

UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS IN BRATISLAVA
FACULTY OF APPLIED LANGUAGES

Registration number: *106006/B/2021/36114651033590788*

**THE LEGACY OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE
IN AMERICAN LITERATURE**

Bachelor thesis

2021

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FACULTY OF APPLIED LANGUAGES

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AMERICAN LITERATURE**

Bachelor thesis

Study Programme: Foreign Languages and Intercultural Communication
Study field: Philology
Consultation centre: Department of Linguistics and Translatology
Supervisor: Mgr. Silvia Adamcová, PhD.

Bratislava 2021

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Declaration

I hereby declare, that I have elaborated the final thesis independently and I have listed all the literature used.

Date:

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Signature

Acknowledgement

I hereby would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Mgr. Silvia Adamcová, PhD. for her patience and very helpful guidance throughout the process of writing this bachelor thesis. I would like to thank my family for their support and the University of Economics in Bratislava for providing an opportunity to gain valuable education. I am also thankful to the teachers of literature that inspire us to appreciate the wisdom and beauty of literature.

ABSTRAKT

MIKULA, Samuel: Odkaz hnutia Harlem Renaissance v americkej literatúre. – Ekonomická univerzita v Bratislave. Fakulta aplikovaných jazykov; Katedra jazykovedy a translatológie – Vedúci záverečnej práce: Mgr. Silvia Adamcová, PhD. - Bratislava: FAJ EU, 2021, 51 s.

Cieľom tejto bakalárskej práce je predstaviť a charakterizovať hnutie Harlemskej renesancie, vytvoriť prehľad rozličných druhov umenia so stručným popisom najvýznamnejších umelcov a ich diel, a nakoniec analyzovať a porovnať dve vybrané literárne diela z obdobia Harlemskej renesancie a zo súčasnosti. Táto bakalárska práca pozostáva zo štyroch kapitol a obsahuje dve prílohy. Úvodná kapitola sa venuje popisu súčasného stavu tejto problematiky na Slovensku a v zahraničí. Druhá kapitola predstavuje a definuje hnutie Harlemskej renesancie, a obsahuje jeho charakteristiku. Tretia kapitola obsahuje prehľad rôznych druhov umenia. Jej tri podkapitoly sa sústreďujú na literárne, múzické a vizuálne umenie, a každá z nich popisuje najdôležitejších umelcov a ich diela. Záverečná kapitola predstavuje empirický výskum tejto bakalárskej práce. Rozhodli sme sa analyzovať a následne porovnať dve významné diela poézie, aby sme zistili, ako sa zmenila alebo vyvinula problematika Afroameričanov a ich rasy a identity z perspektívy oceňovaných básnikov, ktorí zastupujú viaceré hnutia bojujúce za práva Afroameričanov. Prvú z nich vytvoril Langston Hughes počas obdobia Harlemskej renesancie, a druhá báseň Amandy Gorman zastupuje súčasnú Afroamerickú literatúru. Prvé dve podkapitoly tejto časti obsahujú stručné biografie autorov, popis vybraných diel a ich následnú podrobnú analýzu. Posledná podkapitola porovnáva tieto dve lyrické diela a poukazuje na ich podobnosti a odlišnosti.

Kľúčové slová: Harlemská renesancia, Afroameričania, literatúra, umenie, rasizmus, diskriminácia, protest

ABSTRACT

MIKULA, Samuel: *The Legacy of the Harlem Renaissance in American Literature* - University of Economics in Bratislava. Faculty of Applied Languages; Department of Linguistics and Translatology – Supervisor: Mgr. Silvia Adamcová, PhD. - Bratislava: FAJ EU, 2021, 51 p.

This bachelor thesis aims to introduce and characterize the Harlem Renaissance movement, to create an overview of the different categories of art with a brief description of the main artists and their works, and lastly, to analyze and compare two chosen literary works representing the Harlem Renaissance and the contemporary period. This bachelor thesis consists of four chapters and contains two appendices. The opening chapter is devoted to the literary review of the current state of research on our topic at home and abroad and describes the used sources. The second chapter contains an introduction to the Harlem Renaissance movement and provides its definition and characteristics. In the third chapter we present an overview of different categories of art of this movement. Its three subchapters focus on literary, performing, and visual arts, each describing the most important authors and their work. The final chapter contains the empirical research of this bachelor thesis. We have chosen to analyze and then compare two significant works of poetry in order to see if the issues of race and identity of African American people have changed or evolved in the eyes of award-winning poets that represent several movements that fight for the rights of African Americans. The first poem was created during the Harlem Renaissance by Langston Hughes, the second one was written by Amanda Gorman and represents contemporary African American literature. The first two subchapters contain brief biographies of the authors, a description of the chosen works, followed by a detailed analysis. The final subchapter compares these two pieces of poetry, and points to their similarities and differences.

Keywords: Harlem Renaissance, African Americans, literature, art, racism, discrimination, protest

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Introduction

Sixty years since the abolishment of slavery, racial discrimination and conflict still prevailed in the American society. African Americans were racially segregated, constantly discriminated in almost all areas of public life, underrepresented in political life, and frequently attacked by racist hate groups. A group of young African American writers and artists, guided by leading African American intellectuals and activists, tried to peacefully protest against this injustice and unite African Americans in a fight for the equality of civil rights and opportunities, through the use of their art and literature. Together they tried to create unity of African Americans by encouraging them to appreciate their heritage and to be proud of their culture. They aimed to change the negative stereotypical image of African Americans in the mostly white society toward a more positive one. By showing not only their suffering, but also their contribution to society and skill in art, they wanted to prove that they deserve equality.

In this thesis we aim to closely define and characterize the Harlem Renaissance movement and its background and message, and to provide an overview of its most important authors and artists and their work. Through the use of analysis and comparison of chosen representative works of this period and contemporary literature we aim to search for similarities and differences in order to examine its legacy in succeeding generations of American literature and its relevancy to the world of today.

The opening chapter informs about the current state of research in the topic of this bachelor thesis and describes the sources it uses. The following chapter defines and characterizes the period and the movement of the Harlem Renaissance. It also describes the preceding events substantial for its creation. The third chapter provides an overview of the most important works and authors of different categories of art of this movement. The last chapter represents the empirical research of our thesis. Its first subchapter provides a description and analysis of a chosen work of poetry from the Harlem Renaissance, and a short biography of its author. Similarly, the second subchapter describes and analyzes a representative piece of poetry of contemporary American literature, and offers a biography of the author. The final subchapter compares them and shows their similarities and differences.

1. Literary review of the current state of research on the chosen topic at home and abroad

In our country the subject of the Harlem Renaissance is not researched very broadly and is not a part of many academic publications. We have noticed that there already are a few final theses dealing with topic. But we have not found any relevant Slovak sources that would help us in the writing of this thesis.

Instead, we have used literary and academic sources coming mainly from the United States of America, where this topic started to be increasingly researched during the 1970s. We have found several publications focusing solely on the Harlem Renaissance movement, providing a complex image about this period and its background, together with a close examination of its significant works of art and their authors. We have tried to use possibly the newest sources, containing the most recent information.

By the creation of the theoretical part of this thesis, we have among many other academic sources used a book *Harlem Renaissance* by Kelly King Howes and Christine Slovey, offering a complex overview of this movement and its most significant personalities, and containing very relevant information while being written in a understandable way. (Howes & Slovey, 2001) We have utilized knowledge from several encyclopedias, such as the *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance* by Cary D. Wintz and Paul Finkelman, containing almost unlimited information about everything in connection to this subject. (Wintz & Finkelman, 2004) In addition to that, we have used several credible online sources.

In the practical part of this thesis we have worked with the primary literature by Langston Hughes and Amanda Gorman. (Hughes, 1995; Gorman, 2021) By the analyses of the chosen works we were mostly helped by *Poetry for students. Volume 45* and the *English Professor Steven Dooner's analysis of Amanda Gorman's 'The Hill We Climb.'* (Constantakis, 2014; JFYNetWorks, 2021)

2. The Harlem Renaissance and its background

This opening chapter is aimed to introduce, define, and briefly characterize the Harlem Renaissance, to allow a broader analysis and interpretation of the main aspects of this movement and its legacy later in the thesis. It provides a definition of the Harlem Renaissance, its time and location setting, and aims to shortly explain its philosophy and importance.

The Harlem Renaissance, also known as **The Negro Renaissance or New Negro Movement**, was a period of an intense blossoming of African American art and culture. It was an era of unprecedented African American artistic creativity, most notably in **literature**, but also in **music** and **dancing, painting, sculpting, theater**, and many other art forms, which touched almost every aspect of African American life and culture. It began approximately after the end of the World War I, peaked during the 1920s and faded away in the middle to late 1930s. Its main center was in Harlem, a mostly African American neighborhood in the northern section of the New York City borough of Manhattan, which became a symbolic capital of African American culture. In this time in U.S. there was a strict racial segregation and African Americans were discriminated in all branches of life. By the majority of the society, they were stereotypically viewed as inferior.

Representatives of this “movement,” the African American leaders and the younger authors and artists, had a common goal and wanted to uplift the position of African Americans. With the help of literature and art they sought to induce a racial pride and change the negative stereotypical image of African Americans, both in their own eyes and eyes of the whites. They wanted to show what African Americans are capable of to fight the inequality. According to Howes & Slovey (2001), although these writers, artists and performers were active during the same period, they did not have enough in common to form a movement, as they all did not follow the same rules and had opposing ideas.⁽⁵⁾ Hutchinson (2007) also notes, that it was not a cohesive movement, and sees it as *“a product of overlapping social and intellectual circles, parallel developments, intersecting groups, and competing visions – yet all loosely bound together by a desire for racial self-assertion and self-definition in the face of white supremacy.”*
(1)

There are no exact temporal boundaries of this period and they also vary between the artistic categories. The Harlem Renaissance begins roughly after the end of the World War I. Years

between 1924 and 1929 are considered as its zenith. For the first time ever, African American art was in vogue. White Americans were fascinated by it and considered it exotic or modern. Books from African American authors became bestsellers, African American music was the most popular, and exhibitions of African American art attracted many visitors. The downfall of the Harlem Renaissance is connected to the beginning of the Great Depression in 1929, the most significant economic crisis of the 20th century, which affected the whole society, and lasted up until 1939. The crisis strongly affected both the ordinary African Americans, causing unemployment and poverty, and the artists, causing less opportunities and financial support. But the production of literature and art continued in the 1930s. African Americans faced a huge discrimination in employment, as they were the first to be let go and the last to be employed. Another important event was the end of Prohibition in 1933, which devastated the nightlife in Harlem. A riot in Harlem in 1935, during which Harlemites looted white-owned stores and attacked the police, shattered the positive public image of Harlem. The year 1937 is considered to be the end of the Harlem Renaissance era, when many important figures stopped creating or have died. Moreover, the works of Richard Wright after 1937 mark a turning point from a literary point of view. (Hutchinson, 2007: 5-8; Wintz & Finkelman, 2004: 6).

