a strong sense of dignity and attachment to their land, their religion, their social mores, their art, in brief to their culture. There Bita finds love and admiration and sense of community. She in turn loves and admires her community, particularly the members of her houshold: her stepmother, Aunty Nommy, her loving father, and Jubban, the industrious, discreet, and devoted drayman of the Plants' farm.

McKay shows no real opposition between Jubilee and Banana Bottom, only a difference. In fact, the two cultural symbols have harmonious relations. Squire Gensir provides a link between them as well as the friendship between Jordan Plant and the Craigs. And Bita, all things considered, is as much at ease with the Craigs as with her people. The question is thus reduced not to a choice between two valid ways of life, but to the possibility of merging the two. Bita fihally rejects the Craigs only because they cannot accept this possibility, because of their intolerance, however well intentioned.

The conclusion of Banana Bottom makes clear that for McKay the resolution of the question of authenticity and assimilation is that of cultural syncretism. After Bita leaves Jubilee for Banana Bottom following several acts of rebellion against the Craigs, she marries Jubban, her father's drayman, an uneducated peasant, a man close to the soil. She does this to the dismay of the bourgeois elite of the community who sees it as an unfortunate mismatch. But the novel ends with a happy

Bita, falling asleep reading Pascal's Pensées while Aunty Nommy plays with her baby. Thus, while Bita chooses to live the life of the majority of her people, she can still keep certain elements of Western culture without experiencing any alienation. She benefits from the best of both worlds while giving birth to a new individual. It is on this positive note that McKay concludes:

> Her music, her reading, her thinking were the flowers of her intelligence and he [Jubban] the root in the earth upon which she was grafted, both nourished by the same soil.[42]

In Bita, McKay has created the prototype of the individual of tomorrow envisioned by the Negritude writers, one able to harmoniously synthesize the values of various cultures, thus helping "to build a more human civilization made of necessary differences, the complementary differences of ethnic groups and nations," to bring about "the civilization of the universal" that is the very goal of Negritude.[43]

While Home to Harlem and Banjo can be considered forceful but abortive starts, Banana Bottom concludes persuasively McKay's exploration of "Blackness and the adventure of Western culture."[44] Certainly, his is not the last word on the subject, but he perceived the basic aspects of the issue so clearly that later Negritude writers have hardly done better. Negritude novelists may have treated the same themes with greater subtlety and insight, but their achievement reflects the perceptive precedence of Claude McKay.[45]

CHAPTER VI

The Poetry of Langston Hughes: The Masses' Negritude

From his first published collection of poems, The Weary Blues (1926),[1] to his posthumous volume, The Panther and the Lash (1967),[2] Langston Hughes's poetry is an uninterrupted rendition of "the dance it-is-good-and-right-and-glorious-to-be-a-Negro," as Césaire defines the Negritude leitmotiv in his classic Cahier.[3] Through forty years of social change and evolution of the race question in the United States, this motif, sung at various registers, has underscored the main subject of Hughes's poetic works, namely his people and their culture, their socio-political situation in the land in which they had been transplanted. It is precisely this emphasis on race, as well as other aspects of his poetry deriving from it, that identified Hughes to Senghor as the Afro-American poet most representative of Negritude, "the blackest in expression."[4] Hughes himself was very much aware of the strong thematic, philosophical, and stylistic links between his poetry and Negritude literary canons. In his retrospective look at the Harlem Renaissance in "The Twenties: Harlem and its Negritude," Hughes stresses among other common characteristics between the poetry of the two movements, pride of heritage and consciousness of race, and the use of similar images and sounds.[5] Yet, despite these broad similarities, we will find upon examination of Hughes's poetry definite differences contingent

upon both the social and cultural milieu that inspired the works, and the poet's own personal background.[6]

As we established earlier, the primary occupation of the Negritude poets is the search for and assertion of a distinctive Black cultural identity as well as the expression of the will to political and social freedom.[7] Generally, the poet's level of political awareness steers him toward either of two modes of conceptualization of Negritude: the Césairean socio-historical mode, or the Senghoran racial-psychological mode. The dynamics of both approaches involves two interlocking steps: the rejection of the negative image of Blacks in Western societies, and the assumption of a positive image. This Negritude motif of racial and cultural identity is one of the underpinnings of Langston Hughes's poetry which he establishes at the very start of his career. True to his role as a precursor, his handling of the motif encompasses both the Césairean and the Senghoran modes, with more emphasis on the former.

Hughes's first published poem and one of his best know works, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers,"[8] in a way sums up all the various directions his poetry would later take as he seeks to define the Afro-American. Does his identity rest simply on race, or can it be explained by his ancient and possibly surviving African roots? Is he the result of the historic experience of slavery and the forced sojourn in a foreign land? Has he become assimilated into America's cultural mainstream after these centuries of familiarity with the dominant values of his society? Is he a synthesis of ancient Africa and modern America? Such are the questions which the poem purports to answer:

> 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.

Although inconclusively and indirectly, the poem touches upon several alternatives which will be developed more systematically in later works. First, its very title implies the poet's agreement with a racial definition of the self. His indirect assertion that he is a Negro is intended to give the word a positive connotation. To this racial definition Hughes adds a historical dimension. The central symbol of the great and ancient rivers of the world, from the Euphrates and the Nile, to the Congo and the Mississippi, clearly suggests the antiquity of the race as well as its historical participation in the building of great civilizations. Thus, countering the prevailing opinion of his society, Hughes claims the historical continuity of his people's culture: their past rejoins their present in a continuous flow as surely as these rivers have maintained their course for millenia. Ultimately, the poet's consciousness of race coincides with his total identification with the history of his people, as this line repeated twice in the poem indicates: "My soul has grown deep like the rivers."[9]

Quite apart from the mystical connotation of the word "soul," Hughes's apprehension of the social and cultural reality of Blacks is rather solidly anchored on the materiality of History. In his view, as it emerges from the totality of his poetry, the characteristics of a race or a class are the result of its historical experience. Indeed, it is precisely this understanding of the significance of history that

guides the poet through the obligatory journey across the "mystical geography" of Negritude, lighting his way as he moves from the sphere of Africa to the circle of America, and finally to Harlem, the navel of his world and the pole of his poetry, to paraphrase the Sartrean language.[10]

Predictably enough, like his Harlem Renaissance colleagues and the Negritude poets, Hughes begins his journey in Africa, making a metaphorical return to the ancestral land where he hopes to discover the key to his racial and cultural identity. Although it is a historically given fact, he finds it necessary to repeatedly refer to Africa as the cradle of the race. The connection between the Black race and Africa may on the surface appear to be gratuitous. However, in view of the prevailing conception of his race brothers as a people without roots, stressing the obvious becomes an assertive gesture well in tune with the definition of Negritude as not only a search but also the assertion of one's identity. Hence the significance of the poet's use of the simple and direct apostrophe "Dark ones of Africa" to address his people in the poem "Sun Song":

> 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.[11]

In "Negro," a poem of self-definition, the idea of Africa as the alpha and omega of the race is further stressed in these lines that begin and end the poem:

> I am a Negro:
> Black as the night is black,
> Black like the depths of my Africa.[12]

Since Africa is the fertile soil in which the race is rooted, the millions of the Black diaspora appear to the poet as offshoots withering

in alien lands. Such is in fact his vision of the Black race in the poem entitled "Black Seed" in which Blacks are compared to seeds scattered to the wind and led by Fate to germinate and bloom precariously on arid soil where they are cut by careless gardeners.[13]

The twin themes of exile and alienation, typical of Negritude poetry, are rather rare in Hughes's works. However, while they are treated indirectly in the poem cited above, they are explored more explicitly in a few other poems. Thus, in "Our Land," through images of light and color, fragrance and birds' songs, evocative of a lost Africa, the poet expresses his nostalgia for the old continent.[14] Inevitably, the faraway land of the poet's roots, symbol of a certain freedom of spirit and joy, stands in contrast with the gray, joyless land of exile. And the poet sighs in conclusion:

> Ah, we should have a land of joy,
> Of love and joy and wine and song,
> And not this land where joy is wrong.[15]

Hughes's evocation of the African past in this romantic mood is undoubtedly contrived and as conventional as the stereotypical images of the poem. Indeed, his nostalgia for a milieu and a landscape he has never seen, as well as his hankering after a putative pristine purity, have no objective basis. Unlike some African poets such as Senghor who have invoked a childhood spent in traditional African surroundings, Hughes had no first hand, real knowledge of Africa. Therefore, his nostalgia and his alienation of exile must be seen as a conceit, the metaphorical expression of his dissatisfaction with the status of his race in America. In any case, he abandons early this mode of treatment of the theme of Africa, prompted perhaps by his experience in Africa and the discovery that this particular vision of the Black continent is only

the product of his poetic imagination.[16] His "return to the native land," his "journey to the origins" had been very brief and unsatisfying.

As this particular road to Africa leads to a poetic cul-de-sac made of cliches and unconvincing sentiments, so does the road Hughes takes to explore the Black "soul," a theme often treated in tandem with the theme of Africa. Thus, in several instances, in the early poetry, Hughes envisions the specificity of Blacks as comprised of atavistic cultural elements expressed in the form of primitivistic impulses and reactions. Such is, for example, the view conveyed by "Danse Africaine," a poem whose metre suggestively echoes the rhythm of the drum, symbol of Africa:

> the low beating of the tom-toms,
> the slow beating of the tom-toms,
> . . . . . .
> And the low beating of the tom-toms
> Stirs your blood.[17]

Some critics attribute these primitive notes to the passing influence of contemporary American poets of the primitive, such as Vachel Lindsay.[18] Mercifully, this type of poetry constitutes only a minimal part of Hughes's poetic output. Aware perhaps of the basic fallacy of this approach to the Black reality, Hughes soon abandons his use of the primitive. Unfortunately, his Negritude successors, especially those of the Senghoran school, have not followed his example.

Still pursuing his search for his identity and yielding to the necessity to assert that identity, Hughes focuses on the external signs of race, namely color, as symbolic manifestation of the inner racial self. In accordance with the Negritude notion of reversal of values, the socially attributed negative connotation of the color black is transformed into a positive subject of pride. Thus, in "Negro," color is used as a simple, matter-of-fact term of self-definition:

I am a Negro:
Black as the night is black,
Black-like the depths of my Africa.[19]

Color is also given an intrinsic esthetic value as Hughes sees in it the sign of the transcending physical beauty of Blacks, which itself is the Platonic reflection of their inner beauty:

The night is beautiful,
So the faces of my people.
The stars are beautiful,
So the eyes of my people.
Beautiful also is the sun.
Beautiful also are the souls of my people.[20]

The use of color as a symbol of physical and spiritual beauty is epitomized in several poems in praise of the Black woman, anticipating Senghor's famous "Femme noire," if not always in tone and imagery, at least in intent.[21] The style of these poems varies from the light and subtle gallantry of "Ardella,"[22] to the oriental form of "Songs to the Dark Virgin"[3] whose metaphors and similes echo the "Song of Songs," in an obvious evocation of the Queen of Sheba. The love poem "When Sue Wears Red," in which the interplay of the colors red, brown, and black (night), evokes at once majesty and racial antiquity, is very much typical of Hughes's use of color symbolism to sing the beauty of the Black woman:

When Susanna Jones wears red
Her face is like an ancient cameo
Turned brown by the ages.
Come with a blast of trumpets,
Jesus!
When Susanna Jones wears red
A queen from some time-dead Egyptian night
Walks once again.
Blow trumpets, Jesus!
And the beauty of Susanna Jones in red
Burns in my heart a love-fire sharp like pain.
Sweet silver trumpets,
Jesus![24]

As color is idealized as the abstract symbol of racial beauty, it is also used to illustrate the tragic socio-political situation of Blacks. Thus, in a love poem entitled "A Black Pierrot," Hughes reflects on the sufferings of his race, symbolically representing their repression through the combined metaphor of color and the tragic clown, and making the complaint of the rejected lover that of his people rejected by their society:

> I am a black Pierrot:
> She did not love me,
> So I crept into the night
> And the night was black, too.[25]

Seen in this social perspective, color provides a convenient symbolism to express the relationship of mutual opposition between the Black minority and the White majority. Although this opposition is not couched in absolutist terms, it occurs in the poetry with such consistency as to constitute a system of racial antagonism. It is not a rigorous system, but it conveys clearly Hughes's conception of the dynamics of social and racial relations, a conception which, as we will show later, he eventually transcends. Meanwhile, in a poem like "Argument," racial antagonism is clearly expressed as an explanation for the social reality according to which "White is right,/ Yellow mellow,/ Black, get back!"[26] Hughes, however, does not accept this social reality, for it means the repression of one's identity and the acceptance of a negative definition of the self. Hence the necessity to once more proclaim: "Black is fine!/ And, God knows,/ It's mine!"[27]

In "Dream Variations," a poem with somewhat surrealistic overtones, the poet again emphasizes racial antagonism as the main social impediment on the road to self-realization and his dream of freedom.[28] His ultimate wish is:

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.[29]

As the above examples indicate, color in Hughes's poetry is a motif that recurs in various guises to express aspects of the Black reality. Underlying the many uses of the motif, however, there is one consistent message--that the external sign of social opprobrium should be turned into a symbol of pride. This, in fact, is the final word he delivers in his last collection, The Panther and the Lash:

Wear it
like a banner
For the proud--
Not like a shroud:
Wear it
Like a song
Soaring high--
Not moan and cry.[30]

