

Jean Toomer's thinking on race matters took many turns over the course of his life, but when it came to the African American musics he encountered while serving as a visiting teacher in Georgia, he never changed his tune. That 1921 sojourn, Toomer wrote years later, "was the first time I'd ever heard the folk-songs and spirituals. They were very rich and sad and joyous and beautiful. But I learned that the Negroes of the town objected to them. They called them 'shouting.' They had victrolas and player-pianos. So, I realized with deep regret, that the spirituals, meeting ridicule, would be certain to die out."¹ This was a crucial artistic awakening of Toomer's early life, and paying tribute to the music of Georgia thus became one of his central concerns in *Cane*, the diverse, enigmatic, and frequently Southern-themed collection of poetry, prose sketches, and drama he published two years later and upon which his reputation rests. Following Toomer's stated interest in song, several interpreters of *Cane* have identified music as one of its unifying themes, likening the text to a performance of jazz, blues, or, as the advertising team at Boni and Liveright put it in 1923, "black vaudeville."² But it is perhaps best thought of as a field recording, an attempt on Toomer's part to catch a disappearing musical culture in words and to preserve it in literary form. Certainly this is how *Cane* was introduced to the public by Waldo Frank, the critic, novelist, and friend of Toomer's who wrote the foreword to its first edition: "Reading this book, I had the vision of a land, heretofore sunk in the mists of muteness, suddenly rising up into the eminence of song. Innumerable books have been written about the South; some good books have been written in the South. This book *is* the South."³

If Toomer's attempt at capturing the South's musical essence was as successful as Frank suggests, it grows all the more impressive when one considers the many limitations—some self-imposed, some not—under which he worked. Although descended in part from Southern blacks, he had grown up in Washington, D.C., and claimed to have been entirely unfamiliar with the region's musical idiom before he encountered it in 1921. As a would-be preservationist, moreover, he had arrived on the scene rather late, for Southern folk music and spirituals had already been in the process of being studied, gathered, published, recorded, and generally fretted over by collectors for some sixty years before *Cane*. Most significant of all, Toomer's literary aesthetic and quasi-mystical sensibility impelled him to emphasize the fundamental mysteriousness of the music he had encountered rather than to document it in a straightforward manner. Evaluating, accounting for, or transcribing melodies, lyrics, and song structures in any precise way was, for Toomer, largely beside the point: in his autobiographical writings, he reports having been moved by the music of Georgia primarily because it expressed something greater than itself, a "folk-spirit" that was "walking in to die on the modern desert" (*WS*, 123). Add to this the fact that Toomer's text refers explicitly to a mere handful of independently verifiable folk pieces—"Deep River," "My Lord, What a Mornin'," and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," and even then only in snippets—and *Cane* can come to seem musical in an essentially abstract sense, more concerned with what one of its poems refers to as "soul sounds" than with anything that could be literally heard.⁴ How, then, can the text be said to have achieved "the eminence of song" and captured the musicality of the South?

Cane grows more audible if one allows for the possibility that Toomer intended the South's music to resound not merely from his pages but also from another (if somewhat unexpected) source: his readers. The dearth of preexisting, classifiable, known music in *Cane* is counterbalanced by a great many original poems written in unmistakably musical forms, metered and arranged in such a way as to be easily recognized as spirituals or work songs in spite of the fact that they do not bring any particular extraliterary melodies to mind. Music is seldom supplied but frequently suggested by Toomer's verse, and a crucial question in regard to *Cane* is therefore how one is to interact with a text so insistently devoted to the signification of song but so lacking in clear indications for how it has been or is to be performed.

Readers, having no conclusive sense of what these at once familiar and foreign airs are meant to sound like, may decide to read them as uninflected poetry, but a great deal of this text's enduring, incantatory power rests on the fact that they are also free to sing Toomer's songs on their own and in whatever ways they like. Indeed, one could even say that for Toomer it is imperative that readers fashion their own melodies and aural interpretations of *Cane* if the South's music is to endure as what he understood it to be: an artistic dynamic of ongoing, interpersonal relation. As I shall demonstrate, *Cane* memorializes a musical and social process of collaboration rather than a tradition of specific songs, and its central paradox is that it attempts to preserve the folk music and "spirit" of Georgia by asking its readers to make up a new folk music entirely.

By way of example, consider "Karintha," a prose sketch of rural life that opens *Cane* and is interwoven with some of Toomer's most singable verse. When published in *Broom* some months before *Cane* made its debut, "Karintha" had formally requested that its audience imagine it as an audibly accompanied performance, perhaps in the style of the poet Vachel Lindsay: in its first incarnation, it was to be read to "the humming of a Negro folk-song."⁵ This instruction had disappeared by the time Toomer included the piece in *Cane*, but the redolent possibility of its being rendered musically never did. The following stanza arises or is alluded to at various points in the text:

Her skin is like dusk on the eastern horizon,
 O cant you see it, O cant you see it,
 Her skin is like dusk on the eastern horizon
 . . . When the sun goes down. (C, 3)

Any number of melodies and musical interpretations might be supported by this poem's framework. "Karintha" aspires to the condition of the vernacular by including only two words of more than one syllable, making it especially adaptable. It is repetitive and thus easy for singers to take up as it continues to reverberate throughout the passage; and it deploys anapests in the first and third lines in the service of strong rhythmic flow. Even as Toomer provides musical prompts, however, he leaves a sense of open-ended mystery in regard to the poem's rendering that readers must improvise upon and resolve for themselves. The second line might either continue in the same rhythmic pattern as the first or begin with the double stress of a spondee, while

the elision that precedes the final line negates one of the expected verbal stresses and creates a provisional space, one that is presumably to be filled with something other than words. But filled this poem must ultimately be, as its second line suggests in the phrase “O cant”: in dropping the formal apostrophe and emphasizing the aural character of language over the visual, Toomer not only asks “Can you not see it?” but also suggests the Latin *canto* and an imperative construction, thus calling on readers to “cant” and sing even as they “hear.”

