

JEAN TOOMER, MULATTO AND MODERNIST:  
THE FUSED RACE AND FUSED FORM OF  
*CANE*

By

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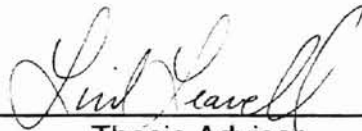
Master of Education  
University of Central Oklahoma  
Edmond, Oklahoma  
1992

Bachelor of Arts  
Northeastern State University  
Tahlequah, Oklahoma  
1989

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate College of the  
Oklahoma State University  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for  
the Degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS  
May, 1997

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Thesis Approved:



Thesis Adviser







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## PREFACE

In the fall of 1993, I enrolled in Dr. Leavell's modern/contemporary literature course that examined familiar "novels" under a different form, the short story cycle. We discussed how familiar texts, like Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, Faulkner's *Go Down Moses*, and Hemingway's *In Our Time*, labeled by critics as novels, could be viewed under the definitions of a different genre. As we analyzed this genre, I thought how vulnerable art and artists are at the hands of critics who define pieces based on literary traditions. Chagrined, I thought of the pieces of literature that I could have misread.

When we finally turned the pages of Jean Toomer's *Cane* and examined the pioneering strategies of this modern writer, the consequences of misleading critiques became apparent to me. Rarely do we read of the Harlem Renaissance without seeing the name Jean Toomer. Accordingly, scholars contend that Toomer contributed to the awakening of the African-American experience in the 1920s and that his *Cane* secured his place in the African-American canon.

But after reading biographical sketches, I found that Toomer, as an orphaned mulatto, rarely felt as if he belonged to any racial category. Moving between both black and white, rich and poor, young and old, Toomer knew little about securing his social position. He defined race as a social institution, an

unjust categorization of Americans, creating a prejudice and fragmented society. Toomer, therefore, refused to be placed within these confines. As a result of my reading, I believe that Toomer's social "drifting" is his personal illustration that Americans should not feel restricted to social categories and that Americans do not lead isolated lives but actually share a common experience—alienation. In fact, as an ostracized young man, he found only one way to find peace within his world, and that peace came from writing. His alienation gave Toomer an objective perspective that lead to his social and literary philosophies.

From Dr. Leavell's emphasis on the importance of literary form and theme, I realized that critics fail to understand *Cane's* structure relative to its theme. If critics did not apprehend Toomer's racial ideology presented in *Cane*, how could they interpret the significance of the text's structure? A man who would not be confined to one race could not limit his art to conventions of one culture. In *Cane*, Toomer fuses the art forms of the African-American with the European.

I see Toomer, a man eventually marginalized because of his racial ambiguity, creating a text, *Cane*, that follows the traditions of American literary pursuits. In the tradition of Franklin, Emerson, Hawthorne, and Whitman, Toomer attempts to create an American character and structure. Toomer's mulatto represents modern man, and he presents these isolated characters in a modern, fragmented society. He fuses his racial ideology into *Cane's* structure. Like its multi-racial characters, *Cane's* structure depends on the aesthetic



conventions of many races. Toomer's literary innovations with form and theme make him a Modernist. Because of his ethnicity, however, Toomer found his text as much on the periphery as himself.

After Toomer voiced his racial views and his literary aspirations, scholars would contend that Toomer "deserted his people." I maintain that readers misinterpret *Cane's* projection of his mixed-race characters and the significance of its multi-cultural form. Critics have not fully understood Toomer or *Cane*. Toomer's views blur lines that critics fail to reevaluate.

After examining Toomer and his text, I can appreciate the complexity of a man who refused categorization and a book that evades literary classification. In the first chapter, I will place Toomer in American literary traditions and provide biographical details that influenced his social views. In the second chapter, I will discuss Toomer's racial and social ideology and its impact on *Cane*. In the third chapter, I will focus on the theme and structure of *Cane's* prose. In the fourth chapter, my focus will shift to the merging of *Cane's* poetic theme and structure. Opposing other critics who have placed Toomer in the African-American canon, I propose that Jean Toomer, who was influenced by white Modernist writers, such as Anderson and Frank, experiments with a national character—the mulatto—and a national form—a structure blending the art forms of the African American and European American—and writes within the broader traditions of American literature.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to express my appreciation to my advisor, Dr. Linda Leavell, for without her constant reassurance and guidance I would not have completed this project. Her demand for excellence and her faith in my persistence accompanied me throughout this endeavor. Of course, her mentorship started several years ago in her classroom, where I initiated my Toomer studies. While in her class, I found that she is not only an outstanding scholar, but more importantly, a superb teacher. Her compassion for students makes her genuine, and this sincerity led me to her.

I also thank my other committee members, Dr. Jeffrey Walker and Dr. Elizabeth Grubgeld. Their knowledge is my inspiration.

Of course, I express my gratitude to my family and friends. As so often in my life, their love and support carried me through the hardships. Whenever I need someone to advise or to listen, Mom and Dad never falter in giving me reassurance. In their eyes, I have always been a success. And this belief in me has created my tenacity. I have persevered to make them proud. For the past eleven years, Lane Glenn has offered his long-distance motivation. Through our e-mail correspondence, he has created the spark of ambition and a desire in me to fulfill my potential. As for my friend Pam Stinson, she can only be explained

as one of life's unexpected pleasures, her reserve and scholarship continuing to teach me.

