An Examination of the Compositional Style of Dorothy Rudd Moore and its Relationship to the Literary Influence of Langston Hughes

Latoya Andriel Lain

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, LainL@unlv.nevada.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/thesesdissertations

Part of the African American Studies Commons, and the Music Commons

Repository Citation
https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/thesesdissertations/1587

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Scholarship@UNLV. It has been accepted for inclusion in UNLV Theses, Dissertations, Professional Papers, and Capstones by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@unlv.edu.
AN EXAMINATION OF THE COMPOSITIONAL STYLE OF DOROTHY RUDD
MOORE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE LITERARY INFLUENCE OF
LANGSTON HUGHES

by

LaToya Andriel Lain

Bachelor of Arts
Florida State University
1999

Master of Music
University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music
2003

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Doctor of Musical Arts in Performance

Department of Music
College of Fine Arts
The Graduate College

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 2012
THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

We recommend the dissertation prepared under our supervision by

LaToya Andriel Lain

entitled

An Examination of the Compositional Style of Dorothy Rudd Moore and Its Relationship to the Literary Influence of Langston Hughes

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Musical Arts

Department of Music

Alfonse Anderson, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Ken Hanlon, Ph.D., Committee Member

Tod Fitzpatrick, D.M.A., Committee Member

Michelle Latour, Ph.D., Committee Member

Joe N. Bynum, M.F.A., Graduate College Representative

Ronald Smith, Ph. D., Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies

and Dean of the Graduate College
An Examination of the Compositional Style of Dorothy Rudd Moore and It’s Relationship to the Literary Influence of Langston Hughes

By

LaToya Lain

Dr. Alfonse Anderson, Examination Committee Chair
Professor of Music
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Dorothy Rudd Moore, born in 1940, grew up during a period in American history where many of the principles upon which this country was founded were denied to African – Americans. It was a time when black people in this country, amidst a struggle, were fighting for the basic human rights afforded to whites. In addition to protests, marches, and speeches, black artists used the power of artistic expression to communicate anger at the racial climate in America. Writers, dancers, actors, and musicians all used their various genres as platforms to speak out against inequality. Dorothy Rudd Moore and Langston Hughes were among those artists.

Dorothy Rudd Moore is a part of an elite group of black women composers who have overcome both race and gender to make substantial contributions to classical music. She has composed in essentially every genre including instrumental ensemble, choral works, and opera. Although there is limited academic exploration into her works, perhaps due to her unrelenting pursuit of privacy, her musical contributions should not be overlooked.
Being a poet in her own right, she has high literary taste and is attracted to poetry that is powerful and commanding in its approaches to speaking about the experiences of black people in America. She is very careful in her selection of poetry and quite meticulous in its treatment through her music. She reads the poem, studies it, and memorizes it until what she brings forth musically seems innate. A composer this cautious about text would naturally gravitate to one of the most famous poets of our time, Langston Hughes (1902 – 1967).

Langston Hughes earned a reputation as a lyrical poet whose words were rhythmic and often referred to as musical. He too used the pen as his platform to speak out against racism and the plight of black people in this country. His output included short stories, prose, children’s books, an opera, and he was also the librettist for Kurt Weill’s *Street Scene*.

This document will examine the literary language of Langston Hughes and the musical translation of Dorothy Rudd Moore, specifically in her songs “Weary Blues”, “Dream Variation”, and “Song For a Dark Girl.” Further, it will briefly discuss the political climate that surrounded both composer and poet and its heavy influence on the choice of topics and Moore’s attraction to them.

The research will primarily come from interviews and musical coachings with the composer, dissertations, journal articles, and other relevant literature.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I became interested in this composer because I knew that I wanted to explore more into the lives and struggles of African-Americans in this country, and as a musician, I knew that I wanted to find a composer who was active in the civil rights movement and voiced their opinions about these injustices through music. I first heard of Moore through the advertisements throughout New York City about her opera on the life of Frederick Douglas. After reading about her and the premiere of this opera, I learned that she was in the process of writing another opera on the life of Harriet Tubman. At that point, I knew, based on her subject matter, I wanted to research her other compositions. I discovered that she had written a cycle for mezzo-soprano and cello. I was able to hear small snippets of it on the internet and was intrigued to search for more.

I soon learned that there was only one full recording of this cycle in the New York City Library for Performing Arts featuring Hilda Harris. I knew Ms. Harris was on the faculty of The Manhattan School of Music as a number of my colleagues studied with her. I emailed her and explained my interest in studying this cycle and she graciously mailed one of her personal copies to me. After listening to it and studying the literary sources, I noticed that Langston Hughes seemed to be Mrs. Moore’s poet of choice as she set much of his poetry to music.

I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to Mrs. Harris and also to Dr. Willis Patterson, Professor Emeritus of Voice, University of Michigan, for providing me with his recording of “The Weary Blues.”
I am forever grateful to Dr. Alfonse Anderson, my committee chair, advisor, and mentor for his encouragement and undying support throughout my tenure. I extend my sincere thanks to Dr. Tod Fitzpatrick, Dr. Michelle Latour, Dr. Ken Hanlon, and Professor Nate Bynum, who graciously served on my committee and offered their expertise during this process.

There are no words to express my gratitude to my parents who have supported me from one endeavor to the next. Thank you for your love and encouragement. I would not have been able to do this without you.

Finally, I am indebted to the composer Dorothy Rudd Moore. She has inspired me, coached me, and shared her vast knowledge of the history of our people throughout this process and I could never thank her enough.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ...........................................................................................................iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ......................................................................................v

CHAPTER ONE DOROTHY RUDD MOORE: AN INTRODUCTION .................1
  Biographical Information .....................................................................................1
  Compositional Style ............................................................................................7

CHAPTER TWO LANGSTON HUGHES .............................................................10
  Biographical Information ....................................................................................10
  Literary Style ....................................................................................................13

CHAPTER THREE THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE .......................................16

CHAPTER FOUR THE MUSIC ............................................................................19
  The Weary Blues ................................................................................................19
  Song For a Dark Girl ............................................................................................27
  Dream Variations ...............................................................................................37

CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSION ..........................................................................44

APPENDIX ONE LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES ..........................................46

APPENDIX TWO CATALOGUE OF VOCAL COMPOSITIONS .......................47

APPENDIX THREE SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY ...........................................48

BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................................................................49

VITA ....................................................................................................................52
CHAPTER ONE

“Ever since the beginning of her career in the early 1960s, the music of Dorothy Rudd Moore has been highly respected for its communicative power, integrity, intelligence, and impeccable craft.”¹ Dorothy Rudd Moore was born in Wilmington, Delaware, on June 4, 1940 to James Monroe Rudd and Rebecca L. Ryan Rudd and was the oldest of six siblings.