In the context of Toomer’s larger project of musical commemoration, the malleability on display in “Karintha” and elsewhere in *Cane* is meant to suggest several things, among them that songs are often changed in the transmission from one person to another rather than simply absorbed and faithfully echoed. As his later poem “Song of the Son” indicates in its resonant final stanza, the music of the folk and the “souls” expressed through it cannot be locked into static forms, with the “seed” of cultural heritage left for Toomer’s generation by the elder one growing until it becomes

[a]n everlasting song, a singing tree,
 Caroling softly souls of slavery,
 What they were, and what they are to me,
 Caroling softly souls of slavery. (C, 14)

Here the question of what musical expressions “are” to their new singers and listeners is as important as what they “were” to their old ones, and the poem’s emphasis on refashioning has implications not only for the preservationist credo of *Cane* but also for the ways a reader might go about interpreting Toomer’s text. Scholars have argued that the formally challenging modernism of *Cane* demands some kind of active collaboration on the part of its audience, as its sometimes bewildering shifts of perspective, setting, and genre presuppose a readership that can serve as “a coparticipant in the act of creation” and make sense of its avant-garde multiplicity.⁶ Additionally, when it came to specifically musical practice Toomer believed, at least in his later years, that open and productive relations between artists and audiences essentially constituted the art. In 1937, he wrote, “What man, full of song, wants to keep it to himself? There are no misers in music. . . . The singer is not content to sing only for himself; by the law of his being his deepest urge is to share his song with others.”⁷ Music, by Toomer’s definition, is fundamentally social, and it follows that an

effective musical text would attempt to preserve songs not as recordings or as formal accounts of past performances—these are shown by *Cane* to be standardizations, even reifications—but rather as opportunities for audiences to participate in something new.

The musical openness of *Cane* also provides a rather ingenious way for the text to destabilize notions of racial classification, a subject about which Toomer—who claimed seven distinct bloodlines—was famously uneasy. In equating his verse with black folk song even as he makes it possible for audiences of many stripes to sing it, Toomer is able to emphasize difference and similitude, self and other, at the same time: his poetry asks readers to imagine an explicitly raced subject position and then to occupy it through the act of vocalization, demonstrating in the process what W. E. B. DuBois had in 1921 called “the Universal in the Particular” in regard to racial categories.⁸ During the performance of such poems, a black musical identity can be said to channel or command nonblack voices. So too can nonblack voices be said to assume or appropriate a black musical identity, and between these poles cycles a dialectic of racial specificity and musical collectivity that *Cane* never resolves and that appears to have consumed Toomer’s thoughts while he wrote it. Corresponding in 1923 with DuBose Heyward, the white novelist whose *Porgy* (1927) would later achieve another sort of biracial musicality at the hands of George Gershwin, Toomer described his text thus: “Both black and white folk come into *Cane*’s pages. . . . But in no instance am I concerned primarily with race; always, I drive straight for my own spiritual reality, and for the spiritual truth of the South.”⁹ Here he refers to the people and experiences that inspired *Cane*, but so too can his black and nonblack audiences both be said to “come into” his text on musical terms, contributors to an aesthetic that scholars have grown increasingly inclined to identify as fundamentally interracial.¹⁰

In the pages that follow, I will attempt a musicological reading of Toomer’s text, showing how *Cane* uses song and the act of singing to memorialize the culture of Georgia, to encourage active readerly involvement in literary production, and to ease racial difference. First, I will take up the presence of the slave spirituals in *Cane*—especially “Deep River”—finding that Toomer tends to ironize the received, familiar African American musical tradition and the often reductive ways it was discussed in the 1910s and 1920s. Second, I will study the text’s poetry, demonstrating how Toomer’s original song verses

invite readers both to perform their own musical interpretations of his words and to imagine themselves as crossing boundaries of ethnicity and subjectivity. I will then conclude by considering the musicality of *Cane* in relation to prevailing trends in Harlem Renaissance scholarship, finding that Toomer's dedication to blurring divisions of black and white in song presaged much in the contemporary critical moment—a moment increasingly attuned to interracial and interdisciplinary currents in American literature.



Before delving into the folk songs that Toomer wrote for *Cane*, it will be useful to consider the tradition of musical letters from which he was distinguishing himself and the means by which he did so, as his text reads not just as an attempt at musical preservation but also as an extended criticism of various earlier approaches to African American musicality. In the years since DuBois had adorned the chapter headings of *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) with transcriptions of what he called the “Sorrow Songs,”¹¹ writers had on several occasions turned to well-known African American music—spirituals in particular—for literary effect. James Weldon Johnson's novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), anonymous upon publication, is narrated by a composer who considers the “old slave songs” to be “material” for his own pieces, with the lyrics of “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” quoted at one point to give readers a more intimate sense of what his work might sound like.¹² Clement Wood's novel *Nigger* (1922), meanwhile, chronicles the changing fortunes of a black family over several years, and it relies on a soundtrack of sacred and popular tunes to reinforce the plot's passage of historical time: at the beginning, his characters sing “I's Troubled in my Mind” and “Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen,” but by the end they are listening to recordings of “My Old Kentucky Home” and “Snuggle Up a Little Closer.”¹³

In these and other such cases, writers were aided in no small part by the fact that such songs had been broadly popular for decades and could therefore be presumed to be part of their readership's common fund of musical knowledge. The Fisk Jubilee Singers, a chorus of black undergraduates from Fisk University in Tennessee, had made the first national hit with the spirituals decades before when they began touring the United States (and eventually Europe) in the early 1870s, along the way raising \$150,000 for their school, selling around sixty

thousand anthologies of their songs, and inspiring any number of imitation ensembles and vaudeville knockoffs throughout the country. The story repeated itself in 1909 when a quartet of Fisk singers began making phonograph records and cylinders for the three largest music labels (Victor, Edison, and Columbia), eventually becoming the second most popular African American vocal act of the era and, as Tim Brooks has shown, selling some two million copies of their performances to a largely white, middle-class audience.¹⁴ So too were the spirituals circulating widely in other settings in the early twentieth century, in preservationist book collections (including important volumes edited by Harry Burleigh, Natalie Curtis Burlin, Henry Edward Krehbiel, and John Work Jr. in the 1910s), in classical arrangements for recital or salon performance, and on the stage.

Perhaps the most important precursor to Toomer's musical verse, however, was Johnson's poem "O Black and Unknown Bards" (1908), an encomium à la Thomas Gray to the inglorious slaves who crafted the spirituals and a compelling model of how a writer might go about integrating song and prosody:

Who heard great "Jordan roll"? Whose starward eye
Saw chariot "swing low"? And who was he
That breathed that comforting, melodic sigh,
"Nobody knows de trouble I see"?

What merely living clod, what captive thing
Could up toward God through all its darkness grope
And find within its deadened heart to sing
These songs of sorrow, love and faith, and hope? (A, 817)

Few poems from the era so effectively demonstrate the power an enduring song can have in a poetic context. Not every reader, of course, will be familiar with the spirituals Johnson refers to here, but if the poem is sung as well as recited by those who are, "O Black and Unknown Bards" becomes an exercise in multivocality, with a striking divide emerging between musical and poetic language. The dominant iambic pentameter is suspended temporarily by the snatches of song, with caesuras implied in the first and second lines and the fourth obeying a new rhythm entirely. Further, the sound of the imported spirituals makes the contrast between the exalted art and degraded social position of the slave considerably more stark, with the cruel designation

of “clod” falling with an uncomfortable thud after the graceful melodic arc of “Nobody knows de trouble I see.” And above all else, Johnson’s invocation of music and his invitation to perform it (if accepted) guarantee the immortality of the bards, temporarily making the poem’s interpreter a medium or instrument for the unknown artists it honors: for Johnson, these slaves still sing, and they sing through us.

