

Jazz Poetry and Making Visible the Black American Experience

Shannon Marks

University of Wyoming

English Honors Thesis

Spring 2019

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*Jazz, to me, is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America: the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul – the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world, a world of subway trains, and work, work, work; the tom-tom of joy and laughter, and pain swallowed into a smile.*

- Langston Hughes (*“The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain”*)

### **Thesis**

The selected poetry from Langston Hughes, Bob Kaufman, and Amiri Baraka work together to demonstrate the conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible* in that what is being created is a voice, through jazz, as a means to make visible the black American experience of the United States as it made the shift from slavery into tensions faced by black Americans in the twentieth century.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines creation as, “the action or process of bringing something into existence from nothing by a divine or natural agency” (“Creation”). This conceptual metaphor is not meant to directly challenge the definition of creation. If it were, it would seem to suggest that jazz is being created from nothing and it is revealing something that is not already there. However, jazz is undeniably made from previously existing influential sounds and music, and the black American experience is something that already exists, it is just largely unrecognized. Mainstream white-dominated society most commonly presents an image of the black American life that is most convenient for them, which is the happy-go-lucky experience more than the realistic struggle. This conceptual metaphor is operating in a way that

suggests an artistic construction of voices and experience that would otherwise not be heard were it not for jazz, and jazz poetry. It supports the notion that without outlets such as jazz, and jazz poetry, the black American experience would remain largely unrecognized.

There are many different layers and directions to investigate in considering the black American experience – all of which offer equally valuable insight to contribute. However, there is a certain value in studying just these three men and their goals, rather than delving into other avenues of jazz poetry. Other areas that are relevant that are not discussed include female jazz poets, an even deeper engagement with the notion of appropriation, and even the various sounds of the poetic decisions being made in each poem. Jazz poetry, and the black American experience are both large, complex topics to discuss. The poets discussed in this paper though – especially Hughes and Baraka are credited with being the founders and instrumental figures of jazz poetry and expressing racial pride. Although there is much more to explore in these areas, starting at the beginning is valuable, as it laid the foundation for everything to follow.

In their respective research, scholars Christopher DeSantis, Tom Fisher, and Komozi Woodard each claim that the driving factor and the main underlying message behind the works of the poets Langston Hughes, Bob Kaufman, and Amiri Baraka stem from political motivations.

In his work, Rage, Repudiation, and Endurance: Langston Hughes' Radical Writings, Social Issues in Literature: Race in the Poetry of Langston Hughes DeSantis expresses the notion that, “the tradition of African American writing, from slave narratives to that of 1960s radicals, has been to draw a precise picture of race in a white-dominated civilization. Langston Hughes is part of that tradition” (38). The question of “Americanness” is complicated, especially for those brought to the United States against their will. The different between black and white refers not only to the image of the piano, but it refers to how we have been conditioned to think of things.

Hughes writes of black Americans as a despised race of people who have been torn from their African beginnings, and that in order to survive, they wear masks, figuratively speaking, to hide their rage at their condition. DeSantis says that, “the only hope for a misplaced, persecuted race will come through social revolution” (38). DeSantis is saying that it is this social revolution that is driving Hughes’ work.

Tom Fisher expresses a similar notion about Kaufman in his work, Writing Not Writing: Poetry, Crisis, and Responsibility. He states that, “Kaufman’s silence is a kind of politics of disengagement and withdrawal that both complicates speech’s relation to politics and amplifies an inaudibility that refuses the “taking part” that is central to our notions of engagement and political action” (17). Here, Fisher is saying that Kaufman opts to not write as a way of demonstrating the clear lines we tend to draw between silence and speech. In doing so, Fisher is expressing that Kaufman is politically motivated in a way that allows voices that had been previously silenced to now be heard.

Komozi Woodard also makes similar claims about Baraka in his work A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics. Woodard states, “Amiri Baraka emerged from the Newark black Power experience convinced that African Americans would have to fashion their own ideologies in order to liberate themselves from racial opposition in America” (160). Woodard describes Baraka’s political motivations in expressing that, “Baraka became foremost among the leaders who linked the fate of the black freedom movement to the political momentum generated by the African American urban uprisings of the 1960s” (70). These scholars argue that each of these poets considered it his duty to bring to light the black American experience, by making a political stance, and promoting black racial pride.

In this paper, I agree with the findings of these scholars, and the main notions circulating in conversation in regard to the political motivations of these three poets. However, I also expand upon the claims made in the research of these scholars – that the poetry of Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka were political platforms through which these poets could let their voices be heard and make a stance on their racial pride. I expand upon these claims by agreeing that there are undeniably political statements being made in these poems. This is because it was only through their poetry, embracement of the possibilities offered by jazz, and other forms of expression from the Black Arts Movement, that they were best able to make such political statements. In addition to that, these poems point directly to the idea that jazz is one of the only ways that the black American experience could be expressed in white-dominated American society during the 1960s because it was one of the most influential paths through which black Americans could find a role in white-dominated society while still embracing the essence of who they are, and their ancestry.

James Weldon Johnson's The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man is referred to frequently in this analysis. Johnson's work is a fictional story that follows a young man who is referred to only as an "ex-colored man" living in America in the late 1800s and the early 1900s. Throughout the novel, this young man lives through a variety of experiences that convince him to 'pass' as a white man to secure his place in society. However, he also feels that in doing so, he has given up his motives of 'glorifying' the black race through composing ragtime music. In this work, the narrator is forced to give up his dreams. This was not the case for Johnson himself. He may have presented his narrator in this way for several different reasons. He may have written his character as having to give up his dreams as a means to appease white audiences, he may have been using it as a projection of what his own life could have been, or he could have been trying to depict the most accurate depiction of what this complex position was like, in an attempt

to capture the voices that had been silenced, much like jazz poets did. This character faces the complexities of understanding both the black American experience and the white American experience. Many of the sentiments made in Johnson's work are reflected in the poetry of Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka.

As readers, we are able to understand that jazz became one of the only ways through which black Americans were given a voice because Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka demonstrate in their poetry the ways in which racial tensions rely on the conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible*. This is one of the many conceptual metaphors by which we lead our lives, how we communicate, understand one another, and function socially (Kovecses 3). By engaging with this conceptual metaphor, in particular, these poets are not only expressing that their experiences, and the experiences of those they represent, deserve the chance to be heard, but also that it was the creation of jazz that was greatly influential in making visible the black American experience by giving them a voice. Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka demonstrate that in many ways the black American experience would remain unknown, or silenced were it not for the platform provided by jazz.

These poets are particularly instrumental in forming and shaping the notions supported in the Black Arts Movement, which sought to emphasize racial pride. Amiri Baraka is the most closely connected to the founding of the Black Arts Movement, however, each of these three poets influenced this movement, and his readers, uniquely. Without the notions of racial pride illuminated through the Black Arts Movement, something such as jazz poetry, and other forms of studying the black American experience would not be available to us today. Jazz poetry has been influential in shaping modern day spoken word, including rap and hip-hop music. Without the



Black Art Movement and the need to stand up for who one is, much of this expression may have evolved differently.

Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka each demonstrate the conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible* distinctly from one another. Hughes demonstrates this conceptual metaphor by employing the notion across his work that jazz was one of the only vocations, and senses of purpose black Americans could fill in a white-dominated American society. The subjects of his poems demonstrate jazz as a vocation through which a black American can not only contribute to white American society, but it was also one through which black Americans were best able to embrace their ancestral roots while also finding a means through which they are still able to tell the truth of their experiences rather than being overshadowed by the white American perception of the black American experience. Langston Hughes once said, “a world I dream where black and white, whatever race you be, will share the bounties of the Earth and every man is free” (“Langston Hughes Quotes”). It is this world where black and white are both free that Hughes proposes in the possibilities of jazz.

Kaufman demonstrates this conceptual metaphor by employing the notion across his work that it is through jazz that the black American can escape silence. This is not to say that all other vocations filled by black Americans imply a silence, rather, jazz was one of the most influential and expressive forms of making the black American experience known. This was because their music could not be reproduced by white Americans, making it unique, and able to embrace the history of everything that has been endured by the black American culture. At the time of Kaufman’s poetry, jazz was one of the outlets that a black American could use to describe his or her experience. Kaufman’s work suggests that without jazz the black American experience has no voice, and without listening to jazz, the white American is ignorant to the

black American experience, and the wisdom it has to offer. Kaufman once said, “streets paved with opal sadness, lead me counterclockwise, to pockets of joy, and jazz” (“Bob Kaufman Quotes”). His work suggests that chaos is the result of not listening to jazz and should one rewind time they will find a wisdom within jazz.

Baraka demonstrates this conceptual metaphor by employing the notion of feeling unrecognized, and the consequences that leads to across his work. Baraka provides an example of how black Americans were treated in white American society without the presence of jazz. Jazz does not have a strong presence in his work. By looking at how jazz and music is treated across jazz poems, it is considered to be an opportunity. In much of Baraka’s work, there is no such chance of being anything more offered by jazz or any other opportunity. Baraka once said, “the artist’s role is to raise the consciousness of the people. to make them understand life, the world and themselves completely” (“Amiri Baraka Quotes”). His poems often focus on skin color and treat music as a forgotten promise. His subjects are treated poorly, with little hope of social progress. This presentation of society and life without jazz further supports the power and influence jazz can have as addressed in Hughes’ and Kaufman’s poetry by offering an alternate vision of the world – one without the possibilities of jazz.

The imagery and symbolism these poets use in their poetry is significant because jazz serves as a voice to make the black American experience visible, but jazz itself is not a visible entity, so it relies on other forms of representation such as the imagery and symbolism used by these poets to be made visible itself. The imagery and symbolism in the poetry of these three men is what conveys the possibilities of jazz. For this conceptual metaphor, in particular, jazz music relies on jazz poetry as a visible representation of its qualities and its creations because of the ways in which it captures the transition of the black American experience into a sense of

belonging / purpose in society that was more than what white-dominated society originally outlined. Jazz poetry does this through the deliberate employment of images of sun, water, and piano (which is the personification / representation of jazz). The unique demonstrations of this conceptual metaphor are expressed in the way these poets all employ images of and discuss the presence of the sun, water, and piano/jazz in their poetry. The choices regarding how these poets employ and present each of these images in jazz poetry are fundamental in the messages that each poem sends to the reader. Each of these images has specific contributions to the expression of this conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible* at the heart of the poems.

The symbols of the sun, water, and the piano achieve this sentiment of the conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible* by presenting the sun as the obstacle to overcome, the water as the option of freedom from the past that is no longer enough, and the piano as the best solution for freedom in the United States in the twentieth century, as it represents a place in society black Americans hope to secure while still embracing their own identities. The use of these particular images is this was is common across much of jazz poetry. Although the experiences represented in the works of these poets speak to the experiences of many, it was not that which was experienced by all. What is presented in the selected poetry here serves as a general map of experience for black Americans specific to the time frame, and the progressive movement of the Black Arts Movement, which connects Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka.

### **Conceptual Metaphors**

As a literary device, a metaphor is a figure of speech that directly refers to one thing by relating it to another for rhetorical effect. It often provides clarity or reveals hidden similarities between two ideas. Metaphors are one of the most extensively used literary devices. Although

poetry is an eloquent demonstration of metaphor, it is not the only place it can be found. A metaphor is much more present in day-to-day life than just poetry. The conceptual metaphor does not discredit this use of metaphor and the ways in which it contributes to the effects of a piece of literature. Rather, the cognitive linguistic definition of metaphor points to the idea that metaphor is found beyond literature – it is found in day-to-day conversation and comprehension of the world around us. Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka employ metaphor in the sense that it is a literary device, and in the cognitive linguistic sense in that by poetically recording the impacts of jazz, and the black American experience, these poets are detailing the way people understand the black American experience and communicate about it. Kovecses outlines in his book Metaphor some characteristics of cognitive linguistic metaphors.

Characteristics of metaphors (cognitive(conceptual)linguistic view):

- A metaphor is the property of concepts, not of words
- The function of metaphor is to better understand certain concepts, not just some artistic or aesthetic purpose
- A metaphor is often not based on similarity
- A metaphor is used effortlessly, in everyday life by ordinary people, not just by talented folk
- A metaphor is an inevitable process of human thought and reasoning
- It is omnipresent: metaphor suffuses our thoughts, no matter what we are thinking about
- It is accessible to everyone: as children, we automatically acquire a mastery of everyday metaphor

- It is conventional: metaphor is an integral part of our ordinary everyday thought and language
- It is irreplaceable: metaphor allows us to understand ourselves and our world in ways that no other modes of thought can
- It is indispensable not only in our imagination but also in our reason (x)

There are many layers to consider in the cognitive linguistic model of metaphor, however, for the purpose of this paper I will be focusing in the level of conceptual metaphors. In cognitive linguistics, a conceptual metaphor refers to the understanding of one idea in terms of another. Conceptual metaphors are constructed by two domains: domain A (target domain), and domain B (source domain). They are always established as conceptual domain A is conceptual domain B, for example, *creating is making visible*. We use our knowledge from tangible experiences of the world as source information that can be applied to an understanding of more difficult concepts, or the target of what is not yet fully understood. Conceptual metaphors are, in simple terms, metaphors by which we live our lives. These include a vast array of concepts including, but not limited to: *arguments are war*, *life is a journey*, *ideas are food*, *creating is making visible* and so on.

Metaphorical linguistic expressions (ways of talking) are the iterations of the conceptual metaphors (ways of thinking). Poetry is one field in which many metaphorical linguistic expressions are used, as demonstrated by the sample of poetry from Langston Hughes, Bob Kaufman, and Amiri Baraka. However, it is also possible and common to use metaphorical linguistic phrases in day-to-day speech and interactions. It is because of this ability to be a building block of communication that metaphorical linguistic phrases are iterations of conceptual

metaphors. Metaphorical linguistic expressions are phrases that support these conceptual metaphors. For example, the phrase “let’s put that thought on the back burner” supports the conceptual metaphor *ideas are food*. One cannot actually put a thought on the burner of a stove, but it is entirely understandable what notion is being expressed because these conceptual metaphors are so deeply ingrained in how we communicate.

Metaphors are important because they are not only the ways in which we communicate on a basic, day-to-day level, but they are also how we think. By understanding the thought behind the metaphors used daily, and the metaphors used by poets, such as the ones in this paper, we will better understand some of the complex topics grappled with throughout time. The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another. It reflects the natural structure of our experiences because we compare one experience with other experiences as a means to understand more complex, abstract notions. A metaphor is the ability to map and organize our experiences in order to understand them in different settings. Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka are highlighting metaphor in their work to make an experience known and understood – the black American experience. This is effective because the specific characteristics of conceptual metaphors reflects how we talk about and think about the black American presence.

The culmination of these characteristics outlines the ways in which metaphor is an absolute necessity for the functioning of society and everyday communication. The ways in which metaphor is adopted by the poets Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka express this need for communication, and how in creating a voice through jazz both in music and in poetry, they make visible the black American experience. Through the properties of jazz and poetry, they are able to bring light to what has not been previously visible in a white American society.

Koveces outlines countless conceptual metaphors, and the various applications each can have. For the purpose of this paper, I will be focusing on the issue of race, and how in the sample of poetry from Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka demonstrate the conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible* in that jazz is what is being created and what is being made visible is the black American experience.

### **The Black Arts Movement**

The Black Arts Movement was founded by a group of politically motivated black poets, artists, dramatists, musicians, and writers. It was a black American led art movement, emphasizing racial pride. The Black Arts Movement was formally established in 1965 when Amiri Baraka opened the Black Arts Repertory Theater in Harlem. The movement had its greatest impact on theater and poetry. There are many parallels between the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement, so much so that the Black Arts Movement is sometimes considered to be the “Second Renaissance”. The Harlem Renaissance was an intellectual, social, and artistic explosion that took place in Harlem, New York, spanning the 1920s, considered to be the rebirth of black American arts. The focus of the Black Arts Movement called for the creation of poetry, novels, visual arts, and theater to reflect pride in black history and culture. This new emphasis on pride was, “an affirmation of the autonomy of black artists to create black art for black people as a means to awaken black consciousness and achieve liberation” (“Black Arts Movement 1965-1975”). Although it began in the New York area, it soon spread across the United States. Black Americans have always made valuable artistic contributions to American culture, however, these contributions often went unrecognized because of the brutalities of

slavery and the legacies of Jim Crow. Despite this lack of recognition though, black Americans continued to create their artistic contributions that reflected their experiences.

One of the primary highlights of the Black Arts Movement was the focus on literature. The ability to read and write and the power of the written word plays a crucial role in black American history and culture. It demonstrates the liberation of the slavery era, and black American efforts to express their experiences through art. T.J. Anderson explains in his book Notes to Make the Sound Come Right; Four Innovators of Jazz Poetry that, “achieving literacy is a prominent trope in African American literature and often becomes a vehicle for a character or writer to become enlightened and aware of the world in a larger and often broader cultural context” (13). Because of the significance that literacy holds in black American literature and history, it is a key component of the Black Arts Movement, in highlighting the black American contributions made and recognized in white-dominated American culture. There was often a collaboration between the cultural nationalists of the Black Arts Movement and mainstream black musicians of the time. Cultural nationalists saw jazz as a distinctly black art form that was more politically appealing than soul, gospel, rhythm and blues, and other genres of black music. Due to this collaboration, art such as jazz poetry was formed.

Jazz poetry is improvisational by nature, and in many ways is meant to be performed. However, it is the power of literacy, combined with the racial pride of the Black Arts Movement that allows us to study it today. Because there were so many important aspects of the Black Arts Movement to consider, “the Black Arts Movement left behind many timeless and stirring pieces of literature, poetry, and theater and helped lay the foundation for modern-day spoken word” (“Black Arts Movement 1965-1975”). Jazz poetry is still alive today, having also adapted to the form of hip-hop and rap music, and lively, rhythmic poetry events such as poetry slams.



### *Blues to Jazz*

The various culture that each person inhabits provide particular ways of looking at the world. Different ways of living cross-culturally can cause conflict in even the smallest aspects of human interactions. LeRoi Jones describes, “when an African is enslaved by another African, that man can still function as a kind of human being, even if he is the most despised man in the community” (2). However, once an African is enslaved by a man from a different culture – a white man, even the lowest consideration of being a human being disappears. Due to this, “the colonial United States was the complete antithesis of the African’s version of human existence” (L. Jones 4). When a man who sees the world one way becomes the slave of a man who interprets the world in an exactly opposite way, it results in the worst possible kind of slavery because it speaks against everything they consider to be humanity. It was this kind of slavery that dictated the way in which African culture could and would be adapted to better fit white American culture. If pieces of African American culture did not fit, then those pieces were squandered, which in time led to the ways in which black Americans were treated in the United States in the century following the Emancipation Proclamation.

