



**The African-American Poetic Response to
Racial Prejudice**

:A Study of Brown and Hayden

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The African- American poetics is affected by a complex and deeply rooted philosophy of the double consciousness created by W.E.B.Du Bois(1868-1963) which is the feeling of being Americans and African Americans. This feeling has a great impact on the African -American poets. It influences the way in which African- American poets react to racial preconception. However, the present paper is aimed at showing the nature of the African -American poetic response to race. The paper deals with selected poems by Sterling Allen Brown(1901-1989) and Robert Earl Hayden(1913-1974).The study concludes that the African- American poetic response to racial abuse is based on how each poet regards race.

Key Words: African-American, Cabaret, Old Lem , Fredrik Douglass, Dream.

Introduction

Researchers have demonstrated that African- American poets do not only react to the social life conditions in the mainstream society as American poets but they also react as African- American poets. What remains unknown is that dealing with race by the African- American poets takes different modes of poetic expression. Equally important, the gap that the present paper has to cover is the difference in the poetic rhetoric. However, the paper is aimed to demonstrate the nature of the poetic reaction to racial prejudice. Thus, the study found out that Brown looks at race in a way which is different in nature from that of Hayden. Furthermore, the theoretical background that the study is based on is the critical race theory since this theory deals with the systematic abuse and racism which is influenced by how culture is conceived and the self-representation by the prejudiced people.

Brown

Brown's " Cabaret " from the southern portion of *The Tin Roof Blues* (1932) was written by Brown. It is among the most important Harlem Renaissance movement poems dealing with the abuse of African-American performers in the 1920s. The significance of "cabaret" there by any means rests in the sub-level balance that the poet establishes for both their fact and imagination, in both living African- American lives and the lives that American audiences enforce on them. "Cabaret" works as an example of African-American performance artists ' shrouded anger prior to the actual strange perceptions of white patronizing the African -American arts of the 1920s. The gruesome reality uncovered by the poem is the accompaniment of African- American culture, such as blues and jazz music, and the lawlessness of the tin pan Alley, the misapplication of African- American chorus girls and composers as well as the inappropriate performances of initial African- American music in which he presented the countryside tale of the desperate and powerless African- American in the 1927 - horrible flood of the Mississippi(Harper;1980 :10). The poem is set in 1927 in a cabaret. The title of the poem is a mixture of time and place,1927and Tan Chicago. At that time there was a disastrous flood on the Mississippi River, that agitated Brown to collect the corpses of the dead White people during the deluge , while African Americans were abandoned . Portraying this case that inspired Brown to compose this poem, Brown commented in 1974, "I was in Missouri teaching then. And I saw the Missouri in flood. I saw Mississippi, I saw Arkansas at that time. And then I go into the cabaret and hear the popular muddy water, business and the contrast struck me"(Callahan;1998:245) :

Rich, Flashy, puffy- faced,
Hebrew, and Anglo-Saxon,
The overloads sprawl here with their glittering arling,
The smoke curls thick, in the dimmed light
Surreptitiously, deaf, mute waitres

(Collected Poems p.111)

Brown illustrates the creative abuse in "cabaret" by clarifying that African- American performers no longer produce critique and examples for their community, offering only the examples of African-American rustic life to a fragmented white listeners, or reader. Highly, "cabaret" makes a distinction around two pictures: the portrait of African- American workers throughout the south in 1927 and also the image of African- American actors just acting , so-called a Chicago speakeasy-a location in the America where people might unlawfully purchase alcohol in the 1920s and 1930s which was illegitimate in those days:

The jazzband unleash its frenzy.
Now, now
To it, roger; that a nice doggie,

Show your hicks to the gentlemen. (Collected Poems p.111)

Together with the pictures of forced labor throughout the Arkansas outskirts and the images demolished societies by one of the worst ground of that era, Brown funnily introduces the portrait of African- American young artists linking the river and the southern countryside in their lyrics, hearing comparable living circumstances of African Americans:

