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A Compound Stylistic Approach to the Racial Conflict in Selected Poems by Langston Hughes

Dr. Mursi H. Ali*

* Lecturer, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Port Said University, Egypt; morsi.hasan@arts.psu.edu.eg

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ABSTRACT

The present study seeks to stylistically investigate Langston Hughes's dramatization of the racial conflict between black and white Americans in his best relevant poems. In a twofold self–defense, Hughes and his black American personae counteract the Whites' racial stereotypes through an affirmation of their race–pride that evolves from a deep self–acceptance of their own beauty and ugliness as equal, yet distinct, people within the American nation. The study explores the stylistic patterns employed in the poems to deliver this message. It attempts a compound approach of analysis, presupposing two levels of the conflict: (a) one related to black and white American personae on the enounced level of the poetic text world, and (b) the other pertaining to Hughes, as a black American poet and person, and his readers or critics on the coding level of reality. The proposed analysis examines the interrelationships, if any, between the two levels of the situational orientation, typical of such compound texts as Hughes's dramatic poems.

Keywords: dramatic poetry, hyphenated identity, mind–style, enounced event, coding event.

1. Introduction

The racial conflict between black and white Americans has been deeply rooted in the Afro–American national history, and it has made its way into the Afro–American literary tradition. It has started with the Whites' disbelief or, at least, questioning of the Blacks' distinct identity, which was an indication of the Blacks' inferiority to the Whites. That inferiority brought physical, psychological, and social humiliation to the Blacks. As a self–defense and a positive reaction against this racial degradation, black Americans engaged in a conflict with the Whites to maintain their colored identity as equal to and distinct from theirs. Langston Hughes (1902–1967), the "Negro spokesman" (Smith, 1989, p. 45), highlighted this conflict in his poetry, taking the responsibility of defending black Americans represented by (a) Hughes, the "Negro Artist," on the artistic level, and (b) the poetic persona within the poetic text world. These two main lines of his defense can be detected from Jemie's comment (1976) on Hughes's essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1971):

Hughes contends that far from being

> totally assimilated into American life, blacks had in fact retained their ethnic distinctness. Hughes… welcomes it, regards it as an asset for black people [celebrated by Hughes's persona, within the poetic text world] and a boon to the black artist [exploited by Hughes, the poet, on the artistic level]. (p. 9)

Firstly, on the artistic level, the black American artist is accused of producing a poor distorted version of the white American's artistic production, and is thus charged of cultural assimilation. Yet, Hughes, the poet, (1971) stressed the Blacks' distinctness in his seminal essay:

> Without going outside his race, and even among the better classes with their "white" culture and conscious American manners, *but still Negro enough to be different* [italics added], there is sufficient matter to furnish a black artist with a lifetime 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 inexhaustible supply of themes at hand. *To this the Negro artist can give his racial individuality* [italics added], his heritage of rhythm and warmth, and his incongruous humor that so often, as in the blues, becomes ironic laughter mixed with tears. (para. 5)

His artistic production was intended to expresses the self while addressing the other inclusively: "He [i.e., Hughes] chose to reveal the soul–beauty of his people, but to reveal it to all who cared to see" (Jemie, 1976, p. 147). It, thus, "encompasses the polar extremes of that experience, namely: 'resignation,' or the impulse towards assimilation; and 'revolt,' or the impulse towards nationalism" (Jemie, 1976, p. 12).

Notably, this point does not destroy the argument about Hughes's artistic uniqueness that is mainly based on his revolt. Rather, the two extremes of that experience confirm the existence of the Afro–American who "ever feels his *twoness* [italics added]—an American, a Negro; *two souls* [italics added], *two thoughts* [italics added], two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals *in one dark body* [italics added], whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (DuBois, 1964, p. 17). Hughes combined the African with the American in his artistic production just as they were in the souls of the Afro–American people, but the fact that such combination was presented by only the black American foregrounded the distinct black experience, and highlighted its inclusiveness and, hence, its richness. He insisted on using a distinct black art that employed both black themes and styles to foreground the black experience and to emphasize that Afro–Americans are equal, yet distinct, people within the American nation.

Secondly, within the poetic text world, Hughes located his persona among the lower classes to let them stand for the vast majority of black Americans (i.e., the self) in their conflict with white Americans (i.e., the other) who spread racial stereotypes about the self. Such stereotypes associated deficiency in each domain of life with blackness and, accordingly, emphasized the other's superiority over the self although they, by definition, are unjust categorizations based on unfounded overgeneralization, and are driven towards prejudice (Fowler, 1996, p. 26). Hughes's poetic persona counteracts these stereotypes through an affirmation of its pride in the black distinct identity. That race–pride evolves from a deep self–acceptance of its beauty and ugliness. Both self–acceptance and race–pride confirm the Blacks' distinctness from the Whites while the black–white equality is left to be asserted by the persona's hyphenated identity: "As the hyphenated nomenclature *African–American* implies, one of the Negro's two points of references is American. The Negro, Black American, Afro–American, African–American is an American" (Adell, 1994, p. 19). Therefore, the black American is as American as the white American is since his identity incorporates both the African heritage and the American experience. With this strategy in mind, Hughes's persona proceeds in the poetic text world to act

against the Whites' racial allegations of their superiority over the Blacks in the person racial conflict.

The framework of analysis adopted in the present study is, thus, of two integral parts, marking a compound approach of studying Hughes's works in general, though the focus here is on his poetry, whether in terms of the performance of the poetic persona within the poetic text world or the artistic positive stance attempted by Hughes on the artistic level. On both levels, the racial conflict is dramatized. The study aims to unveil the dramatization forces behind Hughes's respective poems of the racial conflict in order to drive his message and biases home.

