

# Harlem Renaissance Poetry & African American Music

Title & Author	Summary	Your Reaction

**50-50**

**Langston Hughes**

I'm all alone in this world, she said,  
Ain't got nobody to share my bed,  
Ain't got nobody to hold my hand—  
The truth of the matter's  
I ain't got no man.

Big Boy opened his mouth and said,  
Trouble with you is  
You ain't got no head!  
If you had a head and used your mind  
You could have me with you  
All the time.

She answered, Babe, what must I do?

He said, Share your bed—  
And your money, too.

**I, Too**

**Langston Hughes**

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.  
They send me to eat in the kitchen  
When company comes,  
But I laugh,  
And eat well,  
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,  
I'll be at the table  
When company comes.  
Nobody'll dare  
Say to me,  
"Eat in the kitchen,"  
Then.

Besides,  
They'll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed--

I, too, am America.

**Harlem**  
**Langston Hughes**

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up  
like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore—  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over—  
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

**The Negro Speaks Of Rivers**  
**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.

**Mother to Son**  
**Langston Hughes**

Well, son, I'll tell you:  
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.  
It's had tacks in it,  
And splinters,  
And boards torn up,  
And places with no carpet on the floor—  
Bare.  
But all the time  
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 set down on the steps.  
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.  
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.

**Incident**  
**Countee Cullen**

Once riding in old Baltimore,  
Heart-filled, head-filled with glee,  
I saw a Baltimorean  
Keep looking straight at me.

Now I was eight and very small,  
And he was no whit bigger,  
And so I smiled, but he poked out  
His tongue, and called me, 'Nigger.'

I saw the whole of Baltimore  
From May until December;  
Of all the things that happened there  
That's all that I remember.

**Yet Do I Marvel**  
**Countee Cullen**

I doubt not God is good, well-meaning, kind  
And did He stoop to quibble could tell why  
The little buried mole continues blind,  
Why flesh that mirrors Him must some day  
die,  
Make plain the reason tortured Tantalus  
Is baited by the fickle fruit, declare  
If merely brute caprice dooms Sisyphus  
To struggle up a never-ending stair.  
Inscrutable His ways are, and immune  
To catechism by a mind too strewn  
With petty cares to slightly understand  
What awful brain compels His awful hand.  
Yet do I marvel at this curious thing:  
To make a poet black, and bid him sing!

**America**  
**Claude McKay**

Although she feeds me bread of bitterness,  
And sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth,  
Stealing my breath of life, I will confess  
I love this cultured hell that tests my youth!  
Her vigor flows like tides into my blood,  
Giving me strength erect against her hate.  
Her bigness sweeps my being like a flood.  
Yet as a rebel fronts a king in state,  
I stand within her walls with not a shred  
Of terror, malice, not a word of jeer.  
Darkly I gaze into the days ahead,  
And see her might and granite wonders  
there,  
Beneath the touch of Time's unerring hand,  
Like priceless treasures sinking in the sand.

**Harlem Shadows**  
**Claude McKay**

I hear the halting footsteps of a lass  
In Negro Harlem when the night lets fall  
Its veil. I see the shapes of girls who pass  
To bend and barter at desire's call.  
Ah, little dark girls who in slippared feet  
Go prowling through the night from street to  
street!

Through the long night until the silver break  
Of day the little gray feet know no rest;  
Through the lone night until the last snow-  
flake  
Has dropped from heaven upon the earth's  
white breast,  
The dusky, half-clad girls of tired feet  
Are trudging, thinly shod, from street to  
street.

Ah, stern harsh world, that in the wretched  
way  
Of poverty, dishonor and disgrace,  
Has pushed the timid little feet of clay,  
The sacred brown feet of my fallen race!  
Ah, heart of me, the weary, weary feet  
In Harlem wandering from street to street.

**Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing  
(Negro National Anthem)  
James Weldon Johnson**

Lift ev'ry voice and sing,  
'Til earth and heaven ring,  
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;  
Let our rejoicing rise  
High as the list'ning skies,  
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.  
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark  
past has taught us,  
Sing a song full of the hope that the present  
has brought us;  
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,  
Let us march on 'til victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,  
Bitter the chastening rod,  
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;  
Yet with a steady beat,  
Have not our weary feet  
Come to the place for which our fathers  
sighed?  
We have come over a way that with tears  
has been watered,  
We have come, treading our path through  
the blood of the slaughtered,  
Out from the gloomy past,  
'Til now we stand at last  
Where the white gleam of our bright star is  
cast.

God of our weary years,  
God of our silent tears,  
Thou who has brought us thus far on the  
way;  
Thou who has by Thy might  
Led us into the light,  
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.  
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God,  
where we met Thee,  
Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the  
world, we forget Thee;  
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,  
May we forever stand,

True to our God,  
True to our native land.

**Strange Fruit  
Abel Meeropol  
performed by Billie Holliday**

Southern trees bear a strange fruit  
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root  
Black body swinging in the Southern breeze  
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees

Pastoral scene of the gallant South,  
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,  
Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh,  
And the sudden smell of burning flesh!

Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck,  
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,  
For the sun to rot, for a tree to drop,  
Here is a strange and bitter crop.