Visual Elements of the Poetic:
Re-representing Identities of the Harlem Renaissance

By

Emily Burgess

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ABSTRACT

BURGESS, EMILY Visual Elements of the Poetic: Re-representing Identities of the Harlem Renaissance

ADVISORS: Professor Claire Bracken and Professor Katherine Lynes

In this thesis I will discuss how reading Harlem Renaissance poetry in terms of visual arts offers an overlooked and interdisciplinary understanding of the period's struggle to re-represent identity. Past scholarship has heavily focused on the influence of music on poetry, disregarding the interplay of visual arts with the poetic. While recent work with the poetic has presented a broader understanding of the types of identities expressed in the Harlem Renaissance, and some scholars have acknowledged the importance of visual arts in re-representing identity, these projects have not taken the two subjects into consideration conjointly.

To show the interactions of poetry and visual art during the period, I will discuss the poetry of Langston Hughes, Helene Johnson, and Gwendolyn Bennett in conjunction with the paintings of Aaron Douglas to highlight particular visual instances in the poetic. In Chapter 1, I will consider the content of poetry, or the imagery and word choice of a poem, with Douglas' work to show the discrete factors, forces and issues that play a role in defining identity. In Chapter 2, I will analyze poetic structures alongside the visual in order to illustrate how identity was restructured, and how the African American mentality of the period perceived the issue of re-representing oneself. In Chapter 3, I will apply the methodology used in Chapters 1 and 2 to literary journals in order to show

how the packaging and presentation of seemingly opposing views of identity are more interactive than commonly perceived.

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Introduction:
A History of Representation

The relationship between the visual and the poetic is a seldom considered subject when regarding the Harlem Renaissance, which began in the 1920s. Representation of African American history, culture, and modern society underwent major reconsideration during the period, and re-representations of African American experience were largely expressed in visual and textual forms. In order to understand the movement and its effects on perceptions of African American experience, it is essential to first understand the representations that characterized preceding decades. Literature and visual art offer a means to track these representations.

The 19th and early 20th centuries were particularly limited in representations of African American life. White Americans flooded the media with negative images of African Americans to instill a belief that the two races were inherently and inescapably different from one another. More so, African Americans were portrayed as "naturally" lesser people in terms of intelligence, economic capability, artistic ability, and moral integrity.[1] In art, specifically, depictions of African Americans, as designed by white Americans, were limited to scenes that linked back to plantation days and promoted the dehumanization of blacks. One such example is found in the photographs of lynching victims that were used as souvenir postcards for white folk.[2] These publicly circulated images of African Americans by whites were chiefly produced for white audiences, yet the scenes were inescapable reminders to African Americans of the inhuman and primitive identities that white society determined.

Furthermore, at the same time, African American writers and artists produced material that avoided all associations with a past that was publicly defined by slavery and subhuman depictions.[3] In rejecting "The Negro" as a product of white misrepresentation, African Americans took to embracing middle and upper class and, coincidentally, white values, often European in origin.[4] Despite this new mentality, degrading representations of African Americans still built up in the minds of both white and black citizens.

The fact of the matter was that even when depicting themselves in public venues, such as newspapers, African Americans were restricted to racist white aesthetics. One of the most famous African American writers of the 19th century, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, was an accomplished and talented writer and poet. Though he worked in Standard English his fame was only achieved through his mastery of dialect writing. White journals would publish dialect writing as it upheld a very limiting stereotype of how black America wrote and spoke. Dunbar's poem, "Little Brown Baby," written in a very heavy dialect style, was the type of writing expected of African American authors:

> Little brown baby wif spa'klin' eyes,
> Come to yo' pappy an' set on his knee.
> What you been doin', suh—makin' san' pies?
> Look at dat bib—you's ez du'ty ez me.
> Look at dat mouf—dat's merlasses, I bet;
> Come hyeah, Maria, an' wipe off his han's.
> Bees gwine to ketch you an' eat you up yit,
> Bein' so sticky an' sweet—goodness lan's!... (Dunbar 53)

Dialect verse became an inexorable stereotype, depicting simplistic characters and often offering negative images of African American life. With only white journals available to publish in, Dunbar had no choice but to write in dialect verse. The dialect often reemphasized common literary stereotypes of black characters like *Mammy*, an older, but strong motherly figure, or *Uncle Tom*, a mistreated yet loyal, older, black male servant.

Other caricatures included *The Brute*, a sexually charged, violent and dangerous black man, or the *Tragic Mulatto* character, a child of mixed race, unable to belong to the black or white community.[5] While these misrepresentations of black America were intended for white consumption, they remained present in the African American consciousness.

Activism proceeded to convert from silent avoidance of negative stereotypes to a proactive reestablishment of cultural heritage and racial pride. Dunbar's poem "WE WEAR THE MASK" (1895), illustrates African Americans' former inner conflict with this societal position:

> We wear the mask that grins and lies,
> It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,--
> This debt we pay to human guile;
> With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
> And mouth with myriad subtleties.
>
> Why should the world be overwise,
> In counting all our tears and sighs?
> Nay, let them only see us, while
> We wear the mask.
>
> We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
> To thee from tortured souls arise.
> We sing, but oh the clay is vile
> Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
> But let the world dream otherwise,
> We wear the mask! (Dunbar 71)

Breaking from the limiting connotations of dialect verse, Dunbar asserts the truth of African American experience in a country dictated by white authority. Dunbar's mask in this poem shows the mentality held by African Americans in order to abide by dominant white aesthetics. The literature and art produced under these masked terms, such as romanticisms of plantation life, did not reflect the true mindset of the individuals it sought to depict. Dunbar shows the disquiet behind façades of tranquil adherence to

white society. In aiming "to write black selves into the mainstream of American literature,"[6] black writers would not overshadow racist representations promoted by white society. Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask" displays this hidden frustration, sadness, and anger.

Harlem Renaissance intellectual, W.E.B. Du Bois, who is also one of the most important writers and activists of the period, additionally notes that dismissing and ignoring negative images by whites will not remedy the problem. The solution that both Du Bois proposes is to reconfigure a new identity and to actively re-represent African Americans. Trying to reject derogatory images will not naturally build new perceptions. In his most famous publication, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois affirms, "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line."[7] Perceptions of African Americans accordingly differed on either side of segregated society. In another essay "The Criteria of Negro Art" (1926), Du Bois, says that furthermore, "Suppose the only Negro who survived some centuries hence was the Negro painted by white Americans in the novels and essays they have written. What would people in a hundred years say of black Americans?"[8] Du Bois asks that black Americans take back their stereotypes to dictate how they will be depicted for themselves. To do this, Du Bois points to the arts. Through the arts, both literary and visual, a new image of black America could be created.

Langston Hughes, writer and poet of the Harlem Renaissance, addresses this mismatched combination of racial ideals and cultural heritages in his essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1926). As an example of this contrary mentality, Hughes reflects on a young black poet who claimed he did not want to be termed "a

Negro poet," but rather, just "a poet."[9] In making this complaint, Hughes determines that the young man simultaneously asserts a desire to be like white poets when he rejects a black adjective and label. It is not a matter of whether or not the young man's poetry reflects ideals of African American experience, but rather that he does not want his name to denote any such connection either.

The ideals that Hughes and Du Bois convey through their essays abide by the New Negro mentality. The New Negro represents a generation of intellectuals, writers, artists, and citizens, which is concerned with social change and inspired by creativity.[10] Alain Locke, writer and philosopher, differentiates the Old Negro from the New in his essay, "The New Negro" (1925). Locke explains that the Old Negro "was a creature of moral debate and historical controversy… something to be argued about, condemned or defended, to be 'kept down,' or 'in his place,' or 'helped out,' to be worried over, harassed or patronized, a social bogey or a social burden."[11] Over all, the Old Negro was forced into a "distorted perspective of a social problem."[12] Locke poses the Old Negro alongside the New Negro, who is a proactive member of society. As Locke notes, the New Negro "now becomes a conscious contributor and lays aside the status of beneficiary and ward for that of collaborator and participant in American civilization."[13] The New Negro rejects the passive concealment of inequality that recently strove for whiteness. The combination of the New Negro's activism with Du Bois' call for re-representation propelled the Harlem Renaissance forward in the 1920s.

For Dunbar, Du Bois, and other societal leaders, it was no longer time to "Wear the mask that grins and lies," putting up with negative depictions. Instead it was time to reconstruct a true African American identity. A new mode of self-perception emerged

during the Harlem Renaissance and manifested itself in the New Negro.[14] The New Negro mentality embraced the urbanity of the present and the folk art of the past, reclaiming negative representations, and taking control of how African Americans were depicted in society.[15] While it may have been well and good to be prim and proper to avoid being associated with the horrific images in society at one time, such a single sided façade was not the truth of the matter either.

More importantly, this re-representation of African American identities was not wholly intended for a white audiences' analysis. Many of the depictions of African American experience in the Harlem Renaissance were created by African Americans, for African Americans. Recreating identity was not a simple task, though, and writers and artists had to rationalize their relationship between past and present. Literary and visual artists investigated a broad scope of topics ranging from the relationship between the African American citizen and Africa, to nature and love stories.[16] It was the goal of these artists to reclaim all components of African American experience including literature, art, music, and dance, rather than to merely mask off negative images like those put out by white society. Du Bois notes that African Americans "fear that evil in us will be called racial [by whites], while in others it is viewed as individual," referring to the fact that all races and civilizations have criminals and wrongdoers about them, but ignoring them in literature and art will not be the truth of African American experience.[17] With a reestablished understanding of the self, representations of criminals, as well as intellectuals, could be portrayed as parts of an inclusive re-representation of African American experience. Scholars have long worked to reveal the multi-faceted identities that Harlem Renaissance writers created for each other and for themselves.[18] Typically

one reads about the generational rifts between younger and older artists, the discussions of art's role in representation, or the major focus on the subject of music in art and literature. More recent scholarship has gone further in discussing the complicated intersections of these areas.[19] After all, no single perspective on African American experience, or version of identity, could be the truth of an entire people.

The interwoven connections between all fields of African American experience during the Harlem Renaissance are endless. Looking at African American re-representation with a focus on subjects like poetry and painting, though, offers a means to investigate these interactions and the complexities of seemingly separate areas. Within these two disciplines, there is a trend among scholarly works to look at re-representations of identity in terms of music. Harlem Renaissance poetry, especially, is commonly associated with themes of music, connecting it with musical traditions of blues and jazz. Take Langston Hughes, for instance, and his most famous poem "The Weary Blues" (1926). Hughes' inspiration for this poem draws from the mixed feelings of "love and loss, laced with often mordant humor" that characterized the blues.[20] His poetry is renowned for its musicality and certain poems retain a particular form that follows the blues structure. The poetic pattern for the blues is denoted by a single long line repeated and followed by a third shorter line that rhymes with the previous two.[21] These musical forms originate from plantation songs of the South, direct products of purely African American experience. Blues and jazz offer a means of bringing the past, and a previously rejected heritage, into the present. Its inclusion in poetry and painting works to the same effect, and offers a medium from which a particular identity may be defined. However, discussing the musicality of artistic expression in the Harlem Renaissance exclusively,

while important and meaningful, maintains a historical connection with limiting stereotypes of African American experience. Looking at blues and jazz exclusively, upholds white assumptions that African Americans are no more than a product of that environment. Understanding poetic and visual arts through music alone, stifles notions of a more complex and interdisciplinary African American re-representation.

Looking at poetry and visual art in reference to one another, though, offers a new lens from which to approach the same bodies of work. The visual arts experienced a major surge of creativity during the Harlem Renaissance, alongside poetry. Artists like Aaron Douglas, one of the most important painters of the period, are known for depicting traditional African symbols and motifs in an image of African American experience, and all within in an entirely modern technique. This work dynamically discusses the same issues that contemporary poetry does, such as the functions and implementation of racial uplift and the individual experiences of African Americans. Seeking to pull from past and present to recreate a true African American identity, visual artists held the same priorities as many of their literary neighbors. Artists working towards the same goals as poets, though, are seldom read in conjunction with poets. It is curious that such little work has been done on the intersections of these two major forms of representation.

The work of Langston Hughes, as a writer who is commonly perceived as a musically inspired poet, offers a broad body of work to investigate this additional connection with visual arts. Hughes' work ranges thematically, but critically remains heavily tied to blues and jazz. Interactions with the visual arts within his poetry have not been thoroughly discussed. More recently acknowledged poets, namely Helene Johnson and Gwendolyn Bennett, present less mainstreamed themes in their poetry that tends

towards subjects like nature and love as much as it does music, from which to further expand perceptions of visually inspired poetry. These three poets offer a fair representation of the writers working during the Harlem Renaissance, as their joint body of work consists of poetry that is both well known and fairly unknown, written by both male and female poets, and written by individuals with varying levels of experience with the visual arts. Gwendolyn Bennett, for instance, was a painter herself, while Langston Hughes participated in collaborative text-image projects with artists like Aaron Douglas, and Helene Johnson was primarily a writer until she abandoned her literary career for a domestic life.[22]

The artwork of Aaron Douglas serves as a standard to which these varying poetic expressions may be compared. His artwork is widely recognized as some of the most prominent and important work produced during the Harlem Renaissance, and consists of a substantial amount of paintings to draw from. Also, in addition to being an innovative modernist, Douglas is a traditionally and technically trained artist, meaning that he is an accomplished draftsman and realistic painter. His work offers a breadth of subjects and techniques, but remains grounded in portrayals of African American experience, acting as a consistent and relevant visual source to consider alongside Harlem Renaissance poetry.

Understanding Hughes, Johnson, and Bennett through Douglas' artwork will illustrate the deep interconnections of poetic and visual expression that produce a unique understanding of African American re-representation. More specifically, visual influences on poetry will be evident in two basic forms: content and structure. Visual elements may be found in poetic content, which consists of literary imagery and word choice, or in the poem's structure, both as it appears physically on the page, and in the

technical organization of lines. The visual influences in the content of these poems highlight issues such as racial uplift, the balance of past and present cultural heritages, and integration of traditional and modernist artistic approaches, which shape African American identity. Consequently, visual components of structure show how the distinct factors that are seen in poetic content influence the actual restructuring of African American identity. After establishing the manner in which visual art communicates with poetry in select instances, re-representations of identity as promoted through journals of the Harlem Renaissance offer a historically relevant application to these readings. Journals like *The Crisis* and *FIRE!!*, are especially significant proponents of both literary and visual re-representation. Looking at these publications in terms of their poetic and visual elements will further reveal the complexities of African America identity, as it was re-represented in the Harlem Renaissance.

Notes:

[1] Carroll, Anne Elizabeth. *Word, Image, and the New Negro*: *Representation and Identity in the Harlem Renaissance.* Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2005. (5-6). Print.

[2] Carroll, Anne Elizabeth. 2005. (6-7).

[3] Fine, Elsa Honig. *The Afro-American Artist: A Search for Identity*. Tenessee; Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1973. (42-43). Print.

[4] Fine, Elsa Honig. 1973. (44-45).

[5] Lynes, Katherine. "African American Literature Before 1900." Union College, Schenectady, NY, Fall, 2009. Lecture.

[6] Levine, Robert S. "Review essay: Slavery, race, and American literary genealogies." *Early American Literature*. Chapel Hill, 2001. (88). Print.

[7] Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Random House, 1993. Print.

[8] Du Bois, W.E.B. "The Criteria of Negro Art." *The emerging thought of W. E. B. Du Bois; essays and editorials from the Crisis*. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1972. (366). Print

[9] Hughes, Langston. "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." *The Nation*, 1926. *Double Take: A Revisionist Harlem Renaissance Anthology*. Eds. Maureen Honey and Venetria K. Patton. New Jersey; Rutgers University Press, 2001. (40). Print.

[10] Locke, Alain LeRoy. "The New Negro." 1925. *The New Negro*. New York; Arno Press, 1968. (3-16). Print.; Braithwaite, William Stanley. "The Negro in American Literature." *The New Negro.* New York; Arno Press, 1968. (10). Print.