Finally, I want to thank Shane Bainum, who forfeited endless days to research and the library, who patiently accompanied me through all-nighters, who comforted me through the countless revisions, and who celebrates this degree with me.

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## Chapter One

## A Search for Personal and Artistic Identity

*What then is the American, this new man? He is neither a European nor the descendant of a European; hence that strange mixture of blood which you will find in no other country . . . He is an American who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manner, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced . . . Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world.*

*Michel-Guillaume Jean de Crevecoeur*

By the end of the eighteenth century, America was attempting to sever its religious and political ties with Europe, but it struggled under the "sluggard intellect . . . of its iron lids" to create a national character and literary form (Emerson, *Scholar* 55-56). Walt Whitman answered Emerson's search for a writer who realized the "value of [America's] incomparable materials" (Emerson, *Poet* 235). Whitman's poetic celebration of America provided a new vision of American form and character. He embraced America's pluralism and in his poetry presented America's diversity of people. Liberating American writers from European poetic forms, he initiated a new "breathless" poetic line and the use of American colloquialism. His innovations with American character and American

form foreshadowed the concerns of American Modernists.

Modernists in the early-twentieth century undertook the struggles of their nineteenth-century predecessors and probed questions concerning the American. Following Whitman's lead, they examined the many ethnicities in America. Whereas Whitman celebrated difference within America, some Modernists saw themselves cast apart from the majority and America because of their literary philosophies, region, gender, or ethnicity. Unlike these Modernists, such as the Fugitives, the expatriate poets, and the Harlem Renaissance writers, who shunned Whitman's embracement of pluralism, Jean Toomer demonstrated a strong claim to Whitman's philosophy and sided with other Modernists and former American writers who experimented with character and form. Like Whitman, Toomer saw form and character as extensions of multi-cultural America.

But despite Toomer's embracing of American pluralism and his *Cane* appearing two years before the Harlem Renaissance began, critics can not resist making Toomer a founding father of the Renaissance and reading his publications as African-American literature. Perhaps the primary reason for critics' misreadings of *Cane* involves Toomer's use of mulattoes, whom readers have assumed were African Americans. But the mulatto has rarely been a welcome member in the African-American community.

Even the Harlem Renaissance had its biases, and the most interesting

aspect of prejudice within the African-American community is the frequent bias toward skin color. According to Judith Berzon, "historically there have been distinctions made between lighter and darker-skinned members of the oppressed caste" (4). Although African Americans usually considered the lighter African American to be more attractive, the reaction toward the lighter-skinned mulatto and his ability to "pass" created anxiety within the community. The ability of the mulatto to slip over the bounds of the Caucasian community has caused suspicion in the minds of African Americans and Caucasians. Whereas some mulattoes often found themselves absorbed or placed into the African-American community, this placement did not secure their racial identity. For once inside these boundaries, mulattoes still found themselves set apart.

Other artists have been interested in the mulatto since at least the eighteenth century. And by the height of the Victorian period, visual artists, such as Joanna Mary Boyce who painted *Mulatto Woman*, were inspired by the mulatto's "ambiguity of the ethnic identity" (Nunn 13). For writers of American fiction, the mulatto has often symbolized the merging of American taboos: sex and race. In "White Slaves: The Mulatto Hero in Antebellum Fiction," Nancy Bentley argues that for writers before the Civil War, miscegenation created mixed-blooded offspring that destroyed the "imagined synthesis between nature and society in bourgeois domesticity" (503). Judith Berzon claims that antebellum fiction set up the mulatto as an exotic (14). Later, Modernist fiction

presents the mulatto as a sufferer searching for an identity but wanting to sidestep old issues concerning race. In African-American fiction after the Harlem Renaissance, the mulatto is alienated due to the individual's ambiguous race, or the individual becomes whole by embracing his African-American heritage. A writer or individual embracing multiple ancestry was inconceivable (Sollors 293-316). The mulatto's search for a social identity will end only with the absence of social categories—an impossibility in America.

Jean Toomer, mulatto, refused racial classification and membership in the Harlem Renaissance. His literary experimentation with character and form placed him within the Whitman tradition and Modernism when he attempted to create a new American art that would widen the boundaries of America's national character—a national character that encompassed both European and African predecessors. But before Toomer could create an American character and form, he needed to secure his own identity. Toomer vacillated between his need for inner fulfillment and his refusal to be racially categorized.

Toomer's life became a constant battle to discover his missing heritage, which in turn became a quest to find inner peace and a sense of identity. He believed that securing his identity relied in part upon his effort to find his father. His father, Nathan Toomer, a light-skinned mulatto, abandoned his wife, Nina, and his six-week-old son, Nathan Pinchback (Jean Toomer). Because Toomer never knew his father, his comfort came from his child-like mother. Nina and her



son, Nathan, went to live with her parents. Toomer's search for his heritage is oddly reflected in the constant changing of his name. After their move, Toomer's grandfather, P. B. S. Pinchback, the influential former governor of Louisiana, wanted to change the boy's name to his own, and his mother agreed to drop Nathan. Her child became known as Eugene or "Pinchy" Toomer. After Toomer was old enough to claim his own name, he decided that he preferred the use of Eugene, or its French version, Jean. Years later, Jean Toomer would reclaim his father's name, calling himself Nathan Jean Toomer. He added Nathan to his name for two reasons: in hopes of reuniting with his father who, unknown to Toomer, died in 1907, and of correcting readers' assumptions that he was female. (Because he decided to use the feminine spelling, he encountered this error frequently. Ironically, Toomer, who was attempting to define his identity, was even sexually misinterpreted.) His unsettled childhood and the constant changing of his name demonstrate his difficulty in forming an identity.