LeRoi Jones describes in his work Blues People the connection and relationship between master and slave in the United States. He writes, “There was no communication between master and slave on any strictly human level, but only the relation one might have to a piece of property – if you twist the knob on your radio you expect it to play. It was this essential condition of nonhumanity that characterized the African slave’s lot in this country of his captivity” (3). To worsen this relationship, and the treatment received by slaves, the United States was to one day also become the home of these individuals. However, there are many ways in which pieces of

African culture survived and began to influence white American society to be what it is known to be now, such as the influence of jazz.

Early on, a black American only had a place in society if he or she was a slave. After the Civil War, emancipation meant a constant desperate search for employment for a lot of black Americans and former slaves (L. Jones 64). LeRoi Jones states that “the post-slave society had no place in society for black Americans to have an integral function, unless it was one that they created for themselves” (55). Due to this, many black Americans turned to jazz as a way to have a place in society. Jazz music soon began to grow, turning into something more than just a place in society for black Americans.

Due to the instability of the United States economy during the Depression and the years during the war, many jazz bands were forced to cut back on personnel, because the financial expenses for managing such bands was burdensome, especially for black American musicians who were not paid well. This resulted in smaller ensembles with musicians who played multiple instruments, creating the illusion of the big band sound. This style became known as bebop – a subset of jazz – that would be placed in accompaniment of the recitation of jazz poetry. The transition from swing to bebop was in part due to the desire of black American musicians to create a music that would be difficult for white Americans to copy and receive a financial reward. It was not uncommon for white musicians to exploit black American performers and composers before the emergence of bebop (Anderson 69). However, by creating music that could not be copied, black Americans ensured their role in white American society, and therefore the freedom to use that music as they saw fit. Anderson describes that “bebop not only highlighted the differences but also presented a uniqueness outside the linear margins of popular music” (70). In understanding jazz poetry, considering how poets applied the rhythmic and tonal

techniques of bebop in order to achieve their aesthetic purposes is important. The use of bebop propelled the cadence and often the subject matter of jazz poems.

After the end of slavery, black American music lost many of the more superficial forms it had borrowed from the culture of white men and the forms that we recognize now as blues began to appear (L. Jones 59). Blues developed because of the black American's adaption to and adoption of culture in the United States. It was also music that developed because of the black American's particular position in the United States. Early blues was perhaps the most impressive expression of the black American's individuality, based on emotional meaning to the individual, which was so seldom expressed. When it emerged, blues was largely functional music. It was meant to tell the story of the black American experience. It emerged from the work song, which existed mostly as a form of communication of some part of the black slave's life (L. Jones 98). The idea of blues becoming a form of music that could be used to entertain people on a professional basis was a revelation. Never before had people actually paid to hear and see blues performed.

Because of the way in which blues became an expression of individuality, it could remain a very fresh and unique form of expression for a long time, withstanding the changes and the treatment of black Americans in the United States (L. Jones 66-67). Blues was not created directly from slavery. LeRoi Jones explains that "blues is not, nor was it ever meant to be, a strictly social phenomenon, but is primarily a verse form and secondarily a way of making music" (50). However, this oversimplification has created an intellectual climate for the appreciation of blues in the United States. Musically, blues showed the black American singer's appropriation of many elements of popular American music, such as music associated with popular theater. The instrumental music that accompanied blues also reflected this development

(L. Jones 81). Blues appeared in the United States at about the same time as ragtime, the most instrumental music to come from black American inspiration.

Ragtime moved so far away from vocal origins of black American music that it was easily popularized, which led to its purer forms disappearing later (L. Jones 90). Ragtime resulted from the black American's appropriation of white piano techniques used in show music. LeRoi Jones describes, "popularized ragtime, was a dilution of the negro style, coming from the white parodies of African American life and music" (111). However, because of this popularization, black American music was heard on a wider scale throughout the country for the first time because of touring shows. Many blues singers, musicians, dancers, and comedians all found fairly steady work with touring shows. This was important in spreading their voices and establishing stability for themselves in society. Black Americans began to exert a tremendous influence within mainstream American entertainment by introducing the older forms of blues as well as classic blues and early jazz to the entire world. White American society was now being introduced to the sounds of a certain kind of cultural existence in the United States that had not been heard before (L. Jones 86).

Blues had a considerable benefit to black Americans. It was a rich, more universal, way to express one's experience and it became a strong influence on the culture it had depended upon for its growth. Ragtime, Dixieland, and jazz are all known as American terms. These terms all depend on blues for their existence. When they are mentioned anywhere in the world, they relate to an American experience. But the term blues relates directly to the black American's involvement in the United States. LeRoi Jones describes that "blues is the one type of music the black American made that could not be transferred into a more general significance than the one given to it initially" (94).

There was always a border beyond which black Americans could not go, both musically and socially. A black American could never become white, other than instances of “passing” as Johnson addresses in his work The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man. While this led to a long and difficult road, it also served as a strength because it demanded that black Americans make use of other resources. LeRoi Jones says, “this necessity to explore other resources to make their presence known and respected provided the logic and beauty of his music” (80). When black Americans began to learn more about instrumentation, they began to think musically in terms of their instruments, as opposed to only their voices. Blues then began to change, giving rise to the era of jazz (L. Jones 70). Jazz is a music that could not have existed without blues. Blues timbre and spirit can easily be found within jazz (L. Jones 71). However, jazz is not a successor to blues. It developed out of blues spirit and sounds and then moved off into its own path of development through which black Americans could tell their stories.

### Jazz Poetry

Poetry is one of the most difficult things to define in the artistic world. Even many of the greatest writers and poets to ever live cannot agree on a single definition. Edward Hirsh describes poetry as, “an inexplicable (though not incomprehensible) event in language; an experience through words” (“What is Poetry”). Matthew Arnold defines poetry as, “a criticism of life” (“Matthew Arnold Quotes”). Robert Frost expresses it as “poetry provides the one permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another” (“Robert Frost Quotes”). Poetry can – and often does – fall under all of these notions and more. It functions as a unique platform through which one experiences and understands the world. It is important to consider how one

might define both jazz and poetry as individual entities, in order to understand how to define jazz poetry, and the complex history it has.

This uncapturable quality of defining poetry is part of what makes it so intriguing to study. Modern poetry can be simplified into two main forms. These forms are closed-form poetry and open-form. Open-form is also commonly referred to as free verse poetry. Closed-form poetry follows the rules of rhyme and meter. Closed-form adheres relatively closely to the various elements of poetry. These elements include but are not limited to: syllables, lines, stanzas, meter and musicality, patterns, form, imagery, denotation and connotation, tone, and figurative language. Figurative language poetry often makes use of metaphor, personification, symbol, allegory, paradox, overstatement, understatement, irony, and allusion. Open-form, or free verse poetry, does not adhere to these elements intentionally, although any of them can be included in open-form poetry. As a direct reaction against the traditional closed-form, the objective of open-form poetry was to stray away from these various elements of poetry and to open the minds of readers in presenting these new voices and ideas that had been previously silenced. Modern poetry is often marked by the rise of open-form poetry as a reaction against traditional closed-form poetry. It often represents the rise of previously silenced voices, perspectives, opinions, forms, and reflect the concerns of the twentieth century.

One of the most significant subsets and eras of modern poetry is jazz poetry. Much like its overarching umbrella of modern poetry, jazz poetry is considered to be many different things and is quite difficult to define. It is said to be jazz music translated into prose – jazz informed poetry. It is an expression of beat and rhythm, which reflects a particular culture. There both has been and continues to be extensive discussion on what exactly jazz poetry is, as poets and

musicians alike try to define this perplexing and enchanting collaboration of art and the turbulent history that shapes it.

The beauty of jazz poetry is it falls in both the closed-form and the open-form categories of modern poetry. It heavily relies upon the musicality element of the rhythm and meter, yet it is modern enough to introduce these previously silenced opinions and voices and to follow a free verse structure when written on the page. When studying jazz poetry, it is crucial to consider both what is being said, and the musical layer of the poem. As George Santayana said, “poetry is the speech in which the instrument counts as well as the meaning” (qtd in Feinstein 254). This idea of considering both the music and the meaning is especially applicable to jazz poetry because it is this combination that brings jazz poetry to life.

Jazz poetry first emerged in the 1920s by the black American culture and was maintained in the 1950s and 1960s by counterculture poets like those of the Beat Movement. In the Beat Movement, many poets questioned mainstream politics and culture. Generally apolitical and indifferent to social problems, they advocated personal release, purification, and illumination through the heightened sensory awareness. Jazz poetry was an expression of how Beat poets defied mainstream society thinking. Many voices that had previously been silenced were now being heard through jazz poetry, and societal comments were being made specifically about the discrimination against black Americans at the time. There are many jazz poets and poets of the Beat Movement that have made tremendous contributions to the poetic literature of today. Beat poets sought to liberate poetry from academic constraints and bring it “back to the streets”, being both rugged and powerfully moving (“Beat Movement”). By the 1960s it had produced a number of interesting and promising writers. It is a form of poetry that is meant for the people.

Jazz poetry is meant to be accompanied or complemented with the music of a (typically) small jazz band. This accompanying music is not background music, but rather an additional characteristic of the poetry (Anderson 27). Bebop and ragtime were more of the music meant to complement jazz poetry, demonstrating the significance of the evolution of blues music. The combination of formal and informal literary constraints and the reliance on musicality makes jazz as unique as it is. Anderson describes, “it is important to emphasize that jazz, in all its manifestations, plays an important role in terms of expanding the way poetry can be read or heard” (21). Since jazz poetry is an art form that is closely related to music, devices such as tone and meter become crucial elements to consider when analyzing. Due to this it is important to keep in mind that there are moments in the poetry when meaning collapses and tonal and rhythmic qualities play the most significant role, because of the ways in which jazz poetry is connected to music, and the improvisational qualities of jazz in particular that it relies on musical qualities to convey meaning. However, there are also moments when the poetry has more formal literary constraints, such as closed-form, and tightly structured meter.

Jazz also influences poetry in the way that poets create verse that reflects their own poetic sensibilities as well as their individual association with jazz. This is similar to the ways in which jazz musicians interpret standard songs according to their own musical styles and moods (Feinstein 7). The ability for jazz and jazz poetry to reflect individual experience is expressed in the improvisational nature. The improvisational nature is even further embraced in the sense that the telling of the black American experience had never been told before. Poets like Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka had to almost make it up as they went, while also being eloquent in the messages they wanted to send in regard to the meanings of their works.



Jazz poetry as told by black Americans is important to study for many reasons. Johnson describes in The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man that one reason the study of jazz poetry is important to study is that at the time these poems were being published, “every black man in the United States was forced to have an outlook not from the viewpoint of a citizen, or a man, or even a human being, but from the viewpoint of a black man” (21). This type of discrimination – so deeply rooted and enforced – is what makes it necessary to have a platform through which the black American experience can be told.

Being reflections on tensions of the twentieth century, and the history of the black American experience preceding it, there is no doubt that the poets were mindful of the fact that their poetry would be received not only as a representation of themselves but as representatives of their racialized community (M. Jones 15). This was important for them to consider because their audiences would often be aware of the issues of race presented in their works and respond to it. For far too long, “the African’s sole purpose in America was, for the most part, to provide the cheapest agricultural labor possible to procure. Any deviation from this purpose was either accidental or extremely rare” (L. Jones 3) and not enough people made a stance on the black American’s purpose being something different. Those who did not may have been afraid of speaking out / swimming against the tide of common opinion. Although this may have been how the black American experience began in America, this is not how it has ended up today.

When analyzing jazz poetry, there is a vast collection of questions to ask. These can be questions of form, of improvisatory language and sound, repetition, content, among many more poetic devices (Feinstein 4). These questions are the key to unlocking both the meaning of the poem and the ways in which each of the selected poems demonstrates the ways in which the conceptual metaphor creating is making visible. W.S. Merwin said, “poetry addresses individuals

in their most intimate, private, frightened and elated moments. People turn to poetry in times of crisis because it comes closer than any other art form to addressing what cannot be said” (qtd in Zapruder 98). Poetry is often credited with being able to express the inexpressible. This is why poetry is so important in being the platform through which Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka demonstrate the conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible*. Through poetry are they able to make visible the black American experience, since it is a platform that can make the space for such expression. It is a platform that makes connections available that are otherwise hidden because the metaphors being used allow us to understand one domain in another, which is more often than not, an enlightening experience, as it brings to light what was not visible before. Poetry brings to life the possibilities, and the powers of language (Zapruder 13) and Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka embrace poetry’s power to finally tell the black American experience as never before.

In the following pages, I will explore the ways in which each poet uniquely addresses the conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible* in that what is being created is a voice, through jazz, as a means to make visible the black American experience.

I begin with a brief biographical explanation of each poet, and the significance he has contributed to studying jazz poetry. I then move into discussing how each poet addresses the symbol of the sun in his work, and how it operates as an obstacle that must be overcome if the voice of the black American experience is to be heard. I then move on to discuss how each poet addresses the imagery of water, and how it represents an outdated method of escape from the oppressive nature of white American society, forcing the black American community to find a new way through which they can interact with their surroundings. Next, I discuss the image of the piano and how each poet embraces the notion, and representation / personification of jazz, as

the solution for the black American voice to finally be heard, and the black American experience recognized.

I end by drawing conclusions about the conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible*, in the work of these poets by discussing the importance of how it is demonstrated in this selection of jazz poems. I reflect on why it is important to continue to listen to the wisdom that can be gained from poetry such as this, and how it applies to the constant search for identity. I also present a cento of my own along with a reflection on the process of writing this cento, and how it contributed to my own experience of the works of these poets. I end with the proposition of further study, and how there are many other ways in which the black American voice can be heard.

### Langston Hughes (1902-1967)

Langston Hughes is often said to be the founder of jazz poetry. Much of what he wrote focused on the portrayal of black American life from the 1920s-1960s. Hughes' work has been described as, "always intensely subjective, passionate, keenly sensitive to beauty and possessed of an unfaltering musical sense" ("Langston Hughes").

Hughes is considered to be one of the first major modernist American poets to successfully experiment with the musical element of jazz and blues in poetry. He worked with the basic musical pattern of twelve-bar blues and combined it with poetic devices, such as alliteration, to accentuate the rhythmical qualities of the blues. Other poetic devices in his work, such as symbol and metaphor, help to convey the mood of each poem. In addition to that, Anderson describes that, "Hughes is known for using vernacular and voices in his poetry that reflects the ethnicity and influences of the speaker" (32). By pairing musicality with poetic verses Hughes calls into question the boundaries between poetry and music. His blurring of distinctions expands the creative possibilities of jazz-driven poetry (M. Jones 62).

Hughes's early work, in particular, has received a lot of criticism. Race was an especially sensitive topic to discuss in culture and in books at the time. For the black Americans being represented in his works, many of them wanted to put their best foot forward in their efforts to secure a better position in their society. However, Hughes' work portrayed what many considered to be an unattractive view of the black American life and experience. Hughes sympathized with the desire and the necessity to present the best possible image of the black American experience to the white American public, however, he found it extremely difficult to do so in his writing. He came from a lower class, so he was not often in the company of those who led the lifestyle of the upper class. He thought those who were around him were also good people and in need of just as much representation as anyone else. Hughes chose to identify with

the plainness, the truth, and the significance of the lower class, rather than the more ornate, and polished upper class that was being sought. Hughes' poetry embraces his own people. His subjects are often workers, singers, performers, and impoverished black Americans looking for a job, who do not have an easy life, but who are determined to not be beaten down wholly and completely.

Despite there being a constant and high demand for creativity, especially in order for him to survive as a black writer, one of the most present themes in Hughes' poetry is that "black is beautiful". He was not always well received due to his portrayal of black life in the United States. However, he had the wit and intelligence to explore the black human condition in great depth. Hughes recorded the nuances of black life and its frustrations as accurately as possible. Although Hughes had trouble with both black and white critics, he was the first black American to earn his living solely from his writing and public lectures. He received great acceptance and love he received from average black people, as they thought that his work embodied the beauty, strength, and power in a way that encouraged their empathy to the highest degree. In his work, it is apparent that he never lost his belief that most people are generally good.

Hughes has one of the greatest reputations of black American writers. In Jazz Poetry: From the 1920s to the Present, Sascha Feinstein makes the observation that Langston Hughes had a more integral approach and connection to the music, doing his best to promote national respect for jazz and blues (qtd in Anderson 16). Hughes' achievements have gone so far as to overshadow the jazz poetry of white American writers. In The Muse is Music; Jazz Poetry from the Harlem Renaissance to Spoken Word Meta DuEwa Jones states, "Hughes's lyrically opaque wordplay illuminates how the subjective normalization of "whiteness" tends to mask its historical, cultural, and political formation" (62).

His work is well known because of the honesty and directness he portrays in his maintaining of the sounds and rhythms of the black American experience. His work stands apart from the work of other black Americans because his work has always been intended for black people. When other poets turned inward, towards a decreasing audience of readers, Hughes turned outward, using language and themes, attitudes and ideas familiar to anyone who had the ability simply to read. Hughes has offered such a diverse literary canon to what is studied today. Many still wonder if he was actually heard through his poetry (M. Jones 33).

### **Bob Kaufman (1925-1986)**

Bob Kaufman successfully conveys the importance of poetry as an aural as well as written creation in his jazz poetry. In his work and in his personal life he demonstrates the power a voice can have. Kaufman began to study literature in the early 1940s, after leaving the United States Merchant Marines. It was at this time that he began to be inspired by both the Beat Movement and surrealism. Fisher remarks in his research that “Kaufman’s declaration that everything is bearable because he is “not white” racializes the Beats’ critique of “straight” society in ways that parallel the Black Arts Movement and its commitments” (101). Like his colleagues, Kaufman aimed to embrace racial pride, especially through his work.

Scholars claim that Kaufman created his poems in the same way that a jazz musician might improvise, because of how he would perform his work (Rice 405). Other scholars have commented on Kaufman’s work as being essentially improvisational, and best when accompanied by a jazz musician.