Besides lower- and middle-class African Americans there were also many talented writers, artists, and musicians, who moved to New York and specifically to **Harlem**. It provided them a place, where they could express themselves freely, and thanks to their creativity Harlem, also known as "the Mecca of the New Negro," became the center of African American spirit and identity. In these times the neighborhood attracted white Americans to experience African American culture with its famous playhouses, cabarets, and dozens of musical clubs. Harlem's unique and legendary nightlife offered them a "*chance to see and hear the best jazz and blues musicians in the world, watch talented dancers, and immerse themselves in a lively atmosphere,*" which was "*unlike anything white society offered.*" (Herringshaw, 2012:8). Besides Harlem, African American culture and art flourished in other Northern cities, for example **Chicago**, Los Angeles or Washington D.C. The influence of the Renaissance spread not only through the whole U.S, but also to other places in the world like Africa, Europe or the Caribbean. It also inspired the literary and cultural movement of francophone writers called Negritude.

The Harlem Renaissance had a big impact on the development of African American culture in almost all areas. It made many white Americans notice the works of African American art. By building a new sense of a positive African American identity and spreading art, reflecting the African American culture, and challenging the racist stereotypes, it changed how African Americans were viewed upon by many white Americans. The movement also inspired and influenced future generations of African American writers, artists, and activists. By making many African Americans proud of their race, culture, and heritage, it encouraged them to more participation in a fight for equal rights and provided grounds for the later **Civil Rights Movement** in the 1950s and 1960s. Black History Month, an annual memory of the accomplishments in African American history, was also established during this period in 1926, originally named Negro History Week. (Hutchinson, 2007:3)

2.1 Origins and background of the Harlem Renaissance

For a better understanding of the events that played an important role in the rise of African American culture and art during the Harlem Renaissance we will present the following background of the movement. This subchapter deals with African American history and their struggles with racial oppression and discrimination. It describes the causes that played a big role in creation of this era, such as the **Jim Crow laws**, **the Great Migration**, or the **World War I**.

The Harlem Renaissance is closely connected with African American history, and their constant struggle with unequal civil rights and racial discrimination. During the **slavery** period, slaves were forced to work hard mainly on plantations, without getting paid, and were considered property of their owners. Their basic human rights were denied, and slavery was an inherited condition. In the North, slavery was gradually abolished between the 1780s and the 1810s, but the Southern states resisted to give up the slavery system, which escalated into the Civil War. After its end and the ratification of 13th Amendment in 1865, African Americans in the South were finally freed from slavery, and after the ratification of the 14th and 15th Amendment in 1868 and 1870, they were granted American citizenship and voting rights. African Americans were optimistic and dreamed of more participation in American society, and equal economic and political opportunities. The previously unpaid labor transitioned to paid labor, producing frustration and anger of the previous slave owners. (Kelley & Lewis, 2000: 8-

12) Soon an agricultural system called “sharecropping” was created. African Americans could rent land by giving the landowners a percentage of their harvest, but this system was unfair and designed to keep them poor and powerless. (The Smithsonian, 2020¹)

During the Reconstruction period (1865 - 1877), the U.S. Army stayed in the South to preserve order, and government agencies were helping the newly freed African Americans with their problems and obtaining jobs. But after the army left in 1877, things started to get back as they were before. Soon a set of laws, called Jim Crow laws, were passed in the Southern states, but later spread to the North as well. These laws introduced a strict racial segregation, prohibiting African Americans from inhabiting the same physical spaces as whites, or having the same privileges. African Americans had to be separated in all areas of life. Not only in private establishments as restaurants, stores, or theaters, but also in schools, hospitals, trains and buses, churches or at work. Interracial marriage was prohibited too. By claiming that these facilities are “separate but equal,” they got around the 14th Amendment. African Americans also couldn’t exercise their voting rights, after the introduction of high poll taxes or the “grandfather clauses.” (Howes & Slovey, 2001:6,7)

Close to the end of the 19th century, the agricultural production in the South plummeted due to floods, droughts, and the infestation of cotton plants with “boll weevils” insects. The African American sharecroppers became largely indebted and the racial tensions worsened. Hate groups as the Ku Klux Klan, which terrorized African Americans and intimidated them from exercising their rights, rose in popularity. The number of lynchings (a violent practice of murder using methods as hanging, burning, or shooting) increased. These were usually overlooked by the authorities, and terrified African Americans. (Howes & Slovey, 2001:7)

At the beginning of the 20th century, the vast majority of African Americans lived in the Southern states of the USA. Since 1890s, because of harsh racial discrimination, poor economic conditions, and the increased terror of racist hate groups, they started to move to the industrialized North, seeking safer living conditions and new opportunities. This was the beginning of the Great Migration, during which, between 1890 and 1920, around 2 million of African Americans moved from the South to the North. (Howes & Slovey, 2001:8) The migration peaked during the World War I, which caused a huge labor shortage, as the demand

¹ The Smithsonian Museum: A New African American Identity: The Harlem Renaissance
(<https://nmaahc.si.edu/blog-post/new-african-american-identity-harlem-renaissance>)

for industrial products increased, and the workforce consisting of European immigrants and American men departed to Europe to fight in the war. As a result, the northern companies started heavily recruiting African Americans from the South, offering well paid jobs, free transportation, and cheap accommodation. Besides that, better educational opportunities and greater personal freedom also attracted African Americans to move to cities such as New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, or Baltimore, resulting in growing African American communities. (Crew, 1987²)

This migration of African Americans to New York was key for the development of the Harlem Renaissance. The community in Harlem grew from a tiny two-block enclave in 1900, to 14,000 blacks in 1914, later to 175,000 by 1925, and by the beginning of the Depression, there were more than 200,000 African American inhabitants, what has made it a center of their culture. The interaction of blacks from all parts of the United States and distant Africa led to the growth of a highly race-conscious, sophisticated community. It was a place of ideological and artistic freedom, attracting a remarkable concentration of intellect and talent, which contributed to the unprecedented upsurge of African American culture and art. (Wintz & Finkelman, 2004 :898)

The participation of African Americans in the WWI also had an effect on their racial consciousness. Many of them resented the idea of fighting for a country that discriminates them, but they also viewed it as an opportunity to show they deserve equality. Several hundred thousand African American soldiers voluntarily joined the army, but they had to be segregated and under the lead of white officers. They were sent to France, and even though most of them had to do menial work and did not get to the battlefield, the exception was the 369th regiment. They spent 191 days in combat, more than any other American unit, and were nicknamed The Harlem Hellfighters by the Germans. 170 of these soldiers were awarded military medals by the French, but did not get any medals from their homeland, until in 2015 Barack Obama posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor to a famous soldier Henry Johnson, who fought off a German raid and saved a soldier.³ Most famous is their glorious parade through New York and Harlem after their return in 1919, which was celebrated by a quarter of a million of African

²CREW, Spencer R. 1987. *The Great Migration of Afro-Americans, 1915-40*.

<https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/1987/03/art5full.pdf>

³RAY, Michael. *Harlem Hellfighters*. Encyclopedia Britannica, 18 Apr. 2020.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Harlem-Hellfighters/Discrimination-at-home-and-fame-abroad>

Americans, and is sometimes recognized as the beginning of the renaissance. This experience made African Americans more self-aware and less willing to tolerate the mistreatment and injustice. Important to mention is also a military band led by James Reese Europe, credited with introducing American jazz to Europe. (Howes & Slovey, 2001:9-10; Wintz & Finkelman, 2004:375-376)

The last important event, named by James Weldon Johnson as the “Red Summer of Hate,” happened in mid-1919. By this time, the Ku Klux Klan grew into a nationwide organization, with millions of members or supporters, which carried out violent acts against blacks and other minorities. During this summer 83 blacks were lynched. African Americans refused to accept this quietly, which caused bloody race riots in 26 American cities. (Howes & Slovey, 2001:10). In response to this, Claude McKay wrote his most famous poem *If We Must Die*:

“If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we’ll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying but fighting back!”⁴

⁴ McKay, 1999: 181

2.2 African American Leaders and Organizations

This subchapter will shortly introduce the most important African American leaders, intellectuals, and activists, as well as some organizations supporting African Americans, as they provided a strong foundation for the development of the Harlem Renaissance. As most of the key writers and authors were young and only at the beginning of their careers, these experienced elders encouraged and nurtured them to create art, that would help the position of African Americans in the society.

The most important was **W.E.B Du Bois**, the leading African American intellectual of the early 20th century. Well educated, with degrees from Fisk University and a doctorate in history from Harvard, he was committed to fighting for full civil equality for African Americans, writing essays and books which would later influence almost all of the Harlem Renaissance authors. He directly contributed to the establishment of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909 and moved to New York to be its director of publicity. He edited its monthly journal *The Crisis*, in which he supported the cause of African Americans. He recognized that artistic and literary production could be a way of accomplishing African Americans' dream of justice and respect, and established himself as a patron, mentor and later a critic to the emerging Harlem Renaissance movement. In *The Crisis* together with its literary editor Jessie Fauset they provided opportunities for young black writers by organizing literary competitions. Among others they discovered Langston Hughes and published his first poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" in 1921. Du Bois believed that the artists should not focus on their own individual views and expressions, but on the advancement of blacks as a whole, and encouraged them to always portray the blacks as dignified and respectable. In his essay "Criteria of Negro Art" he emphasizes the role of the art and the political responsibilities of the black writers to represent their race, which can be seen in his famous words: "All art is propaganda, and ever must be..." Many authors for example Countee Cullen, shared his opinions, but some like Langston Hughes strongly disagreed. Du Bois also opposed the music of jazz, as he viewed it as vulgar and a bad representation of African Americans. (Howes & Slovey, 2001:13; Wintz & Finkelman, 2004: 311-316)

The next important personality was James Weldon Johnson, a well educated and very versatile and talented man, who after pursuing several careers such as a diplomat, or a lawyer,

became the first black head of the NAACP in 1920. He blended a quiet integrity, forceful ideas, and natural modesty. In 1912 he anonymously published his unique novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, a complex psychological portrait of a self-indulgent man, alienated by both races, and victimized by the racist values of American society. Johnson highly valued African American folk traditions and believed that the new art of black artists should look up to their rich cultural heritage. (Howes & Slovey, 2001:17, Wintz & Finkelman, 2004:629-631)

The last important African American intellectual we will mention is Alain Locke, a professor at Howard University, who always helped and encouraged African American artists, and prompted them to examine their heritage and express their own voices and visions. He was a mentor to the younger generation of artists. In the essential document of the Harlem Renaissance *The New Negro: An Interpretation* published in 1925, he explains the aims of the movement and signifies its creativity. This anthology gathered essays on African American art and literature, as well as reflections on broader social issues, and included generous selections of African American fiction, poetry, and drama from many talented young authors like **Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer**, and many others, which has helped them in their careers. (Howes & Slovey, 2001: 14-15; Wintz & Finkelman, 2004: 600-601)

3. The Forms of Art of The Harlem Renaissance

In this chapter we aim to provide an overview of the types of art which the Harlem Renaissance encompassed. It concentrates on its movements of literary, performing, and visual arts. It briefly describes and characterizes each type of art during this era, mentions the main figures and describes their work, meaning and importance.