Toomer's search for identity becomes more complicated when considering his struggle with race. His politically active grandparents, the Pinchbacks, socialized in white aristocratic circles. After living in this environment for fourteen years, Toomer moved into his Uncle Bismark's home in an upper-class black community. As a child and adolescent, Toomer found himself "passing" into many ethnic environs. Later, he discovered that his light-skinned father also slipped between the boundaries of both the African-

American and Caucasian communities. His father "stayed at the white hotel, did business with white men, and courted a black woman" (Kerman and Eldridge 85). Toomer found that his race did not fall into one particular category. By claiming one racial identity, he felt that he was denying another part of himself, so he did not identify himself within a particular race.

Because of his confusion concerning race, Toomer concluded that although he had no defined social position, he was very much a part of America. He wrote in his sketches, "I was to some extent at war with society, but I was not . . . an outcast" (Kerman and Eldridge 51). As he matured, Toomer explored numerous possibilities for establishing inner fulfillment. After attending various universities, Toomer traveled to the South. Inspired by his travels in Georgia, he would begin to write his masterpiece *Cane*. The beginning of the book portrays this Southern influence. The stories take place in the South, the narrative style is lyrical—typical of Southern literature—and some of the characters are Southern African Americans, such as Barlo and Sister Carrie. Critics use these details to support their claims that *Cane* speaks for the African-American experience, but they should take into account that the setting of *Cane* shifts from South to the North and then back to the South. And most important, besides the book's changing setting, African-American characters are few when compared to the number of mulatto protagonists.

Toomer's use of the mulatto, I propose, represents his denial of racial

categories. After he personally defined his race and no longer claimed an African-American ethnicity, Toomer, a man esteemed as a founding father of the Harlem Renaissance, and the "most talented Negro writer America bred," became an embarrassment to the African-American literary world (Turner 1). Toomer's renouncement made it difficult for Harlem's historians to discuss Toomer and *Cane*.

Harlem Renaissance historians recognize that Toomer is not the "typical" African-American writer, but they still associate him with the Harlem Renaissance. Nathan Huggins in 1971 stated that although Toomer's experimental text differed from other Harlem writers, "*Cane* is a forthright search for the roots of the Negro self" (180). In his summary of *Cane*'s "Kabnis," Huggins contends that Ralph Kabnis is a "pathetic figure who cannot accept his past . . . and experience the beauty and pain of the South" (185-86). David L. Lewis delivers a fine biographical sketch of Toomer that explains Toomer's initial affirmation of his African heritage and his later denial of it. As a historian, Lewis does not interpret *Cane* nor Toomer's motives and instead discusses only biographical details. Toomer neither lived in Harlem nor associated with Harlem writers; *Cane* is neither about Harlem nor set in Harlem. Blind to these obvious facts, Harlem's historians still claim Toomer is a Harlem Renaissance writer.

Aside from Harlem Renaissance historians, other critics divide into two main groups who examine Toomer's artistic expressions in *Cane*'s theme or in its

form. One group examines the racial ramifications of Toomer's work and believes that *Cane* depicts the African-American experience. For example, in 1923 Montgomery Gregory claims that "*Cane* is not OF the South, it is not OF the Negro; it IS the South; it IS the Negro" (374). Later, W. E. Farrison describes *Cane* as the "soul of the Negro" and that it "marks the awakening of the Negro Renaissance" (297). Although these worthy interpretations assist in making Toomer's work "reputable," the attention to Toomer's African-American ethnicity drawn by these readings reinforces the same thinking that he disputed. These critics see Toomer as a voice for the African American—a man devoted to portraying the African-American experience. Yet, they give little notice to Toomer's mixed heritage nor to his mulatto characters.

The other group of critics examine *Cane*'s skillful structure. Just as Toomer's characters illustrate that Americans can not be confined to racial categories, *Cane*'s structure can not be defined by conventional genres. *Cane*'s multi-genre structure introduces an innovative art form—an art form he presents as American. His fused-race parallels his fused-genre. In *Cane*, Toomer unites aesthetic traditions of Southern, African American, and European-American art forms. This union constructs a new multi-dimensional text. In the tradition of Whitman, *Cane*'s "mulattic" form with its new American character takes Toomer and *Cane* out of the racial and artistic confines of the Harlem Renaissance.

The earliest critics of *Cane* acknowledge that the text could not be

defined by traditional genres. Yet for simplification they address the book as a novel. This categorization, however, posed difficulties for later critics who would study *Cane's* structure. Attempting to uncover the significance of the experimental structure, critics would examine *Cane* according to its marked divisions. Specifically, Robert Littell's 1923 essay divides the book into two parts. He poses that the first section, Parts I and II, involves short poetic sketches and vague characterizations. The second half, he defines as a long short story, "Kabnis." He poses that the clarity of this second half makes "Kabnis" more entertaining (32). In 1972, W. E. Farrison expands Littell's two divisions. He argues that the book consists of thirteen sketches with fifteen occasional lyrics interspersed among them. Working together, the poems and prose present fragments of folklore. He defines "Kabnis" as a drama (295-302). Noting *Cane's* "kaleidoscope" of genres, Addison Gayle claims that the text presents a "collage of fiction, songs, and poetry" (50). The most accurate category for *Cane* is the short-story cycle, a term defined by Forrest Ingram in 1971. Using Ingram's definition in 1975, Robert Bone places *Cane* into this category that is occupied by some of the century's best known works of fiction, such as Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg Ohio*, James Joyce's *Dubliners*, and Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time*.