Spirituals of the sort that Johnson praises (and would go on to publish in a collection of his own in 1925) sometimes appear in *Cane*, but when Toomer traffics in familiar African American song he does so to very different and generally unsettling effect, as though arguing that known musics are obstructions to rather than facilitators of his text’s larger aims. His first reference of this kind occurs in “Rhobert,” an odd character sketch presenting a “banty-bowed, shaky, ricket-legged man” who, despite owning a home that affords him some degree of material comfort, is “way down” in his troubles (C, 42). Toomer strikes an absurdist note throughout, likening Rhobert to a deep-sea explorer: his house is a “monstrous diver’s helmet” that protects him from life’s vicissitudes, but he is nevertheless a man in peril, one who “would sink in mud should the water be drawn off” and who has made the mistake of assuming the “practical infinity” of his metaphorical air supply. Rhobert’s situation is perverse, and it grows yet more so when Toomer’s piece concludes with an invocation of “Deep River,” which music historian Wayne Shirley has called “perhaps the best-known and best-loved spiritual of all among the general public”:¹⁵

Lets build a monument and set it in the ooze where he goes down.
A monument of hewn oak, carved in nigger-heads. Lets open our
throats, brother, and sing “Deep River” when he goes down.

Brother, Rhobert is sinking.
Lets open our throats, brother,
Lets sing Deep River when he goes down. (C, 43)

If it is readers to whom Toomer refers when calling out for a “brother,” then some of us can indeed “open our throats” and, up to a point, deliver these final three lines of verse in a Johnsonian manner. When sung according to what has come to be their standard melody, the words “Deep River” have something of a productive relationship to their literary context, creating a rare moment of calm and covering five distinct pitches that move progressively “down” along with Rho-

bert. Yet much of “Deep River” is out of place here, with the song’s stated desire for redemptive horizontal motion—“I want to cross over into Camp Ground”—markedly at odds with Rhobert’s vertical sinking. Add to this Toomer’s subsequent, impish description of God as “a Red Cross man with a dredge and a respiration-pump who’s waiting for you at the opposite periphery” (C, 42), and “Deep River” comes here to seem anachronistic, irrelevant, or amusing—anything, that is to say, but transcendent.

There are several reasons why Toomer might have tweaked “Deep River” in this less than respectful manner, but one was surely the widespread popularity that it and other spirituals enjoyed in the 1920s. Literary allusions to well-known pieces of music, after all, can have something of a hallucinogenic effect on readers, dredging up memories of specific performances that can then be brought to bear on the text containing them—a process of automatic recognition that Toomer, with his distaste for “victrolas and player-pianos,” would in all probability have regarded as mere ventriloquism rather than active participation of the sort required by the elusive “Karintha.” Moreover, there is no predicting what might happen when readers are invited to access their own musical memories in literary contexts, especially when the music in question exists in as many versions as the most famous spirituals did in 1923. “Deep River,” for instance, had been published in no fewer than twelve vocal settings by a single arranger in 1917 alone,¹⁶ precipitating a performance craze on the New York recital circuit and inspiring a 1921 pop hit called “Dear Old Southland” that, to some consternation, blatantly plagiarized the beloved melody.¹⁷ Indeed, there were dozens of contemporary versions of the song that Toomer’s first readers might have heard before encountering it in *Cane*, thus making it difficult to say what an appropriate treatment of it in a literary context might actually entail.

Consider the stakes, for example, of Toomer’s first readers aligning “Rhobert” with any of the three records of “Deep River” made by the white opera singer Frances Alda for the Victor company in 1917 and 1918.¹⁸ The performances in question are characterized by lush orchestration, Mancini-esque backup singing, and what can only be described as a virtuosic delivery on Alda’s part, and while they might strike some modern listeners as excessive they were far from unusual at the time. Composers such as Antonín Dvořák and Harlem Renaissance thinkers such as Johnson and Alain Locke had long considered

the spirituals worthy of classical settings, and by 1923 a sizable number of white musicians, concertgoers, and record buyers had come to agree. Thanks in large part to Burleigh's popular 1916 setting, "Deep River" was a bona fide hit in lieder circles in the years before *Cane* and became a staple of the repertoire for practically every male and female concert singer of note, with Shirley arguing that the song's "runaway popularity" was perhaps more responsible than anything else for making it "thinkable for spirituals to appear on a mainstream vocal recital."¹⁹ By the time *Cane* was published, "Deep River" and other spirituals had gone from being marginal music to commanding a central place in America's classical canon, interpreted not just by singers but by any number of instrumentalists as well. And if such performances are heard alongside Rhobert's predicament, Toomer's sketch becomes yet more surreal and his invocation of "Deep River" comes to seem even further out of place: it is of course all but impossible for most readers to open their throats and produce anything on the order of Alda's assured, expertly controlled rendering.

Even when *Cane* spells out how its allusions to black music are meant to be heard, it still causes the known spirituals to sound questionable or problematic. In the short story "Avey," Toomer invokes "Deep River" for a second time and in a specific performance, with the song discussed in the context of an unsatisfying relationship between an anonymous narrator and the woman for whom the story is named. The setting is a park in Washington, D.C., with the narrator—a college-educated artist with a somewhat romantic conception of himself—attempting a spiritual convergence with Avey and drawing upon music to facilitate it, hoping, as he puts it, "to find the truth that people bury in their hearts" (C, 48). He begins to "hum a folk-tune," then recites some of his own works, and finally sings "a promise-song," but through it all an irritating sound in the background works against him: "A band in one of the buildings a fair distance off was playing a march. I wished they would stop. Their playing was like a tin spoon in one's mouth." Far better, the narrator says, would be something else: "I wanted the Howard Glee Club to sing 'Deep River,' from the road. To sing 'Deep River, Deep River,' from the road . . ." But all of his music and plans come to naught, with Avey falling asleep and the narrator left with little to do but shiver through the night and gaze upon the dome of the Capitol, a "gray ghost ship drifting in from sea" (C, 49).

Once more Toomer places a reference to “Deep River” in close proximity to a character’s spiritual failure, and this time the discomfort Toomer creates cannot be blamed on readers’ divergent notions of what the song might be intended to sound like. Some critics have argued that the allusion to “Deep River” here indicates a folk heritage from which African Americans like Avey had grown alienated since the Civil War, but the narrator’s stipulation that the song be sung by the Howard Glee Club raises a host of interpretive possibilities, among them that Toomer is using the music to cast his protagonist—and not his protagonist’s paramour—as out of touch with this tradition. In mentioning one of the many celebrated choral groups from the nation’s historically black colleges and universities, Toomer could not help but wade into what was a widespread and controversial question among music collectors of his era, namely, whether trained singers were in fact capable of giving “legitimate” or “authentic” performances of the spirituals. Ensembles such as the Howard Glee Club had for decades been prominent on the national and international scene, but they had also been criticized in some quarters for using excessively elaborate vocal arrangements, thereby obscuring the spirituals’ folk melodies under a weight of pretentious, quasi-classical harmonization. Thus questions of the highbrow and lowbrow, of refinement and simplicity, and of the relation of race to all of these categories accompany “Deep River” into Toomer’s scene, drawing attention away from the narrator’s pursuit of musical unification and fixing it on his implied desire for self-distinction instead.