Her great-great-grandfather was the pastor of Mt. Salem Methodist Church. Although some spirituals were heard at Mt. Salem, the choir and congregation usually sang Methodist hymns and cantatas on special occasions. Its ministers were well educated, and their sermons were delivered with restraint and decorum. Classical music was part of the social fabric of the black community, and there were many opportunities to perform at church musicals, Easter services, church breakfasts, and teas.²

Because her mother was a popular singer in the community, she was exposed to music at a young age and had a natural gift. She began studying piano with her mother and was later taught by a community music teacher. “Moore has always been grateful to her parents for not placing any limits on her aspirations and allowing her to explore as many avenues as possible.”³ When she entered high school, she continued her piano lessons and also joined the school band and choir.

A particularly influential teacher in high school was Harry Andrews, who would later become superintendent of music for Wilmington’s schools. He formed a music theory class especially for Moore and a fellow student, and taught her to play the clarinet so that she could integrate the all-boys school band. By the time she entered college, she had a thorough musical grounding.⁴

² Ibid, 221.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Walker-Hill, 221.
Moore was unlike any of her classmates as she was attracted to what some may consider ‘high art’. She enjoyed poetry, reading, and classical music. Because of her love for music at an early age, she showed a focused dedication to developing her craft. Sometimes labeled a snob, Moore avoided hanging out with her classmates and instead listened to classical music on the radio.\(^5\)

Her fondness and appreciation for other composers and their compositions ranged the spectrum of all musical genres. Moore’s early and enduring influences were Johann Sebastian Bach and Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington. “She admired the organization and logic of Bach, and the structure and inventiveness of Ellington, who inspired her first serious composition for solo piano, titled *Flight*, written when she was 16.”\(^6\) She praised different compositional aspects of both Ellington and Bach. In Ellington, she revered the improvisatory style of his rhythms, the non-traditional harmonic progressions, and the way he highlighted the best qualities of each instrument through his arrangements. In Bach, she esteemed his treatment of counterpoint, his technical demands on the performer, and his mastery in diverse genres.

She attended Howard University in Washington, D.C. after her uncle convinced her not to attend Boston Conservatory, where she was originally accepted.\(^7\) Howard, a historically black university, has a rich musical heritage and many alumni have gone on to have prolific careers. Her uncle knew that this environment would expose her to many black musicians and provide her with the nurturing she would need.

Like many musicians, she felt that she should choose a major that provided immediate stability. She initially wanted to study music, but chose against it, accepting it

---

\(^5\) Walker-Hill, 221. 
\(^6\) Ibid., 228. 
\(^7\) Ibid., 221.
as more of a hobby. “Later she decided that composition was more than a side interest and changed her major, a decision that was supported by her teachers, Warner Lawson, dean of the fine arts department, and Mark Fax, her theory and composition teacher.”

She continued piano lessons, added voice lessons, and soon began composing pieces that earned her great recognition on and off campus.

While a student at Howard University, her career as a composer began to take shape. She wrote her first song cycle, *Songs from the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, in 1962. It is a cycle for mezzo-soprano and oboe based on text of Rudyard Kipling. She premiered the cycle in Paris of that same year and in 1975, she performed these songs in a recital in Carnegie Hall, and it was well received. She also completed her first symphony, *Symphony No. 1* during this time. In 1963, it was premiered by the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, D.C.

Her experiences at Howard expanded Dorothy’s world in more than musical directions. A three-month tour of South America and the Caribbean by the Howard University Concert Choir, directed by Warner Lawson, exposed her to places, people, and social conditions she had never known in her protected youth in New Castle. Her appetite was whetted for travel abroad. In 1963 she graduated magna cum laude and received a Lucy Moten Fellowship for study at the American Conservatory at Fountainebleau, France.

Like many other gifted American composers of this time, she wanted to further her studies in Europe. Because of a financial grant from the University, she was able to spend long periods of time in France. One of the most popular composition teachers in

---

8 Walker-Hill, 221.
9 Ibid., 222.
France was Nadia Boulanger. “She studied composition privately with Boulanger, sang in her madrigal choir, and took her class in form and analysis.”

At Fontainebleau, Boulanger was won over by Moore’s playing of the Bach *B Minor Prelude* from *The Well Tempered Clavier*. She refused to look at her *Symphony* saying, “You’re too young to write symphonies.” Boulanger was so impressed with her *Twelve Songs on the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyám*, for mezzo-soprano and oboe however, that she chose it for performance in a regular evening concert in the Jeu de Paume Hall at the Palace of Fontainebleau. Moore never forgot the rigor of Boulanger’s analysis, nor the pristine pitch and pronunciation she demanded of her madrigal singers.

From France, she returned to the United States and took residency in New York City. She later studied with Chou Wen-chung who was a student of Edgard Varèse. “The fusion of these two compositional styles gave her a foundation that is both a mixture of traditional and avant garde. She uses a combination of twentieth-century compositional techniques and African-American stylistic elements.”

While still an active composer and performer, she continued to be a music educator. She taught music history and appreciation at New York University and Bronx Community College. She was also on the music faculty at The Harlem School of the Arts, in addition to teaching private voice lessons. “While she did explore a career as a performer, Moore always considered herself, first and foremost, a composer. She said, ‘I was a reluctant performer, even though I had sung my whole life. I was always a composer. My husband called me ‘the reluctant soprano.’”

---

10 Walker-Hill, 222.
11 Ibid.
12 Gloria Harrison Quinlan, “A Contextual Analysis of Dorothy Rudd Moore’s Song Cycle *Sonnets on Love, Rosebuds, and Death*” (D.M.A. diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 1996), 98.
She performed her pieces throughout New York City and gained attention from many local musicians. After one of her concerts, she attended a reception at the home of Arthur Krim, an entertainment lawyer and friend. There, she met Kermit Moore, a composer in his own right, cellist and conductor.

The attraction must have been immediate and intense, because Dorothy began to compose the Baroque Suite for unaccompanied cello a few days after she met him, and presented it to him as a wedding gift at their marriage just three months later. Theirs has been a partnership of mutual inspiration and support; they have presented joint programs of their music, and both were founding members of the Society of Black Composers in 1968.14

The Society of Black Composers was a group of musicians who provided a forum of encouragement and support for one another. They published a newsletter, had an information center, performed first readings of each other’s music, and provided public concerts at Brooklyn Academy of Music, Harlem School of the Arts, and other surrounding institutions. Through this group, Moore and her husband met and gained the support of fellow musicians, and it opened many more performing opportunities throughout New York.

In 1978, she was commissioned by Opera Ebony to write an opera based on the life of Frederick Douglas. It took her eight years to complete the opera, and it became one of her most outstanding accomplishments. She wrote the libretto herself, and it covers the span of eighteen years of his life, from his 1844 escape from slavery to the Emancipation Proclamation signing in 1862. “The emotional triumphs and heartbreaks in

14 Walker-Hill, 223.
Douglass’ efforts to emancipate the slaves are all the more vividly revealed through Moore’s melodic and often contrapuntal treatment of the music.”

*Frederick Douglass* was premiered on June 28, 1985 by Opera Ebony in New York City and was met with rave reviews in the New York press. Gary Schmidgall reported on the premier in the October, 1985 issue of *Opera News*, “Moore displays rare ability to wed musical and dramatic motion, graceful lyric inventiveness and full command of the orchestral palate... It would not be surprising to see it *(Frederick Douglass)* take a place beside *Lizzie Borden, The Ballad of Baby Doe* and Thomson’s *Mother of Us All*. In one respect – its inspiring theme – it outclasses them all.”