[11] Locke, Alain LeRoy. 1968. (3-16).

[12] Locke, Alain LeRoy. 1968. (3-16).

[13] Locke, Alain LeRoy. 1968. (3-16).

[14] Locke, Alain LeRoy. 1968. (3-16).; Fine, Elsa Honig. 1973. (42-43).

[15] Patton, Venetria K. Introduction. *Double Take: A Revisionist Harlem Renaissance Anthology*. Eds. Maureen Honey and Venetria K. Patton. New Jersey; Rutgers University Press, 2001. (xix-xli). Print.

[16] Patton, Venetria K. Introduction. 2001. (xix-xli).

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[17] Du Bois, W.E.B. "Negro Art." *The emerging thought of W. E. B. Du Bois; essays and editorials from the Crisis*. New York; Simon and Schuster, 1972. (354). Print.

[18] Patton, Venetria K. 2001. (xix-xli).

[19] Patton, Venetria K. 2001. (xix-xli).

[20] Rampersad, Arnold. Introduction. *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*. Ed. Arnold Rampersad. Vol.1. Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2001. (9). Print.

[21] Rampersad, Arnold. "A Note on the Blues." *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*. Ed. Arnold Rampersad. Vol.1. Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2001. (73). Print.

[22] Mitchell, Verner. Introduction. *This Waiting For Love*. Ed. Verner Mitchell. Amherst; University of Massachusetts Press, 2000. (3-18). Print.

Chapter 1:

The Visual Elements of Poetic Content: The Building Blocks of Identity

The poetry of the Harlem Renaissance is deeply associated with rhythmic imagery of blues singers and jazz musicians, dancers, and urban musicality. The African American musical traditions of blues and jazz inspire these poetic images, which in turn evoke emotions and feelings associated with the music. While this musical trend is an incredibly important component of the Harlem Renaissance's movement towards re-representing African American identity, the visual arts play an equally significant role in how identity is reconstructed in poetry. The poetry of Langston Hughes, Helene Johnson, and Gwendolyn Bennett specifically utilize visual elements in the content of their poems, reflecting the profound interactions of literary and visual realms. Literary imagery and symbols within their poems are consistent with images from visual artists like Aaron Douglas. Looking at Aaron Douglas' work alongside the poetry of Hughes, Johnson, and Bennett helps to reveal the presence of visual art within the content of the poetic, and helps to highlight more obscure or subtle references to the visual.

More importantly, the visual elements in these poems remain grounded in African American artistic traditions, and consequently help promote uniquely African American identities. Instances of visual influence offer glimpses into the types of re-representations African Americans create for themselves with the New Negro mentality. Like puzzle pieces, visual components from all three poets are highlighted through visual interpretation to show the factors and forces that ultimately come together to structure these specifically new African American identities of the Harlem Renaissance. Hughes

uses the visual elements of his poems to specifically reference topics such as racial uplift, where racial identity is strongly correlated with economic prosperity. In turn, Johnson tends to focus on the issue of balancing past and present representations of African American experience in order to show two specific forces that push and pull on African American identities in the Harlem Renaissance. Some of Bennett's poems, on the other hand, look more closely at topics such as the mixing of musical and artistic heritages and the complexities of combining ancestral and modern motifs in both literary and visual work, displaying another factor that weighs in on the reconfiguring of African American identities during the period.

Each writer exemplifies varying forms of visual influence in their poetry. The visual arts influences in Hughes' poetry, for example, are mostly found in the overarching images of his poems that run parallel to Douglas' paintings. This broad sense of artistic influence, or visual parallelism, denotes the consistency between a poet's literary image and a scene from Aaron Douglas' two-dimensional artworks. The ways that poetic images are conveyed, whether or not they run visually parallel to Douglas' work, may also be embedded with visual arts influences. Johnson's poetry, for instance, goes beyond artistically sensitive images, exemplifying visual influence through specific attention to language. Her word choice seems to come straight out of the artist's studio. Johnson not only provides the materials needed for her poem's image, but also describes the artistic techniques and processes that put those materials to use. By immersing these materials into her poetry, she produces a painted image that gains strength, nuance, and depth. Working along similar lines, Bennett seems to be particularly in tune to artistic language, but also to the finer details of studio arts, which manifests itself within her

poetry. She utilizes the language of artistry, as Johnson does, but there are also elements of her poetry that more specifically reference the art of printmaking and the style of Cubism. She has an artist's eye that guides her poetry, bringing the finer points of studio arts into her written word. While each of these visual approaches to poetry is characteristic of a corresponding poet, the concepts may apply to other poet's work at times, developing complex visual expressions in each poet's work.

Langston Hughes: Visual Parallelism

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Langston Hughes' poetry has been thoroughly researched and analyzed in terms of its musicality, and rightfully so, as much of his poetry lies at the heart of the intersection between blues and jazz and the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance. Yet, Hughes is also known to have collaborated with a number of visual artists, Aaron Douglas in particular, in exploring the relationships between text and image. In 1926 he and Douglas created a portfolio for *Opportunity* magazine comprised of Hughes' poems and Douglas' images centered on the blues.[1] Yet, even outside of these purposeful explorations of literature and art, Hughes' poetry remains significantly visual. Many anthologies tend to focus on musically infused and vernacular poetry, placing a higher

priority on those forms, rather than other poems that better displayed major themes of the Harlem Renaissance like urban identity, nature, and the black folk art tradition. Jazz and the blues are uniquely African American conventions and offer one take on the African American identity, fluid as it is. Accordingly, most of Hughes' anthologized poems fall into these genres, though his work spans a much broader scope of topics. This exclusivity could be due to such themes, specifically nature, being recognized as common topics for female poets, though Hughes and other male poets are known to have written extensively within the subjects.[2] Hughes' lesser-known poems such as "Florida Road Workers" (1930), and "Dream Variation" (1924) embody some of these underemphasized themes, like nature and urban identity, which are equally pertinent to the Harlem Renaissance. Within these overlooked themes, Hughes' poetry also becomes much more dynamic in terms of its visual components especially when given Aaron Douglas' paintings and prints to help to illuminate the visual within the poetic.

Hughes' visual parallelism is quite uncanny as he illustrates a complex visual scene in the poem "Florida Road Workers" from *Dear Lovely Death* (1931) that is exceptionally evocative of Aaron Douglas' painting *Building More Stately Mansions* (1944) (Fig. 1). He employs nuanced visual statements through themes of racial uplift and urbanity that are best understood when put into conversation with a purely visual counterpart like Douglas' painting. In the first stanza of the poem Hughes' narrator tells of the road he is building, calling attention to the tension between the natural landscape and the man made road:

I'm makin' a road
For the cars
To fly by on.
Makin' a road
Through the palmetto thicket
For light and civilization
To travel on. (Hughes 124)

The speaker is building a road through the vegetation of a palmetto thicket, thereby bringing civilization into the natural world. He is physically shedding light onto the thicket, using the road to bring the thicket into the modern world. Hughes' focus of urbanity contrasts with the uncultivated nativity of the palmetto thicket, alluding to the contrast between the native roots of his African American speaker and the world he is building for white others.

This type of image is seen repeatedly in Aaron Douglas' work, as in the painting *Building More Stately Mansions* where architectural achievements from history are layered in front of one another leading up to a bare, uncultivated hill in the foreground. Susan Earle notes in her analysis of his work called "Harlem, Modernism, and Beyond," that all of the architectural and sculptural forms, such as the Egyptian sphinx, have the education and labor of African Americans at their common center.[3] In fact, the figures in the painting are located at the base of all of these architectural forms, visually grounding the composition. Given Douglas' composition one can see that the image in Hughes' poem works in a similar way. The narrator is grounded, building a road from the earth on which vehicles of technology and civilization may move forward upon. The word "light" also seems to insinuate knowledge, in which case education and labor are common components of Hughes' road and Douglas' architectural forms. Hughes' speaker is the foundation of the image, literally on ground level. Even though Hughes' image seems to

move in a horizontal direction, while Douglas' painting has a greater focus on verticality, both have African Americans' hands working at the base of their images. The idea of verticality is representative of racial uplift and advancement in both works of literature and art. While Hughes' image does not have a strong upward composition, the development of the thicket, as a natural and native entity, runs parallel to the idea of embracing and re-representing African American heritage, and Africa as a source of racial pride.[4]

In the latter parts of the poem, Hughes is less concerned with creating an image for the reader and more concerned with calling attention to the viewing of that image. In the third stanza the narrator calls for the critique and viewing of the image created in the first stanza:

> Sure,
> A road helps all of us!
> White folks ride-
> And I get to see 'em ride.
> I ain't never seen nobody
> Ride so fine before.
> Hey buddy!
> Look at me!
> I'm making a road! (Hughes 124)

Hughes is very focused on the sense of sight in this stanza. Most of the action in the section is based on what the speaker can and has seen, and what he wants others to see. The narrator notes that he is merely a spectator of the road he is building, and also of the figural scene that has been presented in the first stanza since he will not be among those riding on the road. One would assume that by focusing on the narrator's integral role in building the road, that he would also be a part of its destination. But Hughes stifles the notion of uplift by grounding the road worker to the construction of the road, offering a

nuanced tone to the poem. Hughes illustrates that African Americans are figuratively and physically responsible for the growth of civilization, which is something to be proud of, yet he also notes that they are not the ones that enjoy the fruits of their labor. The narrator illustrates that relationship saying, "A road helps all of us! / White folks ride- / And I get to see 'em ride." The narrator of the first stanza was proud to be making something that fosters growth and development, yet his focus shifts when he discusses the reality of his position. He says that he will "get to see 'em ride," and see his contribution to society, yet will gain nothing from it. He is restricted to the role of a spectator, calling attention to what he is able to see rather than what he is able to do. Hughes' gesture here is complex. It seems as if he is building up an image of pride only to break it down in visualizing the reality of society's perception.

In his essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" from June of 1926 Hughes expresses his desire for the New Negro artist to look and move forward through criticism:

> … Let Paul Robeson singing "Water Boy," and Rudolph Fisher writing about the streets of Harlem, and Jean Toomer holding the heart of Georgia in his hands, and Aaron Douglas's drawing strange black fantasies cause the smug Negro middle class to turn from their white, respectable, ordinary books and papers to catch a glimmer of their own beauty. We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves. (Hughes 2)

Hughes' idea of being free within oneself helps make sense of the seemingly conflicted images. On one hand, the narrator could be interpreted as cynical in the final lines of the poem, especially given the plentiful exclamation marks. But, given Hughes' essay it seems appropriate that the speaker's declaration of "Look at me! / I'm makin' a road!"

may insinuate that the speaker is more of the mindset that Hughes encourages in his essay. Hughes road from "Florida Road Workers" is, in fact, a very similar image to the "temples for tomorrow" that he speaks of in "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." The speaker in the poem sees and recognizes the complexities and contradictions of his situation, but is disdainful of others' scrutiny and frustration. Instead he only looks forward asking for others to look at him in the same way he sees himself, building "temples for tomorrow" by making a road on which "light and civilization" may travel. The speaker is focused on a personal quest for racial uplift that onlookers may either choose to acknowledge or not. As a creator, not unlike the artists Hughes addresses in his essay, the speaker maintains Hughes' view in which it does not matter whether one receives praise or criticism as long as one remains "free within [oneself]." By remaining honest with himself, the speaker assumes a strong sense of personal identity motivated by hopes of racial uplift.

Hughes' layered approach to visualization also appears in the symbolic imagery of "Dream Variation" from an earlier volume entitled *The Weary Blues* (1926). In "Dream Variation" Hughes references established symbols of black identity that seem to run parallel to Douglas' painting *The Creation* (1935) (Fig. 2). Unlike "Florida Road Workers," where the narrator comes to scrutinize the pride of his peoples' historical accomplishments, the narrator here undergoes a metaphorical transformation where he comes to fully embody the strength and pride of his people:

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.

One major component of Hughes' imagery in this poem is the contrast he generates between day and night. Instantly, there is the notion of white and black, with day being explicitly referred to as "white day." Hughes refers to the brightness and energy of daytime, while "cool evening" and the dark of night is coupled with calming restfulness. Both day and night also have corresponding objects associated with them in the poem to help enhance the relationship between light and dark. For instance, the tree of night is contrasted with the sun of the "white day." Though Hughes does not say so specifically one is led to understand that the sun is the tree's opposite, countering the "cool evening" with white heat. Nighttime and images from nature are understood to be symbolic of black pride and offer a sense of protection.[5] With such a reading one may infer that the heat of "white day" offers opposing connotations.

The tree is a key image in Hughes' poem, standing tall as a reference to pride and racial uplift. The narrator finds sanctuary beneath the tree, too, resting there after the "white day." Trunk and branches reach into the sky, emphasizing the need to advance

forward and upwards in society, while the tree's darkness and comforting qualities of nighttime resolve the image to be a uniquely African American symbol. The unwavering rootedness of the tree corresponds with the African American experience of endurance through time. The speaker says that the night is "Dark like me" applying a sense of self to the evening, seemingly absorbing the blackness of the calming atmosphere around him, aligning himself with the nighttime landscape. Being represented in the same dark color palette, the speaker and the tree become images of the same ideals of strength and growth.

Through careful word choice, Hughes adds a layer to his poetic visual in the second stanza. Hughes adds a more specific focus to the line "To fling my arms wide / In some place of the sun" as it becomes "To fling my arms wide, / In the face of the sun," in the new stanza. The speaker's movement becomes a defiant act against the sun's face rather than the sun in general and the overbearing "white day." The change in word choice reaffirms the idea of the sun as a symbol for white dominance, since the addition of a face actually allows it to physically look down on the rest of the landscape. Another change in the second stanza is the transformation of "To whirl and to dance / Till the white day is done" to "Dance! whirl! whirl! / Till the quick day is done." Initially the idea of whirling and dancing seems to trigger an image of fluid energy, a swirling of sorts. In other works by Hughes the action of whirling is identified as a form of spiritual release.[6] The concept of spiritual whirling combined with the visual connotation of fluidity produces a dynamic image of extreme emotional movement, a mental and spiritual equivalent to dance.

The most significant alteration in image is arguably found in the last few lines which read, "Rest at pale evening… / A tall slim tree…." Where in the previous stanza the speaker takes refuge beneath the tree, he now seems to embody the tree as he rests. The sense of self that the speaker portrays onto the nighttime takes over and transforms him into the tree that he previously found solace beneath. Whereas in the first stanza the two were reflections of one another's ideals, pride, protection, resilience, and awakening, the second stanza progresses to combine both man and tree into one.[7] In becoming a seamless component of the landscape the speaker's presence feels natural, as if he had grown from the same soil as the tree. Hughes interjects sentiments of strength and tranquility into the night landscape, where history would suggest heated feeling to be found. The all too recent memories of slavery are inseparable from the vast fields and woods of the natural landscape, yet Hughes harnesses that emotional energy to show a modern understanding of the past, present, and future of African American identity. Hughes links his speaker with the land in a way that the speaker gains shelter from it, grows from it, and accepts the land as part of himself. This connection with the earth is empowering and consoling, rather than uncomfortably restrictive as in "Florida Road Workers." That new acceptance of the land is founded in tranquility, rather than hatred, and a modern African American racial identity is created through that new interpretation of the past.

Hughes' final image is similar to Douglas' *The Creation* where a single man appears in a natural landscape, facing the hand of God. His stance even mimics the plant he is standing next to just as Hughes' speaker becomes the tree. His dominant form is represented in the same manner as the plant, as if he has become its superior, a towering

vertical tree of sorts. Yet, both the plant and man in the painting exist at the same time, where in the poem the speaker and tree become fused. The painting seems to show both stanzas of Hughes' poem at the same time. On one hand there is the relationship of the man in a natural landscape at night, but at the same time one notices that the man's hand is actually touching the plant. This connection causes a type of tension between the forms, since one's eye expects there to be space at that junction. The man and plant are free standing forms besides that one point of connection, which fuses them together, as in Hughes' final image. Douglas allows both visuals to exist- that of individual solidarity, and that of the images fusion and reliance on one another.