Poor half -naked fools,
tagged with identification numbers,
Worn out upon the levees,
Are carted back to the serfdom
They had never left before
And may never leave again(Collected Poems p.112)

Thereby, "cabaret" is a rebellion against impact of the economy on the African- American creative manufacturing, a depiction of popular culture and conspicuous consumption as obstacles for both folk traditions and creative development(Anderson;1998:1030). In this regard, African -American musicians understand that they bear witness to the unpleasant and blank dream in the chant they sing and the childhood they reside besides Brown refers to the female slave through some of the phrases such as "create beauties" that relate to the servant woman in the African- American auction to the singing lady in the stage show of the 1920s. Its aim is to demonstrate that African- American women were far from the society in general:

Their shapely bodies naked save
For tattered pink silk bodices, short velvet tights,
And shining silver-buckled boots;
Red bandannas on their sleek and close –clipped hair; (Collected Poems p. 111)

As shown by John F. Callahan's "cabaret," the first African -American modernist poem, Brown is probably using contemporary methods such as divergence to divide the sound and movement the poem presents. The poet tries to get his crowd out of conformity and far from being complicated with the unquestioning assumption of the Jazz age. "Cabaret" is also like T.S. Eliot's(1888-1965) "the waste land," it's array of pieces, it's tolerated by multiple voices that demonstrate Brown's trying to subvert the notion of consistency and permanence because African Americans in "cabaret" aren't essential components of the overall culture(Sonya;2017:144). The best illustration of the concept of disjunction is the point to the "muddy water" sign, which is a terrible one, it is a reaffirmation of mortality and it refers to home, the African- American people in the south, because in the flood-making Delta, African Americans are lost, tired and killed trying to flee:

(Down in the valleys
The stench of the drying mud
Is a bitter reminder of death)
Dee da dee D A A A H (Collected Poems p. 113)

Brown achieves a unique particular form in terms of language to what Ralph Ellison (1803-1882) calls jazz in order to combine achievement with development in one complicated job. He introduces a skilled jazz quality by presenting great anti-cathartic fragments "dee Da Dee DAAAH" in Cabaret that cannot be interpreted because they are not actual words but certainly sounds. This constant repetition invokes a reconsideration of the Eliotic style of the 1920s.

"Old Lem" taken from *No Hiding Place* (1935) is a ballad that illustrates Brown's adherence to reality; as a matter of course, he presents the African- American struggle against whites. The poem portrays the reality of a person getting tired of random violence. The power of the poem is taken entirely from the sensitivity of Old Lem, through which Brown could express straightly and easily the consequences of inequality. The approach in which Brown passes his concept is a parable. He rewrites the experience of the long story of "Old Sis Goose," which is, a goose in the court of foxes seeks justice and eventually loses even its bones:

"They weigh the cotton
They store the corn
We only good enough
To work the rows; (Collected Poems p..180)

Brown presents the racial conflict as unbalanced in that it is ahead of a planned strategy. The reality that Brown argues about is expressed as all instruments are already on one part, the whites. In this poem he prevails the fact that is the bravery and strength of the African American are pointless. Regardless of whether impoverished and helpless, African- American individuals conform to their communal anxiety of lynching and the indifference of the South in that the formal fairness is on the part of the Whites (Wagner;1973:482):

"They got the judges
They got the lawyers
They got the jury- roles
They got the law (Collected Poems p. 108)

In terms of both theme and technique in the poem, Brown is compelled to rely solely on the complete opposite depicted by the conflict between "we" and "they" that in a larger metaphorical sense means the inequality between the African Americans and the White Americans. The thematic aim of this contrast is to demonstrate the differences between the African American and White Americans as an actual reality through its relatedness to broader sociopolitical trends:

We got to slink around
Hangtailed hounds.
They burn us when we dogs
They burn us when we men
They come by tens ...(Collected Poems p. 181)

Throughout the poem, Brown's approach indicates complete acceptance of design, the humorous mood of the poem indicates the difference between "[they] do what [we] are forced to accept" (V.Gabbin;1994:135). As a tragic figure, however, "Old Lem" is among the poor males Brown employs in his writing, and in this situation Old Lem is vulnerable, not difficult or ignorant of the ethnic circumstances all over him:

I had a buddy
Six foot of man
Muscl'd up perfect
Gone to the heart
They don't come by ones
Outworked and outfought (Collected Poems p.81)

Thus, Old Lem is a sensitive figure, frightened by racist laws and legal bandits, his reaction is rapidly suppressed by the truths of the horrible lynch mobs.

