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## What is the Originality in a Popular Verse? —Some Notes on the Original Voice in Langston Hughes' *Panther and the Lash*—

KOGA Tetsuo

Langston Hughes' last book of poetry is here reasserted as the author's major and critical attempt at summarizing his whole poetic output, rather than being a mere death-bed volume to combat the changing political situation of the times. By carefully documenting and discussing the poet's editorial work of recharging the older poems under the new and changed titles, in addition to the genuinely new poems, it may finally be shown that the principal intent of the poet's endeavors should lie in resonating his "original" stance in the matters of freedom and democracy, matters which are the two most "popular" themes for black people in America. After a brief introduction of the situation where the poet decides to publish his newest volume of poetry, the question of "originality" is raised as a topic which, in an Emersonian context, never collides with the notion of popularity, but merely accentuates the poet's prophetic vision of racial emancipation and an uplift of the democratic ideal in the mode of a popular address to the masses. The sections titled "The New Beat of *The Panther and the Lash*," "American Heartbreak" through "Dinner Guest; Me," and "Daybreak in Alabama" all tackle to analyze the major poems, and also to ascertain the poet's motive for summarizing his lifelong struggle for racial equality.

Langston Hughes (1902-67) was an active participant in the last editing process of his newest book of poetry, *The Panther and the Lash* (1967), which was finally published after the poet's death on May 22. He had actually been doing the job of editing, in addition to having already composed the new sections, by incorporating much what he had been writing and published in his previous collections into this new one, mainly at the request of his publisher Knopf.<sup>1)</sup> Selecting the titles, and changing the title if necessary, should now be regarded as more than a simple process of editing. We think it reflects more of the editing of his whole life than of simply editing for the new collection, merely incorporating a fitting genre or adding an easy apology for the time. Now the published book of poems, wearing the subtitle "Poems of Our Times," stands as the poet had intended. It may indeed seem as contemporary as it is retrospective; section titles from the top till the end, "Words on Fire," "American Heartbreak," "The Bible Belt,"

“The Face of War,” “African Question Mark,” “Dinner Guest: Me,” and “Daybreak in Alabama,” are all indeed new, but more than the half poems appear as his earlier poems or in his previous collections. And we think this feature comprises not a failure but a regaining advantage, as we examine the author’s delicate placement of old poems under new titles or his supplanting the meaning of new poems with the older ones, consolidating his political aim or summarizing his whole poetic career over sixty years.

Hughes believed in the American ideal of individuals’ freedom and equality as a black man. As an artist, he spoke for the black masses, although he may never be immune from the modern artist’s destiny of creating the huge gap between the artist’s original ego and the demand of the masses. He almost never admitted his deep estrangement from the masses, identifying himself as in the role of the artist the masses want, whose model, as he once admitted, was less Carl Sandburg (his initial “guiding star” [Rampersad *II*, 70]), but, as we may contest in his final years, Walt Whitman,<sup>2)</sup> who also revised his poems throughout his life by constantly editing and rewriting *Leaves of Grass* from 1855 till his death in 1892.

Emersonian “self-reliance” may be our starting point in discussing his originality, since Emerson says at the beginning of the essay so named, that “I read the other day some verses written by an eminent painter which were original and not conventional” and goes on to insist that “to believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, – that is genius” (Emerson 259), which aptly summarizes the idea of originality as the one of universal overflow of Godhead which is transcendent above the domain of the human, yet uniquely representing the universal character of mankind. We argue that it is this “transcendent” quality of selfhood in poetry that first defines Hughes’ poetic character of popularity and his original voice; never in his egotistical observation of half-truth, but in such universal truthfulness he elocutionarily exacts his poetic utterances.<sup>3)</sup>

Before going into examining his last book, we must settle some issues concerning our characterization of Hughes’ poetry as “popular.” We may assert that the popularity of Hughes’ poems has two meanings. First, his poems have been “popular” due to the fact that the black populace who are mostly in the working class have loved his poems. And eventually his poems, such as “The Weary Blues” (1925) and “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” (1926), have acquired the status of classic Negro poetry and asserted blackness in a self-affirmative tone. The former poem has not only such bluesy diffident lines as “droning a drowsy syncopated tune” or “rocking back and forth to a mellow croon” but also

such strong enunciations like “O Blues!” or “Sweet Blues!” The latter has such incantatory memorable lines as “my soul has grown deep like the rivers” or the repeated “I’ve known rivers,” whose instances all signify blackness from the Euphrates to the Mississippi. These instances show indeed an authentic sign of Hughes’ identification as a blues poet.<sup>4)</sup>

