



JPC

Journal of Publishing and Criticism

JPC, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2026, pp.9-25

Print ISSN: 3107-0892; Online ISSN: 3107-0906

Journal homepage: <https://www.jpcjournal.com>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.64058/jpc260102tslhp>



“The Third Space” in Langston Hughes’s Poetry: A Path to the African American Identification

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Abstract: As the Poet Laureate of the Harlem Renaissance, Langston Hughes focuses on African Americans’ culture and identity, and attempts to construct a multidimensional African Americans’ identification through his poetry. The concepts of hybridity and the third space proposed by Homi K. Bhabha are effective strategies for breaking binary oppositions and cultural hegemony which are employed in Hughes’s poetry to challenge the entrenched authorities, make the voices of marginal African American heard and show the negotiation between different cultures. The hybridity is demonstrated in poetic structure, language and narrative, which create the third space. This space serves not to define a static African Americans’ identity, but to show African Americans’ collective memories and rich culture, and then articulate African Americans’ dynamic identification and to envision a multicultural American future. Hughes’s poetic strategies demonstrate African Americans’ self-affirmation. His poetry, rooted in his ethnic pride, provides a solid cultural foundation for African Americans’ resilient, dynamic, and dignified identification.

Keywords: Langston Hughes; Hybridity; The Third Space; Postcolonialism

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标题：兰斯顿·休斯诗歌中的“第三空间”：非裔美国人的身份认同之路

摘要：作为哈莱姆文艺复兴时期的桂冠诗人，兰斯顿·休斯关注非裔美国人的文化与身份，并着力通过其诗歌构建一种多维度的非裔美国人认同。霍米巴巴所提出的混杂性与第三空间概念则为理解休斯的诗歌策略提供了批判性的视角。休斯的诗歌有效地打破了二元对立和文化霸权，挑战了根深蒂固的白人权威，使得被边缘化的非裔美国人得以发声，进而展现不同文化之间的协商。混杂性体现在休斯诗歌的结构、语言和叙事三个维度，进而创造了第三空间。该空间并非为了定义一种静态单一的非裔美国人身份，而是为了展示非裔美国人的集体经验和丰富的文化，进而展现非裔美国人对自我身份的持续探索和动态的身份认同构建，并且展望着一个多元文化并存的未来美国社会。休斯的诗歌策略展示着非裔美国人的自我肯定，这份植根于民族自豪感的创作，为该群体构建一种富有韧性、动态和尊严的认同提供了坚实的文化基石。

关键词：兰斯顿·休斯；混杂性；第三空间；后殖民主义

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Langston Hughes is one of the prominent African American poet of the twentieth century, and his poetry is deeply embedded with African American culture which shows his responsibilities for speaking up for the African American community. His poetry embodies characteristics of African Americans in both structure and content, confronts the historical wounds of the black community, and expresses strong ethnic confidence which provide a cultural blueprint for the African Americans' identification and construct literary discourse to resist racial oppression in twentieth century. Hughes becomes "a leading figure of the Harlem Renaissance by innovating American verse through a jazz poetry style" (Murray, 2018, p.39). Such innovation not only constructs a poetic form but also asserts the value of African American vernacular. As an African American, Hughes explores the racial differences in his poetry, and his poetry becomes an important part of American culture. The interplay of African heritage, American citizenship and racial cultures deepens the complexity of Hughes and his poetry. Hughes's poetry shows the collision of cultures which results in the hybridity. According to Bhabha, "the process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area negotiation of meaning and representation" (Rutherford, 1990, p.211), which is

aligned with features of Hughes's poetry. Moreover, for Bhabha, "the importance of hybridity...is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge" (Rutherford, 1990, p.211). Therefore, Hughes' distinctive poetic style and content create the third space which provide opportunities for African Americans to resist the mainstream narrative in the West, and keeps the vitality of African Americans' culture in the process of deconstructing and reconstructing it.