Douglas' visual help illustrate the complicated issue of racial uplift during the Harlem Renaissance in both of Hughes' poems. In "Florida Road Workers," especially, the problem of balancing self-perception and public approval is key to understanding the finer points of the debate surrounding how to approach racial uplift. In both poems Hughes promotes an alliance with the self, a freedom within the self, in order to attempt any sort of racial uplift. Without a united self, for instance, there is no way to unite and raise an entire people.

Helene Johnson: Language of Artistry

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Working within many of the same themes as Langston Hughes, Helene Johnson has also adopted strong visual tendencies to her work. Johnson, like Hughes, finds visual meaning in the interplay of light and dark, but also in her use of specific artistic materials and supplies. Her language is rich with artistic vocabulary. She has a painterly approach to her descriptions, which not only offers the reader specific images, but also suggests the style in which they are to be seen. She lays out a nighttime scene in her poem "Trees at Night" (1925) from the volume *This Waiting For Love* (2000), with descriptions that transcend strict literary imagery and begin to evoke painted images similar in style to Aaron Douglas' works. More so, her visual message is also consistent with social commentary of the time, grounded in the desire to reconcile past and present portrayals of African American experience.

Johnson opens her poem "Trees at Night" with a focus on imagery that saturates the rest of her poem. Her focus on the visual is evident in both her word choice and subject matter. She depicts a quiet landscape of trees against the night sky:

Slim Sentinels
Stretching lacy arms
About a slumbrous moon;
Black quivering
Silhouettes,
Tremulous,
Stencilled on the petal
Of a bluebell;
Ink sputtered
On a robin's breast;
The jagged rent
Of mountains
Reflected in a
Stilly sleeping lake;
Fragile pinnacles
Of fairy castles;
Torn webs of shadows;
And
Printed 'gainst the sky—
The trembling beauty
Of an urgent pine. (Johnson 23)

Johnson constructs her poetic images using language that is, in part, reflective of the visual arts. She describes the delicate shadows of the tree branches as being "stenciled" on an equally delicate flower petal, and as if they were "ink sputtered on a robin's breast." Such word choice refers to the visual arts and helps to figuratively paint the scene she illustrates with her words. Johnson not only describes the shadows, but also the medium and brush strokes used to paint them. She suggests that the scene in the poem is man made, fabricated with stencils, paint, and ink. These techniques are from folk art motifs that would have been the subject of much debate at the time. Folk arts such as mask making, or sewing projects, like quilt making, are part of African American heritage, and therefore a foundation to grow from. However, they also function simultaneously as a distinctive feature that holds a people back from a connection with high culture, and fine art. Intellectuals like W.E.B. Du Bois were particularly keen on the

idea fine art being a sign of advanced civilization. Folk art, on the other hand, was heavily associated with the limited resources and education of plantation culture and therefore inseparable from negative stereotypes of a less accomplished people. The question facing many African American artists (literary and visual, alike) was how to resist the stereotyping inherent to this artistic heritage, yet still embrace it in a modern fashion.[8] Re-representing African American identity meant resolving this issue and reconciling and reclaiming the images of the past.

Visual artists like Douglas approach this problem in a similar light to Johnson. For instance, in many of his paintings thin slit eyes and wavy hair characterize his figures. The eyes are references to traditional African masks, yet Douglas' adaptation of them in his silhouetted figures gives them a very modern appearance, described by one scholar as both "soulful and cosmopolitan."[9] The wavy hair is a reference to the Nile River and Africa by association.[10] Integrating traditional folk art and geographic references into his modern paintings embraces past heritages without being defined by them. Johnson's solution to this ambiguity is parallel to Douglas.' Johnson's descriptions of the tree's "lacy arms" and the "stenciled" shadowy pattern they create, echo the fiber arts and decorative painting techniques of folk arts, giving her modern free verse poem a link back to tradition. She has subtly worked the folk art tradition into her modern literary work with distinct word choice, an adaptation that brings folk art techniques into a modernist domain without becoming bound by them or denying their importance, either. Johnson fuses past and present, and in doing so reclaims ownership of folk art practices that may have been shunned for their connections with lower class art. Through delicately integrating folk references into her modern poem, Johnson

creates the balanced relationship that African Americans of the Harlem Renaissance sought in establishing a new cultural identity.

Johnson uses shadows and silhouettes throughout her poem, a technique that is particularly reminiscent of the flat shapes in Aaron Douglas' work. She does not focus on the object itself, but only its flat, silhouetted appearance. Douglas is known for his extreme simplification of physical details in the subjects of his paintings. In *Science* (1930) (Fig. 3) for instance, the only slight variation in the rendering of the figure is from the radiating concentric circles, not from any realistic differentiation in the form itself. The silhouetted figure is completely flat, like the rest of the image. In "Trees at Night," Johnson contrasts the dark trees with the light of the moon and night sky, achieving a quiet nighttime scene by keeping her words within a certain color pallet. Douglas works similarly in *Science*, maintaining a tone-on-tone pallet in his night scene. Johnson's use of words like "lacy," "bluebell," and "robins breast," are all conceptualized within the realm of shadows and moonlight, evoking a soft, earthy feel of blacks, grays, blues, and cool browns. Such attributes are particularly recognizable in many nighttime paintings. By illustrating her scene in this convention, Johnson's imagery is consistent with two-dimensional artworks like Douglas' *Science*.

Johnson's flowing and blending color pallet in "Trees at Night" also reflects her suspension of definitive labels, as she allows a number of perceptions to communicate with one another until the end of her poem. The "Slim Sentinels," or unspecified trees that Johnson speaks of in her first few lines, actually remain unidentified until the final line of the poem where Johnson reveals them to be pine trees. Until that point, Johnson allows the trees to absorb whatever form she suggests in her descriptions, without

needing to compete with preexisting, fixed impressions the reader may have of pine trees. She personifies the trees as sentinels, and their limbs as "lacy arms." The human qualities of the image imply the possibility of self-generated movement and flexibility, and give the trees a purpose, as they are watchful guards rooted to their landscape. The image of lace in moonlight alludes to a soft flickering of light and shadow that would insinuate that the tree limbs are unstructured, unfixed forms, open to variation. Also, by withholding the label of pine tree and granting the metaphor of the trees as human-like forms, the reader is less likely to restrict his or her reading to logical, biological characteristics of trees. The openness that Johnson employs through her specific choice in imagery permits her to impose whatever message or tone she desires, without needing to overcome a readers' preexisting notions of the scene she is fashioning.

Johnson's trees are fluid in their identity, a concept that is also consistent with the subjects of Aaron Douglas' paintings and prints. Douglas' use of racially ambiguous figures, who may have attributes of African or Egyptian decent, permits the viewer to imagine a wide spectrum of identities.[11] In so doing, Douglas' work appeals to a much wider audience, as no viewer is estranged from, or trapped in, a racially stereotypical form. Douglas pulls from a number of cultural backgrounds, namely Egyptian and African traditions, to create a new modernist, African American visual statement. For example, his use of a slit for his figures eyes is a two dimensional adaptation of traditional African masks.[12] In his painting, *The Founding of Chicago* (1933) (Fig. 4), Douglas depicts a silhouetted man, presumably Jean-Baptiste Pointe du Sable, who founded Chicago, along with a silhouetted woman in chains with her unchained baby. The figures are in the foreground, looking out from the past into modern day, illustrating

the role that African Americans have held in the building of American cities and culture. Jean-Baptiste Pointe du Sable's figure is identifiable due to the historical context of the painting, but there are no specific characteristics that would prevent him from assuming a number of identities. In this way he is also a symbol for the African American laborer in general.[13] His form is strong and angular, but there are no defining characteristics that denote a particular heritage. The woman is similarly ambiguous, as is the child, yet they resonate with the African American past; the woman representing an earlier enslaved generation and her free child as a step forward in social movement. The figures suggest an African ethnicity due to the contour of particular facial features, but also due to the flat, profiled style that they are depicted in, which echoes Egyptian art. Also, the city behind them, as with the orientation and composition of the image, alludes to a greater sense of verticality and by association, racial uplift. Douglas' skyscrapers reappear throughout his work as a double symbol of modernism and racial uplift.[14]

Strikingly similar to Douglas' use of ambiguous ethnicities is Johnson's use of personified trees. The image conveyed in the first part of her poem, "Slim Sentinels" who are also "Black quivering silhouettes," is already a contrast of images. Sentinels, as guards, suggest a certain amount of power and strength, as do trees. Despite being stationed, or rooted, to the ground these sentinels are thin and quivering. The forms resonate with human, and more specifically, African American racial and cultural identities, and provide a similarly inclusive image. The figural trees are watching and waiting, unsure of their identity and therefore their significance.

Just as Douglas' forms allow for ethnic ambiguity, Johnson's trees do the same, representing a general racial identity, and trying to hold off any binding stereotypes or

specific ethnicities that would counter a debated African American identity. Her trees are silhouetted and shadowed, as are Douglas' figures, dismissing labeling characteristics. Johnson's final lines read, "And / Printed 'gainst the sky-- / The trembling beauty / Of an urgent pine," (Johnson 23) more securely insinuating the metaphoric significance of these trees as symbols of African American identity. The trees are identified as tall, hardy pines, yet they still tremble. The use of the word "urgent" draws the meaning of the poem into a social context. Biologically, pines are strong, enduring and rooted, yet Johnson's image is that of the trees' shadows and silhouettes, which are fragile and varying, directly influenced by their atmosphere. The verticality of the trees calls to the concept of upward mobility and growth as do Douglas' sky scrapers, and the sense of urgency reflects the social mindset of racial uplift held by African Americans in the 1920s and 1930s. As does Hughes, Johnson employs a tranquil nighttime landscape as a foundation for the African American identity to grow from. She does not abandon the landscape as a symbol that would hold a race back, due to its past associations with slavery. Instead, she embraces the landscape as an undeniable part of racial heritage that must be accepted if African American society is to move beyond its heavy past. Recall Hughes' "The Negro Artist and The Racial Mountain," where he says, "We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame." Johnson has done just this- rebuilt a cultural and social identity free from "fear or shame." The insecurity of social status, and need for a racial identity are conceptually visualized by Johnson's careful use of imagery. She creates a nuanced image of strength, fragility, and hope that reflects the generalized African American social position during the time.

Where Hughes' poems show the complexities of racial uplift, Johnson addresses the need to balance past and present representations of African American experience. She accomplishes this through specific symbols like the trees, which take on a deep range of emotions and connotations. They express dual identities in their solid forms and their quivering shadows, the same duality of emotion that African Americans were faced with deciphering. Insecurity, linked with the past, and strength, as the new mentality of the New Negro, come to terms with one another in Johnson's work. This component of African American identity plays off of Hughes' focus on the individual, adding a sensitive tone of fragility to rooted self-reliance.

Gwendolyn Bennett: An Artist's Eye

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

In addition to describing imagery through specific artistic materials, visual elements may present themselves in a poem's content through a more inclusive embrace of the artistic process. Gwendolyn Bennett's poems "Heritage" (1923) and "Hatred" (1926) take language suggestive of printmaking and Cubism, and give the images very specific connotations that follow those art forms. These two poems are some of her best-known contributions to the Harlem Renaissance, overshadowing her painting career.[15]

As a painter herself, it is not surprising that Bennett would be more apt to adopt visual elements into her writing. Similar to Hughes, Bennett was interested in both worlds of literature and visual art. Though she created work from both fields, there is no evidence that she intended to pursue a project that combined them in their separate forms. Some of her illustration work can be found in literary magazines such as *The Crisis*. The few existing examples of her artwork appropriately have narrative qualities where her poetry has visual[16]. Aaron Douglas' extensive body of work helps to validate the visual techniques in her poetry beyond her own artwork, which appears to be more geared towards the illustrative graphic design of magazine covers.

In "Heritage" Bennett conveys the same message with minor variations repeatedly through six stanzas, each with a different image. All of her images reference symbols of black pride either in figural or literal terms:

I want to see the slim palm-trees,
Pulling at the clouds
With little pointed fingers…

I want to see the lithe Negro girls
Etched against the sky
While sunset lingers.

I want to hear the silent sands,
Singing to the moon
Before the Sphinx-still face…

I want to hear the chanting
Around a heathen fire
Of a strange black race.

I want to breathe the Lotus flow'r,
Sighing to the stars
With tendrils drinking at the Nile…

I want to feel the surging
Of my sad people's soul,
Hidden by a minstrel-smile. (Bennett 508)

Bennett creates a similar image to those of Hughes and Johnson's naturalistic scenes in her first stanza. Tall slim trees reach up to the sky, in a common reference to black pride and racial uplift. As in Hughes' poem "Dream Variations" the trees are contrasted with the sky, pulling down at the clouds. If one presumes the clouds to be white, the image becomes that much more dynamic with racial forces pulling at one another. Bennett also personifies her trees with "little pointed fingers" that grasp and pull at the clouds. The second stanza offers an analogous image with "lithe Negro girls / Etched against the sky / While sunset lingers." One cannot help imagining Hughes' "white day" and sun in Bennett's lingering sunset dominated by graceful black forms. Bennett even applies her visual vocabulary using the word "Etched," controlling the way the silhouettes appear against the light of the sunset. Etching suggests a controlled black and white palette due

to the ink used in the process, and also suggests that the girls' forms have sharp crisp edges. Instead of offering a word like "shadow" or "silhouette" which would inherently carry the connotation of a black and flat image, Bennett portrays the image with an artist's hand, allowing for a richer, printmaking inspired image. The darkness of ink, and flat quality of a print produce a more developed form of the same image by incorporating the racial connotations seen in Hughes, as well as Johnson's focus on specific materials.

The following stanzas present similar messages of black strength, but they do so from a stand point that directly references and embraces Africa as a source of identity. Bennett references desert sands and the Sphinx, as well as the Nile and African traditions, ignoring the relationship between African American and American society. By shifting her focus from that contrasted relationship, the image's appeal to the African American identity becomes that much stronger, because Bennett has eliminated the opposing force. The earlier stanzas depicted elements of blackness dominating white environments, while the final stanzas take the dwindling white elements out of the picture to focus more explicitly on black heritage. Douglas makes similar moves in some of his paintings that depict exclusively African scenes, for instance, in a study for *Aspects of Negro Life: The Negro in an African Setting* (1934) (Fig. 5). In this painting Douglas has also eliminated competing elements such as urban symbols of smoke stacks and cities. His scene is purely African, appealing to the popular frame of mind that understood Africa to be a source of identity.

It is also important to note that in her visually charged poem, Bennett does not eliminate the musicality associated with black heritage, leading to the blue and jazz age. She references the chanting and singing of Africa and its people saying, "I want to hear

the silent sands, / Singing to the moon" and "I want to hear the chanting / Around a heathen fire." She upholds the musical features of her poem while simultaneously carrying on her visual references and imagery. She even calls equal attention to the senses of sight and hearing, using them both twice over the course of her six stanzas.