The second meaning of his popularity resides in his assertion of black mass liberation, sometimes in a propagandist mode as in his socialist poems of the 1930s (“Good Morning Revolution” [1932], or “One More ‘S’ in the U.S.A.” [1934]), or sometimes in a naturalistic mode as in the more politically sedate but vigorously demotic poems of the 1940s (“Madam and the Phone Bill” [1949] or “Migrant” [1949]). In each poem, the poet exhorts the reader to “pal round together” with “revolution,” or to “put one more s in the U.S.A. / To make it Soviet” and “join our fight” for communism, or even to sympathize with Madam Alberta K. Johnson who finally declares to the telephone operator that “I sure ain’t gonna pay,” or with a migrant worker called “Daddy-o” or “Buddy-o” who, after a hard working day, “signs his name in uphill letters / On the check that is his pay,” all symbolizing the act of unification with the mass of working people.

This gesture on the poet’s side to stand for the people has indeed made his poetry “popular,” even though the poet himself sometimes “faced opposition both from the white audience that largely supported his work and from many members of the black audience for whom a great deal of it was written.”<sup>5)</sup> As many have already noted<sup>6)</sup>, Hughes “risked being simple” (Unterecker, ix) in a modernist age when it was fashionable to be difficult, precisely because his strategy to be a modern poet was to make a significant difference from the practice of his white counterparts. Standing on the African-American tradition of the blues and its oral culture, being simple and popular risked doubly the accusation of low artistic merit and the banal realism of easy verse. As Irene Ramalho Santos has eloquently demonstrated (Bercovitch 2003), Hughes is a major modern poet, ranking on a par with Stein, Williams, H.D., Moore, and Crane, among whom Hughes questioned the fundamental “color” of the modernist experiment.<sup>7)</sup>

In reviewing his poetic practice from the early debut poems in *The Crisis* till the final collection of *The Panther and the Lash*, we may acquire a general sense that Hughes has indeed written his poems both for black people and for himself, making an intricate path between popularity and originality. When his first book of poetry *The Weary Blues* was published, Harlem was in full vogue, a vogue which began from the early 1920s with the publication of Claude Mackey’s *Harlem Shadows* (1922) and James Weldon Johnson’s edition

of *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922). This volume, together with *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927), firmly established Hughes as a poet for the black masses, though sometimes severely criticized by the black elites as the poet of the low life, complicit with the current “exploitation of the Negro.”<sup>8)</sup> His political and aesthetic stance, best expressed in “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (*The Nation*, 1926), clearly states the cause of his black aesthetic in the popular culture to be becoming “self-reliant” poetically and racially.

Then, Hughes’ socialist turn during the 1930s can now be seen as a further continuation of the poet’s initial resolve to become a people’s poet. Though *A New Song* (1938), published by the International Workers Order as a sort of pamphlet, may comprise a meager volume for a book of poetry, and hence Hughes may be “decide[d]ly not a very successful proletarian poet” (Santos, 328), this volume, together with most of the uncollected poems during the 1930s,<sup>9)</sup> do make explicit his ideological standpoint when it verges on the far left. However, his other ideological turn in the 1940s to be one with the people comes with the beginning of World War II, especially with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, which made a firm impact on *Shakespeare in Harlem* (1942) and *Jim Crow’s Last Stand* (1943). The former “book of light verse,” sung in “the blues mood,” and “syncopated and variegated in the colors of Harlem, Beale Street, West Dallas, and Chicago’s South Side” (in the dedicatory words by the poet), does become a light-hearted song book for the black majority during the depressive wartime, while the latter’s more overtly democratic anti-segregation, anti-fascist protest poems make plain the poet’s move from leftist politics to the political center.