2. Hughes's career–mission

A series of challenges and achievements marked the life of James Mercer Langston Hughes, the black American poet and writer. He was born to a life of misery, poverty, and loneliness that made him truly feel the suffering of his people and skillfully express it in his writings. As Raymond Smith (1989) put it, "Hughes's evolution as a poet cannot be seen apart from the circumstances of his life which thrust him into the role of poet" (p. 46). These circumstances were the sources of his poetry, which Hughes himself outlined:

> I am both a Negro and poor. And that combination of color and poverty gives me the right then to speak of the most oppressed group in America, that group that has known so little of American democracy, the fifth million Negroes who dwell into our bodies. (Langston Hughes, 1937; as cited in Graham, 1993, p. 213)

Defending both himself as a black American and his people, Hughes devoted his artistic production to disclosing the racial discrimination in the American society, as if believing in Foucault's analysis of "power [that] comes from below as well as above, in a shifting relationship of force and *resistance* [italics added]" (Kramarae et al., 1984, p. 12). This is quite obvious in that "roughly every tenth poem by Hughes has no reference to color" (Emanuel, 1967, p. 127). That was his life–mission or his single–mindedness. Being Negro, poor[1], and a gifted poet, it seems that Hughes was destined to be the spokesperson proper of the Negro, with no affectation or propaganda. That unaffected stance furnished him with the spontaneity Léopold Senghor noted about him, and that was the secret of his prolific artistic production (Smith, 1989, p. 45). At some moment in his life, Hughes himself (1988) felt his spontaneity that was definitely an inevitable result of his writing about the life he knew:

> Poems *came to me* [italics added] now *spontaneously, from somewhere inside* [italics added].... I put the poems down *quickly* [italics added] on anything I had at hand when *they came into my head* [italics added].... But I began to be afraid to show my poems to anybody, because they had become *very serious* [italics added] and *very much a part of me* [italics added]. (p. 34)

Graham (1993) observed that he "seemed clear about his role as an artist" (p. 214) since Hughes himself declared, "Most of my own poems are racial in theme and treatment, derived from the life I know" (Hughes, 1971, para. 11). His literary work belonged to what Jemie (1976) designated as "literature of necessity.... [that] is related in an organic, inseparable way to the black struggle" (p. xiv).

Despite the fact that his artistic treatment "was almost nonexistent" (Ikonné, 1981, p. 160) before him, Hughes simply expressed himself when he expressed his people. He gained his critical publicity as the true representative of black Americans. Distinguished as he is, Arnold Rampersad (2001) provided some sort of psychological analysis of the case, proposing that Hughes wrote poems about "the masses of black folk, to whom he became, in a sense (or so I have argued) *psychologically* [italics added]

[1] Robert E. Washington (2001) hinted at the fact that Hughes was not that rich: "Writing did not, however, always afford him a means of livelihood" (p. 88).

mortgaged" (p. 39). He continued to insinuate that such a connection with the black folk—with their entire heritage of feelings that were piled up throughout the racial struggle—left Hughes with some kind of self–doubt masked by confidence. Rampersad based his argument on the notion that, according to him, the arts of any renaissance seem to "depend in a fundamental way on the presence of strong feelings of inferiority, cultural and otherwise, at the very moment—paradoxically—of the repudiation or transcendence of those feelings of inferiority in the name of progress, emancipation and independence" (pp. 31–32). Roughly, it is the same argument of the effect of racism on the Blacks that Jemie (1976, p. 9). Thus, out of the "achievement motivation" (Baucum, 1999) to be a self–confident person and a distinguished poet, Hughes remained faithful "to his art and to his social vision, as well as to his central audience" in such a manner that "he fused his unique vision of himself as a poet to his production of art" (Rampersad & Roessel, 1995b, p. 5).

Likewise, Jones (2002) suggested that Hughes tried to "*shape himself* [italics added] as a poet, an American, and an African American" through jazz poetry (p. 1153). Adopting DuBois's (1964) terms of the Afro–Americans' "double–consciousness,"[2] it is clear that Hughes tried to "merge his double self" or his "double–consciousness" or, rather, to reconcile his "twoness" in order to attain "a better and truer self" (p. 17) through his self–accomplishment as a distinguished black poet. Since his Negro (or African) self—as a counterpart of his American self—was always degraded by the white American society until he himself was trapped in the vicious circle of self–doubt and since jazz, along with blues and other forms of black music, was "one of the inherent expressions of *Negro* [italics added] life in America" (Hughes, 1971, para. 12), Hughes chose to express "without going outside his race… the relations between Negroes and whites in this country" (para. 5) through manipulating such "Negro–style" of treatment (Jones, 2002, p. 1145) to let the others re–evaluate his Negro self and hence to restore his self–pride and self–confidence: "I am a Negro—and beautiful" (Hughes, 1971). Consequently, that would lead to some kind of reconciliation between his "twoness"; and this reconciliation would develop, in turn, into the self–accomplishment of "a better and truer self" (DuBois, 1964, p. 17) that would emphasize the Blacks' equality to and distinctness from the Whites on the artistic level of the racial conflict.

In terms of psychological analysis, Hughes's single–mindedness in theme and treatment was driven by the "achievement motivation secondary need" (Baucum, 1999, p. 82) for more than one purpose. Firstly, he wanted to overcome such "feelings of inferiority" (Rampersad, 2001, p. 32) within himself. Secondly, he sought to restore his self–confidence and self–pride. Thirdly and ultimately, he attempted to defend the artistic position of the Negro artist on the artistic level of the racial conflict. These are all acts of "ego defense mechanisms" (Baucum, 1999, p. 236).