The difficulty of placing *Cane* within a conventional structure compares with Toomer's dilemma of claiming a specific race. *Cane's* structure and its

mulatto characters deserve equal attention. Oddly, when critics examine the structure of *Cane*, they arrive at one of two approaches: either they become so engrossed with the form that they do not look at the content, or their misunderstanding about Toomer's racial ideology does not allow them to see the connection between the two. Not until recently has one critic looked at the importance of the mulatto. In 1991, George Hutchinson's first Toomer article discussed Toomer's racial ambiguity and his use of the mulatto. But to Hutchinson, Toomer's racial views never emerge in *Cane*; instead they explain Toomer's association with certain people. Hutchinson makes no connection between the mulatto and *Cane* in this article. A few years later, however, Hutchinson in "Toomer and American Racial Discourse," connects Toomer's racial ideology with *Cane*'s mulattoes. As definitive as these interpretations may be, they do not link the mulatto's significance to *Cane*'s innovative structure.

After the publication of *Cane*, Toomer became frustrated with the misinterpretations and thus tried to clarify his racial views. He did not believe in racial categories and eventually determined that he did not want his writing categorized by race. After Toomer no longer wanted to be claimed by the Harlem Renaissance or by African Americans, his prolific writing after *Cane* would be boycotted by publishers. And though Toomer, like Whitman, spent the majority of his writing career encouraging readers to seek a universal brotherhood, regardless of class, sex, or race, he could not gain re-entry into the

literary world. The mulatto Toomer alienated himself from African Americans, and in turn the American literary world, which includes the European-American and the African-American, rejected him.

After *Cane's* publication, Toomer sought to find other means of inner-fulfillment. He turned to the beliefs of George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff in the mid-1920s. In the 1940s, he joined the Quakers, Society of Friends. He relentlessly encouraged them to take a public stand against America's social institutions that encouraged prejudices. But Toomer failed in this, too. Sadly, Toomer's search for his identity was life long, persistent, but in the end, futile.

Chapter Two

The Blue Man's Questionable Quest:  
Toomer's "Beauty in Solution"

*The differences between black folk and white folk are not blood or color,  
and the ties that bind us are deeper than those that  
separate us.*

*Richard Wright*

Jean Toomer is a paradox in that he opposed the very racism that promoted his limited literary career. Railing against the boundaries of the Harlem Renaissance, he argued that to define man according to his race distorted and limited his social identity. Whereas most critics will argue that Toomer's struggle with race occurred after his writing of *Cane*, his oeuvre illustrates that he was concerned throughout his life with racial categories and man's placement within these categories. Even during the time that Toomer was writing *Cane*, he was troubled by his racial views and how to incorporate them into his art.

In the fall and winter of 1920, Toomer frequented the meetings of the New Negroes of Washington, D. C. In a seminal essay, George Hutchinson claims that this group had many discussions concerning the rigidity of race in America at this time. Since the United States census had deleted the category "mulatto"



from its form, members saw that race in America had become either black or white. In the home of Georgia Douglas Johnson, the usual location of the New Negroes' meetings, Toomer led discussions concerning his idea of the "inclusive" American race and would use the meetings to articulate his belief that man could no longer be classified into pure racial categories. The discussions held at these meetings encouraged many writers, including Toomer, to pursue and express the dilemma of the mulatto. Toomer saw the mulatto, an individual refused racial and political identification, as the Modern character.

His letters of the early 1920s also demonstrate his concern with racial classification. Toomer uses his personal background to illustrate his frustration with race. In a 1922 letter to *The Liberator*, he claims:

Racially, I seem to have (who knows for sure) seven blood mixtures: French, Dutch, Welsh, Negro, German, Jewish, and Indian. Because of these, my position in America has been a curious one. I have lived equally amid the two race groups. Now white, now colored. (*Reader 15-16*)

Throughout his growth as a writer, Toomer repeatedly found himself defining his race for the American public. This early declaration initiates a subtle defense for his later refusal to be placed within a racial category and proves that Toomer was concerned with race before the writing of *Cane*.

Toomer wanted his art to stand on its own merits and not by his race.

Though he would present his views in the pieces that would become *Cane*, he was nonetheless plagued by this paradox: he was attracted to that which he was repulsed by. He wanted it both ways—recognition and separateness. The same letter to the *Liberator* demonstrates Toomer's confusion:

Within the last two or three years, however, my growing need for artistic expression has pulled me deeper and deeper into the Negro group. And as my powers of receptivity increased, I found myself loving it in a way that I could never love the other. It has stimulated and fertilized whatever creative talent I may contain within me. (*Reader* 16)

A few sentences later, however, he contradicts himself, "From my own point of view I am naturally and inevitably an American. I have striven for a spiritual fusion analogous to the fact of racial intermingling" (*Reader* 16).