Her ability to write the libretto for her opera *Frederick Douglass*, is in direct connection to her literary capabilities as a poet. In addition to studying music at a young age, she also was an avid reader of poetry and often wrote her own. “She had long written poetry as a way to respond to personal and world events, but never set these poems to music because she felt they were too complete as entities.”

The titles and words of her poems are indicative of her concerns: “To My Brothers” (about the black Americans serving in Vietnam) and “The Uninvited” (about the absence of black guests at the White House receptions). Many of her poems reveal her despair and rage at the human condition. She feels that she is “condemned to always see the glass half empty.”

For Moore, music is another way to respond to the world, and with transforming power and energy. During the racial unrest of the late 1960s and 70s, she wrote many of her compositions. She grew up during a time when black people were not considered as equals in this country. She was very verbal in her efforts to contribute to the struggle for

---

15 Moham, 55.  
16 Ibid., 56.  
17 Walker-Hill, 224.  
18 Walker-Hill, 224.  
19 Ibid.
civil rights and equal liberties. As seen through the literature she chose to set to music, she had a powerful message and her compositions were the way she communicated it. To highlight thematic ideas of racial conflict, she makes frequent use of dissonant sonorities. These elements of antagonism continue between all instruments to demonstrate an expression of injustice.

COMPOSITIONAL STYLE

Her compositional style is considered to be extremely personalized and modern. She celebrates her individuality and uses almost no fragments of what some consider African-American “idioms” in her music. “When Moore was asked how she felt about being categorized as an African-American woman composer, she responded, ‘That’s what I am. I am a composer who is female and who is African-American.‘”20 She didn’t like being labeled an “African-American composer” as the title was limiting, and she believed that it put herself, and other composers like her, in a box. She felt and showed that she was much more multi-dimensional than the use of “black idioms” and the restrictions that she believed they placed on other composers.

She has a dislike of labels, and elaborated on this subject in an interview with the author Wallace Cheatham: “We are all different…no composer that I know of would permit ‘typecasting.’…It is important that black composers not be ghettoized. Unfortunately certain forces are intent on polarizing our society…There are many black artists in all disciplines and each is an individual with his or her unique experiences.”21

20 Walker-Hill, 225.
21 Ibid.
Although she avoided “black idioms” in her music, she did make use of modern African-American compositional techniques used by other black composers along with her demonstrated mastery of the traditional European compositional form.\(^22\) Her *oeuvre* includes chamber music, instrumental pieces, orchestral works, choral works, solo songs, extended song cycles, and one opera.

She repeatedly expresses her admiration for Schubert, Schumann, Wolf, and Beethoven. Her music, however, is contrapuntal and harmonically complex, reminiscent of her two primary influences, Johann Sebastian Bach and Duke Ellington. She stated, “If I could take only one composer with me on a desert island, it would be Bach because of the beauty and order of his compositions – but also Duke Ellington because of the structure and inventiveness of his music.”\(^23\)

Because she began voice lessons at an early age and was an accomplished singer, she understood the voice and how to effectively set text to music. Her melodic lines, although challenging, are easy to sing with a properly developed vocal technique. “The songs of Dorothy Rudd Moore are contrapuntal, harmonically, and rhythmically sophisticated, and make dramatic use of contemporary compositional devices, such as dissonances, frequent key shifts, and melodic and rhythmic motifs.”\(^24\)

Most of her compositional output has come through commissions from companies as well as solo artists. Except for *The Weary Blues* (1972), her vocal solo works are all a part of song cycles.

\(^{22}\) Quinlan, 63.
\(^{23}\) Moham, 57.
\(^{24}\) Ibid., 4.
She whole-heartedly believes that her songs should not be excerpted but performed in the context of the cycle in its entirety. In her song cycles, she provides unification through key relationships, motives, and themes while exploring the complete emotional spectrum. She doesn’t treat the voice as a separate entity in her music. Even her vocal works are chamber pieces with voice, as distinguished from the voice being the primary focus with the instruments performing an accompany role.\textsuperscript{25}

THE POETRY

Dorothy Rudd Moore has high literary taste and is attracted to poetry that is powerful and commanding in its approaches to speaking about the experiences of black people in America. “Her powerful, dissonant settings of poetry express a deep spiritual response to the African-American condition, even if they do not usually employ a black idiomatic language.”\textsuperscript{26} She has a very systematic approach to setting these poems.

When setting poetry, she first absorbs the text at length, writing it out in longhand and then memorizing it. Each work is approached with a fresh outlook in terms of function, its text, or its instrumentation. “She has no preconceived notions of how it will sound, and each work suggests and assumes its own form.”\textsuperscript{27}

“To achieve continuity within the cycle, Moore decided on a point-of-view from which she wishes to approach the cycle, relying on this viewpoint and the purpose for which the piece is being written to dictate the choice of text. Moore emphasizes that, for her, choosing the poetry is both an intellectual exercise and an extremely personal choice.”\textsuperscript{28} For this reason, so many of her pieces are set to the poetry of Langston Hughes.

\textsuperscript{25} Quinlan, 8.
\textsuperscript{26} Walker-Hill, 228.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Moham, 57.
CHAPTER TWO

Langston Hughes was born on February 1, 1902, in Joplin, Missouri. He was considered to be one of the premiere poets and was very vocal about racism, even to the point of being investigated by the U.S. Government. After his parents divorced at a young age, he was raised by his grandmother. She taught him to have pride in his race, and it carried with him throughout his life. Using the oral tradition, popular in the black community, and recalling the racial experiences of her generation, she taught him the importance of becoming an activist in the fight for equal rights for everyone.²⁹

He began writing at an early age and was chosen by his peers to become the editor of his high school newspaper where he learned to write plays, poetry, and short stories. Young Hughes listened to blues and spirituals growing up, and he weaved these sounds into his own literature. “In school, he enjoyed the poems his teachers read from the works of Carl Sandburg, Vachel Lindsay, and Edgar Lee Masters.”³⁰ His influences also included American poets, Walt Whitman and Paul Lawrence Dunbar.³¹ “Though his contemporary, Countee Cullen, depended on sources in the poetry of John Keats, Hughes relied on allusions to the folk ballads of 1830 – 1850, on the nature and prophetic poems of Walt Whitman, and on the more contemplative verse of Vachel Lindsay.”³²

Throughout his young life, he lived with various relatives. He spent sporadic moments with his mother in numerous cities and even lived with his father, who fled to

²⁹ http://www.poemhunter.com/langston-hughes/biography/
³¹ Ibid., 15.
Mexico to escape the harsh realities of being a black man in America. He also spent some time living in Washington D.C. “Those were unhappy years; as a result, Hughes produced a great deal of poetry. The connection between low spirits and literary production is important in Hughes’s career.” The harder the times were for him, the more source material he drew upon.

Hughes was one of a limited number of African-American writers who was not afraid to speak out against racial inequality, and he used it to influence his writing. Against the criticism of many black writers, he chose to share in his works the uncelebrated sides of life in urban communities. Other black writers, such as James Baldwin, felt that only the good and noble aspects of black life should be revealed to the world. They felt certain qualities of black life were unattractive and wanted those things to remain within the community.