Defining his career–mission in a September 1960 interview, Hughes answered a question about his literary aims: "I explain and illuminate the Negro condition in America. This applies to 90 percent of my work" (Emanuel, 1967, p. 68). His poetry, then, is mainly about the self, the black self whose condition in America is one of racism with all its physical, psychological, and social ramifications—as the racial connotations of the word "Negro" suggest. To contextualize the racial conflict, the theme of racism definitely evokes the presence of the other (viz., white American) who practises oppression on the self (viz., black American). This sort of juxtaposition makes up the person racial conflict between black and white Americans, which crystallizes the theme of racism in Hughes's most poems.

[2] The same point is foregrounded by the concept of "dual citizenship" (Gilroy; as cited in Westover, 2002, p. 1212), but with more emphasis on social factors.

3. Hughes's dramatization of the racial conflict

The focal point of the present argument is that Hughes was "essentially a dramatic poet" (Jemie, 1976, p. 31), staging his themes through some dramatic incidents that are acted upon in his poems. Interestingly enough, drama "has been judged primarily as a poem" as it was once defined as "'a poem written for representation'" (Bradbury; as cited in Fowler, 1991, p. 67). Considering the concept of drama and its constituting elements, it is implied that in Hughes's poems there are characters undergoing a series of actions in certain settings and time frames and that they communicate with one another or communicate something to their audience through specific features of language revealed in the stylistic analysis of the poems. Above all, there is some kind of conflict and conflict–resolution: "Drama denotes conflict, contradiction, confrontation, defiance" (Sanger, 2001, p. 6), which are all features of the stages of the racial conflict.

The element of characters concretizes the person conflict. The selection of certain characters as representatives of either the self or the other is also a significant point in the analysis on this level since it is an echo of the racial conflict; for instance, in Hughes's poem "Porter" the self is the "porter" while the other is the master or, rather, "sir" (see Rampersad & Roessel, 1995a, p. 116).[3] Basic to the dramatic technique is Hughes's embodiment of the racial conflict through a dramatized incident either based on real events or merely dramatically contrived. Generally, the poetic text world is constructed as a simulation of real life, even in the language adopted by either the self or the other. This is evident in the types of setting(s) and participants chosen in the poetic text world, for "the settings and participants come to be recognized as stereotypes" (Fowler, 1996, p. 113). Correspondingly, "Hughes's particular world [i.e., settings] is the inner city and, specifically, Harlem" and "Hughes's people [i.e., his black personae] are the lower classes, the urban folk: porters, bell boys, elevator boys, shoe shine boys, cooks, waiters, nurse maids, rounders, gamblers, drunks, piano players, cabaret singers, chorus girls, prostitutes, pimps, and ordinary, decent, hard–working men and women" (Jemie, 1976, p. 26). On the other hand, the white personae are the upper classes in high social, economic, and authoritative positions: presidents, police officers, landlords, masters, employers, teachers, landladies, and ladies.

Along with speech–acts and conversational clues, the titles of Hughes's relevant poems also perform a key function in the interpretation of poems as dramatic discourses. Notably, the discourse structures they construct are not as simple as the "prototypical discourse structure of poetry [that] has just one discourse level, where authors apparently address readers directly" (Short, 1997, p. 169). Rather, their discourse structure is somewhat similar to that of "prototypical drama [that] is more complex discoursely, having at least two levels of discourse, the author–audience/reader level and the character–character level" (Short, 1997, p. 169). Evidently, Hughes wrote poems evoking that structure, such as "God to Hungry Child," "High to Low," "Low to High," "Mother to Son," "Ultimatum: Kid to Kid," "Poet to Bigot," "Poet to Patron," "Letter from Spain Addressed to Alabama," "Dear Mr. President," "Do You Reckon," "Imagine," and so many others. His best poems are samples of the mini–drama of the underlying racial conflict that this study seeks to explore.

This is all based on the critical belief that writers' linguistic choices, whether conscious or unconscious, imply some kind of ideology (Carter & Nash, 1990, p. 21) that is manifested in the way a writer creates a fictional world "to be manipulated *at his will* [italics added]" (Leech, 1969, p. 166). Fowler (1996) generally called this phenomenon a "world–view" and, when discussing it in literary fiction, he termed it a "*mind–style*: the world–view of an author, or a narrator, or a character, constituted by the

[3] All references to Hughes's poems are from Rampersad and Roessel (1995a); henceforth, quotes or verse lines, not poem titles, are cited.

ideational structure[4] of the text" (p. 214). A writer's ideology or mind–style is transmitted to the reader through the stylistic pattern that is formed in a text by the consistently recurrent linguistic choices (Haynes, 1995, p.18). Implied in the concept of mind–style is subjectivity since the ways people use language to express thoughts and feelings are not objective (Turner, 1987, p. 29). Through mind–style, the writer's "way of experiencing and interpreting things" is uncovered, and his viewpoint is unfolded on a subjective basis, the fact that proves that "there is no kind of writing that can be regarded as perfectly neutral and objective" (Leech & Short, 1981, pp. 188–189). This is how Hughes crystallized his own vision of the racial world in his dramatic poems, where black American personae suffer inequality vis–à–vis white American personae only on the basis of some racial stereotypes. His mind–style is, by convention, subjective in terms of its sources (viz., Hughes's personal experiences & context of culture) and its presentation (viz., Hughes's distinct treatment).

The present study argues that Hughes's dramatization of the racial conflict requires two levels of analysis, typical of compound texts. The first throws light on the racial conflict of black and white American personae within the poetic text world, aka the enounced level; the other uncovers Hughes's mind–style of this racial world on the coding level of communication, where Hughes, the poet, addresses his audience. For the purposes of the present study, however, the analysis of the enounced level is only juxtaposition of the relevant poems, meant to offer the overall stylistic and thematic patterns that embrace them all (see 4), while the analysis of the coding level is largely a build–up (see 5). This does not mean that the two levels of the compound communicative event are completely separate; they are interrelated inasmuch as each one of them influences the other, and they together make up Hughes's dramatization of the racial conflict.