Listening to a recording of “Deep River” by the Fisk Jubilee Singers—dated from 1940, but in the same style as their extant 1920s performances—makes for a useful introduction to this debate, as their rendering of the song is even more formally complex than Alda’s.²⁰ Here the melody remains strong throughout, but the vocal lines that undergird it are in such constant and unpredictable harmonic flux that they suggest two very different idioms: on the one hand, the convoluted operatic choruses of Richard Wagner, and on the other, the “overdone” style of “barber-shop” singing that Johnson believed had been derived from the spirituals many years before.²¹ Depending on how this music strikes the reader’s ear, then, Toomer’s second, carefully specified invocation of “Deep River” in *Cane* can raise as many questions as it answers, among them whether the narrator, in having developed an urbane aesthetic sensibility and a taste for sophisticated

music, has not become one of the snobbish, effete, so-called “Dittie” blacks that Toomer’s text sometimes satirizes (*C*, 53). Avey’s inability to comprehend the narrator and his musical overtures may mark her as cut off from a traditional folk heritage, but the musical signification implied by “Deep River” in a glee club setting may just as easily indicate something similar about the man who seems to view her as such. But perhaps his tastes are not so elevated as he thinks? The Fisk Singers’ records were quite popular in the years before and after *Cane*, with the group moving as many as one hundred thousand units of their most acclaimed songs in an era when a record that sold twenty thousand was considered a hit. Indeed, the narrator’s sense for the musically appropriate would seem in many ways to align with that of the broader American public: as Brooks has shown, the Fisk Quartet’s records received relatively little attention in the black press but were the primary means by which “middle-class whites in the early twentieth century became familiar with this important aspect of African American culture.”²²

One might ask at this point why spirituals such as “Deep River” are contextualized so unfavorably by Toomer and why they fall short of accomplishing the musical entrancement and interpersonal reconciliation that *Cane* pursues more broadly. A well-known song, after all, should be correspondingly easy for audiences to take part in, and as the very existence of the Alda and Fisk records indicates, “Deep River” was the province of black, white, male, and female singers in the period. Toomer’s anxieties about the passive consumption of song and the place of music in the commercial market have been rehearsed already, and they undoubtedly contributed to his treatment of the spirituals. But in all likelihood, the greatest problem for Toomer was one of frightenedness, as preexisting pieces of music would have been too burdened with outside, sociopolitical associations to be capable of inspiring the sense of mystery and productive mutability he was attempting in his text. The spirituals had long been at the center of discussions about the nature of race and, among other things, its role in musical expression—discussions that tended to draw attention to the very divisions of black and white that Toomer’s art was largely intended to blur.

Most immediately, the field researchers who had collected and studied the folk culture of the former Confederate states in the years

leading up to *Cane* had long sought to account for the “blackness” of the spirituals they had encountered, an anthropological project that resembled Toomer’s literary one in more than one particular. The first three decades of the twentieth century saw more and more attention paid to the South’s rural arts (which were widely believed to be imperiled by the spread of communication technology and mass entertainment), and in particular to African Americans (who were considered by black and white thinkers alike to represent the closest thing the nation had to a peasant class). Here the chimerical goal was to locate musical and racial “authenticity,” with the researchers who canvassed the region during the 1910s and 1920s dedicated to finding the purest, least “contaminated” examples of African American song and the best means of recording them. Here too it was presumed that the art’s aesthetic validity depended on the racial identity of its performers, with collectors often expressing anxiety that the number of black singers capable of giving legitimate performances of the spirituals and other such musics was dwindling by the day. In the years before Toomer visited Georgia, it was not at all unusual for preservationists to make melancholy pronouncements along the lines of this one from 1918:

A recorder realizes, perhaps better than can another, how approximate only is any notation of music that was never conceived by the singers as a written thing. When one rereads the fixed transcription it seems to bear the same relation to the fluent original that the peep of a caged canary does to the free caroling of a bird on open wing. Would that some genius would add to our system of notation a gamut of more delicate symbols that would enable us better to express the unconscious voices of true folk-singers.

Those of us who are now recording the old Negro melodies keenly realize that we come late to the harvesting, and that a generation and more have lived since the originators of the slave-songs passed from the plantations.²³

Before and after *Cane*, collectors used a wide variety of techniques in attempting to leave the most precise and fullest possible account of their musical and racial specimens. Some opted for dialect over standard English in taking down lyrics; some used Western notation to transcribe melodies; some made audio recordings; and others tested a new process called “phonophotography,” which created a wavelike

visual representation of a sound that captured pitch, time, and inflection and that was frequently accompanied by images of the singer's mouth in action. In almost all of these cases, however, collectors were united in the desire to discover and capture a quintessentially "old Negro" idiom, though most acknowledged that they were regrettably, even tragically "late to the harvesting" of "true" racial music.

By 1923, Americans who were not privy to academic debates over the spirituals or to the concerns of anthropologists had nevertheless been fixated on the idea of racially "authentic" black music for quite some time, thanks to purveyors of turn-of-the-century mass entertainment—the very institution, of course, blamed for desiccating the South's "authentic" musical idiom in the first place. Producers of African American stage reviews of the 1890s, for instance, had frequently attempted to distinguish their acts from the long and tired tradition of blackface minstrelsy and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* adaptations by claiming direct connections to the musical culture that had developed in the South under slavery. The popular traveling extravaganza *The South before the War* (1891) featured, among other things, a chorus that sang spirituals, an on-stage cotton field, a camp meeting, and a grand cakewalk; *Black America* (1895) went one better and allowed its audiences to wander through its tableaux of cabins, farm animals, and cotton gins before the show started; and a host of imitators followed, all trumpeting their antebellum musical pedigrees and you-are-there verisimilitude. Authentic blackness was invariably the selling point of these and other such productions, and it was the yardstick by which they were usually measured by spectators: the *New York Times* review of *Black America* was typical in observing that its performers had been "selected from all the various sections of the South, and are well qualified to enlighten the Northern white man in relation to a life that will soon be extinct."²⁴ Race-based stage entertainment grew somewhat less anachronistic in the decades leading up to *Cane*, but an emphasis on rural, Southern blackness as expressed in song was still to be found in the famous Williams and Walker comedies—notoriously marketed as the work of "Two Real Coons"—and in up-to-the-minute, sophisticated 1920s fare like *Shuffle Along*, *From Dixie to Broadway*, and *Plantation Review*. As ever, these shows were judged to be hits insofar as they were believed to feature genuinely racial song, and their performers skillful insofar as they were perceived to bring audiences closer to some vital black actuality.