The use of the motif of the African return, and of color symbolism to circumvent at once the racial, social, and cultural aspects of the Black reality, is one of the most obvious parallels between Negritude poetry and Hughes's works. In this respect, both present the same weakness, which is the abstraction and subjectivisation of a reality that is above all political and historical. In Hughes's poetry, however, this subjective approach is evident only in a comparatively small number of works. As we suggested at the beginning of the chapter, his appprehension of Negritude is generally rooted on a firmer base of history and sociology. Among the earlier poems, "Afro-American Fragment" stands out as a very good example of the more rational and objective approach to the questions of race and cultural identity.[31] Although the tone of the

poem is one of nostalgia, it is a calm, objective evaluation of the Afro-American cultural heritage. In the move from the African past to the American present, Hughes observes, the greater part of the original cultural wealth has been lost; and all that remain are only fragments, vestiges in the collective consciousness transmitted by history and tradition. The poet concludes resignedly:

> So long,
> So far away
> Is Africa's
> Dark face.[32]

Ultimately, nebulous questions about the Black soul, as well as backward glances at a remote past are irrelevant in Langston Hughes's works. Instead, the bulk of his poetry purports to answer such concrete and immediate questions as the influence of history on Afro-American cultural identity, the place of Blacks in American society, their ideals, their philosophy. Thus, as the poem "Negro" intimates, the focus of Hughes's poetry is not some abstract, idealized Black, but the modern Afro-American people as they have been molded by their various historical experiences as slaves, workers, artists, and victims.[33] To paraphrase George Kent, his is the poetry of "Blackness and the adventure of American culture" at the juncture of the beginning of the 20th century.[34] For, no matter the antiquity of the history of the Afro-American and its point of departure in Africa, it does end up in America. Consequently, as Hughes intimates in this dedication of his work to his people, his poetry is of immediate relevance to the American reality:

> Dark ones of Africa.
> I bring you my songs
> To sing on the Georgia roads.[35]

The historical experience described in the poetry is one of continuous oppression in various forms. It is first the experience of slavery.

in a very recent past, directly told in "Aunt Sue's Stories" by an old Black ex-slave to a young child,[36] or alluded to as in the leitmotiv of the long jazz poem Ask your Mama, "in the quarters of the Negroes . . ."[37] This history is also one of endemic violence of which Blacks have been victims in America. A great part of Hughes's poetry chronicles this violence in all its most obvious forms. Thus, the spectacular and dramatic violence of lynching is the recurring theme of several poems. At times it is treated with pathos, as in "Song for a Dark Girl":

> Way Down South in Dixie
> (Break the heart of me)
> They hung my black young lover
> To a cross roads tree.
>
> Way Down South in Dixie
> (Bruised body high in air)
> I asked the white Lord Jesus
> What was the use of prayer.
>
> Way down South in Dixie
> (Break the heart of me)
> Love is a naked shadow
> On a gnarled and naked tree.[38]

At other times Hughes handles the theme with black humor and profound irony, as in "Ku Klux:"

> They took me out
> To some lonesome place.
> They said, "Do you believe
> In the great white race?"
>
> I said, "Mister,
> To tell you the truth,
> I'd believe in anything
> If you'd just turn me loose."[39]

Other poems address the less dramatic form of oppression known as racial segregation, a system whose absurdity is caught so poignantly in the words of the little Black child of "Merry-Go-Round" who wonders: "Where is the horse/ For a kid that's black?"[40] Finally, the great bulk of the poems purporting to expose oppression treat the subject of economic

and human exploitation. "Share-Croppers," for instance, denounces the plight of the Southern rural Blacks described as "Just a herd of Negroes / Driven to the field / Plowing, planting, hoeing,/ To make the cotton yield," and never able to enjoy the fruit of their own work.[41]

Hughes does not simply chronicle and denounce the oppression of his people. A no less important aspect of his poetry is the depiction of the Black response to oppression, which takes two main forms of expression. Some poems describe the result of the internalization of oppression analyzed by Fanon in Black Skin, White Masks.[42] Its symptoms are meek acquiescence, quiet suffering, or silent impotent rage; in brief, the "old Negritude" whose death Césaire celebrates in a well know passage of the Cahier.[43] This "old Negritude" is portrayed in the proverbial figure of Uncle Tom in the poem of the same name:

> Within--
> The beaten pride.
> Without--
> The grinning face,
> The low, obsequious,
> Double bow,
> The sly and servile grace
> Of one the white folks
> Long ago
> Taught well
> To know his
> Place.[44]

To this "old Negritude" of accommodation, Hughes opposes a more aggressive Negritude, what Césaire calls "upright Negritude,"[45] one based on struggle and resistance to oppression. To Hughes, this "upright Negritude" not only is a more appropriate response in the contemporary context, but it is a constant element of the history of his people. So it is with an approving tone that he relates the heroic episode of armed resistance of John Brown in the poem entitled "October 16," and urges his people to keep alive the memory of this episode.[46]

Historically, Black resistance has taken other forms as well, and to Hughes these modes of resistance are as significant even though they are less spectacular. What is important is that one says no to oppression. Such is the significance of the Black migration from the South to Northern cities, the subject of "One-Way Ticket":

> I pick up my life
> And take it on the train
> To Los Angeles, Bakersfield,
> Seattle, Oakland, Salt Lake,
> Any place that is
> North and West--
> And not South.
>
> I am fed up
> With Jim Crow laws,
> People who are cruel
> And afraid,
> Who lynch and run
> Who are scared of me
> And me of them.[47]

Closer to our times, the civil rights movement, in which Hughes participated, inspired several poems. The names of fighters such as Malcom X, Stokeley Carmichael, and Martin Luther King, are evoked in The Panther and the Lash and Ask your Mama as living symbols of Negritude in action.

Hughes's task as a Negritude poet goes beyond the mere denunciation of racial oppression and the description of the responses it elicits. Rejecting all false objectivity, he not only approves of certain reactions, he unambiguously advocates them. He incites his people to revolt, and assuming their cause, he protests, warns, threatens. His poetry becomes one more weapon to his people's arsenal. He uses it at once to fan the flames of popular resistance, and to strike directly at the oppressor. From the beginning of his poetic career in the ferment of the 1920's, to the publication of his last collection of poems at the height of the civil rights movement, Hughes remains faithful to his role as a

committed poet. Dressed in the mantle of "evangelical Negritude," to paraphrase Sartre,[48] his poetry announces the good news that the spirit of "upright Negritude" has been recaptured and the times are ripe for its manifestation. And such is the significance of the sub-title of The Panther and the Lash: "Poems of our Times." While the poems of protest and struggle contained in this volume are immediately relevant to the 1960's, they actually continue a Hughes tradition that goes back to the Weary Blues of the 1920's. The language and imagery vary from volume to volume, or even from poem to poem, but the mood of revolt and the tone of righteous violence are always present. Thus, in the well known poem "Harlem" the poet's threat is abstract, veiled, and indirect:

> 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?[49]

In "Lunch in a Jim Crow Car," the incitement to revolt is direct and unambiguous as the poet calls to his people to

> Get out the lunch-box of your dreams.
> Bite into the sandwich of your heart,
> And ride the Jim Crow car until it screams
> Then--like an atom bomb--it bursts apart.[50]

As to the outcome of the struggle, Hughes remains always optimistic. The final goal is the end of oppression, and to the poet, despite the many setbacks and defeats, this dream of freedom is immortal:

> Now dreams
> Are not available
> to the dreamers,
> Nor songs
> To the singers.
> In some lands

Dark night
And cold steel
Prevail--
But the dream
Will come back,
And the song
Break
Its jail.[51]

The above poems reemphasize Hughes's vision of the relationship between America and Blacks as one of basic systematic opposition. In the final analysis, as we intimated earlier, this antagonism is not simply racial, does not rest on mere irrational feelings of race leading to mutual exclusion. To Hughes, the clash is between freedom and non-freedom. The sense of moral outrage and the feeling of betrayal that underscore the poems on the theme of betrayal of the ideal of freedom are based on the realization that this antagonism should not exist in America. After all, as the poet says in "I, Too," his people and America are one and they share the same ideal of freedom.[52] The paradox of this unnecessary conflict between the two is strikingly caught in the ironic poem, "American Heartbreak" in which, through the subtle evocation of two significant historical events, Plymouth Rock and the introduction of slavery, Hughes illustrates the contradiction of an ideal America, land of freedom, and a real America, oppressor of those who aspire to freedom:

I am the American heartbreak--
Rock on which Freedom
Stumps its toe--
The great mistake
that Jamestown
Made long ago.[53]

The existence of these two Americas inspires in the poet contradictory feelings of love and hatred, unrequited love for the ideal of freedom, and deep hatred for the facts of oppression, America's rejection of Blacks, her refusal to accept them as her legitimate children partaking

of the same humanity and deserving of the freedom of the land. These opposing thoughts and feelings are expressed dramatically and symbolically through the mulatto themes of poems such as "Cross,"[54] and "Mulatto."[55] Blacks are depicted as the bastard children of a White father and a Black mother, in a symbolic reference to the historical formation of Afro-Americans. They are rejected by their father whom they claim in vain, and are torn by ambivalent feelings toward their mother. The essence of this relationship of love and hatred, attraction and rejection, is captured most graphically in "The South," in which America is metaphorically seen as a strikingly beautiful, but syphilitic woman to whom the poet-lover is attracted but is forced to reject:

> Beautiful, like a woman,
> Seductive as a dark-eyed whore,
> Passionate, cruel,
> Honey-lipped, syphilitic--
> That is the South.
> And I, who am black,
> Would give her many rare gifts
> But she turns her back upon me.
> So now I seek the North--
> The cold-faced North,
> For she, they say,
> Is a kinder mistress,
> And in her house my children
> May escape the spell of the South.[56]

Yet, because of his undying optimism, Hughes preserves his faith in America. His vision of the future always anticipates the dawn of freedom and racial brotherhood, the final disappearance of oppression. This optimism brims over in a poem such as "Daybreak in Alabama," as the poet envisions this bastion of American racism as the land of future racial harmony.[57] He is certain that the country will live up to her ideal, that America will be true to herself.

Freedom, then, is the Muse that inspires Hughes's poetry of commitment. It is, in fact, one of the most frequently occurring words in

his poetic works. As he understands the reality of Blacks in America as a clash between their will to freedom and America's oppression of that will, so his apprehension of Blacks in the rest of the world is based on the same understanding. Thus, to return to the themes of Africa and Black universality, he ultimately conceives Blackness not as an abstraction manifested by racial traits and other more elusive common characteristics, but fundamentally as a historical state. Black universality is the universality of oppression, as he says most explicitly in a poem entitled "The Same," a panoramic evocation of the colonial and neo-colonial status of non-White countries from Sierra Leone in Africa, to Haiti in the Caribbean.[58]

In the defense of these oppressed Blacks in foreign lands, Hughes manifests the same spirit of commitment and the same sense of righteousness. His dedication to the cause of Africa and other colonized and neo-colonized Black countries is expressed most strongly in his poetry of the 1950's and the 1960's at the height of the struggle for African independence.[59]

As Hughes's understanding of the dynamics of oppression in America leads him to the comprehension of oppression in other Black lands, by the same process he enlarges his vision to include among his concerns the cause of the oppressed all over the world regardless of race. As Sartre says of the Negritude poet in "Orphée Noir," consciousness of race finally leads him to consciousness of class, the transcendance of Negritude.[60] This consciousness is at the roots of his socialist poetry of the 1920's and the 1930's recently published in a collection entitled Good Morning Revolution.[61] The influence of the larger current of radicalism in American literature is apparent in these poems, if not in their

message, at least in their form. Indeed, the stock political phrases and socialist slogans of these poems belong as much to Langston Hughes as to any other "proletarian" poet of the period.

Apart from their formal conventionality, Hughes's socialist poetry provides another insight into a different aspect of his social philosophy, namely his spontaneous and deep felt sympathy with the common people, the workers, the masses. This sympathy certainly explains his choice of the common Blacks of Harlem as the focus of the bulk of his poetry. Indeed, the greater number of his Selected Poems deal with the lives of these poor urban Blacks, their preoccupations, their problems, their ways of coping with daily life, their philosophy. Hughes's persistent optimism undoubtedly is the result of this felt kinship with these people who, despite the difficulties of their exploited lives, keep hoping and can still sing: "Life is fine,/ Fine as wine."[62] His poetry, then, is a testimony to the resilience and spirit of resistance of the Black masses.

Inevitably, as the poetry reflects so closely the culture of the Black masses in its content, its form and style also are a reflection of popular culture. Countless studies have been done of Hughes's use of jazz, the blues, the spirituals, and the gospel songs in his poetry.[63] A detailed analysis of the technical aspects of his works in this context falls outside the scope of the present study. We would like, however, to briefly indicate the stylistic links with Negritude poetry that exist as a result of the adoption of these elements of popular culture.

Senghor has likened Negritude poetry to a jazz score.[64] The poetry of Langston Hughes could have inspired this comparison. Indeed, in countless individual poems, Hughes often tries to reproduce the rhythm

of jazz. His conception of poetry as music is epitomized in his Montage of a Dream Deferred[65] and in Ask your Mama[66] in which he systematically uses the language of jazz, and includes musical direction for the execution of the poems. Parenthetically, the jazz slang of these poems is to a certain extent Hughes's way of circumventing the question of language which the Negritude poets would later address. More than a modest subversion of the English language, it is an attempt to find a poetic language truly reflective of the culture he purports to sing.