Hughes's significant achievements and contributions attract plenty of scholars' attention at home and abroad. A large number of foreign papers study Hughes's poetry from a postcolonial perspective including cultural hybridity, black identity and challenges to colonial hegemony etc. Wahyuni and Andriani (2021) analyzed the hybridity and the dominance of whites over blacks in Hughes's poetry. Gohar (2007) focused on confronting the history of slavery and colonization in terms of content and themes in Hughes's poetry. Kanwal and Ashfaq (2024) explored self-apprehension and mixed identities in "The Negro Speaks of River". However, domestic papers that directly study Hughes's poetry from a postcolonial perspective are relatively limited. Scholar Luo Lianggong introduced the postcolonial features of Hughes's poetry in *American Literature: Critical Essays* including "save the image of the black, explore the historical origin of ethnic culture and discover the distinctive cultural resources of the black" (2004, pp.440-445). Scholar Zheng Yi applied postcolonial theory to Hughes's poetry, but she focused more on postcolonial themes reflected in the content of the poetry, while insufficient analysis of the deep connection between the form of the poetry and the postcolonial theory. Although Zheng Yi mentioned the Black music and the Black vernacular in the paper, the discussion lacked specific demonstration. Moreover, Zheng Yi also analyzed Hughes's identity and his poetry from the perspective of hybridity to demonstrate "the deconstruction of the dominant mainstream white culture and meanwhile show his call for multicultural integration"¹(2009, p.100), but she only focused on the thematic content of Hughes's poetry while neglecting the diction and his poetry style, which are also important component of the hybridity of Hughes's poetry.

Regarding to Hughes's poetic innovations, Patterson demonstrated the blues in Hughes's poetry and Hughes's critique of black cultural nationalism. According to Patterson, "Hughes, appealing to the strength, humor, and "rooted power" of the blues, tries to change the derogatory view of folk culture that prevailed among the African American middle class and Euro-Americans" (2000, p.661). Patterson's argument reveals the duality of blues in Hughes's poetry, but fails to further explore how this tension embodies the hybridity of Hughes's poetry and the resulting the third space. Borshuk argued that "while Hughes accents African American difference through his use of recognizably black cultural source material, his relationship to that material is quintessential modernist in the distance he asserts between it and his own artistic expression" (2025, p.13). These descriptions imply a kind of hybridity and an int-between state but the connection between postcolonial theory and poetic style is implicit.

¹ All English translations of Chinese articles, books and other sources cited in this essay are done by authors of this essay.

In terms of the study of Hughes's poetic style, a domestic scholar Luo Lianggong carried out detailed analysis from different aspects including black English vernacular and African American music. According to Luo Lianggong, "Langston Hughes's exploration and use of African American music in the United States are inseparable from his poetic ideals" (2002, p.48), which shows the importance of connecting the forms of Hughes's poetry and the connotations of his poetry. Most studies on Hughes's poetic style separate it from postcolonial theory, but postcolonial connotations are in the process of discussions. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce the postcolonial theory especially the third space to the study of Hughes's poetry which enables a more comprehensive understanding of Hughes's poetic innovations in poetry and highlights the important role his poetry plays in African Americans' identification.

1. Hybridity in Structure: Collective Memories of African American Community

Hughes's attempts to explore African American cultures and communicate his cultural pride are illustrated in his use of blues in poetry. For Hughes, the use of blues and jazz is not merely a stylistic choice, but reveals his politic and cultural awareness. As Luo Lianggong states, "The blues...originates in the corn and cotton fields of the American South, and it evolves through the fusion of work songs, church spirituals, and folk humor and wisdom, gradually develops into a simple but expressive means of catharsis" (2002, p.52). Therefore, the blues represents African Americans' collective memories and strong creativity which provides Hughes a great platform to deconstruct Western cultural hegemony and construct African Americans' cultural confidence.