4. Enounced level of the conflict

Hughes, consciously or unconsciously, sets a pattern of the person conflict. It can be detected on the enounced level of communication within the poetic text world through three stages: (a) third–person stage of indirect confrontation (i.e., that of the *I/we–he/they* situation), (b) second–person stage of direct confrontation (i.e., that of the *I/we–you* situation), and (c) first–person stage of a potential reconciliation (i.e., that of the inclusive big–*we* situation). The first stage shows no real face–to–face communication; it illustrates lack of freedom on the part of the self whose equality to the other is severely doubted. The second conveys the revolutionary tone of the self's direct criticism of the other in direct communication. The third signifies the potential resolution of the person conflict. Poems like "Merry–Go–Round," "This Puzzles Me," "Ku Klux,"[5] and "Theme for English B" are mainly in the third–person stage of the conflict, whereas poems such as "Ultimatum: Kid to Kid," "Death in Yorkville," and "Brotherly Love—A Little Letter to the White Citizens of the South" are mainly in the second–person stage. Tokens of the first–person stage of reconciliation flash in the poetic text world, but they quickly fade away, as shown in the analysis below. Generally, the communicative framework of the poems illustrates the images of the participants and their respective characterizations in the light of each stage of the conflict.

Observing that the speaker of the third–person

[4] This is one of Halliday's (1973; as cited in Fowler, 1996) terms for the three functions of language identified in his linguistic theory: the (a) ideational, (b) interpersonal, and (c) textual. Fowler refers here to the first part of the ideational function that is the experiential (as a counterpart to the logical; see Halliday & Hasan, 1976), where "'the speaker or writer embodies in language his experience of the phenomena of the real world'—[and] through it he represents his view of the world" (Fowler, 1996, p. 31).

[5] The analysis of a poem like "Ku Klux" exemplifies the instances when the enounced level cannot be fully comprehended unless background information from the coding level is borrowed. The Ku Klux Klan was a Southern–American secret political organization of Protestant white men, which emerged after the American Civil War with the aim of denying the blacks all their rights. The members of that organization believed that white people were superior to all people of other races and other religions (see Tallack, 1991, for more detail). Hughes's poem employs these realities to present an experience of an adult black American narrating how the members of the Ku Klux Klan maltreat him.

poems (viz., “Merry–Go–Round,” This Puzzles Me,” “Ku Klux,” & “Theme for English B”) is the black American persona and that the first of the second–person poems (viz., “Ultimatum: Kid to Kid”) is presented in the voice of the White, it is safe to conclude that the Black seems to avoid a direct confrontation with the White because he is too oppressed to freely face and criticize the oppressor and because he is so tactful that he attempts to defend himself without getting into a non–ending conflict with the Whites. Even when the Black appears as the speaker of two of the second–person poems (viz., “Death in Yorkville,” & “Brotherly Love), he directly reasons with the Whites in a virtual and noble manner to basically try to convince them of the urgency of racial reconciliation. Yet, he is tactful not to threaten his self–face or the other–face while indirectly calling on the other for reconciliation. On the other hand, the white speaker of “Ultimatum: Kid to Kid” violates all maxims of politeness, and breaks all the expectations of an equal–equal relationship, and thus widens the social gap between the Blacks and the Whites in a way that stresses the racial stereotypes of the white world. He is all but a (pathetically) tyrannical racist who never stops threatening, insulting, and attacking the Blacks verbally and physically, although he is not that strong to carry out his threats or even to control himself and not to shout and/or burst into tears. Such a great divide between the Blacks and the Whites is articulated by the abundant use of (non–deictic) third–person referring expressions in the poems insofar as these expressions reveal that the indirect confrontation between black and white American personae dominates the poetic text world in a way that underlines the yawning distance and/or detachment between the conflicting parties.

Still, on the embedded level of the enounced event, two of the four third–person poems referred to—namely, “Ku Klux” and “Theme for English B”—are based on the second–person stage of the conflict, and the latter of these two poems temporarily witnesses the first–person stage of the potential racial reconciliation. In the embedded enounced event of “Ku Klux,” the white speaker turns the direct communication of the second–person stage into an arena of verbal and physical enforcement with some communication disorder. He is so coercive that he directly attacks the Black verbally and physically to enforce him to adopt the racial belief in the superiority of the white race. Conversely, the black speaker tries to open a channel of communication with the Whites through regarding maxims of politeness on addressing them, but he fails because of the Whites’ insistence on dehumanizing him. He appears pathetically helpless in the scene that ends in an outburst of rage representing the Whites’ verbal and physical racial acts. In “Theme for English B,” the white speaker detaches himself from the Black and implicitly degrades him on account of racial stereotypes; the black speaker counteracts these stereotypes and defends himself, but notably without attacking the White. The Black’s tolerant reasoning with the White restores the intrinsic features of the direct communication of the second–person stage. Consequently, he develops this communication into a potential state of racial reconciliation when he presents the inclusive plural first–person subjective deictic pronoun *we* of the first–person stage of reconciliation; yet, the racial situation hangs over the poetic text world, and racial reconciliation proves impossible. Generally, the embedded level of the enounced event of these significant poems is remarkable for the evident features of their designated stages of communication.

As for the embedded level of the second–person stage, the same two poems (i.e., “Ku Klux” & “Theme for English B”) juxtapose black and white American personae to prove that they are poles apart, but they interestingly define the second–person stage of the conflict differently. The first poem throws light on a shocking example of a dogmatic and coercive racial conflict on the part of the White and a pathetic instance of helplessness on the part of the Black. It typically dramatizes the burning conflict of the confrontational second–person stage. The second poem redefines the second–person stage through foregrounding some kind of an argumentative communication between the conflicting parties, especially on the part of the Black.