“The reviews of his own poetry collection, “Fine Clothes to the Jew” (1927), moreover, saddened Hughes because most of its hostile critics were black – commentators who assumed that self denial, an abandoning of dialect and sexual imagery, would lead to acceptance in white society.” Langston Hughes didn’t agree and wasn’t afraid to go against the grain. “He wanted to tell the stories of his people in ways that reflected their actual culture, including both their suffering and their love of music, laughter and language itself.”

He was known for his ability to colorfully portray black urban life from the twenties through the sixties. His mission was to draw attention to racial injustice and

---

33 Dickinson, 19.
34 Miller, The Art and Imagination of Langston Hughes, 15.
force Americans to acknowledge its existence. More than any of his literary contemporaries, he diligently documented every aspect of black life, including its frustrations.

Hughes translates racial beauty and ancestral heritage into verbal form, but the motivation is hardly the pure greed for objects and mere tools; for him the verbal structures are repositories for the soul and for celebration. Whereas for some others the motivation to use literary form may be material words in themselves, or the artistic externalization of physical need, Hughes uses it to suggest the fulfillment of the Dream.36

He is thought to be one of the first black writers to be able to support himself financially. Few blacks have been able to make a living solely through their writings.37 He frequently toured college campuses giving lectures, workshops, and briefly served on the faculties of Atlanta University and University of Chicago.38 “With the encouragement of Mary McLeod Bethune, President of Bethune-Cookman College, Hughes began a series of poetry readings in the educational centers of the South and West.”39

His writings captivated many by focusing on the ordinary people and not the educated. He sought to honor his race and change the attitudes towards it.40 “Langston Hughes’s works preserve the jazz rhythms of his time, the southern dialect with which he was familiar, and both the pathos and humor of the folk Blacks whom he loved.”41

“Harlem is Hughes’s principal subject and inspiration. Aside from two academic

36 Miller, 71.
37 Dickinson, 112.
39 Dickinson, 60.
40 Miller, 11.
41 Ibid.
appointments, he lived this period in New York, close to his favorite people, the urban Negroes.”

He was able to spend some time touring the world. He visited Africa and frequently went to Europe. This period in Hughes’s life was relatively free from care since racial injustice was easy to forget in Europe. Back in the United States, however, the same racial prejudices afflicted black people.

Upon returning to the States, he found that the fight for equality was like a raging war and different groups had various ways of tackling the issue. While he did support and agree with the founding ideals of the Black Power movements, he felt that the approaches of these young people were too harsh, and it made them seem angry. Hughes agreed that this kind of emotionally driven writing was useful, but objected to the philosophy that all Negro writers must follow the same pattern. Hughes felt he should write about what he knew best. As he said, “I knew only the people I had grown up with, and they weren’t people whose shoes were always shined, who had been to Harvard, or who heard of Bach.”

LITERARY STYLE

“Langston Hughes has written librettos, song lyrics, plays, and a musical comedy. He functions throughout the impressive volume of literature as a wry and sympathetic commentator on the world of the Negro.” He gave voice to those who otherwise were

---

42 Dickinson, 82.
43 Ibid., 19.
44 Langston Hughes, The Big Sea (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940), 268.
45 Dickinson, 82.
silent and exposed what was once a secret. “He emerged as a writer whose complex use of metaphor belied his seemingly transparent treatments of folk life.”

“While the conservative writers peopled their poems and stories with doctors, social workers, and dancers, Hughes and his friends wrote about prostitutes, laborers, and drunks.” He wasn’t afraid of what those on the outside thought. He wasn’t concerned with whether or not he was feeding into a stereotype. Regardless if he shared these stories, the stereotypes would still persist.

He was particularly drawn to the rhythms of African-American music. He was a jazz and blues enthusiast and mimicked the syncopations in his word schemes. One anthologist commented, “With his prolific imagination and sensitive ear, Hughes raised to the level of art the material of the blues and the jazz idiom as well as the songs of the gospel singers and the ‘shouts’ of the rural South.” He crafted his verse based on the sound and dialect of black vernacular and imitated the rhythmic energy in his texts. This is one of the characteristics that set him apart from other writers and because of it, he was able to venture into different metrical rhythms in his literature. Through shaping his rhythms to match the meter of the language of black people, he was able to retain a certain level of authenticity and maintained this throughout his career. This became a signature of his works.

In order to fully understand much of his output, the listener needs to be familiar with black colloquialisms. He often employs the slang of his people, and it reads as a foreign language with those unversed in the dialect. “Whether abroad or at home, the

---

46 Miller, 6.
47 Dickinson, 43.
words may serve either to liberate victims or to enslave them.” 49 Yet the political posture must not obscure literary experimentation. “When Langston Hughes’ bluesy wit blossoms fully, he achieves a stream of consciousness and an effective sweet in dramatic expression as well as psychological association. Where the newspaper headlines displace the political narrative, the speaker has told the story through the visual flash.” 50 Hughes often writes on controversial, racial themes. His life and career depict the negatives that blacks faced in this country as he continued to write only in realism. 51

He sustained his career as a prolific writer and activist until he lost his battle with prostate cancer on May 22, 1967, at the age of 65.

49 Miller, 76.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., 3.
CHAPTER THREE

“The melding of disparate influences, this fusion of traditional artistic sensibilities with the innovations and optimism of African-American artists, is a trademark of the period known as the Harlem Renaissance, when post-World War I blacks began to assert themselves economically, and also in the arts.”

The Harlem Renaissance was a literary movement that began in Harlem, New York, in the 1920s and lasted through the 30s. It expanded to other art forms such as dance and beyond the United States, to the Caribbean and France. It was a time in American black history when artists came together in mutual respect and support of one another. Against the criticism of some conservative black writers, they created their own venue to promote and perform their works in a reaction to constantly being denied by the white establishments. It was a period that encouraged, for the first time, the celebration and embracing of black culture. The movement for an enlarged concept of equality prompted this group of young writers to reject the old patterns and create a new Negro literature. “Langston Hughes’s career is closely connected with this group’s assertion of literary independence, which was a part of a more general racial awakening sometimes referred to as the Harlem Renaissance or the New Negro Movement.”

Hughes and his contemporaries decided that it was time to tell the story of the Negro in America without being apologetic. They weren’t afraid to share with outsiders the positives and the negatives of black urban life. While some black writers were ashamed and criticized Hughes and other members of the Harlem Renaissance, he was unremorseful about sharing the stories of prostitutes, drug addicts, and pimps.