Kaufman usually did not write down his poems. His wife was the one who would write down his poems as he created them. Any surviving published work of Kaufman’s today is thanks to her. Kaufman was a poet in the oral tradition, so he was much more focused on sharing his

work through performing his poetry in front of others rather than leaving them to be read by others someday. Many of his poems are known to have quite a few versions, as each performance was unique. The oral tradition plays a very large role in jazz poetry. One can see just from the way a jazz poem is structured on the page, and with the particular diction and slang used within the poetry, that it is meant largely to be read aloud, and heard, rather than just read. The same is true for jazz music. It is meant to be heard. As the lines of the poem flow together, and various aspects like musicality, dialect, and scat are highlighted, it is nearly impossible to not read a jazz poem without picking up on the rhythm enough to read aloud, and let it be heard. Kaufman's poetry adapts the harmonic complexities and the spontaneous invention of "bebop" to fit poetic sound and meter to make it pleasant to listen to. His poetry made excellent use of jazz syncopation and meter. Poet Jack Micheline said about Kaufman, "I found his work to be essentially improvisational, and was at its best when accompanied by a jazz musician" ("Bob Kaufman"). His technique resembled the surrealism that inspired him. He demonstrated a range of skill spanning from visionary and satirical work to powerful and political.

Kaufman was very close to his maternal great-grandmother, who came over from Africa on a slave ship. It was through her that he discovered his appreciation for nature and the need to give voice to that which had been previously silenced. This became an important element in his work. His work demonstrates the mixture of African, European, and Caribbean cultures that feed into the Louisiana tradition of aesthetic improvisation (Anderson 71).

Kaufman did not have an easy life. During his time in New York, he battled poverty, addiction, and imprisonment. His move to California did not ease much of his suffering. In California, he was the target of beatings and harassment by the city police. Kaufman frequently expressed his desire to be forgotten as both a writer and a person. He took a vow of silence both

in his personal life and in his work after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, which lasted about ten years. This vow of silence had a remarkable impact on his readers, as it indicated much of his politics. He broke this vow of silence when he recited one of his poems, *All Those Ships that Never Sailed*, at the end of the Vietnam War.

At the beginning of the poem, the ships are powerless and incapable of movement. Only through the will of the poet are they made into something functional. For the purpose of the poem, they serve as vessels of historical memory. Reciting this poem after his long silence was significant because Kaufman emphasized that poets often carry the responsibility of simultaneously representing two roles – the role of witness and the role of visionary, in order to reclaim and harness the power of language (Anderson 74).

Words that capture the creative and critical configurations of “voice” in literature generally include hearing, healing, writing, rising, finding, losing, tearing, and telling (M. Jones 1). The “voice” adopted in black American poetry, in particular, has functioned not only as a literary and cultural device, but also as a musical, and poetic instrument. Kaufman’s strives to recognize all of these configurations of voice in his work.

Jazz poetry, in particular, is one of the best demonstrations of the power of language. It is through poetry that everyday language begins to resonate with more significance than what it usually means in everyday life. It becomes more activated and symbolic (Zapruder 164). As poets like Kaufman try to capture the voice of black Americans, and the voices of those who have previously been silenced, the deep histories, both personal and collective within the everyday language of those voices begin to be understood.



### *Amiri Baraka (1934-2014)*

(Imamu) Amiri Baraka was born with the name Everett LeRoi Jones. He was a poet, a writer, a teacher, and a political activist. Baraka was known for speaking out against police brutality and racial discrimination, and for his leadership in the Black Arts Movement. He was praised for speaking out against oppression, but he was accused of fostering hate throughout his career.

After Malcolm X was killed in 1965, Baraka moved to Harlem and founded the Black Arts Repertory Theatre and School. The Black Arts Movement helped develop a new aesthetic for black art and helped shift away from looking to white culture for validation. Baraka did a lot in terms of defining and supporting the mission of black literature. He is credited with opening the doors in the white publishing establishment.

Baraka's own political stance changed several times, which divides his work into periods. During the 1950s, Baraka – writing as Leroi Jones – was associated with Beat poets, where he believed in poetry as a process of discovery rather than an exercise in fulfilling traditional expectations. In the 1960s, he moved to Harlem and joined the Black Nationalist Movement. Throughout most of his career, his work had a confrontational tone, with the intention of making his audiences aware of the political concerns of black Americans. Although traits of blues and allusions to black culture are found in his poems, the subject of blackness does not predominate his work due to the ways he has integrated his Bohemian social roots. In 1959, Baraka took a trip to Cuba, where he met artists from third-world countries whose political concerns included the fight against poverty, famine, and oppressive governments. From this experience, his view of his work changed dramatically, and he began to write with stronger political messages. Politics is common in jazz poems and often leads to great insight. Zapruder explains, “the greatest poems written about political issues often contain within them a central ambiguity that competes with

genuine certainty and rage” (118). It is often this ambiguity that opens the door to the expression only achievable through jazz poetry. Baraka demonstrates this ambiguity in his work as he tries to balance leading a movement built on racial pride and speaking out in a way that expressed his opinions and politics strongly enough.

Baraka points out that it is impossible to fully capture the qualities of a blues or jazz solo by using notation. The music itself cannot be completely understood without examining the attitudes that produced it. The use of jazz as it is applied in the creation of poetry can be viewed similarly. Although the actual printed text is important, how the work sounds when it is read aloud is also crucial. Jazz poetry is not categorized only as jazz poetry in that it reflects similar improvisational qualities. In the recitation of it, a poet can use his or her voice as a musical instrument by changing the pitch or the cadence of a single word to create images and sounds. The relationship between the words of the poem and the sound of it is important because not only does the poet need to say what he or she is saying, but the poet also needs someone to hear it. Someone needs to hear the art, and someone needs to hear about the experience that is being represented in the art. The spatial relationship between words, what is silent or unsaid, is equally important as what is said. This is what creates the music-like quality of jazz poetry. The ability of the poet’s voice to serve as a musical instrument gives the poet the responsibility of being both the musician and the writer. Jazz performers often face the same two roles. Jazz music creates spaces of ambiguity and it becomes up to the artist’s expression of his or her interpretation. In this way, both jazz and poetry echo that they are not easily definable forms of art, which only adds to its complexity and beauty (Anderson 8).

He had a major influence on younger writers, as he encouraged them to respond poetically to their own experiences, rather than wait for someone else from a culture substantially different from theirs to write for them.

*Sun*

### Baraka's Use of Sun

In his poem *An Agony. As Now*. Baraka presents the sun as a representative of white power and an obstacle that must be overcome by the black American community in their efforts to make their voices heard. He presents the notion of feeling unrecognized and the pain that has come from that. In this poem, the speaker discusses how his skin is a cage, and how it is the sun that is trapping him in this cage, bringing him an inescapable agony.

Komozi Woodard attempts to delve into the reasoning behind the treatment of black Americans in A Nation Within A Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics. In his work, he compares black Americans to other groups that have been marginalized and endured horrible treatment. Woodard approaches this racism by asking if black Americans are an ethnic group destined to be assimilated into white American society as Irish Americans, Jewish Americans, and German Americans have been. He poses the idea, “do they constitute an oppressed nationality locked out of white America, fundamentally in conflict with the established social, economic, and political order of the United States” (4)? Woodard argues that black Americans “are an oppressed nationality subjugated by racial oppression in the United states. Black nationality consciousness took form in the context of slavery, racial oppression, and group conflict in American” (5). In attempting to understand black Americans, their history, and what brought about the treatment they received, Woodard considers Baraka’s work a demonstration of how black Americans deserved so much more than what they got in terms of how they were treated. Baraka is able to accomplish this political unveiling of the black American experience by first making the experience visible in his work.

This poem demonstrates the conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible* in the sense that it allows the reader to step into the “flesh” of a black man and feel the pain that he endures

because of the color of his skin. Baraka embraces the effect of empathy in establishing the sense of being unrecognized within the reader. The creation of the opportunity to step into the flesh of a black man is what makes the experience of the black man known. This conceptual metaphor is perpetuated by the fact that jazz does not have an active role in this poem, so it cannot serve as the voice of the black American experience, therefore expressing the only way in which someone else could understand the black American experience is by stepping into his skin, so to speak.

As with his other poems, Baraka is commenting on the notion of the black American seeming stuck and trapped in the view of white American society without the presence of jazz to act as a spokesperson and form of escape from the brutalities experienced by the black Americans. James Weldon Johnson describes in The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man the amount of influence the color of one's skin had at this time. In his work, the narrator describes this power of being white as bravery. He says, "perhaps what bravery I exercised in going out was due to the fact that I felt sure my identity as a colored man had not yet become known in the town" (185). If the narrator had felt as though he was being viewed as a black man, he would not have had such "bravery" because he knows the difference between how a black man and a white man was treated in society at this time. Baraka demonstrates this same sentiment in his work by focusing this poem on the idea of flesh, and how it has been a cage and has brought nothing but pain to the black man.

The speaker of Baraka's poem begins with the mention of "fouled tunes" coming from the breath of the white American. It is specifically a "tune" because the speaker is indicating that the oppressive nature of the sun has kept this music stuck in the past, not allowing it to grow into the complexities of jazz, mirroring the ways in which this oppressive nature of white power has prevented black Americans from growing into more complex roles in society. In addition to that,

the tune is fouled, because no one listened to it, so it remained stationary while its potential to grow rotted away.

The poem continues from the description of the “fouled tunes” into describing how flesh is not only an enclosure, but it is one that causes pain – the pain of the black American experience. The speaker continues to repeat the expression “or pain” throughout the middle section of the poem as if stuck on this idea of the pain that is caused because it is too overwhelming to move past, and too present to ignore. The repetition of the phrase “or pain” demonstrates another mirroring of the black American being prevented from growing into more than what white American society views it to be, in addition to demonstrating the overwhelming nature of the pain.

The idea of pain is also discussed in the form of the limits that have come because of one’s skin color. Johnson addresses this in his work when he describes the pain that came from losing a loved one due to the color of the narrator’s skin. The narrator in Johnson’s work explains how he eventually had enough courage to ask his love interest to marry him. He writes, “then began the hardest struggle of my life, whether to ask her to marry me under false colors or tell her the whole truth. My sense of what was exigent made me feel there was no necessity of saying anything; but my inborn sense of honor rebelled at even indirect deception in this case” (200). At this point in the novel, the speaker is commenting on the fact that the woman he loves thinks he is white, and he is dreading having to tell her that he is not, because he is afraid that she will leave him because of it. Soon after he admits his dread of this conversation he reveals to the reader her response to finding out that he is a black man that passes for a white man. He continues, “I felt her hand grow cold, and when I looked up, she was gazing at me with a wild, fixed stare as though I was some object she had never seen. Under the strange light in her eyes I

felt that I was growing black and thick-featured and crimp-haired” (204). He then describes how she seemed to not have understood what he had said, and once she was able to comprehend that he was a black man rather than a white man, she began to tremble and cry greatly.

In his poem *An Agony. As Now*, Baraka is capturing this same sense of pain that the narrator in Johnson’s work experiences simply because of the color of his skin. By centering the blame of the pain to be based around something as trivial as skin color allows Baraka to make a strong statement about the politics of the white American’s world, and how something that never should have, served as a type of cage and punishment that could not be escaped or changed. Because of that, too many black Americans suffered a lot of various forms of pain.

In *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, the narrator speaks about noticing in traveling that sometimes he would be treated as a white man. Later, after it was learned that he would be stopping at the house of someone in the black community, the attitude and treatment would change dramatically. He continues to express how this was often uncomfortable because, “it cannot be so embarrassing for a colored man to be taken for white as for a white man to be taken for colored; and I have heard of several of the latter kind” (172). In this sense, Johnson is not only making visible the black American experience, but he is pinpointing the absurdity of such a history and he is allowing white readers to feel the shame of being a black man.

In Baraka’s poem, the sun is a very present force, symbolizing the oppressiveness of white power. Baraka writes, “Or pain, the mind / silver spiraled whirled against the / sun, higher than even old men thought / God would be” (23-26). Here Baraka is expressing that the sun – white power – is more oppressing than God since it is higher than any man thought God would be. The height of the sun also reflects the ego of white Americans in their societal power. This inflated white power is what has led to such pain endured by the black Americans. The speaker



of the poem continues to repeat the phrase “or pain” throughout the poem. He is unable to think beyond the pain because of how great it is. Being repeated in a concentrated amount near any mention of the sun heightens the idea that the greater the sun is, the greater the pain is. Baraka embraces the notion that “the role of the poem is to bring out all the aspects of language: its provisionality, uncertainty, slippage, as well as its miraculous ability to communicate” (Zapruder 108). This can look like making connections that are unjustified, saying what is beautiful and exciting, and how this is the start of how poetry enacts social change. Baraka makes use of this aim to bring out all aspects of language, by allowing the reader to get inside the mind and body of the black American experience and know the ways in which the pain affects it because jazz is not present to be the voice of the black American experience.

### **Hughes’ Use of Sun**

Hughes describes the impact of white power, represented by the sun, in his poem *Dream Boogie*. In this poem, the speaker continually tries to hear, and encourages his father to try to hear as well, the sound of the black American dream, and recognize how it has been deferred by white American expectations. However, the oppressiveness of the morning sun – acknowledged in the first line – continues to prevent the speaker from completing his thought, thus perpetuating the white power in suppressing the voice of the black American experience.

DeSantis expresses in his research Rage, Repudiation, and Endurance: Langston Hughes’ Radical Writings, Social Issues in Literature: Race in the Poetry of Langston Hughes that although Hughes committed himself to his writing, at the time of the Harlem Renaissance, he was more concerned about speaking out about the beatings, lynchings, and daily humiliation of segregation which black Americans suffered. DeSantis writes, “as a member of the African

American community, Hughes accepted the responsibility to speak out against these injustices in his writing and to fight them in his daily life, at whatever cost to his own personal welfare” (100). The responsibility Hughes claims for himself in speaking out against this is evident in his work and his portrayal of black American life. However, Hughes is doing more than just speaking out against these injustices. He is making them visible by giving a voice to the black American experience – the voice of jazz. In *The Weary Blues*, in particular, he is contrasting what the black American experience is, as voiced by jazz, in comparison to what the black American experience is thought to be through the eyes of white Americans. By employing this comparison, Hughes is making a political statement about the suffering endured by black Americans, and he is saying what had never been heard or listened to before, by illuminating that voice of the black American. In his poems his black subjects get the chance to break out of the mold built for them by white-dominated society.

Hughes’ poem *Dream Boogie* supports the conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible* in exploring the disregard white power exercised in the black American voice, confining the community to a disrespected position. By creating the presence of the white speaker, who will not let the black speaker be heard, or let the black speaker hear the dream that has been deferred, Hughes is making visible the power that jazz has in voicing what that dream was before it was deferred. If he listens a little more, he’ll hear it, but he is constantly interrupted. The poem begins with an address to the speaker’s father, when he says, “Good morning, daddy!” (1). In poetry, this form is known as a direct address or an apostrophe. The speaker is addressing someone who is not there. By addressing the speaker’s father, the speaker is inserting a sense of lineage. This lack of being heard is not only an issue experienced by the speaker, but also by the speaker’s ancestry. By addressing the notion of ancestry, the speaker is establishing credibility.

This address of ancestry also implies the history of tension that black Americans have faced, and how it is not any better than what it used to be during the height of slavery. In this poem, the speaker is also addressing a cause for the need to be heard.

The subsequent lines use the image of “rumble” to describe the sound of a piano. It is a common image across many jazz poems and often serves as a symbol for jazz in the sense that the part represents the whole. By adding to the rumble with the description of “boogie-woogie” there is no doubt that Hughes is referring to jazz. Hughes writes, “Ain’t you heard / the boogie-woogie rumble” (2-3). The speaker of the poem prompts the reader to listen closely to the jazz because through listening closely, one might be able to hear the “dream deferred”. Hughes makes references to the “dream deferred” in many of his poems. He is referring to black Americans dreams being forgotten and destroyed as a result of the treatment from white American society. It is significant that Hughes is establishing the notion of jazz in these lines because of what jazz music represents. Poet Sterling Plumpp describes how jazz makes him think about the black experience and a method for articulating that experience no matter how it changes over time. He says, “jazz for me implies improvisation, the ability to negotiate chaotic mode into some coherent and manageable pattern through articulation” (qtd in Feinstein 269). Many poets would agree with the observation that it is only through their art and music of black Americans that black Americans have been able to tell their story.

In this poem, through the interactions between the different speakers, Hughes is attributing jazz with the power of creating a voice for the black American experience, in order to make visible the dream deferred – the dream that was born from the black American experience. However, there is a switch in the middle of the poem. The speaker is prompting the father to listen closely to the sound of the jazz but is continually cut off in thought. This is apparent in

Hughes' use of the dash. He writes, "beating out and beating out a -" (7). Both the second and the fourth stanzas end in dashes, cutting the speaker's thought short of finishing. This is reflective of how black Americans were seldom listened to, especially in 1951, when this poem was written. Black Americans were not listened to because they were thought of as less than human in comparison to the white populations of the United States and were therefore not treated with the respect of having their voices heard. The intentional use of the dashes reflects the oppression of black American culture, as this other speaker responds to what jazz might unveil by simply not letting it be heard. The desperation in keeping the jazz from being heard in the poem highlights the way Hughes, and other jazz poets, allow jazz to be heard has become necessary.

Another point of interest in this poem is the turning point that the third and fourth stanzas offer. The sentiment expressed is, "listen closely: / you'll hear their feet/beating out and beating out a - / you think / it's a happy beat" (5-9)? The tone of this question is sarcastic, or one of disbelief, expressing that Americans often listen to jazz music superficially, acknowledging it for its upbeat presence. However, if one were to listen carefully, one might find that it is actually not a happy beat because jazz music both reflects and embodies the history of the turmoil faced by black Americans in the enslavement they faced from white Americans. The third and fourth stanzas reveal that jazz holds the truth of the beat, and the work and treatment represented by it. If one pays attention to what is being represented in the jazz beat and lyric, one notices that the truth it is holding is that of the black American experience, and the horrors they have endured, rather than the upbeat show tune. By cutting off the speaker, white audiences are able to keep quiet the blame that they should own, because they are keeping the jazz from making visible the truth of the black American experience. LeRoi Jones describes in Blues People how the music

played by black Americans was transformative in culture. It was new and unique. He describes, “the barbaric harmonies, the audacious resolutions, often consisting of an abrupt jump from one key to another, the intricate rhythms in which the accents fell in the most unexpected places, but in which the beat was never lost” (98-99). This beat that was never lost results in ragtime music. Jazz and subsets of jazz, like ragtime, was not only transformative because it was a new kind of music, but because it gave the black American performing it a voice that they had never had before, as it was continually squandered by the overwhelming, overbearing white American culture.

