



The Oral Tradition as Index: The Leitmotif of Music in the African-American Literary Imagination

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Abstract: The oral tradition forms part of the aesthetic pillars of African-American literature and the study of its presence in African-American literary works deserves more attention. This article shows how African-American creative artists have used their oral tradition, more specifically music, as an index to construct narrative contents, structure and decorate them, thus conferring them beauty, originality and complexity. It focuses on the deployment of the Jazz, the Blues and the slave secular and civil war songs in texts by Langston Hughes, Margaret Walker and Toni Morrison.

Keywords: oral tradition, music, blues, jazz, narration, spirituals, aesthetic

Introduction

Since the turn of the twentieth century, the African-American intellectuals have been urging their community to turn back to their cultural heritage, particularly the folk culture as a means of not only valorizing their identity, but also crafting a distinctive and original form of art. Eminent scholar and visionary, W.E.B. Dubois forms part of the pioneers who promulgated this use of African-American folklore in *The*

Souls of Black Folk (1903). Robert Bone largely shares this view when he traces the roots of the development of the nationalistic trend in African-American literature to the growth of the Niagara Movement of the 1900s. For Bone, the African-American intellectual of the 1920s “shared fully in the spiritual alienation of the Lost Generation” and like the white expatriate, he rejected the dominant culture. The alienation of the black intellectual as “an artist caused

him in turn to alter his goals as a Negro” and “instead of advocating blind assimilation into a hopelessly materialistic culture, he began to think in terms of preserving his racial individuality.” These desires to build a distinctive tradition made the “alienated Negro” dig into his folk culture (64).

This incipient nationalistic and even “postcolonial” trend grew stronger with the Harlem Renaissance, the nationalism of Garvey’s “back to Africa” and later the Black Arts’ movement. These movements spontaneously coalesced around a common interest in Africa, a continent celebrated as a cultural matrix and the harmony of which was contrasted with the decadent White civilization. This pride in Negro cultural heritage and history resulted in the accentuation of cultural markers in literary works and a desire from the marginalized people to depict ignored aspects of their cultures and civilizations” (Dieng 2). As a result, from the mid-twentieth century onward, many African-American creative artists have indeed self-consciously used their folklore in the design and ornamentation of their literary output.

The oral tradition, which includes storytelling, music, myths, proverbs, sermon, language, songs, etc., ranks among the most utilized elements of African-American folklore as some theorists and critical analysts have posited. In “A Blues View of Life” (Literature and the Blues Vision, 1989), Traylor (1989) argues that African-American literature is built on oral folklore. Williams (1979) also points out the importance of the oral traditions in African-American creative writing in her study of Lucille Clifton’s poetry, “The Blues Roots of Contemporary Afro-American Poetry” (1979). She

assesses that Clifton’s work epitomizes the birth of a “new tradition built upon the synthesis of black oral traditions and Western literate forms” (191).

Today, the oral traditions continue to inspire the muses of prominent contemporary African-American creative writers. Morrison (1999) for instance, follows this aesthetic tradition because she is preoccupied with conferring her works a print quality but also an oral quality. She believes the novel should replace the traditional stories that helped educate the community, suggest solutions and raise key issues. Morrison further argues that she did not initiate this practice, for many antecedent African-American creative writers “incorporate...unorthodox novelistic characteristics” such as features of the black art in their works (Morrison, 1999, p.200). In this work, which forms part of a wider project on the motif of the oral tradition in African-American literature, the focus is put on the examination of the various uses of music in the crafting and molding of texts written by African-American authors, including in the recreation of events, narrative and decorative purposes. Following a chronological order, this study focuses on representative works of three authors namely Langston Hughes, Margaret Walker and Toni Morrison to illustrate that music, more specifically the spirituals, the Jazz and the blues, have been utilized for various purposes in African American creative works: mimesis, narration, and decoration.