3.1 Literary arts

The self-conscious literary movement of the Harlem Renaissance is viewed as the most important from all forms of art. Before this period there were many African American literary works advocating their cause since 18th century, for example by Frederick Douglass, a writer of slave narratives, or Charles W. Chestnutt. But this literature never important or interesting for the mostly white American society. The authors of Harlem Renaissance and their literary works often protested against dispossession, poverty, and racial prejudice, and are most significant for their articulation of a positive sense of black identity and their attempts to promote black consciousness. Many of the important writers of this movement lived in Harlem, which was regarded as the center of African American literature. The Harlem Renaissance literature is wide-varied. It illustrates the complexity and richness of black experience and demonstrates an emancipation from the cultural stereotyping. (Stringer, 1996: 283). The Harlem Renaissance literature was influenced by ideas and views of important African American leaders, but not all writers created according to them. Langston Hughes in his essay *The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain*, published in 1926, explains the spirit of his generation of artists:

*“We younger artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn’t matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn’t matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.”*⁵

⁵ In Howes & Slovey, 2001:35

3.1.1 Poetry

Important predecessors to the poetry of this period were Phillis Wheatley, the first African American author of a published book of poetry, George Moses Horton, the first black poet to protest slavery, or Paul Laurence Dunbar, who is regarded as one of the first accomplished African American poets, and his poetry was imitated by poets succeeding him.

The most famous poet and a star of the Harlem Renaissance was **Langston Hughes**, who also wrote two novels, and many plays, short stories, or essays. He was a socially committed poet and his poetry focuses on the low and middle classes of African American society, with whom he identifies and empathizes. His first famous poem *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* is concerned with the past and African American heritage. In 1926 he published his first collection of poems, *The Weary Blues*, which uses modern forms, characteristically employs rhythms of jazz and blues, and provides an experience of African American culture portraying it with realism and dignity, while expressing racial pride. His next poetry collection, *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927), was very controversial, as it portrayed the best but also the worst of Harlem, including prostitutes or heavy drinkers. His critics disapproved of his interest with lower class residents, but his supporters appreciated his honesty, compassion, and skill. Many of his poems deal with racial themes, protesting discrimination and inequality, but many celebrate African American culture and take inspiration from African American history, religion or music. Music was very important to him, in his poetry he uses it in many forms, as a rhythm, form of verses, vocabulary, or themes. His works during the 1930s, the years of the Great Depression, involved more militant social protest. Since 1940, he published the first installment of his two-part autobiography *The Big Sea*, two more collections of poetry, and numerous important pieces of drama, and regularly contributed to African American magazines, such as the *Chicago Defender*. (Gray, 2011: 488-489; Howes & Slovey, 2001: 56-60)

A renowned poet and a literary editor of an important journal *Opportunity* **Countee Cullen** belonged to the most significant figures of the Harlem Renaissance. He represents a dramatic contrast to Langston Hughes as they had very differing views. Cullen created according to the ideas of African American leaders, portraying blacks in a favorable way likeable to the whites. They also differed in their views of racial identity, where Hughes was proud to be black, Cullen wanted to be known simply as a poet, not a black poet. This is also reflected in his works, as he

took example from British poets of romanticism and used traditional forms of poetry. His most important collection of poems is *Color* (1925), focusing on racial topics but also on love, nature, or friendship. In his best-known poem *Yet Do I Marvel* he asks why would God make a poet black and “bid him sing,” meaning his poetry would not be appreciated because of racism.⁶ In a poem named *Heritage* he thinks about the history of African Americans, polemizes about his connection to Africa, and asks “what is Africa to me?”⁷ The poem *Incident* is about his first encounter with racism as a child on a trip, when he smiled on a young white boy who in response called him a “nigger.”⁸ Cullen produced three more collections, *Copper Sun* (1927), *Black Christ and Other Poems* (1929) and *The Medea and Some Poems* (1935). He also married W.E.B. Du Bois’ daughter, Nina Yolande. (Howes & Slovey, 2001: 60-62)

A poet with Jamaican ancestry, **Claude McKay**, became famous after the publication of his most famous poem *If We Must Die* in 1919, which advocated violent resistance to violence. Collection of poems *Harlem Shadows* (1922), containing vivid portraits of Harlem life, established McKay as a major poet of the Harlem Renaissance. His other poems deal with lynching, slavery and its heritage, or the relationship with Harlem. (Howes & Slovey, 2001:63)

James Weldon Johnson was in addition to being one of the African American leaders also a skilled and accomplished poet. His finest literary work is the collection of poetry named *God’s Trombones*, a deeply moving work reflecting the depth of religious experience, serving as a tribute to African American spirituality. (Howes & Slovey, 2001: 55)

Other significant poets included Sterling Brown, Gwendolyn Bennett, Arna Bontemps or Helene Johnson. Here we provide an example of poetry by Langston Hughes, his first published poem *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*:

“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.

⁶ Poetry Foundation: *Yet Do I Marvel* by Countee Cullen. www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42611/yet-do-i-marvel.

⁷ Poetry Foundation: *Heritage* by Countee Cullen. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42619/heritage-56d2213a97c6c>.

⁸ Poetry Foundation: *Incident* by Countee Cullen. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42618/incident-56d2213a45f36>.

*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.”*⁹

3.1.2 Fiction

Jean Toomer was a contributor to African American journals and produced many works of social criticism, an expressionist drama, and a variety of novels. His masterpiece *Cane*, an innovative hybrid of poetry and prose published in 1923, deals with his Southern inheritance and is an homage to African American folk culture. The South is depicted as a place of racial prejudice and violence, but containing a romantic night world and a vibrant folk culture. The city life in the North, is depicted even worse, with poverty, insecurity in the society, racial conflict and without any sense of folk culture or community. (Gray, 2011: 485)

Walter White, one of the most active African American leaders, in 1924 published an important novel *The Fire in the Flint*, which exposed the true horrors of racism in the South. The main character, a black physician, tries to help people in his town, but in the end, he is lynched. (Howes & Slovey, 2001:45)

Wallace Thurman, a talented poet, playwright, editor, and novelist, was a master of both satire and irony. Besides writing his popular play “Harlem” also wrote three notable novels. One of them, *The Blacker the Berry* from 1929, explored the subject of taboo, interracial prejudice, and self-hatred. The title comes from a common African American saying: “The blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice,” which, as well as the novel, celebrates blackness. The work explores the development of a dark-skinned African American girl confronting both the prejudice because of her dark skin color and her own negative self-image, a result of internalized racism. Later she accepts her black skin and starts experiencing freedom. (Howes & Slovey, 2001: 51)

⁹ Hughes, 1995: 23

Claude McKay also wrote three novels, in which he applied a mixture of racial concern and sensuous impulse, with especial clarity and intensity. His realistic novel *Home to Harlem* (1928) became the first bestseller by an African American author but was strongly criticized by the black leaders.

There were also important representants of women literature. **Jessie Redmon Fauset** was a pioneer in exposing the experience of African American women. She wrote four novels, depicting the experience of dark-skinned women, that all insisted on the need to accept the African American inheritance rather than escape it.

Nella Larsen is famous for her two novels *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929). Larsen's major characters are intelligent and sophisticated women of mixed race. They are caught up in troublesome confusions of race, gender, and class, and struggling in the complex society. *Quicksand* deals with the story of a woman with mixed heritage, which complicates her search for security and self-realization. *Passing* is about two mixed-race women "passing", what means pretending to be white, one of them marrying a racist white husband, and the other an African American physician. Both novels deal with racial and sexual identity and involve elements of modernism (Gray, 2011: 482-484).

Zora Neale Hurston is regarded as one of the key figures of this movement. She was born in Alabama and lived in Florida, before moving to Harlem in 1925. During the 1920s she wrote short fiction featuring rich descriptions of black life. During the 1930s she published three novels, but she is most famous for the second one. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* published in 1937 was a masterpiece. It is accurately written in an African American dialect, concentrating on issues of African American women, and is a representation of racial and gender oppression. This work is praised for the accurate and warm portrayal of the African American life in the South, and the central character Janie Woods, a strong, impassioned, and self-sufficient woman. This work inspired many later African American women writers, for example Alice Walker or Toni Morrison. (Stringer, 1996: 661; Howes & Slovey, 2001: 47)

Other notable fiction writers of this period include Rudolph Fisher, Arna Bontemps, George Schuyler or Eric Walrond.

3.2 Performing arts

In the times of racism and racial segregation, African American music and theatre were vital in overcoming these barriers and spreading African American culture. Visiting Harlem to experience its culture became popular between white Americans. This trend was called “Harlemania.”

3.2.1 *Music and dancing*

Music was an essential part of The Harlem Renaissance and was vital in popularizing the African American culture, and the 1920s are often called as “the Jazz Age.” It had the broadest reach of all artforms. Before the literature and visual art got their recognition, African American music genres of jazz and blues were already famous worldwide. But these new genres of music were actually disapproved by the African American leaders perceiving them as vulgar and worsening the image of their culture. Despite this, the music of Harlem’s nightclubs inspired several literary authors, particularly Langston Hughes.

Musical genres of blues, ragtime, and jazz originate from African American folk music, work songs or spirituals, sung by slaves while working in terrible conditions on the plantations of the slavery-dominated South. Firstly, the secular musical form of **blues**, developed from the sorrow-filled laments sung during the hard work. The singers express anguish, challenges or humors of their lives and their lyrics often blend heartbreaking sadness with straightforward honesty. The pace is typically slow, and the tone is melancholic and mournful. Themes often used are failure in love, sexuality, misery, or the injustices the African Americans had to face. (Aberjhani & West, 2003: 37)

Blues developed in cities such as New Orleans or Memphis, and since the beginning of the 20th century, was together with other cultural aspects spread by migrating African Americans. Many talented musicians moved to Chicago and New York, which have later become centers of African American music. During the Harlem Renaissance, blues was popularized by famous singers **Ethel Waters**, **Ma Rainey**, **Mamie Smith**, or **Bessie Smith**, enjoying great popularity and selling millions of records.