---

52 Harrison, 10
53 Dickinson, 3.
Not only did the period of the Harlem Renaissance liberate black writers, black people in all arts began to see an increase in performing opportunities. “It was a period,” as Hughes reports, “when every season there was at least one hit play on Broadway acted by a Negro cast. And Negro authors were being published with much greater frequency and much more publicity than ever before or since in history.”\textsuperscript{54} Large-scale publishers not only supported individual black authors, but for the first time created anthologies of their writings.\textsuperscript{55}

Black writers and musicians during this period used the folklore of the race as a source of inspiration. “While combining this with the contemporary practices of the day, a new art form was born. The poets, perhaps even more self-consciously than the composers, blended traditional and contemporary artistic ideas. The connection throughout the publications of these writers was the topic of racial inequality in the United States.”\textsuperscript{56} They tackled race relations head on and were not afraid or intimidated into silence. Hughes and his contemporaries made it a point to tell the stories of the lower-class blacks, who would otherwise go unnoticed.

Black musicians during the Harlem Renaissance also made their mark within the movement. “They created a new style by combining traditional compositional techniques such as waltzes, contrapuntal writing, and scoring the work for voice, piano, and violin with techniques such as an abundant use of syncopation, pitch modification,
ostinato, call and response, and changing meters, which have been identified as important elements in Black Music.”

“With his circle of literary friends, his publication success, and his fresh realism, Langston Hughes has been correctly characterized as the most representative and productive member of the New Negro Movement.”

---


CHAPTER FOUR

THE WEARY BLUES

Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,
Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,
   I heard a Negro play.
Down on Lenox Avenue the other night
By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light
   He did a lazy sway . . .
   He did a lazy sway . . .
To the tune o' those Weary Blues.
With his ebony hands on each ivory key
He made that poor piano moan with melody.
   O Blues!
Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool
He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool.
   Sweet Blues!
   Coming from a black man's soul.
   O Blues!
In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone
I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan--
   "Ain't got nobody in all this world,
   Ain't got nobody but ma self:
   I's gwine to quit ma frownin'
   And put ma troubles on the shelf."

Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor.
He played a few chords then he sang some more--
   "I got the Weary Blues
   And I can't be satisfied.
   Got the Weary Blues
   And can't be satisfied--
   I ain't happy no mo'
   And I wish that I had died."

And far into the night he crooned that tune.
The stars went out and so did the moon.
The singer stopped playing and went to bed
While the Weary Blues echoed through his head.
   He slept like a rock or a man that's dead.
“The Weary Blues” is a part of Hughes’ first collection of poems, of the same name, published in 1926, at only 24 years of age. His intention was that they would be read with musical accompaniment in the clubs he so often frequented. The best poems in *The Weary Blues* group themselves around themes of pride and protest. “They state simply and precisely the reasons why the Negro is what he is and how he fits into the American way of life.”59

Perhaps because of his own unhappiness and because of the infectious rhythms he heard in jazz clubs, Hughes completed “The Weary Blues” in 1924. He has referred to “The Weary Blues” as his lucky poem because it was instrumental in launching his literary career. “Written in the cadence of the blues, this poem tells the story of a Harlem musician who plays the piano all night and then goes home to sleep.”60

The speaker begins the poem by creating the mood seen and felt in the blues clubs of Harlem. He paints a picture describing what the club looks like, “pale dull pallor of an old gas light,” what he hears, “I heard a Negro play,” and what the blues musician is doing, “…rocking back and forth” all within the first five lines of the poem. From the beginning, the speaker creates the environment and conjures up a somber mood.

Though arranged closely to an actual blues song, Hughes uses an irregular rhyme scheme because there is no repetitive leading line. “The form of the blues, Sterling Brown points out, is fairly strict: a leading line, repeated (sometimes with slight variations), and generally a rhyming third line. Sometimes the first line does not rhyme.”61 “The form is simple, but well adapted to express the laments of folk Negros

---

59 Dickinson, 39.
60 Ibid., 20.
61 Ibid., 46.
over hard luck, ‘careless’ or unrequited love, broken family life, or general dissatisfaction with a cold and trouble-filled world.”

“The Down on Lenox Avenue” – Lenox Avenue is one of the signature avenues in Harlem. It runs from Central Park at 110th Street up to 147th Street. On it are some of the most iconic landmarks in Harlem, including Harlem Hospital, The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Sylvia’s Soul Food Restaurant, and the typical place where the scene of this poem may have taken place, Lenox Lounge. Although Harlem is actually “uptown” in relationship to the rest of Manhattan, Hughes says “down on Lenox” to perhaps drawn attention to the emotional state of the ‘down-trodden,’ or the people who live there.

“The Down on Lenox Avenue”

“A Blues!” “Sweet Blues!” “O Blues!” – This poem is a combination of lyrics and narrative. Three times the speaker abruptly interjects unrelated material during the narrative. In the black church, it is common for the congregation to interrupt the speaker with shouts of agreement, often times with a hearty “AMEN!” or simply repeating what the speaker just stated. In this case, Hughes is evoking the idea of that “call and response feedback” with emotional outbursts connected to the blues. “The rhythms of the blues, which appear in the poetry of this period, are so distinct that it is easy to imagine one of the greatest singers shouting them out to the accompaniment of a rickety piano.”

Throughout the poem he uses imagery with words like “drowsy,” “lazy,” and “rickety.” These words give accurate description and life to particular words he used to create the scene. He also creates contrast comparing the “ebony hands” against the “ivory keys.” “The Weary Blues” is melodious in its rhythms and completely delightful.

64 Dickinson, 46.
in its picture of the tired cabaret musician. “In blues, such as this, Hughes found a perfect medium for his verse. They spoke the language of the common man with precisely the right mixture of happiness and grief.”65 The poem ends in the same mood it began, the singer is tired and goes to bed.

“The Weary Blues, like most of Hughes’s writing, is a vivid index to contemporary Harlem life. David Daiches, a literary critic, in a discerning comment on Hughes’s literary objectives, emphasized this very point.”66 “Weary Blues” was met with harsh criticism from other black writers because they felt that it fed into the stereotypical Harlem rather than fighting against it.

Moore’s musical approach to this poem is consistent with what Hughes intended. She scored the poem for baritone, cello, and piano. The piece opens with an extended cello solo that provides recurring thematic material. In it, she introduces the triplet figure and half-step relationships that are seen throughout the piece. The piano enters playing a C Major 7th chord approached by half-step. This idea serves as bookends as it is introduced in the beginning and then is restated at the end (Example 4.1).

Example 4.1

---

65 Dickinson, 21.
66 Ibid., 37.
Mrs. Moore sets the tempo at moderato and instructs that it is to be played “a la blues.” To aid the performers in achieving the sound of the blues, she composes the “swing” in the rhythm using syncopation and triplet figures (Example 4.2).

Example 4.2

Not only does the syncopation aid in the “swing” rhythm, it also functions as text painting because the first time the composer uses the triplet figure is when the speaker says, “rocking back and forth.”

With the exception of a brief melisma each time the word “weary” appears, the text is set syllabically to ensure that the words are understood clearly (Example 4.3).

Example 4.3
The range of the vocal line rarely exceeds an octave, which draws attention to the low energy of the narrator, further adding to the melancholy of the blues.

Throughout the beginning of the piece, the cello is only heard when the poem makes references to the music. For example, when the narrator says, “…that poor piano moan,” the cello plays a figure indicative of the piano (Example 4.4).