The Fusion of Jazz and Blues in Langston Hughes’ Works

The world-renowned novelist, poet, children’s books creator, and critical and political essayist, Langston Hughes forms part of the first wave of African-

American writers who developed a folk-based aesthetic, mingling traditional European and revolutionary Negro forms. Hughes blossomed in the context of the Harlem Renaissance - a period of self-assertion and celebration of Negro cultural heritage, and he was a trendsetter who encouraged black artists to climb over the racial mountain to implement new aesthetic forms rooted in their folk culture. This encouragement is proclaimed in his famous essay: "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," in which he exhorts black artists not to be afraid of being their own selves, of escaping from the limiting prism of Western forms and in which he urges them to set up a new aesthetic rooted in black culture.

Faithful to this aesthetic creed, he experimented the Jazz, Blues, and bebop poetics in his works and for this reason, most critics view him as a modernist creating tensions between the verbal center and the musical margin. For Miller (2006) for instance, Hughes is the voice of modernity "who subverted the very conventions of genre through which tradition and modernity have sought to confine the free imagination" (*The Art and Imagination of Langston Hughes* 27). Positive and negative reception of his poems earned him the sobriquet of Jazz poet and illustrates the high presence of music in his poetic output. James Baldwin, known for being a detractor of the poet, softened his criticism" and acknowledged that by the 1950s, "[Hughes] no longer created the blues—he began to recite the blues" (Wallace, 2012, p.96). More conservative voices of the Harlem Renaissance such as Alan Locke accused Hughes of writing a "Jazz version of Negro life," while Countee Cullen who had a traditional approach to

writing and good knowledge of Western versification viewed Hughes' "Jazz poems as interlopers in the company of truly beautiful poems in the other sections of [The Weary Blues]" (Tidwell, 2007, pp. 4-5).

Langston Hughes had a passion for music and used it extensively in his literary output. He loved listening to music, especially the blues and the jazz, and he always travelled with his records. The poet and novelist had quite extensive knowledge of blues and jazz notes. As a matter of fact, he was in "constant contact with the finest musicians and composers including WC Handy, Duke Ellington, Kurt Weill, Nina Simone, Louis Armstrong, Randy Weston, Hazel Scott, Charles Mingus, and Tony Scott, to name a few" (Wallace 79). Hughes' poetry was truly musical: he even collaborated and performed with many of the above-cited musicians throughout the 1950s in a reading series called the "Poetry-to-Jazz Program." Amiri Baraka, a great connoisseur of music, poet and central actor of the Black Arts movement who has published a book-length study on music acknowledges Hughes as "one of the most influential "Jazz" poets" and calls him "one of the first American writers (black or white) to respectfully and seriously consider blues as a laudable and important part of American culture" (Wallace, 2012, p.69).

Several studies related to the presence of the Jazz and the Blues in the poet's works have been completed. It is well known that Hughes mimed the techniques, structure, language, rhythm, cadences and other features of blues and jazz melodies in his verse. Rob Wallace devotes a whole chapter –"Langston Hughes: How To Take the Impossible and Make It Dance" of his book entitled

Improvisation and the Making of American Literary Modernism, to the poet's utilization of music, more specifically the Jazz and the Blues in *The Big Sea, I Wander as I Wonder, Montage of a Dream Deferred* and *Ask Your Mamma: 12 moods for Jazz*. He elaborates on the use of improvisation in the works of Langston Hughes. Wallace also explains that Langston developed a version of blues he calls blues imagism in his poems. Following on Larry Scanlon's footsteps, he explains that Hughes "manipulated the spirit and form of the blues to create a blues sublime rather than show the capacity of poetic meter to capture blues rhythm" (89).

Among Langston Hughes' blues poems, critics list *The Weary Blues* (1926), *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951), *Harlem* (1951), and *Ask Your Mamma* (1961). Resemblances with the blues songs can indeed be identified at several levels: in the rhythms and cadences, improvisational mode, the comments about the vicissitudes of life and the presence of an infinite amount of choruses. "The Weary Blues," as Trudier Harris in "The Blues in African American Literature" notes so well, "captures the form and ethos of the blues"(67). The paratext of the poem establishes an obvious parallel between the poem and the music and the form and ethos clearly replicate features of the black music. Indeed, Langston Hughes' 1926 signature poem reads.

The Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,
Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,
I heard a Negro play.