In either case, however, the embedded level of the enounced event of these poems dominates the primary level to such an extent that the third–person stage of the primary level carries the features of the significant second–person stage. Unfortunately, this does not happen with the example of the first–person stage of the potential conflict–resolution. The poem "Theme for English B" witnesses the single instance of the inclusive plural first–person subjective deictic pronoun *we* by the end of the Black's embedded enounced event, yet the poem ends with a rebound to the second–person stage of the conflict. This suggests that racial reconciliation is the Blacks' far–fetched dream or, to adopt a title of one of Hughes's poems and poetry anthologies, it is the Blacks' "dream deferred" that is turned into a chimera by the Whites' obstinate racial stance.

Obviously, each stage of the racial conflict carries some broad features evident in the given poetic text world one way or another. The third–person stage signifies some distance between the participants, the second–person stage denotes some degree of communication, and the first–person stage designates that the participants succeed, or are about to succeed, in communication. Yet, it seems that there is not always a one–to–one correspondence between the stage of communication involved in the poetic text world and the nature of the racial conflict between the participants. This happens especially when the speaker adopts a tone different from the one that is characteristic of the particular stage, or when the enounced event is compound and its embedded level includes stage(s) of communication different from the one on the main level. For example, the poems "Merry–Go–Round" and "This Puzzles Me," which are of a simple enounced event, canonically dramatize the indirect confrontation and/or criticism, typical of the third–person stage. On the other hand, "Ku Klux" and "Theme for English B" bolster the indirect confrontational stance of the third–person stage with a direct confrontational force of the second–person stage that appears on the embedded level of their enounced event. In parallel, the poem "Ultimatum: Kid to Kid" dramatizes the burning confrontational conflict or the enraged assault of the Whites to define the second–person stage as an essentially racial battlefield. In spite of that, "Death in Yorkville" and "Brotherly Love" reshape the dramatic confrontational and/or revolutionary force of the attacking second–person stage in a way that redefines it, on the part of the black speaker, as a rich paragon of tolerance, forgiveness, and argumentation—not a shocking epitome of an attack–counterattack arena. Consequently, the embedded second–person stage of the compound enounced event in two of these third–person poems (viz., "Ku Klux" & "Theme for English B"), on the one hand, and the pathetic brotherly tone of the black speaker in two of these second–person poems (viz., "Death in Yorkville" & "Brotherly Love"), on the other hand, break the expectations of the indirect confrontation of the third–person stage and the expectations of the attacking or revolutionary force of the second–person stage, respectively. On this account, the dramatic patterns that person racial conflict creates are far from conventionalized clichés: They are meaningfully variant and variously meaningful.

Collectively, these dramatic patterns are utilized to point out the characteristic differences between black and white American personae in the poetic text world and to crystallize the racial conflict as a whole. The self–other person racial conflict between black and white American personae is markedly characterized by an unfairly attacking, and aggressive stance on the part of the other and mostly by a counteractive, defending, and challenging stance on the part of the self. These variant patterns are evident all through the poems.

The other attacks the self verbally and/or physically in a direct or indirect way (e.g., "Ultimatum: Kid to Kid," "Death in Yorkville," "Ku Klux," "Brotherly Love," & "Theme for English B"). This situation psychologically affects the Blacks in a negative manner. The Whites' persistent racial acts illustrate the verbal, physical, and psychological ramifications of racism. Believing that the Whites are superior to the Blacks, the other proceeds with his racial, egotistic, sadistic, and insolent acts as though he

were a real tyrant. Blind to the discrepancy between his unfounded principles of absolute superiority and his shameful practices of barbarian racism (e.g., "This Puzzles Me"), he launches a verbal and physical campaign of a dogmatic intellectual nature to force the Blacks to believe in their superiority (e.g., "Ku Klux"). Even worse, in every situation where the self proposes racial reconciliation with him, his snobbish egotism and his obstinate racial stance emerge, and he seems reluctant to accept the proposal or even to stop his racist war, although the twofold truth of the hyphenated identity of Americans and their reciprocal give–and–take prove the Blacks' equality to and distinctness from the Whites (e.g., "Death in Yorkville," "Brotherly Love," & "Theme for English B"). Accordingly, the Whites prevent racial reconciliation form taking place in the poetic world because they always cling on to the racial beliefs of the white world, which are "all due in part to the [Whites'] racial self–esteem... and their attitudes towards those [black people] whom pseudo–scientists have dubbed inferior" (Harris, 1984, pp. 84–85). Thereupon, the White's stance develops only in terms of racial accentuation in that it is foregrounded sometimes as a verbal transgression and sometimes as a physical assault; yet, it is racist all through, and it is wrongfully based on egotism, snobbishness, dogmatism, and sadism.

In contrast, the self defends himself against the other, and never yields, even in the intensely dark moments of helplessness. He counteracts the Whites' racial stereotypes about the Blacks' inferiority, and proves himself and his own black people as equal to and distinct from the Whites (e.g., "Merry–Go–round," "This Puzzles Me," & "Theme for English B"). Sometimes he becomes more positive than his being a mere defender of reactionary rejection in that he subverts the racial stereotypes, and discloses the ugliness of the erroneous racial beliefs of the white world so as to prompt the other to change himself (e.g., "This Puzzles Me," "Death in Yorkville," & "Ku Klux"). Through his evidently smart and eloquent argumentation and through the twofold truth of the hyphenated identity and the reciprocal give–and–take of Americans, he proves the Blacks' distinctive ethnic and cultural identity and, consequently, their distinctive mental and verbal capacities (e.g., "Theme for English B"). His argument is mainly encoded in an emphatic tone of self–acceptance and self–pride, often mixed with a sense of ridiculing the other or with a pathetically ironic self–doubt tone hiding a challengingly sincere self–confident tone (e.g., "This Puzzles Me" & "Theme for English B"). Sometimes the self accentuates his defending tone until it becomes a revolutionary attacking one, yet always on a fair and justified basis and often with an evasive ironic streak (e.g., "This Puzzles Me" & the closing of "Brotherly Love"). He keeps integrating the ironic principle with the politeness principle in an argumentative framework in order to avoid enraging the other in a counterattack (e.g., "Merry–Go–round," "This Puzzles Me," "Ku Klux," & "Theme for English B"): "Whereas an insult can easily lead to a counter–insult, and hence to conflict, an ironic remark is less easy to answer in kind" (Leech, 1983, p. 144).