The blues as a traditional musical form has its specific structure. According to Tracy, "Twelve-bar blues generally consist of one thought or statement repeated, and a third line which resolves or extends the repeated thought in some way (AAB)" (1988, p.76), and such structure makes significant impact on Hughes's poetry. For example, Hughes's poem "Po' Boy Blues" is a typical poem that employs the blues structure, and the reader can follow the blues form to experience the boy's misery which is emphasized by the repeated lines:

When I was home de
Sunshine seemed like gold.
When I was home de
Sunshine seemed like gold.
Since I come up North de
Whole damn world's turned cold.
I was a good boy,
Never done no wrong.
Yes, I was a good boy,
Never done no wrong,

But this world is weary
An' de road is hard an' long.
.....
Weary, weary,
Weary early in de morn.
Weary, weary,
Early, early in de morn.
I's so weary
I wish I'd never been born. (Hughes, 1927, p.28)

Hughes's use of the blues in poetry results in the hybridity in double dimensions. Each stanza of the poem strictly adheres to the AAB blues structure. The structure of the blues makes each stanza has the similar pattern that repeating the first two lines and presents a new opinion in the last line in each stanza. In terms of structure, Hughes integrates the musical structure and rhythms of the blues into modern poetry, which endows literary texts with musical resonance while imbues the blues with narrative function and depth, and thus achieving a profound mixture of music and literature. This hybridity creates the third space for the distinctive experiences and historical traumas of African Americans. Moreover, the use of the blues form creates the third space. Soja and Bhabha "define the third space as a place, where marginals build a community of resistance, in order to be heard by the 'powerful' representatives" (Kalscheuer, 2009, p.37). Hughes's poetry is a hybridity that constructs a space for African Americans to speak for themselves and exposes African American culture to the public that makes their marginal voices to be heard by other people. Hughes writes the white Americans' expectations for African American authors, "be stereotyped, don't go too far, don't shatter our illusions about you, don't amuse us too seriously" (1985, p.3). The cultural hegemony of the white in American society constrains African American writers, and Hughes strategically incorporates the blues form into traditional poetic forms, which creates a "new area negotiation of meaning and representation" (Rutherford, 1990, p.211). Hughes combines the blues originating from the African American life experiences with English poetry that has traditionally been dominated by the white, which shows a mixture of the African American cultural spirit and the dominant white literary tradition. The use of the blues can be regarded as a strategic appropriation, creating the hybridity that challenge the traditional poetic form and carves out the third space, where marginalized community is able to reshape the language of power.

According to Tracy, "African-American music like the blues, a combination of African and European elements, would draw partially on these African elements to create a new music from "a new race" (1988, p.64), and the inherent hybridity makes the blues the third space. Thus, when Hughes incorporates the blues form into poetry, he does not merely adopt a musical structure but situates his poetry within the third space which endows his poetry with expanded interpretive dimensions and a capacity to explore complexity. As

Tracy states, “Blues performances are both communal and individual extural meeting ground of African and European art in America...blues performances are both communal and individual expressions, dynamic and varied” (1988, p.60). The blues can speak for both individual African American and the collective African American community, which enables Hughes’s poetry to bridge personal emotions with collective history and offer profound insights into the complex realities of African American life and identity. According to Liu Guangjian and Zhang Huicheng, “Ethnic poets, either implicitly or explicitly, weave non-mainstream heterogeneity into their works by constructing epistemological thresholds. This strategy not only asserts the actual existence of the ‘Other’ but also facilitates a process of identity filtration within the community” (2025, p.107). Hughes introduced the blues, with its distinctive AAB rhythmic structure into poetry to create a form of heterogeneity that functions as an internal identity code for the African American community. By transcribing musical rhythms into text, he protected the construction of African American identity from being fully subsumed by dominant discourses. This mechanism of filtration allows the identity to maintain its cultural uniqueness even as it engages in the mainstream culture, ultimately achieving an active and evolving self-definition. Although the boy’s identity is not directly pointed out in “Po’ Boy Blues”, the blues form indicates his African American identity. The poem traces a boy’s psychological journey and his inner world transforms from “sunshine” to “weary” with the geographical movement showed in the lines “Since I come up North de/Whole damn world’s turned cold” that indicates the Great Migration that millions of African Americans move from the rural community in Southern America to the Northern areas, which is a force that leave the African Americans in a state of “rootlessness”. Hughes employs the blues structure to reveal and emphasize this collective dislocation. The boy’s lament “this world is weary” is an epitome of the mental situations of the whole African American community, which is aligned with the inherent hybridity of the blues. Moreover, the poem “Homesick Blues” has the similar blues structure:

De Railroad bridge’s
A sad song in de air.
De railroad bridge’s
A sad song in de air.
Every time de trains pass
I wants to go somewhere. (Hughes, 1994, p.71)

The poem revolves around personal emotions, but the blues form evokes the collective memory of the migratory African American community. As Tracy notes in *Langston Hughes and the Blues*, “the blues are ‘a way of life’... A particular misery and sadness, a particular blues, unites African-Americans” (1988, p.59). Although the narrator feels homesick, the destination remains an ambiguous “somewhere” that reflects an in-between state, which is also the condition of African American community at the time. They displace from the

South but not belong to the North, and although they are legally American, they are marginalized by the society. They can neither return to the past nor arrive the ambiguous future. The blues, a hybridity from cultural encounters, served as both medium and metaphor unfolds African American's life experience.

Although the blues form is a distinctive feature of Hughes's poetry, he does not mechanically transplant the blues form into his poetic practice. Hughes extends the blues form with original literary ideas in some of his poems. "Hughes implies that the conventional blues idiom is so compelling, and so limited, as to threaten his imaginative freedom" (Patterson, 2000, p.664), and the extensions and changes enables Hughes's poetry further transcend constraints. The structure of the poem "Southern Mammy Sings" is derived from the traditional blues form. "The traditional a-a-a rhyme scheme in the blues is replaced by a more complicated scheme, a-b-c-b-b" (Johnson & Farrell, 1979, p.61). Through his innovative use of line repetition in poetic form, Hughes amplifies African American voice that expresses the misery of oppression and appeals for racial justice. The poem reads as follows:

Miss Gardner's in her garden.
Miss Yardman's in her yard.
Miss Michaelmas is at de mass
And I am gettin' tired!
 Lawd!
I am gettin' tired!
.....
Last Week they lynched a colored boy.
They hung him to a tree.
That colored boy ain't said a thing
But we all should be free.
Yes, m'am!
We all should be free. (Hughes, 1994, p.227)

The poem "Southern Mammy Sings" shows the collective voice of African American labors. As Tracy states, "The blues...represented an adaptation of older instrumental and vocal techniques (which responded to one kind of oppressive system) to a new kind of music, one that responded to the unique problems posed by the new oppressive system and provided an appropriate way of expressing these problems" (1988, p.75). Hughes's expansion of the blues form further reveals his rebellion against the oppressive system and his strive to break the existed form, which brings newness to the culture and expression. According to Kalscheuer, "newness enters the world, questions existing structures of authorities and politics and thereby establishes the preconditions for a modified relationship between the colonizer and the (oppressed) colonized" (2009, p.39).

This poem constructed the third space where the stereotype of the southern mummy is debunked and the real living environment of African Americans is revealed. The hybridity in structure enables the expression of personal emotions to resonate with the collective memory and historical traumas of African American community, which powerfully challenges the single literary orthodoxy. Through such structural innovation, Hughes elevates the blues from a musical genre to a profound narrative strategy that carries out cultural resistance, constructs group identity, and renews cultural confidence.

2. Hybridity in Vernacular Language: Articulation of the African Americans Subjectivity

Black vernacular language stems from their traumatic experience of black people in American plantation culture, which has become an epitome of their physical and mental traumas as slaves. According to Vukelic, “vernacular expression was one of the strongest media for Black people fighting for freedom and racial justice” (2022, p.46). By integrating Black vernacular language into his poetry as a strategy of cultural resistance, Hughes achieves cultural empowerment, which carves out a space for African Americans to articulate their own voices within poetic expression. This approach promotes the construction of a collective identity and reinforces African Americans’ cultural confidence.