New Orleans is also considered as the birthplace of **jazz**. It has evolved out of blues and ragtime, combining their elements with many other elements from different cultures. The defining qualities of jazz music were improvisation, combative contrast, and discontinuity. Early important jazz musicians were for example Jerry Roll Morton, producing many recognized masterpieces, or James Reece Europe, who popularized jazz music in France. The most important jazz musicians during the Harlem Renaissance were **Duke Ellington, Fletcher Henderson, or Louis Armstrong**. Several types of dance are associated with jazz, for example, **the Charleston**, created in the 1920s, and tap dance, which became internationally popular with the rise of the African American music. (Aberjhani, 2003: 170-171)

During the 1920s, Harlem possessed a vibrant and legendary night scene, and attracted a remarkable concentration of the best African American musicians. This was also helped by the arrival of Prohibition in 1920, which supported the creation of very popular nightclubs or secret taverns, where alcohol was served illegally, and jazz and blues music was played. In the 1920s and 1930s, Harlem had an incredible number of clubs, cabarets, and other nightspots. Some of them allowed strictly white and wealthy audiences, which were provided entertainment by African American performers, for example The Cotton Club, opened in 1923. and soon became one of. This segregationist club belonged to the most glamorous places in New York and featured the best African American performers, between the residents of Harlem it but was very unpopular. On the other hand, there were also many places, where skin color was unimportant and members of all races enjoyed the music and danced together. The Savoy Ballroom, opened in 1926, took place of an entire city block and offered a giant dancefloor and elegant equipment. Performances by leading bands and singers of this era, including L. Armstrong, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday, created a great atmosphere and made it a delightful oasis of integration. (Hillstrom, 2008: 66-68)

3.2.2 Theater and acting

One of the first important theatrical events of the Harlem Renaissance was a jazz musical, produced and performed entirely by African Americans, called “Shuffle Along.” It opened in 1921, became a Broadway hit, and enjoyed a run of 504 performances. This musical featured a crowd-pleasing blend of lively jazz dancing, spirited singing, and romantic drama,

and launched the careers of leading performers, for example, a famous dancer Josephine Baker, or a cabaret singer and dancer Florence Mills. Its immense success brought attention and public interest to African American performances, and for the rest of the 1920s, musical revues written, directed, and performed by African American artists regularly appeared on Broadway. It also led to the establishment of many dancing schools teaching the Charleston, the Black Bottom, the Lindy Hop, types of dance popularized by African Americans. (Hillstrom, 2008: 59-61)

In the 1920s, African American actors and actresses, such as a theatrical star Paul Robeson, were more successful than ever before. Popular theatrical performances included a 1927 drama “In Abraham’s Bosom” by Paul Green, which won a Pulitzer Prize and featured an only African American cast, or the 1929 Broadway hit “Harlem” by Wallace Thurman. Many African American acting groups and organizations were founded in the 1920s, such as “the Negro Art Theatre” or “the National Colored Players.” (Hillstrom, 2008: 62-63).

3.3 Visual Arts

During the Harlem Renaissance, it was for the first time that African American painting and sculpting achieved critical and popular success in the United States. African American visual arts reached its zenith later than music and literature, as the first sustained wave of important African-American art did not emerge until the late 1920s. Important for the development of visual arts were the publication of the *New Negro* anthology, featuring illustrations by black artists, and the establishment of the Harmon Foundation in 1926, which organized yearly competitions for talented artists, aimed to promote their art and help interracial relations, launching careers of many artists, for example **Aaron Douglas**, who is considered one of the greatest of the Harlem Renaissance artists.

Douglas was inspired by African traditions and modern trends such as cubism. His works combined the visual style of flat forms and hard geometric shapes with images from both the past and present African American life, and provided a “*striking vision of the modern black American spirit*” (Hillstrom, 2008: 99). His illustrations appeared in many major African American journals and in books by the most popular Renaissance writers. His most famous work is a series of four murals created in 1934 named *Aspects of Negro Life*, blending elements from history, religion, politics, and social studies. (Howes & Slovey, 2001: 110-111)

Besides Douglas, many other artists were made essential artistic contributions, for example, painters such as Palmer C. Hayden, who interpreted folklore and working-class life, Archibald J. Motley, known for his paintings of urban social life and realistic portraits, or Lois Mailou Jones. Renowned sculptors included Augusta Savage and Richmond Barthé. James van der Zee was a leading artist in the field of photography. He documented all aspects of Harlem's social, economic, and cultural life, and captured the leading personalities of the Harlem Renaissance. (Hillstrom, 2008: 71)

4. The Legacy of Harlem Renaissance in American Literature

In the practical part of this bachelor thesis we will describe, analyze, and then compare two chosen works of poetry, one from the period of Harlem Renaissance, and one very recent poem as a representation of contemporary period. In the following subchapter we summarize the aims of the thesis, and describe the research we will conduct, and the methods we will use.

4.1 Aims, methods and empirical research

Naturally, before the beginning of writing this bachelor thesis, we have determined its main and partial aims. The first partial aim was to introduce the period of the Harlem Renaissance, as it is a mostly unknown topic in our country and has been a subject of very few final theses. Therefore, we aimed to closely define and characterize the period of the Harlem Renaissance, its aims, philosophy and background, as well as the main figures shaping and influencing the movement, to allow a more detailed analysis of the works of this period later in the thesis. As the Harlem Renaissance brought an important breakthrough of African American creativity in many forms of art, the next partial aim of the thesis was to create an overview of these types of art (such as music and performance art, visual arts and literature), each describing the most popular authors and artists, their most important works and their significance for the African American culture and literature. The main aim of this bachelor thesis is to compare the selected literary work from the period of the Harlem Renaissance with a work of literature from the contemporary period of American literature. We aim to analyze these works, to find the similarities or differences, and to examine the impact of the Harlem Renaissance on the following periods of American literature and the relevancy of its ideas in the present.

We have chosen to compare two literary artists and one literary medium for the empirical research. For the representation of the Harlem Renaissance, we have chosen to compare a significant work of poetry from Langston Hughes, one of the most active, most published, and most beloved poets of this period. He was a socially conscious poet, sympathizing with minorities and lower classes of the society, and his works promoted equality, condemned racism and injustice, and celebrated African American culture. We chose to analyze and interpret his poem *Let America Be America Again*, because of its similarity with a significant work of

contemporary poetry, a *poem The Hill We Climb* by a young, but already popular poet Amanda Gorman, created for the occasion of inauguration of the new American President Joseph R. Biden. This poem was listened to by millions of people from the whole world watching the event, and received praise and very positive reviews. Its main theme is America, and it deals not only with contemporary and very recent events, but also with the American history and future as well. This poem vouches for the values of peace, equality, and unity, and is meant to bring hope to American nation in uneasy times. It also contains elements of African American protest against racism. Both of these poems reflect on the situation in America and polemize about its fulfillment of its ground values.

With regard to the methods, for the definition, description and overview of the Harlem Renaissance we have concluded a thorough research of primary and secondary literature dealing with this topic, to select the most relevant information essential for this thesis. For the practical research we will employ methods of analysis and comparison. First, we will analyze the selected works of Harlem Renaissance poetry and fiction. We will try to break down the subject of the research into smaller parts and examine them individually, to give a better understanding of the problem as a whole. We will then compare the results of the analysis of selected works, to determine the similarities or differences between these works, to conclude the influence of the Harlem Renaissance on succeeding periods of American literature.

4.2 A Comparison of Harlem Renaissance and Contemporary Poetry

In this subchapter we will conduct the empirical research of this bachelor thesis. This subchapter is divided into three parts. The first two parts provide a short biography of both authors containing information helpful for a better understanding of their work, a description of the works chosen to represent the Harlem Renaissance and contemporary literature, followed by a detailed analysis of the work. The final part consists of a comparison of the literary periods, the authors and their works, aiming to find similarities or differences, reflecting on the legacy and influence of Harlem Renaissance.

4.2.1 *Langston Hughes*

James Mercer Langston Hughes is one of the most famous and celebrated African American poets of all times. Born in 1902 in Joplin, Missouri, he had a mixed heritage but he and his family identified as blacks. He lived mainly with his mother, a schoolteacher, who also liked to write poetry, and his grandmother, who taught him the oral traditions of black Americans and embedded in him the sense of racial pride. His father could not become a lawyer due to his race. Frustrated by the poverty and racism, left his family and moved to Mexico. Despite the Jim Crow segregation, he attended a white elementary school, where he suffered from racism. In high school, his writing talent was discovered. He left the Columbia University in New York after one year because of racial prejudice and worked in different jobs to support himself. Thanks to participating in a poetry contest of the *Opportunity* magazine and won a scholarship to attend the Lincoln University and graduated in 1929. (Howes & Slovey, 2001: 203-207)

During his career spanning for five decades, he became one of the central figures of the Harlem Renaissance. His works of the 1920s deal with themes of African American identity and heritage, and fuse elements of African American culture, such as their language, religion, and music. He creatively portrayed both the positive and negative side of African American life. In the 1930s, especially in response to the Great Depression, certain features of his poetry changed as he began to feel the need for radical political action. He then wrote his most radical poems, as well as some of the most poignant lamentations on the difference between American social ideals and American social reality, such as his 1935 anthem *Let America Be America Again*. After the end of the Renaissance, in his poetry Hughes returned to his older themes, and wrote articles for African American magazines and books for children. (Hughes, 1995 :4)

The life and remarkable career of Langston Hughes “underscore the richness, power, and depth of the Harlem Renaissance.” (Brown, 2006:258) His works depicted the life and culture of African Americans with artistry and realism, and celebrated their culture and heritage. He concentrated on the lower classes, brought awareness to their problems with discrimination and inequality, and advocated freedom and equality for all Americans. He won several prestigious prizes, including the Harmon Foundation Gold medal for literature, Guggenheim Fellowship, or the Spingarn Medal awarded by the NAACP. Until his death in 1967, he was a

defender of human rights, revealing the sorrowful emotions of African Americans suffering from injustice, and calling for unity and cooperation among all races. His ashes rest in Harlem, where he lived for the most of his life.

4.2.1.1 *Let America Be America Again*

Langston Hughes wrote the poem *Let America Be America Again* in 1935, during the late years of the Harlem Renaissance era and the period of the long-lasting Great Depression. In this time there was still racial segregation of African Americans and racism, discrimination, and inequality prevailed in American society. First published in 1936 in the magazine *Esquire*, this poem, using simple language and clear images reveals Hughes's thoughts about the current state of America, and what it should be like, and protests against social and racial inequality. Besides racism, African Americans faced also the problems of poverty, deepened by the economic crisis. Worsened by a discrimination in employment, the unemployment rates for African Americans were estimated to be 30 to 50 percent higher than among whites. The desperate workers often went on strikes to protest against unfair working conditions, but were mostly denied.¹⁰

Let America Be America Again discusses various themes; most importantly, the failure of the American Dream of peace, equality, liberty and happiness. It criticizes the injustice, of it not being possible to be achieved by not only the discriminated African Americans, but also by other minorities and groups of underprivileged people, such as poor whites, Native Americans, or the immigrants.