Two more books were published after the war: *Field of Wonder* (1947) and *One-Way Ticket* (1949). One becomes a somewhat private testament to the healing poetic power of nature during the war years, while the other makes recognition of black identity and social advancement in the still segregated society after the war. Hughes’ poems of the 1950s and the early 1960s, *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951) and *Ask Your Mama* (1961), comprise another new turn for the poet, since in these two distinctly innovative books of poetry appears his new aesthetic of jazz and be-bop, rather than of blues. The newly popular bebop tune was symbolically introduced in the former’s first poem as “Hey, pop! / Re-bop! / Mop! // Y-e-a-h!” (“Boogie Segue to Bop”), while the entire poem of the latter was framed in Charlie Parker-like jazz music: “IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES / ORNETTE AND CONSTERNATION / CLAIM ATTENTION FROM THE PAPERS / THAT HAVE NO NEWS THAT DAY OF MOSCOW. . .” (“Cultural

Exchange”). Then comes his final attempt to become the people’s poet during the new era of black power and the Third World consciousness of the 1960s, *The Panther and the Lash* (1967).

### The New Beat of *The Panther and the Lash*

The new collection starts with the following “Words on Fire” of “Corner Meeting,” which resonates with the Zoot suits and amplifiers of Black Panthers and the like:

Ladder, flag, and amplifier  
now are what the soap box  
used to be.

The speaker catches fire,  
looking at listeners' faces.

His words jump down  
to stand  
in their  
places.

(*The Poems: 1951-1967*, 139)

This scene is indeed symbolic of the whole book, accentuating its new rhythm and its new collocation.<sup>10)</sup> The poem titled “Black Panther” contrasts their retaliatory “Eye for eye” message with an observer’s statement that looks more detached to tell that “the panther in his desperate boldness / Wears no disguise,” while Hughes also suggests that they were “motivated by the truest / Of the oldest / Lies” (148). This compassionate criticism, neither an utter denial on the ideological standpoint nor a complimentary appraisal, shows also the poet’s political stance in the middle ground, which travels a long way from his revolutionary stance, especially during the 1930s.

Not only his political ideas but also the realities around him have changed. Another poem called “Harlem,” itself reused as it was changed of its title, refers to the changed reality surrounding Harlem, whose boom in the 1920s had already subsided into one “on the edge of hell” of slum and poverty, making its residents “wonder / What we’re gonna

do / In the face of what / We remember,” evoking a mere sense of despair.<sup>11)</sup> Their “Prime” was also wasted: “Uptown on Lenox Avenue / Where a nickel costs a dime, / In these lush and thieving days / When million-dollar ways / In the press and on the radio and TV – / But won’t let me / Skim even a dime – / I, black, come to my prime / In the section of the niggers / Where a nickel costs a dime,” whose bluesy indictment repeats the usual tone of utter denigration without any sense of hope, unlike the hitherto prospective poems on social advancement, especially during the 1940s. Other titles, mostly contemporary ones, such as “Crowns and Garlands,” “Elderly Leaders,” “The Backlash Blues,” “Junior Addict,” “Death in Yorkville,” treat, in each, with a disillusioned gaze, the black celebrities, criticism against the elders who came after the whites, protest against racial wrongs and social inequalities, and historical remembrances of the racial riots, quite matter-of-factly, and their tone of dejection and unrealized dreams quietly echo the present dissatisfaction.

The ensuing sections of the book, namely, “American Heartbreak,” “The Bible Belt,” “The Face of War,” “African Question Mark,” “Dinner Guest: Me,” and “Daybreak in Alabama,” all await careful treatment while each, in its differing way, makes plain the fact that the poet is now trying to summarize what he had been doing and makes a better case of protesting for the better future and the overcoming of past struggles.

### “American Heartbreak” through “Dinner Guest: Me”

The second section, starting with the title poem “American Heartbreak,” continues the general mood of grimly confronting a new age in a tone slightly too upbeat; the Hughes poetic here has both digested and makes plain its new ingredient: the beatnik poetry of the 1960s. The so-called modernist poetry of hard edges and mythological denseness has by now grown into a mere “pop,” loose form of beatnik poems in variable feet, a sort of Whitmanian chant on a rock’n’roll rhythm:

I am the American heartbreak –  
 The rock on which Freedom  
 Stumped its toe –  
 The great mistake  
 That Jamestown made  
 Long ago.