George Schuyler, a black writer, used to write to Hughes, “What the black masses need is hope and pride, an understanding of their potentialities, a reinforcement of dignity” (Rampersad, 1986, p.221). Noticing African Americans’ critical deficit in self-understanding, Hughes positions his poetry as a strategy aimed at promoting African Americans’ sense of self-worth. Specifically, Hughes’s deployment of Black vernacular language serves as a vital tool in his endeavor. In the poem, “Bound No’t Blues”, the Black vernacular language not only traces the migration and mental activities of African Americans, but more importantly, it demonstrates an elementary collective identification through the linguistic form of the community. The use of Black vernacular language functions to validate the marginalized experience and establish a foundation for African American cultural discourse. The poem reads as follows:

Goin’ down the road, Lawd,
Goin’ down the road.
Down the road, Lawd,
Got to find somebody
To help me carry this load.
Road’s in front o’ me,
Nothin’ to do but walk.
Road’s in front of me,
Walk...an’ walk...an’ walk.
.....

On the no'thern road.
These Mississippi towns ain't
Fit fer a hoppin' toad. (Hughes, 1994, p.76)

The poem comprises lots of direct appropriations of Black vernacular language such as “Lawd”, “fer”, “Goin’”, embedding colloquial expressions within a formal poetic framework. This cultural hybridity infuses Hughes’s poetry with emotions and thoughts of African Americans, transforming it into a window for their expression. The Black vernacular expressions reveal the complex and authentic emotions and collective experience of African Americans during the Great Migration, presenting neither a purely pessimistic complaint nor blind optimism, but a paradoxical sensibility that includes sorrow, hope, and disillusionment etc. Such rich emotions prevent African Americans from being defined as “‘unitary’ or ‘originary’ identity, identity as ‘presence’, identity therefore represented by the supposedly transcendental ego” (Easthope, 2008, p.342), but a more dynamic and multi-faceted image of African Americans, transcending the simplistic mainstream definitions.

Influenced by the White cultural hegemony, Black culture is portrayed as primitive and uncivilized, and so is Black vernacular language. More importantly, such external devaluation is so deep and profound that some Black bourgeoisie internalize it and refuse to accept the Black culture. Trying to adapt to White culture is trying to get rid of Black identity. As Fanon writes in *Black Skin, White Masks*, “The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle” (2008, p.9). Their rejection of Black vernacular language and culture is an attempt to become whiter, which divides the African American group as a whole, and leads to internal fragmentation and cultural shame. Just as Fanon mentions, “In the man of color there is a constant effort to run away from his own individuality, to annihilate his own presence” (Fanon, 2008, p.43). The imitation of White people results in the loss of identification of African Americans, so that they not only cannot integrate into White group but also alienate themselves from their own culture and racial group. Hughes’s use of Black vernacular language is not an emphasis on returning to origins, but a cultural strategy of hybridity. Hughes’s poetry creates a third space that is neither purely Western nor purely African, but a space where African Americans can truly understand themselves and achieve identification. By validating Black vernacular language through his poetry, Hughes helps African Americans get rid of an originary identity. In this “in-between” space, they can understand themselves and forge a new and resilient sense of cultural confidence.

Hughes’s poetry is not a simple exposure of Black culture to the public, but a strategic practice, a conscious reconciliation and adaptation. In the poem “Mother to Son”, rather than directly express African Americans’ rage or joy through purely revolutionary language, Hughes reveals African Americans’ experiences and thoughts through Black vernacular language. The poem reads as follows:

Well, son, I'll tell you:

.....

I've been a-climbin' on,

And reachin' landin's,

And turnin' corners,

And sometimes goin' in the dark

Where there ain't been no light.

So boy, don't you turn back.

.....