Bennett utilizes the visual in a more modern way in her poem "Hatred" where the composition of her symbols makes a stylistic visual statement. She posits a Cubist feel on her poem through her images that echo Douglas' work, as in *Judgment Day* (1927) (Fig. 6). *Judgment Day* displays a group of very angular human figures of varying proportion depending on their importance to the scene, a black St. Peter dominating the composition.[17] Other elements are distorted through geometric representation, but are still recognizable. For instance the large vertical zigzag on the left hand side of the painting is an unrealistic depiction of lightning, yet its form is understood. Similarly, St. Peter's wings are only identifiable by the notches of negative space on their edges. Bennett employs the angularity of Cubism into her poem by distinguishing the direction of her images:

I shall hate you
Like a dart of singing steel
Shot through still air
At even-tide,
Or solemnly
As pines are sober
When they stand etched
Against the sky.
Hating you shall be a game
Played with cool hands
And slim fingers.
Your heart will yearn
For the lonely splendor
Of the pine tree
While rekindled fires
In my eyes
Shall wound you like swift arrows.
Memory will lay its hands
Upon your breast
And you will understand
My hatred. (Bennett 509)

Bennett carries the symbolic visual references through her poem, as seen in "Heritage" and works by Hughes and Johnson, as well, but she also seems to embody the Cubist form in feel as well as image. Bennett's poem is extremely emotionally charged, giving the entire poem a sharp overtone that speaks to the angular quality of works like *Judgment Day*. Also, in the first half of the poem Bennett speaks of a dart shooting through the air at "even-tide." This action suggests horizontal movement, which is reaffirmed by her inclusions of "even-tide" which seems to imply parallelism. She mentions the verticality of pines again, which counteracts the horizontality of the dart. The two directions relate well to the opposing angles characteristic of Cubist works and the blocky angular feel of Douglas' *Judgment Day*. The two opposing directions are referred to again towards the end of the poem with "swift arrows" which denote the same direction of movement and also evoke repetition, another quality seen in many Cubist

works. In Douglas' piece the concentric circles repeat one another as do the zigzag patterns that represent both lightning and water. The repetition of smaller silhouetted figures in the bottom of the composition applies to this characteristic of Cubism, too. Also, opposing temperatures appear in Bennett's poem with "cool hands" and "rekindled fires." Douglas' cubist inspired painting similarly contrasts the opaque black with various light grays and whites. By employing characteristics of cubism into her images, Bennett is able to mimic the overall feeling of her poem and add to the up and rising Cubist style.

Bennett's poems reveal a distinct focus on ancestral and modern motifs and techniques, different from that of Johnson's past and present. In "Heritage," for instance, Bennett's imagery reflects the issue inherent in seeking Africa out as a cultural background. She refers to a different past and present than Johnson as she traces African American ancestry back to Africa, a land that most of those in the Harlem Renaissance generation have never even seen. Understanding this heritage in light of African Americans' modern society was another issue factoring into the greater African American identity of the Harlem Renaissance. The modernity of Cubism in "Hatred" represents the opposing force to ancestral images. Joining the two in literary and visual form signifies the significance of these forces in re-representing African American experience.

Conclusion

The consistency between poetic imagery and the scenes of Aaron Douglas' paintings reveal the multiple factors and forces that go into shaping the re-representations

of African American experience during the Harlem Renaissance. These building blocks of identity are conveyed through visual parallelism, language specific to the arts, and a deeper understanding of artistic practices that manifests within a poem's message. Visual analysis helps highlight issues such as racial uplift, reconciliation of past and present representation, and the balance between ancestral and modern motifs. Also, it is essential to note that musicality is not discounted in poetry that also fosters visual influence. In the Harlem Renaissance, both music and visual arts developed simultaneously with poetry, so it is not logical to believe that the two would exist in distinctive circles. The various elements discussed come from African, European, and American foundations, appealing to the inclusive quality of the African American cultural identity of the Harlem Renaissance. Accordingly, visual elements of the Harlem Renaissance's poetry are grounded in social context, adding to the complexity and nuance of the African American identity.

Notes:

[1] Earle, Susan. “Harlem, Modernism, and Beyond.” *Aaron Douglas : African American Modernist*. Ed. Susan Earle. New Haven; Yale University Press; In association with Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, 2007. (13). Print.

[2] Patton, Venetria K. 2001. (xxiii).

[3] Earle, Susan. 2007. (37).

[4] Patton, Venetria K. 2001. (xxiii).

[5] Patton, Venetria K. 2001. (xxiv).

[6] Trotman, C. *Langston Hughes : The Man, His Art, and His Continuing Influence*. New York: Garland Pub., 1995. Print.

[7] Patton, Venetria K. 2001. (xxiv).

[8] Bell, Bernard. "Folk Art and the Harlem Renaissance." *Phylon (1960-)* 36.2, 1975. (155-63). Print.

[9] Earle, Susan. 2007. (27).; Carroll, Anne. "Art, Literature, and the Harlem Renaissance: The Messages of God's Trombones." *College Literature* 29.3, 2002. (69-73). Print.

[10] Earle, Susan. 2007. (33).

[11] Earle, Susan. 2007. (37).

[12] Carroll, Anne. 2002. (69-73).

[13] Earle, Susan. 2007. (37).

[14] Earle, Susan. 2007. (33).

[15] Patton, Venetria K., and Maureen Honey, eds. “Gwendolyn B. Bennett.” *Double-Take : A Revisionist Harlem Renaissance Anthology*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2001. (506). Print.

[16] Patton, Venetria K., and Maureen Honey, eds. 2001. (506).

[17] Earle, Susan. 2007. (151). Given the title of the piece, *Judgment Day*, I identified St. Peter due to his dominating presence, wings, and key, which are traditional characteristics of his form.

Chapter Two:

Foundational Structures

No poem is without a structure, just as no painting is without a composition. The innovative structures and forms that Harlem Renaissance poets implement in their work reveal an undeniable visual influence. The free verse form that many poets begin to embrace during the Harlem Renaissance is commonly associated with the free moving, impulsive, and improvised energy of blues and jazz music. Yet, is the modernist artwork of Harlem Renaissance painters, such as Aaron Douglas, any less free moving, impulsive, and improvisational? Paintings are made complex with the intersecting shapes and fluid structures that guide the viewer's eye through the work. The same techniques are at work in poetic structures, dictating the reader's movement through the poem. If a poet's use of musical imagery, rhythmic, and free verse structure is evidence of a thorough blues and jazz influence on his or her writing, then what is to be assumed of a poet whose work uses imagery suggestive of the visual arts and visually suggestive structure? The visual arts movement of the Harlem Renaissance did not take place in isolation, so its overlap with poetic expression cannot be ignored, especially if its artistic neighbor, blues and jazz, is already credited with that type of cohesive relationship.

The influence of visual arts on the poetry of Langston Hughes, Helene Johnson, and Gwendolyn Bennett is indisputable when analyzing their structural techniques. Visual components of poetry are absorbed in both content and structure, showing the profound influence of the visual arts. As previously discussed, content relays many of

the distinct factors that shape identity through the interactions of poetic imagery and word choice with Aaron Douglas' artwork. Poetic content essentially depicts the building blocks of identity through specific images within the poems. The strength of visual influence on a poem does not need to be consistent between content and structure, but rather, throughout the larger body of work as a whole. The influence of an entire artistic movement is too broad to fit into specific expectations, allowing for variation in the intensity of visual influence on a poet's work. In other words, there is not a recipe for visual influence in a poem's content or structure. Visual influence is a trend that appears over a larger body of work in either content or structure, but not always in both components equally. A poem may be particularly visual in terms of content only, structure only, or a combination of the two.

Visual analysis of poetic structure will illuminate the specific ways in which African American identity is structured, handled, and understood by the writers of the Harlem Renaissance. It is important to note that visual impact will inevitably vary from poet to poet and from poem to poem, but specific poems from Hughes, Johnson and Bennett show instances of the stronger cases of poetic structures with visual influences, so that those influences might be recognized in the subtleties of other pieces. Johnson and Hughes are much more experimental with their formats, where as Bennett, the visual artist herself, seemingly subscribes to more established conventions. Johnson, in a number of pieces, tends to zero in on the center of her poem, a gesture that is evocative of Aaron Douglas' concentric circles. Accomplishing this movement in two ways, Johnson finds a central focus in delicate details lying at the heart of her poem, or more spatially, where the text on the page actually forms a focal point at the center of the piece. The

focus of these structures points to a depiction of where the African American consciousness stands in terms of past, present, and future, and what is to come of that position. Hughes manipulates this center driven movement in his own work, but harnesses the energy of Douglas' bull's-eyes instead of the physical shape. Hughes not only dictates a path for the reader to travel along, but also the speed and energy with which they proceed. He pulls his poem to a single point, and uses the format of his text to echo the idea of concentric circles, but does not formulate a path to lead the reader back out of that focus as Johnson does. Experimenting with the appearance and format of text, Hughes' poems also call Douglas' contrasting prints to mind. The size and style of the text does not take on an illustrative role, but helps dictate the way the eye travels over the poem. Hughes' use of text works in the same way that basic compositional conventions function in Douglas' artworks. Bennett's work has visual strength compositionally, as well, carrying the viewer's eye over distinct visual statements made by the printed text. However, Bennett offers a different kind of focus to her poetry than Johnson and Hughes. Instead of working from or to a single point, she constructs a unified poem from multiple visual and literary elements, not unlike the way Douglas uses separate symbols of African and African American culture to create a cohesive image. Instead of building up a direct center, she brings a broader sense of wholeness to her poetry. Subtle assimilation of seemingly disparate elements creates an inclusive whole, free of a definitive center or an exterior boundary.

Through exploring the impact of Johnson's poetic center, Hughes' use of boundaries, or Bennett's emphasis on creating an inclusive whole, the visual influences on a poem's structure reveal how African American racial, cultural, and historical

identity is being restructured and reassessed to be more holistic and modern. Where poetic content illustrated the factors that shape new perceptions of African American identity, looking at poetic structures through a visual approach will show how this identity is interacted with and understood by African Americans during the Harlem Renaissance.

Helene Johnson- Circular Unification

Fig. 7

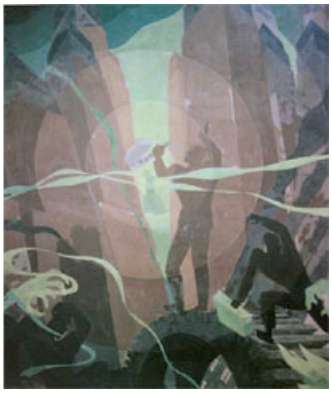

Fig. 8

While many writers aim to have a lasting image, a central idea embedded in his or her writing, Helene Johnson also gives many of her poems a physical central axis. As previously discussed, her poem "Trees at Night" (1925) focuses on the symbolism of the trees as images of both the strength and apprehensiveness of the African American identity of the Harlem Renaissance. Yet, "Trees at Night" is also visually striking in a structural sense. Looking at the center of the poem, one will note that Johnson fixates on the delicate details of the scene she fabricates. Johnson guides the reader through her poem "Trees at Night" by structuring her words in such a way that the reader is lead from background to foreground, and back again. Aaron Douglas employs this concept with his concentric circles in *Congo* (1928) (Fig. 7), which direct the viewer's eye from the larger

circles, inward towards the smaller. By structuring their work in this manner, both artists find a focus on details that may otherwise be ignored, and allow the full range of images to be seen. In structuring these compositions, Johnson also illustrates how African American identity was being redefined, repossessed and rebuilt.

Johnson directs her images in such a way that they flow together, but remain distinct from one another. She opens her poem with a description of trees that reach into the night sky, but then narrows the reader's gaze to the fragile details of flower petals and birds:

> Silhouettes,
> Tremulous,
> Stencilled on the petal
> Of a bluebell;
> Ink sputtered
> On a robin's breast (Johnson 23)

The vast landscape that she paints in the beginning of her piece is left behind as she zooms into the intricacies of the foreground. The entire night sky is funneled down to the flickering moonlight on the "petal of a bluebell" and a "robin's breast." Johnson gradually leads the reader back to the surrounding landscape, describing mountains, lakes, and silhouetted trees. Her structure ushers the reader through her scene, stopping to describe the distinct features of each stage. She emphasizes the broad reach of the trees as they are "Stretching lacy arms /About a slumbrous moon" and then the "jagged rent / Of mountains / Reflected in a / Stilly sleeping lake" towards the closing of the poem. Placing the most delicate images in the center of the poem shelters them within the scene, embedded within a night sky and sweeping landscape. The sky does not get lost in the landscape since the fragile details separate the two larger images. Johnson

breaks up her poem without employing separate stanzas that would interrupt the flow of her scene.

As in Johnson's poem, Douglas' concentric circles also work to highlight intricacies and to direct the viewer's gaze. For Douglas, the radiating circles are a major component of his work, integrated into most of his paintings. In *Congo*, a piece that depicts a lively circular dance, Douglas has also included radiating concentric circles that focus into the middle of the action. The circles vary in tone, becoming brighter and brighter as they get smaller, but more significantly, the smallest circle at the center of the composition highlights a snake's head. Such a form would become lost amongst the dancing legs and reaching arms if it were not the focal point of the concentric circles. It calls attention to other intricacies of the image, especially those that echo its shape, such as the wave pattern of the figures' hair and the curved cut outs of eyes and mouths in the foreground. For Douglas, these smaller details amongst the action and abstraction of the piece are essential forms that ground the image in African American heritage. As seen in earlier paintings, these squiggles are references to the winding Nile River in Africa, bringing symbols of African origin into the modern painting. Providing a delicate detail at the center of the image allows the reader to carry it back out through the image to decipher larger issues and concepts. For instance, the image of the snake is a manageable, recognizable form with strong tropical associations. Being able to then carry these connotations through the similar shapes in the painting makes it easier to comprehend the more complicated and abstract forms and concepts of African heritage.

Note that Johnson's focus on the fragile bluebell and robin's breast works to a similar effect as the snake image in Douglas' *Congo*. These images are not complex,

overwhelming forms and thereby allow the reader to carry connotations of delicacy and fragility into the broader, less defined, and seemingly unfaltering landscape and sky. Johnson needs to centralize this image in her poem so that its contrasting connotations can stretch through adjacent images. Just as Johnson achieves a balance between sensitivity and strength through the symbols that build up the content of this piece, she accomplishes a similar relationship structurally. In the same way that she captures the apprehensiveness of the African American social and racial identity through sensitive shadows of strong vertical trees, so does she convey this uneasiness and urgency of the New Negro's search for re-representation by centralizing boundless concepts of land and sky with fragility. The fragility, size and sensitivity of these images are relatable characteristics that one may also see in the insecurity inherent in defining a contested cultural identity. The placement of this insecurity is the key to Johnson's structure, though. Embedded within the vastness of two overwhelming images, land and sky, fragility takes the same position that the African American consciousness does among major factors such as past and present representations of African American experience. Sky, with connotations of height, and therefore advancement, may be considered the present and immediate future, while the earth with deeply rooted connections with African American plantation heritage may coincide with the past. In the middle stands the African American consciousness, reaching through both past and present in a precarious position of uncertainty.

W.E.B. Du Bois discusses the problems of reclaiming a cultural identity specifically through art in his essay from *The Crisis* entitled "Negro Art." He writes, "…we face the Truth of Art. We have criminals and prostitutes, ignorant and debased

elements, just as all folk have. When the artist paints us he has a right to paint us whole and not ignore everything which is not as perfect as we would wish it to be."[1] These images of "criminals and prostitutes" would have been shunned for fear of them being understood as the classic *Brute* and *Jezebel* caricatures and stereotypes of previous generations. Insecurity and uncertainty come into play in needing to accept these images as part of a new and whole cultural and societal perception. Conquering this uneasiness is comparable to Johnson's embedding fragility and sensitivity within broader images. Johnson offers delicate images as a way to understand the broader concepts of land and sky, past and present. This cultural uneasiness needs to be perceived and accepted in order to fully develop a new historical and cultural identity. One must change personal self-perception before others can perceive that new image.

