

## Imagery and Rhyme in "The Weary Blues"

Langston Hughes has a very unique and powerful way with words. His poetry evokes such strong emotions that it is quite difficult not to fall in love with his writing. In just one stanza, he can make a black person proud of his African American heritage, proud of the strength of the black man's character, proud of the soul he possesses, and proud of the depths to which his emotions and spirituality reach. In his poem "The Weary Blues," Hughes creates a speaker who, while spending a night out on the town, listens to a black man singing the blues. A constant theme of pain and sorrow riddles throughout the black man's song. While listening, the speaker can fully grasp the intensity of the trials and tribulations this man has had to endure and overcome over the course of his life. This poem can be compared to the man's song in that both are deeply emotional, somber, and full of rhythm. Hughes is able to successfully convey the dark, solemn mood of the poem to the reader through his use of imagery and rhyme.

The setting takes place on Lenox Avenue, a street in Harlem, in the mid-1920s. The reader is constantly being bombarded by images of the night life and what life must have been like for black people during the twenties in the midst of the Harlem Renaissance. These people, dealing with an insurgence of independence, had not yet been accepted in true society but were making due with what life had dealt them. Black people were finally able to express themselves and did emphatically by means of paintings, sculptures, acting, and music. By doing so, they were able to open up a hot-bed of emotions that had been waiting to surface. The blues singer in the poem embodies everything that the Harlem Renaissance stood for, the ability to freely express one's feelings and to explore creativity through the medium of music.

The use of imagery is strong in this poem. Key words such as "drowsy," "mellow," "pale," "dull," and "melancholy," to name a few, suggest to the reader that the atmosphere surrounding the speaker is dark and laid-back. Even the lighting of the street is not enough to brighten up the surroundings, being that the only source of light mentioned is "the pale dull pallor of an old gas light" (5). The haziness of this light, mixed with the darkness of the night, evokes a sense of sluggishness in the environment. The singer further calms the night by singing his song and playing his piano. He has a unique talent in that he can make the piano come to life and take on human emotions. The speaker tells us that "he made that poor piano moan with melody" (10). So, not only does this musician make the speaker and the reader experience his pain, he can also control the feelings of an inanimate object, his piano. The most vivid image regarding the piano and the singer is that of "his ebony hands on each ivory key" (9). In the singer's era, the idea of black and white coming together to create harmony would be far-fetched, but he has achieved this goal by producing the melodic tune that comes out of the piano.

Imagery is an important aspect of this poem, but rhythm gives the poem a musical quality and makes it easier and more satisfying to read and listen to. End rhyme plays an important role in this poem because it helps to develop consistency and allows it to flow smoothly. The lines "Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool / He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool" (12-13) connect well together, like a comforting nursery rhyme. The use of motion words and onomatopoeia also contribute to the overall fluidity of the poem. The blues singer is constantly "rocking back and forth" (2) and "swaying to and fro" (12) throughout the poem. The thumping of the singer's foot serves as the underlying beat of the song, and the "rickety stool" (12) even has a rhythm that adds to the music. He puts his whole body and soul into the music and encourages the reader and the speaker to take hold of the rhythm and let loose with their own emotions.

The image of the beautiful night sky is enhanced by the addition of the moon and stars that eventually lull the singer to sleep. The perfect end to the perfect night is the deep and peaceful sleep that the man receives. His music was so profound and moving that "the Weary Blues echoed through his head" (34) while he slept. The imagery and rhythm

that Hughes uses in this poem is astounding because, though written almost eighty years ago, the reader can still put himself in the speaker's shoes. The reader can imagine hearing the singer's music and taking in all the sights and sounds of Harlem, New York in the 1920s. The rhythm of the poem is comforting and warm; one can almost hear the man playing his piano and singing his deeply touching song. Hughes created a moving poem of struggles and obstacles that was strangely not depressing. He wrote it in such a way as to revive one's spirit and rejuvenate the mind. He wanted to uplift the soul by telling this man's story, and he accomplished his goal.