All this is to say that *Cane* and its attempt at capturing the musical essence of the South had many antecedents in a variety of social contexts, and that in every previous case—whether aesthetic, anthropological, or commercial—to talk about the region's music was inevitably to talk about race as well. The universalist Toomer therefore took quite a risk in modeling his text on the African American musical idiom: it was very likely, both in his time and after, that his audiences would attend to the racial character of that idiom to the exclusion of all else. And in a great many cases this was to be Toomer's fate, to see his poetry on the one hand praised for being "truly racial" by such luminaries as Langston Hughes and on the other speculated to have been the work of a "racial opportunist" by such later readers as Alice Walker,²⁵ with these opposing conclusions having little in common other than their concern for whether the race feeling and music of *Cane* was sincerely felt. Such categorization of art and identity alike came to irritate Toomer more and more over the course of his life, eventually leading him to deny that *Cane* or any of his other works were racial to any significant degree and to forbid their being reprinted in anthologies of African American verse. It should therefore come as no surprise that the most well-known examples of the established African American musical tradition tend to be ironized in his literary treatment, and that the capacity of the most famous spirituals to ease or transcend racial division in the twentieth century is more or less dismissed in *Cane*.



Toomer's larger project of musical and racial merging is more likely to be enacted by poems that are free of specific referents and that are equally foreign to all his readers' ears, and those who would hear that project must therefore turn to the first section of *Cane*, which contains most of his poetry inspired by rural ways and black folk song. Toomer in fact suggests at one point that readers begin in the middle part of his text (which depicts urban life and features the failures of "Deep River" in "Rhobert" and "Avey") and only later turn to the beginning,²⁶ with this jumbled itinerary in some ways confirming the popular interpretation of *Cane* as a search for and recovery of a lost, essential black heritage. But Toomer's focus on black particularity and his use of black musical forms in the early poems of the book are better thought of as access points rather than final destinations,

as a means of inviting readers to construct and participate in a musical idiom rather than to evaluate it from an outside perspective. The key is to avoid reductionism and not conclude that the musical pull of these poems is a direct and exclusive function of their blackness, of what the doomed young white man of Toomer's story "Blood-Burning Moon" insensitively and inadequately refers to as an ineffable, inherently racial "way": "What way was that? Damned if he knew. . . . Was there something about niggers that you couldnt know?" (C, 33). For Toomer, the musical idiom as expressed in *Cane* was something any number of readers could "know" through their own creation of it, with his invitation to participate in blackness meant to serve as a portal not only to racial experience but also to something beyond it.

The songs of this first section, that is to say, compel multiracial performances of ostensibly racial music, and many of them treat the unification of voices on a thematic level even as they make it possible on a formal one. Consider "Cotton Song," whose musicality is premised on the interplay of singers and depends on an audible contrast of distinct, alternating sounds. There are at least two voices in this work song, the first of which begins by calling,

Come, brother, come. Lets lift it;
Come now, hewit! roll away!
Shackles fall upon the Judgment Day
But lets not wait for it. (C, 11)

As was the case in "Karintha," "Cotton Song" explicitly invites vocalization, with the singer's call to "lift it" in the first line not just implying that there is a job to be done but also striking a Johnsonian note, exhorting audiences, as had the older poet in the so-called "Negro National Anthem" of 1900, to "lift every voice and sing" (A, 874). Once again Toomer eschews formal punctuation, relying on homonyms to reinforce both the aurality of language and the inclusive aims of Toomer's verse: "hewit" sounds as "hew it," invoking that perplexing word that implies, as does "cleave," both a sharp separation and the tantalizing possibility of drawing close to a boundary. Finally, the voice's call to resist worldly "[s]hackles" reinforces the poem's emphasis on free expression, and then, in the following stanzas, Toomer makes a typographical decision that he repeats nowhere else in the Georgia poetry of *Cane*, with a second voice emerging and being set aside in quotation marks:

God's body's got a soul,
 Bodies like to roll the soul,
 Cant blame God if we dont roll,
 Come, brother, roll, roll!

Cotton bales are the fleecy way
 Weary sinner's bare feet trod,
 Softly, softly to the throne of God,
 "We aint agwine t wait until th Judgment Day!"

Nassur; nassur,
 Hump.
 Eoho, eoho, roll away!
 We aint agwine to wait until th Judgment Day!"

God's body's got a soul,
 Bodies like to roll the soul,
 Cant blame God if we dont roll,
 Come, brother, roll, roll! (C, 11)

One voice is in an obviously marked dialect ("Nassur") while the other attempts a certain parable-like poetry ("Weary sinner's bare feet trod"), but common ground is as important as difference. Both echo one another in referring to the "Judgment Day," and their frequently repeated calls for the other to "roll" create a sense of constant circularity, as if to demonstrate that this poem could roll on forever, cycling back and forth for as long as there is a new voice to respond to the last one.

Others of the Georgia poems suggest a Pythagorean conception of reality in which all supposedly discrete objects are revealed to be connected by some larger harmonic plan; their songlike lyricism reverberates in Toomer's surrounding prose passages and elides difference by working, as he would later put it in his autobiographical writings, to "lift facts, things, happenings to the planes of rhythm, feeling, and significance" (*WS*, 20). The story "Carma" demonstrates Toomer's cosmic sense of unity especially well, a tale of an assertive, adulterous woman whose life is said to be "the crudest melodrama"—or as the term's prefix, "melo," implies, the crudest musical drama (*C*, 13). Her village of Dixie Pike is a place of constant singing, with the voices of neighbors ever in the air. Carma does not herself sing, but she is no less tuneful: indeed, "her body is a song" in and of itself (*C*, 12). Lives

are music, people are music, and it would seem that time is music as well, for at the beginning, middle, and end of “Carma,” an imperative, chanting voice emerges both to invite the reader’s participation once more and to mark key transition points in the narrative:

Wind is in the cane. Come along.
 Cane leaves swaying, rusty with talk,
 Scratching choruses above the guinea’s squawk,
 Wind is in the cane. Come along.