After the publication of *Cane*, however, critics would place Toomer "among the finest artists in the history of Afro-Americans" and *Cane* as "one the most respected books of the Harlem Renaissance" (Turner qtd. in *Cane* 122). Toomer would initially use this racial classification as a way of promoting *Cane*. Later, though, he would renounce this racial identity. In a 1923 letter, Toomer answers Horace Liveright who has accused Toomer of denying his African-American heritage:

My racial composition and my position in the world are realities

which I alone may determine. . . Nor do I expect you as my publisher, and I hope, as my friend, to either directly or indirectly state that this basis contains any element of dodging. Whatever statements I give will inevitably come from a synthetic human and artistic point of view, not from a racial one. (*Reader* 94)

Jean Toomer's identity is enigmatic.

Eventually Toomer would solidify his racial views. Whereas he sympathized with the African-American movement—"If one holds his eyes to individuals and sections, race is starkly evident, and racial continuity seems assured. . .the thing we call Negro beauty will always be attributable to a clearly defined physical source" (*Reader* 23-24)—Toomer realized that he did not need to isolate himself or his art within racial confines and that to focus his art on one race would be a deliberate separation from the Whitmanesque tradition in literature—the tradition that he advocated. Toomer saw the separation of art into ethnic groups as a cultural death for America. Instead he argues that all groups were a part of a changing society. He claims:

The Negro of the folk-song has all but passed away: the Negro of the emotional church is fading . . . America needs these elements. They are passing. Let us grab and hold them while there still is time. Segregation and laws may retard this solution. But in the end, segregation will either give way, or it will kill. (*Reader* 23)

Although writing here in a personal letter to Waldo Frank, Toomer speaks to all Americans, black and white, and encourages them to recognize the changing milieu of America and its changing people. Toomer stresses: "a wholly new life confronts me . . . For it is jazzed, strident, modern. Seventh Street is the song of crude new life. Of a new people. Negro? Only in the *boldness* of its expression. In its healthy freedom. . . American" (*Reader* 24-25). Like Whitman, Toomer had come to appreciate the diversity of America and what it offered America, a new race, fused from its many cultures: "America . . . A beauty that is in solution will continue to live" (*Reader* 25). The fusion of race in America was creating not only a new race, but also a new culture.

After Toomer voiced his racial views in private letters, he instigated social change through publication. In his 1929 essay, "Race Problems and Modern Society," Toomer argues that racial stratification is unnatural, but social establishments cause racial discrimination. Just as Toomer believed America embodied its own solution—acceptance of diversity and a changing culture—he saw it creating its own problem: biases based on this diversity. Believing that Americans could no longer classify themselves in pure categories, he calls for a deletion of such factions. He, like Crevecoeur, uses the metaphor of the melting pot and its fusion of all races. This fusion, for Toomer, represents his definition of the American race.

Although unusual for a writer or an individual, Toomer would incessantly

defend his multiple ethnicity. In a defiant letter of July 11, 1930, to James Weldon Johnson, who wanted to include Toomer in the updated edition of *Book of American Negro Poetry* (1930), Toomer stresses that "we are all Americans." In defense of his racial views, he claims, "I see myself an American, simply an American" (*Reader* 106). In response to publishers' needs to categorize literature, he argues that writing should be viewed as "primarily American art and literature. . . not as Negro, Anglo-Saxon, and so on" (*Reader* 106). Toomer refuses Johnson's offer of publication. In reference to his own writing, Toomer states:

My poems are not Negro poems, nor are they Anglo-Saxon or white or English poems. My prose, likewise. They are, first, mine. And second, in so far as general race or stock is concerned, they spring from the result of racial blendings here in America which have produced a new race or stock. We may call this stock the American stock or race." (*Reader* 106).

In "Fighting the Vice," published in 1932, Toomer states that although he owes much to Waldō Frank for *Cane's* success, Frank did him a disservice by referring incorrectly to Toomer's racial position. Toomer clarifies that he did not want to push "the Negro feature" (*Reader* 102). He states that during the New Negro movement in literature he saw things he did not like: "I did not like the boosting and trumpeting and the over-play and over-valuation of the Negro, of

the products of Negro writers, which were springing up. I refused to have any part in this displaying" (*Reader* 102). In the conclusion of this piece, he refutes racial and cultural divisions and claims that "the time was ripe for the projection of such a symbol for a general movement towards a fundamental Americanization of all American people" (*Reader* 104).

Because of these racial views, very little of Toomer's later work achieved publication. Toomer, however, never hesitates to reiterate these racial views in later pieces. According to Frederik Rusch, editor of *A Jean Toomer Reader: Selected Unpublished Writings*, Toomer even creates a metaphor for his racial ideology, the "blue man." Playing with America's need to "colorize" its world, Toomer discards black, yellow, red, and white and chooses one of the colors that still represents America, blue. The blue man embodies America's multiple races. In his long poem "Blue Meridian," published in *The New American Caravan* in 1936, Toomer uses the blue man as a "racial amalgamation" of the American (*Reader* 80). The blue man is the mulatto. Accordingly, the "blue man" represents Toomer's perception of the apotheosis of the Modern individual and America's pluralism.

In "Not Typically American" Toomer explains, "I have passed from one American group to another American group, in search of the fundamentals . . . While I lived in it, each group became mine—which means that in a spiritual sense the total world of America has become mine" (*Reader* 98). With this

explanation, Toomer illustrates his belief in pluralism and acknowledges the costliness of his belief. He states, "This identification with the entire country is most untypical—and I have had to pay for it by suffering a variety of strains, stress, counterpulls, and misunderstandings" (*Reader* 98-99). Because of his ambiguous racial ideas, Toomer's *Cane* is critically misunderstood today.