Johnson continues to have pivotal lines in her poems that work to ground her pieces in the same way that a bull's-eye functions. In "The Whimsy of It All" Johnson uses a simple break in rhyme scheme and rhythm to achieve this effect. Though Johnson wrote this poem much later in life, her ideas and concerns remain constant with those from her work completed during the actual Harlem Renaissance. The poem consists of two simple stanzas:

> A little room at the end of the hall,
> A chair, a bed. The room is small.
> And faintly smudged on the blistered wall-
> "I love you."
>
> Why do I come back?
> To be enthralled
> by ghosts grown tall?
> Or to enjoy the whimsy of it all? (Johnson 86)

Johnson breaks her rhyme scheme to reveal a line written on the wall. She leads the reader through the rhythmic, consistent rhyming to a stark, short line: "'I love you.'" Such a break makes the line stand out and fall heavily amongst the former melodic phrases. The following stanza picks the rhythm and rhyme scheme back up again, leaving "'I love you"' in complete isolation. Even though the first line in the second stanza does not rhyme with the rest, it takes the form of a question, which is consistent with the lines that follow it. "'I love you" feels as though it floats between stanzas. The feeling of heaviness that the line carries breaks the flow of the poem, but is also accompanied by a physical break in the poem. Space at the center of the poem gives the text a symmetrical structure that pushes energy through both stanzas. Breaking the poem after this pivotal line allows the reader to perceive the words without distraction from immediately following lines. The structural division is accomplished through the break in poetic devices in addition to the physical construction of the piece, further emphasizing the isolation of "'I love you.'" The line is also where the poem takes on a narrative feature as opposed to remaining a purely description driven scene. Johnson integrates a personal tone back through the descriptions that precede "'I love you,'" and down through the lines that complete the poem. Just as Douglas draws the viewer's eye back and forth through the concentric circles of his paintings, so does Johnson harness that movement with her focus on a single, pivotal line.

Johnson takes a further step towards physically structured poetic formats with her poem "The Quest," a poem also written after the Harlem Renaissance, yet within the same thematic and visual trends as earlier work. Working along similar conventions as "The Whimsy of It All," "The Quest" also revolves around a single central line:

When you are old you become singular and dry
When you are old you stop asking why.
You always know.

So

If the quest is stilled
and the full circle is a vise,
how circumspect,
how elegant,
to genuflect (or curtsy), and to die. (Johnson 87)

In this instance, Johnson relies heavily on the visual effect created on the page by the single word line, "So." The text to either side of "So" arches around it, partially encircling the word. In final second stanza the lines are shorter and do not reach out as far to the right as the first two lines in the first stanza. However, with phrases such as "full circle" and "circumspect" in those short final lines, the encircling sentiment is still echoed through the body of the poem where the physical reach of the lines may be weaker. Indented and set apart from the other lines, the word "So" becomes an axis for the poem to rotate around. The poem resonates with circularity, especially given the prominent hollow sound of "So" being the central focus. The horizontality of the lines of text is countered with roundness in the poem's staggering lines and centered "So." In the same way, Douglas harnesses the circle through the vertical and horizontal movement in his painting entitled *Aspects of Negro Life: Songs of the Towers* (1934) (Fig. 8). Smoky, cloud-like shapes horizontally intersect the concentric circles that lead into the center of the composition, while buildings surge upward, vertically breaking the space. The roundness permeates the scene directing the eye to move about the image in any direction rather than on the horizontal and vertical lines alone.

In both these poems, Johnson's structures show the position of African Americans in the search for defining cultural identity. There is a sense of returning, reflection, or acknowledging the past in relation to the present in both pieces. Take the line, "Why do I come back?" from "The Whimsy of it All," or the attention paid to age and dieing in "The Quest." Physical centers are used in these poems linking past, present, and the future's uncertainty. In order to reclaim the past into a modern restructured identity, the past and present must be tied together as done through the central, pivotal lines in Johnson's poems.

Langston Hughes: Constructing Obscurity

Fig. 3

Fig. 5

Poetic structures in Hughes' work show similarities to Douglas' structural ideas, capturing the same energy that Douglas generates in his compositions. Where Johnson's work was concerned with creating a path both to and from the focal point by using full circular formats, Hughes uses some circularity, but is much more concerned with getting to that grounding point and remaining there with a sense of urgency. Hughes controls the reader's progress through the poem structurally, too, by experimenting with capitalization.

In “The Cat and the Saxophone (2 A.M.)” (1926) Hughes creates a downward whirling motion as the reader progresses through the poem. Alternating text styles Hughes achieves a similar effect to Douglas’ concentric circles in a physically visual way that can also be perceived through reading the poem:

EVERYBODY
Half-pint,-
Gin?
No, make it
LOVES MY BABY
corn. You like
liquor,
don’t you, honey?
BUT MY BABY
Sure. Kiss me,
DON’T LOVE NOBODY
daddy.
BUT ME
Say!
EVERYBODY
Yes?
WANTS MY BABY
I’m your
BUT MY BABY
sweetie, ain’t I?
DON’T WANT NOBODY
Sure.
BUT
Then let’s
ME,
do it!
SWEET ME.
Charleston,
mamma!
! (Hughes 25-26)

Functionally, Hughes’ alternation between using all capital letters and normal capitalization works to show two different conversations going on at once. Lyrics to a song separate a couple’s conversation, potentially in a club or speakeasy. The textual differentiation also works towards an effect similar to the varied shades of Douglas’

concentric circles. If one were to envision Douglas' concentric circles, the lines of capital letters would be perceived as darker than the lines of standard capitalization because they fill more space in the line. Covering more space creates the effect of a darker area. The lower case letters appear in consecutive lines. They take up more vertical space over all, but spatially are perceived as a shade lighter than the longer darker lines. As the poem progresses, though, the sections of lighter, lower case text become shorter. The lighter text transitions from three lines, such as, "Half-pint / Gin? / No, make it," down to a single line, as in "daddy," "Yes!" and " do it!" Closer to the beginning of the poem, the lower case sections are longer, as the larger circles in Douglas' graphics are, appropriately, located towards the outer edges of the piece. The further into the poem one reads the smaller the sections of lowercase text become. This progression from big to small can also be found in the bulls-eye patterns of Douglas' work.

However, Hughes' textual representation breaks from Douglas' graphic when the two styles of text transition more rapidly. The rapid change in capitalization and frequent exclamation marks make the poem seem to speed up and even gain more energy. Though it does not appear so on the paper, it feels as though the text funnels down as the poem continues to progress, moving quickly through a series of single word lines. The final line pulls the poem to a literal point with the dotting of an exclamation mark. Instead of rendering a full circle, as seen in Johnson's poems, Hughes' poem more closely resembles a sector of a circle. Again, this form is not physically apparent on the page, but achieved through Hughes' ordered, alternating structure. The strong verticality of the poem's structure works with the energy in the piece to pull the words down to a

point, warping the horizontality of the lines, and suggesting a wedge-like shape. The urgency and energy pushed to this vertex resonates with the new liveliness of the Harlem Renaissance's need to establish identity. Such emotion is conveyed through Hughes' essays. Recall "The Negro and the Racial Mountain" where he calls for "the younger Negro artists" to disregard those who may or may not agree with the images they produce, because supplying the truth is more important. Hughes' tone through the passage is assertive and pressing. He wants artists to step up to the challenge and to defy current timid and conservative approaches to solving the problem of the color line. This same energy comes through the structure of "The Cat and the Saxophone (2 A.M.)," pushing through the final exclamation point to the blankness of the page's margins.

Douglas' circularity remains a major factor in Hughes' adapted form. The sector shape is developed from a circle, but the relationship between Douglas and Hughes' work goes beyond geometric definition. Douglas' work often revolves around the concentric circles that radiate from key points in his compositions, often quite centralized in the piece, yet there are a number of instances where partial circles serve similar purposes. Looking back at *Science* (1930) (Fig. 3), the concentric circles are cut off, fixed in the corner of the composition, leading the eye on and off the page, not around the painting in a contained sense. Some speculate that Douglas' concentric circles echo the different layers of African American consciousness and identity, and in *Science*, especially, a modern technique of harnessing energy, light, and a sense of freedom[2]. Where Douglas' work uses concentric circles to pull energy up and off the page, so does Hughes direct his layered poem to a point. Hughes' "The Cat and the Saxophone (2 A.M.)" finds a foundational point at the base of his poetic structure.

Hughes and Johnson both use the center of a circular framework as a foundational location. Hughes' poem may not continue after this point, but as in *Science*, there remains the suggestion of there being something beyond that foundational point. Hughes completes his poem and leaves the second half of his circle out, pushing energy off the page. Johnson, on the other hand, offers shape to her poem, beyond her central pivotal lines. Yet, while she completes the circular format of her poems in shape, she also concludes with questions and speculations, withholding strict definition.

Both poets use circular formations are used to reflect the African American identity. Outlined, yet unstructured, the boundlessness of circularity mimics the struggle inherent in defining African American cultural and historical identity. For Johnson it seems that the first half of her poems resemble what has already been experienced, the past, while the second half offers more obscurity, what is to come, and her focus on the central pivotal points symbolize what is fully known, acting as a guide and link to past and present uncertainty. Hughes, conversely, does not voice the same type of wonder, but surges energy through his poem, up to that central point, in anticipation of what cannot be defined. These poems try to create a foundation amongst uneven ground, but with that foundation, the rest of the poem can be comprehended. Without the centers and points of focus that these poets configure in their writing, the poem would lose specific, unifying direction. By restructuring poetic formats in a way that reflects a search for poetic center, they illustrate the personal search for identity that characterizes the Harlem Renaissance. These innovative poetic structures show how African Americans sought to restructure representations of themselves and articulate identity. The pivotal points in these works that tie the poems together mimic the intimate and personal racial identities

sought after during the period that were necessary in order to make sense of past and present, and the impending future.

The textual experimentation seen in "The Cat and the Saxophone (2 A.M.)" is quite unique among Hughes' other poems in the collected volumes. Looking at those poems that were not originally published in collections, though, there are more poems of this style. After "The Cat and the Saxophone (2 A.M.)" was published it received rather harsh review from contemporaries such as Countee Cullen. Upon reviewing *The Weary Blues* Cullen singled out "The Cat and the Saxophone (2 A.M.)," saying, "This is a *tour de force* of its kind, but is it a poem… In the face of accomplished fact, I cannot say *This will never do*, but I feel that it ought never to have been done."[3] He expresses his bewilderment at the unconventional moves Hughes makes in this poem as part of his first published collection, going onto admire the finesse of *Sea Calm* and *Fantasy in Purple* which abide by more traditional structural conventions. However, "The Cat and the Saxophone (2 A.M.)" is not an anomaly in Hughes' work. In the uncollected poems of Langston Hughes, one will find a great many more poems of this sort. Stretching the boundaries of format and structure, poems such as "Scottsboro" (1930-1940) move beyond formats inspired by Douglas' concentric circles and take on the geometric, linear qualities of Cubism that one will also recognize from Douglas' paintings.

In the poem "Scottsboro," Hughes addresses the false accusation of rape, unjust imprisonment, and death sentence of the nine Scottsboro Boys that became an international headline in the 1931.[4] He incorporates a number of structural and stylistic factors into a single piece of work that evoke effects similar to the newspaper headlines

that would have surrounded the issue. Using text size, capitalization and spacing, Hughes builds up a visually complex poetic structure:

> 8 BLACK BOYS IN A SOUTHERN JAIL.
> WORLD, TURN PALE!
>
> 8 black boys and one white lie.
> Is it much to die?
>
> Is it much to die when immortal feet
> March with you down Time's street,
> When beyond steel bars sound the deathless drums
> Like a mighty heart-beat as They come?
>
> Who comes?
>
> Christ,
> Who fought alone.
>
> John Brown.
>
> That mad mob
> That tore the Bastille down
> Stone by Stone … (Hughes 207-209)

Hughes begins his poem with a bold number eight, using the numerical form rather than spelling it out, as is typical of most of his other poems. Using the numerical form becomes a visual move on Hughes' part, drawing the reader into a unique poetic composition. The eight is oversized, taking up the thickness of two normal lines. Creating a very bold impression at the first line works to push the powerful presence of the number into the standard sized eight that starts the third line. The energy flows into the repeated form, and through the rest of the poem written in the same size text.

The first two lines of text that accompany the eight are also written in capital letters, a convention seen in "The Cat and the Saxophone (2 A.M.)." The combination of text size and capitalization mimics a newspaper headline that then flows into poetry.

Hughes compliments the serious subject matter with a structure that packages the poetry in this way. The headline feature of the piece presents the poem in a way that commands an attentive audience from the onset. At the end of the poem, though, Hughes repeats the opening two lines in the same format, abstracting the newspaper connotation with a closing headline. Opening and closing the poem in this way creates a border for the poem, containing the discussion within. This structure is quite opposite to the compositional effects of "The Cat and the Saxophone (2 A.M.)." All action occurs within the headlines, asking to be resolved within those bounds. Hughes, in this case, provides the definitive boundaries, but does not define the center point figuratively or visually, as Johnson does. Definition is placed on the boundary while the center is ambiguous.

The poem continues in a list formation with each short line or group of lines spaced apart from one another. Short lines occur consecutively with grouped lines dispersed through the list, resulting in two effects. Rhythmically, the change in text length of the coupled lines proves to speed up the reading at these points. This compares to the short lines, which are surrounded by thoughtful space. Shorter, separated lines require pausing before and after, whereas the enjambment of the coupled lines instigates a speedier, fluid reading. There is not a specific pattern that structures the placement of short or long lines, but the flow between them feels impulsive and staggered, similar to cubist intersections and overlays in Douglas' work. The impulsive rhythm translates visually, evoking the same cubist forms. The grouped lines appear blockier than the short, single word lines, resembling light and dark areas as before. Looking at *Aspects of Negro Life: The Negro in an African Setting* (Fig. 5), one may note that the rays of light

and wavy lines that layer over the figures in the painting are compositionally essential for directing the viewers eye. Their direction is fully thought out, but where those lines intersect other forms feels less predictable. There is no strict pattern to govern how or where a figure may be intersected with a compositional or atmospheric line. For example, the shoulder, torso, or leg may be shaded a different color than the rest of the body depending on where these lines pass through the form. Space between intersections is not consistent, just as Hughes lines vary in length through "Scottsboro." The blocky sections of text resemble the darker areas of the painting, and the lighter sections of text act as the various shades that interrupt the forms.

Initially, Hughes' blocky exploration of contained space feels opposite to flowing and streamlined progression of circular or sector-like formats. While boundaries are set up by the pillars of capitalized text at the beginning and end of the poem, the middle does not resolve itself at any given point, just as no clear resolution is achieved in "The Cat and the Saxophone (2AM)". The impulsive intersections that occur rhythmically and visually foster the same type of ambiguity that was seen in the boundless roundness of the circular structures. This structure appears to be asking for resolution between two boundaries. In the same way, many artists of the Harlem renaissance search for a definition of the African American identity when given black and white, past and present. Even though the structure here is opposite to that seen in "The Cat and the Saxophone (2 A.M.)," both structural formations are grasping for what is not defined within them. The structures are essentially asking for a resolution to the undefined racial identity of the Harlem Renaissance.

Gwendolyn Bennett: Unifying Variation

Fig. 7

Fig. 4

Gwendolyn Bennett offers a far different structural reading from Johnson and Hughes, caused in part, by her dual career as both a poet and a painter. Furthermore, Bennett has a much more limited body of work to look at in comparison to her contemporaries. Looking over her poetry one will initially see that she remains fairly traditional with her physical structures. Taking her poem "Song" (1926) into closer consideration, though, her structure is revealed to be complex and seamlessly integrated into the same issues surrounding the insecurity of racial identity seen in Johnson and Hughes. Bennett begins her poem with traditional conventions, but also with the openness of free verse:

> I am weaving a song of waters,
> Shaken from firm, brown limbs,
> Or heads thrown back in irreverent mirth.
> My song has the lush sweetness
> Of moist, dark lips
> Where hymns keep company
> With old forgotten banjo songs.
> Abandon tells you
> That I sing the heart of race
> While sadness whispers
> That I am the cry of a soul. . . . (Bennett 22)

Bennett keeps the structure of the beginning of her poem simple, fluid and quiet. She maintains a fairly consistent line length, and does not stretch the boundaries of the font and spacing as Hughes does. The text is comfortable to read; it does not require the reader to navigate through explorations of text and space. She completes her first stanza with an ellipsis, trailing her thoughts off to the second stanza that one assumes will follow the form of the first. However, Bennett breaks from her form here and transitions to the vernacular:

> A-shoutin' in de ole camp-meeting-place,
> A-strummin' o' de ole banjo.
> Singin' in de moonlight,
> Sobbin' in de dark.
> Singin', sobbin', strummin' slow . . .
> Singin' slow, sobbin' low.
> Strummin', strummin', strummin' slow . . .
> Words are bright bugles
> That make the shining for my song,
> And mothers hold down babies
> To dark, warm breasts
> To make my singing sad. (Bennett 22)

Moving into dialect verse, Bennett refers back to past literary practices that were defined by stereotypes of African American experience. The dialect writing has visual characteristics all its own when placed alongside non-dialect writing. Apostrophes and cases of double letters make the lines of dialect poetry very dense and busy to look at. The shape of the letter "m," for instance, dominates the line "Strummin', strummin', strummin' slow . . ." in both and auditory and visual manner. Visually, though, the "m" makes for a very constant, heavy line because the space between letters resembles the spaces with the letter's shape. The overall alliterative qualities of these dialect lines have the same effect.