(*The Poems: 1951-1967*, 150)

A counter-beatnik, the Hughesian way is *not* enounced in a typical blues rhythm which usually drags the refrain too heavily; the strong confessional or co-optative statement that “I am the American heartbreak” is here compelled by the complaining, not protesting, manner of identity politics, with a rhyme of “toe” and “ago,” whose vocalic segments make it audible as a triple measure of blues form. Moreover, a Ginsbergian poetic of endless refrain might make this terse statement poem a *via negativa* by making us imagine the fundamental tragic nature of the “original sin” in black history, which was to bring the first black slaves from Africa into Jamestown. The last poem in this section, entitled “Words Like Freedom,” has a similar tactic:<sup>12)</sup>

There are words like *Freedom*  
Sweet and wonderful to say.  
On my heartstrings freedom sings  
All day everyday.

There are words like *Liberty*  
That almost make me cry.  
If you had known what I know  
You would know why.

(*The Poems: 1951-1967*, 154)

The reader may hear an echo of the time’s “new beats,” as their lighter feet (a two quatrain stanza form and rhyme scheme almost as in refrains) dominate over the heavier prose contents of historical importance, as in the longer poems of “Ghosts of 1619,” “October 16: The Raid,”<sup>13)</sup> “Frederick Douglass: 1817-1895.”

The ensuing “Bible Belt” section reveals not half nostalgic “old South” scenes but radical “new South” realities after the Reconstruction that the poet himself has witnessed during his reading tours. “Christ in Alabama” has a fantastic formula of “Christ is a nigger. . . . Mary is His mother. . . . God is His father,” which may be totally unacceptable to white Christians but its similar phrasings like “Nigger Christ / On the cross / Of the South” have a logic of its own: “It would be too bad if Jesus / Were to come back black. / There are so many churches / Where he could not pray / In the U. S. A., / Where



entrance to Negroes, / No matter how sanctified, / Is denied, / Where race, not religion,  
/ Is glorified. / But say it— / You may be / Crucified.” Here the fundamental inconsis-  
tency is indicted to support its cause, as in most of the Southern congregations, under a  
new religious fervor.

“The Face of War” section, on the other hand, reveals another contemporaneity. The  
cold war pieces like “Mother in Wartime,” “Without Benefit of Declaration,” “Official No-  
tice,” “Peace,” “Last Prince of the East,” “The Dove” and “War,” tell in each poems new re-  
alities of the war in the Far East. The son referred to in “Mother in Wartime” may well  
be in combat in Vietnam, about whose war the government claimed its utter superiority,  
making his mother at home “believing everything she read / In the daily news, / (No in-  
between to choose)” since it shows only “freedom’s cause” as “the weapons used today /  
Killed with great élan” and “Technicolor banners flew / To honor modern man—,” mak-  
ing her think “that only / One side won, / Not that both / Might lose.” The indicting  
tone, however, sounds not too severe; it almost amounts to being mainly voyeuristic, as  
it merely reports the horrors of modern warfare. The poet sounds neither like he did dur-  
ing the 1930s when he supported the revolutionary cause of socialist doctrine quite for  
its ideological sympathy nor like he has done since the 1940s in intentionally supporting  
the middle ground to be one with the masses; he may have gone back to his original radi-  
cal stance *without* its political fervor. The next section of “African Question Mark” does  
include pieces of immediate urgency since they underscore the poet’s own experience as  
an ambassador to the African nations.

Hughes has made three visits to Africa during 1961 and 1962 and wrote two books on Af-  
rica during the time: *The First Book of Africa* (1960) and *An African Treasury: Articles,  
Essays, Stories, Poems by Black Africans* (1960). Through these experiences he composed  
poems like “Oppression” where appear statements of profound belief in the liberation of  
the oppressed: “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” (*The Poems: 1951-1967*, 169), which  
specifically refers to the Apartheid and its brutal realities.<sup>14)</sup> “Angola Question Mark”  
says “Don’t know why I, / Black, / Must still stand / With my back / To the last fron-  
tier / Of fear / In my own land. // Don’t know why I / Must turn into / A Mau Mau /  
And lift my hand / Against my fellow man / To live on my own hand. // But it is so— /  
And being so / I know / For you and me / There’s / Woe” (*The Poems: 1951-1967*, 169-70),  
as in similar observations in “Lumumba’s Grave,” “Color,”<sup>15)</sup> “Question and Answer,”

“History,” all of which comprise a compassionate statement but do not reveal more than a diplomatic tone, which again raises the question of documentary truthfulness, as in such poems as his Spanish Civil War pieces during the 1930s. The fact that the new government of J. F. Kennedy actively makes contact with Hughes when welcoming the African officials (Rampersad *II*, 342-43) would make the poems more than the artist’s innocent reportage, which triggers indeed the question of insider/outsider dilemma.