The reader is able to infer that the speaker is asked if he is happy when he is interrupted because of how he responds. The speaker says, “Sure, / I’m happy!” (15-16). This interruption is very significant in this poem because it reveals how black Americans were both viewed and treated in white-dominated society. Johnson explains that “his character has been established as a happy-go-lucky, laughing, shuffling, banjo-picking being, and the reading public has not yet been prevailed upon to take him seriously. His efforts to elevate himself socially are looked upon as a sort of absurd caricature of ‘white civilization’” (168). In these interruptions, Hughes is expressing that the speaker is being forced to consider the beat a happy one, because that is what is expected of him, and that it doesn’t matter what is actually being expressed in the beat, because the only thing that matters to the one who continues to interrupt the speaker in this poem is the speaker’s work.

Hughes uses the word “mop” in the ending rhyme. This adds to the impression of “boogie-woogie” music in that it fits along with the rhythm and rhyme of the poem, while also revealing the status of the speaker. Since Hughes uses the image of a mop, the reader can guess that the speaker is a black American and his work is a point of tension, both in that black

Americans have a long history of being abused through labor, and in the idea that even in the post-slavery era they are still struggling to find a function in society higher than the one they previously held.

Johnson addresses this idea of class and occupation in The Autobiography of An Ex-Colored Man when the narrator has the possibility of escaping the treatment and labor expectations of those who were black and considered to be low in society. At this point, the master points out the various traits the narrator has that would allow him to pass as a white man by appearance, education, and taste, and choosing to run among black and poverty life when one would not necessarily have to would be considered an act of throwing one's life away in the opinion of the master. The master says, “look at the terrible handicap you are placing on yourself by going home and working as a Negro composer; you can never be able to get the hearing for your work which it might deserve” (144). In this scene, the white master is telling the narrator that since he looks like a white man, he could choose to live the life of a white man and would have a much easier experience. He also indicates that he thinks he is a talented individual, but because of his association with the black population, no one will give him a chance, even though they would if he associated himself with the white population. In this scene, Johnson demonstrates the same idea that Hughes is capturing in this poem – the idea that simply because of skin color, society decides who is expected to work hard, and who gets the privilege of a voice. In addition to that, Hughes is trying to capture the notion that music is a universal art, and that it cannot be limited by country or race. Due to that, jazz is the platform through which the black man is given a voice because white-dominated society is not able to impose limitations because it was uncopiable. The white man in the poem knows this and will not accept the due blame for mistreatment and discrimination, so instead, he continues to interrupt the speaker,

trying to keep him from being heard. The white man's privilege is what prevents the black man from being heard. This sense of entitlement is reflected in the nature of the exchange that happens between the white man and the black man in this poem

Despite not being able to hear the complete depth of what is made visible of the black American experience through jazz, enough is still present in this poem, as the sounds of jazz are still heard enough through the rhyme to expose the labor conditions. Furthermore, the power of jazz to expose the true condition of the black American experience is expressed in this desperate need to silence the speaker. Hughes gives the impression that whoever is listening to the speaker of the poem is not permitted to know the full extent of what is being said in listening to the beat closely. This censorship alone demonstrates how *creating is making visible* because it is an attempt to squander the creation so that what lies within it will not be made visible.

In his research, DeSantis discusses how Hughes believed in the transformative powers of the written word. He believed in using art for purposes other than social change. DeSantis says, "Hughes called for the formation of a 'racial art' which would lead to the creation of a distinct black aesthetic. He denounced writers who believed their art came first, their race second" (108). Hughes believed art had an inherent quality to it that could spark social force. He considered it his basic duty, and the basic duty of other black American artists to use their art in this way.

In this poem, jazz is being threatened by the white American's conception that it is the black American's role to work. This work is imposed upon the black American speaker as an attempt to keep jazz from being heard. It is also a means of reflecting the social status of the main speaker in the poem. The speaker's interruptions are successful in this way because of the presence of the sun in the poem. Hughes begins with, "good morning" (1). implying that the sun has risen. By implying the rising of the sun, Hughes is also implying the rise of white American

power. It is the presence of the sun that keeps the black American speaker of the poem “in line,” keeping him from fulfilling a role that would allow him to be part of white American society while still embracing his roots. Because this power works so hard to suppress the wisdom jazz holds, Hughes is demonstrating the power jazz has in voicing the black American experience. This desperate need to keep jazz, and the dream deferred silence demonstrates the impact it will have when it is listened to.

The poem ends with the speaker not only being prevented from speaking his mind in regard to the deeper meanings of jazz but ends up telling the listener only what the listener wants to hear, claiming that he is happy, despite the underlying agony held in the tension of a jazz beat – the beat of a working man. T.J. Anderson expresses that the speaker is still able to be heard though. He says, “unmistakable is the rhythmic quality of the poem, capturing a bebop cadence as well as the implied message of sociopolitical discontent. Hughes’s closing bebop riff becomes not only a weapon to articulate the ‘rumble’ but also a passageway to the spiritual and redemptive quality of the African American music” (36-37). As expressed by Anderson, Hughes is demonstrating that jazz serves as the voice of the black American because it is what is able to capture the discontent that the black American experiences, while also tricking the white man into thinking that he is fulfilling the role he is imagined to fill, as the entertainer and the servant. The need to silence jazz tells the reader how significant jazz is, as readers are able to infer why white American society considered it necessary to keep it silenced. The speaker ends the poem with “Re-bop! / mop!” (19-20). The “re-bop” is a sound of jazz music, and mop not only perpetuates the sounds of jazz, but also it implies the work expected of black Americans. Hughes is using the jazz as a mask for the black American to wear, in that he fills the role expected of



him, and the word “mop” allows him to do so, while also presenting the improvisational nature, and embracing the ancestry within the rhythms of jazz.

Anderson explains in his research that several poets like Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka have made use of the rhythms of jazz and scat singing in their work. They did this by, “placing runs of nonsensical syllables at crucial moments within the text when ‘logical language’ seems to collapse. In jazz poetry, scat phrasing acts as a kind of verbal release that alludes to the instrumental quality of the human voice, as opposed to conveying any formal sense of meaning” (68). The “re-bop” in Hughes’ poem is an expression of this scat singing in this poem. Using scat singing and the rhythms of jazz in this was significant because it challenges conventional notions of “meaning” and emphasizes the importance of both the fact that the music is the key aspect of the poem, and that notions and cultural practices of African culture challenged conventional notions of “meaning” in white American society. Even though people tried to silence jazz, it still achieves its goals. It was this challenging notion that led these poets to their political stands during the Black Arts Movement, and to the responsibility of making visible the black American experience through the creation of jazz, and the incorporation of it in their jazz poetry.

The ways in which Hughes addresses and discusses the presence of the sun as a symbol of white power spans across many of his poem. In Hughes’ *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*, the image of the sunset plays a vital role in the expression of the conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible* as well. There is no longer a dominating power over the black Americans of the South, suppressing them to only difficult labor since the sun is setting in this poem. As the sun sets in Hughes’ poem, the black Americans are allowed to transform from being mud, into being gold, as their value as human beings is finally established. When the sun is setting, Hughes is

implying the power of the white man setting. This can also be assumed by the reader because the sunset – white man’s power and control over blacks in the South – sets after Abe Lincoln makes it to Mississippi. This allusion to Lincoln is a reference to the Emancipation Proclamation and the ways in which it impacted the lives of black Americans in the Confederate South. Amiri Baraka once defined the black writer’s responsibility to, “report and reflect so precisely the nature of the society, and of himself in that society, that other men will be moved by the exactness of his renderings” (qtd in DeSantis 38). He continues to suggest, “if they are black men, grow strong through this moving, having seen their own strength, and weakness; and if they are white men, tremble, curse, and go mad, because they will be drenched with the filth of their evil” (39). Hughes embraces this sentiment in this poem because, without the setting of the sun, the black Americans would not be allowed to turn from mud into gold, and the music that they create would not be made visible and thus the experience of the black American would not be heard.

### **Kaufman’s Use of Sun**

Baraka and Hughes use the sun to present the notion that the black American has very little chance of being heard because of the ways in which their voice – as expressed through jazz – is squandered in the presence of the sun. In *Battle Report*, Kaufman begins to suggest the possibility of the voice of the black American experience once the oppressive power of the sun is removed. In this poem, jazz attacks a city at night, thus changing the very nature of the city. Such an attack would not have happened or been nearly as impactful had it been during the day when the sun was up. Kaufman strategically uses the setting of his poem to suggest a chance of escaping the oppressive power of the sun.

Kaufman's vow of silence extended to his work in many ways. Tom Fisher describes in his research Writing Not Writing: Poetry, Crisis, and Responsibility that not only did Kaufman stop writing poetry during his ten years of silence, but the power of silence is largely expressed in his poetry. Fisher describes that Kaufman's refusal to speak was a demonstration of a form of the political that, "puts into question vocabulary and comportment that assume agency, audibility, and legibility as the necessary conditions of it. Kaufman's silence approaches in this way the very effect of its apparent antonyms: noise, blare cacophony" (16). Fisher is correct in expressing that through his vow of silence, Kaufman is actually voicing quite a lot, in terms of his politics and his beliefs. His poetry does the same. He takes the thought of jazz being silenced and presents the horrible circumstances that come from that. In *Battle Report* Kaufman allows jazz to not be silenced. It does much more than being silent. It attacks a city and leaves it changed from that attack. The noise that comes from it is the noise of the voices of black Americans who had previously been silenced.

This poem demonstrates the conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible* in a couple of different ways. Kaufman allows the black American experience to appeal to all the senses in this poem by not just giving black Americans a platform through which they can be heard, but also by giving jazz a personification, and the ability to change an entire city with its influence. Poet Carol Bergé describes the influence of jazz as, "jazz and poetry are alike in that they're both intended to be heard and felt at the same time, with a vivid appeal to the senses" (qtd in Feinstein 251). In this poem, the jazz is both heard and felt at the same time. Jazz is personified in the way that it adopts human wartime characteristics and the power of influence. This personification is apparent in the Kaufman's diction when he describes how the saxophones "infiltrate the city" and that there is "the fleet of trumpets" ready to "attack". Kaufman used this terminology to

specifically call up wartime images for his readers. The diction that Kaufman uses in this poem is deliberate. By calling up wartime images and references, Kaufman is also calling up many wartime associations in the minds of his readers. He is calling up the idea of sudden change, and forcefulness. These are characteristics that many black Americans had to face when they were first sold into slavery. By engaging this imagery, and by using jazz in particular, Kaufman is expressing an ironic turnaround, where white American culture must face and undergo the influence of jazz and black American influence. White American culture was now at the mercy of the sudden changes of jazz, rather than the other way around.

Having a reliance on wartime imagery is significant because it represents the fight that black Americans have had to engage in, in order to be heard. Johnson describes this as, "...a struggle; for though the black man fights passively, he nevertheless fights; and his passive resistance is more effective at present than active resistance could possibly be. He bears the fury of the storm as does the willow-tree" (75). He then continues to describe that because of jazz, this struggle between races has shifted. It began as a fight over the black Americans' right to be classed as a human being, and it shifted into being fought over social recognition. It is this social recognition that the Black Arts Movement sought to bring to the spotlight. A dramatic shift such as this represents an impressive amount of progress for the black American. The fight for social recognition is one of the cornerstones of the Black Arts Movement. Kaufman is able to demonstrate how much progress has been made. However, since jazz is attacking the city in the poem Kaufman is also demonstrating how much progress has yet to be made to receive the recognition they want. Kaufman employs these images of fighting to help express how the black American has had to fight for so long, and for so much. By setting his poem as an attack at night – one where the next day, the lasting impacts are visible, is significant because through this

setting, Kaufman is expressing to his audiences that the fight that has been fought by black Americans for so long will leave an undeniable impression, such as an attack at night would, and that it will change the city because they have finally found a means through which they can be heard.

In this poem, Kaufman adopts the notion that jazz leads to chaos and upset in society. This is a significant theme to employ because it was first through jazz that the black American experience in the twentieth century was told, and this challenged everything in white society because it was the first time that white society was to be held accountable for the suffering that was happening. White audiences would almost certainly perceive this change as chaos. Kaufman achieves the sensation of chaos in the society by employing the extended metaphor and personification of jazz attacking a city at night.

The combination of these different poetic devices expresses the mood of the poem. The mood of the poem expresses the ways in which white society first viewed jazz, due to the ways in which it has been derived from black American influence. It was viewed as something chaotic, something evil, and unwanted, and as something that would upset the status quo of the white American's society because it was different, and it challenged mainstream white-dominated influence. This is all evident from the diction employed by Kaufman in this poem. Jazz is needed as the agent in this personification because it is through jazz that black Americans are able to tell their stories. By personifying jazz, Kaufman is demonstrating the ways in which it has an impact on a society and the way it changes a city. In creating jazz, Kaufman is not only making visible the black American experience as told by jazz music, but he is also making visible the possibility and the potential of jazz. He does this by showing what jazz can achieve and how much of an impact it can have.

In addition to that, Kaufman is insinuating that in the near future, jazz will have a lasting impact on society, and therefore so will the black American culture supporting it. Readers are able to read this insinuation because of the setting of the poem. Jazz is attacking at night. Kaufman illustrates this idea in the line “under blue cover” (8). This line works cleverly because the “blue” can refer to the musical influence, and it can also refer to the coolness and darkness of night. Furthermore, when a city falls under attack, it is often done at night, so the attackers can have the advantage of the dark. Jazz was popularly played in jazz clubs at night. By comparing jazz to the attack at night, Kaufman is allowing jazz to move out of jazz clubs at night and into an even wider influence. When Kaufman employs the imagery of war, and attacking a city at night, and then likens it to the influence of jazz music, he is suggesting that jazz will soon break out of the night time cycle – its limited cycle – and leave a lasting impact on society in the daylight, as such often happens during a war, and can easily be noticed after an attack. In this sense, the creation of the jazz music at night will grow until it can no longer be contained within the night, and the influence will spread, making it visible in the daylight. Simply by likening the influence of jazz to the impact of an attack on a city at night, Kaufman is demonstrating the conceptual metaphor. He is suggesting that jazz as a voice, is making visible the black American experience, both in that it is a platform through which Kaufman, and other poets like him, can not only make political statements but let their voices be heard. Letting their voices be heard is bringing the black American experience, and the contributions and influences they have had on American society as we know it today out of the dark, where it was born, and into the light where everyone can see it. Furthermore, without the presence of the sun – representing white privilege and power, jazz is able to bloom and make a stance without being squandered. Not only

is setting this poem at night historically, and wartime sensitive, but it gives jazz the chance it needs to be heard.

Kaufman was bold in suggesting that jazz could be a force so strong that it could be compared to an army attacking a city at night. This boldness was part of the fight that Kaufman and other black Americans had to fight in order to make known the black American experience. It was part of exposing the truth about the black American experience. Fisher describes the dangers of revealing the black American experience by alluding to Hughes, “politics can be the graveyard of the poet” (27). Fisher explains how Hughes articulated the lessons he learned the hard way, indicating that it would be wise to keep poetry and politics as separate entities for, “the sake of art as well as for the sake of the poet” (27). However, the responsibility of those involved in the Black Arts Movement was too great. Jazz holds within it the power to be heard, and poets like Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka had no choice but to allow that voice of jazz to be the driving force behind their poetry, to finally reveal what had been needing to be revealed for far too long. As poets, their responsibility was to find a voice, and the method that worked best for them was expressing racial pride, and main agendas of the Black Arts Movement through their poetry.

This poem calls to attention the idea of jazz being a form of expressing social and political stances and rebellion against common ways of thinking. It is personified in a way that makes this clear. These are the actions of attacking a city at night. As jazz is the attacker, it is thus personified as the carrier of the system of beliefs and practices contrary to the common beliefs and practices of the white man’s society. This is an important characteristic of this poem because it demonstrates the anxiety felt by many at the thought of black Americans having any sort of influence or sense of belonging in a white American’s world. Kaufman expresses to his readers that participating in the spread of jazz is rebellious since it represents everything contrary

to a world without the influence of jazz through the action of attacking in his poem. At the time he was writing black writers were not given the same respect / attention as white writers were. On the rare occasion that black writers were given the same amount of attention, their followers were considered to be against mainstream thinking and rebellious. However, this is also a startling aspect of this poem because jazz, like many other pieces of culture considered “truly American”, has a deeply rooted foundation in black American culture. This allows the reader to consider the outcome of the attack on the city. Because of the ways in which jazz has become deeply ingrained in the American culture, readers can assume that jazz will be successful in the attack portrayed in this poem.

This presents some complex notions of viewing black Americans as both outsiders and insiders, but only because of the actions of the people within the city – the white Americans who thought they could decide who or what belonged in the city. The complex notions presented in this poem demonstrate why it is so captivating. The ways in which Kaufman portrays jazz as a persona – adopting the characteristics of an army – allows the reader to be exposed to the wisdom that jazz has to offer. Matthew Zapruder describes this as, “one of the things readers truly love about poetry, this ability to hear the wisdom that feels truly wise yet also disembodied, as though it comes from the world itself” (194). In this poem, jazz is wise, yet disembodied. It comes from the world itself because of the stories it has to tell, and the lives it represents. Because of that, it is not able to remain silent, and when it is given a voice, listeners are attentive. Fisher continues this sentiment about the jazz offering a profound insight that could only be provided by jazz. He describes, “as a political and poetic subject, then, Kaufman commits himself to a silence that remains silent, outside, inassimilable, and useless; a silence that interrupts a political and aesthetic economy that can only make use, make sense, make present,



make speech” (106). From his research, Fisher is able to conclude that Kaufman’s silence inspires quite the opposite when it comes to illuminating the black American experience. In his silence, Kaufman’s audience is able to recognize what is in need of being said, and that jazz is the one who says it. Although the ways in which Kaufman executes his vow of silence both in his personal life and in his work is a political stance, it would not be successful was it not for the ability of jazz to be given a voice in that silence, making visible the black American experience. Conceptual metaphors reveal how we think about and talk about the black American experience. Kaufman’s silence reveals the same thing.

*Water*

### *Water in Hughes' Poetry*

Water is used as a source of the past in Hughes', Kaufman's, and Baraka's work. It is the past's method of escape from the obstacle of white power (the sun). Water could be a reference of escape from returning to one's ancestry across the sea, or even crossing the Ohio river, which acted as a boarder between the free Northern states and the slave states of the South. In the poems from these three jazz poets, water is always discussed in the past tense, expressing that it is an outdated option of escape from oppression. Hughes heavily relies on the imagery of water in his poem *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* to express the need to find a new way to be recognized in white American society.