The poem portrays the difficult situation in the past and the present time of its writing and shows examples of unfairness or suffering. Despite that, the final lines are encouraging and show hope that America can be remade into the country it should be. Through this poem Hughes appeals to recreate a better America, a land of dreams that offers everyone, including African Americans, other minorities and oppressed people, the rights and the opportunities they were promised.

¹⁰ Constantakis, 2014. *Poetry for Students, Volume 45*.

4.2.1.2 Analysis of the poem “*Let America Be America Again*”

The poem is written in a free verse. It contains stanzas of varying lengths and does not follow a traditional structure. The first three stanzas use a form similar to a traditional Shakespearean sonnet, but this pattern is interrupted by the lines in parentheses.¹¹ The rest of the poem does not have any established meter or rhyme scheme. This lack of consistent structure is purposeful and signifies the imperfection of America.

The poem contains a rich variety of literary devices, including metaphors, imagery, symbolism, assonance, or enjambment. Alliteration, anaphora and repetition are utilized to create emphasis. Hughes uses end rhymes and internal rhymes, and combines perfect rhymes with imperfect rhymes and half-rhymes, also called slant rhymes. The language of the poem is relatively simple, to make it more accessible to common people.¹²

The title of the poem is a request for America to be a country it once was, suggesting it has changed. The first four lines set up the premise of the poem, the author is calling for America to fulfill its promises. He wants America to be true to the original dream of the first settlers. With a use of alliteration, and repeating different forms of the word “dream,” he signifies its importance. Hughes then in lines 6-14 describes this dream closer and envisions America as a “*great strong land of love*,” without the oppression of the lower class by kings or tyrants; a land full of democracy, freedom, real opportunities and equality. Liberty should be a true value, not only celebrated due to blind patriotism.

Lines 5, 10, 15 and 16 are in parentheses, separated from the main narrative of the poem. The first three larger stanzas relate the hope that America can live up to its promise, but these lines state, that America never was the land it was supposed to be, claiming that he has not yet experienced these ideals of equality and freedom. Line 16 repeats the final lines of the American national anthem. By enclosing them within quotation marks he indicates irony, and suggests that they are not true.¹³

Lines 17–18 are the only two lines in italics, different from the others in the poem. It indicates that these words are spoken by someone other than the speaker. These lines question

¹¹ ZEVANOVE, Samantha. *Let America Be America Again*. LitCharts LLC. 2019
<https://www.litcharts.com/poetry/langston-hughes/let-america-be-america-again>

¹² Constantakis, 2014. *Poetry for Students, Volume 45*.

¹³ Constantakis, 2014. *Poetry for Students, Volume 45*.

the speaker about him complaining and criticizing his country, asking who he is.¹⁴ This might represent the voice of power which ignores the complaints of minorities.

The next three stanzas list all people who might respond to these lines above. In lines 19-38, Hughes includes not only the African Americans, strongly marked by the history of slavery, being only the servants to others. He also identifies with white workers struggling with poverty, Native Americans forced to leave the land of their ancestors, and immigrants struggling to fulfill their optimism. He criticizes the society, in which minorities are oppressed by the majority, and people hurt others in order to be successful. With a use of repetition he signifies the trouble of young people, who are limited by the greed, selfishness, and materialism of the society.¹⁵ He adds the farmers, who were in these times suffering by the unfair conditions sharecropping system, and factory workers with low salaries. He shows the frustration of common people, who were beaten by life and society.

The following stanza explains that these poor and badly treated people, European immigrants and people involuntarily brought from Africa, are the ones whose labor made America, built its cities and farmed its countryside. Hoping for a better future, they contributed with their hard towards building a country, that would be true to its key value of freedom.¹⁶

With rhetorical questions in lines 51–55 Hughes expresses disagreement with the statement that America is the “homeland of the free.” He points to millions of poor people with very low salaries and protesters whose demands are constantly denied. The author shows the injustice towards these people. For their contribution to America, they are rewarded only with a dream, that is impossible to achieve.

In the following two stanzas, the mood alters from anger and frustration and becomes more encouraging and inspiring.¹⁷ The author asks again for America to be the country it never was, but is supposed to be, a country of freedom and equality, regardless of wealth or race, a country of all people, including the poor and the minorities. He encourages these people to work on bringing this country of their dreams back to reality. By switching from using the personal pronoun “I” to the use of “We” he calls for unity. He reminds, that America is a country of the people, and encourages them to take it country back from those who oppress them.

¹⁴ Constantakis, 2014. *Poetry for Students, Volume 45*.

¹⁵ Constantakis, 2014. *Poetry for Students, Volume 45*.

¹⁶ Constantakis, 2014. *Poetry for Students, Volume 45*.

¹⁷ Constantakis, 2014. *Poetry for Students, Volume 45*.

Lines 75–79 combine the negativity and the positivity of the poem. The author brings optimism and almost a certainty of a better future. The lines in parentheses from the beginning are now stated clearly. The words of inspiration and encouragement in the previous two stanzas build up to the author making a pledge, that America will once become the country that the people have dreamt it would be.

The last stanza summarizes the poem well. The first two lines acknowledge problems the society faces, but the rest of the stanza is hopeful and patriotic. He alludes to the words in the beginning of the preamble to the U.S. Constitution and signifies the greatness of the country. In this final stanza, Hughes urges Americans to unite and to make their country better themselves.

4.2.2 *Amanda Gorman*

On the 20th of January 2021, Amanda Gorman became the youngest poet to compose and recite a poem at a Presidential inauguration ceremony. After reciting her poem *The Hill We Climb* at the inauguration of the 46th U.S. president Joseph R. Biden, 22 years-old Amanda Gorman went from being a talented, ambitious young poet to an internationally popular figure. Her poem became a source of hope to a country divided by politics, protests, and a global pandemic.

Born on the 7th of March 1998, Gorman is a native of Los Angeles. Together with her twin sister she was raised by a single mother, working as a language arts teacher. As a child, Amanda had a noticeable speech impediment. This has also influenced her poetry, as she often prefers to use words such as “globe” instead of “world.” She has worked to get rid of this problem by practicing reading poetry, and during her performance at the inauguration there were no signs of her having speech problems in the past. One of works that helped her was *Hamilton*, a sung-and-rapped-through musical about the story of one of America’s Founding Fathers Alexander Hamilton by Lin-Manuel Miranda, which she also referenced in her inaugural poem. Similarly, the new President Joe Biden has a speech impediment as well. Gorman is also a member of African American Catholic Church.

She was and still is very influenced by her idols. Gorman often cites **Maya Angelou**, a famous African American writer, poet and civil rights activist, as one of her biggest influences.

Angelou was also an inaugural poet chosen by Bill Clinton and had also had a speech impediment while she was young. Gorman was also inspired by Marianne Deborah Williamson, a writer and a 2020 presidential candidate, or Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani civil rights activist protesting against of oppression by a terrorist organization Taliban. She is only one year older than Gorman, and her speech in 2013 as the Nobel Prize Laureate inspired Gorman to join the United Nations as a youth delegate, and activism became a defining part of her life. She also mentioned Toni Morrison, Phillis Wheatley, or Michelle Obama as African American women she looks up to. (Dumm, 2021)

After finishing her early education, she won a scholarship to study Sociology at Harvard University, and graduated cum laude in 2020. At 16 years of age, she was named the winner of the Los Angeles Youth Poet Laureate award in 2014. In 2015 she has self-published her first poetry collection called *The One For Whom Food Is Not Enough*. and two years later became the first recipient of the National Youth Poet Laureate program. Since then, she has appeared as a guest at several television channels and has been contacted by *Nike*, to write a poem to honor black athletes. Some of her poems, such as *In This Place: An American Lyric* or *The Miracle of Morning*, are available on the internet. In December of 2020, she was invited to recite a poem at the inauguration by the President's wife Dr. Jill Biden, who thought of Gorman and suggested choosing her, after Biden was impressed by a presentation of a poem she gave at the Library of Congress in 2017, which reflected on a recent event of a violent far-right organization "*Unite the Right*" march. By accepting the invitation, she became only the sixth and easily the youngest inaugural poet of the United States. (Dumm, 2021)

In addition to being a powerful poet, she is the founder and executive director of a non-profit organization *One Pen One Page* providing free creative writing programs for underserved youth. Recently as a part of her work at Harvard, she has started a project called Generation Empathy, meant to help strengthen the voice of women of minorities in industries dominated by men. (Dumm, 2021)

In September 2021, she plans to release her debut poetry collection titled *The Hill We Climb*, which includes her inaugural poem. On the same day she also plans to publish her first picture book *Change Sings*. Gorman is clearly very ambitious, and inspired also by Kamala Harris, the current and first African American female vice-president of the United States, she has declared her intent to be a presidential candidate in 2036 elections. (Dumm, 2021)

4.2.2.1 *The Hill We Climb*

The poem *The Hill We Climb* belongs to a genre of occasional poetry. It was composed for the occasion of inauguration of the President Joseph R. Biden. Gorman put emphasis on the sound of the poem, as it was meant to be recited. By the presentation she used a lot of hand gestures to visually signify the meanings of her poem. In the creation of the poem, she had almost complete freedom, and was only instructed to write about hope and unity, as these were also important elements of the President's inaugural speech. Even though it is a poem, it also contains some elements of a political speech. According to Gorman's own words, the ambition of her poem is to "envision a way" in which America "can still come together and can still heal." The poem does this in a way "that is not erasing or neglecting the harsh truths America needs to reconcile with."¹⁸

The poem takes into consideration the long history of America, but it mostly concentrates on the present situation. It also looks at the future of America and provides advice for American people. Gorman reminds the history of African American slavery, and appreciates the progress of the society, that nowadays, also thanks to the accomplishments of the 1950s and 1960s civil rights movement, a young African American woman has the possibility of becoming president. Even if her poem was supposed to inspire hope, Gorman could not leave out some important negative events of recent years and even weeks, although they are not stated directly. She mentions injustice, which might refer to unjust killings of African American citizens by the American police. African Americans view this longstanding crisis of police violence and structural racism as a big problem of American society nowadays. In 2020, a wave of one of the biggest protests in American history emerged. With a slogan **Black Lives Matter** they protested against police violence toward African Americans, after a recent death of George Floyd, but also in memory of a long list of African Americans unjustly killed by the police. Gorman has also admitted she had to change her poem after the events on January 6, 2021, after a mob of Ex-president Donald J. Trump supporters, including white supremacists waving Confederate

¹⁸ ALTER, Alexandra: *Amanda Gorman Captures the Moment, in Verse*. The New York Times. 2021.
www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/books/amanda-gorman-inauguration-hill-we-climb.html

flags, violently stormed into the United States Capitol. In addition to that, since 2020, America and the whole world find themselves in a crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. (Dumm, 2021)

This poem also includes a lot of intertextuality, as there are many references to important literary works, texts or speeches. Gorman used references to *Hamilton*, the Bible, U.S. Constitution, and many more. She also took inspiration from famous speeches by Martin Luther King Jr., Abraham Lincoln or John Fitzgerald Kennedy and used some of their elements. There are also potential references to some poems of Langston Hughes or Maya Angelou. At the inauguration Gorman wore a ring with a bird in a cage, symbolizing the famous work *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou, which also referenced a poem *Sympathy* by Paul Laurence Dunbar.