Sometimes it is cane, sometimes corn, that creates the sensation described in the first and fourth lines, but in either case the unifying effect is the same. The stalks suggest both the reeds of Pan’s pipes and the wind-swept strings of the aeolian harp, with the “choruses” of the physical world echoing in their “[s]cratching” way the “crudest melodrama” of human affairs and thus merging the people of Georgia with the place itself. Even the grating quality of certain sounds Toomer mentions—scratching, squawking, and somehow “rusty”—only serves to highlight just how all-encompassing this musicality is. “Carma” seems almost transcendental in its supposition, to borrow from Emerson, that “[u]nderneath the inharmonious and trivial particulars, is a musical perfection, the Ideal journeying always with us, the heaven without rent or seam.”²⁷

Toomer often uses the song verses of *Cane* to interweave voices and depict the unification of humanity with the physical world, but perhaps most significant is the way he employs them to bring about racial harmony. The story “Esther” serves as a fitting final symbol of the broad reconciliation to which Toomer’s text is so often devoted. Here a black man named Barlo drops to his knees in a bar, claims to have fallen into a communion with Jesus, and relates the story of African enslavement at the hands of whites, with his words registering a transition into a musicalized state of being:

“[B]ut his head was caught up in th clouds. An while he was agazin at th heavens, heart filled up with th Lord, some little white-ant bid-dies came an tied his feet to chains. They led him t th coast, they led him t th sea, they led him across th ocean an they didnt set him free. The old coast didnt miss him, an th new coast wasnt free, he left the old-coast brothers, t give birth t you an me. O Lord, great God Almighty, t give birth t you an me.” (C, 23)

Read aloud, the rhythmic, even sing-song quality of Barlo's language becomes immediately audible, with a rhyme scheme emerging to connect the words "sea," "free," and "me," and his vision (beginning with "They led him t th coast" and ending with "birth t you an me") spontaneously organizing itself into ten lines of trimeter. As language shifts from prose to verse the reader is called on to imagine and create the poem's musicality, and Toomer reinforces this openness by describing the ways the townspeople who surround Barlo contribute to his chant: "Old gray mothers are in tears. Fragments of melodies are being hummed." And strikingly, the revelatory, communally created space of song eases—if only temporarily—racial difference in Georgia, as "[w]hite folks are touched and curiously awed," preachers of both races "confer as to how best to rid themselves of the vagrant, usurping fellow," and even "old Limp Underwood, who hated niggers" seems to fall under Barlo's influence and wakes up the following morning "to find that he held a black man in his arms" (C, 23). In its moment of musicality, a tale of opposition also becomes the means by which opposition might be resolved, a fleeting echo of the at-once racial and inclusive poetic project of *Cane*.

That Toomer hoped to use blackness as a means of expressing some broader spiritual understanding in his work is plain, as he revealed in a 1923 letter to Frank: "As an approach, as a constant element (part of a larger whole) of interest, Negro is good. But to try to tie me to one of my parts is surely to loose [*sic*] me. My own letters have taken Negro as a point, and from there have circled out."²⁸ But the circular quality of Toomer's text has frequently eluded his readers, largely because his most effective means of demonstrating the DuBoisian universal in the particular—the available and singable cadences of the black musical tradition—are so easy to associate exclusively with the latter. As Burlin, the aforementioned collector of Southern folk culture, had declared some years before *Cane*, when an audience of Toomer's era heard African American song, it was not uncommon for them to "think of Emerson and ponder: The Negro 'Over-Soul'—is it Music?"²⁹ For Burlin and many like her, the music of the black South was to be sincerely admired, but so too was it understood to be the creation of a fundamentally different, quite possibly unknowable race. It was an art that could on the one hand be thought of as having achieved the heights of spiritual sublimity and on the other remain firmly segregated by what George Frederickson has termed "romantic racialism" on the part of

whites,³⁰ and thus it was that Toomer could be read, both in his time and since, as having gained access to a deep and particular race feeling through the songs of *Cane* but not gone further than this.

The universalist Toomer, however, could at least have taken solace in knowing that he understood transcendentalism better than had particularists like Burlin: race, after all, is precisely the sort of material concern that Emerson regarded as having distracted humanity from higher unities, with the very notion of a “Negro ‘Over-Soul’” therefore being a contradiction in terms. Toward the end of his famous essay, he writes, “[T]he heart in thee is the heart of all; not a valve, not a wall, not an intersection is there anywhere in nature, but one blood rolls uninterruptedly an endless circulation through all men, as the water of the globe is all one sea, and, truly seen, its tide is one.”³¹ And if the Emersonian Over-Soul were to find its expression in music, it would not only sound black but would also achieve a vastness along the lines of the following passage from “The Blue Meridian,” the most noteworthy poem that Toomer completed in his largely fallow years after *Cane*:

Upon my phonograph are many records
 Played on sides in sacred and profane extremes;
 Sometimes I hear Gregorian chants
 Or Bach’s “It Is Consummated”;
 Sometimes I hear Duke Ellington
 Or Eddy Duchin sing popular contemporary;
 And some rare times
 I hear myself, the unrecorded,
 Sing the flow of I,
 The notes and language not of this experience,
 Sing I am,
 As the flow of I pauses,
 Then passes through my water-wheel—
 And those radiant others, the living real,
 The people identical in being. (*WS*, 228)

Each variety of music, “sacred and profane” and old and new alike, is an access point to that which is “not of this experience,” and no one style is incompatible with any individual. It is the openness of the listener that matters, the ability in “rare times” to hear “the flow of I” even through a medium so ancient as the Gregorian monks or so

unpromising as Eddy Duchin or so complex as Duke Ellington, the man lauded today for having achieved the Toomeresque ideal of creating a music that is unmistakably African American but is also, in the words of John Edward Hasse, “beyond category.”³² And while readers may not always have heard this expansiveness in the folk songs of *Cane*, the literary record Toomer left behind is no less audible and its musical calls no less inviting for that.



Is it counterintuitive or strange to think of African American musical poetry—whether by Toomer or other writers of the 1920s—as interracial in its construction and available to nonblack voices in its reception? To a degree, no: critical approaches to the Harlem Renaissance as a movement have come increasingly to resist what Paul Gilroy has called “the continuing lure of ethnic absolutisms,” instead arguing that *Cane* and other texts like it are products of a distinctively modern, “mongrel” cultural synthesis.³³ Certainly there have been eminent thinkers over the decades who have claimed that black writers were or should have been pursuing a separatist agenda in the 1920s, or that the effects of white participation on black cultural production in the period were generally damaging. But newer studies of the movement have tended to characterize it as an interracial nexus, defined by literary relations between blacks and whites that catalyzed expression both in African American culture and across a broadly defined modernism.³⁴ African American writing of the Harlem Renaissance is today more likely to be considered in expanded racial, aesthetic, and geographical contexts, with the movement’s works shown to be calling and responding to audiences outside of the niches to which their authors were far too often consigned.