Attempting to prove the Blacks' distinctness to the Whites and to establish racial reconciliation, the self utilizes all these strategies to prepare directly or indirectly for his reconciliation proposal. This is why his tone, otherwise than the revolutionary, is coy and tolerant while it is never insulting or timid (e.g., "Death in Yorkville," & "Brotherly Love"). Such coyness, by definition, is purposefully operated to urge the Whites to stop being aggressive and to be inclined to racial reconciliation with the Blacks instead. Being only a strategy of defense, the self's coyness is not demeaning after all; rather, it is an indication of his politeness. Contrary to the Whites' racial beliefs and stereotypes about the barbarian nature of Negroes, "Negroes are practically never rude to white people" (Hughes, 1988, p. 225). Besides, his coyness also gives evidence of the tyranny of the other and a proof of the oppression of the self. In a similar vein, his reasonable argument, which permeates the poetic text world, enables him to call on the other for reconciliation while he regards his self–face and the other–face in case that the other wishes to refuse the proposal. In this regard, the Black's stance on racial

reconciliation (through his proposal) develops from the coy and cautious to the confident and daring; yet, it is positive all throughout. With this potentially unwelcome proposal, he takes the risk of threatening his self–face in order to end up the racial conflict when he initiates the reconciliation proposal, and commits himself to its teachings, although the White seems reluctant to accept it. By all accounts, his general stance undergoes four phases. It develops from (a) the somewhat passive and distant into (b) the challengingly revolutionary or confrontational. Then, it transcends all negative feelings of hatred and vengeance, and it turns into (c) the positively communicative and argumentative that, in turn, leads to (d) the transcendentally forgiving and reconciliatory. The dramatic force, therefore, swings from the distal to the proximal.

Clearly, this person–juxtaposition discloses the racial conflict between black and white American personae who are poles apart in that the former seeks coexistence "without fear or shame" (Hughes, 1971, para. 14) while the latter holds fast to racism and egotism. As conveyed in the poetic text world, racial discrimination pervades every aspect of their conflicting relationship. It primarily emerges when the Whites "actually behave in a negative way toward a [black] person as a result of stereotyping" (Baucum, 1999, p. 298). Thus, the Blacks suffer racism everywhere; it is there in education, work, and entertainment settings wherein they try to live safe and secure or even live and not be killed (e.g., "Theme for English B," "Merry–Go–round," "Ultimatum: Kid to Kid," "Ku Klux," "Brotherly Love," & "Death in Yorkville").

In terms of social psychology, the self–other racial conflict is summed up in the fact that "majorities [e.g., white Americans] tend to exclude minorities [e.g., black Americans] from humanity, to infra–humanize, ontologize, delegitimize, or exclude them from the moral community" (Opotow, 1990; as cited in Chryssochoou, 2004, p. 60). This elimination process poses a serious threat to the Blacks' identity. Theoretically speaking, studies of social psychology spell out four types of threat at the level of identity, all of which are evidenced in the racial conflict here. In practice, black American personae suffer (a) categorization threat, (b) threat to distinctiveness, (c) threat to the value of identity, and (d) acceptance threat (Branscombe, 1998, 1999; as cited in Chryssochoou, 2004, p. 61). They are (a) "categorized against their will," (b) "prevented from being distinctive," (c) "undermined" in terms of the value of their group, and (d) "undermined" in terms of their position in the big community (Chryssochoou, 2004, p. 61). Yet, they counteract these threats through (a) proving their equality to the other, (b) proving their distinctness, (c) displaying high self–acceptance and self–pride, and (d) attempting to reconcile with the other.

Even so, the racial conflict obtains, and persists, with no resolution in the poetic text world. The general reason is that it is based on stereotypes that "tend to be self–confirming and, therefore, highly resistant to change" since they are simply a type of discrimination, aka "schematic processing" (Baucum, 1999, p. 298). This is why racial stereotypes appear as leitmotifs running through the enounced event in the sense that the white American persona keeps promoting them as regards the Blacks while the black American persona keeps counteracting them. On the coding level of situational orientation, however, there is another considerable explanation for the impossibility of racial reconciliation in the poetic text world.

5. Coding level of the conflict

This part of the analysis focuses on the coding communicative level of the situational orientation, that is, the level of the writer–reader/critic communication; yet, the enounced level is the basis of the analysis. Hughes here displayed a prominent technical mastery in the way he managed to establish some overall stylistic patterns of dramatized racial relationships between black and white American personae. In such a dramatic poetic world, "it is common to find that instead of having persons [i.e., personae], times and places [i.e., settings] described as separate aspects of the situation they

are interrelated as features of a kind of a composite reality which we usually refer to as 'themes'" (Widdowson, 1977, p. 68). He succeeded in building up a poetic miniature world through the consistently regular linguistic choices that make the "cumulative ideational structuring" (Fowler, 1996, p. 213) and that represent his own vision of the real world. This stylistic structuring helps uncover Hughes's mind–style before the decoder.