Another stylistic aspect of Hughes's poetry that falls within the canons of Negritude, is the improvisational tone of many of the poems. If, as Senghor insists, spontaneity of rhythm is the stamp of the Negritude poet, then Hughes is the poet of Negritude par excellence.[67] Indeed, one of the most obvious characteristics of his poetic language is the simplicity of diction, the conversational tone, the abundance of common sayings, which give the reader the impression that the poems are meant to be spoken, not read. In this, Hughes again anticipates Senghor's conception of the poetry of Negritude as primarily an oral art in harmony with African poetic traditions.[68]

Finally, among other characteristics of Hughes's works, his trademark in fact, is the irrepressible, pervasive humor, that is present even in his treatment of serious subjects such as lynching. As humor, in the words of Senghor, is the other side of Negritude,[69] this aspect of the poetry is one more link with Hughes's Negritude successors, Léon Damas in particular.

Of all the aspects of Hughes's poetry, the style singles him out as the most original of the poets of the Harlem Renaissance. This originality lies in his ability to transform elements of popular Black culture

into poetic expression. His blending of the content of popular culture, that is the ideas and attitudes of the masses, with their own means of expression, gives his poetry a distinctive unity and consistency. It is precisely because his works faithfully reflect the culture of his people both in form and content, that he deserves his characterization as the Afro-American poet "the Blackest in expression."[70]

CHAPTER VII

The Fiction of Langston Hughes: Defining Black Identity

Langston Hughes's popularity as a fiction writer lags far behind his continuing fame as a poet. Just as the general public is less aware of his fiction, the critics, by and large, have paid less attention to his novels and short stories than to his poetry. The greater critical appeal of Hughes's poetry undoubted lies in his more readily recognized innovativeness and versatility in that genre. In comparison, his fiction, in terms of technique and philosophical insight, breaks no new ground. However, within the more specific sphere of the literature of Negritude, Hughes's narrative prose deserves as much attention as his poetry. In this respect, his fiction is to a great extent an extension of his poetry, in the sense that, mainly through character development and situations; the novels and short stories explore in a more systematic and analytical manner some of the issues and ideas raised in the poems.

It would be misleading to range all of Langston Hughes's narratives under the banner of Negritude. As James A. Emanuel points out, his sixty-six published short stories, his three novels, and the three Simple collections, treat more than forty different themes.[1] Only a number of these are directly related to racial matters. Furthermore, as Negritude literary theories make no prescriptions regarding either the technique of fiction or the treatment of its subject matters, the technical side of Hughes's writing obviously would not provide any links with

Negritude. However, among the narratives specifically concerned with issues of race, at least his first novel, Not Without Laughter (1930),[2] and several short stories, explicitly deal with the focal theme of Negritude literature, namely the question of racial and cultural identity. The treatment of the question in these works anticipates its formulation by the Negritude writers in positing a dialectical opposition betwen authenticity and assimilation in the racial and cultural sphere, and between acquiescence and resistance on the socio-political plane.

The formulation of the issue in these dialectical terms obviously presupposes the existence of a separate Black identity as the basis of the dialectic. Its resolution hinges upon the determination of the nature of that identity either as innate and racially fixed, or as a function of the social environment. If there exists an unchanging, universal Black essence, then assimilation becomes a moot question: whatever the individual does, he will remain true to his racial and cultural self. If, on the other hand, this essence is environmentally defined, assimilation like authenticity depends on the conscious choice of the individual. In that case the individual actually faces three alternatives: his complete identification with his people and their cultural values; his willing assumption of the values of the dominant White culture; and finally, a balanced synthesis of the components of the two cultures.

Such is Hughes's approach to the question of the identity of Black Americans as a minority evolving in the midst of a predominantly White Anglo-Saxon majority. All the various aspects of the question delineated above are explored in Not Without Laughter. Hughes's avowed intention in this first novel is "to write about a typical Negro family in the Middle West, about people like those I had known in Kansas."[3] As

William Edward Farrison points out in a comparative study of the novel, its autobiographical and documentary aspects are not the least of its attractions to the critic.[4] The chronicle of the daily life of Aunt Hager's family of three generations does indeed provide certain insights into the social situation of the lower-class, small-town Blacks at the turn of the century. Similarly, the bildungsroman elements of the novel contribute to a greater understanding of Langston Hughes, the man and the author. But beyond the topical characteristics of the work, what interests us most in the present context is the intentional symbolism of the characters and the significance of the situations in which the author places them.

The central character of the novel is the little Black boy Sandy, whose upbringing is described. He is the ideal creation for the author's task of exploring the dynamics of Negritude, from the individual's consciousness of race to his final choice of identity and the behavioral pattern deriving from that choice. Sandy's young mind is a tabula rasa ready for the impressions of experience and the selective acquisition of the values he observes around him.

The milieu in which Sandy evolves, the small town of Stanton, is a microcosm of middle America, a scale model of the larger society in its conflicting divisions. On one side stands Sandy's family composed of Aunt Hager, his ex-slave grandmother, her three daughters, the rebellious young Harriett, the middle-class Tempy, Sandy's hard-working mother Annjee, and her peripatetic husband, Jimboy. The Williams family unit is, in a certain sense, a social and historical cross-section of Black America, which is completed by Aunt Hager's neighbors and the other lower-class Blacks of the town. Each member of Sandy's family as well

as these other Blacks represent for the young boy particular responses to the Black situation, and each symbolizes a certain ideal of Blackness. The cultural, social, and racial antithesis of these various ideals of Blackness is represented by the White population of Stanton whose more privileged status reflects that of their counterparts in the rest of the country.

Out of these familial and social conditions Sandy's consciousness develops, leading him to his own resolution of the contradictions of the social, racial, and cultural dialectic partly through his own experience, and partly through his observation of the models offered by his family, his relatives, his friends, and the town's Whites. At the end of the novel, the values Sandy adopts to make up his self, govern his view of the world, and give direction to his young life, are ultimately the result of an informed and conscious choice.

The first model of Blackness offered to the young Sandy is Aunt Hager, the matriarch of the family. In a way she represents a certain aspect of the Black past and embodies certain attitudes which Hughes considers archaic but treats with understanding. A former house slave, she does have some consciousness of the oppression of her people. But her solution to their plight is limited to the vision of race uplift advocated by her hero, Booker T. Washington, and which she hopes Sandy will realize. Whatever pride of race she feels is more or less contingent upon the approval of the Whites around her. For instance, while she is proud of being a hard-working, self-supporting old Black woman, she takes no less pride in what she perceives as her White employers' appreciation. Furthermore, her apprehension of her own oppression and that of her race is tempered by her extreme religiosity and a naive

sentimentality. Thus, she would, Christ-like, pray for those who oppress her. And even her memories of slavery are suffused with a misplaced objectivity for, as she recalls, "some o' de white folks was just as nice to their niggers as they could be, nicer than many of 'em now, what makes 'em work for less than they needs to eat."[5] In Aunt Hager's heart there is no room for hatred because "white folks is white folks, and colored folks is colored, an' neither one of 'em is bad as t'other make out."[6]

To a younger generation of Blacks, Aunt Hager's understanding of and response to the Black situation past and present are totally inadequate. She is the embodiment of Césaire's "old Negritude,"[7] a compendium of compromising and pacifying attitudes which, in the final analysis, support the status quo and postpone change to some future day. As she realizes herself, the impatient and angry young Blacks see her and her generation as "ole fogies, an' handkerchief heads, and white folks' niggers."[8] But for all the negative aspects of her attitude, she still commands the respect and love of her Sandy. On a certain level, the relationship between the two is highly symbolic, and represents the meeting of the two poles of the Black experience, the discretionary marriage between the past, however unsavory and unsatisfactory, and the more assertive future. Thus, Sandy understands the nature and the extent of oppression better than his grandmother, and so rejects her assessment of the situation of the race. On the other hand, he agrees with her on the necessity to transcend the situation and do one's individual best for a better future.

While the young Sandy can objectively find something positive in the model presented by Aunt Hager, his aunt Tempy and her husband

Arkins Siles represent a totally unacceptable conception of Blackness and response to the Black situation. In thought, attitudes, and action, they are symbols of unquestioning and eager assimilation. What Hughes thinks of this path is evident in his highly satiric treatment of these two characters. Members of the Black lumpen-bourgeoisie--Arkins is a mail clerk, and the couple owns some modest real estate--their solution to the race question is for Blacks to do their utmost to reach a respectable middle-class status. To do so, they must reject their culture as it is defined by the Siles, and wholeheartedly embrace the values of the dominant sector of society. The Siles in fact see themselves as shining examples of successful assimilationism. Thus, they have rejected the old Black Baptist folk religion in favor of the more "dignified" Episcopalian church; contemptuous of the blues, they visit with their friends to listen to opera. Even the traditional diet of Blacks must be spurned: Tempy prides herself in never eating watermelon. Above all, the Siles have found it necessary to reject their own people, both Aunt Hager's family which they hardly see, and the average poor Blacks, "the common element," in Arkins' words. In Siles' view, his rejection of Blacks is totally justified, for it is based on his observation that they are nothing but "a lot of minstrels." Whatever ideal of Blackness the couple entertains, it is on the social elitist model of Dubois, the Booker T. Washington model being too pedestrian. Ultimately, for the Siles, the true resolution of the whole question will be found when Blacks finally ". . . come up in the world, . . . up to the level of white people, talk like white people, think like white people--and then they would no longer be called 'niggers'."[9]

The Siles not only preach, but they live according to their views, exhibiting a highly comical pattern of behavior, a mixture of crass,

acquisitive materialism, conspicuous consumption, and spurious sense of dignity. If these aspects of their behavior are manifestations of the values of White culture, then the Siles have succeeded in their efforts toward assimilation. In fact, they are perceived by the rest of the family as having become White. That Hughes condemns the path taken by Tempy and Arkins Siles as sterile and counterproductive is evident not only in the outspoken disapproval of the other characters and his satiric treatment of the couple, but in the symbolic fact that the couple's marriage is sterile.

Jimboy, Sandy's father, is precisely the type of Black the Siles do not approve of, not only because of his impecuniosity, instability, and lack of sense of responsibility, but also because he so joyfully and naturally lives out his culture, especially in its artistic manifestations. An accomplished blues singer and guitarist, he holds his people under the affecting charm of his music and sings their joys and pains. His self-confident consciousness of race and his wryly humorous understanding of race relations counterbalance the Siles' smug complacency and assimilationism as well as Aunt Hager's partial vision. Jimboy's relationship with Sandy is a loving one. But though the boy admires a certain side of his father, especially his artistic gifts, he is also aware of the drawbacks in his character. Sandy finally does not wholly and unquestioningly accept his father as a model.

A special relationship exists between Jimboy and Sandy's younger aunt Harriett. He awakens in her artistic talents, and under his influence she learns to appreciate and express the art of her people. As she frankly assumes her culture, she simultaneously acquires a high consciousness of oppression. It is this consciousness that fuels her constant

rebellion and uncompromising rejection of Whites and their culture. She has no tolerance for Aunt Hager's Christian attitude, nor for her sister Tempy's assimilationism, nor for Anjee's indifference. To her, the only effective response to racial oppression is a fierce hatred of the oppressors: "I hate white folks! . . . I hate 'em all!"[10] The path of rebellion taken by Harriett is certainly a rocky one. She suffers much, but the faithful support of her loving and admiring nephew, as well as the happy ending of her story, indicate Hughes's opinion that rebellion of any sort is a positive act, no matter the cost.

Sandy's mother, Annjee, offers another kind of response which the young boy rejects. Passive and indifferent, she has unconsciously internalized the effects of oppression. She endures everything and has no hope of transcending her situation. Her one obsession is Jimboy who, despite his neglect as a husband and father, symbolizes for her love and a certain joy that otherwise is lacking in her life. Her only ambition for Sandy is for the boy to be able to earn a living and take care of her. To her, Sandy's schooling is so much waste of time.

All these characters, as we stated earlier, symbolize for Hughes various ways of following the quest for identity, of adjusting to a social situation that apparently demands of the individual the rejection of his self in order to survive. Evidently, none of these alternatives is considered satisfactory: some, like the assimilationist approach of the Siles, are to be discarded outright; others, such as Aunt Hager's "old Negritude," are simply inadequate. Ultimately, it is Sandy's choice, Hughes seems to suggest, that is the most appropriate: to combine in his self the dream of racial greatness of Aunt Hager, the rebellious spirit of Harriett, and the genius of his people's culture which

she expresses in her music. Such is at least the symbolic meaning of the final meeting between Sandy and his aunt, now a famous blues singer. Harriett's spontaneous offer to help Sandy through school is meant to represent the collective effort of the race toward effecting change, using for this purpose the institutions of the White society while remaining true to its own spirit.

In his treatment of the question of Black identity in Not Without Laughter, Hughes makes clear that the supposed existence of a Black soul uniformly present in all is in the realm of sociological myth. He appears rather to agree with Frantz Fanon's conclusion that "there is not one Negro, but Negroes."[11] Any search for some ideal state of Blackness made of subjectivity, spontaneity, and emotionalism, would be futile. Hughes's opinion that the very idea is absurd is evident in two satirical short stories of his collection The Ways of White Folks (1933).[12]

The first story entitled "Slave on the Block" satirizes the racial stereotypes held and developed by Whites concerning in particular the myth of the Black soul.[13] The two main characters, Michael and Anne Carraway, are a young White artist couple, residents of the Village where since the 1920's several American cultural fads have originated. Great consumers of packaged Black culture--plays, musicals, night clubs, novels, paintings--they are irresistibly attracted to Blacks, a "charming and naive and lovely race." The couple's artistic dream is for the wife to capture the Black soul on canvas, and for the husband to express it in a musical composition. Their opportunity comes when they hire the young nephew of their defunct cook to be the wife's model and the husband's inspiration, in brief, their resident all natural, spontaneous, night-black jungle Negro. Unfortunately, Luther, the ideal Negro, and

the new cook, both decline to behave like natural Negroes and to reveal that elusive soul. On the contrary, they judge the Carraways as "mighty funny" in their expectations.