Having made himself a celebrity, the poet confesses his own self-consciousness as in the title piece of “Dinner Guest: Me”:

I know I am  
The Negro Problem  
Being wined and dined,  
Answering the usual questions  
That come to white mind  
Which seeks demurely  
To probe in polite way  
The why and wherewithal  
Of darkness U.S.A.—  
Wondering how things got this way  
In current democratic night,  
Murmuring gently  
Over *fraises du bois*,  
“I’m so ashamed of being white.”

The lobster is delicious,  
The wine divine,  
And center of attention  
At the damask table, mine.  
To be a Problem on  
Park Avenue at eight  
Is not so bad.  
Solutions to the Problem,  
Of course, wait.  
(*The Poems: 1951-1967*, 173)

To think that the “I” being ridiculed in the poem above should strictly apply to the person of Langston Hughes would seem too naïve if we think of such a portion of poems which have already indicted such “whitished” aspects of himself as in “Wise Men” or in “Advertisement for the Waldorf-Astoria.” However, a reading of a probable gibe toward other black celebrities may lack its own support when we think of his social success both in the white world and in the black one. As New Black Art Movement poets like LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka) severely criticized the poetics of Hughes on the ground of his accommodating stance,<sup>16)</sup> his poetic persona seems here to give an ambiguous message. “Northern Liberal” in the same section also indicts a consciousness which panders to the opposite:

And so  
we lick our chops at Birmingham  
and say, “See!  
Southern dogs have vindicated me—  
I knew that this would come.”  
But who are we to be  
so proud that savages  
have proven a point  
taken late in time  
to show how liberal I am?  
Above the struggle  
I can quite afford to be:  
well-fed, degreed,  
not beat—elite,  
up North.  
I send checks,  
support your cause,  
and lick my chops  
at Jim Crow laws  
and Birmingham—  
where you,  
*not I,*  
am.

*(The Poems: 1951-1967, 174)*

If these “insider” sentiments comprise part of his originality during his late years, his political stance would give an endless repercussion of ambiguous equivocation. Hughes was himself a “northern liberal” who supported the civil rights cause in Birmingham, while also he joined the actual movement not only by his sending checks but also by travelling south himself to witness the scene, whose political seriousness far exceeded any reproach of self-serving assistance among the bourgeois liberals.

The poems like “Sweet Words on Race” and “Un-American Investigators” exemplify the authenticity of his politics. The former reproaches too soon the old note of political compromise in such “sweet words so brave / When danger is not near,” which the poet hears too often, while those “sweet words” can “so quickly wilt” and their abortive dreams vanish. The latter is quite unambiguously sarcastic:

The committee’s fat,  
Smug, almost secure  
Co-religionists  
Shiver with delight  
In warm manure  
...

*(The Poems: 1951-1967, 175-76)*

According to his biographer, Hughes taped his testimony at Joseph McCarthy’s Senate Permanent Sub-Committee on Investigation and put them both on air and in print, defending his position (Rampersad *II*, 221). These acts later surface in poems as above. Other poems in this section, except “Cultural Exchange,”<sup>17)</sup> are contemporary epigrams, which are balanced by those poems under the theme of the fight against segregation, his life-long political agenda.

### **“Daybreak in Alabama”**

The poem leading the final section, entitled “Freedom,” has actually three versions under the same title, two of which have almost the same but different endings, revealing the poet’s changing stance.<sup>18)</sup> The newest version in this last collection ends the poem as

follows, where freedom “will not come / Today,” “Nor ever / Through compromise and fear,” making the protagonist declare that “I tire so of hearing people say, / *Let things take their course. / Tomorrow is another day,*” which prompts neither an easy belief in its realization nor a resignation, but in a disillusioned observation of the present situation. As with most contemporary political activists who claim a radical change in racial politics, he endorses the position by agreeing to its fundamental assertion that “Freedom / Is a strong seed / Planted / In a great need,” while also by maximizing its effect to say that “I want freedom / Just as you.” In this regard, he is not equivocating nor making his stance ambiguous; on the contrary, he is as radical as some contemporary radicals and questions the attitude of the majority who allows the change to “go slow”: “Am I supposed to forgive / And meekly live / Going slow, slow. . . ?,” whose diminutive merely reveals his sympathy.