To the tune o' those Weary Blues.
With his ebony hands on each ivory key
He made that poor piano moan with melody.

In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone
I head 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.

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."

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.
(Rampersad 1995, 50)

In these lines, the singer expresses his feeling of loneliness and isolation. He complains that his life is miserable

because he is by himself. He has been probably abandoned by the love of his life. However, far from being a mere

complaint, the song, like a blues' lyric, plays a cathartic function and serves as a means for the speaker to get rid of the sorrow and transcend the situation. The plaintive as well as cathartic function of the blues appears in these four lines: "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." Putting his troubles on the shelf allows him to release his intense suffering and be able to go to bed and "sleep like a rock" at the end of the poem. The poem opens on a note of sadness, a note that even the moaning piano echoes, but it ends on a positive note: there is hope because the singer will enjoy a new day when he wakes up after a good night sleep.

Johnson and Farrell (1979), who closely scrutinized the presence of the blues in Langston Hughes's poems, consider that the blues' influence shows more in Langston Hughes' early poetic productions and the poems he wrote after his revolutionary interlude in the 1940s. The language, structure and rhythm of early poems such as the ones in *Fine Clothes to a Jew* (1927) are clearly influenced by the blues. Johnson and Farrell (1979) state "when Alfred Knopf published *Fine Clothes to a Jew*, Langston Hughes became one of the most innovative voices in American poetry and the first poet in the world to transform the idioms of blues and jazz into poetic verse" (55). They also explain that although Hughes was carried away from blues poetry by the revolutionary wave of committed writing resulting from his immersion in communism, he returned to it fifteen years later with the publication of *Shakespeare in Harlem* in 1942. The poems in *Fine Clothes to a Jew* and *Shakespeare in Harlem* are all

structurally designed after the lyrics of the blues. However, Hughes modified his use of blues after his revolutionary interlude: 1) the poems in *Shakespeare in Harlem* had less of an ethnic imprint, 2) they include less black speech idioms, 3) one can notice in them an attempt to make form consistent with content, 4) they emphasize class rather than race and 6) more poems emphasize class rather than race. Finally, the majority of the poems in *Shakespeare in Harlem* focus on economic and social problems while most in *Fine Clothes to a Jew* deal with male-female relationships, unrequited love, etc. (55-9).

Like her male counterpart, Langston Hughes, Margaret Walker, another product of the Harlem Renaissance whose literary output fully blossomed in the 1960s draws literary flavor from music. However, whereas Langston fell under the charm of the Blues and the Jazz, Walker taps to the source of slave secular songs in her novelistic craft.

Margaret Walker's Use of Music as an Index for Reconstructing History in *Jubilee*

Margaret Walker no doubt makes an extremely original and innovative use of the oral tradition in her 1966 historical novel she began in the 1930s and takes the use of music in literary craft a step higher. In *Jubilee*, she not only exploits music to organize the narrative structure, but also to complement her scholarly reconstruction of the period encompassing slavery and the civil war years. She herself explains in *How I Wrote Jubilee* that her intention was to develop a "folk novel based on folk material: folk sayings, folk belief, folkways" (25). She adds that as a historian who had read the dominant representations of the period of

enslavement, read slave narratives, read slavery and civil war novels, listened to oral histories, made field trips to the South and spent years of unremitting hard work researching the period. She was aware that the true nature of African-American experience was not depicted in Anglo-American historical writing and fiction. Walker believed that Anglo-American historical writing, was propagandist, biased, and incomplete in nature and a similar neglect, bias, and destruction of black history can be identified in literary representations of slavery and the Civil War years by white authors. No traces of agency of the enslaved could be found in these representations which also, like Barbara Christian notes in reference to antebellum narratives, disseminated “images of blacks as servile and inferior race” (Christian, 1985, p.19). Stereotypes such as the black Sambo, the minstrel, the mammy, the conjure woman, the Jezebel, and the lewd black woman found their origins in antebellum and postbellum white Southern women writers’ fictions. Civil War novels written in the nineteenth and twentieth century performed analogous silencing, “othering,” and marginalization of black subjects as fictions of plantation tradition. With *Jubilee*, Walker wanted to revise history to accommodate a valid black perspective and to revive the African-American memory swept away by these master-narratives. She planned to write a folk novel so as to capture the slaves’ experience and cultural memory and to show the significance of the Negro people and their role during the war because these aspects had been blotted out of the dominant culture’s representations (*How I Wrote Jubilee* 26).