More wildly satiric of the idea of a Black soul is "Rejuvenation through Joy" in which Hughes describes the scheme of a couple of White hustlers to exploit the Harlem craze and obtain money from rich alienated Whites in search of excitement and psychological peace.[14] Taking inspiration from the fashionable art and therapy colonies, Lesche, the smooth-talking Don Juan, and Sol, the public relations man from Hollywood, decide to use Black culture as therapy for a rich clientele. The plan is implemented and the colony functions successfully for a while in an artificial, Hollywood-made atmosphere of Black music and dance, African jungle costumes and decor. The story revolves around a central irony: neither the two hustlers, nor the hired Black artists believe in the reality of this Black soul on which the success of the venture rests. For Lesche and Sol, it is one more way to exploit the gullibility of the alienated rich; for the Blacks, it is just a job. The obvious conclusion is that the concept of a Black soul is only fit for fools and cynics.

While Hughes rightly and easily dismisses the idea of a racial specificity based on abstract, almost mystical criteria, he does recognize the existence of certain cultural modes to which the majority of Blacks subscribe. Not once, however, does he intimate that these cultural modes are spontaneous acquisitions or the natural expression of some psychological state. On the contrary, he makes clear that they reflect the material and historical conditions of the evolution of Black Americans as a group. And since these conditions are objectively

different from those of White Americans, it follows that the cultural modes of the two groups are perforce different. While stressing this objective difference, Hughes does not establish a manicheistic distinction between the two cultures. In this respect, the definition of the concepts of authenticity and assimilation illustrated in Not Without Laughter is brought into sharper focus in some short stories, to coincide more with the later formulation of some Negritude theoreticians.

As it is implied in these stories, authenticity is the recognition by the individual of the validity and the relevance of Black culture to the socio-historical experience of the race, as well as his acceptance of and participation in that culture. Because ideally the two cultures are not closed systems and do not necessarily oppose each other, the authentic Black can selectively participate in the culture of the majority without, however, losing his cultural identity. In fact, under conditions of mutual respect, intercultural exchanges contribute to the enrichment of the individual. This view is not far from the Senghoran vision of a future synthesis of Western/White culture and African/Black culture for the creation of a new man.[15]

Hughes illustrates the above ideas in at least two stories, "Home,"[16] and "The Blues I'm Playing."[17] The protagonists of both stories are musicians, and music is used as a metaphor for culture. "Home" narrates the return of a sensitive, talented, and consumptive young Black musician, Roy Williams, to his small Southern hometown from a stay in Europe where he has perfected his musical gifts. Although the climax of the story is the lynching of the protagonist by the Whites of the town on a false charge of attempted rape, the underlying theme is cultural identity and intercultural dialogue. An excellent jazz

musician who understands the significance of the music to his people. Ray also has a good mastery of classical music. He is as much at ease playing Mozart as he is improvising a jazz riff. His music moves Blacks and Whites alike. One of the people Roy's art touches the most is Miss Reese, "an old maid musicianer at the white high school", as Roy's mother describes her. Through the medium of music, a subtle, yet strong relationship based on a silent understanding, mutual respect and sympathy, is established between these two individuals of different races and different cultures. The tragically ironic end of Roy Williams, his lynching by a mob while talking of music with Miss Reese, carries a final message that is at once optimistic and pessimistic. Human contacts between the races and intercultural dialogue are possible but this society is not ready for the realization of this dream.

"The Blues I'm Playing" treats the same theme of intercultural exchange, once more stressing that it does not necessarily lead to assimilation. The heroine of the story is Oceola Jones, a young Harlem singer and musician who becomes the exotic protege of an old, rich, New York lady. Unable to comprehend Oceola's attachment to Harlem, her love for her Black fiance, and her attraction to Black music, the old lady is determined to mold her protege to her image, in effect to assimilate her. Oceola is sent to Europe to study classical music and acquire "culture." Mrs. Ellsworth's dream of making of the young girl a famous classical pianist as well as a sophisticated lady, is destroyed as the young artist decides to marry her fiance, continue to play jazz and the blues, and live her life as before. Oceola's decision is a rational one based on her understanding that, even though she can participate in and enjoy certain aspects of White culture, her own cultural heritage reflects her

self more faithfully. Furthermore, her own culture is an open door leading to the appreciation of others. Such is the significance of the closing scene of the story, the farewell recital Oceola gives Mrs. Ellsworth. After playing Beethoven and Chopin, she offers the shocked old lady a pot-pourri of blues which she accompanies with these revealing comments:

> This is mine . . . Listen! . . . How sad and gay it is. Blue and happy--laughing and crying . . . How white like you and black like me . . . How much like a man . . . And how like a woman . . . Warm as Pete's mouth . . . These are the blues . . . I'm playing.[18]

The end of the story is somewhat ambiguous, but it is suggested that the bridge between the two cultures will eventually be established, for even a conservative spirit such as Mrs. Ellsworth finally becomes receptive to the music from another world. It is that hope that is expressed in the closing image of the old lady dreamily sighing: "And I . . . would stand looking at the stars."[19]

Cultural conflicts within the individual, as Hughes implies in the preceding stories, are due to the social circumstances surrounding the meeting of the two cultures, not from any absolute, irreconcilable antagonism between them. In a larger context, referring to the historical confrontation between the West and the colonized world, Aimé Césaire makes a similar point in Discours sur le Colonialisme: encounters between Western and non-Western civilizations create conflicts because they occur under exploitative and oppressive circumstances.[20] Using the convenient figure of the mulatto as the visible symbol of racial and cultural encounters, Hughes similarly argues that such encounters inevitably result in open conflict or in internal tension hiding under the veneer of assimilation, or in sterility of the spirit.

The protagonist of "Father and Son," Robert, embodies the outcome of such an encounter that takes place under oppressive conditions.[21] As the mulatto son of Colonel Norwood, a Southern White plantation owner, and his Black servant, Cora, Robert was conceived not out of love but out of an exploitative sexual act by which Norwood exacted from Cora his master's due. Ideally, had the meeting between the Black mother and the White father happened in an atmosphere of equality, love and mutual respect, Robert would have enjoyed his legitimate rights as the son of Colonel Norwood. As it happens, the father wants to establish a master and slave relationship with the son, and Robert is expected to behave like a "field nigger." He rebels in order to enforce an ideal which the social conditions of the South forbid. Colonel Norwood's death by the hands of his son, and Robert's consequent suicide to avoid lynching, make both of them the tragic victims of the historically oppressive and exploitative conditions of racial-cultural encounters in the South.

Hughes's most pessimistic assessment of racial and cultural contacts inspired by exploitation is found in "Red-Headed Baby."[22] It is Hughes's most affecting and poignant story, of a grimness and pessimism not once alleviated by the usual glimmer of hope, the mitigating sense of irony, or the subtle humor found in the other stories dealing with the subject. Written as the interior monologue of a drunken White sailor, the story narrates his return to the dilapidated shack of a Black woman and her teenage daughter with whom he had a brief sexual encounter a few years before. The nocturnal hour of the sailor's visit, the desolate location of the shack in the marshes, its decrepit state, all this conveys most effectively the oppressive conditions under which the two characters meet. Furthermore, the drunkenness of the sailor, the mother,

and the girl, as well as the latter's prostitution which started with her first sexual act with the sailor, are symbols of the degeneracy of the individuals interacting in the vicious circle of oppression. Their meeting, instead of bringing mutual enrichment, results in spiritual sterility, the visible symbol of which is the deaf, mute, deformed red-headed baby, the fruit of their encounter. Both the mother and the father recognize him as the projection of their selves. The mother keeps him at distance, and the father is positively afraid of this horrible materialization of his exploitative self. In this symbolic fashion, Hughes reiterates his point that relationships of exploitation and oppression between Blacks and Whites can only lead to mutual spiritual impoverishment, which is precisely the point raised by Césaire,[23] as stated previously, and which Fanon explores more systematically in The Wretched of the Earth.[24]

In the stories examined above, Hughes primarily stresses the existence of a basic difference between Black and White cultures, and the choices faced by the individual Black at the crossroads of the two cultures. In Negritude terminology, these choices are between authenticity and assimilation, or a synthesis of the two cultures whose qualitative value depends on the conditions under which it is operated. But beyond these considerations, Hughes's concern is to illustrate the nature of Black culture, to define Black cultural identity. Although very often, both in Not Without Laughter and in the short stories, Hughes uses Black music and religion as metaphors for the culture, they are just convenient symbols. Obviously he does not confuse these expressions of the culture with its essence, nor does he reduce the whole culture to these external manifestations. As it is both explicitly and implicitly

defined in Not Without Laughter, some short stories, and the Simple series, Black culture is a compendium of attitudes and values, a world-view rooted in the historical and social experience of Blacks in America.

This experience, it has been said over and over, is one of exploitation and oppression. Consequently, Black culture is the reflection of the various modes of resistance developed by Blacks, and of their constant struggle to survive with their spirit intact, and to remain conscious of their humanity. This is exactly what the young Sandy perceives in a flash of insight as he observes the resilience of the poverty-stricken Blacks of Stanton, their ability not only to endure and survive, but above all to transcend the dreariness of their material situation and keep a certain zest for life:

> . . . That must be the reason, thought Sandy, why poverty-stricken old Negroes like Uncle Dan Givens lived so long--because to them, no matter how hard life might be, it was not without laughter.[25]

Hughes also defines the culture as a certain approach to life based on a system of moral values that is more elemental and thus different from the conventional system of the larger society. It is this system of values, this particular approach to life, that is embodied by the heroine of "Cora Unashamed."[26] Cora accepts with joy her illegitimate child, unconcerned with the moralistic prejudices of the White society of Melton, because "she was gentle and humble in the face of life." She greets the premature death of her baby with rage at the heavens because "she was not humble before the fact of death." Her philosophy is simple: life must be appreciated, respected, and loved under all circumstances. Hence her rage and pain at the death of Jessie, the neglected child of her employers, the Studevants. Her values come into direct conflict with those of this White family who preferred to risk

the death of their child by forcing her to have an abortion in order to save the family's social respectability and apparent moral uprightness. Because she has learned to triumph over the adversities of life, Cora has acquired such a strength of character and spirit that in her own materially impoverished family as well as in the spiritually poor Studevant family, she "was like a tree--once rooted, she stood, in spite of storms and strife, wind and rocks, in the earth."

The definition of Black culture given by such symbolic characters as Cora is in a way limited. A more comprehensive definition can be gathered from Hughes's description of the way of life of his people, their aspirations, and their ways of coping with a difficult social and economic reality. Since culture is not an abstraction but is lived by a people as a whole, we must point out that for Hughes the people is primarily and solely the Black masses. He is totally unconcerned with the Black bourgeoisie, and in the rare stories in which he depicts their way of life, such as in "Professor"[27] and in his portrait of Tempy and Arkins Siles in Not Without Laughter, it is to satirize them. Hughes's people are the urban and rural poor, the workers, the unemployed, the wanderers, the prostitutes, all those who are exploited and oppressed. It is the sum total of their lives that provide an understanding of their culture. In this respect, Hughes' most famous fictional creation, Jesse B. Semple, otherwise known as Simple, the hero of four collections of short stories,[28] is intended as the embodiment of Black culture, Hughes's ideal Black, if he ever existed, is "a product of Caucasia and Africa, Harlem and Dixie, . . . entirely conditioned by our environment, our modern times."[29]

It has been pointed out that the phenomenal popular success of the

Simple stories is due to the fact that the Black readers of the Chicago Defender in which they were published, readily identified with the character.[30] There is indeed no doubt that Hughes made a conscious effort to create a literary character that would embody the concerns, attitudes, ideas, life history, and even the mannerisms of the average Black American. As he himself indicates, Simple is the end product of his observation of and relationship with countless average members of urban Black America.[31] The result, then, is a generalized profile of Black Americans. Thus, Simple was born in the South, in Virginia more precisely. Like thousands of others, he had made the historic migration to the North, not only to look for better economic opportunities, but to live in a less racially oppressive milieu. Still, he has a sentimental attachment to the South and feels nostalgic at times for this place that could be a paradise if not for the racism of the Whites. For Simple is very race conscious, too much even for the taste of his drinking partner and interlocutor, the slightly pedantic Boyd. Simple consequently takes pride in and identifies with the accomplishments of his racial brothers, from Jackie Robinson to Ralph Bunche. He loyally proclaims his love of Harlem, the only place where he feels at ease because it is the only place where White folks don't go, the only place he can claim as home:

> Here's to Harlem!
> They say Heaven is Paradise.
> If Harlem ain't Heaven,
> Then a mouse ain't mice!
>
> . . . It sure is mine . . . From Central Park to 179th, from river to river, Harlem is mine! Lots of white folks is scared to come up here, too, after dark.[32]

Simple's consciousness of race, his understanding of his and his people's place in American society, his feeling of solidarity with his racial

brothers, are meant to represent those of Blacks in general, just as his speech faithfully reproduces the cadence and idiosyncracies of Afro-American English.[33]

Yet Simple is not so generalized and simple as to be faceless. He has his own immediate concerns such as his broken marriage and elusive divorce, his petty landlady, his difficulties with his "cultured" girl-friend Joyce. He has his own personal habits and tastes: he has his daily beer at his favorite bar, he hates dogs. But it is precisely this mixture of personal idiosyncracies and generalized traits that identify Simple as Hughes's answer to the question of Black cultural identity. "If there were not a lot of genial souls in Harlem as talkative as Simple," writes Hughes, "I would never have these tales to write down that are 'just like him.' He is my ace-boy, Simple."[34] In this respect, Eugenia W. Collier very aptly describes Simple as an epic hero, the Black Everyman, whose story is "infused with the sad-happy, tragic-funny, laughing-crying humor which has grown from the black man's suffering and strength."[35]

Furthermore, if the success of the Simple stories in translation is any indication, he is not only the Black Everyman, but the average man everywhere. What Eugenia W. Collier describes as his epic qualities links him to other literary heroes whose thoughts, behavior, ideals, and preoccupations reflect those of their people to such an extent that they become representative symbols of the collective. In this respect, the difference between Simple and the Jewish Schlemiel, for instance, is only ethnic.[36] Stripped of his American idiosyncracies, Simple is like the rest of humanity utterly human, that is to say, he loves and he hates, knows happiness and unhappiness, and ceaselessly struggles against the

odds of life. The character of Simple finally brings to the fore the humanistic thrust of Hughes's fiction. His effort to arrive at a definition of Black identity leads him to the definition of the common man everywhere who only aspires to freedom and dignity. Thus, as Sartre says of the Negritude writers,[37] Langston Hughes's search for his Negritude paradoxically leads to its transcendance. His fiction, by focusing on Black singularity opens on the universal, the ultimate end of literature.