**Example 4.4**

When the poem switches from a narrative to a lyric, the composer employs a fuller texture and the cello, with the exception of a few pitches, doubles the voice. After the climatic full-textured middle section, at measure 72, she returns to the opening tempo and the cello part no longer has soloistic qualities, but now takes on the character of *basso continuo* (Example 4.5).
The piano part returns to its original harmonic progressions one octave lower. Except for the voice, each instrument drops out on the text, “The singer stopped playing and went to bed.” The cello re-enters doubling the vocal line.

When the narrator says, “He slept like a rock or a man that’s dead,” Moore indicates a slower tempo and ends that section with a moment of silence. Without the voice, the other instruments return, playing the opening material with instructions that the piano should be in strict time with the cello (Example 4.6).
This piece is not suitable for a younger singer, as like most of Moore’s output, it is rhythmically and harmonically challenging. The baritone must be able to provide contrast in repetition and also be able to make dramatic distinction between the narrative and the lyric sections of the poetry. The singer must have a keen ear, accurate timing, and the ability to convey the mood of melancholy without sacrificing the energy demanded for proper vocal technique.
SONG FOR A DARK GIRL

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

Although short, this poem cannot be mistaken for simple. “Song For a Dark Girl” was written in 1927 and like “Weary Blues,” it is a narrative, but this time the speaker is in first person. It was first seen in his play “Don’t You Want to Be Free?”, following a lynching scene. In a few words, this poem speaks volumes against the American lynching culture. Hughes grew up during this time. He was so terrified of traveling to the South that he once said, “When I was a child, headlines in the colored papers used to scare the daylights out of me. I grew up in Kansas and for years I was afraid to go down south, thinking – as a result of the Negro Press – that I might be lynched the minute I got off the train.”67 Hughes continued to unrelentingly respond to lynching throughout his writings for the rest of his life.68 “No poet spoke about lynching more than Langston

---

68 Ibid., 1.
Hughes. Behind many of his best poems, the ghosts of lynch victims hover like watermarks on bonded paper.”⁶⁹

“It is estimated that at least 4,742 blacks were lynched between 1882 and 1968. It is during this time in American history that all of Hughes poetry was written.”⁷⁰ A lynch mob would find an innocent black man and without trial, torture him, often times beyond recognition, for hours and hang him from a tree for the public to see. The perpetrators of these gruesome acts were hardly ever brought to justice, as law enforcement often participated. Hughes was surrounded with this fear and through his poetry addressed it repeatedly. “Langston Hughes, encountering American lynching culture in his youth required a steadying of nerves; his response later intensified into anger as this travesty of American justice was hypocritically tolerated by the masses.”⁷¹

“He engaged in a lifelong national campaign against the American lynching culture. In fact, Hughes addressed, referenced, responded, or alluded to lynching in nearly three dozen different poems.”⁷²

His anti-lynching poem “Christ in Alabama” was so controversial that Hughes’s appearance at UNC-Chapel Hill on the first day of its publication in 1931 required that a police guard be stationed outside Gerrard Hall for his public reading. Addressing lynching was not easy for Hughes or his publishers. Despite facing intense censorship, Hughes kept responding to lynching throughout his lifetime. His “Dream Deferred” is one of the world’s most well-known poems. Here he quietly but assertively interrogated equal opportunity in America by using lynching as a coded analogy. He reactivated the idea of fruit made famous in Billie Holiday’s song “Strange Fruit.”

⁷⁰ W. Jason Miller, 3.
⁷¹ Ibid., 5.
⁷² Ibid., 1.
Where Holiday sang of fruit “for the sun to rot,” Hughes updated the metaphor by asking if dreams “dry up like a raisin in the sun?” His poem is America’s most memorable record of the emotional scars left by lynching.\textsuperscript{73}

He felt a sense of obligation in speaking the truth about this brutality. Like so many other writers, Hughes recognized early on that mainstream daily newspapers offered inadequate representations of lynching. “Hughes took several opportunities to offer counter narratives to these newspaper reports in his short stories, plays, and poetry.”\textsuperscript{74} With the enormous risk of losing his own life, he assumed the responsibility of forcing America to face this part of its culture head on.

Dorothy Rudd Moore’s musical approach runs parallel to the literary ideas of Hughes. She includes this piece in her work \textit{Sonnets on Love, Rosebuds, and Death}, a cycle of eight pieces for high voice, violin, and piano of 1976. \textit{Sonnets on Love, Rosebuds, and Death} follows the life and experiences of a young woman through the combined poetry of other African-American poets. “In utilizing these eight poems in her song cycle, Mrs. Moore demonstrated sensitivity and insight into the phenomenon of love, and illustrated the complexity of the interaction between men and women.”\textsuperscript{75} “Despite the title of the cycle, “Song For a Dark Girl” is not a sonnet, and is the only poem in this cycle which explicitly addresses racial themes.”\textsuperscript{76}

The piece begins with the violin playing a rhythmic motive that it retains throughout. Moore sets the tempo at \textit{allegro energico a marcato} as the violin plays a steady stream of eighth notes, perhaps representing the racing heart of the girl or the

\textsuperscript{73} Florida Current Word Press (accessed April 4, 2012.)  
\textsuperscript{74} W. Jason Miller, 13.  
\textsuperscript{75} Quinlan, 61.  
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 47.
angry roars of the lynch mob. The piano enters playing strong forte octaves, signifying the emotional weight she is facing (Example 4.7).

Example 4.7

In this song, the story begins with the speaker setting the scene location. “Way down south in Dixie” recalls the old popular minstrel songs, yet it tells a different story. The juxtaposition is that “Dixie” celebrated life in the south and this poem describes the horrors African-Americans faced there. To make the connection evident, the voice enters on the syncopated beat and the melodic line mimics the old minstrel tune (Example 4.8). This line is repeated three times throughout the song as the speaker uses it to reiterate not only where this takes place but the darkness of “Dixie” for black people.

At the end of the first three melodic phrases, Moore included a portamento up to an ‘x’ in place of a note head. The performer would assume that Moore is alerting the singer to use sprechstimme here to further display the emotional state of the narrator (Example 4.8).

However, “the composer noted that although the score indicates a portamento where the word “Dixie” preceded the “huhn,” her intent was for the singer to utter a
guttural cry in the manner of the field cries. She also wanted the singer to emphasize the “n” in “huhn” to dramatize the subject’s pain.”

Example 4.8

This poem is set in two stanzas. The first shows a racial divide between “them” – those who lynched her lover and “me” – those of darker skin who were the victims. The second turns to religion as a means for answers. “Introduced in the first stanza and seen in the second, Hughes brilliantly injects by contrast the ugly underbelly of the south of the period with the parenthetical and understated second line ‘Break the Heart of Me.’” Here, the speaker pauses and reiterates, not only sadness, but a broken heart. Musically, Moore sets the parenthetical phrase down a fourth so that it is less present and it is made clear to the listener that it is not a part of the story but a description of an emotional state (Example 4.9).

77 Quinlan, 90.
78 Ibid., 48.
Example 4.9

The next line, “They hung my black young lover,” Moore replaced the word “black” with a more open word “dark.” Because Moore was also a singer, she understood the challenges in singing particular vowel sounds and felt that the more open mouth spacing for “dark” would be technically easier (Example 4.10).