In his research, Christopher DeSantis states, "the subject matter of Hughes's poetry has to be considered against the historical issues that impacted him" (10). He further explains that the principal historical issues during the time Hughes was writing that inspired his work was the racism that, "escalated in the 1920s and 30s, resulting in more and more lynchings, as whites competed with blacks for the few jobs available" (10). Even in his early works, the tensions of slavery and the treatment of black Americans is an apparent focal point in Hughes' poetry. DeSantis is correct in expressing the political driving forces behind Hughes' poetry, and claiming that the racism experienced in the 1920s and 1930s was a considerable influence on his work.

More than that though, Hughes uses his work to express that *creating jazz is making visible* the black American experience. Hughes sees jazz as the most affective and fulfilling way to express this particular experience. In *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*, the racism is addressed in the lines of the poem detailing the experience of the black American who was taken away from lands that he knew so well, to a time when he got to see the United States change from enslaving

Africans to enslaving black Americans, and how black Americans overcame this treatment. Furthermore, through this poem, Hughes is expressing that this racism is an undeniable aspect of the black American experience – an experience that must be exposed.

This poem demonstrates the conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible* by first creating the ancestry of the black American experience. Hughes does this through his expression of the various sights not associated with the United States, indicating past experience and a world outside of the United States. The line “My soul had grown deep like the river” (4) suggests to the reader that the speaker has experience that runs deep. The river in this instance would be a metaphor for the speaker’s experience. The speaker then mentions the Euphrates River. The Euphrates is the longest and one of the most historically important rivers of Western Asia. Together with the Tigris, it is one of the two defining rivers of Mesopotamia. The speaker’s mentioning of this river, and not one of African origin, could be for many reasons. The speaker could want to suggest a worldlier idea of the impact of slavery, or the speaker could be expressing the worldliness of his or her experience. Of the other rivers that the speaker mentions, two of them are of African origin, and the last is of American origin.

DeSantis describes how the rivers are part of God’s body and participate in his immortality. He writes, “they are the earthly analogs of eternity: deep, continuous, mysterious. They are named in order of their association with black history. The black man has drunk of their life-giving essences and thereby borrowed their immortality. He and the rivers have become one” (46). He describes further how the transformation of the Mississippi from mud to gold by the sun is mirrored in the transformation of slaves into free men by the Emancipation Proclamation. This transformation depends on the black American experience. DeSantis continues, “as the rivers deepen with time, so does the black man’s soul; as their waters ceaselessly flow, so will the

black soul endure” (46). Hughes is evoking the idea of the black American having a past before being brought to the United States as a slave, be that a past in the Middle East, or Africa, or elsewhere. Hughes is bringing to the readers’ attention that there is both a world and many experiences of that world that exist outside of America.

In Johnson’s The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man, the narrator explains the sensation of getting to know the ancestry of one’s race. He writes about “entering” his race in getting acquainted with the population of black Americans in his community. He writes, “I had formulated a theory of what it was to be colored; now I was getting the practice. The novelty of my position caused me to observe and consider things which, I think, entirely escaped the young men I associated with; or, at least, were so commonplace to them as not to attract their attention” (74-75). The narrator is a black American, yet his skin tone is so light that he often passes for a white American and can, therefore, adopt this outlook. He feels that since he was able to associate with both black men and white men, he is able to receive a broader knowledge of men and history. With this broader knowledge, he is also able to have a better understanding of the struggle between the black and white races in the South. In this example, Johnson is supporting Hughes’ creation of a world and experiences separate from the experience of the white South by exposing both the already formed opinion or what it meant to be black, and the reformation of that opinion as the narrator learned more about where his people came from. Only by seeing these differences, would one be able to understand the tensions between races, as Johnson explains, and be able to embrace one’s ancestry as Hughes suggests. In this sense, Hughes is not only making a political statement, but he is expressing why it is so important to understand the differences between races because each man has a history of his own.

Hughes is enlightening his American readers of the world that exists outside of their own country. He is creating an image of the rest of the world – the world that surrendered too many innocent lives to American slavery. And through this, he is making visible the black American experience. In addition to that, he is making visible the human traits of black Americans that have been so overlooked, by suggesting that they too have a place they call home, and they too deserve rights as any other human being. Matthew Zapruder expresses in Why Poetry that a poem is often one of the only platforms where one is able to say what needs to be said because through poetry one brings together descriptions that might otherwise not be brought together or understood. For example, through poetry a white man can understand what a black man is experiencing, because he is able to step into the experience of the black man as one might step into someone else’s shoes. In that light, it is through poetry that one is able to discover a world beyond his or her own. Zapruder writes, “a poem moves through contradiction, connecting previously unlike elements so we understand in new ways. Sometimes, in doing so, a poem lands on what can feel like a great truth” (145). In Hughes’ *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*, the poem is connecting the audiences with the history of black Americans, and since it feels like a moment of a great truth, and since Hughes establishes credibility for himself, then the audience feels inclined to listen, thus making the black American experience heard. It is more than what white-dominated society has said it to be. In creating this connection, Hughes is not only making a political statement about the history of black Americans, but he is making visible the black American experience.

Hughes takes the reader through different sights of different countries to express that there is much more to a black American than what meets the eye. One of the keywords that catches the readers’ attention is the word “ancient” first appearing in line two. It implies a history

behind the speaker. By including ancient and introducing phrases in the past tense of “I’ve known”, this gives the speaker credibility because it indicates that he is knowledgeable. This is significant because black Americans would never be listened to if they had no credibility.

In his book, Johnson references a number of black men who have been influential. He writes, “I read with studious interest everything I could find relating to colored men who had gained prominence” (46). He then describes how he spent much of his time reading the works of black men such as Alexander Dumas, and how much he admired individuals such as Frederick Douglass. He then continues to express how much of an impact these black men had on the narrator, as a young, impressionable black man himself, and how the works of these men gave him an escape from the struggles of his life. Without credibility, these influential men, and men like Hughes would not be able to tell their story because no one would listen. By speaking to a history of knowledge, as Johnson speaks to the knowledge gained from the works of the men listed The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man, Hughes is not only establishing credit for himself, but he is also encouraging others to embrace their ancestry and to speak about their experiences. The speaker has roots and knowledge from those roots.

Water is the most prominent image in Hughes’ poem. Similar to how it is used in many other jazz poems, the water in *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* symbolizes the passage back to Africa, or other means to get to freedom such as crossing the Ohio River. It represents the idea of escape from the horrible treatment black Americans were receiving in the United States. However, because of the way it is paired with descriptions of the “ancient” world Hughes brings to light the notion that water is no longer a viable form of escape for black Americans by the 1960s. Society has been shaped by the time that has passed too much for that to remain an

option, and still promote progress and forward motion. Hughes solves this by presenting jazz as the new option for escape and expression.

There is a lot of repetition in this poem, which is one of the most used rhetorical devices in expressing musicality, and jazz-type impressions on this poem. The repetition suggests a connection to closed-form poetry in that it adheres closely to the rhetorical devices of rhythm and meter. However, the poem also suggests a connection to open-form poetry in that it is bringing to light a voice that had previously been silenced. The voice being made visible is the voice of the black American experience through jazz. There is a lot of repetition in jazz style music as well, and by incorporating that in the poem, Hughes is expressing that jazz is being heard, and within that, the voice of the creators of jazz is most at stake in these lines. The image of jazz comes into play as the renewed form of escape for black Americans in America during the 1960s. Playing jazz music was one of the only ways in which they could have a functioning role in society. Hughes relies on the image of singing in this poem to convey the presence of jazz. This poem expresses how the singing in Mississippi turned what was muddy into something golden. In the poem, Hughes writes,

“I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln  
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy  
bosom turn all golden in the sunset” (8-10)

In these lines, Hughes is directly referencing the power held within the music of black Americans. The possibility of jazz music is what made that possible. LeRoi Jones describes how pieces of African culture that were nearly impossible to destroy are the most apparent legacies to black Americans, but that just recognizing this is not enough though. He writes, “to merely point out that blues, jazz, and the Negro’s adaptation of the Christian religion all rely heavily on



African culture takes no great amount of original thinking. How these activities derive from that culture is what remains important” (16). Hughes embraces this importance by showing his audiences and readers that aspects of African culture not only linger long after slavery, but they have influenced American culture and brought about a transformation that would otherwise not have been possible.

Hughes leaves the music with an ambiguous quality by describing it only as “singing”. Because of this, the reader is allowed the opportunity to interpret the singing either as the singing of a slave song, or the singing of a jazz song. However, the songs sung in slavery gave rise to blues music, and blues eventually gave rise to the jazz era, allowing the black American experience to continue to be told across the years. Thus, either way the reader interprets the singing, those interpretations allude to the power of jazz. These lines also represent the transformation of America that occurred as a result of the influence of African culture. LeRoi Jones in Blues People states, “the Africanisms are not limited to black People, but indeed, American culture, itself, is shaped by and includes a great many Africanisms. So that American culture, in the real world, is a composite of African, European, and Native or Akwesasne cultures, history, and people” (xi). By describing the Mississippi as turning from mud to gold, Hughes is attributing American value to be from African influence. Much of what is considered to be truly American came from African culture originally, such as ragtime music. Hughes is showing that black Americans have given a lot more to white American society than their labor, and they have not been acknowledged, let alone respected, for that because it goes unnoticed in white society.

### *Water in Kaufman's Work*

Kaufman does not rely on the imagery of water in the same way that Hughes does, but he still employs the notions that water is past's method of escape from the oppressive white power. In his poem, *The Night That Lorca Comes* Kaufman presents the notion of a South that no longer disrespects the black American community. In achieving this reality, the absence of water in Kaufman's poetry suggests that water was the past's method of escape, and there is now an alternative way to make the voice of the black American experience heard. We cannot know for sure the omission is intentional by the poet for any purpose at all. Omissions can have a purpose, or it show a cultural blind spot in the poet. We cannot say with certainty what the poet's intentions were. However, in considering how the image of water is treated largely across different jazz poems, I have interpreted this omission of water to have the purpose of representing past's escape from oppressive white power.

Fisher describes how Kaufman's silence is timed crucially in a moment that allows his speechlessness some power, and provocative nature. He describes the potential impact of this as, "Kaufman elects silence not only precisely when the power of speech is flourishing but also when it is staging or producing a 'political' encounter or event in the sense that Ranciere (Jacques Ranciere – French philosopher) gives the term. Kaufman's silence, then, might seem a monastic renunciation of world and politics" (105). Kaufman is able to use his vow of silence in his work to express some of his political thoughts, as Fisher describes, however, this would not have been effective were it not for the fact that this poetry is built upon the conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible* in that jazz is being created and that the black American experience is what is being made visible. Furthermore, Kaufman's silence expresses the demand for the black American experience to be told. It is apparent that this poetry, and the poetry of many other jazz poets, like Hughes and Baraka, is built on this conceptual metaphor because in order to derive

the meaning behind the poetry, and apply that as politically motivated intentions, one must be willing to embrace the black American experience – as it is being presented through jazz. In Kaufman’s work, he villainizes silence and makes it the force that brings chaos to the society and makes the people there suffer. LeRoi Jones attributes the silence to the foreignness of African culture.

The uncertainty and squandering of African traditions within the United States silenced their cultural customs and their voices. LeRoi Jones describes this as, “what made the American most certain that he was ‘superior’ to the African (aside from the fact that the African was his slave)” (8). Due to the suppressing of African cultures, because of the foreignness of it, Americans were able to silence them. Yet, through jazz, some ancestral African roots are embraced, giving it the unique style of belonging to the black man. Johnson expresses in his work, the impact of connecting to one’s roots. He writes, “it is difficult for me to analyze my feelings concerning my present position in the world. Sometimes it seems to me that I have never really been a Negro, that I have been only the privileged spectator of their inner life; at other time I feel that I have been a coward, a deserter, and I am possessed by a strange longing for my mother’s people” (210). It is at times when the narrator questions his identity that he most longs for the connection to his “mother’s people”. Jazz allows the black American the confidence in identity by carrying ancestral roots.

In this poem, the silence takes the form of the labor done by the black American populations in the South, done under poor treatment, and with no appreciation. Kaufman projects an idea about a future when the black American populations of the South will one day leave, and the white South will realize what they never acknowledged as valuable. Johnson addresses this idea of the relationship between the South and black Americans in his work. He describes, “the

claim of the Southern whites that they love the Negro better than the Northern whites do is in a manner true. Northern white people love the Negro in a sort of abstract way, as a race; through a sense of justice, charity, and philanthropy, they will liberally assist in his elevation” (170). The Southern whites love the presence of black Americans because of they are not concerned with assisting their elevation in society, and count on the black American presence to remain what it has always been. The chance to become something more is what attracts so many black Americans to the North. Johnson continues, “yet, generally speaking, they have no particular liking for individuals of the race. Southern white people despise the Negro as a race and will do nothing to aid in his elevation as such” (171).

This poem demonstrates the conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible* by exploring the common notion of not knowing the value of something one has until that something is gone. Johnson describes how it is often the black American who understands white culture better than white Americans do because black Americans do not have the ignorance brought about by entitlement. Johnson describes, “I believe it to be a fact that the colored people of this country know and understand the white people better than the white people know and understand them” (22). It is because of this attentiveness to white culture that black Americans are able to have the wisdom and foresight presented in this poem about how the South will hurt one day when the black Americans are freed and move North. Kaufman achieves the sentiment of not recognizing the value of something until it is no longer there by expressing in this poem that the South will be dramatically changed, and to a large extent, even hurt by the change when the black Americans leave and go to the North for their freedom. The pain of this change is apparent in the descriptions of how the “South shall weep bitter tears to no avail” (15-16). By engaging this idea of not recognizing the value of something until it is gone, Kaufman is supporting the conceptual

metaphor *creating is making visible*. In creating this proposed idea, he is making visible the weaknesses of the South, revealing the ways in which it will inevitably crumble once it has lost the labor of the black Americans that it so heavily depended on for so many years. The weakness of the South for depending on the labor of black Americans would not be known were it not for the opportunities presented by jazz as a profession and an escape in the North.

Zapruder examines how political poems have a tendency to turn into lyricized essays, sermons, or even rants. He says, “This is partially because the language of politics is so often designed to do the opposite of what poems do: the poet has to remain vigilant not to slip into euphemism, generalization, obscuring abstraction” (11). This may also be because the importance of the subject matter may be so great to the poet that he or she begins to inform, convince, lecture, describe, or report on the subject in the poem rather than allow that to be done in prose. Due to this, poems such as jazz poems easily fall into the tendency to be politically expressive.

Kaufman employs several different poetic devices in this poem. From the opening line, the reader can tell that allusion – reference designed to call something to mind without mentioning it explicitly – is a major foundation for this poem. This is especially important for Kaufman as a poet because it is a method that establishes his credibility as a poet. His readers can tell from the allusions that he makes that he has intelligence and credibility in the areas to which he refers. Kaufman alludes to Lorca in the opening lines. Lorca was a Spanish poet, playwright, and theater director. He lived from 1898-1936 and was well known in Spanish literature for his thoughts on futurism and surrealism. Kaufman’s references to Lorca promote the idea of the black Americans leaving the South as futurism and surrealism. The ideas

discussed in both Lorca's work and Kaufman's are European movements and indicate that Europe is further ahead in civil rights than America.

Repetition is another major aspect of this poem. Near the end of the poem, Kaufman begins to repeat himself in saying, "Crispus attacks shall arrive with the Boston Commons, to take Elissi Landi" (19-20). The images in these lines are repeated until the end of the poem. An interesting aspect to make note of is the way Kaufman plays around with the language. For example, in the poem, instead of saying Ellis Island, he writes "Elissi Landi". This playing around with the common landmarks is Kaufman's attempt to demonstrate the integration of black Americans into white American society. Here, Kaufman distorts the words 'Ellis Island', as if to express that it does not matter where various people came from, black Americans should be fully considered to be an integral part of the United States, and due to that, they deserve equal treatment. This images of joining the United States through immigration was not the case for many black Americans but it is being presented as how their experience should have been considered.

This poem, similar to *Battle Report*, specifically takes place at night. This setting functions the same way in this poem as it did in *Battle Report* in that the black American experience and jazz would not have the same chance to be heard if the sun were up, and the poem took place during the day. Fisher describes how poetry is often allowed to make use of what serves it best because it is able to achieve so much. Fisher describes, "poetry 'prefers not to' be gathered into the empire; it wanders the edge of polis, just outside earshot calling out what cannot be heard" (138). Here, Fisher compares the attitude of poetry to mirror that of Bartleby the Scrivener by Melville, in that it is able to accomplish more by not being gathered into the empire. Fisher further supports this line of thought by saying, "poetry's refusal, then, is also the

relation of its importance, viability, consequence, substance, audibility; poetry can only affirm its own inconsequence and marginalization” (138).

The image of jazz is presented in the word “blueness”. Kaufman describes how it is this blueness that will transport the black Americans of the South to freedom. Jazz is often referred to as blue in that it came about from blues music, it came from the night, as that was often the time to listen to it, and because the stories it represents are often sad and tragic, reflecting the difficulties that black Americans had to face. However, by making these stories known, black Americans will be transported to a better condition, and the only way these stories can be known was through their music during the height of the Black Arts Movement.

### **Water in Baraka’s Work**

Baraka clearly offers the sentiment that water is the past’s method of escape in his poem *Legacy* when he expresses that the sea is the subject of the songs sung by black Americans, and those who sang slave songs and blues music before the black Americans of the twentieth century. In this union of expressing that water is an outdated method of escape, but music is not, Baraka presents a road map for the way to escape from the oppressiveness of the sun through music.

Although the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement have much in common, one major difference is while the Harlem Renaissance was derived from black artists and meant for audiences of all races, the Black Arts Movement was aimed at black audiences specifically. Woodard writes, “while the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s treasured the accomplishments of the black establishment and counseled racial moderation, the Black Arts Movement celebrated the folk culture of blues people and preached black revolution” (xiii). Woodard says the Black Arts Movement has “turned black art from other-directed to ethnically

centered. Thus, the contemporary [black American] artist writes out of his or her own culture and, moreover, is self-consciously an African American” (xiii).

As the Black Arts Movement began to gain popularity though, the shift from the sea, or water as the method of escape transformed into music as the solution for black Americans to have a place in white-dominated society. Specifically, the piano is that solution, as that is an instrument that both represents jazz and it represents the harmonious working together of both the white and the black pieces in the sense of both the black and white keys and the black man’s fingers on the white keys working together to create the music. The transition of the method of escape moving from the sea to music is supported in this poem because the sea is spoken of in the old songs. Baraka writes, “Down a road / where people are asleep. Towards / the moon or the shadows of houses. / Towards the songs’ pretended sea” (14-17). Since the form of escape exists in the songs, the songs become the new form of escape. The transition is further supported in the closing lines of the poem when the speaker expresses that the songs exist, but the sea does not because it is described as a “pretended sea.” This goes as far as to say that the blues people in the South that the speaker mentions are looking for an escape, and that escape is the option of music. It is through music that they will, and do find an escape, not only from the brutalities of the South but from the brutalities of not being heard. The blues people presented in this poem know that the slave song which they reference worked as an escape for their ancestors, and so they turn back to the music with the hope of it working as a form of escape for them as well.