On the one hand, it is believed that "the critic 'may take the trip from language or style to the soul'" inasmuch as "seemingly insignificant details of language can, when analyzed systematically, be shown to be organized in such a way that whole patterns of meaning depend on them" (Carter & Simpson, 1989, p. 28). On the other hand, when readers find themselves before these "particular kinds of designs" (Carter & Nash, 1990, p. 22), they embark on a three–stage process of reading, interpreting and critiquing, whereby they, respectively, "encounter a text," "create a companion text," and finally "generate a dialectic or dialogic text" (Bogumil & Molino, 1990, p. 800). In this way, the encoder Hughes unfolds his viewpoint to communicate with the decoder critic and reader through his poems: "What literature communicates, then, is an individual awareness of a reality other than that which is given general social sanction but nevertheless related to it" (Widdowson, 1977, p. 70).

The version of reality that Hughes implies in his dramatic poetic text suggests that he is subjective, at least, implicitly. As a black American poet and person and as the "Negro spokesman" (Smith, 1989, p. 45), he definitely sympathizes with his own black people: "Poems came to me now spontaneously, *from somewhere inside* [italics added]" (Hughes, 1988, p. 34). He dramatizes the racial suffering of the Blacks and the racial tyranny of the Whites in a bitter tone of dark irony that sometimes makes his poems, on the deep level, "very serious and very much a part of [him]" (Hughes, 1988, p. 34). His implied sympathy is unmistakably evident in his characterization of the black persona who always wonders, questions, and defends—sometimes in a pathetically passive and helpless way and sometimes in a sarcastically denouncing and/or motivational way. By contrast, his implied antipathy pushes him to characterize the white persona as the one who always orders, threatens, insults, and attacks in an insolently tyrannical, egotistic, and sadistic way. He loads the black persona's utterances with instances of understatement entailing reserved politeness, praiseworthy modesty, and ironic doubt in a pathetical tone of misery while he foregrounds the white persona's utterances as instances of overstatement expressing flagrant impoliteness, notorious egotism, and blatant confidence in an arrogant tone of tyranny. For example, the white speaker of "Ultimatum: Kid to Kid" is contrasted with the black speaker of "Merry–Go–Round" in terms of insolence–politeness dichotomy; and the White of "Ku Klux," who is the adult counterpart of the white child in "Ultimatum: Kid to Kid," is juxtaposed with the Black of "Ku Klux," "Death in Yorkville," and "Brotherly Love" in terms of prejudice–tolerance opposition. In a word, Hughes's mind–style permeates every line of his dramatic poetic text to the extent that his decoder cannot mistake where he offers his sympathies: "Hughes in his usual way is content to dramatize... although his manner of presentation leaves no doubt where his sympathies are" (Jemie, 1976, p. 74).

He pathetically presents the black persona as a representative of his own underrated black people who are the lower classes. He presents him as the Southern little child who is robbed of enjoyment on a carnival day in "Merry–Go–Round"; who feels lonely and frightened among his presumably white peers in "Ultimatum: Kid to Kid"; or who pathetically wonders about the Whites' sadistic, brutal, and bloody acts of racism against black children in "Death in Yorkville." He also chooses to portray him as the helpless adult who is the victim of the fanatic racist Whites with their brutal egotism in "Ku Klux" and as the oppressed, outcast college student who is alienated and underestimated by his racist white teacher, educational institution, and non–colored colleagues in "Theme for English B." Yet, being "a man burning with a rage" (Jemie, 1976, p. 198), he vents this rage

through the sarcastic tone that he sometimes makes the black American persona adopts in an entire poem such as “This Puzzles Me” or in parts of poems such as “Merry–Go–Round” and “Ku Klux.” Finally, his emphasis on the black persona’s essentially tolerant, forgiving, and reconciliatory stance—aided by the three Aristotelian rhetorical proofs—vis–à–vis the white persona’s persistently egotistic, aggressive, and racial stance reflects his sympathetic subjectivity in his dramatization of this racial conflict.

In spite of all this and in spite of his racial suffering as a Negro poet and person, Langston Hughes is not the first–person black persona in the poetic text world of his relevant poems. He is genuinely black to the core, and this leads him to write about his black people’s and his own suffering; yet, his dramatic technique builds a poetic text world equivalent to his contemporary real world, but it is not the real world. Simply, this is his artistic distinctiveness and his single–mindedness. He creates “an art about the people and for the people” (Graham, 1993, p. 218), and emerges “as a totemic figure, as a representative *of* and *for* African Americans” (Jones, 2002, p. 1153) in the sense that “choosing the life of the black folk was also a way of choosing himself” (Kent, 1989, p. 19).

Although the fine line that distinguishes between the fictional and the real in Hughes’s poetry seems blurry because of the person amalgam inherent in all literary works, the dramatization of the racial conflict underscores this line in such a way that resolves the person amalgam. It is interesting to note that Widdowson (1977) outlined this person amalgam and gave a clue to its resolution:

> The “I” in literary writing... does refer to the private thoughts, imaginings and perceptions of the individual person... But it is not the writer as the message sender, the craftsman, the “maker” [i.e., the encoder of the coding event] that the “I” refers to but to the inner self [i.e., the speaker of the enounced event or the speaking persona] that the writer is objectifying, and *the very act of objectification involves detaching this self and observing it as if it were a third person entity* [italics added]. (pp. 52–53)

On the other hand, Semino (1992) identified the criteria, by which the objectified speaker of the enounced event (i.e., the speaking persona) is attributed to the encoder of the coding event (i.e., the author):

> The degree to which readers assimilate the constructed poetic *persona* to the author will, however, vary from case to case, depending, presumably, on their knowledge and expectations about different writers and genres, and on their perception of each individual text. (p. 136).