Example 4.10

The second stanza opens with “Way down south in Dixie.” Unlike the first time, Moore indicated that this should be sung piano. This is to allow a stark contrast of the next line “I asked the white Lord Jesus” which she sets at forte. It is challenging for the narrator to pray to a white Jesus who looks like the members of the lynch mob who just hang her lover and she asks herself, “What’s the use of prayer? (Example 4.11).”
Example 4. 11

“The use of syncopation continues as the lover asks “What was the use of prayer?” and the composer suggested that during a performance, the singer should show vocally the bitterest sound on this line in order to capture the inner emotions felt by the love.”\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{79} Quinlan, 91.
The violin continues to interject the opening motive reestablishing the energy of the scene. Up until the final statement of “Way down south in Dixie,” Moore used very few accidentals. Now, with a change in mood, there is a shift in tonality and beginning at measure 45, c-sharp minor is the new tonal center (Example 4.12).

Example 4.12
Example 4.12 cont.

Throughout this poem, Hughes compares the hung lover to the crucifixion of Jesus. He describes the location of the lynching at the “cross roads.” This signifies Christ’s hanging from the cross and also tells the reader that the subject of the poem was hung in a place for all the community to see, the crossroads. Hughes describes the lover’s body as “naked on a gnarled and naked tree.” This is also a comparison to the scene of Christ’s crucifixion as described in the Bible in Isaiah and the Gospels of the New Testament. Finally, the violin returns with the opening motive and, with the piano, builds dramatically to fortissimo. The piece ends on an octave on c-sharp minor in the left hand of the piano and all other instruments fall silent, signifying death.
Just as Moore provided dynamic contrast, Hughes provided textual contrast. In this poem we see the opposition of a “dark girl” praying to a “white Lord” and in “Weary Blues” we saw the “ebony hands” playing on “ivory keys.” This is done to show further division between those involved. In this piece, Moore avoided extreme vocal range, set the text syllabically, and maintained scalar melodic lines.
DREAM VARIATIONS

To fling my arms wide
In some place of the sun,
   To whirl and to dance
Till the white day is done.
Then rest at cool evening
   Beneath a tall tree
While night comes on gently,
   Dark like me-
   That is my dream!

To fling my arms wide
In the face of the sun,
   Dance! Whirl! Whirl!
Till the quick day is done.
Rest at pale evening...
   A tall, slim tree...
Night coming tenderly
   Black like me.

While “Song For a Dark Girl” carries overt connections to lynching, “Dream Variations” is a sort of corrective to American lynching culture. “It serves as a hopeful reminder of how African-Americans can again connect with the natural world once they become free of fear.”80 “Written in two stanzas, “Dream Variations” has nine lines in the first and eight in the second, signifying the possible dwindling of the dream. While the persona longs for his dream, he sees the externalization of it in his love for nature, the place, and the sun.”81

In “Dream Variations,” Hughes uses a simple language to paint the picture of freedom. Like the style of form of the American blues, emotion and heartfelt longing penetrates throughout the poem. Also, like the blues, he makes use of repetition to

---

80 W. Jason Miller, 136.
81 R. Baxter Miller, 56.
reiterate and characterize the hardships of life in the narrator’s current state. The speaker paints the picture of the dream and then encourages the reader to pursue it unrelentingly. Hughes often wrote about dreams in his poetry. He had, for example in “A Dream Deferred” (1951) and “The Dream Keeper” (1925), a remarkable ability to vividly describe the dream and transport the reader to that very place.

In 1923, Hughes visited Africa. In his autobiography The Big Sea, he wrote:

> When I saw the dust – green hills in the sunlight, something took hold of me inside. My African, Motherland of the Negro peoples! And me, a Negro! Africa! …it was… the Africa I had dreamed about – wild and lovely, the people dark and beautiful, the palm trees tall, the sun, bright.  

This quote accurately sums up the inspiration behind “Dream Variations.” He describes what he saw and the emotional way it captured him. In the year following his visit, he published this poem.

In the first stanza, the speaker inserts himself into the center of the dream, “To fling my arms wide in some place of the sun” immediately signifies freedom in that the speaker is no longer bound by the negativities of this world and the shackles of oppression have been loosed. “Some place of the sun” is assumed to refer to Africa where there is warmth, it is restful, and it is paradise. The speaker further describes this land complete with “cool evenings” and “tall trees.” And as the sun sets, “Night comes on tenderly, black like me” is a line of resignation. It declares that the struggles are over, and the speaker now has peace.

---

82 Hughes, The Big Sea, 36.
Hughes was one of the first poets to celebrate dark skin at a time when people were ashamed of it. In this poem, by comparing the “tender night” to “dark skin” gives dark skin a positive position. It is no longer shamed, but now acclaimed.

In the second stanza, the speaker has a harsher tone. He uses exclamation declaring what he’ll do in the ‘face’ of the sun. Here, “In the face of the sun” evokes defiance. Hughes leaves what the speaker is defiant against up to the reader. The speaker may be dancing in the ‘face’ of oppression, racism, bigotry, or poverty. “Dance! Whirl! Whirl!” are all commands where the speaker may either be talking to himself or encouraging those around him to join. This is a dance of freedom in spite of circumstances.

This second stanza is composed of the same images but with a more exaggerated emotion. Like “Weary Blues” and “Song For a Dark Girl,” Hughes again makes stark contrasts between images. In this poem, he talks of the “white day” and the “dark night.” He also uses terms like “pale” and “black” for further examples of contrasts.

Dorothy Rudd Moore set “Dream Variations” in her cycle From the Dark Tower, written in 1970. It is a song cycle for mezzo-soprano, cello, and piano and was first commissioned by her husband and then later commissioned for orchestration by Metropolitan Opera Mezzo-soprano, Hilda Harris. The cycle is based on eight poems of African-American poets.

“Dream Variations”, written in g-sharp minor, opens outlining the theme in the sub-mediant. The sixteenth note figures in the right hand serve as a “dance motive” that is present throughout the entire piece (Example 4.13).
The cello assumes the role of the accompaniment and mainly serves in doubling the left hand of the piano. The vocal line is set syllabically with a brief steady melisma on the word “dream” (Example 4.14).

This is done to highlight the dream-like qualities the composer specifically asked for.

For the first time, in measure 36, the composer introduces the tonic. This begins the defiant second stanza. She further illustrates defiance by setting “In the face of the sun” on a leap of a diminished 5th up to the word “face.” The energy continues to build to a forte “Dance! Whirl! Whirl!” In coaching with the composer, the author was instructed to add emphasis to the downbeats of measures 46 – 48 by accenting the beginning consonants (Example 4.15).
As the second stanza draws to a close, the dynamics are lowered to mezzo piano to allow the singer to return to the dream-like and reflective qualities of the opening of the piece. With a slight ritard at measure 60, the composer desires the singer to command control throughout the phrase “Black like me” (Example 4.16).
Example 4.16

The cello and the piano return to the original tempo and restate the opening motives as a sign of resolve and rest (Example 4.17).
Example 4.17

To effectively perform this piece, it is important for the singer to have outstanding intonation and an accurate ear. “While her settings are lyrical and inventive, they are extremely sophisticated and demand a singer who is an excellent musician with an extensive vocal range and exceptional dramatic ability.”