CHAPTER VIII

Conclusion: Claude McKay and Langston Hughes— West Indian, Afro-American, and African Negritudes

I have referred earlier to the relevance of Janheinz Jahn's comment on the diversity of the Harlem Renaissance and the lack of cohesion among the writers associated with the movement.[1] As I also indicated, the connecting thread among these writers is their preoccupation with similar social and political issues, and their treatment of common themes in their poetry and fiction. This diversity in unity in the Harlem Renaissance is paralleled by the multiplicity of the voices of the Negritude poets and novelists, as can readily be seen in the Marxist views of a René Dépestre, the historicism of a Césaire, and the mystic leanings of a Senghor. The differences, nuances, and similarities among the various approaches and responses found in both movements constitute a measure of the complexity of the common issues of concern to the writers. Ultimately, the various registers and pitches of all these voices produce not cacophony but a symphony on the single theme identified by Raymond F. Betts as "the ideology of Blackness."[2]

While we readily accept this ultimate unity among these writers by grouping them under the common labels of Harlem Renaissance and Negritude, still we must account for their differences as well as their similarities, however minor. Consequently, a summary inventory of various typical ideological, contextual, and stylistic aspects of the

works of the West Indian Césaire and the African Senghor, will point out the existence of at least two great schools of Negritude. Similarly, a comparison between McKay and Hughes will indicate the differences in personal and cultural backgrounds as the source of the disparate approach of the two writers to similar questions and treatment of similar themes. In a way, the relationship between the two prefigures the apparent fragmentation of the Negritude movement.

To a certain extent, Césaire typifies the West Indian approach to Negritude, while Senghor represents the African version. Whereas the Sartrean "mystical geography" of Negritude is clearly delineated in Césaire's poetry, Senghor's works are only minimally concerned with the New World experience and stresses rather Africa and Europe. After all, Senghor and his people did not experience "the middle passage" and the forced migration to the Americas. Understandably, the motif of slavery is virtually neglected in the works of Senghor and other African Negritude poets, while it is prevalent among the West Indians. The different treatment of Africa by Césaire and Senghor signal another difference between each mode of Negritude poetry. In the West Indian poet's works Africa has mainly a mythic and symbolic function, while among the African poets the continent is treated in a more realistic manner that derives from their more immediate familiarity with the cultural and physical milieu. Consequently, for the West Indian poets the theme of the return to the native land refers both to Africa and to their island home, while for the African poets it includes only Africa. Finally, it must be pointed out that the dictions of Césaire and Senghor, and consequently those of the West Indian and African writers, reflect their respective linguistic background.

What the preceding summary generalizations intimate is that the treatment of the literary motifs and themes of Negritude bears the imprint of the individual author's personal background and particular cultural roots. This is precisely what is already apparent in the case of Claude McKay and Langston Hughes. Because McKay's most productive years were spent in the United States, and because his works reflect such a great involvement in the questions of race and culture in America, and because of his links to the Harlem Renaissance, he is generally seen as an Afro-American author. Yet, he was very much an outsider, even to a great number of his Renaissance colleagues, as Jean Wagner aptly underlines.[3] To a great extent, his contributions to the movement reflect unmistakably his Jamaican roots. In this respect, Wagner's observation is most pertinent:

> To the frivolities of the chaotic existence that was all the rage, and to the Harlem primitivism of which he soon had enough, McKay opposed the solid qualities of his Jamaican heritage, the sureness and perspicacity of his judgment, and his desire for inner progress and ennoblement.[4]

It remains, then, that in a greater measure than generally considered by the critics, McKay is very much a West Indian poet, while Hughes is definitely an Afro-American poet. As evident in our study, the focus of the works of both authors is the same: the clash of races and cultures, the definition of "the being-in-the-world" of Blacks at a particular historical juncture. Although both poets ultimately reach similar conclusions, particularly with regard to the validity of cultural syncretism, there are still well-delineated nuances in their respective ideological approach. Thus, while both McKay and Hughes show a similar awareness of cultural diversity in the Black world, each envisions a

certain ideal of racial and cultural identity which unsurprisingly incorporates elements of their respective Black cultures. For McKay, the ideal Black culture is that of his island, and his ideal Black is the Jamaican peasant. For Hughes, the ideal is Afro-America, and his hero is the urban Black American. Hughes's quintessential Harlemite, Jesse B. Semple, bears absolutely no resemblance to McKay's solid peasants such as Jordan Plant and Jubban. Furthermore, the cultural syncretism envisioned by each author includes elements of the particular Western and Black cultures with which they are familiar. For McKay, it is a blend of the Jamaican peasant tradition and British elements, while for Hughes it is a mixture of Southern Black folk tradition and modern America. It is clear, therefore, that both authors turn to local cultural resources and traditions to find a resolution to the central issue of racial and cultural conflict.

The predominant attitude of each poet toward the question of race and culture, and the terms in which they consider the matter, show the influence of their different development. McKay's more manicheistic vision certainly reflects the intellectual legacy of the British Romantics of his youthful literary education. Thus, the dialectical terms of his expression of racial and cultural consciousness really parallel the romantic dichotomy of reason and intellect versus instinct and emotion, civilization versus primitivism. In this context, his early models of Blackness, Jake and Banjo, can be seen as updated urban versions of the noble savage. In addition, the defiant tone of McKay's protest poetry, his characteristic stoicism, his typical pose as a tortured Prometheus, and the prevalence of the subjective "I" in his poetry, all these aspects are echoes of romanticism. By contrast, Hughes has a more objective

attitude, a more balanced vision, and generally prefers understatements to McKay's hyperboles.

These differences between McKay and Hughes cannot be explained only as the former's internalization and racialization of the romantic world view. These differences also reflect the particular social conditions in McKay's original cultural milieu. McKay's Black countrymen are in the majority on their island while the British colonials, the minority, constitute distant entities whose alienness is perceived but not threatening. As McKay himself explains, he and his countrymen were virtually immune from the daily interventions of racism and social oppression in their lives.[5] Under these conditions, the individual's sense of self is spontaneous and unreflected, since he is not overly concerned with what the Negritude writers call "the Other." This is very much apparent in McKay's dialect poetry in which Whites and the West are virtually absent subjects. By contrast, as we indicated earlier,[6] the poetry of his American period shows a greater awareness of race, and a dichotomous vision of race and culture. This vision which came to dominate McKay's works is the direct result of the cultural shock of his American experience.[7] It is precisely this shock that is the catalyst for the violence that underscores his poetic response to racism and social oppression in the United States.

The calmer, understated tone of the protest poetry of Langston Hughes shows his greater psychological adaptation to the surrounding conditions. Furthermore, Hughes's more balanced vision reflects the historical fact of greater interaction between Whites and Blacks in the United States, if only because they share a common social, economic, and political system. In this respect, one other aspect of

the two poets' works points to the significance of their respective cultural background in the formulation of their poetic response to race and culture. The treatment of Jamaica in McKay's poetry reveals a strong feeling of territoriality, even of patriotism, if not nationalism. While Jamaica gives him a definite sense of belonging, America elicits in him only feelings of alienation and estrangement. Hence the pervasiveness of the theme of the return to the native land. In Hughes's poetry, this theme is totally absent, and none of his poems expresses this unambiguous sense of patriotism. We simply gather that for him, for better or for worse, America is home and he is a member of the American family. Of this fact Hughes feels he must convince his White countrymen as he does in his well known poem "I Too":

> I, too, sing America
> I am the darker brother.
> They send me to eat in the kitchen
> When company comes,
> But I laugh,
> And eat well,
> And grow strong.
> Tomorrow,
> I'll be at the table
> When company comes.
> Nobody'll dare
> Say to me,
> "Eat in the kitchen,"
> Then.
> Besides,
> They'll see how beautiful I am
> And be ashamed--
> I, too, am America.[8]

The sharp differences in style between McKay and Hughes are also rooted in the diversity of their personal and cultural backgrounds. The conservative form of McKay's verse, his adoption of the sonnet in the greater bulk of his poetry, show an inability to shake off early cultural acquisitions, more precisely the influence of his Romantic mentors.

Even McKay's dialect poetry, already modified and brought somewhat closer to standard English, uses traditional English meter and rhyme scheme. By contrast, Hughes's innovative and experimental style reflects his formation in the more adventurous atmosphere of American letters. As for the differences between the two poets' diction, they are functions of their respective natural environments. McKay's origin in rural Jamaica is clearly evident in the predominance of nature images in his poems. In addition, the pastoral undertone of much of his poetry as well as his constant use of the city as a negative symbol, indicate the sensitivity of one nurtured in the country. Langston Hughes, by contrast, is a thoroughly urban poet. In his poetry, nature images sound false and stereotypical, while the sounds and sights of the city seem spontaneous and authentic.

Consideration of the two poets' style brings to the fore the question of literary language of Black writers, a question that is still debated today. How does the writer reconcile his desire to find a literary language appropriate for the expression of his racial and cultural experience, with his continuing use of a Western language? Jean-Paul Sartre accurately observes that the Negritude writers circumvent this arduous question by subverting the syntax and grammar of the French language, by inventing new symbols or changing the connotations of old ones, to reflect their particular historical experience as well as their respective cultural and linguistic roots.[9] Since none of these writers go so far as to use their own African or West Indian languages, one suspects a certain reluctance to abandon the colonial language in which they write. While this may be explained by a desire to reach a greater audience, it may also be caused by a totally subjective and

sentimental attachment to the Western language. After all, Senghor is one of the greatest singers of the unique virtues of the French language.

Like their Negritude successors, McKay and Hughes confronted this question of language, and like them also they have not been able to resolve it satisfactorily. In a poem entitled "O Word I Love to Sing," McKay complains about the inability of English to fully express his racial reality:

> O word I love to sing! thou art too tender
> For all the passions agitating me;
> For all my bitterness thou art too tender,
> I cannot pour my red soul into thee.[10]

Hughes in at least one article reflects on the necessity to use popular language to explore the Afro-American's collective experience.[11] McKay's resolution of the issue is to be found in his use of dialect in his early poetry, a language he soon abandons, however. His concern for a poetry linked to popular culture to a lesser extent is expressed in the lyric quality of his poetry, and is emphasized in his first two volumes by the addition of musical scores for the interpretation of the poems. Despite these two aspects of McKay's poetry, his dream of a poetic language to translate his presumably ineffable experience has not been realized. Had he been more adventurous, he might have developed further the potential of his Jamaican dialect as an effective artistic medium. For Hughes, the choice is not so clear cut, as the linguistic differences between standard American English and Black urban speech are not so great. However, he could have explored the Black Southern dialect as Paul Lawrence Dunbar did before him. In any case, Hughes did use very effectively the Afro-American urban speech, and considerably narrowed further the gap between popular culture and literary language by the

systematic use of the diction and form of jazz and the blues, these quintessential expressions of Black American culture.

I draw attention to this question of language not because I believe that an author cannot produce original and culturally authentic works in a language other than his own. Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe who has considered this issue has satisfactorily demonstrated that a Western language can very well express his African experience.[12] But in the case of McKay and Hughes, I wanted to point out their repeated inability to reconcile certain contradictions or to pursue some of their theoretical positions to their logical and practical conclusion. The minor contradictions in the matter of language are in great measure indications of deeper contradictions which, in the final analysis, may be linked to the very ideological foundation of the works of the two authors, their early version of Negritude.