Bennett integrates the heavy dialect into a poem that is written in a modern free verse form up to this point, and begins to develop a commentary on African American identity through her poem's structure by giving the dialect poetry attention and recognition in the middle of the modern piece. The language choice does not take over the poem, but remains an integral and defining component of the structure, hovering between her first and last stanzas. Swiftly transitioning back to common English, Bennett completes her third and last stanza of "Song:"

A dancing girl with swaying hips
Sets mad the queen in the harlot's eye.
    Praying slave
    Jazz-band after
    Breaking heart
    To the time of laughter . . .
Clinking chains and minstrelsy
Are wedged fast with melody.
    A praying slave
    With a jazz-band after . . .
    Singin' slow, sobbin' low.
Sun-baked lips will kiss the earth.
Throats of bronze will burst with mirth.
    Sing a little faster,
    Sing a little faster,
    Sing! (Bennett 22)

Returning to free verse, Bennett also employs strategic indentation not seen in the rest of the poem. There is much to be said about the content of "Song," but looking in a purely structural direction, the entire stanza stands out amongst the previous two. The structure feels much livelier with its indentations and instances of slight repetition. Similar to Hughes, the last stanza offers a variation in the overall appearance of the poem, making the text into an interesting construction of words of the page. The eye flows through the first stanza, experiences lively, choppy, heavy text in the middle, and arrives at the last

stanza to be carried through the long and short lines of indentation and down to a final exclamation mark. With different visual elements at work in each stanza, the poem appears to have three completely different structures within it that are undoubtedly held together thematically. However, the progression of structural impressions helps to keep the eye engaged visually as it proceeds from forms that are arguably moderate, heavy, and light in feel. Offering all three dimensions of textual density, the poem finds a cohesive bind.

The repetitive qualities of the final stanza cause words like "Praying slave / Jazz-band after" to echo through the poem, bringing a consistency to the indentations. By indenting the last section of her poem, Bennett aligns three lines of the word "Sing," a device that works to visually emphasize the word and the end of the poem. One will note that many of the factors at work in "Song" not only have strong visual functions, but also feel musical, resembling verses and choruses. Those words that are repeated through the poem have musical connotations in most cases. This is not to say that the poem must resolve to fit into a single genre, however. Rather, it is important to see that in a poem of particular visual value there is comparative musical importance. Coexisting within the same poem, the two influences cannot be easily separated from one another.

Bennett achieves a more general sense of center and unification than Johnson and Hughes, who direct the reader's eye to a certain point on the page. While she does embed the dialect into the physical center of her poem, the overall unification of African American literary forms seems to be her centralizing feature. She brings visual and musical structures together, and integrates dialect and free verse poetry together in a progressively visual structure. Each step of her poem has new visual elements at work.

When taken as a whole, the different levels of visual influence meld into a single cohesive image. As discussed earlier, Douglas, too, takes from various visual traditions to create his paintings. Pulling from early African techniques, his figures boast Egyptian-like features, yet they may be placed in an American or Western setting as in *Noah's Ark* (Fig. 7) or *The Founding of Chicago* (Fig. 4). Beyond binding two cultures and experiences, Douglas then paints in a modernist form incorporating geometric and cubist techniques. His paintings become a complete unification of African American experiences. Bennett's poem similarly creates a whole by combining three different levels of African American literary and visual expression. She finds a much broader foundation for her work than Hughes and Johnson, by striving for inclusion, rather than movement from a single point.

Bennett's poem demonstrates a direct parallel relationship between various literary styles that make a single poem and dueling forces that structure identity. Where Bennett brings continuity to a poem structured by substantially different styles of verse, African American society is grasping for a sense of wholeness and cohesion for their cultural identity in the Harlem Renaissance.

Conclusion

In comparison, Johnson, Hughes and Bennett have substantially different approaches to poetic structure, and as such, appear to have embraced different visual influences into their work. Yet, in offering a center to grow from, broad boundaries to search for definition within, or an inclusive range of experiences to draw meaning from, there remains a deep rooted motivation in each poet to find a foundation for racial, social,

political, historical or cultural identity. One of the overarching issues of the Harlem Renaissance, the search for racial identity, is displayed through the assimilation of the visual elements that these poets have taken into their work. In structuring their poems these poets demonstrate the actual restructuring of identity and self-perception taking place during the Harlem Renaissance. Specific arrangement of poetic components such as the placement of details in the middle of a poem reflects the same type of metaphorical center desired in recreating a personal racial identity. The visual elements of poetic structure exemplify the complexities of how this racial identity is, itself, constructed.

Notes:

[1] Du Bois, W.E.B. 1978. (354).

[2] Earle, Susan. 2007. (34).

[3] Cullen, Countee. "Poet on Poet." *Critical Essays on Langston Hughes*. Ed. Edward J. Mullen. Boston; G. K. Hall & Co., 1986. (38). Print.

[4] Earle, Susan. 2007. (24).

Chapter 3:

Identity for Public Consumption

The visual arts have informed the poetic in such a way that a more complex, yet complete reading of racial identity may take place through an analysis of the poetic-visual relationship of Harlem Renaissance poetry. Poetry by Langston Hughes, Helene Johnson, and Gwendolyn Bennett are given a new artistic energy when read alongside the artworks of Aaron Douglas. Reading poetry in this light allows for a more layered and inclusive understanding of this period's African American identity, broadening commonly considered views of identity that heavily focus musical influences. Within the poems' content, imagery reveals how racial uplift, the balance between past and present cultural experiences, or the combination of traditional and modern artistic techniques may play a role in this racial identity, while poetic structures display how the deeper, holistic interpretations and combinations that these components formulate structure one's perceptions of identity. In previous chapters these relationships have been best seen when the image and poem have been deliberately selected to depict that poetic-visual relationship; yet, following the same methodology, such trends are also apparent in literary journals of the time that already feature both literary and visual texts.

Applying this methodology to journals from the Harlem Renaissance, *The Crisis* and *FIRE!!,* allows one to gain a greater understanding of the identities being promoted and advertised during the Harlem Renaissance. These publications incorporate original artwork and poetry by contemporary African American artists. While the publishers and editors decide which poems and illustrations to include, they do not necessarily make

their selections based on the poem-image relationships that were discussed in previous chapters. The visual texts inevitably impact the poetic selections in the journals, whether or not the journals specifically intended to have that poetic-visual relationship. The informative nature of a journal also provides a basis for discussing how perceptions of identity may be interpreted once the artistic elements of poetry are understood. As such, these publications offer a natural example for discussing how the juxtaposition of image and poem may foster a more dynamic reading of African American identity. Focusing on poem-image interactions within a journal will mean disregarding other texts within the publication. However, certain articles or captions may be considered to determine the particular views of the journal and may be key in understanding the context of certain visuals.

Within these publications, images impact the poetic through direct juxtaposition of visual and poetic texts or by providing an overarching visual statement that carries through the journal. Thus far, Aaron Douglas' paintings have provided a constant visual example from which to consider poetry. In *The Crisis* and *FIRE!!,* though, visual texts range from reproductions of paintings, prints and drawings, to photographs. The visuals may be present in select parts of the journal, as well. For instance, cover art sends an immediate message about the journal's content, while illustrations, photographs, and other larger images may reflect specific articles. Decorative visuals in the journals have their own influence on the poems, as well. Borders around certain poems, or symbols through the journal highlight particular visual instances in the poetry from a graphic perspective. The specificity of certain visuals does not limit their impact on the poems,

because they are all part of the same journal. It is also important to note that all images will be referred to in the context of their original location in the journal.

By joining the approaches used in previous chapters, which discuss poetic content and structure as separate considerations, one may understand the relationship between the visual and poetic as they function in a journal. Imagery will, again, be considered in terms of visual parallelism, and language choice. Accordingly, poetic structures will be interpreted in terms of overall layout and organization, but also in the context of the journals' designs. The resulting relationships will then be compared to the journals' central views, revealing the dynamic constructions working to package and promote specific modes of identity. Reading *The Crisis* and *FIRE!!* in this manner will grant seemingly opposing philosophies about African American identity in the Harlem Renaissance a sense of nuance and wholeness than is normally understood.

A Generational Divide Between *The Crisis* and *FIRE!!*

The Crisis and *FIRE!!* are two of the most prominent and important journals of the Harlem Renaissance and represent two extremes of the period's periodicals.[1] *The Crisis*, as the creation of W.E.B Du Bois, and the monthly publication of the NAACP, is arguably on the conservative side of publications. Du Bois edited the magazine from 1910 to 1934. *FIRE!!,* on the other hand is understood to be a bold reaction to publications like *The Crisis*, by the next generation of "younger negro artists," as the journal's subtitle states. *FIRE!!* only produced a single issue in 1926.[2]

W. E. B Du Bois, as the editor of *The Crisis*, is considered one of the Harlem Renaissance's foremost leaders in politics, social matters, and education[3]. His prominent

position in society reflects his mission to create a "high class journal" for "intelligent Negroes."[4] *The Crisi*s packages the world of academia and current affairs in a comprehensible form for the upper middle class by combining multiple forms of written and visual texts. The dynamic interactions of these texts produce the cohesive bind to a very complex journal. Du Bois includes affirmative articles and images that boast the recent accomplishments of African Americans in order to "'inspire them toward definite ideals."'[5] However, it is important to note that these affirmative messages always reside within a delicate boundary of propriety. Du Bois' perception of what was socially acceptable and expected occupies a reserved niche of suit coats and portraiture in an effort to depict his ideal example of society. On the other hand, fear of immersing his readers in only good news prompted Du Bois to include the negative side of reality. To avoid reporting a half-truth, Du Bois includes unsettling news on the constant injustices and prejudices plaguing American society to keep the ongoing challenges of racism and violence in the forefront of his readers' minds. In this sense, Du Bois takes hold of past and present resentment and hostility and still emphasizes the greatness of African American people, in an effort to produce a balanced and comprehensive representation of the issues surrounding and related to African American identity.

Responding to the conservative messages of magazines like *The Crisis,* contributors of *FIRE!!,* led by its editor Wallace Thurman, fashioned a new journal that would vehemently critique the views of older generations.[6] *FIRE!!* takes the same approach of using multi-media texts to produce a compelling periodical, yet the context of these various texts is far from that of its predecessors. Standing as an independent publication, *FIRE!!* embraces its ability to publish its radical views on racial identity, and

more importantly, on issues that faced African American experience beyond race, specifically, sexuality[7]. Where Du Bois and the NAACP regulate the content of *The Crisis*, *FIRE!!* looks to a team of emerging writers and artists to shape their non-conformist journal. Writers and visual artists working on *FIRE!!* include Gwendolyn Bennett, Aaron Douglas, Langston Hughes, Zora Neal Hurston, Richard Bruce Nugent and Wallace Thurman. The journal uses the arts as a means to show the truth of African American experience, rather than as a component of a more conservative plan for social change. Thomas H. Wirth reflects on the ideals of *FIRE!!* in his essay "*FIRE!!* In Retrospect,"

> -- that despite all obstacles, the artist must express the truth within himself. That the artist must do so, not for art's sake, but for his own sake, his people's sake, and for the sake of humankind. And that neither self, nor truth, nor art can be divided into boxes labeled 'Black' and 'White', or 'High' and 'Low'.[8]

FIRE!! is much more concerned with showing the raw truth, boasting the dirty laundry as well as the clean, in a holistic way. In expressing the self, African American creators could effectually write about African American experience, but did not necessarily need to focus on re-representing racial identity outright. Being African American and writing about personal experience meant writing about African American experiences. Race did not need to be a focal point of these expressions, as it was in *The Crisis*. Granted, while *The Crisis* does address both positive and negative experiences of African Americans, it is with a selective eye. Opposition would argue that the combination of articles is skewed to pose a pre-censored fabrication of an all-inclusive representation of racial identity. Between the two journals it is apparent that a difference in generational identity, as a product of conflicting views on racial identity, is the major source of dissonance.

Preexisting Structures

The November issue of *The Crisis* from 1926, as compared to *FIRE!!*, which was also published in November of 1926, include radically different presentations of poetry from one another. *The Crisis* understandably deals with different genres of articles than *FIRE!!* however, both journals strive to include poetry as a key component of their publications.

In *The Crisis,* poems seem to have a supplementary presence in the overall structure of the journal, despite Du Bois' enthusiasm for their inclusion. The first selection of poetry presented in this issue is entitled "Two Poems," consisting of "Happiness" and "Death" by Edward Silvera. The section breaks the space of the page following a four and a half page biographical essay on Martin Robinson Delaney, an African American abolitionist from the 19th century. The two poems fall one after the other, centered within the space they are allotted. Being placed so close together, one poem seems to flow directly into the second. Even though they are two separate poems, being coupled within the title "Two Poems" and positioned in sequence, they take on the presence of a single piece of work.

The second section of poetry to appear in this issue of *The Crisis* comes five pages later with "Decay," a poem by Georgia Douglas Johnson. This selection of poetry is incorporated into a more diverse page layout. Johnson's poem resides in the middle of the page between dense columns of text from the article "Conditions in Harlem" that take up the first third of the page, and a photograph at the page's base. The poetry appears separate from its neighboring components in this instance, as well, yet the structure of the poem, as it appears visually, is definitely affected by the heaviness of the text and

photograph above and below. The poem gains some shape from the empty margins to its left and right, but still feels like a continuation of what comes before and after.

The placement of Georgia Douglas Johnson's poem "Courier," offers an example of how poems often appear in *The Crisis.* The last major selection of poetry in this issue, "Courier" is hard to find if one simply flips through the pages. Beneath two dense columns of the article above, "Courier" is stationed in two columns itself, taking on a similar format to the surrounding text. Occupying the last quarter of the page, the two types of writing are not overly distinguishable from one another. Structural patterns within Johnson's poem that may have been seen otherwise are masked by the altered structure. In other words, the journal does not accommodate the poem, but rather, the poem adopts the preexisting format of the journal.

It is also important to note that the formatting of the poems' titles and authors' names in *The Crisis* consistently emphasizes the poet over the poem. The selection from the section entitled "Two Poems," poses the poet's identity as a higher priority than the title of the poem:

Two Poems

EDWARD SILVERA

HAPPINESS

I went in quest of happiness
  Upon a golden mountain
But she was in the plain below
  Beside the public fountain… (Silvera 13)

This presentation positions a title for the two poems collectively, followed by the poet's name in a slightly smaller font, and finally the first poem's title in bold lettering, which is

only slightly larger than the font of the actual poem. The sizing and pattern may vary for other selections of poetry in this issue and others, but the placement of the poet's name remains the same- always ahead of the poem, never after. In arranging titles and names in such a way, the body of the poem comes second to the poet. According to sequence and sizing, more importance is generally placed on the poet than on the poem. Fittingly, high achieving individuals of the black community were of high priority to Du Bois. By placing names before work, Du Bois shines a spotlight on the high achieving individual, again, suggesting a potential example for his readers to follow.