4.2.2.2 Analysis of the poem “*The Hill We Climb*”

The title of the poem is a continual metaphor. The hill represents a goal, which requires hard work to accomplish. This goal might be that America will be a country true to its key values, such as liberty, equality, justice, or opportunity. Americans are for centuries striving to accomplish this, and the title suggests that this goal is not achieved yet. The poem brings hope, that the goal can still be accomplished if Americans will be united.

The poem is written in free verse and does not have a clear meter or a rhyming scheme. It uses an impressive range of rhymes, including end rhymes, internal rhymes and off-centered rhymes. It also includes perfect rhyme, half rhyme, or pararhyme, and several examples of assonance, consonance, and alliteration. This work of poetry uses a broad spectrum of literary devices, such as metaphors and symbolism, personification, anaphora, allegory, enjambment, or a pun. It also includes a chiasmus, repeating and reversing a previous part of a sentence to signify the opposite meaning, often used in political speeches. Passages with a strong rhythm and a higher tempo interchange with passages with less rhythm and slower tempo. All together, these changing patterns make the speaker's tone feel deliberate and masterful, and she uses stress and sound to mirror her ideas.

The poem opens up with a question, asking where Americans can find optimism and hope in time full of negative events, at the beginning of a new period in its history, using symbols of

light and shade. From the beginning, Gorman as the speaker uses the personal pronoun “we,” identifying with the American nation and signifying its unity. She recognizes the hard times Americans went through, including the historical, but also current events. The phrase “belly of the beast” comes from the biblical story of Jonah, who was swallowed by a giant fish, but survived. The next lines are a call to idealism and state that there is still injustice in America, using a pun of “just is” and “justice.” This might also refer to the recent event of George Floyd’s murder by the police followed by a massive wave of protests against racism and police brutality on African Americans.

Using a double rhyme and an alliteration creating cadence in the next lines, Gorman states that Americans have somehow always overcome hard times. She asserts, that the original vision of America is not ruined, and induces hope that it can still be achieved. This key line is also a reference to the musical *Hamilton*, where America is compared to a great unfinished symphony.¹⁹

In the next passage, Gorman references her own life and shows her humility. She appreciates the progress her country has made, that nowadays it would be possible for an African American woman to become president, and to recite her poetry at the inauguration of a president. She is also proud of her ancestry and pays homage to her mother by mentioning her.

Using alliteration, the poet later echoes the humility. Americans should admit that are not flawless and America should not aim to be perfect, but to have purpose. This purpose is to be a country full of equality and without discrimination of any minority. This creates an allusion to the preamble of the U.S. constitution.²⁰

Gorman urges Americans to be united. It is necessary not to concentrate on the differences between the people, but to focus on the future. Here she uses a chiasmus, typical for political speeches, often used for example by John Fitzgerald Kennedy or Abraham Lincoln. With a use of assonance and homonyms of weapons and hands as symbols, she calls for peace and unity for everyone. The part also recalls Abraham Lincoln’s second inaugural speech.²¹

¹⁹ JFYNetWorks. *English Professor Steven Dooner’s analysis of Amanda Gorman’s ‘The Hill We Climb’*. 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cNI3XwktfO4&t=1529s>

²⁰ JFYNetWorks. *English Professor Steven Dooner’s analysis of Amanda Gorman’s ‘The Hill We Climb’*. 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cNI3XwktfO4&t=1529s>

²¹ JFYNetWorks. *English Professor Steven Dooner’s analysis of Amanda Gorman’s ‘The Hill We Climb’*. 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cNI3XwktfO4&t=1529s>

Typically for her, she uses the word “globe” instead of “world.” Using anaphora, beautiful alliterations coming from a negative to a positive image, an anagram, and enjambment, she claims, that the world should at least acknowledge the efforts of America to create a better world. She signifies that unity is more important than victory or success.

The phrase “everyone *shall sit under their own vine and fig tree and no one shall make them afraid*” is an allusion to the Bible and was also often used by George Washington, and is meant to suppress fear. Gorman suggests that success can be achieved by cooperation, not by conflict or violence. The climbing of the hill represents a constant struggle. If Americans will have the courage to live up to this advice, they can climb the hill, and America can achieve its ambitions. It might also be a reference to Martin Luther King Jr. and his famous last speech “*I’ve Been to the Mountaintop*,” in which he called for equality. The mountaintop represents the ultimate goal many people have to die for, so that others could at some point achieve it. Similarly, Langston Hughes’ poem *Mother to Son* also provides an image of African Americans climbing a difficult way up the stairs towards equality.²²

Gorman then states, that being American incorporates a national pride, but also acknowledging the mistakes of the past and trying to fix them. She talks about a force dividing the nation, and trying to destroy democracy, nearly succeeding. These lines react to the storming of the U.S. Capitol by supporters of Donald Trump, violently protesting about presidential elections results. She claims, that even if democracy can be delayed, it can never be defeated. Langston Hughes This line is very similar to the message of the poem *I Too* by, where he compares African Americans to the darker brother Americans sent to the kitchen when company comes, but tomorrow he will be sitting at the table as an equal.²³

Americans have to trust in democracy, and the present era is very important for the future. Americans feared and were unprepared for these recent negative events, but they have overcome them. They were pessimistic, but now they have confidence and are optimistic.

Gorman advises Americans to concentrate at the future and states the qualities America should have, signifying unity, freedom, and courage. She uses alliterations and warns the nation,

²² JFYNetWorks. English Professor Steven Dooner’s analysis of Amanda Gorman’s ‘The Hill We Climb’. 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cNI3XwktfO4&t=1529s>

²³ JFYNetWorks. English Professor Steven Dooner’s analysis of Amanda Gorman’s ‘The Hill We Climb’. 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cNI3XwktfO4&t=1529s>

that if they do not act now, they will pass the current problems to the future generations. Instead, by being strong, but also merciful and righteous, they can create a legacy of love and change for their children.

The next passage pays homage to both Martin Luther King Jr. and Maya Angelou, by combining elements from his famous “*I Have a Dream*” speech and her poem *Still I Rise*.²⁴ At the beginning of the next passage, Gorman advises Americans to do everything they can, not only to make their country better than it was, but also to make the whole world a better place. Using anaphora, she names several different parts of the United States and describes them in a positive way, calling for unity of the people from every part of the country. She uses alliteration and signifies their beauty and diversity, and urges them to be strong again, even if it is difficult.

The ending passage of the poem answers the question stated in the beginning of the poem. Using symbolism, Gorman brings hope that Americans will come out of the negativity of the shade, without fear and on fire, burning with positivity. They themselves can free the new dawn, meaning creating the beginning of new, more positive era. Her main message is, that a better future can always be achieved, but only if Americans are not afraid to see it, meaning being open to change, and only if they have the courage to be it, meaning that they themselves have to contribute to this goal.

4.2.3 Comparison

The poems by Langston Hughes and Amanda Gorman are separated by 86 years. Even though African Americans were promised freedom and equality after the abolishment of in 1865, during the era of the Harlem Renaissance they still faced the problems of constant racism, racial discrimination, segregation, and many incidents of lynching by racist hate groups. Although the movement of the Harlem Renaissance did not completely succeed in the fight against this injustice, it provided the grounds to build upon to the Civil rights movement of the next generation, which finally succeeded in 1968. Since then, we have progressed to a time, when racism is prohibited, punishable, and not tolerated. America had the first African American president in Barack Obama, serving from 2009 to 2017, and now Kamala Harris is

²⁴ JFYNetWorks. English Professor Steven Dooner's analysis of Amanda Gorman's 'The Hill We Climb'. 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cNI3XwktfO4&t=1529s>

the first female African American vice president. But African Americans feel, that individual and structural racism is still present, and view it as a persisting problem mostly shown in excessive police violence, mass incarceration, redlining (discrimination in housing), or unequal medical care.²⁵ During the recent years, America has also seen a noticeable rise of white-supremacist hate groups.²⁶ Similarly to the ending years of the Harlem Renaissance, when America faced one of the biggest economic crises in history, nowadays we face a crisis caused by a pandemic, which also brought economic decline and political conflicts. Crises often worsen the interracial relationships, but can also bring people together. In 2020, millions of people in a huge wave of Black Lives Matter demonstrations protested against the police brutality and all racially motivated violence.

The authors Langston Hughes and Amanda Gorman share several similarities. Their mothers were teachers, they grew up without a father and both are university graduates. Both were proud of their African American heritage and culture. They shared similar values of equality, freedom, and peace. Likewise, they were social activists sympathizing with the common and discriminated people, advocating for equal rights and unity, and protesting against violence and injustice. Through their works of literature, they aimed to make America and the whole world a better place for everyone.

The representative works of the two authors are also very similar. Both of these pieces of poetry criticize the situation in America at the time of writing. They condemn racism, injustice, inequality in the society, violence and discrimination. Hughes' protest is much more clear and direct, he criticizes the oppression of African Americans, as well as other minorities and lower classes of the society and its unfairness. Gorman's criticism is aimed towards conflicts between the people, and the injustice, which is not described clearly, but might refer among other to recent unjust killings of many African Americans by the police. Both works advocate for abiding the values of freedom and true democracy. Although they show the negative side of America, they also aim to bring hope and optimism. Both authors also show patriotism and appreciation of the American land, and call for unity of the American nation. They call for the

²⁵ BAILEY, Zinzi D. – FELDMAN, Justin M. – BASSETT, Mary T. *How Structural Racism Works — Racist Policies as a Root Cause of U.S. Racial Health Inequities*. The New England Journal of Medicine. 2021. <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMms2025396>

²⁶ WILSON, Jason. *White nationalist hate groups have grown 55% in Trump era, report finds*. The Guardian. 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/18/white-nationalist-hate-groups-southern-poverty-law-center>

accomplishment of the American Dream and encourage Americans to make their country better, emphasizing that the future is in their hands.