Since McKay and Hughes, as well as their Negritude successors, stress primarily the social import of their literary creations, it is most fitting to assess their works from the point of view of their conceptualization of the social question. Both Hughes and McKay exhibit the same major weakness in their method of approach that will later earn Negritude ideas the negative criticism of younger African and Caribbean writers.[13] While in their poetry and fiction McKay and Hughes take stock of the real conflict between races in the United States and in the wider context of the West and Africa, they have generally overlooked the core of the question by focusing on the racial and cultural superstructure to the relative neglect of the socio-economic structure. Precisely because the realms of race and culture are fluid and subjective, the attempts of both authors to effectively circumvent the problems of

racial identity, and racial and cultural conflicts, are fraught with false starts and contradictions. Thus, we have seen both McKay and Hughes play with the nebulous concept of the Black soul, flirt with the equation of race and class, strike Marxist poses, invoke history, and over all be very eclectic in their general approach. Such eclectism which is also found among the Negritude poets, novelists, and theoreticians, is no doubt responsible for the ambivalence which they elicit today. To many they appear as very progressive artists, while to others they represent the ultimate in conservatism.[14]

The concepts of race and culture that give unity to the works of Hughes and McKay have a further drawback. They must necessarily deal in generalities, and give the distinct impression of ignoring historical and material disparities and divergences among national groups. It is true, in the final analysis, that for Hughes Black is synonymous with the Afro-American urban masses, and for McKay with the Jamaican peasantry. But the tendency of both authors to imply a more universal meaning to the term is never far from the surface. This tendency is evident, for instance, in their efforts to establish a poetic and fictional profile of the ideal Black type that would sum up the characteristics of the race. In this respect, Frantz Fanon's criticism of Negritude racial generalizations is very pertinent: they overlook or do not stress enough the fact that "there is not <u>one</u> Negro; there are Negroes."[15]

As the ideological approach of McKay and Hughes raises certain questions, so does their conception of the purpose of their art. Both writers conceive their poetry and prose as tools for effecting social change. Whether or not they succeeded will be assessed according to

one's conception of literature as either a catalyst of social change or a reflection of a society at a certain juncture. While some critics, such as Lilyan Kesteloot,[16] see a political potential in the parallel literature of Negritude, Langston Hughes for his part doubts that his works, as well as those of his Harlem Renaissance colleagues, had any real political and social impact. As he says in a retrospective look at the movement, the Renaissance did nothing for the masses.[17] In this context McKay's farewell poem to the poetry of race can be explained by his realization of the impotence of such poetry to influence events:

> Around me roar and crash the pagan isms
> To which most of my life was consecrate,
> Betrayed by evil men and torn by schisms
> For they were built on nothing more than hate![18]

It is this same impotence Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka later attributes to the literature of Negritude in his oft-quoted phrase: "A tiger does not shout out about his tigertude, he jumps."[19] Soyinka's point is that the relentless affirmation of Black identity leads to the neglect of concrete political action or enticement to action, the only effective road to socio-historical change. Mere self-examination, in Soyinka's view, is a dead end.

It appears, then, that the main failure of Negritude literature as well as the literature of the Harlem Renaissance is primarily ideological. While this criticism of the ideological approach of McKay and Hughes, these two representatives of the movement, is most pertinent, I do not fail to consider that they are being judged from a safe temporal distance. The subjective and idealistic foundation of their works is undoubtedly related to the urgency of the social and historical situation they were facing. At a time of obvious racial persecution in the United States, and of triumphant European colonialism abroad, the

historical phenomena of oppression and exploitation could easily have been perceived primarily in racial terms, at the expense of their material roots. Consequently, it is understandable that any Black writer of the period with a modicum of social consciousness, such as McKay and Hughes, would have selected race as the focus of their social claims. That the Negritude poets of the 1940's adopted similar views and attitudes under similar circumstances suggests the relative validity of McKay's and Hughes's literary response to the Black experience.

All things considered, beyond their limitations, deficiencies, and contradictions, it remains that the Jamaican expatriate and the "Afro-American poet-laureate" have left behind a considerable intellectual and literary legacy for which contemporary Black writers from all continents must be grateful. Both Hughes and McKay have been faithful witnesses of their times, and fulfilled admirably their role as the conscience of their generation. Their artistic creations more often than not echoed the perception of the great Black masses, a fact that is evident in Hughes's great popularity as a poetry reader,[20] and the popular response to McKay's famous poem "If We Must Die" written in reaction to the 1919 race riots.[21] The issues they raised, pertinent for their times, are still relevant and very much alive in today's Black literatures. The themes of cultural identity, Western and African relations, oppression, colonialism, human dignity, freedom, are still the mainstay of Black literatures. Furthermore, the models they provided for their immediate Negritude successors are still valid: after them, pure literary estheticism has never had any appeal for the Black writer, and a Black writer without a social conscience is inconceivable today. Finally, and this may be the greatest contribution of McKay and Hughes, they were among

the first to utter the important "non serviam" to Western artistic models, thus breaking the spell and the fascination Western esthetics held for colonized and neo-colonized Blacks. Whatever the esthetic limitations of the two Renaissance poets and novelists, the masterpieces of contemporary African, Afro-American, and West Indian literatures owe a direct debt to these pioneers, among the first to conceive the very idea of a distinctive Black literature. In the larger context of Black history, including the impact of the West on Africans and the Black Diaspora, the works of McKay and Hughes, and by extension the literatures of the Harlem Renaissance and the Negritude movement, have a much greater significance. They are the expression of a historical will, echoes of voices of the past and the present asserting, in the words of Frantz Fanon:

> I, the man of color, want only this:
> That the tool never possess the man. That the enslavement of man by man cease forever. That is, of one by another. That it be possible for me to discover and to love man, wherever he may be.[22]

NOTES

Chapter I

[1]See in particular Van Wyck Brooks, America's Coming-of-Age (1915; rpt. Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1958); and Max Eastman's articles in The Masses (1913-1918), the best known and most controversial radical publication of the period.

[2]For a witness account of the experience of cultural alienation and expatriation among writers of this generation, see Malcom Cowley, Exile's Return (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1934). Henry F. May also provides a penetrating analysis of the roots and manifestations of the intellectual ferment of the period in The End of American Innocence (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959).

[3]I use the terms "Black" and "White" in this study generally to refer to race and culture in accordance with today's practice, with no pretension to scientific exactitude. Occasionally, depending on the context, I will substitute parallel terms such as "Afro-American," "African," "Western," "European" whose meanings will be self-evident.

[4]Seymour L. Gross, "Stereotype to Archetype: The Negro in American Literary Criticism," in The Image of the Negro in American Literature, ed. Seymour L. Gross and John Edward Hardy (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 2.

[5]Sterling Brown, "Negro Character as Seen by White Authors," Journal of Negro Education, 2 (1933), pp. 179-203.

[6]W. E. B. Dubois, The Souls of Black Folk (1903), rpt. in Three Negro Classics (New York: Avon Books, 1965), pp. 207-369.

[7]Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

[8]Phyllis Wheatley, "On Being Brought from Africa to America," Life and Works of Phyllis Wheatley, ed. G. Herbert Renfro (1916; rpt. Miami: Mnemosyne Publishing, 1969), p. 48.

[9]James Weldon Johnson, The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man (1912); rpt. in Three Negro Classics (New York: Avon Books, 1965), pp. 392-511.

[10]Gross, "Stereotype to Archetype: The Negro in American Literary Criticism," p. 7.

[11]Alain Locke, "The New Negro," in The New Negro, ed. Alain Locke (1925; rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1968), pp. 3-16.

[12]Locke, p. xv.

[13]Locke, p. 4.

[14]Locke, pp. 4-5.

[15]Locke, p. 7.

[16]Locke, p. 9.

[17]Locke, p. 10.

[18]Locke, p. 12.

[19]Sterling Brown, Negro Poetry and Drama (Washington, D.C.: Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1937), p. 61.

[20]Janheinz Jahn, Neo-African Literature, trans. Oliver Coburn and Ursula Lehrburger (New York: Grove Press, 1968), p. 187.

[21]Raymond F. Betts, The Ideology of Blackness (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Co., 1971), p. 1.

[22]Betts, p. 1.

[23]For a comprehensive summary and analysis of Légitime défense see Lilyan Kesteloot, Les Ecrivains noirs de langue française (Bruxelles: Université libre de Bruxelles, 1965), pp. 25-82.

[24]Leo Frobenius, Histoire de la civilisation africaine (Paris: Gallimard, 1936).

[25]M. Delafosse, Civilisation négro-africaine (Paris: Stock, 1925).

[26]Kesteloot, Les Ecrivains noirs de langue française (Bruxelles: Université libre de Bruxelles, 1965), pp. 29-34.

[27]Kesteloot, pp. 29-30.

[28]Like Légitime défense, this journal had a very brief life and copies are extremely rare. For a discussion of its history and content see Kesteloot, pp. 91-100.

[29]Quoted in Kesteloot, p. 92.

[30]Throughout its thirty-year history Présence Africaine has always been identified with Negritude, and has published works by most of the major writers associated with the movement.

[31]Aimé Césaire, Cahier d'un retour au pays natal / Return to my Native Land, bilingual ed., trans. Emile Snyder (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1960).

[32]Betts, The Ideology of Blackness, p. 1.

[33]Légitime défense, in Kesteloot, p. 63. This citation is my translation.

[34]René Dépestre, Pour la Révolution, pour la poésie (Ottawa: Editions Leméac, 1974), p. 163.

[35]Dépestre, p. 77. This citation is my translation.

[36]Kesteloot, p. 64. This citation is my translation.

Chapter II

[1]Claude McKay's most important essays and articles have been collected in The Passion of Claude McKay: Selected Poetry and Prose--1912-1948, ed. Wayne Cooper (New York: Schocken Books, 1973).

[2]Lilyan Kesteloot, Les Ecrivains noirs de langue française (Bruxelles: Université libre de Bruxelles, 1965). See also Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Problématique de la négritude," Présence Africaine, No. 78 (2e trimestre), pp. 3-26.

[3]Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Comme les lamantins vont boire à la source," in Poèmes (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973), p. 154.

[4]Senghor, "Comme les lamantins vont boire à la source," p. 155.

[5]Jean-Paul Sartre, "Orphée Noir," Introd., Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française, by L. S. Senghor (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948), pp. xv-xvi. This citation is my translation.

[6]McKay, "A Negro Poet Writes," The Passion of Claude McKay, pp. 48-50.

[7]McKay, A Long Way from Home (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970), pp. 35-38, and p. 245.

[8]A Long Way from Home, p. 350.

[9]McKay, "For Group Survival," The Passion of Claude McKay, pp. 234-239.

[10]For a detailed discussion of the political spectrum among Blacks during this period see Nathan Irvin Huggins, Harlem Renaissance (New

York: Oxford University Press, 1973). See also Harold Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1967).

[11]See the following articles in The Passion of Claude McKay: "A Negro Writer to his Critics," pp. 132-.39; "On Adam Clayton Powell: A Response," pp. 250-252; "Negro Extinction or Survival: A Reply to George S. Schuyler," pp. 253-257.

[12]McKay, "On Adam Clayton Powell: A Response," The Passion of Claude McKay, p. 252.

[13]Sartre, "Orphée Noir," p. xi.

[14]MaKay, A Long Way from Home, p. 350.

[15]"Socialism and the Negro," The Passion of Claude McKay, p. 54.

[16]"Birthright," The Passion of Claude McKay, p. 73.

[17]"How Black Sees Red and Green," The Passion of Claude McKay, p. 58.

[18]Sartre, "Orphée Noir," pp. xiii-xiv. This citation is my translation.

[19]René Dépestre, Pour la Révolution, pour la poésie (Ottawa: Editions Leméac, 1974), p. 77. This citation is my translation.

[20]Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1968), p. 247.

[21]McKay, "For Group Survival," The Passion of Claude McKay, pp. 234-239.

[22]A Long Way from Home, p. 349.

[23]W. E. B. Dubois, The Souls of Black Folk (1903; rpt. in Three Negro Classics (New York: Avon Books, 1965).

[24]For an analysis of this widely used Negritude notion see Sartre, "Orphée Noir," p. xv.

[25]Contemporary views on race are discussed in Nathan Irvin Huggins, Harlem Renaissance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), and in Harold Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1967).

[26]Melville Herskovits, "The Negro's Americanism," in The New Negro, ed. Alain Locke (1925; rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1968), p. 360.

[27]Alain Locke, "The New Negro," in The New Negro, ed. Alain Locke (1925; rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1968), p. 12.

[28]McKay, "A Negro Writer to his Critics," The Passion of Claude McKay, p. 137.

[29]"Negro Extravaganza," The Passion of Claude McKay, p. 63.

[30]"Negro Extravaganza," p. 63.

[31]Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, p. 212.

[32]Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, p. 213.

[33]Cheikh Anta Diop, The African Origins of Civilization, ed. and trans. Mercer Cook (New York: Lawrence Hill and Co., 1974).

[34]Quoted in McKay, A Long Way from Home, p. 89

[35]See in particular Aimé Césaire, Discours sur le colonialisme (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1955).

[36]McKay, "A Negro Writer to his Critics," The Passion of Claude McKay, p. 137.

[37]A Long Way from Home, p. 245.

[38]"He Who Gets Slapped," The Passion of Claude McKay, p. 70.

[39]George Kent, Blackness and the Adventure of Western Culture (Chicago: Third World Press, 1972), p. 36.

[40]Kent, Blackness and the Adventure of Western Culture.

[41]McKay, A Long Way from Home, p. 321.

[42]"Letter to Max Eastman," The Passion of Claude McKay, p. 154.

[43]"Letter to Max Eastman," p. 155.

[44]A Long Way from Home, pp. 139-140.

[45]A Long Way from Home, p. 103.

[46]A Long Way from Home, p. 186.

[47]"A Negro Writer to his Critics," The Passion of Claude McKay, pp. 132-139.

[48]"A Negro Writer to his Critics," p. 134.

[49]"A Negro Writer to his Critics,", p. 133.

[50]"A Negro Writer to his Critics," p. 133.

[51]"A Negro Writer to his Critics," p. 135.

[52]Sartre, "Orphée Noir," p. xv.

