



## Pastoral In The Era of Harlem Renaissance

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### KEYWORDS :

Pastoral as a mode originated with the Idylls of Theocritus. These narratives about gods and shepherds were the model for the Eclogues of the Roman poet Virgil which in turn become the model for the pastoral poetry and prose written in Europe during the Renaissance.

It has been extensively used by different writers in various countries. It takes a dominant form in England during the Elizabethan age and its conventions continued in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. From the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards poems of country life began to focus more realistically on their subjects. Aspects of the pastoral continue to crop up in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century poetry. Its artifices, however, have been withered by the assumptions of realism. W. Empson in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935) makes the point that pastoral is not a bundle of conventions but a particular structural relationship (putting the complex into simple) which survives and extends beyond the limits of the formal mode. This interpretation of the pastoral establishes the validity of this mode today.

Pastoral has also flourished in American Literature. The major figures are Thoreau, Twain, Hemingway and Robert Frost. During the 1920s there was a remarkable socio-cultural awakening among Afro-Americans which gave rise to a spurt of creativity activity extending to areas like music, poetry, drama and fiction. This movement of the blacks has come to be known as the Negro, black or Harlem Renaissance. Pastoral came in handy for the writer for this period. The present paper deals with the practice of the pastoral during the Harlem Renaissance with special reference to the novels of two writers of this period – all Paul Laurence Dunbar and Langston Hughes. Paul Laurence is probably the first accomplished black poet of novelist of America. A fair proportion of his verse and three of his four novels are cast in the pastoral mode. A glance at his career shows his basic inclination towards the pastoral ideas.

Dunbar has applied three conspicuous varieties of pastorals in his short stories and novels. They are pastorals of release, pastorals of reconciliation and pastorals of place. The present paper deals with Dunbar's two novels "the uncalled" and "the support of the god" of which the former is the pastoral of release and the latter pastoral of place. The plot of the novel "the uncalled 1898" concerns a youth who was made a minister much against his will and his female guardian. The central metaphor of this novel is rebellion from the restrictions of racial stereotypes. The novel depicts the story of a boy Freddie Brent who and his mother were abandoned in town of Dexter Ohio by his wastrel father after the death of his mother, Freddie was adopted by town spinster, Hester Prim who against his wishes educated him for the ministry. The novel thematically is a conflict between the young Brent and the religious narrowness of the people in the town, Brent, after achieving ordination refuses to preach a sermon against "fallen woman" he surrenders the plunk and a chase at marriage and success

Dunbar's other novel "the sport of the gods" 1902 begins with the voice of the intention of the author to move away from the spirit of the plantation tradition; "Fictions has sad so much in regret of the old age when there were plantation and overseers and masters and slaves, that it was god to come upon such a household as Berry Hamilton, if for no other reason than that it offered relief from the monotony of tiresome iteration". The novel is about the suffering of Berry Hamilton, a black in the hands of Maurice Oakley for no fault of his own. Berry the protagonist his wife and their two children Kit and Joe are members of the black middle class. The Hamilton family have own good name and respect among the black community being the pillar

of the black church and are both admired and envied by blacks of less attainment.

Another notable figure of the Harlem Renaissance is Langston Hughes. In fact the period from 1926-1930 is known as Harlem Renaissance of the new Negro movement. Hughes's literary activities were intimately connected with this period as we know pastoral conventions predominate this period, many writers taking up pastoral as their literary form emerge Langston Hughes is one of them.

The novel depicts the six years of varied experience of Sandy, an incident of a negro boy growing up early in the present century in a town in Kansas, where negro life was narrowly prescribed by racism, poverty and conservatism. He has mixed experience with his playmates and schoolmates. A conspicuous distinction was maintained between the white and Negro children at school. Sandy found himself most uncomfortable in this situation. Afterwards when he entered his job, he revolted vigorously against the drunken missionaries Sandy could not avoid the undesirable conflict even in his family. He is caught between two worlds – the world of his grandmother and that of his aunt, Harriett – without understanding the other. Ultimately Sandy makes up his mind to return to school and make something for himself. It is certainly a victory for the conservatism and of his grandmother.

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