With this basic technique of incorporating poetry into the ebb and flow of the journal, Du Bois certainly succeeds in using poetry as a link to the fine arts and upper-middle class aesthetics. Poetry becomes one of many steps in his overarching plan and views surrounding African American identity. Du Bois considers poetry to be a product of high culture, the arts, and therefore a necessary element for racial uplift. Structurally speaking, poetry becomes a supportive pillar for Du Bois' complex views of racial identity.

Conversely, *FIRE!!* devotes the entire middle section of the journal to poetry. Similar in length to an issue of *The Crisis*, *FIRE!!* gives nearly twenty percent of its pages to poetry alone. The section of poetry entitled "Flame From the Dark Tower: A Section of Poetry," allots each author his or her own page for a single poem or two shorter pieces. The first poem from the section, "From The Dark Tower," by Countée Cullen, for which the section is named, resides in an entirely different environment than the poems in *The Crisis*. Centered within the page layout, immersed in the blankness of the surrounding margins that are cropped only by two subtle borders, the actual text of

the poem becomes the main focus of the page. The visual impression of the poem's structure is clear, unobstructed by surrounding text, and the space allotted to each poem does not force the text into columns as in *The Crisis*. In this sense, a greater difference in textual appearance is achieved than in *The Crisis*.

In crediting authorship, *FIRE!!* takes the opposite approach from *The Crisis*. In the instance of "From The Dark Tower," Countée Cullen's name is off centered just below the final stanza. Though capitalized, the name is in the same size font as the poem, making the poem more important than the mere product of the writer. Where *The Crisis* boasts the author of the poem in the same headline as the poem's title, *FIRE!!* attempts to give the art the spotlight over the artist. In so doing, *FIRE!!* upholds its goals of having art show expressions of African American experience while Du Bois is critiqued for using poetry as a step in a greater scheme for social change.

First Impressions: The Effects of Cover Art

The cover art that ushers the reader into a piece of written work has a significant effect on the textual content within because the artwork sets the reader's expectations for what the content will reveal. In journals such as *The Crisis* and *FIRE!!*, which recognize the importance of visual art, the cover art is especially important. If the cover sends an opposing message than its contents, that relationship, too, is key to understanding the relationship at work between the text and the visual.

Du Bois affirms that the presence of visuals in African American publications is an essential component to the example he is striving to present to his readers. Speaking retrospectively, Du Bois notes that "Pictures of colored people were an innovation… at

that time it was the rule of most white papers never to publish a picture of a colored person except as a criminal."[9] Visuals also add a captivating element to a publication, and offer a change in pace for the viewer's eyes. They have the power to highlight or overshadow what is written, creating a complex conversation between forms of information within the same publication.

The choice in cover art for the November, 1926 issue of *The Crisis* reflects the goals of Du Bois and has a strategic influence on the poetry within. The drawing is simply labeled as "A Drawing by Aaron Douglas" on the contents page of the issue. Again, note the attention granted to the artist, rather than the art. The sketch is of the head of an African American boy, fully rendered. The boy's face appears round and soft, yet Douglas has employed a cubist technique that divides the boy's face into smaller, angular planes. Each plane has a different tone, giving the boy's face a three-dimensional appearance. The choice behind this particular drawing by Douglas can only be speculated, but does pose some interesting points to consider.

Choosing a piece by Douglas that shows his technical artistic skill, over his better known modernist and abstract work, emphasizes the traditional world of art over the innovative. It seems fitting that this choice would stress the traditional fine arts, the realm of art that Du Bois is most associated with. In a poem such as "Decay," by Georgia Douglas Johnson, a similar relationship between tradition and modernity becomes evident in the poem's structure. The poem's rhyme scheme and rhythm react similarly to the cubist elements of Douglas' technically accomplished drawing:

Swift-footed Time, how eagerly you go
Across the swaying summer grasses bed
As on in breathless haste you hurry me
To Winter with its chilling winds and snow.

The noontide hour is fading – in my hair
The furtive shadows caper and recline.
I tell my beads of amethyst and gold
So near at end, so passing dear and fair. (Douglas Johnson, 22)

While the rhyme scheme shows that the first and last lines of each stanza rhyme, the enjambment carries the poem in such a way that those instances of rhyming are not heard. They are only perceived in written form. The flow and rhythm created through the piece is much more in line with free verse poetry. Visually, the poem abides by more traditional forms, while the spoken verses feel more modern. In this same way, the illustration of the boy also conveys modern practices of cubism through traditional techniques of drawing. The conversation that then arises when these patterns are found, accordingly abides by Du Bois' goals for his readers. Du Bois, in this case seems to be acknowledging the importance of innovation. However, in wanting to package his acceptance in such a way that his readers will understand, he understates the innovative presence by conveying it in terms of the traditional.

Georgia Douglas Johnson's second poem in this issue, "Courier," engages Douglas' cover illustration in a very complex conversation through poetic content. In *The Crisis,* the poem appears in two columns.

WHERE are the brave men?
Where are the strong men?
Pygmies rise and spawn the earth,
Weak-kneed, weak-hearted and afraid!
Afraid to face the counsel of their timid
Hearts,
Afraid to look men squarely –
Down they gaze
With fatal fascination –
Down,
Down,
Into the whirling maggot-sands
Of prejudice! (Douglas Johnson, 29)

Douglas Johnson focuses on the downward gaze of her subjects' faces, those of the "Pygmies" who "spawn the earth." She relies heavily on their sense of sight, emphasizing the direction of their glance by repeating the word "Down." One will quickly remember the similar downcast eyes of Douglas' boy on the cover of the issue. This case of visual parallelism does not have the same type of positive correlation seen in other more purposeful comparisons because the images are not conveying the same ideas. However, the effects of the image on the poem are no less relevant. The boy and the connotations of youth and innocence that he carries repel Douglas Johnson's adjectives of weakness, corruption and "fatal fascination." The boy is hardly the spineless and prejudiced "pygmy" to which she refers, but the parallel images bring the comparison to mind, nonetheless.

The mismatched ideals of youth's promise and the evil of prejudice proceed to provoke one to reassess Douglas Johnson's rhetorical tone at the beginning of the poem. In looking for the connection between the two images one is brought back to Douglas Johnson's initial question of, "Where are the brave men? / Where are the strong men?" The speaker implies that these men are not present, but also insinuates a sense of urgency. Douglas' boy seems to offer an answer to this question, depicting the next generation. With youth comes the concept of change, which is exactly what Johnson is calling for. However, the downcast eyes of Douglas' boy highlight the main issue at hand. Change will not happen of its own accord. Without intervention there is no promise that youth will not fall into corruption as dark as those who "…gaze / With fatal fascination." The unstable connection between these two central images (Douglas'

boy's face and the poetic imagery) reflects the complexity and fragility of the identities people chose for themselves, and helps convey the urgency in Douglas Johnson's tone. The images do not provide answers for each other, but effectively spark a reader into reassessing oneself and the active or passive role he or she identifies with. The ambiguity implied by the similar images ultimately brings the responsibility back to the reader when he or she refers back to Johnson's opening question.

In *FIRE!!*, the cover art has equally significant effects on the poetry within the issue. Consequently, Aaron Douglas is also credited with the cover illustration for *FIRE!!,* though the image is much more reminiscent of his abstract paintings seen in previous chapters than the technical illustration displayed on the cover of *The Crisis*. The imagery of Edward Silvera's poem "Jungle Taste," is enhanced when read alongside Douglas' print. In this case, both structure and content in Douglas' illustration play into the visual at work in Silvera's poetic content:

> There is a coarseness
> In the songs of black men
> Coarse as the songs
> Of the sea.
> There is a weird strangeness
> In the songs of black men
> Which sounds not strange
> To me.
>
> There is beauty
> In the faces of black women,
> Jungle beauty
> And mystery.
> Dark, hidden beauty
> In the faces of black women
> Which only black men
> See. (Silvera 18)

The most prominent instance of visual influence occurs in the second stanza where the speaker pays particular attention to the appearances of black women. Taking Douglas' cover into consideration, which displays a blocky profile and the silhouette of the Sphinx, the speaker's poetic images become clearer. Silvera's poem tells of "Jungle beauty / And mystery /… In the faces of black women," but makes a point of clarifying that this beauty is hidden, only recognizable by black men. Douglas' visual similarly places images of Africa within the profile on the cover of the publication. The two profiles echo one another with the same stylized features and Douglas' visual acts as an iconic map for the relationship Silvera is illustrating in his poem. Africa, through the image of the Sphinx, is physically placed within the human profile on the cover of *FIRE!!* just as "jungle beauty" is internalized in black women's faces.

Silvera also emphasizes the power of sight as the speaker notes that black men are the only ones who can recognize the "jungle beauty" of black women. Silvera proceeds to end his poem with the word "See," floating in a line of its own. The concept of appearances is strengthened by the strategic placement of the word. One will also recall the particular style in which Douglas illustrates the figures' eyes on the cover illustration. A single simplified line, jagged in the case of the human profile, wave-like in the Sphinx's, substitutes for the figure's eye. Note that the wave-like gesture used here also symbolizes the waves of the Nile, and Africa by association. Furthermore, consider that these lines are implemented through negative space, or the space that surrounds a positive image. At this juncture the background penetrates the profiles deeper than any other. Given the simplified graphics, this also means that the figure's surroundings push into their solid silhouettes through a symbol of Africa. Through the eyes, the figures in

Douglas' image, as well as the women in Silvera's poem, internalize Africa and translate their identity through an African lens. The eyes become a window to the cultural and historical origins of African American racial identity. Only through this window can those origins be conveyed and understood. Douglas' illustration highlights the deep internalization of racial identity taking place in Silvera's poem. The visual offers a pictorial outline of how the poetic images line up, but also provokes a complex discussion of how racial identity is perceived and conveyed in both poetic and visual texts.

Shaping Perceptions through Embedded Images

Secondary images, or the images within a publication, further impact the visual elements of poetry in *The Crisis* and *FIRE!!*. Images close in proximity to poetry will have stronger effects on those particular poems than images that supplement specific articles, but all images add to the overall visual statement of the journal. This greater visual impression plays into one's reading of the visual elements of the poetic.

A poem and image located on the same page will have a direct impact on one another. In *The Crisis*, Georgia Douglas Johnson's poem "Decay," is presented directly on top of a black and white photograph. Taking up the entire bottom section of the page, the photograph captioned, "Negro American Delegates of the World's Y.M.C.A. Conference at Helsingfors, Finland" has a strong structural impact on the poem above. Douglas Johnson's poem is overtaken spatially, the square inches of the photograph exceeding the reach of the poem. However, the dissimilarity in size is countered by the natural difference in medium. The poem's blank margins repel the solid box of the image

below, and the text forms a tone and texture completely different from that of the photograph. Through opposition, the two balance one another compositionally.

Looking conceptually at the relationship between "Decay" and its neighboring photograph will reveal additional complexities. Lines from the first stanza reflect on the inevitable passing of time:

> Swift-footed Time, how eagerly you go
> Across the swaying summer grasses bed
> As on in breathless haste you hurry me
> To Winter with its chilling winds and snow. (Douglas Johnson 22)

Note that "Time" is both personified and associated with nature. Time is portrayed as an individual who ushers the speaker through life's warmth of the "swaying summer grasses bed" and onto "Winter with its chilling winds and snow." Taking the poem's title into consideration it seems that the speaker is being ushered towards the end of his or her life. Pleasant times are hurried through, only to come up against the hardships of "Winter." The photograph below the poem is of considerably opposite messages. As an independent entry, separate from an associated article, the photograph is given its own designation on the contents' page. Within the image, the group of men, or the "Negro American Delegates," stand stationary in their suit coats above the caption that contextualizes their presence. The proud photograph links the men with worldly accomplishments and progress directly after a poem that signifies the unavoidable passing of time and life. The juxtaposition of these two sentiments brings a reader from a sense of despair directly into a sense of pride for those men at the Y.M.C.A conference. Though it is difficult to see, it appears as though the men are lined up in front of a receding landscape. Whereas Douglas Johnson's poem refers to the natural progression from "swaying summer grasses" to "Winter with its chilling winds and snow," using the landscape to illustrate

the passing of life, the photograph interjects a group of inspirational men into the foreground, taking hold of the landscape and granting a feeling of pride. The poem and picture do not communicate exclusively with one another. Rather, the photograph presents an inspirational message after the poem pulls the reader into a sense of gravity and seriousness. The two converse with one another, offering a full range of emotions without ever needing to intersect directly. This effectively keeps the reader in a complex state of mind, varying between somber thoughts of life's path and pride for humanity. The poem and image are placed so closely to one another that the two concepts are constantly repelling one another, yet inseparable due to proximity. One cannot think within one frame of mind without quickly being reminded of the other.

While visuals in *The Crisis* tend to shape readers' emotions to promote a specific perspective on racial identity, the visuals in *FIRE!!* influence the journal's poetry in a way that highlights a range of identities. There are two prominent selections of secondary images in *FIRE!!* The first, consisting of two illustrations by Richard Bruce Nugent, conveys strong Africanist motifs, and a clear focus on sexuality. Both images focus on the female nude, presumably African American given the stark contrast of the black and white print and the implementation of African designs in the backgrounds. The main focus of both images is the sensuality and sexuality communicated through Nugent's sensitive artworks. The first of these illustrations falls directly after the "Table of Contents," while the second follows the poetry section.

When one proceeds from the first drawing, which depicts a nude woman standing relaxed against the gentle arch of a palm tree, to the poetry section several pages later, the impact of the illustrations still enhances visual elements within the poems. One will recall

from past discussions, the use of the human form to mimic the strong verticality of trees. In a poem such as "Finality" by Edward Silvera, which heavily references the image of a tree, the symbol offers a much more intricate reading than previously seen. Through visual parallelism the illustration initially highlights the issues surrounding racial identity that may not be explicitly addressed in the poetry. In "Finality," for example, there is no reference to racial identity:

> Trees are the souls of men
> Reaching skyward.
> And while each soul
> Draws nearer God
> Its dark roots cleave
> To earthly sod:
> Death, only death
> Brings triumph to the soul.
> The silent grave alone
> Can bare the goal.
> Then the roots and all
> Must lie forgot –
> To rot. (Silvera 18)

The "souls of men" are not described in terms of race, maintaining a focus on the individual's relationship to religion. An image such as the first drawing by Nugent, though, poses the African American form with the tree in the poem. The human body is joined with the tree in the drawing, transposing that connection, and the racial identity it carries, onto the souls that had originally been presented as race-less. However, the sensuality of the image cannot be extricated from the racial identity transmitted to the poem. Race and sensuality are unified in Nugent's drawing, and it follows that a sexual identity would also be considered alongside "Finality." The poem's religious overtones resist these connotations, creating an incongruent reading of the text. Incongruence

continues as symbols of strength, vitality and sexuality are pitted against the inevitability of death.

The conflicting sentiments ultimately find a common denominator in the poem's focus on death. Multiple identities saturate the unspecified "souls of men." Yet, the poem's irrevocable promise of death unifies the seemingly competing identities (spiritual, racial, sexual), because all such identities come to an end with the body's death. The multiple identities that impose themselves on the poem via the illustration become one through the common experience of death. Death sheds some of its darker and somber connotations in light of this unifying effect.