This poem demonstrates the conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible* in that the power of the music, referred to as “old songs” (11) in the poem, is what propels the blues people of the South to continue forward and to push for recognition. The image of jazz is presented as a song because it is more focused on blues style as the predecessor to jazz, and singing was more



closely associated with blues than it was with jazz, as jazz was when musicians started to adopt the influence of more instrumentation in their music than they did in blues. The lasting impact of blues represents the ways in which the Black Arts Movement embraces African ancestry. LeRoi Jones says that, “it is absurd to assume, as has been the tendency among a great many Western anthropologists and sociologists, that all traces of Africa were erased from the Negro’s mind because he learned English” (9). Baraka demonstrates in this poem that even though the black American experience seems to be that of what white American society made it to be, this heightening of racial pride allows the legacy of black culture to survive, and it allows for the “old songs” to still have an influential presence. This poem begins with the parenthetical information that it is dedicated or is otherwise meant for “blues people”. Along with the title, this dedication indicates a time of the past as black Americans made the shift from being viewed through the eyes of white American society into speaking for themselves, embracing the strength of their ancestry and laying a foundation for generations to come. Stereotypically, blues is thought of as being performed by black Americans. The shift from blues to jazz, while monumental, was not easy.

Johnson explains how black Americans often do not fully appreciate the old slave songs and would prefer to sing hymns from books. He says that “this feeling is natural; they are still too close to the conditions under which the songs were produced; but the day will come when this slave music will be the most treasured heritage of the American Negro” (182).

In Baraka’s poem, the blues people in the South that are presented represent the black American population of the South, because it was most often the case that and black American was a bluesman in that he was somehow connected to blues music. “Baraka’s work is concerned with the ‘sounds of black life’” (Woodard xi). In the poem, the blues people are presented again,

in an unflattering light, as they are on the streets, drunk, and looking for an escape. Baraka writes, “in the south, sleeping against / the drugstore, growling under / the trucks and stoves, stumbling / through and over the cluttered eyes” (1-4). The South indicates segregation, and Baraka begins with a description of the way life in poverty might have looked in The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man. Johnson speaks to how understandable it was for black Americans to sympathize with one another even if someone was a terrible criminal. This sympathy was a protective measure because it was a natural human impulse. He explains that when it is suggested that the South should be left alone with dealing with tensions between races, “my thoughts go back to that scene of brutality and savagery. I do not see how a people that can find in its conscience any excuse whatever for slowly burning to death a human being, or for tolerating such an act, can be entrusted with the salvation of a race” (188). Baraka’s sentences are not complete thoughts. For example, in the middle of the poem, Baraka writes, “frowning / drunk waving moving a hand or lash” (5-6). This sentence has little coherency, reflecting the drunken state of the speaker. This indicates the helplessness and uncomfortable shift in making the black American experience visible. It also demonstrates how bad the situation was at the time.

Poetry allows us to do what is compassionate and correct rather than what is comfortable. This is a necessary place to start in the effort poetry makes in creating social change. Zapruder says that “regardless of how small and helpless we might feel or even be, one thing we as individuals can always be responsible for is attention to our language” (127). In the Black Arts Movement, many poems that sincerely attempted to engage the most challenging political, social, and cultural issues were being written, to not only embrace what was left of black culture,

but to also leave a legacy of modern culture, and the voice of the black American in white American society.

The speaker expresses that escape as being towards the sea, as presented in old slave songs. The sea is a major point of interest in this poem. Water is often used as a reference to a passage home or other means of escape, as black Americans were brought over to America via the sea. It is certainly immediately apparent that all forms of political and economic thought, which were two of the most profound sophistication of African culture, were suppressed immediately (L. Jones 15). In many slavery songs and jazz poetry, the sea is thought of as a chance for freedom and escape from their terrible lives in the United States. The diverse labors of the African, which were the sources of this kind of song, had been funneled quite suddenly into one labor, the cultivation of the white man's fields (L. Jones 20). However, Baraka expresses the loss of hope felt by many black Americans in his phrasing of "the songs' pretended sea." This closing line of the poem expresses the loss of hope because the black Americans have endured the hardships of slavery for so long that the idea of home feels like a distant memory to them – so much so that their home across the sea seems to be pretend, and any chances of getting back to their homes is not a very good one.

The ways in which Baraka uses enjambment in this poem not only suggests, but it emphasizes the lack of control that black Americans felt in their situation, further expressing the need to enact social change through their poetry and other efforts.

Baraka specifies that this poem is set during the "early mysterious night". Since it is set at night, there is no sun, which allows the black American experience to be seen. However, since this opportunity is in the early mysterious night, black Americans are not sure what to do with this visibility yet. Instead, they stagger around in the way that they are perceived in white

American society. By the end of the poem though, they are reaching high for the moon, implying a later hour of the night and by extension, more experience, strength, and comfortability in the unveiling of the black American experience because in reaching this part of the night, then they will be able to connect with the stories past, and the notion of escape from white American society and poverty.

*Piano*

## Baraka and Jazz

In *Snake Eyes* Baraka reminds his readers of what the black American experience is without the presence of jazz. There is no image of jazz or the piano in this poem, or any other opportunity of escape, further indicating this feeling of being trapped. Instead, the subject of the poem, a black American, is stuck and limited by the status of being a black American. Baraka uses the same sentiment he used in *An Agony. As Now.* by establishing an empathy within his readers to understand the black American experience to be that of unrecognized. In this presentation of a situation without the presence of jazz, Baraka perpetuates the need for a voice like jazz to be the outward expression of the black American experience.

Komozi Woodard describes in A Nation Within a Nation; Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics that the driving force behind Baraka's work is also what drove him to be the "father" of the Black Arts Movement. It is evident in Baraka's work that he is searching for an identity and a purpose for himself, and for the other black American lives he is representing. In his research Woodard describes that as a leader of the Black Arts Movement, Baraka's personal yearning for an identity, a purpose, and direction inspired the imagination of generations of his followers and readers, because, "to varying degrees it was experiencing similar tensions between feelings ranging from spiritual ennui, personal malaise, and identity crisis to racial kinship, black consciousness, and cultural regeneration" (51). To a large extent, this is true – in his work, Baraka is yearning for an identity and a purpose in a white man's world. This sentiment is only understood however due to Baraka's engagement of the conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible*.

The conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible* is demonstrated through a different approach compared to the ways in which Hughes and Kaufman demonstrate this

metaphor. In this poem, jazz does not have a presence. By holding this poem in comparison to the other selected poems presented by Baraka, Kaufman, and Hughes, one can see the ways in which the way these poets describe the black American experience differs to a great extent. In its absence, compared to these other poems, readers can see what comes from jazz. Hughes and Kaufman often express the power of jazz, indicating that the black American experience would not be told without it. Baraka achieves this same sentiment by capitalizing on the absence of the voice jazz gives to black Americans, and what that leads to. In this poem, the speaker refers to himself as a “battered, old brown thing” (3) that has been swept off of the streets. The image of the “battered, old brown thing” is striking. Johnson describes in The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man that “among Negroes themselves there is the peculiar inconsistency of a color question, its existence is rarely admitted and hardly ever mentioned; it may not be too strong a statement to say that the greater portion of the race is unconscious of its influence; yet this influence, though silent, is constant” (154). This image of a black American is far more generic rather than specific, and it makes for an unflattering presence in the poem, while also being defining of the black American presence. This reflects the lack of respect white American society has in considering the black American presence. There is little hope, and little inclination of progression towards better treatment, and better times. Rather, the black American experience is being told in a way that a white American might understand it, with black Americans being mistreated, and going to great lengths to be something that they are not – pretending to be something crucial to the functioning of society, playing important roles, when the white American truly thinks that he is really just crazy and that the black American experience will never actually amount to anything.

In the jazz poems presented in this paper that are more directly based on the notions of jazz, the black American has a story to tell. He has a deeper meaning, a soul, and a purpose. He has something worth listening to. This was not fully the case for black Americans until the time of the Black Arts Movement, as more and more black students began to attend universities and colleges in white-dominated society. This new presence, and the unveiling of the black American experience, particularly supported by education, led to a magnificent spread of black nationalism among college students and intellectuals. Some still wanted to demand the black Americans who were making an impression to replace their identities as black Americans with white ones, in order to find a role in society. In other words, those who felt as if they were alienated bureaucracy, “resented the implication that blacks had to become ‘white’ in order to make it in America. Rather than conform to fit into those slots, many of those youths bolstered the forces of black cultural nationalism” (Woodard 7). In this poem, since there is a lack of voice for the black American experience, the black American remains an “old brown thing” and nothing more. The black American remains to be only what the white American sees him as because that is the only story that is being told. By heightening the absence that the black American voice has in this poem, Baraka is expressing that because there is no voice, and thus no jazz that is created, the true black American experience cannot be made visible, and in that case, only the white American’s story gets to be told. Zapruder speaks to the ways in which the beauty of poetry can be diverse. He mentions how for some it will be in the sounds and images of poems while for others it is the way in which poems can cause disruption. Zapruder says, “the beauty of a poem will have far less to do with what we ordinarily consider beautiful or “poetic” language, and for more to do with the powerful, striking movement of the mind as it thinks through complex or difficult issues, personal or political or environmental or global” (118).



Even though this poem is not built on the notions of jazz, it still remains a jazz poem, because it is expressing the black American experience, despite it seemingly being told from the perspective of a white man, evident from the depiction of the black American experience. In the structure, we see that the lines try to break the pattern of the expected uniformity with the indentations. Jazz often does this due to its improvisational nature. And, as the speaker expresses, this is the platform through which the black American can “take unholy risks to prove we are what we cannot be” (11-13). In this sense, the black American is proving that he is more than just the “battered old brown thing” on the street and that he is, in fact, one of many who contributes significantly to society. This role is expressed through the music he makes. In the line, the “cannot be” implies the restrictions imposed upon black American cultures. Yet, the speaker is expressing that it is through the bravery of those who create jazz, that they are able to prove that they are worth something and that there is a black American experience that needs to be told and needs to be made visible.

Johnson perpetuates this lack of respect for the black American presence when he writes in The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man about the narrator’s ability to identify with either the white or the black community. The narrator speaks, “I had made up my mind that since I was not going to be a Negro, I would avail myself of every possible opportunity to make a white man’s success; and that, if it can be summed up in any one word, means ‘money’” (193). Here, Johnson is clearly expressing the ease of being a white man in comparison to being a black man, because of the respect one gets in his presence, and also because of the economic state at this time. There were few jobs, so music was one of the only ways in which black Americans could participate in society, however, this still left them wanting and needing for much more because it

was these types of conditions that condemned black men to be “battered old brown things” on the street, taking desperate measures to prove that they are more than what meets the eye.

In gambling, ‘snake eyes’ is the occurrence where a pair of dice is rolled and only one pip shows on each die. It is called snake eyes because of how the single pips together look like a pair of eyes. Further, snakes are commonly alluded to for their treachery and betrayal, making this roll often a sign of bad luck. Baraka is using this to indicate the bad luck associated with the black American experience. This connection can be made when he mentions the “old brown thing” on the streets. Baraka intends for his readers to connect the notion of bad luck with the black American experience, in that his depiction of the black American experience is not a flattering one and more one that mirrors what bad luck might look like. Johnson distinguishes between whites and blacks and the treatment of them. He concludes that it was not fear or discouragement for more opportunity driving him away from the black race. Rather he suggests, “I knew that it was shame, unbearable shame. Shame at being identified with a people that could with impunity be treated worse than animals. For certainly the law would restrain and punish the malicious burning alive of animals” (191). Baraka also uses the word “risk” near the end of this poem, which also brings to mind thoughts of gambling and notions of luck. His use of the word “unholy” indicates a religious connotation of snake, and further perpetuates the idea of treachery and betrayal.

The poem, as seemingly told by a white American, evident by the lack of willingness to imagine the black American in a different role, does not recognize the sun, or the power it represents because its presence is assumed in the poem being set outside in the streets. This assumption also entertains the notion that the black American will always remain a “battered old brown thing,” that remains underneath the white American presence, so there would be no

consideration of water in this poem, since water represents both a form of escape – even though it is an outdated form – and a connection to the roots of the black American experience.

### *Kaufman and Jazz*

Kaufman takes Baraka's demonstration of reality without jazz and expresses not only the opportunity that can be gained from it but also the wisdom, in his poem *O-Jazz-O-War Memoir: Jazz, Don't Listen to It at Your Own Risk*. Kaufman's demonstration of jazz is one step beyond Baraka's demonstration, in that jazz has a presence, but it remains ignored and the insight it has to offer, unrecognized. In presenting jazz in this way, Kaufman is also demonstrating the need to not only have jazz as an expression of the black American experience but to listen to it.

Fisher expresses in his work that "Kaufman's political silence as a refusal or subversion of this kind of Aristotelian politics that privileges the audible speaking subject. Instead, Kaufman engages a political possibility for the marginal, the anonymous, the inaudible without resorting silence and the silenced to the prestige and privilege of speech and writing" (97). Kaufman conveys this as well in his "war memoir" poems. World War I and World War II were extremely significant phenomenon insofar as it sparked the movement of the black Americans into the mainstream of American life (L. Jones 112). Not only were black Americans recruited to fight in the war, but the war also suggested to many black Americans that there was much more to the world than just America. With the Depression and Roosevelt's New Deal, there were many projects that provided work for impoverished black Americans. Kaufman captures the significance of war in the ways in which it influences his poetry and the treatment of black Americans in the United States at this time.

Kaufman creates a true sense of what jazz and war are in both this poem and his other war memoirs, despite not committing the poem to a final cultural implication of what war and jazz are in the post-nuclear age. This poem demonstrates the conceptual *metaphor creating is making visible* in the sense that jazz is personified as a voice of reason that knows the horrors of the way mankind treats one another. As one of Kaufman's war memoirs, this poem is specifically addressing the horrors of World War II, during which, many of the soldiers who would go out to do the killing would come back and rest, relaxing and listening to the sound of jazz, even when they ignored the warnings from jazz before the killing began. Jazz is able to speak the wisdom that it does because it holds the weight and the history of the horrors endured by the black Americans. Jazz was birthed out of those horrors and has the wisdom of what killing looks like, and what it leads to. The creation of jazz in this poem is not only making visible the black American experience, but it is carrying forward the lessons that can be learned from that visibility, in hopes of preventing further violence. Yet the speaker is dismayed because the poem suggests jazz is not heeded, and the killing continues. This ignoring of jazz demonstrates how white culture does not want to listen to the black American experience because it would then have to admit fault, and the fault is a heavy burden to bear. So, by ignoring it, white culture tries to keep the black American experience from being told.

The title of the poem suggests both a warning and disobedience. By specifically addressing his audiences in saying, "don't listen to it at your own risk" Kaufman is suggesting that jazz will provide the insight that men need to escape the turmoil of war. Jazz holds the possibility of life in a world where death is inescapable. Much of this has to do with the insight those who pioneered in jazz had to offer. The title serves as a warning because not listening to it would be taking a risk since it would be making the choice of not listening to the advice of many

voices who had already endured such hardship and could prevent further discrimination and hatred. The title serves as disobedience because at the time since jazz had such a heavy association with black American culture it was not considered mainstream. Many white Americans considered it risky behavior to consort with jazz in any way due to the lingering tensions between whites and blacks in the United States during the twentieth century. This poem suggests that “American culture is incapable of truly hearing jazz” (Rice 406). Due to this incapability, American culture has not been able to progress much beyond where it was during the slavery era. This lack of progress is what opens the door to the possibility of war to keep returning and destroying the lives of so many. As with many other jazz poems *O-Jazz-O War Memoir: Jazz, Don't Listen to It at Your Own Risk*, deals specifically with the idea of silence, and the harm that can come from it, demonstrated by the harm endured by black Americans in the silence that was imposed upon them by white American society.

It was only when that silence was broken that black Americans were finally heard. Scholar Tom Fisher explains in his research that Kaufman uses this silence not only in his poetry but in his life when he took his well-known vow of silence. He says, “the ‘vow of silence’ that Kaufman famously took should be understood in the two ways its double genitive grammar formally makes possible: as a vow to be silent and as silence’s vow – both as withdrawal into an inaudible wordlessness and a kind of speech made from speechlessness” (96). Fisher argues that the vow of silence is a form of making a political statement. In many ways it is, especially considering the ways in which Kaufman treats silence in his poetry. However, because of the ways in which Kaufman uses silence in his poetry – as a force that leads to only bad things – one can see how Kaufman is doing much more than just making a political statement. He is making a political statement by making visible the black American experience through taking away the

silence before the creation of jazz, and within that, he is illuminating the pain and chaos that came from the silences, and suggesting that if that silence is filled with the insight that jazz and its creators have to offer, then the society can progress, and move past the pain and chaos caused by silence.

This poem begins in a dark, warm place. Such as a warm jazz club at night. Jazz is often thought of as being born in clubs at night since it was once not acceptable to listen to it openly because it was considered to be against mainstream societal thinking and behavior. By being bounded by night, Kaufman is further perpetuating the idea of the effort put into attempting to silence jazz. However, similar to how the night is used in other jazz poems, the lack of sun, and the white power it represents, provides jazz with the opportunity to be heard. In this poem, jazz is personified as a voice responding to the men going to war. Kaufman writes, “Some are evil, some will hate” (16). Jazz insists that there is evil in the world, and it will only bring unhappiness. But the men don’t listen, as Kaufman expresses, “just jazz, blowing its top again” (17). This detail about jazz being the one to speak about the horrors of men is important because of what it implies about black American history. Kaufman employs jazz as a metaphor for the black American experience: it is vitally and irrevocably African and American (Kohli 177). Many notable black Americans were pioneers in jazz.

Black Americans have had the misfortune of a history polluted with not being listened to, as jazz is not listened to in this poem. By being referred to as “secret jazz” in the poem, the reader becomes aware of the turbulent history that jazz has faced in the line of slavery. The turbulent history that jazz has experienced is key because, “the martyrdom of black America, and the inability or unwillingness of white America to recognize its own sins, is a dilemma that Kaufman hopes jazz can resolve in the "war memoir" poems” (Kohli 168). Jazz holds the secrets

of the horrors that black Americans faced, and therefore better knows the horrors facing these young men going to war, which is why jazz tries to convince them to not go. Fisher describes how Kaufman's refusal of involvement grounds a poetic refusal, detachment, and silence. He explores the ways in which writing by way of refusal seems both to risk and reveal the possibilities of writing. He says, "Kaufman's work is a call for an impossible response to what and whom we cannot hear; those who are inaudible within a political aesthetics that privileges speech. Kaufman's silence suspends a political economy and responsibility that demands agency, assertiveness, sovereignty, speech" (113).