But unexamined assumptions remain in criticism of the Harlem Renaissance, particularly in regard to music and its influence on artists in other fields. While the movement as a whole is now understood to have been vibrantly interracial, its component strain of musical expression is seldom discussed in the same terms; the spirituals, the blues, and other musics are frequently held up as wholly African American (and usually working-class African American) presences circulating within a multiethnic cultural network. As Gilroy has warned, modern paradigms of cultural diversity are often constructed in such a way that “right and left, racist and anti-racist, black and

white tacitly share a view of it as little more than a collision between fully formed and mutually exclusive cultural communities.”³⁵ In a similar vein, even the best historians of the Harlem Renaissance are sometimes inclined to hypothesize an uncomplicated strain of essentialized musical blackness within it. It remains common for critics of the movement—most of them primarily conversant in its literature—to describe it as an interracial meeting of the arts without noting the extent to which those arts were significantly interracial already. Black music is thus presumed to have been immutably so, even when it existed in a multiethnic historical moment; so too is the poetry that emulated it, even when it is studied by scholars explicitly committed to the multiethnic ideal.

If histories of the Harlem Renaissance have not always been as attuned to the interracial possibilities of racial music and musical poetry as they could be, it is in part because writers of the period tended to present the relationship between verse structure and race in fairly rigid terms. Consider Hughes’s groundbreaking 1926 essay “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” in which he accuses Countee Cullen of shamefully admitting that he “would like to be white” in obeying genteel models of prosody; against this formal cowardice Hughes arrays an “honest American Negro literature” enriched by spirituals, blues, and jazz.³⁶ The relatively clear-cut distinction he articulates between an abject, essentially white poetics of assimilation and a confident, essentially black musicality often surfaced during the 1920s, theorized by representatives of both races. Such divisions were further exacerbated by the broad intellectual framework of the Harlem Renaissance, whose leaders typically assumed, as Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Gene Andrew Jarrett have observed, that an “ahistorical, lower-class, and authentically black” folk culture underlay the movement’s best works.³⁷

A second obstacle to considering African American musical poetry as anything other than a self-explanatory, unambiguous expression of blackness lies in this nation’s long, well-known history of exploiting the musics of its minority populations. White responses to black song in the 1920s—no matter how well-meaning or sincere—were marked so frequently by misunderstanding, condescension, and outright racism that it can be very difficult to think of the racial relationships they engendered as anything other than what Eric Lott has called “love and theft.”³⁸ Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle’s 1921 musical *Shuffle*

Along, a landmark of African American theater, played to segregated houses and audiences that were close to 90 percent white; black social observers such as Wallace Thurman reported being “forced out of their own places” on the Harlem scene in favor of white cabaret-goers;³⁹ and the plantation-themed decor and acts at such popular nightspots as the Cotton Club led Sterling Brown to accuse whites who attended them of seeking “a ‘jazzed-up’ version” of “the contented slave . . . with cabarets supplanting cabins, and Harleimized ‘blues,’ instead of the spirituals and slave reels.”⁴⁰ It was a time when even many outside of Harlem believed, as the white writer Carl Van Vechten dramatically argued in a 1925 issue of *Vanity Fair*, that much of the era’s popular music had more or less been “raped from the Negro,”⁴¹ and the tensions that so often characterized musical relationships in that period can today add an ominous undertone to the question of black musical verse and interracial responses to it.

Musical meaning, however, is not so easily located and fixed as this, with Gilroy and others arguing that it has a unique tendency to resist “categorisation as the practice of either legislators or interpreters,” particularly in regards to race.⁴² Readers of *Cane* and other poetic works of the Harlem Renaissance would therefore do well to approach them from a musicological perspective as well as a literary one, for scholars in that field have come increasingly to argue that African American music, in the words of Christopher Small, represents a “brilliant tradition, which resulted from the collision in the Americas, during and after the times of slavery, between two great musical cultures” and which “partakes of the nature of both but is not the same as either.”⁴³ The arguments of Gilroy, Small, and others presume that the flow of musical forms between African Americans and European Americans in the United States and their constant adaptation along the way represent predictable and positive developments rather than causes for alarm, and moreover that it is in music that black and white Americans have most consistently enjoyed an intimacy that their nation, for much of its history, forbade in its laws and mores. Heard in such terms, the production, reception, and imitation of black music in the 1920s became part of an ongoing dynamic of communication and change, one whose allure lay in the opportunity it presented to performers and listeners alike to cross racial boundaries or to remake racial identities within an aesthetic space.⁴⁴ And such a musical dynamic, of course, has great implications for the continuing

study of the Harlem Renaissance poets, so many of whom called to their readers in song and sought to join in a far-flung musical conversation among diverse peoples.

When Johnson published his collection of the spirituals in 1925, he found their fusion of “primitive” chant and Christian spirituality, their marriage of European melody and African rhythm, and their “fluid,” simultaneously black and white language to be nothing less than a “miracle” of cultural amalgamation.⁴⁵ Similarly, in discussing the jazz of the 1920s, Zora Neale Hurston in 1934 described an ever-cycling racial flux, finding a spirit of collaboration there and in any number of that era’s other, most distinctive cultural productions: “What we really mean by originality is the modification of ideas. . . . Thus has arisen a new art in the civilised world, and thus has our so-called civilisation come. The exchange and re-exchange of ideas between groups.”⁴⁶ Few writers have so ably expressed the inclusive musical thinking that seems to have motivated Toomer during the writing of *Cane*, and few have so effectively suggested the ways in which literary works by African Americans in the early twentieth century could use music to blur formal and generic boundaries while at the same time making race both palpable and elusive. To a certain extent, contemporary scholars are still working their way toward the paradigm of musical synthesis that Johnson, Hurston, Toomer, and others attempted to express in their works nearly a hundred years ago. But listening audiences in the decades that followed the Harlem Renaissance experienced similar sensations of racial interrelation again and again during the rise of the blues, of rock and roll, and of hip-hop, and in the end it may be they who most instinctively appreciate the central place that this literary movement and its musical poetics occupy within a still-sounding, fundamentally American story.

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Notes

- 1 “The *Cane* Years,” in *The Wayward and the Seeking: A Collection of Writings by Jean Toomer*, ed. Darwin T. Turner (Washington, D.C.: Howard Univ. Press, 1980), 123. Further references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as *WS*.
- 2 See Michael Soto, “Jean Toomer and Horace Liveright; or, A New Negro Gets ‘Into the Swing of It,’” in *Jean Toomer and the Harlem Renaissance*,