Don't you fall now—

For I've still goin', honey,

I've still climbin',

And life for me ain't been no crystal stair. (Hughes, 1994, p.30)

In the poem, a mother tells her son about the hardships of life and offers him advice through her personal experiences. The identities of the mother and the son are not directly given in the poem, but Black vernacular language is frequently used in the poem which indicates the Black identity of the mother and the son. For example, in the line, "I've been a-climbin' on", the auxiliary verb "have" is omitted, resulting in the features of Black vernacular language. Additionally, the "ing" is replaced by "in" in these lines, "And reachin' landin's, /And turnin' corners", which is another important feature of Black vernacular language. In the last line, "And life for me ain't been no crystal stair", the double negative, one of Black vernacular language feature, is used, making the line more like a peaceful and insightful narration rather than a simple venting of emotions, which shows African Americans' philosophy of life and existence. "Black Dialect is an Africanized form of English reflecting Black America's linguistic-cultural African heritage and the conditions of servitude, oppression and life in America" (Smitherman, 1977, p.2). Therefore, the utilization of Black vernacular language liberates African Americans from the singular narrative of slavery documented by the White majority, allowing them to narrate their own stories and show the hybridity forged through the spatial migration and cultural integration experienced by African Americans. The encounters and interactions between traditional poetic form and Black vernacular language establish a third space where the blackness of African Americans is no longer rigidly defined but is transformed into a fluid and subversive subjectivity that transcends the binary opposition of Black and White. This cultural hybridity not only carries the traces of African culture but also incorporates the lived experiences of American society. Hence, their identity is reshaped into a dynamic, resilient, and creative cultural construction, rather than a fixed, surveillable, or classifiable essentialist signifier.

Black vernacular language often echoes the content of Hughes's poetry, collectively demonstrating the authentic life and emotional experiences of African Americans. In the poem "Song for a Banjo Dance", both

the content and the language Hughes chose are forms of Black vernacular. Banjo, as a famous stringed instrument, serves as a powerful symbol of hybridity itself. Banjo is brought from Africa during the Atlantic slave trade, carrying the profound history of African American people and their features of diaspora, and it is frequently used in present African Americans' singing, which positions it as an epitome of collective memory and cultural continuation. Hughes describes the Banjo dance with Black vernacular language. The poem reads as follows:

Shake your brown feet, honey,
Shake your brown feet, chile,
Shake your brown feet, honey,
Shake 'em swift and wil'—
Get way back, honey,
Do that low-down step.
.....
Sun's going down this evening—
Might never rise no mo'.
The sun's going down this very night—
Might never rise no mo'—
So dance with swift feet, honey,
(The banjo's sobbing low)
Dance with swift feet, honey—
Might never dance no mo'. (Hughes, 1994, p.29)

Black vernacular language is mixed with the African Americans' traditional music, strongly showing African Americans' emotions in the poem. In the line "Shake 'em swift and wil'—", the last letter "d" of the final consonant cluster is omitted, and in these lines, "The sun's going going down this very night—/Might never rise no mo'—", the letters "re" of the word "more" is omitted, a common feature of Black vernacular language. The introduce of black dialect in the poem breaks the form of formal written English, imbuing vitality into the poem, which is aligned with the black people's passion. The colloquial expression of black people resonates with the content of the poem. The Black vernacular language Hughes used is a component of African Americans' life and communications, which constructs a sense of authenticity of poetry. The language in the poem is not just a tool for communication but becomes African Americans' experience itself. Through a kind of language hybridity, which draws upon a "genteel tradition, adapted to the special features of black culture" (Rampersad, 1986, p.221), Hughes's poetry functions as a cultural strategy that strengthens a sense of identity and confidence within the African American community.

The frequent use of Black vernacular language endows these poems with strong colloquial features and a sense of authenticity, bringing them closer to the real life of African Americans. Moreover, Hughes makes African Americans' language visible that resonates deeply with the African American community, and thereby strengthening their identification and cultural belonging. "To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization." (Fanon, 2008, p.8). The use of Black vernacular language confirms the position of Hughes and his poetry, and shows a cultural resistance strategy. The repetition of Black vernacular language in poetry effectively counters the denigration of African American language and culture by mainstream culture. Hughes's poetry proclaims that the everyday language of African American is a powerful tool which also transform the poetry into a window of reflecting the African Americans' spirit. It declares that African American people possess their own special linguistic rules and expressions that are not inferior but valid and dignified. Through it, African Americans are able to hear their own voices that help them avoid being defined by a mainstream unitary standard.