To complement her research and the oral narratives she had heard about the period, Walker resorted to the enslaved people’s secular and Civil War songs because she understood that music is a metaphor for the African Americans’ lived experience, a vehicle of their history in the New World. As Leroi Jones argues, in *Blues People* (1969), a fruitful examination of the history of African-American music cannot eschew a scrutiny of the history of African Americans and vice versa because music “was the history of the Afro-American as text, as tale, as story, as exposition narrative, or what have you, the music was the score, the actually expressed creative orchestration, reflection, of Afro-American life, our words, the libretto, to those actual, lived lives” (ix). Indeed, music is history in African-American culture because when they were forcefully transplanted to the New World, Africans retained the ancestral tradition of preserving their lived experiences in songs: they “recorded the circumstances of their daily live in song just as assuredly as if they had kept diaries or written biographies” (Southern, 1971, p. 66).

They created songs under every imaginable circumstance and condition: in the kitchen, in the fields, in the levee camps, in the woods during secret religious services, and in the quarters. Slave songs were expressions of social comments and conveyed the slaves’ feelings of joy and sadness, their thoughts and their reactions to conditions, to work, to the masters and the overseers. For example, a slave could improvise a song to express how sorry he/she was to see his/her best friend punished. The spiritual “Motherless Child” is a good illustration of the slave’s use of songs as a daily

form of expression of sorrow. In this song, an enslaved woman expresses her pain and despair. She laments: “O sometimes I fell like a/ motherless child. Sometimes I feel/ like a motherless child. O my Lord, sometimes I feel like a motherless child.” Behind the pain and despair, there is always a measure of hope because the enslaved woman is going to get down on her knees and prayer and God will certainly provide. Den I gi’down on my knees and pray./ pray. Gi’down on my knees and pray.”

Thus, the slaves’ secular and religious songs provide entry to the totality of the enslaved people’s lived experience. These artifacts of the African-American oral tradition carry the slaves’ social comments, thoughts, and reactions to miscellaneous objects, prayers, and attitudes. They are historical records, diaries and biographies. But how does Walker utilize the motif of music in her text?

Walker exploits the leitmotif of music to build the structure and content of *Jubilee*. The title of the novel is drawn from a traditional spiritual, Jubilee. The three parts and fifty-eight chapters of the narrative open with epigraphs, which are either slave secular or religious songs or Civil War songs. James Spears, in “Black Folk Elements in Margaret Walker’s *Jubilee*,” argues that the epigraphs opening the three parts and fifty-eight chapters of the narrative organize Walker’s historical novel structurally and thematically. He illustrates that the motif of the children of Israel conveyed in the song opening part two and three—“Mine eyes have seen the Glory” and “Forty years in the Wilderness”—helps Walker organize the parts into a coherent story: “together with the chapter titles, two of which parallel the bondage of children of Israel

in Egypt, these epigraphs also help establish the thematic organization of the novel” (14). The resilience and strong faith expressed in “Mine Eyes” parallels the dominant theme of Margaret Walker’s *Jubilee* (1962). Like the enslaved Africans, the speaker in this spiritual is able to transcend the daily sufferings because he is convinced that God will put an end to his predicament and this is visible from the opening lines: “Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;/He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;/He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword: /His truth is marching on” (The Atlantic Monthly Vol. IX, NO. LII, 1862, p.10).

Walker thus imposes order on her narrative with the motif of music. For Spears (1980), music confers thematic unity to the narrative and this view is easily exemplified, as the musical structure of the novel dictates the development of themes in the parts and chapters of the narrative. For instance, it is obvious that the songs used as epigraphs introduce the themes of the different chapters. “Swing Low, sweet chariot” relates to the theme of Sis Hetta’s death in chapter one. “Go Down Moses” relates to the theme of the slaves’ oppression in chapter two; “When Israel was in Egypt land,” which focalizes the slaves’ precarious conditions of life and work in Dutton’s plantation. A similar intertextual link can be argued between the epigraphs and the content of the remaining chapters.