[53]"A Negro Extravaganza," The Passion of Claude McKay, p. 62.

[54]For a summary account of McKay's early education see Wayne Cooper's Introduction, The Passion of Claude McKay, p. 3.

[55]For McKay's account of his work on The Liberator in 1921 and 1922 see A Long Way from Home, pp. 130-146.

[56]A Long Way from Home, pp. 138-141.

[57]The important issue of the relationship between art and politics during this period is examined in detail in Daniel Aaron, Writers on the Left (New York: Avon Books, 1965).

[58]Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Problématique de la Négritude," Présence Africaine, No. 78 (2e trimestre 1971), p. 13. This citation is my translation.

Chapter III

[1]Janheinz Jahn, Neo-African Literature, trans. Oliver Coburn and Ursula Lehrberger (New York: Grove Press, 1968), p. 187.

[2]Harold Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1967), p. 51.

[3]W. E. B. Dubois, The Souls of Black Folk (1903; rpt. in Three Negro Classics (New York: Avon Books, 1965), pp. 207-389.

[4]Langston Hughes, The Big Sea (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940), and I Wonder as I Wander: An Autobiographical Journey (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1956).

[5]Eugene C. Holmes, "Langston Hughes, Philosopher-Poet," Freedomways, No. 8 (Spring, 1968), p. 144.

[6]Quoted in James Emanuel, Langston Hughes (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1967), p. 137.

[7]Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," The Nation, June 23, 1926, rpt. in Amistad 1, eds. John A. Williams and Charles F. Harris (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), pp. 301-305.

[8]Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," Amistad 1, p. 302.

[9]Quoted in Lilyan Kesteloot, Les Ecrivains noirs de langue française (Bruxelles: Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1965), p. 112. This citation is my translation.

[10]Hughes., "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain, Amistad 1, p. 302.

[11]Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

[12]Léon G. Damas, "Hiccups," The Negritude Poets, ed. Ellen Conroy Kennedy (New York: Viking Press, 1975), pp. 48-50.

[13]"Hiccups," The Negritude Poets, p. 50.

[14]Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," Amistad 1, p. 302.

[15]"The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," Amistad 1, p. 302.

[16]Léopold Sédar Senghor, Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948), p. 6.

[17]Senghor, "Comme les lamantins vont boire à la source," in Poèmes (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973), p. 153. This citation is my translation.

[18]Senghor, "Comme les lamantins vont boire à la source," p. 154. This citation is my translation.

[19]"Comme les lamantins vont boire à la source," p. 162. This citation is my translation.

[20]Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,: Amistad 1, p. 304.

[21]Hughes, The Big Sea (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940), p. 209.

[22]Quoted in Edouard Eliet, Panorama de la littérature négro-africaine (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1965), p. 23. This passage is my translation.

[23]Quoted in Irving Leonard Markovitz, Senghor and the Politics of Negritude (London: Heinemann, 1969), p. 41.

[24]Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, p. 136.

[25]Hughes, The Big Sea, p. 325.

[26]Such is, for instance, the basic criticism in Stanislas Adotevi, Négritude et Négrologues (Paris: Union Générale d'Editions, 1972).

[27]Hughes, The Big Sea, pp. 208-209.

[28]The Big Sea, pp. 101-105.

[29]Hughes, "Harlem and its Negritude," African Forum, No. 1 (Spring, 1966), p. 18

[30]Quoted in Arthur P. Davis, "Langston Hughes: Cool Poet," Langston Hughes: Black Genius, ed. Therman B. O'Daniel (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1971), p. 25.

[31]Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," Amistad 1, p. 324.

[32]Senghor, "Problématique de la Négritude," Présence Africaine, No. 78 (2e trimestre 1971), pp. 6-7. This citation is my translation.

[33]Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," Amistad 1, p. 305.

[34]Samuel Allen, "Negritude and its Relevance for the American Negro Writer," Backgrounds to Blackamerican Literature, ed. Ruth Miller (Scranton: Chandler Publishing Co., 1971), pp. 136-144.

[35]Senghor, "Comme les lamantins vont boire à la source," p. 164. This citation is my translation.

[36]Senghor, "Comme les lamantins vont boire à la source," p. 163. This citation is my translation.

[37]Hughes, "The Negro Writers," in Good Morning Revolution, Uncollected Writings of Social Protest, ed. Faith Berry (New York: Lawrence Hill and Co., 1973), pp. 125-126; and "My Adventures as a Social Poet," ibid., pp. 135-143.

[38]Sartre, "Orphée Noir," Introd., Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française, by L. S. Senghor (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948), p. xv. This citation is my translation.

[39]Hughes, "The Negro Writers," Good Morning Revolution, pp. 125-126.

[40]"The Negro Writers," p. 125.

[41]"The Negro Writers," p. 125.

[42]"The Negro Writers," p. 125.

[43]Langston Hughes's poems of social protest have been collected in Good Morning Revolution.

[44]Hughes, "My Adventures as a Social Poet," in Good Morning Revolution, p. 143.

[45]Senghor, "Comme les lamantins vont boire à la source," p. 163.

[46]Hughes, "My Adventures as a Social Poet," Good Morning Revolution, p. 143.

Chapter IV

[1]Jean-Paul Sartre, "Orphée Noir," Introd., Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française, by L. S. Senghor (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1942), p. xvi. This citation is my translation.

[2]Claude McKay, The Dialect Poetry of Claude McKay, 2 vols. in one: Vol. I, Songs of Jamaica; Vol. II. Constab Ballads (1912; rpt. Freeport, N. Y.: Books for Libraries, 1972).

[3]The best poems of this period (1912-1948) have been collected in the posthumous volume Selected Poetry of Claude McKay (New York: Bookman Associates, 1953).

[4]McKay, Spring in New Hampshire (London: Grant Richards, 1920).

[5]McKay, Harlem Shadows (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1922).

[6]Alain Locke, "The Negro in American Culture," Anthology of American Negro Literature, ed. V. F. Calverton (New York: Modern Library, 1929), p. 264.

[7]McKay, A Long Way from Home (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970), p. 354.

[8]Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Problématique de la Négritude," Présence Africaine, No. 78 (2e trimestre 1971), p. 12.

[9]McKay, "Africa," Selected Poems, p. 40.

[10]"Africa," lines 10-14.

[11]"The Wise Men of the East," Selected Poems, p. 48

[12]"The Wise Men of the East," lines 13-14.

[13]See for instance in the Selected Poems, "Outcast," p. 41, and "Enslaved," p. 42.

[14]"Outcast," Selected Poems, p. 41, lines 13-14.

[15]Sartre, "Orphée Noir," p. xvi.

[16]McKay, "On a Primitive Canoe," Harlem Shadows, p. 36.

[17]"On a Primitive Canoe," line 5.

[18]"On a Primitive Canoe," line 8.

[19]"On a Primitive Canoe," lines 9-12.

[20]"Invocation," in The Passion of Claude McKay: Selected Poetry and Prose--1912-1948, ed. Wayne Cooper (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), p. 117.

[21]"Tetuan," Selected Poems, p. 87.

[22]Aimé Césaire, Discours sur le colonialisme (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1955), p. 8.

[23]Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Problématique de la Négritude," p. 12.

[24]For McKay's account of his stay in North Africa see A Long Way from Home, pp. 295-341.

[25]A Long Way from Home, pp. 295-341.

[26]"A Farewell to Morocco," Selected Poems, pp. 88-90.

[27]"A Farewell to Morocco," stanzas 8 and 9.

[28]A Long Way from Home, Chapters xxvi and xxviii.

[29]See for instance in The Passion of Claude McKay, "North Africa and the Spanish Civil War," pp. 285-289, and "North African Triangle," pp. 289-294.

[30]See "Enslaved," Selected Poems, p. 42, and "Exhortation: Summer 1919," Harlem Shadows, pp. 49-50.

[31]"Exhortation: Summer 1919," Harlem Shadows, pp. 49-50.

[32]"Exhortation: Summer 1919," lines 1-13.

[33]Selected Poems, pp. 13-32.

[34]James R. Giles, Claude McKay (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976), p. 45.

[35]Songs of Jamaica, Vol. I of The Dialect Poetry of Claude McKay (1912; rpt. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries, 1972).

[36]Jean Wagner, The Black Poets of the United States, trans. Kenneth Douglass (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1973), p. 206.

[37]See for instance in Songs of Jamaica "Quashie to Buccra," pp. 13-14, "Whe fe Do," pp. 27-29, and "Out of Debt," pp. 38-40.

[38]"Quashie to Buccra," Songs of Jamaica, pp. 13-14. In Jamaican dialect "Quashie" means "Black," and "Buccra," "White." See Jean Wagner, p. 206, Note 25.

[39]"Quashie to Buccra," lines 21-22.

[40]"Quashie to Buccra," lines 25-28.

[41]"Whe fe Do," Songs of Jamaica, pp. 27-29.

[42]"Whe fe Do," lines 56-59.

[43]"King Banana," Songs of Jamaica, pp. 30-31.

[44]"The Hermit," Songs of Jamaica, p. 41, first stanza.

[45]"To a Country Girl," Songs of Jamaica, pp. 119-121.

[46]"To a Country Girl," line 3.

[47]"My Native Land, My Home," Songs of Jamaica, pp. 84-85.

[48]"My Native Land, My Home," first stanza.

[49]"Fetching Water," Songs of Jamaica, pp. 42-44.

[50]"Hard Times," Songs of Jamaica, pp. 53-54.

[51]"Two-an'-Six," Songs of Jamaica, pp. 86-91.

[52]"Compensation," Songs of Jamaica, p. 92.

[53]"Compensation," Stanza 2.

[54]Constab Ballads, Vol. II of The Dialect Poetry of Claude McKay (1912; rpt. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries, 1972).

[55]For McKay's account of this experience see "Preface," Constab Ballads, pp. 7-8.

[56]"The Apple Woman's Complaint," Constab Ballads, pp. 57-58, stanza 3.

[57]"A Labourer's Life Give Me," Constab Ballads, pp. 71-72.

[58]"The Heart of a Constab," Constab Ballads, pp. 62-63.

[59]"The Heart of a Constab," stanzas 6 and 7.

[60]"Songs of Jamaica," Selected Poems, pp. 13-32.

[61]Sartre, "Orphée Noir," p. xvi. This citation is my translation.

[62]"Flame-Heart," Selected Poems, p. 13.

[63]"Flame-Heart," lines 1-2.

[64]"Flame-Heart," Lines 2-10.

[65]"Flame-Heart," line 27.

[66]"Home Thoughts," Selected Poems, p. 21.

[67]"Adolescence," Selected Poems, p. 27.

[68]"The Tropics in New York," Selected Poems, p. 31.

[69]"I Shall Return," Selected Poems, p. 32.

[70]"I Shall Return," lines 13-14.

[71]James R. Giles, Claude McKay (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976), pp. 26-27. According to Giles, McKay's reluctance to return to Jamaica was based on his consideration of the island's remoteness from the major Western cultural centers.

[72]"Boyhood in Jamaica," Phylon, No. 14 (1953), pp. 134-145.

[73]Sartre, "Orphée Noir," p. xvi. This citation is my translation.

[74]"Baptism," Selected Poems, pp. 33-56.

[75]"Americana," Selected Poems, pp. 57-80.

[76]"In Bondage," Selected Poems, p. 39.

[77]"In Bondage," line 5.

[78]"In Bondage," lines 9-12.

[79]"The Lynching," Selected Poems, p. 37.

[80]"Enslaved." Selected Poems, p. 42.

[81]"Outcast," Selected Poems, p. 41.

[82]"The Desolate City," Selected Poems, pp. 52-54.

[83]"The Desolate City," lines 75-80.

[84]"Baptism," Selected Poems, p. 35.

[85]"Tiger," Selected Poems, p. 47.

[86]"America," Selected Poems, p. 59.

[87]"The White City," Selected Poems, p. 74.

[88]"The White House," Selected Poems, p. 78.

[89]"Baptism," Selected Poems, p. 35.

[90]"If We Must Die," Selected Poems, p. 36, lines 12-14.

[91]"Like a Strong Tree," Selected Poems, p. 45.

[92]"I Know my Soul," Selected Poems, p. 56.

[93]Sartre, "Orphée Noir," p. xv. This citation is my translation.

Chapter V

[1]Besides the three novels discussed in this chapter, McKay also published a collection of short stories, Gingertown (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries, 1972). I have chosen not to treat these stories here principally because they develop the same themes and ideas as the novels, and generally reveal no further dimensions to McKay's thought. For a detailed analysis of Gingertown see James R. Giles, Claude McKay (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976).

[2]McKay, Home to Harlem (New York: Pocket Books, 1965).

[3]McKay, Banjo (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1957).

[4]McKay, Banana Bottom (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1961).

[5]Jean-Paul Sartre, "Orphée Noir," Introd., Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française, by L. S. Senghor (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948), p. xxix. This citation is my translation.

[6]George Kent, Blackness and the Adventure of Western Culture (Chicago: Third World Press, 1972).

[7]I am referring here both to Senghor's formal definitions of Negritude in his various discursive works as well as to his poetic rendition of the term.

[8]McKay, Banjo, p. 314.

[9]Banjo, p. 167.

[10]Home to Harlem, p. 140.

[11]Home to Harlem, p. 164.

[12]Home to Harlem, p. 8.

[13]Banjo, p. 304.

[14]Banjo, p. 244.

[15]Banjo, p. 17.

[16]Banjo, p. 244.

[17]Home to Harlem, p. 24.

[18]Home to Harlem, p. 44.