3. Hybridity in Narrative: From Authority Subversion to the African American Self-affirmation

Hughes's poetry focuses on African American identification, but this is not achieved by establishing a single identity sharply opposed to white culture. Hughes traces the historical legacy of Africa, the trauma of slavery, and the collective memory of African Americans. While confronting racial oppression and struggle, Hughes also embraces a vision of multicultural coexistence. The interplay of past and future, Africa and America depicted in his poetry, collectively shapes the complexity and hybridity of African American identity. The essence of African American identity resists any simplistic definition, which is aligned with what Bhabha states, "multiple subject positions—of 'race,' gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitics, sexual orientation—that inhibit any claim to single identity" (1995, p.269). Hence, the hybridity in Hughes's poetry is not only shown in the poetic structure but also in the imagery, narrative and themes, thereby reveal the fluid African American identity and their identification that transcends binary oppositions.

The hybridity in Hughes's poetry deconstructs the binary opposition of the black and the white and challenges dominant white cultural norms and beliefs. In "Christ in Alabama," Hughes does not simply reject the core symbol of the West, Christ, but employs cultural displacement to hybridize traditional Christian images with African American identity, thereby deconstructing entrenched discrimination and domination. The poem reads as follows:

Christ is a nigger,
Beaten and black:
Oh, bare your back!
Mary is His mother:

Mammy of the South,
Silence your mouth.
God is His father:
White Master above
Grant Him your love.
Most holy bastard
Of the bleeding mouth,
Nigger Christ
On the cross
Of the South. (Hughes, 1994, p.143)

According to Bhabha, “Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination” (1994, p.159). Hughes appropriates the narrative of Christianity, including “Christ” “Mary” “Cod the Father” that are all supreme and sacred symbols in white culture and beliefs. However, Hughes places these symbols in the context of black slavery and racism to achieve deformation and displacement. Christ is displaced by a nigger who is oppressed, and Mary is displaced by the mammy of the South who is an exploited black woman, and God is stripped of his universal divinity and displaced by the white master who physically and sexually exploits black people. The repetition in this poem deconstructs the image of Christ as a symbol of white cultural morality, and thereby exposes the underlying reality of racial oppression and challenges the moral legitimacy of white cultural hegemony. Hughes appropriates and satirically imitates the colonial cultural elements of the white people, and as Bhabha states, “Hybridity represents that ambivalent ‘turn’ of the discriminated subject into the terrifying, exorbitant object of paranoid classification - a disturbing questioning of the images and presences of authority” (1994, p.162). The hybridity Hughes created in this poem reveals how the so-called universal religious discourse is exploited by the racial power structure, thereby making Christianity a field for criticizing oppression and expressing the suffering and redemption of African Americans. This poem challenges both white authority in America society and the binary opposition that frames the white as a symbol of civilization while the black as a symbol of barbarism. Hughes’s mimicry does not lead to assimilation, instead distort and disrupts the existing power structure, which empowers African Americans to break free from the ideology of white supremacy, and enables them to affirm their identification.

The narrative hybridity in Hughes’s poetry subverts the authority of White belief and dismantles their monopoly over historical narratives, thereby establishing a new internal authority for African American community within the poetry. As Rutherford writes, “this third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives” (1990, p.211). African Americans are no

longer defined by the histories, authority, or political initiatives created by the White majority. Instead, they transition from a passive object to self-defining subject that reinterprets itself and construct cultural confidence within the in-between status.