Thus, Walker employs the musical structure as an index for recreating Vvry’s experience in time and space. Far from being mere organizational devices and simple markers of shifts in

themes, time, and space, these songs also form part of the narrative discourse. Their meanings fuse with the content of the narrative to provide a better understanding of the slaves' thoughts and attitudes, thereby illuminating their incipient political consciousness and revolutionary spirit. Several chapters, more visibly chapter eight and sixteen, contain events that parallel the content of the songs. Additionally, Walker weaves songs into the fabric of the narrative and the characters' discourse.

The motif of music not only helps the narrative capture with effect the slaves' consciousness, but also it supports the effective description of the slaves' ontology and resilience, which, as noted earlier constitutes an important part of Walker's project. In the narrative, Walker utilizes "Go Down, Moses" the language and cadences of which are particularly suitable for a sermon to illustrate the slaves' revolutionary spirit, thereby further buttressing the narrative's discursive content. Thus, given its central function in the novel's development, its use in reconstructive history, and its discursive performance in the text, one can say that music is a tool through which Walker reclaims history. Music further enables Walker to achieve self-representation and to recover the slaves' voice, consciousness, and resistance.

Music in Narrative Structure: The Jazzesthetics in Morrison's *Love*

Contemporary author Toni Morrison is another creative artist whose literary imagination draws from the enriching well of oral tradition in general and music in particular. Though open to the enriching breezes of postmodernism and avant-gardism, Morrison's literary imagination is rooted in African-American traditions. The artistic credo

that she self-consciously implements in her novels, is promulgated in her interviews and non-fiction, more specifically in "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation" (1984) and "Memory, Creation and Writing" (1984). Black art, in her view, should perform the same therapeutic role as music, and the novel should replace the enlightening classical mythological archetypal stories that parents once told their children to raise key issues that may arise in their lives, to suggest what the conflicts are, to open doors for them without necessarily providing solutions to them (Morrison, 1999, p. 200). Morrison also perpetuates in her creative works the African-American oral tradition. For her, black art should have "the ability to be both print and oral literature," to tell stories that can be read and heard at the same time (Rootedness, p. 200). It should also perpetuate the African-American oral traditions such as the sermonic tradition that dates back from the period of enslavement and which played a cathartic role in the lives of the formerly African-American people. Morrison also pleads for a type of literature that builds a participatory relationship between the writer/artist and the reader/audience (Rootedness, p.198-9). This plea resonates in "*Memory, Creation and Writing*" where she argues that the aesthetic of her works reflects the characteristics of African-American art forms—antiphony, functionality, improvisational nature, relationship to audience, the critical voice which upholds tradition and communal values—and translates them into print (385-90). Morrison's artistic concept of a novel permeated by orality and musicality is better epitomized by *Love*

(2003) though it also transpires in her antecedent texts such as *Jazz*.

It is however important to succinctly present the characteristics of a jazz composition to demonstrate how the narrating instance in *Love* replicates its features. A Jazz composition is characterized by “the ethics of antiphony” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 200), the interaction between the performer and the audience, improvisation and swing. Schuler Gunther explains that this antiphony or “juxtaposition of solo and ensemble music” that “manifests itself in the entire call-and-response typology” constitutes a basic characteristic of African music (57-8). Experts in the field such as Schuler Gunther, Martin Norgaard, and Daniel J. Healey agree that improvisation remains no doubt the most salient quality that distinguishes Jazz music from the European tradition. As for Schuler (1968), he illuminates that “the improvisation of many lines at the same time is a typically African concept, and is perpetuated in most forms of early jazz” (Schuler, 1968, pp. 57–58). Norgaard also clarifies the concept of improvisations when he states:

Improvisations in jazz music “include repeated rhythmic and melodic patterns [...] improvisers use procedures based on the rules of tonal jazz to create an improvised output. This output may contain patterns but these patterns are accidental and not stored in procedural memory for later use” (271).