Hayden

"Frederick Douglass" taken from *A Ballad of Remembrance* (1962-1966) " is an Italian sonnet. It is restricted to the significance of liberty by defining the necessity to be free as Man's intrinsic characteristics. A remarkable character in African -American culture is ascribed to Frederick Douglass (1818-1885) (William;2009: 86). The poem is a demonstration of Hayden's vision to the vitality of Man's liberty. Hayden combines aspects of the natural environment that are important to human life such as air with the significance of liberty:

When it is finally ours, this freedom, this liberty, this beautiful
,and terrible thing, needful to man as air
,usable as earth; when it belongs at last to all
(Collected Poems p.62)

Then the poet links Man's search for liberty with these kind of nonhuman species of nature just like his use of phrases like "diastole" and "systole" referring to the motion of the human core, his conceptual aim is to indicate that the need for liberty is linked to the motion of the heart:

When it is instinct, brain matter, diastole, systole ,
reflex action, when it is finally won, when it is more
(Collected Poems p.62)

Hayden remarks on liberty becomes a social commentary. He considers liberty more than the "gaudy mumbo jumbo" of leaders. It is a sarcastic picture that attracts the attention of the public not just to the liberal's misunderstanding of the individuals, but also to the state officials' duplicity(William;2009: 87) :

(Collected Poemsp.62) ! than the gaudy mumbo jumbo of politicians

To promote his concept of liberty, Hayden recollects such methods such as incremental succession by Whalt Whitman (1819-1892). He presents him as a person in his introduction of Frederick Douglass, then names him as a freed slave and lastly as a spokesperson of his people African American::

This man, this Douglass, this former slave, this negro (Collected Poemsp.62)

The poem's overall formation is constructed on two primary approaches: the first, Frederick Douglass's description is framed by an eternal image of liberty, and Hayden's aim is to demonstrate that Man's search for liberty is an hereditary need, the second is to commemorate and celebrate Douglass. The poem demonstrates that the experiences of Douglass can only be unpleasant previous events:

beaten to his keens, exiled, visioning a world

.where none is Lonely, non hunted, a lien (Collected Poems p.62)

Or as a living instance rather than just a memory, they will be known and valued:

This man, superb in love and logic, this man

shall be remembered. Oh, not with statue's rhetoric

(Collected Poems p.62)

The poem has a future tone in that it demonstrates Hayden's idea for a better tomorrow once Douglass speaks with important phrases like "logic" and "love":

This man, suburb in love and logic, this man

(Collected Poems p.62)

Hayden's theme extends beyond what he stated philosophically in monuments or the part of Douglass in the declaration of freedom as a whole. Through eloquence he shows the greatest testimony referring to the excellence and impact of Douglass through using phrases such as "live" and "lives" that are intended not just for Africa American community but for all Americans. With respect to the impact of Hayden's Bahae, this term relates to the unity of human nature:

But with the lives grown out of his life, the lives

(Collected Poems p.62)

While Douglass represents the defeated individuals pre and post him, he is confident, representing or representing the biggest progressives:

Fleshing his dream of the beautiful needful thing

(Collected Poems p.62)

Hayden's selection of words demonstrates his capacity to represent the topic of the poem that is to universalize the quest for liberty by incorporating the actuality of African-American life. The words "hunted" and "alien" indicate the African-American life's domineering characteristic:

Where none is lonely, none is hunted, alien.