Another poem which depicts his observation of contemporary politics (and poetics) is suggestively entitled as “Stokely Malcolm Me.” The stance of sympathetic politics appears not in deciding to be its own of the Black Panther and the Black Muslim but in depending on its new beat form: “i have been seeking / what i have never found / what i don’t know what i want / but it must be around // Stokely, / did i ever live / up your / way?” (*The Poems: 1951-1967*, 183-84) This actually makes the claim of a similar political cause among them, even though in different political style (Rampersad *II*, 411).

Other pieces of middle and shorter length abound in this last section; it almost gives an impression of a poet who at last resort is now rummaging through his whole poetic oeuvre to highlight his past glories. “Merry-Go-Round,<sup>19)</sup> a short poem condemning the Jim Crow segregation in a nursery song, and “Dream Dust,”<sup>20)</sup> a fragmentary one-line call to one’s inner self, are hastily jostled together between the aforementioned “Go Slow” and “Stokely Malcolm Me” of political middle pieces; a new “Slum Dreams” may coalesce the whole sequence into a better one to acknowledge its own occasion of writing:

Little dreams  
Of springtime  
Bud no roots  
To nourish them

The quoted lines do seem to refer more to the social reality than to the natural one,

since it is said, in the consequent lines, that “no stems / Are there” and this must mean the impoverished social condition among the dwellers of the ghetto, whose youthfulness is merely depicted as one of human youth: “Detached, / Naïve” and “So young” as “They’re hung” “On air alone.”

The title piece of this section, as in the whole collection, is the one the poet has used thrice in his career,<sup>21)</sup> whose placement in the book as the last is also self-consciously made so as to suggest the end-piece of his poetic project, which is to represent the possible form of original poetry in a popular vein, as in the typically Whitmanian cataloguing stanza form:

When I get to be a composer  
I'm gonna write me some music about  
Daybreak in Alabama  
And I'm gonna put the purtiest songs in it  
Rising out of the ground like a swamp mist  
And falling out of heaven like soft dew  
...

*(The Poems: 1951-1967, 187)*

The ensuing catalog lines which fan out the original note of “daybreak music” into an imaginable orchestrating song finally attest to a presence of a poetic psyche as divine so as to transcend any division not only among the races but also between the human and the non-human, fulfilling his dream to compose a music “natural as dew.”

The first of such cataloguing lines (“I’m gonna put the purtiest songs in it / Rising out of the ground like a swamp mist / And falling out of heaven like soft dew” in the above quote) describes the sacred origin of its songs in nature, which first states the importance of the natural flow of music as in the sounds of natural phenomena. The second and third cluster of reiterating lines, however, speak more of the human intervention of the maker than of strictly natural music-making sounds:

I'm gonna put some tall tall trees in it  
And the smell of red clay after rain  
And long red necks  
And poppy colored faces

And big brown arms  
And the field daisy eyes  
Of black and white black white black people  
And I'm gonna put white hands  
And black hands and brown hands in it  
Touching everybody with kind fingers  
And touching each other natural as dew  
(*The Poems: 1951-1967*, 187)

This gesture of putting not only things of nature like “trees” and the “smell of red clay after rain” but also those “necks,” “faces,” “arms,” “eyes,” “hands” and “fingers” of various colored, multi-racial people into the music signifies a typically Hughesian turn in the making of songs/poems. Here the poet/maker willfully asserts the importance of mixing the various human elements and of “touching” those individual elements by himself, enabling both a democratic participation and egalitarian contact among its members. The final editorship here can be symbolized in the poet’s gesture in these lines, that is to say, to put forth these poetic lines “natural as dew,” or natural as it was in its incipient origins in his former books.

This is how and where the poet has reached in his long poetic career, both consolidating his present stance by reusing his past poems and, by so doing, repeating his initial message in his last work.