- ed. Geneviève Fabre and Michel Feith (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2001), 170. On the musical and vocal structures of *Cane*, see Barbara E. Bowen, "Untroubled Voice: Call and Response in *Cane*," in *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: Methuen, 1984); John F. Callahan, *In the African-American Grain: The Pursuit of Voice in Twentieth-Century Black Fiction* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1988); Geneviève Fabre, "Dramatic and Musical Structures in 'Harvest Song' and 'Kabnis': Toomer's *Cane* and the Harlem Renaissance," in *Jean Toomer and the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Geneviève Fabre and Michel Feith (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2001); Karen Jackson Ford, *Split-Gut Song: Jean Toomer and the Poetics of Modernity* (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 2005); Farah Jasmine Griffin, "Who Set You Flowin'?: The African-American Migration Narrative" (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995); Benjamin F. McKeever, "Cane as Blues," *Negro American Literature Forum* 4 (July 1970); and Philipp Schweighauser, *The Noises of American Literature, 1890–1985: Toward a History of Literary Acoustics* (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 2006).
- 3 Waldo Frank, foreword to Jean Toomer, *Cane: Norton Critical Edition*, ed. Darwin T. Turner (1923; reprint, New York: Norton, 1988), 138.
 - 4 Jean Toomer, *Cane: Norton Critical Edition*, ed. Darwin T. Turner (1923; reprint, New York: Norton, 1988), 15. Further references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as *C*.
 - 5 Jean Toomer, "Karintha," *Broom* (January 1923): 83.
 - 6 Joel B. Peckham, "Jean Toomer's *Cane*: Self as Montage and the Drive toward Integration," *American Literature* 72 (June 2000): 279. For more on *Cane* and modernist technique, see Maria Isabel Caldeira, "Jean Toomer's *Cane*: The Anxiety of the Modern Artist," *Callaloo* (autumn 1985): 544–50; Rachel Farebrother, "'Adventuring through the Pieces of a Still Unorganized Mosaic': Reading Jean Toomer's Collage Aesthetic in *Cane*," *Journal of American Studies* 40 (December 2006): 503–21; Catherine Gunther Kodat, "To 'Flash White Light from Ebony': The Problem of Modernism in Jean Toomer's *Cane*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 46 (spring 2000): 1–19; Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Voice, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994); Frederik L. Rusch, "Form, Function, and Creative Tension in *Cane*: Jean Toomer and the Need for the Avant-Garde," *MELUS* 17 (winter 1991–1992): 15–28; and Werner Sollors, "Jean Toomer's *Cane*: Modernism and Race in Interwar America," in *Jean Toomer and the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Geneviève Fabre and Michel Feith (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2001).
 - 7 "Music," in *A Jean Toomer Reader: Selected Unpublished Writings*, ed. Frederik L. Rusch (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 276.
 - 8 W. E. B. DuBois, "President Harding and Social Equality," in *Writings: Essays and Articles* (New York: Library of America, 1987), 1194.

- 9 Jean Toomer to DuBose Heyward, 16 May 1923; reprinted in Cynthia Earl Kerman and Richard Eldridge, *The Lives of Jean Toomer: A Hunger for Wholeness* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1987), 95.
- 10 On the interracialism of *Cane*, see Robert Bone, *Down Home: A History of Afro-American Short Fiction from Its Beginnings to the End of the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Putnam, 1975); Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the "Racial" Self* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987); Matthew Pratt Guterl, *The Color of Race in America, 1900–1940* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001); Charles Harmon, "Cane, Race, and 'Neither/Norism,'" *Southern Literary Journal* 32 (spring 2000): 90–101; George Hutchinson, "Jean Toomer and American Racial Discourse," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 35 (summer 1993): 226–50; Ross Posnock, *Color and Culture: Black Writers and the Making of the Modern Intellectual* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998); and Jeff Webb, "Literature and Lynching: Identity in Jean Toomer's *Cane*," *ELH* 67 (spring 2000): 205–28.
- 11 W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; reprint, New York: Penguin, 1996), 204.
- 12 James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, in *Writings* (New York: Library of America, 2004), 86, 108. Further references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as *A*.
- 13 Clement Wood, *Nigger: A Novel* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1922), 45, 147.
- 14 Tim Brooks, *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1890–1919* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2004), 192.
- 15 Wayne D. Shirley, "The Coming of 'Deep River,'" *American Music* 15 (winter 1997): 493.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 515.
- 17 Turner Layton (composer) and Henry Creamer (lyricist), "Dear Old Southland" (New York: Jack Mills, 1921).
- 18 One of Frances Alda's recordings of "Deep River," arranged by William Arms Fisher, can be downloaded for free at www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/gramophone/indexe.html.
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 The Fisk Singers' record containing "Deep River" has been rereleased on CD as part of the *Fisk Jubilee Singers in Chronological Order* series (Document Records, 1997).
- 21 James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson, *The Books of American Negro Spirituals* (1925; reprint, New York: Viking, 1964), 36.
- 22 Brooks, *Lost Sounds*, 192.
- 23 Natalie Curtis Burlin, *Negro Folk-Songs*, 4 vols. (New York: G. Schirmer, 1918), 2:10.
- 24 "Scenes in 'Black America,'" *New York Times*, 26 May 1895.
- 25 "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," in *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes, Volume 9: Essays on Art, Race, Politics, and World Affairs*,

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- 26 Toomer to Waldo Frank, 12 December 1922, in *The Letters of Jean Toomer, 1919–1924*, ed. Mark Whalan (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 2006), 101.
- 27 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Experience," in *Essays and Lectures* (New York: Library of America, 1983), 484.
- 28 Toomer to Waldo Frank, January 1923, *Letters*, ed. Whalan, 113.
- 29 Burlin, *Songs*, 4:5.
- 30 George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 108.
- 31 Emerson, "The Over-Soul," *Essays and Lectures*, 399.
- 32 John Edward Hasse, *Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington* (New York: Da Capo, 1993).
- 33 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1993), 3.
- 34 Outstanding interracial approaches to the Harlem Renaissance and its literary context include Ann Douglas's *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995); Susan Gubar's *Racechanges: White Skin, Black Face in American Culture* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997); George Hutchinson's *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995); Sieglinde Lemke's *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998); Walter Benn Michaels's *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1995); Michael North's *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994); and Werner Sollors's *Ethnic Modernism* (2002; reprint, Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2008).
- 35 Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 7.
- 36 Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," in *Essays*, 31, 34.
- 37 Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Gene Andrew Jarrett, eds., introduction to *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, and African American Culture, 1892–1938* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 2007), 9.
- 38 Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993).
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- 40 "Negro Character as Seen by White Authors," in *A Son's Return: Selected Essays of Sterling A. Brown*, ed. Mark A. Sanders (Boston: Northeastern Univ. Press, 1996), 176.

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- 42 Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 76.
- 43 Christopher Small, *Music of the Common Tongue: Survival and Celebration in Afro-American Music* (New York: Riverrun Press, 1987), 3.
- 44 Particularly compelling or well-known overviews of black-white influence and its role in creating a distinctively American musical tradition (in addition to Gilroy's and Small's) include Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock 'n' Roll Music* (1975; reprint, New York: Plume, 1990); Ronald Radano, *Lying Up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003); and Nick Tosches, *Where Dead Voices Gather* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2001).
- 45 Johnson and Johnson, *Spirituals*, 19, 43, 21.
- 46 Zora Neale Hurston, "Characteristics of Negro Expression," in *Selected Articles* (New York: Library of America, 1995), 838.