(Collected Poems p.62)

Hayden produces images with vocabulary enhanced by rhythm and voice with his use of imagery to represent the essence of the poem's meaning. The briefness and simplicity assist him add to the poem another African American aspect. For example, because of its African- American origin, he utilizes the sentence "mumbo jumbo" and places it in the center of the poem. The theme of "Frederic Douglass" is African- American experience, but its crux is human and not racial. It shows the African -American desire of assimilation . Across the poem, liberty is continually described by shifting from the imaginary to the actual. The use of "liberation" and "freedom" by Hayden is to spread the concept of liberty. The motivation for celebrating Frederick Douglass is as a honorable instance that individuals do the same and represent modern society basic sociopolitical principles. Douglass is recognized as a representative American man in the African -American context. Hayden's notion is that Douglas is perfect for equality and freedom, not just for the marginalized African Americans in the South or in the North, but for all People in America. Douglass himself recognizes "The deep divide between his dream of a truly egalitarian and fully integrated society and the harsh realities of life in the united states" (William;2009: 87). The poem is characterized with a high composition. It demonstrates the strength of Hayden as a contemporary poet in embracing the sonnet's basic form. This sonnet is a contemporary reaction to rules of Victorian poetic form. Though it is a poem of fourteen lines, these lines are free of textual restriction in that they do not appear as a sonnet. Hayden worked with a group of poets such as Wilfred own (1893-1918) and E.E. Cuming (1894-1862) who practiced with the sonnet framework in the twentieth century for a multitude of rhetorical impacts and conceptual intent. "Frederic Douglass" is; therefore, contemporary in

composition, while a big idea is transmitted conceptually by highlighting the African American values represented by Frederic Douglass (William; 2009:87). The significant thing in this poem is that Hayden universalizes the fight of the African American people by making it natural rather than ethnic.

"The Dream" from *Words in the Morning Time* (1970) can be interpreted in this respect as a reflection on that same topic in", which is the vision of freedom. "The Dream" is formed by mixing two poems published for *The Black Spear*, a volume wherein Hayden introduces an answer to the American situation at the moment of the leveling of the ethnic obstacles (Frienlander; 1998:134). This implies Hayden, having settled *The Black Spear* by putting together the poems it consists of returning to that time when obstacles were leveled and visualizing its significance for two distinct African - American opinions of culture and liberty. It demonstrates Hayden's portraying of the armed conflict, humanizing his colossal fight by coping with persons' hopes, Cal and Sinda. He clearly indicates that the African- American soldier was both an emblem and a person involved in the conflict. Hayden states that the African- American man, was not only the primary reason for the war, but he was also a leading contributor on the playground as well as the home front.

The poem is set in the middle of the armed conflict, for a date (1863) referring to the beginning of the crisis (1863-1865). "The Dream" takes us into the liberation doorway the title of the poem, **the dream** is a reference to a dream of liberty. The dream relies on the feelings of the dreamer that ultimately demonstrates the feeling of society that the dream is promised inside a larger dream. Sinda is a dreamer waiting for the victorious troops to arrive and welcome them and live with them for a long time. she wants Cal, her beloved to be one of them:

That evening Sinda thought she heard the dreams
and hobbled from her cabin to the yard (Collected Poems p.66)

Sinda's emotional obligations tightly govern the creation of the motion in the poem. Due to her "ornery, fanning, cussed commands" she could not join the military:

When laughing, crying, singing the folk went off
with Mares Lincum's soldier boys.
But Sinda hiding would not follow them: those
Buckras with their ornery

(Collected Poems p.66)

The poem is built on a dramatic contrasts. Cal is the drastic counterpoint to Sinda. While Sinda is trying to act as a dreamer. Cal is a realist. He sends a letter to Sinda evoking a question of reality, persistence, and bravery as an African American in which he explains the obligation of the non-citizen soldier to fight. Cal's depiction indicates that, despite the unequal treatment then, they still got in the military, the former slave combatant were courageous as a war attendee. His message to Sinda states that he is prepared to end up hanging Jefferson Davies:

and hope when these few lines reaches your hand they
will fine you well. I am tired same but it is war you know
and ole Jeff Davies muss be ketch and hung to a sour apple...
(Collected Poems P.66)

"The Dream", however, is distinguished because of how it is placed with both two historically important poems, "Sphinx" and "Mystery Boy's Looks for Kin in Nashville " Which creates to the poem a feeling of uncertainty. However, from a thematic point of view, "The Dream" is a poem that contains two notions about how to get into the past.