[19]Home to Harlem, p. 26.

[20]See for instance McKay's treatment of the concept of "group soul" in A Long Way from Home (New York: Harcort Brace Jovanovich, 1968), p. 349.

[21]Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Problématique de la Négritude," Présence Africaine, No. 78 (2e trimestre 1971), p. 15. This passage is my translation.

[22]George Kent, Blackness and the Adventure of Western Culture.

[23]McKay, Banjo, p. 49.

[24]Banjo, p. 6.

[25]Banjo, p. 105.

[26]Banjo, p. 58.

[27]Home to Harlem, p. 46.

[28]Banana Bottom, pp. 261-269.

[29]Banana Bottom, p. 266.

[30]Banana Bottom, p. 266.

[31]Home to Harlem, p. 129.

[32]Home to Harlem, p. 129.

[33]Aimé Césaire, Discours sur le colonialisme (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1955).

[34]McKay, Banjo, p. 194.

[35]Banjo, p. 69.

[36]Home to Harlem, p. 82.

[37]Banjo, p. 325.

[38]Banjo, p. 163.

[39]Home to Harlem, p. 139.

[40]For McKay's summary of and answer to criticism of his works see "Regarding Radical Criticism," Chapter xx, A Long Way from Home, pp. 226-234. See also "A Negro Writer to his Critics." in The Passion of Claude McKay, ed. Wayne Cooper (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), pp. 132-139.

[41]Id.

[42]Banana Bottom, p. 313.

[43]Senghor, "Problématique de la Negritude," p. 26.

[44]George Kent, Blackness and the Adventure of Western Culture.

[45]For purposes of comparison between McKay's fiction and the novel of Negritude see for instance Cheikh Amidou Kane's classic L'Aventure ambiguë (The Ambiguous Adventure).

Chapter VI

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

[2]Hughes, The Panther and the Lash: Poems of our Times (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967).

[3]Aimé Césaire, Cahier d'un retour au pays natal / Return to my Native Land, bilingual ed., trans. Emile Snyder (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1960), p. 152.

[4]Quoted in Arthur P. Davis, "Langston Hughes: Cool Poet," Langston Hughes: Black Genius, ed. Therman B. O'Daniel (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1971), p. 25.

[5]Hughes, "The Twenties: Harlem and its Negritude," African Forum, I (Spring 1966), pp. 11-20.

[6]Because Hughes is so prolific a poet, my analysis of his poetry will focus mainly on the works in The Selected Poems of Langston Hughes (New York: Vintage Books, 1974). This volume contains representative selections from all his major collections. Occasionally I will refer to other collections.

[7]See my Chapter I.

[8]"The Negro Speaks of Rivers," Selected Poems, p. 4.

[9]"The Negro Speaks of Rivers," lines 4 and 13.

[10]Jean-Paul Sartre, "Orphée Noir," Introd., Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française, by L. S. Senghor (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948), p. xvi.

[11]Hughes, "Sun Song," Selected Poems, p. 5.

[12]"Negro," Selected Poems, p. 8, stanzas 1 and 6.

[13]"Black Seed," Opportunity, Dec., 1930, p. 371.

[14]"Our Land," The Weary Blues, p. 99.

[15]"Our Land," lines 13-15.

[16]See Hughes's account of his first visit to Africa in The Big Sea (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), pp. 102-122.

[17]"Danse Africaine," Selected Poems, p. 7, lines 1-2, and lines 14-15.

[18]Nathan Irvin Huggins, Harlem Renaissance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 221.

[19]Hughes, "Negro," Selected Poems, p. 8, lines 1-3.

[20]"My People," Selected Poems, p. 13.

[21]Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Femme Noire," in Poèmes (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973), p. 14.

[22]Hughes, "Ardella," Selected Poems, p. 67.

[23]"Song for a Dark Virgin," The Weary Blues, p. 63.

[24]"When Sue Wears Red," Selected Poems, p. 68.

[25]"A Black Pierrot," Selected Poems, p. 66, lines 1-4.

[26]"Argument," Selected Poems, p. 262, lines 1-3.

[27]"Argument," lines 8-10.

[28]"Dream Variations," Selected Poems, p. 14.

[29]"Dream Variations," lines 1-9.

[30]"Color," The Panther and the Lash (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967, p. 67.

[31]"Afro-American Fragment," Selected Poems, p. 3.

[32]"Afro-American Fragment," lines 21-24.

[33]"Negro," Selected Poems, p. 8.

[34]George Kent, Blackness and the Adventure of Western Culture (Chicago: Third World Press, 1972).

[35]"Sun Song," Selected Poems, p. 5, lines 5-7.

[36]"Aunt Sue's Stories," Selected Poems, p. 6.

[37]Ask your Mama (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961).

[38]"Song for a Dark Girl," Selected Poems, p. 172.

[39]"Ku Klux," Selected Poems, p. 163, stanzas 1 and 2.

[40]"Merry-Go-Round," Selected Poems, p. 194, lines 12-13.

[41]"Share-Croppers," Selected Poems, p. 165, lines 1-4.

[42]Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

[43]Aimé Césaire, Cahier d'un retour au pays natal / Return to my Native Land, pp. 142-146.

[44]Hughes, "Uncle Tom," Selected Poems, p. 168.

[45]Césaire, Cahier d'un retour au pays natal / Return to my Native Land, pp. 146-148.

[46]Hughes, "October 16," Selected Poems, p. 10.

[47]"One-Way Ticket," Selected Poems, p. 177, lines 9-22.

[48]Sartre, "Orphée Noir," p. xv.

[49]Hughes, "Harlem," Selected Poems, p. 268.

[50]"Lunch in a Jim Crow Car," Selected Poems, p. 280.

[51]"Oppression," The Panther and the Lash, p. 63.

[52]"I, Too," Selected Poems, p. 275.

[53]"American Heartbreak," Selected Poems, p. 9

[54]"Cross," Selected Poems, p. 158.

[55]"Mulatto," Selected Poems, p. 160.

[56]"The South," Selected Poems, p. 173, lines 13-28.

[57]"Daybreak in Alabama," Selected Poems, p. 157.

[58]"The Same," in Good Morning Revolution, ed. Faith Berry (New York: Lawrence Hill and Co., 1973), p. 9.

[59]A great number of the poems of commitment to the anti-colonial struggle are in The Panther and the Lash.

[60]Sartre, "Orphée Noir," p. xiii and p. xliv.

[61]Hughes, Good Morning Revolution, ed. Faith Berry (New York: Lawrence Hill and Co., 1973).

[62]"Life is Fine," Selected Poems, pp. 121-122, last stanza.

[63]See for instance Janheinz Jahn, Neo-African Literature, trans. Oliver Coburn and Ursula Lehrburger (New York: Grove Press, 1968), pp. 154-205. See also Arthur P. Davis, "Langston Hughes: Cool Poet," Langston Hughes: Black Genius, ed. Therman B. O'Daniel (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1971), pp. 18-38; Nancy B. McGhee, "Langston Hughes: Poet in the Folk Manner," ibid., pp. 39-64; James Emanuel, "The Literary Experiments of Langston Hughes," ibid., pp. 171-182; and Theodore R. Hudson, "Technical Aspects of the Poetry of Langston Hughes," Black World, September 1973, pp. 24-45.

[64]Senghor, "Comme les lamantins vont boire à la source," in Poèmes (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973), p. 165.

[65]Hughes, Montage of a Dream Deferred (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1951).

[66]Ask your Mama (New York Alfred A. Knopf, 1961).

[67]Senghor, "Comme les lamantins vont boire à la source," p. 154.

[68]Senghor, "Comme les lamantins vont boire à la source," p. 159.

[69]Senghor, "Comme les lamantins vont boire à la source,: p. 162.

[70]Senghor, quoted in Arthur P. Davis, "Langston Hughes: Cool Poet," Langston Hughes: Black Genius, ed. Therman B. O'Daniel (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1971), p. 25.

Chapter VII

[1]James Emanuel, Langston Hughes (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1967), p. 175.

[2]Langston Hughes, Not Without Laughter (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963).

[3]Hughes, The Big Sea (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940), p. 303.

[4]See for instance William Edward Farrison, "Not Without Laughter, but Not Without Tears," Langston Hughes: Black Genius, ed. Therman B. O'Daniel (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1971), pp. 96-109.

[5]Hughes, Not Without Laughter, p. 190.

[6]Not Without Laughter, p. 189.

[7]Aimé Césaire, Cahier d'un retour au pays natal / Return to my Native Land, bilingual ed., trans. Emile Snyder (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1960), pp. 142-146.

[8]Hughes, Not Without Laughter, p. 189.

[9]Not Without Laughter, p. 225.

[10]Not Without Laughter, p. 85.

[11]Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 136.

[12]Hughes, The Ways of White Folks (New York: Vintage Books, 1963).

[13]"Slave on the Block," The Ways of White Folks, pp. 19-31.

[14]"Rejuvenation through Joy," The Ways of White Folks, pp. 66-95.

[15]See Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Problématique de la Négritude," Présence Africaine, No. 78 (2e trimestre 1971), p. 26.

[16]Hughes, "Home," The Ways of White Folks, pp. 32-48.

[17]"The Blues I'm Playing," The Ways of White Folks, 96-120.

[18]"The Blues I'm Playing," pp. 119-120.

[19]"The Blues I'm Playing," p. 120.

[20]Aimé Césaire, Discours sur le colonialisme (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1955), p. 8.

[21]Hughes, "Father and Son," The Ways of White Folks, pp. 200-248.

[22]"Red-Headed Baby," The Ways of White Folks, pp. 121-128.

[23]Césaire, Discours sur le colonialisme, p. 8.

[24]Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1968).

[25]Hughes, Not Without Laughter, p. 267.

[26]"Cora Unashamed," The Ways of White Folks, pp. 31-48.

[27]"Professor," Laughing to Keep from Crying (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1952), pp. 97-105.

[28]Simple Speaks His Mind (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1950); Simple Takes a Wife (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953); Simple Stakes a Claim (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1957); Simple's Uncle Sam (New York: Hill and Wang, 1965).

[29]"Temptation," in The Best of Simple (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), p. 27.

[30]Blyden Jackson, "A Word About Simple," Langston Hughes: Black Genius, ed. Therman B. O'Daniel (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1971), p. 111.

[31]Hughes, "Foreword," The Best of Simple, p. viii.

[32]"A Toast to Harlem," The Best of Simple, p. 21.

[33]For an analysis of Simple's language see Harry L. Jones, "Rhetorical Embellishment in Hughes's Simple Stories," Langston Hughes: Black Genius, ed. Therman B. O'Daniel (New York: William Morrow and Co.,

[34]Hughes, "Foreword," The Best of Simple, p. viii.

[35]Eugenia W. Collier, "A Pain in His Soul: Simple as Epic Hero," Langston Hughes: Black Genius, ed. Therman B. O'Daniel (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1971), p. 130.

[36]For a comprehensive study of the schlemiel figure in literature see Ruth R. Wisse, The Schlemiel as Modern Hero (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

[37]Jean-Paul Sartre, "Orphée Noir," Introd., Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française, by L. S. Senghor (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948), p. xli.

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[1]See my Chapter VII, p. 33.

[2]Raymond F. Betts, The Ideology of Blackness (Lexington: D. C. Heath and Co., 1971).

[3]Jean Wagner, The Black Poets of the United States, trans. Kenneth Douglass (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1973), p. 197.

[4]Wagner, p. 197.

[5]Claude McKay, "A Negro Poet," in The Passion of Claude McKay, ed. Wayne Cooper (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), pp. 48-50.

[6]See my Chapter IV, p. 66.

[7]McKay, "A Negro Poet," The Passion of Claude McKay, p. 48.

[8]Langston Hughes, "I, Too," in The Selected Poems of Langston Hughes (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 275.

[9]Jean-Paul Sartre, "Orphée Noir," Introd., Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française, by L. S. Senghor (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948), p. xx.

[10]McKay, "O Word I Love to Sing," in Selected Poems (New York: Bookman Associates, 1953), p. 43, lines 1-4.

[11]Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," Amistad 1, eds. John A. Williams and Charles F. Harris (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), pp. 301-305.

[12]Chinua Achebe, "The African Writer and the English Language," in Morning Yet on Creation Day (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press / Doubleday, 1975), pp. 91-103.

[13]See in particular Stanislas Adotevi, Négritude et Négrologues (Paris: Union Générale d'Editions, 1972); and Jacqueline Lamartinière, Le Noirisme (New York: Mouvement Haitien de Libération, 1976).

[14]For a supportive critique of Negritude see Lilyan Kesteloot, Les Ecrivains noirs de langue française (Bruxelles: Universite Libre de Bruxelles, 1965). For adverse criticism see Stanislas Adotevi, Négritude et Négrologues (Paris: Union Générale d'Editions, 1972).

[15]Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 136.

[16]Lilyan Kesteloot, The Intellectual Origins of the African Revolution (Washington D.C.: Black Orpheus Press, 1972).

[17]Langston Hughes, The Big Sea (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940), p. 228.

[18]Claude McKay, "The Pagan Isms," in Selected Poems (New York: Bookman Associates, 1953), p. 49, lines 1-4.

[19]Quoted in editor's introduction to Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Problématique de la Négritude," Présence Africaine, No. 78 (2e trimestre 1971), p. 3.

[20]For Hughes's account of the reception of his poetry at the many readings he gave throughout the country see "Poetry to the People," in I Wonder as I Wander (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1956), pp. 39-67.

[21]McKay, "If We Must Die," in Selected Poems, p. 36.

[22]Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, p. 231.

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