References to World War II are common in the works of Beat poets, especially Kaufman's war memoirs. The most visual references are most apparent in the middle of this poem when Kaufman references killing Japanese people in the street. He writes, "Busy burning Japanese in atomicolorcinemascope / With stereophonic screams" (26-27). It is no accident that these words suggest television and stereo. These were technologies that were increasingly dominating sight and sound and advertising in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Television and stereo, "would increasingly package our news and our music, freezing time for us and denying us the ability to improvise or catch in an utterance the motion and the sound of life or death" (Rice 410). The atomic bomb dropped in Japan was a proud moment in the war by the United States. However, it was this blind nationalism that allowed us to lose sight of who we are and lost sight of the more important things like jazz. By using allusion, Kaufman is not only falling under the categorization of being one of the Beat poets. He is also targeting a particular audience of people who would recognize and relate to these images and sentiments about the United States post World War II. A higher connection with his audience would yield a better understanding and a stronger reaction to what Kaufman is saying. In addition to that, the allusions that Kaufman

makes establish his credit both as a poet and as a black American. He is able to express that he has extensive knowledgeable opinions in this particular area, as well as the other black American voices and intelligence that are being represented by jazz. Kaufman contextualizes his poem through these allusions by providing a lot of insight about what was going on in American society at the time, which allows the reader to apply “real world” scenarios to some of the larger ideologies presented in his work.

Enjambment is another technique that Kaufman uses in this poem. Enjambment is when a line is not end-stopped with punctuation but rather continues on to the next line. Kaufman demonstrates this technique in the first two lines of this poem when he writes, “In the beginning, in the wet / Warm dark place” (1-2). In the first lines of the poem, the first line is enjambed since it ends with the word “wet” and no punctuation. The second line is end-stopped with a comma, which allows the reader to pause for a moment. Kaufman also employs end-stopped lines with punctuation, and he also implies end-stopped lines that do not have punctuation throughout this version of the poem. The combination of this purposeful use and non-use of punctuation serves the poem because it expresses the turbulence of the history of jazz and how at times it was out of control, and other times it was very much in control. This further supports the notion of jazz representing life and the unpredictable nature of it. The same can be said for the nature of war. By using enjambment, Kaufman is perpetuating the insight that the men who go to war could have gained had they listened to jazz. Beyond that, Kaufman is also suggesting that “in the context of a society in which everything is a commodity jazz and war must ultimately be transformed into such” (Rice 406). American culture only seems to understand the idea of commodification and cannot hear jazz for what it really is. This is why in the poem, the men who go to war don’t listen to what jazz is warning but return to listening to it and taking it for granted



once the killing is done. Kaufman is suggesting that the entitled ideologies of American living are what lead these young men who are impressionable to do things such as not listen and to go to war.

Kaufman employs a free verse structure, rather than a metered structure. This is important to the interpretation of this poem because it highlights the idea that jazz is improvisational and although there are strong beats of jazz, it is not meant to be contained within a particular meter. Improvisation is often misread as a type of musical freedom from any discipline in which the musician plays whatever comes to mind at that moment. However, the nature of improvisation demands full mastery and comprehension of an instrument so that the performer may have a deep pool of musical phrases from which to draw at any given moment. This exploitation of the improvisational nature of jazz through something such as the meter expresses two things. First, it expresses the chaos of these young men going to war – the chaos they create, and the chaos of their hunger to go to war. Secondly, it further supports the sagacious advice that jazz tries to impart on these men, being a presence in their lives before and after they kill. Furthermore, the free verse structure highlights the idea that “the ability to adapt to any situation, to be "inside at the outside," is the improviser's gift, both in music and in war” (Kohli 171). By using a free verse structure Kaufman is expressing the depth of the insight one could gain by listening to jazz. Not only is there much to gain from jazz in terms of learning about black American culture, but there is also much to be gained from jazz in terms of a wide range of events from going to war to the Civil Rights Movement, to considerations on life and death.

The poem ends with the men who pushed jazz aside to go to war, returning to listen to jazz once more. Those who commit the killing can hear jazz when they are not killing, in fact,

they like and consume jazz after the killing (Rice 410). Kaufman presents jazz as an existential response to living in a world where the pain is real, and death is inescapable. Jazz is able to represent so much because of the extensive history that it has seen from the slavery era to the end of the twentieth century. Jazz has a way of capturing, “in sound who and what we are, the glimpse of life that allows us to see ourselves in motion and in time, that allows us recognition” (Rice 407). Kaufman’s poem *O-Jazz-O War Memoir: Jazz, Don’t Listen to It at Your Own Risk* is about the lessons one can learn from simply listening to the insight of jazz, to recognize great historical mistakes, and with luck, learn how to avoid repeating such mistakes.

### **Hughes and Jazz**

Hughes finally allows the voice of the black American experience to be heard through jazz. This is often presented in accordance with or representation through the image of the piano. In his poem *The Weary Blues*, the voice of the musician is heard, and his story told. It is only after his voice is heard is he able to rest, knowing that the voices that had previously been silenced had finally found an outlet through which they could be heard.

As the father of jazz poetry, it can easily be said that Hughes had an impact on nearly all of the jazz poets to follow him. DeSantis comments in his research that there is a “Langston Hughes” legacy, centered on the allegiance to jazz and the blues through essays and poetry. Many scholars believe the Amiri Baraka is the rightful heir of that legacy because of the ways in which he too is allegiant to jazz and the ways in which it enhances his work. The way that DeSantis points out this, “long allegiance to jazz and the blues through essays and poetry” (52) is a crucial part of understanding Hughes’ work, and the political statements he makes in his poetry. In *The Weary Blues*, in particular, Hughes’ political messages would not be apparent

were it not for the influence of jazz in the poem. Poet Alice Fulton describes the close relationship between poetry and music. She says, “even when the subject of my poems is not specifically musical, the poems’ sounds and its enjambments are influenced by some of the technical questions and resolutions of jazz” (qtd in Feinstein 257). She further expresses how those poems that are not written following a “guidebook” – ones that experiment with time changes, melodies, and unconventional dynamics make more of an impression in influencing the work of others. As jazz was particularly built on unconventional dynamics and experiments the impact it had was very strong. This influence is a demonstration of its own of the significance of jazz poetry – it was a platform that permitted a voice to those who previously had none, and it was a remarkably influential in its surrounding society.

This poem captures the conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible* by heightening the significance of the piano and making that the focus of the night – a time during which black American expression could be heard. In the first stanza of the poem, the speaker is describing the creation of the music. The music being played is specified as being blues music, however, for the purpose of this analysis, in considering that blues gave rise to the jazz era, both are treated the same in that jazz is the creation that makes visible the black American experience. The way that Hughes allows the voice of the black American to be heard is significant because as Michael S. Harper describes, “blues and jazz and the American language are part of America...jazz music is so indigenous to American culture that even if you have a predilection not to like it you have to really be informed about it if you want to be informed about American culture” (qtd in Feinstein 260).

The black American experience is made visible is when the musician sings in the following stanzas. The musician sings about how the music lives inside of him, and how the

weight of that music is what makes it impossible for him to forget his suffering and the suffering of his people. LeRoi Jones describes that jazz is commonly thought to have started around the turn of the century, but that the history and influences of jazz are actually much older. He says, “blues is the parent of all legitimate jazz, and it is impossible to say exactly how old blues is – certainly no older than the presence of Negroes in the United States” (17). The fact that the presence of blues and jazz began with the black American presence speaks to the importance it has in being not only present but a driving force behind the poetry of many black Americans. The connection between the black American experience and jazz illuminates how remembering the suffering of the many black Americans who came before poets like Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka is what makes it possible and necessary for their voices to be heard.

The speaker creates the image of a black American man playing the piano in a jazz club at night. This is a very specific image that the speaker is creating because the speaker specifically mentions that it is a “Negro playing” (3). This is a significant image because of how much of an impact it had on society at the time. Johnson describes the radical nature of a black man entering the visual and labor sphere in his work. He says, “there were then no organizations giving performances of such order as are now given by several colored companies; that was because no manager could imagine that audiences would pay to see Negro performers in any other role than that of Mississippi River roustabouts, but there was lots of talent and ambition” (105). By creating this image of the black American man playing the piano at night, the speaker is calling upon the idea that the piano is a very rich image, representational of great significance in the black American experience. In many records of the inspiration behind jazz poetry, poets speak of the musicians they would listen to. This often includes an allusion to the instruments that were being played. One of the most common references is to a piano, as in this poem when Hughes

writes, “With his ebony hands on each ivory key / He made that poor piano moan with melody” (9-10). Piano keys have often been made with ebony wood, so in this description, Hughes is recognizing the history of the piano and respecting its traits. However, through this description, Hughes is doing even more. Hughes is drawing attention to the idea of uniting the separate worlds of black and white, through music. The piano functions as a symbol for this because it is an instrument that requires both the white keys and the black keys. This is further emphasized in Hughes’ poem because he stresses the color of the pianist’s hands on the white keys – yet another way in which white and black are working together as one. Jazz is an especially important element of black American culture because of the way it permits an entrance of connectivity between white and black. The white keys of the piano are one of the few ways that a black American have a role in a white American’s world. However, it takes work to make this happen. And when it does happen, then something as great as the music is achieved.

The speaker moves from setting the scene to address the lyrics of the song being sung by this Black American man. Hughes introduces the voice of the musician here. The tune he plays on the piano is lined with sorrow, but the lyrics he sings to accompany it suggest forced happiness. This is representative of how black Americans were expected to act in their treatment. The musician says,

“Ain’t got nobody in all this world,  
Ain’t got nobody but ma self.  
I’s gwine to quit ma frownin’  
And put ma troubles on the shelf” (19-22)

DeSantis claims in his research that throughout his career, Hughes’s poetry reflected public concerns. He outlines how his poetry from the 1930s and 1960s differed, “between the fire and

enthusiasm of a young man in his thirties and the weariness and disappointment of an old man in his sixties who finds his dreams still deferred” (48). However, all of his poetry still called for revolution and called for those who had been marginalized to band together to overthrow the enemy that was keeping them silent. Like his other poems, *The Weary Blues* was a political statement, however, it was also specifically intended to let the voice of the black American to be heard, illuminating what has kept him silent. The lines in this poem outline the narrative of many black Americans as they try to make their way in America during the 1960s. This poem, and the lyrics sung by the musician in this piece further support what Hughes demonstrates in *Dream Boogie* concerning the notion that black Americans were expected to have a “happy-go-lucky” disposition, and that if they were fortunate enough to have found a job then it was their responsibility to not complain about their situation no matter how bad. Black Americans were expected to “put their troubles on the shelf” as Hughes suggests in this poem. LeRoi Jones expresses the paradoxical situation many black Americans found themselves, in that they had a role in society, yet they were expected to bury their history and put up with whatever treatment they may receive. LeRoi Jones writes, “there was a body of music that came to exist from a people who were brought to this side as slaves and throughout that music’s development, it had to survive, expand, reorganize, continue, and express itself, as the fragile property of powerless and oppressed people” (ix). This paradox of needing to say something that has not been said while also being expected to keep quiet is what propels black Americans like Hughes to speak out against the injustices faced by his race in the present day, and in the past. By including the voice of the musician in the poem, Hughes is greatly relying on the idea that it was only through jazz that black Americans were able to find a voice for themselves and speak out against the cruelty they have faced in spite of being expected to move on from it.

There is a constant reference to the swaying motion that is adopted in the music, and that is also present in the motion of the stool that the musician is sitting on. He writes in his poem how the piano man is, “swaying to and fro on his rickety stool” (12). The stool in this poem can symbolize the piano players position in society. It is rickety and unstable, and the little that is supporting him as he plays could easily falter. The “to and fro” depicts the swinging rhythms of blues and swing music. The swinging could be referencing the unsteadiness of the black American position in society at the time. It could also be an allusion to lynching, and the ways bodies of those who were hanged swung from the ropes in the wind. The specific diction of “sway” had many powerful meanings behind it in this poem, expressing how the black American experience has evolved over the decades. This swaying image is one that is commonly associated with the rocking motion of a boat on open waters. Swaying, rocking, and swinging is also a very common description of the characteristics of jazz music. There is the close connection to the ideas of jazz, indicating to the reader that the option of water as the choice of escape for the black American has expired, and now music is the way in which they are able to escape the horrible treatment they had endured.

The reliance on the swaying image also suggests the danger of playing the music that Black Americans played. Johnson describes in The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man the dangers of being a colored man, and the difference in those lives. He describes the master talking to the narrator about his success. He talks about how the thought of making something of himself as a black man is not a well-thought-out idea but rather a fearful one with a lot of consequences. He expresses that this will bring him only misery. He says, “if you had remained there, or perhaps even in your club in New York, you might have succeeded very well; but now you would be miserable. I can imagine no more dissatisfied human being than an educated, cultured,

and refined colored man in the United States” (145). He then goes on to say that no matter how one might sympathize with the condition of the black Americans, one cannot “right their wrongs”, and that they are only able to do that on their own. Despite the danger, black Americans such as Hughes made the decision to “right those wrongs” through jazz, by exposing the black American experience, and the wrongs necessary to be corrected by the white Americans.

There is some end-rhyme in this poem. For example, the fourth and fifth lines are rhymed at the end by the words: “night” and “light”. However, Hughes does not commit to this end rhyme throughout the entire poem. This demonstrates a few things. First, it demonstrates that jazz poetry is able to linger between closed form and open form poetry sometimes. It also demonstrates the difficulty of being confined. Hughes continues to break free of the confinements of the rhyme to express his thoughts. In addition to that, it demonstrates the free spirit of jazz as a music type. Jazz was not only a rejection of white culture but also a demonstration of how black Americans picked up the language of the white man and adopted other pieces of white culture. Black Americans took what they had and made it their own. Much of their poetry discusses their struggles, but it also describes their position in society and how they had to adapt to survive. LeRoi Jones expresses this as, “since grammar and idiom are the last aspects of a new language to be learned, the Negroes who reached the New World acquired as much of the vocabulary of their masters as they initially needed or was later taught to them, pronounced these words as best they were able but organized them into aboriginal patterns” (22). Jones then explains that the peculiarities and deviations from common uses of language were due to the fact that they compromise European words cast into an African grammatical mold. It is only because of this resistance of the sun, and the confinements of end-rhyme that Hughes is able



to allow the voice of the black American to be heard. If there was more sun – more white power in the poem, then the musician would not be able to express himself in the free spirit permitted by jazz, and what he has to say would remain unspoken, further perpetuating the silent guilt that white culture has to claim for the treatment of black Americans.

## Conclusion

What makes jazz poetry so important? And what does it say about the black American experience? These are both things that may never be confined to a single definition. Engaging with jazz poetry is as unique to the individual as the individual voices that are heard through poetry are. Both jazz poetry and the black American experience are significant areas to explore and consider because of what they say about the value voice, and what comes of it when that voice is heard. Both are areas that have been oppressed by the idea that only white power has a voice that is worth considering. However, in exploring this small sample of poetry from Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka, it is apparent that there are so many other voices that are worth hearing and considering. Jazz poetry allows us to do exactly that.

The voice that these poets work so hard to create is important because of the ways in which it contributes to identity. The black American experience of the United States has been in many ways an interminable fight for the notion that the voice of the black American experience is one that matters just as much as the next, despite what white-dominated society expressed in the years following emancipation. Through jazz poetry, readers are able to discover this voice, and the importance it has in expressing the history of the United States, and in expressing a condition that many white Americans have not been exposed to before. Being able to express oneself is an ever-rising aspect of the human condition. People spend great effort in defining themselves with an identity, and a purpose to contribute to society. To some extent, we are all purpose-driven, and often that purpose boils down to making one's voice, and what one cares about, heard. Jazz poetry demonstrates that these poets care a great deal about making the black American experience heard. Although the black American experience is not as directly relatable to all as it is to individuals such as Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka, the need to be heard, and

recognized for one's voice is something that all can relate to because it is part of the human condition.

### Cento

through and over the cluttered eyes<sup>1</sup>  
Suddenly they were too busy to hear a simple sound<sup>2</sup>  
    It's a happy beat?<sup>3</sup>  
With his ebony hands on each ivory key<sup>4</sup>  
THE NEGROES HAVE GONE<sup>5</sup>  
    I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the<sup>6</sup>  
Attack: The sound of jazz.<sup>7</sup>  
in its image, battered, an old brown thing<sup>8</sup>  
without shadow, or voice, or meaning.<sup>9</sup>

### Cento Reflection

As an added creative element, I wrote a cento from the selected poems presented in this paper. One line is taken from each poem. This process contributed a perplexing experience for me. My aim was to express the same ideas that are being grappled within each of these poems, by combining the voices of the three poets. I wanted to create a voice through jazz that made visible the black American experience that each of these three poets described. I tried to place

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<sup>1</sup> Amiri Baraka *Legacy*

<sup>2</sup> Bob Kaufman *O-Jazz-O War Memoir: Jazz, Don't Listen to It at Your Own Risk*

<sup>3</sup> Langston Hughes *Dream Boogie*

<sup>4</sup> Langston Hughes *The Weary Blues*

<sup>5</sup> Bob Kaufman *The Night That Lorca Comes*

<sup>6</sup> Langston Hughes *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*

<sup>7</sup> Bob Kaufman *Battle Report*

<sup>8</sup> Amiri Barak *Snake Eyes*

<sup>9</sup> Amiri Barak *An Agony. As Now*

myself in the constraints of needing to say something that needed to be said while harnessing the “jazz voice” of each of these poets. In this sense, I wanted to create a poem that not only demonstrated the common ground shared by these three poets, but one that clearly demonstrated the conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible*. My poem was not influenced by jazz, as the poetry of Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka was. Rather, my poem was influenced by the poetry of these three men.