Toomer's own mixed race and his perception of America's mixed race are important factors when interpreting his art. He believes that just as an individual's heritage can no longer be limited to a pure race or line of descent, that art cannot isolate itself into racial categories. Toomer asserts that as an artist he could not remain within the confines of one race. His art could not escape his fused-race vision. Ironically, the very categories that Toomer sought to dismantle became the barriers to his literary acceptance. Even today, critics accuse him of being a "hypocrite and a traitor" (*Reader* 99).

During his stay at Harper's Ferry in 1922, Toomer wrote in a letter to Waldo Frank that America's ethnic contrast, "ruddy whites, full-blooded blacks . . . a strain of Indian blood," gave him the impulse to collect [his] sketches and poems under the title perhaps of *Cane*" (*Reader* 10). From the onset, the collage of America's ethnicity played a role in *Cane*'s creation and thematic development. In *Cane*, Toomer finds the opportunity to express his "inclusive" ideology that undermines society's premise that, to be successful, individuals must separate themselves into distinctive categories. Yet, Toomer

argues, people become complacent with their own identities and allow themselves to be grouped. His most sympathetic characters, therefore, are those struggling to scale social fences that categorize humanity. Thus, for Toomer the person who best embodies this breaking of conventions is the mulatto. His presentation of diverse and isolated protagonists ultimately lead his readers to conclude that people are linked in their separateness.

Toomer divides *Cane* into three sections. And although most critics would like to see only the divisions that Part I, II, and III create, I see these divisions united by Toomer's alienated protagonists emerging from eclectic backgrounds. In fact, Toomer's most telling characters have indeterminate ethnicity or seek interracial relationships. Their characteristics and their behavior ostracize them from their communities. Toomer argues that social harmony relies upon acceptance of contrasts:

In life nothing is only physical. There is also the symbolic. White and Black. West and East. North and South. Light and Darkness. Day and Night. In general, the great contrasts. The pairs of opposites. And I, with the I's, am the reconciler. (*Wayward* 53-54)

Toomer, in the first part of *Cane*, depicts these binary opposites of the rural South in these images: "a Black bird that flashes in light" (13), "uncanny eclipse" (8), "sun . . . slanting over her shoulder" (12), "the sun . . . behind a heavy mass of horizon clouds" (22), and "up from the dusk the full moon came"



(30). I see Toomer's natural imagery presenting itself in contrasts. His dark shadows burst with bright light. Toomer creates these opposites to illustrate differences. Additionally, he describes women, whom readers have identified as African Americans, in varying shades. His Karintha has skin "like dusk on the eastern horizon" (3); Fern's skin is "soft cream foam" and "down slightly darkened" (16); Esther has a "chalk-white face"(22); Carma has a "mangrove-gloomed, yellow flower face" (12). Although these women might all be considered Southern African Americans, Toomer's descriptions make their race ambiguous. By pointing out shades, Toomer emphasizes the differences of characters.

But Toomer's deliberate descriptions of skin color are not the only devices to separate his characters from their community. These women, who blur racial lines, find themselves alienated because of their behavior. Yet their alienation bonds them. He seems to be thinking of them in this sketch: "Some people are so isolated that it suggests an uncommon genesis. So strong is this impression of uniqueness that we feel shock when we see or are told that they too . . . share with us many of our own experiences" (*Wayward* 21). *Cane's* Southern women have similarities. Esther, Louisa, and Becky find themselves on the periphery of their communities because of their longing for and partaking of sexual encounters. They are connected in their difference and in their isolation.

Esther, a mulatto girl who falls in love with King Barlo, is sexually

frustrated. She recalls an "affair she had with a little fair boy while still in school" (24-25). But "he told her that for sweetness . . . he much preferred a lollipop," (25) and "the salesman from the North . . . never came back, having found out who she was" (25). Although it is unclear why Esther is deprived, Toomer hints that Esther's mixed race complicates her sexual endeavors. When she goes to Barlo, the man who "assumes the outlines . . . of [the] visioned African" (23), and offers her body, she "recognizes his ugliness and thinks of the sin" (27). She realizes that sexual intimacy with Barlo would be unacceptable. Knowing society will label her desire as "sin," Esther leaves him and emerges as emotionally dead: "She draws away, frozen. Like a somnambulist she wheels around and walks stiffly to the stairs" (27).

Just as Esther finds herself "controlled" by social customs, Becky finds herself alienated because she surrenders to her desires. Becky, "the white woman who had two Negro sons," ignores society's "contemptuous comments" and now lives on "ground islandized between the road and the railroad track" (7). Because of her unacceptable behavior, both blacks and whites ostracize her. Of the boys, the narrator questions, "White or colored? No one knew, and least of all themselves . . . We who had cast out their mother because of them, could we take them in?" (8). Just as Becky has been cast out, so would be her sons. However, before they leave, the sons curse both communities: "Godam the white folks; godam the niggers" (8). The mulatto sons find themselves

marginalized. Toomer illustrates that Becky's sexual conduct alienates herself and her children from society.

The miscegenation that costs Becky's family social acceptance also plays a role in the ruin of Louisa. Her desire for both a white man and a black man destroys all their lives. "Separately, there was no unusual significance to either one. But for some reason, they jumbled in. . . and from the jumble came the stir that was strangely within her" (30). When Louisa thinks of Tom Burwell, "his black balanced, and pulled against, the white of [Bob] Stone" (30).