Hughes's exploration of African Americans' identification does not stop at the deconstruction of white cultural hegemony. He is also committed to exploring the historical and cultural resources of the African American community from a positive perspective. One of Hughes's representative poems "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" employs rivers as the central image to show the transnational history and experiences of African Americans. The poem is the following:

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. (Hughes, 1994, p.23)

In "The Negro Speaks of Rivers", the hybridity is shown in the interplay of the splendor of ancient civilization and the trauma of black slavery, the interplay of ancient soul and modern thinking, which rejects a one-dimensional interpretation on African Americans. "This notion of a 'third space' reflects the way hybrid theory articulates identity outside this self/other polemic and not in terms of being tied to a particular location" (Wright, 2018, p.105). This poem creates a third space that transcends concrete geographical and temporal boundaries, where African American identity is liberated from the self/other polemic and the binary opposition of the white and the black, and emerge in a mixed and open state. Hughes links black identity not to a single location, but to the rivers of human civilization including the Euphrates, the Congo, and the Nile. The inherent fluidity and vitality of these rivers serve as a powerful metaphor, which resonates with the transnational and migratory history of black people and their vitality. Hughes writes that "My soul has grown deep like the rivers" (1994, p.23), and African American culture and soul contain the history of African continental history and the American experiences, which make African American identity deep and dynamic just like the rivers. The poetic space is the third space that is a historical and fluid homeland rather than a geographical and static place. In the poem "Black Seed", Hughes describes the diaspora of African American, "Driven before an alien wind/Scattered like seed" (1994, p.130), which leads to their destined identity that "Hybrid plants/In another's garden" (Hughes, 1994, p.130). The metaphor emphasizes that African American identity is a hybrid that transcends geographical limitations and is rooted in collective memory, and this hybridity serves as the foundation for their identification.

Hughes's poetry shows his aspiration of African Americans for equality in the United States and hope for a society of multicultural coexistence. According to Sheng Anpeng, "hybridity manifests in many forms including linguistic, cultural, political, racial etc." (2004, p.62). In his poems, Hughes frequently employs these various forms of hybridity, which is not only a call for a symbiotic society of different cultures and ethnic groups but also his effort to help African Americans build self-confidence and to strengthen their identification. In the poem "Theme for English B", Hughes writes:

Being me, it will not be white.
But it will be
a part of you, instructor.
You are white—
yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.
That's American. (Hughes, 1994, p.410)

The line "Being me, it will not be white" is a powerful assertion of a unique and irreplaceable ethnic perspective, and it refuses complete assimilation into white culture. The line "it will be / a part of you" denotes that the cultures and experiences of different races are mutually permeable which breaks the potential binary opposition. This dynamic illustrates the theories of Bhabha, and according to Ikas and Wagner, Bhabha conceives of such intercultural encounters as a "a special kind of negotiation or translation that takes place in a Third Space of enunciation" (2008, p.2), which is supposed to "bring about a common identity, one that is new in its hybridity" (2008, p.2). African Americans' encounters with different cultures and ethnic groups trigger negotiations that retain differences while emphasizing connections. The last line, "That's America" redefines America that is not a fixed entity but a dynamic state of constant interaction and negotiation. It also provides a new understanding for African Americans for their identity that they do not need to choose to be "white" or "black", because the hybridity itself is America. In the poem "I too", Hughes articulates African American identity more directly. The line "I am the darker brother" (Hughes, 1994, p.46) makes an undeniable claim on the kinship within America that despite racial differences, African Americans remain an integral member of America, who is bound to others through brotherhood. The last line "I, too, am America" (Hughes, 1994, p.46) reaffirms African American existence, and strengthens a sense of belonging and pride.

In conclusion, Hughes's poetry serves as a profound poetic interpretation of Bhabha's important concepts of hybridity and the third space. Hughes transcends a narrow binary perspective and reveals the third space through the hybridity in poetic structure and content, by which he demonstrates African Americans' complicated and profound collective memories and experiences, and challenges the entrenched authorities to allow the voices of African Americans to be heard. The third space provides a terrain for African Americans to negotiate and embrace differences, enabling them to achieve a dynamic identification that transcends the

binary opposition. In the created third space, African American community can search and construct their self-confidence and sense of belonging, not in a return to an imagined pure past, but in a forward-looking present. Furthermore, Hughes expands his perspective to the entire multicultural and multi-ethnic landscape of America, calling for an equal dialogue between different cultures and ethnic groups. Hughes's poetry is not only a record of the era, but also a cultural practice for the future, and reveals the potential of literature to foster a resilient process of identification.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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