The difference between Cal and Sinda represents Hayden's vision of history. He looks at history from a universal point of view. The past is regarded in this poem as a question as it is described in the poem as corrective action. Cal and Sinda offer various historical perspectives, based on how they view liberty and rights. For Sinda, freedom is a chance of redemption. She sees that the past is a very complex story:

How many times that dream bad come to her-
more vision than a dream-
the great big soldiers marching out of gun burst ,
their faces those of Cal and Joe.
and Charlie sold to the rice fields oh sold away
a- many and a-many a long year ago.

(Collected Poems P.66)

But Cal considers liberty as something realistic, he likes the abolition of slavery. For him the African - American soldier is up to his particular goal of liberty. Therefore, he should be completely indifferent to tragic death. He perceives death as a song that God can send to conceive without trouble or fear:

Almost like something you might dream about I take it for
a sign The Lord remembers Us There's talk we will be
moving Into Battle very soon again

(Collected Poems P.67)

Surely the best important thing shared between Cal and Sinda is that both of them view liberty as distinguishable and it has national meaning. Cal defines liberty as "something you might dream about" in view of his own knowledge. Sinda considers liberty as a dream which cannot be accomplished by Cal alone but with other troops like Joe and Charlie. She encounters the future just by being persistent to the "battering sounds" of the dream, while Cal sticks to the "Built with my name on it." Cal and Sinda's belief is based on Benet's character. The Black Spear through Cal states that African American history just by victimization. The historical reference, "1863," in the poem, is important, it means the year of the declaration of freedom. It is a reminder of Du-Bois's *Soul of Black Folk* (1903) in which Du Bois previously referred to as the Dawn of Freedom, and what he later called it "a dark human cloud" which the poet Hayden referred to in "The Dream" as "a ragged jubilo(Frienlander;1998:134):

A month later congress called earnestly for the negro
soldiers whom the act of July, 1862, had half
grudgingly allowed to enlist. Thus the barriers
were levelled and the deed was done. The stream
of fugitives swelled to a flood...

(Collected Poems P.67)

In conclusion, Brown looks at race as a matter of fact. He is conservative in his use of language, though he insists on African American dialect. He attempts to confront the racial prejudice by rhetoric represented by wit and humor on a regular basis such as irony. Ironically, he turns situations of abuse into times of happiness through rhetorical expressions providing the sub-level reality of the treatment of the African Americans in the 1920s which is represented in both the living African- American lives and the lives that American audiences enforce on them. While in "Old Lem" Brown presents an element of irony which he conveys in his poetry showing that the law and authority stand with the Whites' side. He presents the story of "Old Sis Goose," which is, a goose in the court of foxes seeks justice. The goose ends up losing even its bones. Whereas for Hayden, race is a point of departure to the universal. He links the topic of the poem to the universal things. The meaning of the poem is represented in combining aspects of the natural environment which are important to human life such as air with the significance of liberty. He universalizes every symbol and every image in the poem such as Fredrick Douglass. He does not treat Fredrick Douglass as an ethnic symbol but he treats his as an American symbol. Moreover, his description of history is framed by a universal image of liberty. He portrays Cal and Sinda as dreamers whose dream sounds American more than African American. Sinda, strongly, believes that liberty is a dream which cannot be achieved by Cal alone but with other American soldiers like Joe and Charlie. In the same way, Hayden uses words that involves all American not just the African American such as **life, lives**.

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