Appropriately, the two men become descriptively interchangeable. The narrator describes Tom Burwell as "erect, lean, like a blackened stone" (36). And when the white man Stone goes to Louisa, he tastes "not his own blood [but] Tom Burwell's blood" (34). These men metaphorically fuse. The two men's deaths eventually leave Louisa alone with the blood-burning moon.

Throughout part one of *Cane*, Toomer's isolated protagonists fight against social conformity. He differentiates them by skin color and sexual behavior only to arrive at an American premise: that our difference separates us. Yet Toomer persuasively bends this premise to show that these women share their isolation. Their difference bonds them. They share experiences and represent Toomer's universal humanity.

The poetic transition, "Seventh Street," "the bastard of Prohibition and the War" (41), opens the second part of *Cane*. Moving from the rural South, like the

migrating Southerners of the 1920s, *Cane's* focus shifts to the North. Toomer depicts this movement as a coming together of Southern and Northern people. On Seventh Street the country "shanties" and the city "brick building" (41) have merged .

Toomer fuses South with North by placing his Northern characters in predicaments similar to those faced by the Southern ones. As these city characters search for partners, they find themselves unable to bond due to social conventions. These Northern characters must push against the boundaries of acceptability and secure their identities. Thus, Toomer isolates his characters to illustrate their similarities.

In a letter to Gorham Munson, Toomer explains the sexual tension between Dorris and John in "Theater." Although the two are attracted to one another, they will not carry out their desires due to their difference of class. Toomer states that the conflict between Dorris and John has nothing to do with race and everything to do with respectability: "Dual separation: They both come to themselves at the same time. By statement in Dorris' case, by implication in John's, they both know their separateness" (*Reader* 20-21). Dorris and John desire to be with the other, but their social status keeps them apart. "[Dorris] finds it a dead thing in the shadow of his dream . . . Her eyes, over a flood of tears, stare at the white washed ceiling" (56). Dorris knows that they will not come together. Dorris and John, victims of social barriers, are typical Toomer

characters.

In "Box Seat" Dan Moore and Muriel find themselves separated. Dan's and Muriel's internal dialogue tells the reader what the characters cannot express. "Muriel: Shame about Dan. Something good and fine about him. But he dont fit in. In where? . . . [Mrs. Pribby, Muriel's landlady] is the town, and the town wont let me love you, Dan" (61). Toomer places his couple "on stage." Mimicking the famous love scene of *Romeo and Juliet*, Muriel, an arm's length away in her box seat, is not only distant from Dan, but also on display for the audience. As Mr. Barry sings to Muriel, Dan sees the woman he loves grasped by the imprisoning arms of society: "steel fingers that manacle her wrists and move them forward to acceptance" (69). Muriel appears to have two suitors: Dan and Mr. Barry. Giving into social restraints, Muriel, "tight in her revulsion, sees black, and daintily reaches for the offering" (69). Her action causes Dan to explode from his seat. Muriel unthinkingly accepts the separatist attitude that Toomer believes instills prejudices—she sees *black*." Ironically, Muriel is more willing to accept the attentions of the bloody-fighter, dwarf singer than to listen to Dan whom society has labelled "unfit." Toomer does not explain why society has labelled Dan as such. Dan is unemployed, so society could shun him because of his economic status. Or, Dan could be white. Toomer does not indicate in "Box Seat" if Dan is an African American. In this sketch, Toomer makes a significant reference to Whitman's belief in America's pluralism and a



window" (80). These complimentary opposites become analogies for Paul's understanding of society and its need for difference. Paul claims, "I came back to tell you, brother, that white faces are petals of roses. That dark faces are petals of dusk. That I am going out to gather petals . . . and know her whom I brought here with me to these Gardens which are purple like a bed of roses would be at dusk" (80). But when Paul rushes to meet Bona, she is gone. The two are not allowed to fulfill their desires.

The people in *Cane's* cities, Chicago and Washington, D. C., like those in the rural South, find themselves alienated. Whereas most critics argue that Toomer speaks for the African American, close readings reveal that Toomer's characters usually have indeterminate race and struggle against racial categories. Indeed, the epitome of Toomer's alienated modern character is the mulatto.

In the "drama" of "Kabnis," Toomer displays the mulatto struggling to fit into his world. Kabnis, the protagonist, yearns to join the Southern African-American community, but he discovers that they have difficulty accepting him. So, calling himself a "bastard," Kabnis claims membership of the "bastard race" (116), the American race. Lewis, also a mulatto, leaves the white world and because of his teaching position attempts to reenter the African-American community. This community will not allow it. In the South, Lewis realizes that he is a part of neither black nor white society. Lewis advises Kabnis, who has cut



himself off in the "Hole" (83) of the South, to seek "satisfaction" (108). Lewis realizes that, by becoming outcasts, he and Kabnis avoid confrontation about their racial ambiguity. The "copper-colored" (97) Lewis speaks for Toomer who encourages people to find a place in a separate world, a world that fuses race and defies social institutions.

In "Kabnis," Father John's cellar represents the prison of racial categories. For Toomer, Father John symbolizes the deaf, blind, and mute African Americans who separate themselves from society. Ralph Kabnis concludes that Southern African Americans do nothing but "pray and shout" (90). Feeling no attachments to these people, Kabnis climbs from the iron-barred cellar. Metaphorically, Kabnis bursts through the imprisoning bars of race and embraces the world. Toomer concludes his text with the rising mulatto meeting the sunrise of a new day (117).

