

Langston Hughes (1902-1967):
The Weary Blues (1926)

I. General Introduction



A. most popular writer of the
20th century

1. rebel -> poet laureate

2. poet whose voice became
almost an official cultural
voice of Afro-America

B. career that lasted from 1920
until 1967 most influential
among Afro-American writer

1. although primarily a
poet

a. **17** volumes of

poetry

b. **3** volumes of **short
stories**¹

c. **9 plays**

d. **2 novels**²

e. **2 autobiographies**

(1) The Big Sea (1940) became the official
history of the "Harlem Renaissance"

f. newspaper columnist

(1) Chicago Defender

(a) great Afro-American national
newspapers

(2) New York Post

(a) not today's post, premiere and
distinguished liberal American journal

¹The Ways of White Folks (1934), Laughing to Keep From Crying (1952),
and Something in Common and Other Stories (1963)

²Not Without Laughter (1930) and Tambourines to Glory 1958

(3) spoke in a sweet common sensical voice about events of the day

(4) created the internal dialogue that was represented by the character Jesse B. Semple and his interlocutor Boyd

g. yeilds the **4** volumes of **Simple Books**

h. numerous children's books anthologies

II. Langston Hughes: **A Brief Biography**

III. Montage of a Dream Deferred (1951)

A. Hughes comes to terms with Harlem of the Depression and the War

1. including the riots of 1942

B. transformation of city of refuge to dark ghetto

1. third of a series of works that solidify him as the poet of Harlem

a. Shakespeare in Harlem (1942)

b. One Way Ticket (1949)

2. retrieve a lyrical (creative) black presence in harlem

C. Hughes provides his own brief introduction

1. always educational

2. always pointing out the connection between his poetry and African-American music

3. hughes sense of language

a. derives from music

b. African-American spoken voice

c. rather than from literature

4. signals (montage) improvisation on a theme

a. dream deferred

5. emphasizes style of life triumphing over content

D. Sections of the Book (according to James De Jongh)

1. Boogie Segue to Bop -- "love life . . . shaped by the limits of life in Harlem"
2. Dig and Be Dug -- "vignettes of hope and frustration" (106)
3. Early Bright -- "
4. Vice Versa to Bach -- "focuses on those middle--class Harlemites whose aspirations are more attuned to Bach than bop, but whose dreams are also deferred" (107-108)
5. "Dream Deferred" -- "strikes many different notes"
6. Lenox Avenue Mural -- "thematically direct"
 - a. most sustained section
 - b. clearly grounds the notion of the deferred dream in the great migration
 - c. series of variations on deferral
 - (1) "Good Morning" (71,65)
 - (a) historicizes the deferred dream

IV. Musical Ques

- A. read it as a musical composition
 1. provide a structure and unity
 2. provide a code to reading
 - a. "Dream Boogie" (3,30)
 - (1) provides the basic melody
 - (a) themes
 - (b) language
 - (2) basis for improvisation and elaboration throughout
 - b. Hughes will return to this poem again and again to improvise

- (1) to show us something new in it
 - (2) show it to us in a different way
 - 3. key to the stance of an important voice that is more or less our guiding melody throughout
 - a. "boogie-woogie rumble"
 - (1) suggests an undertone
 - (2) tells us to read between the line
 - b. speaker is reticent
 - (1) recourse to style, nonsense saying
 - (a) "Hey, pop! /Re-bop!/Mop!//Y-e-a-h!"
 - c. discussion of the dream is deferred
 - (1) is implicate
- B. "Sister" (7,32)
 - 1. introduces another dominant mode of expression
 - 2. the blues
 - 3. about the paradoxes of love
 - 4. about lifemanship in scarcity
 - a. money and the blues
- C. "Juke Box Love Song" (10,34)
 - 1. comments on the blues with romantic love