These two works of poetry use identical themes of the American Dream, the history and the future of America, and the injustice in the society. Both poems use imagery of overcoming obstacles and American nature. Other similarities include the lack of a consistent structure of the poem and a frequent use of repetition, anaphora, alliteration and half-rhymes. Both pieces of poetry use similar mood and tone development throughout the poem. They begin with calmer tempo in the beginning, in the middle the energy rises, and the end is hopeful and encouraging.

Conclusion

The Harlem Renaissance was a period of the biggest African American artistic creativity in history. The representants of this movement fought against racism and discrimination of the African American minority through the use of art. During the years of the Harlem Renaissance era, their music, literature, and art came in vogue and built bridges between the races. Although they did not succeed completely, they have done an important step forward and provided grounds for the successful Civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Without the Harlem Renaissance, it possibly might have never come to life. By comparing their work with an example of the contemporary literature by an African American author, we can see the progress the society has made. We can find several similarities of these works. We think that some ideas of the Harlem Renaissance movement are still very relevant in the society of today, and we can see, that America and the world still face some similar issues. We believe, that both described works of poetry can teach us to learn from the mistakes of the past, and strive towards making the future better. Instead of conflict, we should aim to spread unity. We also think, that by broadening knowledge about minorities and their culture we can help to avoid racism and discrimination.

The opening chapter we have reflected upon the current state of research in the topic of this bachelor thesis and described the sources we used in our thesis. In the following chapter we have defined the movement of the Harlem Renaissance, its time and location setting, its aim, philosophy, accomplishments, and also described the situation in America during this period. We have also described the historical and previous events significant for its creation, and the important African American leaders and organizations that have influenced it. In the third chapter we have provided an overview of different categories of art of this movement, describing the most important authors and their work. In the last chapter we have conducted the empirical research of our thesis. Its first subchapter we have described and analyzed a chosen work of poetry from the Harlem Renaissance, and provided a short biography of its author. Likewise, in the second subchapter we have provided a description and an analysis of a representative piece of poetry of contemporary African American literature, together with the biography of the author. In the final subchapter we have compared these two literary works and have pointed to their similarities and differences.

Resumé

V našej bakalárskej práci sme sa zaoberali hnutím Harlemskej renesancie, ktoré bojovalo za rovnoprávnosť Afroameričanov v USA počas dvadsiatych a tridsiatych rokov minulého storočia. V tejto práci sme predstavili spomínané hnutie a bližšie charakterizovali jeho zámery, filozofiu a úspechy, a popísali sme významné historické udalosti, ktoré predchádzali jeho vzniku. Ďalej sme vytvorili prehľad rôznych druhov umenia zastúpených týmto hnutím. V troch podkapitolách sme rozdelili umenie tohto hnutia na literárne, múzické a vizuálne, a v každej z nich sme krátko popísali najvýznamnejších autorov, ich diela a ich prínos. Nakoniec sme pre náš empirický výskum zvolili dve významné lyrické diela, zastupujúce obdobie Harlemskej renesancie a súčasné obdobie. Pripravili sme krátku autobiografiu oboch autorov, bližšie predstavili ich diela a podrobne sme ich analyzovali. Následne sme tieto dve diela porovnali, a poukázali sme na ich viaceré podobnosti.

V prvej kapitole sme popísali súčasný stav skúmanej problematiky na Slovensku a v zahraničí. V našej krajine nie je povedomie o tejto téme veľmi rozšírené, a venuje sa mu veľmi málo slovenských kníh a akademických publikácií. Pri vypracovaní práce sme používali zdroje pochádzajúce hlavne z Ameriky, kde sa tejto problematike začali vedci a akademici podrobnejšie venovať od začiatku sedemdesiatych rokov minulého storočia. Keďže výskum v tejto oblasti stále napreduje, snažili sme sa používať čo najnovšiu možnú literatúru. Použili sme poznatky z viacerých kníh, encyklopédií a internetových zdrojov zaoberajúcich sa touto problematikou, ktoré nám poskytli komplexný prehľad o hnutí Harlemskej renesancie. Okrem toho sme v praktickej časti pracovali aj s primárnymi zdrojmi od Langstona Hughesa a Amandy Gordon.

V druhej kapitole sme predstavili umelecké hnutie Harlemskej renesancie a pokúsili sme sa ho výstižne definovať a charakterizovať. Taktiež sme priblížili významné historické udalosti, ktoré napomohli jeho vzniku, a predstavili významné osobnosti, ktoré mali veľký vplyv na mladých umelcov. Po skončení Americkej občianskej vojny a zrušení otroctva boli Afroameričanom sľúbené sloboda a rovnoprávnosť, avšak ani jednej z nich sa nedočkali úplne. Onedlho boli prijaté zákony, ktoré prikazovali rasovú segregáciu a umožňovali diskrimináciu Afroamerickej menšiny. Afroameričania museli byť oddelení na takmer všetkých verejných a súkromných miestach, bolo znemožnené zúčastniť sa na voľbách,

a terorizovali ich rasistické organizácie. Na začiatku dvadsiateho storočia žila prevažná väčšina Afroameričanov na juhu USA, a živili sa poľnohospodárstvom. Dôsledkom prírodných katastrof a škodcov napádajúcich plodiny, sa ich ekonomické podmienky ešte zhoršili. Preto sa rozhodli hľadať nové možnosti na industrializovanom severe krajiny. Tieto faktory spôsobili tzv. Veľkú migráciu, počas ktorej sa milióny Afroameričanov presťahovali do severoamerických miest. Migrácia dosiahla svoj vrchol po začiatku Prvej svetovej vojny, keď továrne trpeli veľkým nedostatkom zamestnancov. Vo viacerých mestách sa vytvorili veľké komunity Afroameričanov, ktoré im poskytli priestor na seberealizáciu a slobodné prejavenie ich názorov. Jedna z týchto komunít, štvrť Harlem v meste New York, sa aj vďaka príchodu talentovaných umelcov stala hlavným centrom Afroamerickej kultúry. Za začiatok Harlemskej renesancie sa považuje koniec Prvej svetovej vojny. Po veľkolepom návrate afroamerických vojakov a sprievode cez Harlem v roku 1919 sa ich sebavedomie začalo pomaly zvyšovať. Počas tohto leta bolo zlynčovaných 83 Afroameričanov, ktorí toto násilie odmietali naďalej tolerovať, čo spôsobilo rozsiahlu vlnu protestov po celej krajine. Reprezentanti hnutia Harlemskej renesancie, mladí spisovatelia a umelci podporovaní významnými lídrami, sa rozhodli nenásilne bojovať za ich rovnoprávnosť. Pomocou literatúry, hudby a umenia sa snažili zjednotiť Afroameričanov a povzbudiť ich k hrdosti na svoju históriu, kultúru a tradície. Taktiež sa snažili bojovať proti stereotypnému obrazu Afroameričanov v spoločnosti, ukázať ich schopnosti a prínos, a dokázať, že sú rovnocenní. Obdobie Harlemskej renesancie prinieslo dovtedy nevídanú umeleckú kreativitu Afroameričanov. Ich umenie a kultúra boli na vrchole a stali sa trendom v celej spoločnosti. Harlem bol prestížnym miestom Afroamerickej kultúry, a jeho kabarety, divadlá, a kluby priťahovali aj beloškú spoločnosť, a ponúkali unikátnu atmosféru a legendárny nočný život. Roky medzi 1924 a 1929 sa považujú za vrchol Harlemskej renesancie. Po krachu burzy v roku 1929 nastala Veľká hospodárska kríza, najväčšia ekonomická kríza dvadsiateho storočia. Pri nedostatku pracovných miest boli Afroameričania znevýhodňovaní, ich nezamestnanosť bola porovnateľne vyššia, a trpeli chudobou. Umelci taktiež čelili problémom, avšak ich tvorba pokračovala aj počas tridsiatich rokov. Časové vymedzenie obdobia Harlemskej renesancie nie je presné, a líši sa aj medzi jednotlivými hnutiami rôznych umení. S príchodom hospodárskej krízy však vplyv tohto hnutia a Afroamerickej kultúry začal upadať. Po skončení prohibície a povstaní v Harleme sa jeho vychýrená reputácia rozplynula.

Za rok skončenia tohto obdobia sa považuje rok 1937. Hnutie Harlemskej renesancie povzbudilo Afroameričanov k hrdosti na svoju kultúru a jej dedičstvo, a pozdvihlo ich sebavedomie. Toto hnutie inšpirovalo ďalšie generácie afroamerických umelcov a aktivistov, a položilo základy pre Afroamerické hnutie za občianske práva v päťdesiatych a šesťdesiatych rokoch 20. storočia.

V tretej kapitole sme vytvorili prehľad rozličných druhov umenia zastúpených hnutím Harlemskej renesancie. V troch podkapitolách sme rozdelili umenie na literárne, múzické a vizuálne, a v každej z nich sme stručne popísali najvýznamnejších autorov a ich tvorbu. V prvej podkapitole sme priblížili literárne hnutie a jeho zastúpenie v poézii a próze. Langston Hughes bol hviezdou tohto hnutia a bol jedným z najvýznamnejších afroamerických básnikov celej histórie. Bol sociálne angažovaným spisovateľom a súcitol s najnižšími vrstvami spoločnosti. Vo svojich dielach zobrazoval negatívne aj pozitívne stránky života Afroameričanov, a povzbudzoval ich k hrdosti na svoje dedičstvo a kultúru. V jeho poézii objavoval nové formy a často charakteristicky používal prvky afroamerickej hudby. K najvýznamnejším básnikom tohto hnutia patril aj Countee Cullen, ktorý vo svojich dielach zobrazoval Afroameričanov v pozitívnom svetle, a používal tradičné formy. Ďalším významným básnikom bol Claude McKay, ktorého poézia obsahovala aj radikálne prvky a ostrú kritiku. Medzi významných autorov prózy patrili Jean Toomer, Walter White a Wallace Thurman, ktorí vo svojich dielach popisujú nespravodlivosti páchané na Afroameričanoch nielen na juhu ale aj severe krajiny. Ženské autorky tohto obdobia sa zaoberajú predovšetkým problémami žien s rasizmom, identitou a postavením v spoločnosti. Spisovateľky Jessie Redmon Fauset a Nella Larsen povzbudzujú ženy k hrdosti na ich afroamerický pôvod. Významná autorka Zora Neale Hurston realisticky opisuje kultúru, život a problémy Afroameričanov na juhu, a jej romány sú písané v presnom afroamerickom dialekte. Hudba bola neoddeliteľnou súčasťou Afroamerickej kultúry aj tohto hnutia. Najrozšírenejšími hudobnými žánrami boli blues a jazz, ktoré sa od začiatku 20. storočia šírili spolu s migrujúcimi Afroameričanmi, a neskôr sa stali celosvetovo populárne. Medzi najpopulárnejších hudobníkov patrili slávne mená ako Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, alebo Ethel Waters. Počas Harlemskej renesancie zaznamenalo veľký úspech aj afroamerické divadlo. Predstavenia vytvorené afroamerickými dramatikmi boli populárne a afroamerickí herci sa začali pravidelne objavovať na javiskách popredných divadiel. Afroamerické vizuálne

umenie dosiahlo svoj vrchol počas druhej polovice tridsiatych rokov. Za jedného z najvýznamnejších umelcov tohto hnutia sa považuje maliar Aaron Douglas, ktorý vo svojich dielach kombinoval prvky kubizmu s obrazmi historického aj súčasného života Afroameričanov. Medzi ďalších slávnych umelcov patrili maliari Palmer Hayden a Archibald Motley, a sochári Augusta Savage a Richmond Barthé.