There are many different ways of controlling what we write. As the arranger of this cento, I had to my advantage, my choice in the lines I chose from each poem. I was in control of the order in which they appeared, and how they worked with the surrounding lines. Because I had this control I was drawn to the lines that made the strongest image in my mind, and the ones that stuck with me as representatives of the poems from which they were taken. In addition to that, I picked lines that would work well with the others I chose and ordered it in a way that was coherent, rather than placing them randomly. These conditions are far from the same conditions Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka encountered in their own poetic creations, and in some regard, their aim differed greatly from mine. They had the aim of racial pride and allowing jazz the opportunity to be the voice of the black American experience. In creating their poems, these poets had control in what they wrote, however, they were not writing to demonstrate the conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible* as I was. Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka did this subconsciously through their other aims of the Black Arts Movement. I constructed my poem with the conscious and deliberate intention of demonstrating this conceptual metaphor. I had the aim of creating a poem that mirrored the poetry of these men, and other jazz poets, as well as the notions they present regarding the black American experience. Despite the difference in the deliberateness of demonstrating the conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible*, as a result of

the process of constructing my poem compared to how the nine poems presented in this paper were constructed, the cento still captures a similar notion of making the black American experience visible as other jazz poems do. However, given the unique relationship each person establishes with poetry, I think this cento more accurately reflects my interpretation of the poetry, and the intentions of Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka.

### **The Black American Experience**

A large majority of the black people who were freed from formal slavery in 1865 were not Africans – they were Americans. Although we may choose to characterize their experience in the years to follow emancipation as ‘freedom’ it is still important to remember that black Americans were a group of people who had to adopt all cultural tendencies of white American society, which made them stand apart and receive different treatment (L. Jones 12). Poets like Hughes, Kaufman, and Barak bring to light these differences, how unjust they were, and in some cases how unjust they continue to be. Through the jazz poetry of these three men, the black American experience is finally given a voice – a voice that would not have been heard were it not for the racial pride highlighted in the Black Arts Movement.

Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka connect in the Black Arts Movement as their work moves between images and references to jazz in Hughes’ work as an explanation that jazz is one of the only ways and most influential ways black Americans could find a way to participate in white American society to much fewer images in Baraka’s work, demonstrating the harm that is done when black Americans are not given the voice of jazz. Kaufman’s work connects these two ends of the spectrum by expressing the importance of the voice they sought to create and expressing why jazz is so essential in being the voice of the black American experience. Jazz poetry in

particular is an important platform to consider because it immortalizes the black American experience both in sound and in writing.

Throughout the selection of poetry represented in this paper, the images of the sun are symbolic of white American power. The sun is always presented as a force that is suppressing the ability and the efforts of black Americans in the narratives presented in these poems, be that the sun must set before Mississippi turns to gold or the sun that burns black Americans in their “fleshy cages”.

The images of water are symbolic of escape across the selection of these poems. This is apparent because water is always discussed in these poems as a means, or passageway to Africa or the black American ancestral roots. This symbolism is common among black American literature, as water was the way by which African slaves were originally brought to the United States, thus it represents their path home again. Throughout these poems though, the water is often discussed in the past tense, or as something lost, implying that although black Americans have often dreamt of returning to a place where they were no enslaved, in their efforts of establishing a functional role in white American society, that dream is now outdated. Water is also representative of the division between the free states of the North and the slave states of the South (the Ohio River) It is consistently referred to as a means of identifying where the oppression is stemming from, and the need to escape that.

Across this selection of poems, the image of the piano is used as the most common representation of jazz, due to the strong presence it holds in jazz music. However, in these poems, jazz is also referred to as a personification. The piano is especially significant because serves as a symbolization of harmony, presenting a world in which black and white work together as one. This is apparent because as black Americans worked to secure a functioning role

for themselves within white American society, music, and jazz was one of the few positions they were able to create and fill. It was through this position that the black American experience was brought to light. A piano specifically symbolizes harmony because it is made up of white and black keys. It would not function in the way it was designed to without the contributions of both the white and black keys. The keys work together to make the music a successful possibility. The image of the piano is often used in jazz poetry as a representation extended to society as a projection of what a world where white and black work together might look like. This is presented as the solution to the oppressive misery and lack of recognition faced in the black American experience.

### **Reflections on Poetry**

It is important to look at poetry because it is a platform – one of few and one of the most influential – where aspects about the black American experience are expressed because they need to be both said and heard. Poetry holds a very particular role that is distinct from all other uses of language because of how it demonstrates metaphors that have a much larger presence in daily life than one might originally think. Poetry represents metaphor as both a literary device and as a component of day-to-day speech. Jazz poetry brings to light many racial tensions that had previously been silenced.

There is very little that can be more terrible than witnessing the transformation of human beings into savage beasts. The ability to overcome such a history, and to use art as a key component in doing so deserves the respect of being seen and heard. In addition to that, as the ability to overcome such as history is demonstrated through jazz poetry, jazz poetry paved the way for many other forms of expression to arise, to allow other silenced voices to be heard.

Poetry allows us to hold on to our understanding of language, and how it shapes the world around us. Otherwise, we start to forget the true significance of words as we use them thoughtlessly and effortlessly to function socially (Zapruder 42). By breaking down words into metaphorical linguistic phrases, we are able to recognize the ways in which what we say every day supports the conceptual metaphors by which we live our lives on a daily basis. Poetry is a place we can turn when we feel the need to think in a different way. The insight of a poem gives its readers an invaluable awareness of the experience of another because it carries the strength to say what can usually not be said (Zapruder 81). Language is something that is far bigger and more significant than any one man or woman. The power and influence of language does not only exist in poetry. It exists everywhere, in everyone, at every moment. By harnessing it and deepening our engagement and comprehension of language – of communication – we will have greater success and greater fulfillment in our lives and the relations we make. Language can take us to a world in which black and white, and all other differences can work together in harmony to achieve something great, as the piano does, and as these poets propose jazz can do for the black American experience in a white-dominated society.

A poem serves as an eloquent expression of an individual's experiences. Simultaneously it does even more than that – it is an embodiment of a person. Similar to how one might interact with another person, the more time you spend with a poem, the more you learn, and the more you begin to realize that there will always be more to understand. The highest quality of poetry is that the experience of reading a poem can never be finished, or fully understood (Zapruder 200). Similar to how we might return to people or places in our lives, we must continue to return to poems in order to continue to be changed by them.



## Reflections on Identity

The Oxford English Dictionary defines identity as “who or what a person or thing is; a distinct impression of a single person or thing presented to or perceived by others; a set of characteristics or a description that distinguished a person or thing from others” (“Identity”). Identity is something that is getting the opportunity to bloom more and more, as people search for ways in which to define themselves. At some point in everyone’s life, we question identity and fight for the identities we have. Identity is a question of the human condition. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the human condition as “the state or condition of being human, especially regarded as being inherently problematic or flawed; also the condition of human being collectively” (“Human Condition”). In this regard to painting the big picture, and discussing why jazz poetry is significant to the human condition and why readers like me should be invested in jazz poetry, I use ‘voice’ synonymously with agency, as a means to engage with the conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible* and as a means to entertain the notion that an individual seeks agency and opinion because establishing one’s opinions is part of solidifying one’s identity.

Identity is not exclusive to white-dominated populations, yet there are still voices that are being silenced in various forms. Discrimination is still a problem. Jazz poetry is the way that poets such as Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka fought for their identities. Their poetry is also not exclusive. They not only allow their readers to step into their circumstances, they invite their readers to do so. By including all of their readers, these poets are asking everyone to care and to empathize with the search for voice and identity as a means to have something to contribute. As readers of this poetry, we are responsible for caring, and for continuing the search for the voices that have been silenced.

### Further Study

Many scholars have discussed how the driving forces behind jazz poetry stem from political motivations. DeSantis, Fisher, and Woodard each claim that the motivation behind the works of poets like Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka is political. These scholars are not wrong. In many ways, the works of these poets are political in the sense that they are responding to the white-dominated culture around them and finding a means through which they can express their thoughts and their treatment. Although there are political intentions behind this poetry, the selection of poetry from these three men demonstrate more than just the political motivations as a reaction to the white-dominated society surrounding them. Their poetry goes beyond being political messages though, which is why it is so successful. The poetry of Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka, as well as the work of many other jazz poets, work as demonstrations of the conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible* in that a voice is created through jazz as a means to make visible the black American experience of the United States in the century following emancipation.

The conceptual metaphor as used in the work of Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka is important to consider because it explains how white-dominated society thinks and communicates about the black American culture and experience. As a conceptual metaphor, the way we think about and communicate about experience is often subconscious. Poetry allows us the chance to take a step back and consider why we talk about and think about things and other people in certain ways. These poets are able to point to the white-dominated societal view, while also making visible the true black American experience from the viewpoint of black Americans. Cognitive conceptual metaphors are significant not only in the sense of jazz poetry. They are how we communicate, how we think, how we understand one another. It is through

comprehension of these metaphors that communication becomes accessible to everyone. So often people think of poetic application when they think of metaphors. While that is a very true application of metaphor, it is not the only one. Cognitive conceptual metaphor unveils metaphors that can be found in day-to-day living, further expressing the notion that communication is key to success.

It is undeniable that race has been a factor in the development of jazz and black American poetry. The issue of race highlights the extremely important and complex development of the ways in which both jazz and poetry are forms of black American expression, highlighting the social and political commentary in regard to race and identity (Anderson 2). The works of the poets Hughes, Kaufman, and Baraka carry the weight of such importance that deserves much more awareness than it currently receives.

It is apparent that poetry has great significance in being a platform through which voices that have previously been silenced can be heard. There are many other platforms that serve the same purpose for both the voice that is discovered through jazz poetry, and voices in other matters. The evolution of jazz poetry matches that of the voice of the black American experience it represents. Since the Black Arts Movement, jazz poetry has adapted to its more modern forms of rap and slam-poetry, expressing the voices of those artists, and their experiences. It is important to recognize the ways in which something such as jazz poetry has had an impact on current iterations of it. Jazz poetry paved the way for many other outlets of expression as other possible demonstrations of the conceptual metaphor *creating is making visible*. There are many other conceptual metaphors that are demonstrated through various forms of expression that are important to consider, because it is through the demonstration of such conceptual metaphors that we are better able to understand the human condition, and one another.

Slavery in the United States began four hundred years ago. Unfortunately, it still exists in modern forms of slavery. Jazz poetry is one step of the many that need to be taken to create the world Langston Hughes imagined – a world “where black or white, whatever race you be, will share the bounties of the earth and every man is free” (“Langston Hughes Quotes”).

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## APPENDIX A

### *An Agony. As Now. – 1964*

By Amiri Baraka

I am inside someone  
who hates me. I look  
out from his eyes. Smell  
what fouled tunes come in  
to his breath. Love his  
wretched women.

Slits in the metal, for sun. Where  
my eyes sit turning, at the cool air  
the glance of light, or hard flesh  
rubbed against me, a woman, a man,  
without shadow, or voice, or meaning.

This is the enclosure (flesh,  
where innocence is a weapon. An  
abstraction. Touch. (Not mine.  
Or yours, if you are the soul I had  
and abandoned when I was blind and had  
my enemies carry me as a dead man  
(if he is beautiful, or pitied.

It can be pain. (As now, as all his  
flesh hurts me.) It can be that. Or  
pain. As when she ran from me into  
that forest.

Or pain, the mind  
silver spiraled whirled against the  
sun, higher than even old men thought  
God would be. Or pain. And the other. The  
yes. (Inside his books, his fingers. They  
are withered yellow flowers and were never  
beautiful.) The yes. You will, lost soul, say  
'beauty.' Beauty, practiced, as the tree. The  
slow river. A white sun in its wet sentences.

Or, the cold men in their gale. Ecstasy. Flesh  
Or soul. The yes. (Their robes blown. Their  
bowls

empty. They chant at my heels, not at  
yours.) Flesh  
or soul, as corrupt. Where the answer moves  
too quickly.  
Where the God is a self, after all.)

Cold air blown through narrow blind eyes.  
Flesh,  
white hot metal. Glows as the day with its  
sun.  
It is a human love, I live inside. A bony  
skeleton  
you recognize as words or simple feeling.

But it has no feeling. As the metal, is hot, it  
is not,  
given to love.

It burns the thing  
inside it. And that thing  
screams.

## APPENDIX B

### Dream Boogie – 1951

By Langston Hughes

Good morning, daddy!  
Ain't you heard  
The boogie-woogie rumble  
Of a dream deferred?

Listen closely:  
You'll hear their feet  
Beating out and beating out a –

You think  
It's a happy beat?

Listen to it closely:  
Ain't you heard  
something underneath  
like a –

What did I say?

Sure,  
I'm happy!  
Take it away!

Hey, pop!  
Re-bop!  
Mop!

Y-e-a-h!

## APPENDIX C

### **Battle Report – 1965**

By Bob Kaufman

One thousand saxophones infiltrate the city.  
Each with a man inside,  
Hidden in ordinary cases,  
Labeled FRAGILE.  
A fleet of trumpets drops their hooks,  
Inside at the outside.  
Ten waves of trombones approach the city  
Under blue cover  
Of late autumn's neo-classical clouds.  
Five hundred bassmen, all string feet tall,  
Beating it back to the bass.  
One hundred drummers, each a stick in each hand,  
The delicate rumble of pianos, moving in.  
The secret agent, an innocent bystander,  
Drops a note in the wail box.  
Five generals, gathered in the gallery,  
Blowing plans.  
At last, the secret code is flashed:  
Now is the time, now is the time.  
Attack: The sound of jazz.  
The city falls.

## **APPENDIX D**

### **The Negro Speaks of Rivers – 1920**

By Langston Hughes

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the  
flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.  
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.  
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.  
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln  
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy  
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

## APPENDIX E

### [THE NIGHT THAT LORCA COMES] – 1981

By Bob Kaufman

THE NIGHT THAT LORCA COMES  
SHALL BE A STRANGE NIGHT IN THE  
SOUTH, IT SHALL BE THE TIME WHEN NEGROES LEAVE THE  
SOUTH  
FOREVER,  
GREEN TRAINS SHALL ARRIVE  
FROM RED PLANET MARS  
CRACKLING BLUENESS SHALL SEND TOOTH-COVERED CARS FOR  
THEM  
TO LEAVE IN, TO GO INTO  
THE NORTH FOREVER, AND I SEE MY LITTLE GIRL MOTHER  
AGAIN WITH HER CROSS THAT  
IS NOT BURNING, HER SKIRTS  
OF BLACK, OF ALL COLORS, HER AURA  
OF FAMILIARITY. THE SOUTH SHALL WEEP  
BITTER TEARS TO NO AVAIL,  
THE NEGROES HAVE GONE  
INTO CRACKLING BLUENESS.  
CRISPUS ATTUCKS SHALL ARRIVE WITH THE BOSTON  
COMMONS, TO TAKE ELISSI LANDI  
NORTH, CRISPUS ATTUCKS SHALL  
BE LAYING ON BOSTON COMMONS,  
ELISSI LANDI SHALL FEEL ALIVE  
AGAIN. I SHALL CALL HER NAME  
AS SHE STEPS ON TO THE BOSTON  
COMMONS, AND FLIES NORTH FOREVER,  
LINCOLN SHALL BE THERE,  
TO SEE THEM LEAVE THE  
SOUTH FOREVER, ELISSI LANDI, SHE WILL BE  
GREEN.  
THE WHITE SOUTH SHALL GATHER AT  
PRESERVATION HALL.

## APPENDIX F

### Legacy – 1969

By Amiri Baraka

*(For Blues People)*

In the south, sleeping against  
the drugstore, growling under  
the trucks and stoves, stumbling  
through and over the cluttered eyes  
of early mysterious night. Frowning  
drunk waving moving a hand or lash.  
Dancing kneeling reaching out, letting  
a hand rest in shadows. Squatting  
to drink or pee. Stretching to climb  
pulling themselves onto horses near  
where there was sea (the old songs  
lead you to believe). Riding out  
from this town, to another, where  
it is also black. Down a road  
where people are asleep. Towards  
the moon or the shadows of houses.  
Towards the songs' pretended sea.

## APPENDIX G

### Snake Eyes – 1963

By Le Roi Jones

That force is lost  
which shaped me, spent  
in its image, battered, an old brown thing  
swept off the streets  
where it sucked its  
gentle living.

And what is meat  
to do, that is driven to its end  
by words? The frailest gestures  
grown like skirts around breathing.

We take  
unholy risks to prove  
we are what we cannot be. For instance,

I am not even crazy.

## APPENDIX H

### **O-Jazz-O War Memoir: Jazz, Don't Listen to It at Your Own Risk – 1996**

By Bob Kaufman

In the beginning, in the wet  
Warm dark place,  
Straining to break out, clawing at strange  
cables  
Hearing her screams, laughing  
*“Later we forgave ourselves, we didn't  
know”*  
Some secret jazz  
Shouted, *wait, don't go.*  
Impatient, we came running, innocent  
Laughing blobs of blood & faith.  
To this mother, father world  
Where laughter seems out of place  
So we learned to cry, pleased  
They pronounce human.  
The secret Jazz blew a sigh  
Some familiar sound shouted *wait*  
*Some are evil, some will hate.*  
*“Just Jazz, blowing its top again”*  
So we rushed & laughed.  
As we pushed & grabbed  
While jazz blew in the night  
Suddenly they were too busy to hear a  
simple sound  
They were busy shoving mud in men's  
mouths,  
Who were busy dying on the living ground  
Busy earning medals, for killing children on  
deserted street corners

Occupying their fathers, raping their  
mothers, busy humans we  
Busy burning Japanese in  
atomicolorcinemascope  
With stereophonic screams,  
What one hundred per cent red blooded  
savage, would waste precious  
time  
Listening to jazz, with so many important  
things going on  
But even the fittest murderers must rest  
So they sat down in our blood soaked  
garments,  
and listened to jazz  
lost, steeped in all our death dreams  
They were shocked at the sound of life, long  
gone from our own  
They were indignant at the whistling,  
thinking, singing, beating,  
swinging,  
They wept for it, hugged, kissed it, loved it,  
joined it, we drank it,  
Smoked it, ate with it, slept with it  
They made our girls wear it for lovemaking  
Instead of silly lace gowns,  
Now in those terrible moments, when the  
dark memories come  
The secret moments to which we admit no  
one  
When guiltily we crawl back in time,  
reaching away from ourselves  
They hear a familiar sound,  
Jazz, scratching, digging, blueing, swinging  
jazz,  
And listen,  
And feel, & die.



## APPENDIX I

### The Weary Blues – 1925

By Langston Hughes

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

Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor.  
He played a few chords then he sang some more—  
“I got the Weary Blues  
And I can't be satisfied.  
Got the Weary Blues  
And can't be satisfied—  
I ain't happy no mo'  
And I wish that I had died.”  
And far into the night he crooned that tune.  
The stars went out and so did the moon.  
The singer stopped playing and went to bed  
While the Weary Blues echoed through his head.  
He slept like a rock or a man that's dead.