Thus, Hughes, the black encoder of the coding event, sympathizes with the black speaker of the enounced event because they live the same life of misery, poverty, loneliness, and racism. Yet, they are “detached” by virtue of not being the same person and/or persona in practice. This would partly explain why titles of poems are sometimes rendered as reports (by Hughes, the encoder) in the third–person point of view, although the enounced event is centered around a first–person misery of a black speaker: “Ultimatum: Kid to Kid,” “Death in Yorkville,” and “Theme for English B.”

In fact, this conclusion defies Jemie’s (1976, pp. 129-130) eloquently cogent argument that Hughes’s deictic pronoun *I* in his poems is tantamount to the communal voice of all the Blacks while its informal, spoken, subjective equivalent *me* stands for his individual voice as a poet and person. In truth, the first–person pronoun in Hughes’s poems pertains to the speaker of the enounced event of the poetic text world, not Langston Hughes, the encoder of the coding event of poems. Within the poetic text world, this first–person pronoun indicates that the particular black speaker of the enounced event “is alone, but he is alone with the community of his race... [inasmuch as the] individual black tragedies become racial tragedies” (Harris, 1984, p. 101). That is to say,

the encoder Hughes "tended to suppress the personal element [of himself and of the particular black speaker of the enounced event] in his poetry, appropriating the first person singular as the fitting *epitome of universal human tendencies embodied in race* [italics added]" (Smith, 1989, p. 49). In this regard, Hughes loads the objectified black speaker of the enounced event (in the poetic text world) with a communal racial voice of his black people in order to perform his own indirect social role of the coding event in real world:

> It may indeed be the purpose of a writer to stir the social conscience but he does *not* [italics added] do so by addressing himself *directly* [italics added] to those whose conscience he wishes to stir. He expresses a certain reality, a personal vision, and the reader, as an *observer* of this reality, might feel constrained to act in a certain way. (Widdowson, 1977, p. 53)

His role, so to speak, is to fuel his poems with a "natural" sense of protest: "I write about what I know best, and being a Negro in this country is tied up with difficulties that cause one to *protest naturally* [italics added]" (Graham, 1993, p. 214). He dedicates his artistic production to one of the "major problems of human life... the problem of how to achieve a just society, or overcome coercive systems and break out of authoritarian patterns" (Chomsky, 1988, p. 244). He utilizes every technical and thematic aspect of his art to achieve his goal: "Modestly, like a relay runner, Langston Hughes picks up the folk tradition and carries it on toward *the goal of social change in the real life* [italics added]" (Blake, 1989, p. 135). Such "social change in the real life" is, paradoxically, the implicit cause of his insistence on leaving the person racial conflict in the poetic text world with no definite resolution.

The enounced level of analysis concludes that the potential racial reconciliation is not possible in the poetic text world because, generally, it is based on the type of "schematic processing" or discrimination that "tend to be self–confirming and, therefore, highly resistant to change" (Baucum, 1999, p. 298). Specifically, on the one hand, children personae are incapable of changing the racial situation where they have been brought up because, on the other hand, adult white personae feel satisfied with their legacy of racism, which they manage to make generation after generation. Still, in the coding event, there is a substantially crucial explanation for the persistence of the racial conflict in the poetic text world of the enounced event. Contrary to the popular attitude that "we do not like to use reality to explain literature; rather, we consider that it is literature which explains reality" (Todorov, 1986, p. 375), here the coding event of the real world can help to explain the enounced event of the poetic text world. The real racial world of Hughes's contemporary America influences the poetic text world of his poems in that every attempt of the black American persona at racial reconciliation with the white American persona is doomed to failure because there is no such state of reconciliation in reality. In other words, the encoder Langston Hughes with his subjective mind–style chooses to move the racial suffering of his black people in the real world of America to the poetic text world of his poems. Then, he implicitly maintains that the racial reconciliation in the poetic text world, which should comfort his readers, would not take place unless the social change occurs in real life. Interestingly, "this is the invariable message of the spirituals and blues, the message of black history thus far: no resolution at hand, only endurance [if any], a continuing struggle [and/or a persistent conflict]" (Jemie, 1976, p. 124). It is Hughes's artistic way of resistance and/or revolt.

6. Conclusion

The compound approach of the present study has necessitated two levels of the situational orientation, typical of compound texts, of which literary texts are a prototype. These two levels are distinct and interrelated at the same time. It becomes evident that, in the detailed analysis of the enounced event, there should be no interference of the coding level as long as the literary text is not categorized as autobiographical and as long as there is no urgent need, on the enounced level, for such background information pertaining to the encoder–decoder or

author–reader communication of the coding level. Therefore, the enounced event of dramatic poems, such as Hughes's, can be self–contained insofar as it does not necessarily need the coding event to be fully comprehended and interpreted (cf. "Ku Klux"),[6] whereas the coding event can never be disassociated from the enounced event.

Langston Hughes, consciously and purposefully, was capable of dressing his themes in an artistic garb of a dramatic treatment through projecting the racial conflict in his contemporary America onto an equally dramatic equivalent poetic text world of black and white American personae, and therein lies his mind–style and his subjectivity. His poems on racism are thus devoted to emitting an artistic cry for help to the communal human conscience, urging them to resolve the racial conflict between black and white Americans in the real world before it gets more complicated. Hughes uttered such a cry and died, but his cry did not perish, although the self–other racial conflict persists in the poetic text world (& in the real world?), as shown in the stylistic patterns of the respective dramatized poems. He revealed his subjective mind–style in his poetry, and left his stylistic encoding to uncover its secrets.

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[6] To prevent the monstrous intervention of the coding event in the enounced event of the poetic text world, I preferred to introduce background information sparingly and briefly in footnotes, as done in the analysis of "Ku Klux" (see Footnote 5).

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