V poslednej kapitole našej záverečnej práce sme sa zamerali na empirický výskum. V prvej podkapitole sme bližšie popísali ciele a metódy nášho empirického výskumu. V ňom sme analyzovali a porovnali dve vybrané literárne diela z obdobia Harlemskej renesancie a súčasnej literatúry s použitím analytických a komparatívnych metód.

V druhej podkapitole sme predstavili spomínaný empirický výskum tejto bakalárskej práce. V prvej podkapitole tejto časti sme sa zaoberali básňou *Let America Be America*, ktorú napísal Langston Hughes v roku 1935. V tejto časti sme popísali život a kariéru úctyhodnú kariéru autora, ktorý až do jeho smrti bojoval za ľudské práva. Bližšie sme priblížili jeho dielo a následne sme ho podrobne analyzovali. V tejto básni autor kritizuje nespravodlivosť spoločnosti voči menšinám. Autor opisuje americký sen o krajine plnej slobody, rovnosti a príležitostí, avšak tvrdí, že pre neho a ostatné menšiny Amerika takouto krajinou nikdy nebola. Poukazuje na dlhú históriu ich utláčania a vyzdvihuje ich tvrdú prácu pri budovaní Ameriky. Vyzýva Američanov k jednote, aby mohli spoločne vytvoriť krajinu ich snov.

V druhej podkapitole tejto časti sme priblížili a analyzovali báseň *The Hill We Climb*, ktorú predniesla jej mladá autorka Amanda Gorman na nedávnej inaugurácii nového amerického prezidenta Josepha R. Bidena. Priniesli sme krátku biografiu talentovanej autorky, ktorá je horlivou aktivistkou za ľudské práva. Je nesmierne ambiciózna a je odhodlaná v roku 2036 kandidovať za americkú prezidentku. Bližšie sme predstavili jej dielo a opísali okolnosti predchádzajúce jeho vzniku. V tomto diele Gorman povzbudzuje Američanov k jednote a prináša im optimizmus a nádej v neľahkých časoch. V jej básni popisuje aj veľmi nedávne udalosti. Kritizuje nespravodlivosť v spoločnosti, a odkazuje na početné prípady neprimeranej policajnej brutality na Afroameričanoch. Po nedávnej vražde Georgea Floyda sa v roku 2020 uskutočnila obrovská vlna protestov proti násiliu a diskriminácii Afroameričanov s názvom Black Lives Matter. Gorman si však uvedomuje aj pokrok, ktorý spoločnosť urobila, a oceňuje, že ako mladá Afroameričanka môže snívať o tom, že sa stane prezidentkou. Kritizuje násilie a konflikty v spoločnosti, a apeluje na jednotu Američanov. Zdôrazňuje, že sa

majú spoločne usilovať o lepšiu budúcnosť. Jej báseň obsahuje mnoho odkazov na rôzne diela americkej literatúry a slávne prejavy, napríklad od Martina Luthera Kinga. Používa širokú škálu umeleckých prostriedkov a jej dielo prináša unikátny umelecký zážitok.

V poslednej časti záverečnej kapitoly sme tieto dve diela porovnali, s cieľom zistiť, ako sa zmenila a vyvinula problematika Afroameričanov a ich rasy a identity. Aj keď obe diela delí 86 rokov, spoločnosť v súčasnosti stále čelí niektorým podobným problémom. Počas obdobia Harlemskej renesancie Afroameričania čelili segregácii, rasovej diskriminácii a častému násiliu rasistických organizácií. Po príchode hospodárskej krízy im spôsobovala problémy diskriminácia v zamestnaní. Spoločnosť odvtedy urobila významný pokrok v boji proti rasizmu, ktorý je zakázaný a nie je tolerovaný vo väčšine sveta. V súčasnosti čelí svet kríze v dôsledku pandémie Covid-19, ktorá priniesla pokles ekonomiky a politické konflikty v spoločnosti. Autori oboch diel boli významní aktivisti za ľudské práva, ktorí protestovali proti rasizmu, diskriminácii menšín, násiliu a nespravodlivosti. Obaja vzývajú hodnoty slobody, rovnosti, jednoty a mieru. Pomocou ich diel sa snažili urobiť Ameriku a celý svet lepším. Porovnávané diela sú veľmi podobné. Obe protestujú proti nespravodlivosti, násiliu, a nerovnosti v spoločnosti. Aj keď ukazujú aj negatívne stránky života v Amerike, snažia sa priniesť optimizmus a nádej na lepšiu budúcnosť. Obe diela používajú podobné témy, ako napríklad americký sen. Taktiež sú podobné v neucelenosti štruktúry a použitý voľného verša, a častého použitia repetície a aliterácie. Myslíme si, že odkaz hnutia Harlemskej renesancie má význam aj pre súčasnú spoločnosť.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Langston Hughes – Let America Be America Again

Let America be America again.
Let it be the dream it used to be.
Let it be the pioneer on the plain
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed —
Let it be that great strong land of love
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,
But opportunity is real, and life is free,
Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me,
Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")

*Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?
And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?*

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,
I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.
I am the red man driven from the land,
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek—
And finding only the same old stupid plan
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.
I am the young man, full of strength and hope,
Tangled in that ancient endless chain
Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!
Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need!
Of work the men! Of take the pay!
Of owning everything for one's own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.
I am the worker sold to the machine.
I am the Negro, servant to you all.
I am the people, humble, hungry, mean —
Hungry yet today despite the dream.
Beaten yet today—O, Pioneers!
I am the man who never got ahead,
The poorest worker bartered through the years.

Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream
In that Old World while still a serf of kings,
Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,
That even yet its mighty daring sings
In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned
That's made America the land it has become.
O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas
In search of what I meant to be my home —
For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore,

And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,
And torn from Black Africa's strand I came
To build a "homeland of the free."

The free?

Who said the free? Not me?
Surely not me? The millions on relief today?
The millions shot down when we strike?
The millions who have nothing for our pay?
For all the dreams we've dreamed
And all the songs we've sung
And all the hopes we've held
And all the flags we've hung,
The millions who have nothing for our pay—
Except the dream that's almost dead today.

O, let America be America again—
The land that never has been yet—
And yet must be —the land where every man is free.
The land that's mine—the poor man's, Indian's, Negro's, ME —
Who made America,
Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,
Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,
Must bring back our mighty dream again.

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose —
The steel of freedom does not stain.
From those who live like leeches on the people's lives,
We must take back our land again, America!
O, yes, I say it plain,

America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath —
America will be!

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,
We, the people, must redeem
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers. The mountains and the endless plain —
All, all the stretch of these great green states—
And make America again!²⁷

²⁷ HUGHES, Langston. *The collected poems of Langston Hughes*. 1995: 189-191

Appendix 2

Amanda Gorman – The Hill We Climb

When day comes we ask ourselves,
'Where can we find light in this never-ending shade,
the loss we carry, a sea we must wade?'

We've braved the belly of the beast,
we've learned that quiet isn't always peace.
And the norms and notions of what just is
isn't always justice.

And yet the dawn is ours before we knew it,
somehow we do it. Somehow we've weathered
and witnessed a nation that isn't broken, but simply unfinished.

We, the successors of a country and a time
where a skinny Black girl descended from slaves
and raised by a single mother can dream of becoming president
only to find herself reciting for one.
And yes, we are far from polished, far from pristine,
but that doesn't mean we are striving to form a union that is perfect.
We are striving to forge our union with purpose.
To compose a country committed to all cultures,
colors, characters and conditions of man.

And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us,
but what stands before us. We close the divide,
because we know to put our future first,
we must first put our differences aside.

We lay down our arms so we can reach out our arms to one another.
We seek harm to none and harmony for all.

Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true:
that even as we grieved, we grew;
that even as we hurt, we hoped;
that even as we tired, we tried;
that we'll forever be tied together victorious,
not because we will never again know defeat
but because we will never again sow division.

Scripture tells us to envision that 'everyone shall sit under their own vine
and fig tree and no one shall make them afraid.'
If we're to live up to our own time,
then victory won't lie in the blade
but in all the bridges we've made.

That is the promise to glade,
the hill we climb if only we dare it,
because being American
is more than a pride we inherit –
it's the past we step into and how we repair it.

We've seen a force that would shatter our nation
rather than share it,
would destroy our country if it meant delaying democracy.
And this effort very nearly succeeded.
But while democracy can be periodically delayed,
it can never be permanently defeated.

In this truth, in this faith we trust
for while we have our eyes on the future,
history has its eyes on us.

This is the era of just redemption
we feared at its inception.
We did not feel prepared to be the heirs of such a terrifying hour,
but within it we found the power
to author a new chapter, to offer hope and laughter to ourselves.

So while once we asked 'how could we possibly prevail over catastrophe,'
now we assert: 'how could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?'

We will not march back to what was, but move to what shall be:
a country that is bruised but whole,
benevolent but bold, fierce and free.

We will not be turned around or interrupted
by intimidation because we know our inaction
and inertia will be the inheritance of the next generation.

Our blunders become their burdens
but one thing is certain:
If we merge mercy with might, and might with right,
then love becomes our legacy in change,
our children's birthright.

So let us leave behind a country better than the one we were left.
With every breath from my bronze-pounded chest,
we will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one.

We will rise from the gold-limbed hills of the west,
we will rise from the winds swept northeast,
where our forefathers first realized revolution.
We will rise from the lake-rinsed cities of the midwestern states.
We will rise from the sun-baked South.
We will rebuild, reconcile, and recover.
In every known nook of our nation
and every corner called our country,
our people diverse and beautiful will emerge,
battered and beautiful.

When day comes, we step out of the shade, aflame and unafraid,
the new dawn blooms as we free it.
For there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it,
if only we're brave enough to be it.²⁸

²⁸ Gorman, Amanda. 2021. *The Hill We Climb: An Inaugural Poem for the Country*