For Healey (2014), solos in Jazz melodies can be improvised from scratch even if they can also incorporate a variation of the melody. In an improvisation, rhythmic or melodic phrases may be repeated but also slowly

altered. Improvisations can be individual or collective: in a collective improvisation “some or all members of a group participate in simultaneous improvisation of equal or comparable weight;” a collective improvisation “does not preclude the presence of a soloist but it implies a degree of equality between all players in the ensemble” (Kernfeld, 2001, p.III.3).

Articulation constitutes an aspect of paramount importance in improvisations. It refers not only to the ability of performers to articulate clearly the lines they play while improvising, but also to establish the right connection with the time of the rhythmic section. As a summary, articulation implies good enunciation, good playing of scales, and most importantly playing in time and swinging. It thus establishes harmony between the improvisations of the performers and the melodic line of the rhythm.

In the narrative of our focus, the juxtaposition of two narrating modes, the organization of the story, the interaction between the ghostly narrator and the reader/audience, and the temporal order of the narrative mirror the organization of the musical structure of Jazz, more specifically its antiphony, call and response, individual and collective improvisation, swing, articulation, cadence and rhythm. Morrison opts for an extremely anachronistic narrating instance mingling L’s oral story (typographically signaled through the use of italics) and a third-person narrator alternating limited omniscience and full omniscience and exploiting the perspectives of several characters. L, the ghostly narrator, acts as a conductor in the narrative performance: her oral interventions open the novel and she reappears in several

parts of the narrative, including part 3, 4, 6, and 9 to close the novel. As a matter of fact, even though she is one of the several voices that participate in the telling of the polyphonic story, L is the most omniscient of the voices and plays a central role in the narrative. She in fact claims authority over these voices as a prime witness at the center of events and as an exclusive depository of knowledge. She is the one who enables the reader to piece together the scattered parts of the story so as to reconstruct the true meaning of events.

As in a call and response performance, L interacts with other narrators through recalls and replays their tunes in different melodies. The call and response can be further located in the relationship between L and the reader. Her tone is conversational, and the flow is so fluid that you can close your eyes and hear her talk. L directly addresses the reader/listener through a constant use of “you,” and creates a certain form of familiarity through interpellations such as “listen to me.” The use of expressions such as “No, I don’t care what he told people, something else wrecked his resort” and “but, I know” confers an oral quality to her interventions.

The centrality of L in the novelistic discourse mirrors her key role in the narrative’s melody and arrangement. As noted earlier, L sets the melody of the tale: her epilogue delimits the scope and subject of the narrative and sets the melodic line. Her allusions to June on page 9 establish the transition into the first narrative, which begins with the young girl’s arrival in Silk and ends with the death of Heed in the Hotel Resort. L’s epilogue is characterized by a constant swing movement from “now” (present) to “then” (past) and vice versa.

Indeed, the third-person narration built on the perspectives and voices of various characters follows the same harmonic cadence that progresses on mainly two chords: present and past. This rhythmic movement is mainly achieved through characters’ speech, analepses, and embedded narratives with a predominance of recollections of characters such as Sandler, Vida, Heed, Christine, Romen, and June. Consequently, in the multilayered third-person narration, the various voices of the characters improvise over the first narrative controlled by the narrator.

The harmony of the narrative melody rests on articulations that are established by mixing analepses and allowing temporally second narratives to rejoin the first narrative, comparisons, and thematic bridges. The narrative segments are not really connected by temporal markers as in the Western tradition. The different chapters are thematically organized in such a way that events are naturally connected and the temporally second narratives rejoin the first narrative through thematic pivots and comparative portraits. For instance, in chapter 3, entitled *Stranger*, the title’s theme helps to establish a link between past and present through characterization. June, the used-to-be stranger in the Settlement now stranger in One Monarch Street, feels a certain connection with Bill Cosey, the stranger in the portrait who made her feel at home. In chapter 4, L shifts from “now” to “then” through the subtle comparison between Junior and Celestial. The resemblances she perceives between Junior and Celestial serve as a means to jump back to the past to provide the reader antecedents. Similarly, in chapter 5, entitled *Lover*, the title helps interweave past and present. This