---

Moham, 78.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Through their art forms, both Dorothy Rudd Moore and Langston Hughes expressed their radical emotions toward racism and made their voices heard. “Moore said that at the time she composed much of this music, she needed a way to express her support for the struggle toward a black nationalist identity, and to vent her anger at events of the late 1960s.”84 The themes throughout the pieces are unified through black artistry, anger, and adversity.

Langston Hughes is regarded as one of America’s greatest lyricists, and like Moore, his works celebrated black life in America and promoted equality among all races. “He has experimented with many forms but his central purpose has remained constant – to interpret the living American Negro. Hughes’s writing is, in a sense, a social document reflecting the various nuances of race relationships since 1920.”85

“In the 1920s, Hughes’s poems made two major points; first, the Negro was a proud and sensitive member of society, and second, he resented the stereotypes, hate, and misunderstanding commonly directed at him by the whites.”86

Daiches said, “Langston Hughes’s poetry is what, in terms of the art of the motion picture, would be called a documentary. His concern is to document the moods and problems of the American Negro.”87 “Hughes has performed two major literary services; first, he has clarified for the Negro audience their own strength and dignity and, second,

84 Walker-Hill, 234.
85 Dickinson, 4.
86 Ibid., 41.
he has supplied the white audience with an explanation of how the Negro feels and what he wants.”

Hughes’s writing has been motivated by the immediate problems of being African-American. He has illuminated these problems with optimism and humor. “Hughes believes the Negro has a right to share in the American dream of opportunity and freedom.”

Moore, like Hughes, used repetition as a means to reiterate an idea or mood. As he repeated the text, she repeated pitches in the vocal line, rhythmic figures, harmonies in the piano, and the cello or violin repeats the opening motive throughout. “Moore’s attraction to Hughes’s works is evident as she set many of his poems and they lend themselves to music because the structures of his poems read like ballads.”

“Because she is also a poet, her attention to detail when setting text is sensitive and calls on a wide range of techniques to convey the moods and emotions that it suggests.”

She was able to accurately capture through music what Hughes captured through text and the combination of the two entities made for a more vivid depiction of the lives and experiences of black people in this country.

---

88 Dickinson, 115.
89 Ibid., 116.
90 Harrison, 64.
91 Ibid.
APPENDIX ONE

LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>“Weary Blues”</td>
<td>mm. 10-11</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>“Weary Blues”</td>
<td>mm. 13-15</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>“Weary Blues”</td>
<td>m. 26</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>“Weary Blues”</td>
<td>mm. 32-35</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>“Weary Blues”</td>
<td>m. 72</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>“Weary Blues”</td>
<td>mm. 81-85</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>“Song For a Dark Girl”</td>
<td>mm. 1-7</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>“Song For a Dark Girl”</td>
<td>mm. 8-10</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>“Song For a Dark Girl”</td>
<td>mm. 12-14</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>“Song For a Dark Girl”</td>
<td>mm. 17-19</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>“Song For a Dark Girl”</td>
<td>mm. 24-36</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>“Song For a Dark Girl”</td>
<td>mm. 37-56</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>“Dream Variations”</td>
<td>mm. 1-3</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>“Dream Variations”</td>
<td>mm. 31-35</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>“Dream Variations”</td>
<td>mm. 36-48</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>“Dream Variations”</td>
<td>mm. 59-64</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>“Dream Variations”</td>
<td>mm. 64-70</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX TWO

CATALOGUE OF VOCAL COMPOSITIONS*

Reflections (symphonic wind ensemble), 1962.

Twelve Quatrains from the Rubaiyat (song cycle for soprano and oboe), 1962.

Symphony No. 1, 1963.

Baroque Suite for Cello (chamber piece), 1965.


Modes (string quartet), 1968.

Lament for Nine Instruments (flute, oboe, clarinet, trumpet, trombone, percussion, violin, viola, and cello), 1969.

From the Dark Tower (mezzo-soprano voice, cello, and piano), 1970.

Dirge and Deliverance (cello) 1971.

Sonnets on Love, Rosebuds, and Death (soprano voice, violin, and piano), 1975.

Dream and Variations (piano), 1974.

In Celebration (chorus, soprano and baritone solos, and piano), 1977.

Weary Blues (baritone voice, cello, and piano), 1979.

Frederick Douglass (opera), 1981-85. Libretto also by the composer.

A Little Whimsy (piano), 1982.

Transcension (chamber orchestra), 1985-86.

Flowers of Darkness (song cycle, tenor voice and piano), 1988-89.

* Scores of Mrs. Moore’s compositions can be found with the American Composers Alliance.
APPENDIX THREE

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Recordings of the musical compositions of Dorothy Rudd Moore can be located at the University of Colorado at Boulder in the Helen Walker-Hill Collection in the University Library. The Helen Walker-Hill Collection comprises photocopies and audio recordings of 110 black women composers’ musical compositions. They date from 1890 to the present.

Series II: Audio Recordings

Box 19

Cassette Tapes

Tape 9
Moore, Dorothy Rudd
“From the Dark Tower” performed by Hilda Harris, Mezzo-soprano. Cespica Records, Ltd. 1980.

Tape 11
Moore, Dorothy Rudd

Tape 12
Moore, Dorothy Rudd
“Sonnets of Love, Rosebuds, and Death” performed by Dorothy Rudd Moore, soprano, Vincent Esposito, cello, Wayne Sanders, piano. Wilmington, Delaware, May 18, 1980.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Academy of American Poets, “*Langston Hughes,*”


Florida Current Word Press, “A Sad Chapter of Black History. Lynching in America,


Harris, Hilda. Mezzo-soprano *From the Dark Tower,* by Dorothy Rudd Moore. Cespico Records, Ltd. 1980.


Moore, Dorothy Rudd, “From the Dark Tower,” score, 1972, American Composers Alliance.


VITA

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

LaToya A. Lain

Home Address:
3050 South Nellis Blvd. #2027
Las Vegas, Nevada 89121

Degrees:
Bachelor of Arts, 1999
Florida State University

Master of Music, 2003
University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music

Special Honors and Awards:

Golden Key International Honor Society for Graduate Students, 2012
Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions Encouragement Award Winner, 2004
Gerda Lissner Competition Encouragement Award Winner, 2003
National Association of Teachers of Singing 1st Place State Competition, 1997
National Association of Teachers of Singing 2nd Place Regional Competition, 1996

Dissertation Title:
*An Examination of the Compositional Style of Dorothy Rudd Moore and It’s Interaction with the Poetic Intentions of Langston Hughes*

Dissertation Examination Committee:
Chairperson, Dr. Alfonse Anderson, DMA
Committee Member, Dr. Tod Fitzpatrick, DMA
Committee Member, Dr. Ken Hanlon, DMA
Committee Member, Dr. Michelle Latour, DMA
Graduate Faculty Representative, Nate Bynum