#### Notes

- \* The original version of the paper was presented in Japanese at the 2012 Annual Convention of Society of British and American Studies, Kobe City University of Foreign Studies, which was then reported in Japanese in *Black Studies* 82 (2013).
- 1) Rampersad documents the publisher’s unwillingness to comply with the poet’s initial proposal to make a new and cheap book solely from the poems “of racial wrongs and civil rights,” claiming it “too risky” (II,409).
  - 2) The origin of Hughes’ poetry has been contested among scholars (See Rampersad and Patterson, among others, for the earlier influence of Lindsay and Sandburg [Bloom 7, 136]) but those the poet himself had claimed are three: Dunbar, Sandburg, and Whitman [Bloom 206].
  - 3) Poirier, “The Question of Genius,” *The Renewal of Literature*, 67-94.
  - 4) The question of “authenticity” has been most fruitfully explored in conjunction with Hughes’ political “compromise.” See Chinitz’s brilliant discussions on “authentic blackness” (41-66), “authenticity in the blues poems” (67-84) and “the ethics of compromise” (85-109). About the question of blues, see Tracy.
  - 5) John Unterecker, after quoting these words of Onmuchequa Jemie, observes that, even though

“over the course of more than forty years his books of poems, fiction, essays, and autobiography were produced in an almost uninterrupted flow,” “yet precisely because Hughes did exactly what he set out to do and did it well, critics accustomed to his voice relegated him to the territory of “popular” writer and by-passed serious consideration of his work.” (from his “Foreword” to Jemie’s *Langston Hughes* [ix]).

- 6) See, especially, Ford for an argument of “aesthetics of simplicity” (Bloom 2008).
- 7) The general argument that the Harlem Renaissance forms the core of the modernist movement is best done by North; recently Hughes’ global impact has been partly explored by Kutzinski.
- 8) One review of *Fine Clothes to the Jew* is titled as “Langston Hughes, the Sewer Dweller.” See Santos (Bercovitch 321) and Rampersad (I 140).
- 9) See “Uncollected Poems, 1931-1940” (The Poems: 1921-1940, 203-67); also see Berry.
- 10) This poem is a reprinted one with a slight modification (in its stanza lines and its wordings) of the same title in *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951), which would reveal the poet’s prescient knowledge of the new political style, with a full meaning of his placement of the piece at the beginning of the whole collection.
- 11) This poem is also a reprinted one with its changed title (“Puzzled”) in *One-Way Ticket* (1946), whose repeated appearance may point to the poet’s message of its unchanged slum condition.
- 12) This poem first appears as “Refugee in America” in the 1947 collection of *Fields of Wonder*, whose section title is “Words Like Freedom.”
- 13) This poem first appears in *One-Way Ticket* (1946).
- 14) This poem first appears in *Fields of Wonder* (1947).
- 15) This poem first appears in *Jim Crow’s Last Stand* (1943).
- 16) Baraka is a preeminent fighter of Black Nationalism which criticizes the general compromise among black artists but, on Hughes, states the importance of blues poetic of Hughes as that of predecessor. See Watts (198).
- 17) This poem first appears in *Ask Your Mama* (1961), where the text is all capitalized and without any later editorial simplifications to make it easier to read.
- 18) The first “Freedom” poem, collected in *Jim Crow’s Last Stand* (1943), is a rhythmical tercet-based call-and-response poem, making a claim of freedom’s everlasting value. The second uncollected one, probably written during the period between 1961 and 1967, is the slightly revised one of the first, which differs in tone not only by the change from “imprisoning Nehru” to “imprisoning me” but also by its ending from the more straightforward original one of “You’ll never kill me!” to the thrice emphasized revised one of “No-- / Not so! / No!” The third one, bearing the same title, is actually a completely new one, keeping the tone of original indictment only in its closing statement: “Freedom / Is a seed. . . .”
- 19) This popular piece first appears in *Shakespeare in Harlem* (1942).
- 20) This poem first appears in *Fields of Wonder* (1947).
- 21) This poem first appears in *Jim Crow’s Last Stand* (1943); the fact that its second appearance in *One-Way Ticket* (1949) and its third in this collection never undergo any revision stands for our inquiry of the poet’s idea of originality.

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