segment of the first narrative focalizes Vida and Sandler's grounded suspicions about Romen's hidden involvement with a woman based on his new demeanor. The temporally second narrative shares an obvious connection with the first one, as it describes Bill Cosey's appetite for women and his love for Celestial, a former prostitute. L and the third person narrator adopting various perspectives also play a great role in the articulations of the numerous scattered narratives. L for instance, establishes transitions between the two narrating instances by sketching themes developed in the third-person narrative. The third-person omniscient narrator also brushes up themes and topics before taking the perspectives of actors such as Heed, Christine, etc.

The melody in *Jazz* presents rhythmic variations and the repetition of some tunes. As the story unfolds, the rhythm of the narrative goes crescendo and the tempo slows down. Indeed, the improvisations of the various characters become longer. The narrative begins with the short analeptical accounts of Vida and Sandler in chapter one, which suggests a rather syncopated rhythm and a faster tempo. As it progresses, there is a deceleration of the tempo and change of rhythmic variations. The retrospective accounts of characters become longer. Rhythm constitutes the arrangement of notes according to their relative duration and relative accentuation. Furthermore, one can note a dialogic dimension in the improvisations of the various performers in the narrative. They improvise over the same notes to provide convergent and divergent tunes. To illustrate, several characters including Sandler and L recount some events such as Bill Cosey's boat parties. In this respect, L

can be said to play a central role in the orchestration of the melody, she not only sets the cadence, but also she allows the reader/ listener to interpret correctly the melody by arranging airs. Her various recalls provide true meaning to events that are ignored or misinterpreted by other characters in the story.

Conclusion

Music constitutes an extremely important index which has been exploited for various purposes in African-American literature since the turn of the twentieth century, going through the various movements of cultural self-assertion to contemporary times. Music has inflamed the African-American literary imagination and continues to shape the craft of writers such as Morrison and the young poets' verses replicating the beat and rhythm of rap.

Langston Hughes was no doubt of the pioneers who advocated the use of and actually integrated music into his texts. For this reason he was dubbed a "Jazz poet." Hughes did not only replicate features of the Jazz through constant improvisation in his work, he also used the blues. Hughes' most famous musical poems include *The Weary Blues* (1926), *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951), *Harlem* (1951), and *Ask Your Mamma* (1961). These works recreate the rhythms and cadences, improvisational mode, the comments about the vicissitudes of life and the presence of an infinite amount of choruses of the Jazz. Like the blues, they were also complaints about hard days but also triumph over and resolution of conflicts.

Later on, perpetuating a newly established tradition, Margaret Walker tapped into the sources of enslaved people's secular and Civil War Songs to

complement her historical reconstruction of the period going from bondage to the fratricide war. For instance, music is a tool of mimesis in *Jubilee*. Walker understood that to reclaim “true” history, captures the true consciousness and agency of the enslaved, she had to exploit music which recorded their daily lives and experience. Music permeates Walker’s novel including the paratext, intertext, and text. It decorates and confers organization to the overall narrative and its different parts and chapters. The epigraphs have a close intertextual link with the novel and its different divisions.

Faithful to her conception of art, Morrison perpetuates the esthetic tradition initiated by Hughes and exploits the beauties of Jazz in the narratological organization of *Love*. The narrative replicates features of a Jazz

composition’s characteristics, mainly the antiphony, the call and response, the individual and collective improvisation, the swing, the anachronic structure, the polyphonic narration and the narrative order. In the novel, Morrison established direct contact between the ghostly narrator and the audience and reader thus creating an effect of call and response. The voice of the ghostly narrator, L, is also juxtaposed with the voices of various other characters. This dual form of narration replicates the antiphony of Jazz. Like a conductor, L sets the melodic line of the story and lets the other characters’ improvise over it; harmony and articulation are established by themes and mixed analepses. The anachronic structure, characterized by a constant movement from past to present and vice versa, confers a swing movement to the narrative.

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