The second section of images in *FIRE!!* is quite unlike its predecessors in the journal. Three line drawings by Aaron Douglas fall one after the other at the center of the issue. Each drawing appears on its own page and depicts a single individual. The images show the figures at work in a certain vocation, one as a preacher, another as an artist, and the final as a waitress. Douglas' characterizations are contour line drawings, or drawings that follow the outlines of their subjects, devoid of rendering. More so, the line drawings exaggerate and warp the body in sections, mimicking a blind-contour technique. In blind contour the artist's eye never leaves the subject to look at the drawing beneath their pencil, and often times the pencil never leaves the paper. Using this technique trains an artist to draw what they actually see, the drawing becoming a direct product of the eye instead of the brain's rationalization. While it does not appear that Douglas took this approach exclusively, since the drawings are very coherent and generally proportional, he does appear to have referenced the practice. The wrinkles in the crook of the preacher's arm sleeve, for instance, are spaced unrealistically, similar to blind contour drawings.

When read with these illustrations in mind, the occupational identity present in Langston Hughes' poem "Elevator Boy" stands out. Visual parallelism once again highlights and enhances images already at work in them poem:

I got a job now
Runnin' an elevator
In Dennison Hotel in Jersey,
Job aint no good though.
No money around.
    Jobs are just chances
    Like everything else.
    Maybe a little luck now,
    Maybe not.
    Maybe a good job sometimes:
    Step out o' the barrel, boy.
Two new suits an'
A woman to sleep with.
    Maybe no luck for a long time.
    Only the elevators
    Goin' up an' down,
    Up an' down,
    Or somebody else's shoes
    To shine,
    Or greasy pots in a dirty kitchen.
I been runnin' this
Elevator too long.
Guess I'll quit now. (Hughes 20)

Hughes' poem centers on the speaker's vocation and the instability and insecurity found in many of those occupations. Note once again that the racial identity of the speaker is unspecified. Instead, the focus becomes directed towards a class-based, and occupational identity. Similarly, Douglas' contour drawings suggest a racial identity through the characterizations of the figures' faces,[10] but the activities and occupations depicted absorb most of the attention. The objects that define each figure's occupation are less exaggerated than the figures themselves. While drawn with a similar looseness, the straight lines that delineate a table, for instance, appear mostly straight. The

paintbrushes in the second illustration do not bend and wave like the painter's fingers. More realism is given to the tools of the trade than to the identity of the worker. While Douglas' illustrations show the importance of a class-based identity over a racial identity, by giving one more attention and exactness to one over the other, Hughes does not even allude to the speaker's racial identity to set up that type of comparison. The poem remains solely concerned with the occupation of the speaker. Douglas' illustrations introduce the viewer to a comparative image, and Hughes' exclusivity is made more apparent when read in conjunction with the image.

Since the illustrations express a duality of identity, one tries to find a similar dichotomy at work in the poem because it also focuses on an occupational identity. Images of verticality, such as the elevator, seem like promising symbols for racial uplift. However, Hughes employs a frustrated and monotonous tone on the speaker's portrayal of the elevator. The speaker equates the "up an' down" pattern of running the elevator with shining shoes and washing dirty dishes. There is no message of reaching up and out of the situation, only a monotonous routine that brings the speaker back to the ground every time. With clearly no reference to racial identity, the social identity being described takes full precedence.

This mismatching of expectations reflects *FIRE!!*'s presentation of African American experience that tries to address issues beyond racial identity. As such, Douglas' illustrations reference racial identity, yet proceed to focus on an occupational identity. Hughes' poem does not even make this transitional gesture. Where Hughes' equivalent reference to racial identity would be found, in the elevator's semblance with racial uplift, there is a completely opposite connection emphasized between the elevator

and monotonous stagnation. In this way, *FIRE!!* promotes identities that may be relevant to African American experiences, but that do not depend on a racial context.

Understated Foundations: The Role of Graphic Accents in *FIRE!!*

One further visual element graces the pages of *FIRE!!,* in particular. Graphic accents, or the little designs that structure page breaks and fill space when half a page is blank at the end of a section, have a more significant role to play in a journal than one may expect. There are very few such marks in the November, 1926 issue of *The Crisis*, the absence of which results in equally significant effects.

In *FIRE!!* there are two major instances of graphic accents. There are those listed on "The Table of Contents" page as "Incidental Art Decorations" as designed by Aaron Douglas, and there are page border motifs consisting of parallel wavy lines in the poetry section of the journal. Even these few graphic inclusions prove to lay an unspoken contextual groundwork for the publication.

As discussed, *FIRE!!* boasts a focus on elements of African American experience beyond racial identity. However, the graphic accents that exist throughout the journal seem to refer specifically to that same African heritage and racial identity. Douglas' "Incidental Art Decorations" show up over half a dozen times throughout the issue. Each illustration appears to be drawn with a keen eye towards the style of African Dan masks from the Ivory Coast.[11] The same slit eyes and angular features that characterize many of his more popular paintings are present in these illustrations as well. The fact that these images are found through the entirety of the journal also seems to suggest that they play a structural and foundational role in the organization of the publication. The wavy lines that

accent the poetry pages are extremely reminiscent of the lines Douglas uses to denote the Nile River, as well. These elements act as a framework for the journal- the same framework that the founders of *FIRE!!* would consider one's racial identity to be. Emotional or occupational identities exist within this cultural and racially characterized format, just as African American personal experiences are inherently racial whether or not race is an issue explicitly defined.

While *FIRE!!* greatly claims to be a journal that does not overtly define itself by a racial identity, it is certainly structured by one visually. Also consider Langston Hughes' philosophy on the re-representation of African American experiences as relayed by Richard Bruce Nugent in his retrospective essay "Lighting FIRE!!" where he talks about, "… the importance of the Negro's contributing his share of *himself* to a world that, so far, had never considered him a real person at all."[12] Hughes' priorities fall to representing the truth of personal identity, as it is essentially a part of a greater racial identity no matter if the focus of the expression is explicitly racial or not.

This underlying presence of images that signify a racial identity set the context for the rest of the images and texts within *FIRE!!*. The only notation for these graphics is characterized by the word "incidental," after all. It remains that the racially motivated context of the journal fosters more explicit discussions of other various identities- gendered, sexual, or otherwise.

The November 1926 issue of *The Crisis* is completely devoid of these types of markings. The journal's texts and images are not strung together with a consistent visual thread as in *FIRE!!*. Without such graphics, it seems that *The Crisis* may rely more heavily on the presence of various textual forms than visual. Regularly featured columns

and advertisements, instead, make up the linking factor of the issue. It is impossible to say whether or not *FIRE!!* may have also had these types of links, as there was only ever one issue produced. Yet, in *The Crisis*, there remains to be a much more prominent concentration of textual information over visual.

Conclusion: A Packaged Deal

Both publications pull text and image together in order to package a product. These products offer a particular point of view about how to re-represent African American identity in the Harlem Renaissance. By reading the journals' poetry in relation to the captivating visuals, the ideology behind the journal's construction becomes clear. The poetry and images in these publications provide textual and visual representations from which to investigate this ideology.

In *The Crisis*, Du Bois' complex views on how black society should be re-represented is exemplified through his mixed media and contrasting components. Images and poems work with and against one another to engage the reader in a complete discussion of the various issues facing African American people. In causing discontinuity between image and text, as in the cover art and poem "Decay," he instigates the reader to question and answer complex questions about racial identity. Secondary images work to pull the reader through a complete range of emotions- sadness, pride, guilt, and hope. These efforts work successfully to pose the type of identity Du Bois sees fit for public consumption, that of a regulated and conservative sense of self, with a consciousness of both positive and negative current affairs. The identity he advertises uses the arts strategically, as an example of accomplishment and proof of high culture.

Similar strategies work towards an opposite goal in *FIRE!!* A multiplicity of identity takes the focus away from the older generation's hyper-focus on racial and middle-class identities. The identity that *FIRE!!* is trying to portray is conveyed completely through the arts which offer depictions of a full range of African American experience. No sense of self is pitted over another, though the visuals offer a context of racial identity to the poetry from which to expand. While racial identity does appear to be the backing for the journal, it is overshadowed by generational, emotional, and occupational identities. The cover art, for example, ushers the reader through an illustration that appears to be focused on racial identity only to find an explosion of other identities in the poetry and internal illustrations. *FIRE!!* posits that sexual, gendered, class-based identities are key factors in the re-representations of African American identity with or without a racial background.

Though *The Crisis* and *FIRE!!* are quite different in their foundations and beliefs, both journals successfully package a product that encourages wholeness. The difference lies in how art, both visual and textual, should convey these thoughts. While the two journals seemingly rival one another, they are not operating parallel to one another. They overlap and interact with each other's commentaries on African American identity. *The Crisis* for example, is considerably conservative with the amount of negative and positive images it promotes, and uses art as a means to convey middle class aesthetics. Yet, in carefully regulating the identities that it presents, *The Crisis* also contradicts the idea that art can represent the truth of experience. *FIRE!!* conversely attempts to move away from those middle class values, as they are not representative of a true African American identity made up of lower class experiences, as well. However, as Du Bois affirms, art is

a product of higher cultures, and fostered by many of those same middle class values. As much as the two journals appear to boast separate views on the re-representation of African American identity and experience, they enter into complex conversation when considered alongside one another.

Notes:

[1] Carroll, Anne Elizabeth. 2005. (20).

[2] Carroll, Anne Elizabeth. 2005. (191).

[3] Carroll, Anne Elizabeth. 2005. (20).

[4] Carroll, Anne Elizabeth. 2005. (21).

[5] Carroll, Anne Elizabeth. 2005. (21-39).

[6] Carroll, Anne Elizabeth. 2005. (191).

[7] Carroll, Anne Elizabeth. 2005. (191).

[8] Wirth, Thomas H. *FIRE!! In Retrospect*. 1982. *FIRE!!.* 1926. Westport; Negro Universities Press, 1970.

[9] Carroll, Anne Elizabeth. 2005. (23).

[10] Carroll, Anne Elizabeth. 2005. (213-217).

[11] Carroll, Anne Elizabeth. 2005. (212).

[12] Nugent, Richard Bruce. "Lighting FIRE!!." 1982. *FIRE!!.* 1926. Westport; Negro Universities Press, 1970.

Conclusion

Reading Harlem Renaissance poetry in terms of visual arts offers an under acknowledged, interdisciplinary understanding of the period's struggle to construct a new African American identity. Reviewing Langston Hughes, Helene Johnson, and Gwendolyn Bennett in this light reveals many of the complexities of the Harlem Renaissances goals for re-representation. Past scholarship has traditionally focused on the poetry's intersection with musical traditions like blues and jazz, yet poetry and visual art have a distinct relationship that merits equal attention.

Through visual analysis of poetic content in relationship to Aaron Douglas' artworks, the various forces that shape African American identity become evident. Images in the poetry's content read differently when considered alongside visuals created under the same creative mentality aiming to re-represent African American experience. Subtle details that may have been overlooked, for instance, the Cubist push and pull of certain lines in Bennett's "Hatred," is overly apparent when placed alongside Douglas' angular works. Issues like racial uplift, the balance between past and present cultural heritages, and the implementation of traditional artistic motifs in modern art are highlighted as separate factors that interact in one's search for identity.

The layout of these poems, too, references the restructuring of public and personal perception of the African American identity. Working within geometric forms, whether circularly influenced or bound by strict borders, the structures of these poems show how African Americans processed this need for a new identity. Douglas' mastery of geometry in his paintings carries the viewer's eye in the same manner that one may understand the

development of African American identity. Recall how Hughes' desire to revise public perception is clearly expressed through the structure of "The Cat and the Saxophone (2AM)" which pulses energy through its pointed geometric shape. Poetic structures reveal specific approaches and views on re-representing identity, whether that means searching for a personal balance within one's self, as in Johnson, or passionately calling for a revision of societal perception, as in Hughes' work.

Reading these poets in a visual manner allows one to further investigate the journals published during the Harlem Renaissance that display poetry and illustration together. As discussed, visuals have the ability to profoundly influence the subtleties of a text, and this process is no less relevant in the popular journals that fueled public perceptions of African American identity. In publications like *The Crisis* and *FIRE!!* the relationship between poem and image highlights the intricate foundations and views of African American identity as promoted by the editors. More so, interactions and complexities of the journals' opposing conservative, activist, and radical views become less abrasively against one another when seen in terms of poetic and visual texts. The views of Du Bois and Hughes are not so strictly opposite one another when one considers the poetic-visual relationship at work in *The Crisis* and *FIRE!!*.

The work discussed here is only a sampling of the material that may be approached in this way. There are countless other poets and painters of the Harlem Renaissance that undoubtedly have insightful relationships to explore. With this particular paradigm for reading poetry, additional tracks of research may take place. More so, the standard for visual representation, in this case Aaron Douglas' painting, may also expand to include other styles of art including sculpture, collage, or photography.

The basic exploration of textual and visual representation presents a new paradigm from which to read the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance.

Ultimately, the visual arts, as represented by Aaron Douglas' paintings, offer an indispensable perspective from which to analyze African American poetry. Music has played an extremely important role in influencing African American poetry, but visual art, too, merits similar attention. The Harlem Renaissance sought to rebuild an identity free from binding labels and stereotypes. To then interpret the poetry of this movement in relation to single subject area would be an injustice. The visual arts is just one subject among many from which to look at poetry, but a valuable one none-the-less. As one of the chief forms of representation, along with poetic expression, the visual arts is a crucial subject to take into consideration in conjunction with poetry. Together, poetic expression and visual representation may add nuance and complexity to the analysis of the African American identity of the Harlem Renaissance.

Appendix

Figure 1. Douglas, Aaron. *Building More Stately Mansions,* 1944. Oil on Canvas, 54 x 42 in. Fisk University Galleries, Nashville.

Figure 2. Douglas, Aaron. *The Creation*, 1927. Gouache on paper, 12¾ x 9 in. The Walter O. Evans Collection of African American Art.

Figure 3. Douglas, Aaron. *Science*, 1930. Mural. Caravath Hall, Fisk University, Nashville.

Figure 4. Douglas, Aaron. *The Founding of Chicago*, 1933-40. Gouache on paperboard, 14¾ x 12 in. Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas.

Figure 5. Douglas, Aaron. *Study for Aspects of Negro Life: The Negro in an African Setting*,1934. Gouache on board, 14 x 16 in. The Art Institute of Chicago.

Figure 6. Douglas, Aaron. *Judgment Day*, 1927. Gouache on paper, 11¾ x 9 in. The Walter O. Evans Collection of African American Art.

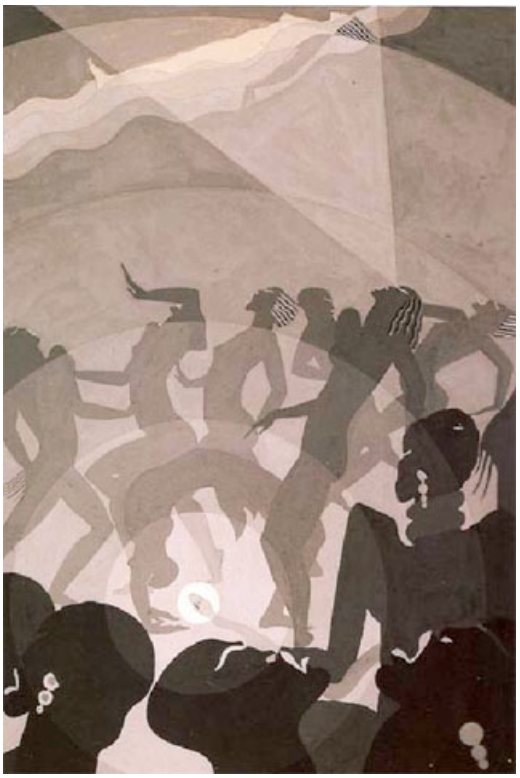

Figure 7. Douglas, Aaron. *Congo*, 1928. Goache and pencil on paper board, 14 x 9½ in. North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh.

Figure 8. Douglas, Aaron. *Aspects of Negro Life: Song of the Towers*, 1934. Oil on canvas, 94½ x 88 in. Art and Artifacts Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and the Tilden Foundations.

Figure 9. Douglas, Aaron. *Noah's Ark*, 1935. Oil on Masonite, 48 x 36 in. Fisk University Galleries, Nashville.

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