Nathan Huggins interprets "Kabnis" as Toomer's statement to "embrace the slave father" (Huggins 189) and claims that Toomer's resolution for the Negro's search for identity is to claim one's roots in the community of the South (186). But Kabnis does not find the "answer" in the metaphorical prison of Father John, and Kabnis does not embrace his "slave father." He does not find comfort in Father John's world; he saw the cellar for what it was: people isolating themselves in darkness. So, Kabnis leaves.

Jean Toomer does not limit *Cane's* theme to the African American. In



spite of his ambiguous race, Toomer clearly chooses a "side." He believed that isolating himself into one racial category denied a part of his identity. Likewise, Toomer thought by separating themselves into groups, Americans deny other aspects of their identities. Overcoming separatism and embracing difference become America's "beauty in solution." Illustrating this fusion of difference, Toomer chooses a race that he believes fits all Americans, the mulatto. And it is this struggling, alienated mulatto and Toomer's ideology that provide the theme of *Cane*.

Chapter Three

Jean Toomer's Innovation with Form:

'Cane Stalks and Choruses

Vignettes under Leaf Tracerics in Washington'

*Social forms must break and set free the materials . . . recombine the stuff of life and make new forms . . . the resulting of a new human universe.*

*Jean Toomer*

The fusion of different races in America created the mulatto. The mulatto—a character who existed beyond racial boundaries and who was kept from social acceptance—became germane to Toomer's experimentation with literary form. Toomer refused to unleash his representative American character within the confines of a traditional novel, preferring instead to release his mulatto in a form that fit his content and freed itself from American literary conventions.

With his multi-structural text, Toomer poses that personal and national growth rely upon the fusion of contrasts. Assimilation of difference becomes acceptance. He writes, "Life bends joy and pain, beauty and ugliness, in such a way that no one may isolate them . . . Perfect joy or perfect pain, with no contrasting element to define them, would mean a monotony of consciousness, would mean death" (62). Just as Toomer saw "contrasting elements" as keys of accepting social change, he also saw these contrasts as ways of creating a new

American literary form.

As William Carlos Williams searched for the American idiom and Gertrude Stein established self-conscious cubist syntax, Jean Toomer attempted to create a new American literary form by fusing various genres and art forms. In a letter written while he was writing *Cane*, Toomer explains his experimentation with form:

I see the importance of form. The tree as a symbol comes to mind. A tree in summer. Trunk branches: structure. Leaves: the fillers-out . . . This symbol is wanting, of course, because a tree is stationary, because it has no progression, no dynamic movements. So my own stuff . . . will have more to do with conscious structure.  
(*Reader* 21-22)

These experiments with form became outlets for Toomer's ideology and his expression of America's mosaic voice.

*Cane's* divisions represent the contrast and eventual fusion of the Southern with the Northern and the rural with the urban. America's voices, heard distinctly in the first two parts, underpin Toomer's new American literary form, a fusion of cultures and genres. Although the poetry cannot be ignored when discussing the structure of *Cane*, in this chapter I will focus on the structure of *Cane's* prose. In the Fourth Chapter, I will look more specifically at poetry. First, though, I will address the text's overall form.

Toomer's American literary form emerges in the multi-generic *Cane*. Even a quick scan of the text reveals its unusual form. The read is a rough one, the eye jumping from standard paragraphs to gaping spaces to isolated letters and to indented poems: structural techniques that jar the reader's expectations. Readers encounter traditional forms of literature—short stories, sonnets, and drama and innovative forms of literature—prose poetry, stream of consciousness, blues rhythms, and jazz improvisation in prosaic and poetic patterns—all mixed within the thin text. Not only do genres mesh—poetry unfolds into prose and prose into poetry and short stories intertwine with drama—but also visual, oral, and musical forms imbed themselves into the text. In addition to the overall structure of *Cane*, Toomer separates his text into clear sections, parts one, two, and three. An obvious division of the text is the regional division of South and North. Toomer incorporates from these regions various art forms. These many art forms make up the structure of *Cane*, and to Toomer, they substantiate American culture.

Within the pages of *Cane*, Toomer uses three simple drawings. He divides each section with these simple curved lines. The first section begins with a singular line on the middle left of the page, possibly suggesting *Cane's* theme in this section: the isolated Southerner. Likewise, all the stories in the first part take place in the South and portray Southern women alienated from their communities. At the beginning of the next section, the second drawing, a

similar singular line placed higher on the page, suggests the isolated Northerner who battles against the force of society in this division of the text. Yet these drawings have come together by the beginning of the third section. By placing the two lines near each other, Toomer implies a union depicting that the Northerner has become a part of the South—Kabnis, the Northern teacher in Georgia. These drawings symbolize *Cane's* fused form and content.

In the first section of *Cane*, the Southern section, Toomer clearly relies upon the folklore of the South: lyricism, the work song, and the call-and-response sermon. Lyrical imagery resonates from *Cane's* first section; descriptions rely on the mental pictures that Toomer took while in Georgia. His "photographic" images sing poetic images of rural Georgia: "Face flowed into her eyes" (16); "The full moon, an evil thing, an omen, soft showering the homes" (36); "The pines whispered to Jesus" (7). Toomer depicts the South in metaphor: "The sun is hammered to a band of gold" (12); a "sawmill hugged the earth" (3); the canefield itself represents the South. The imagery Toomer provides in this section extends to the supernatural: "A creepy feeling came over all who saw that thin wraith of smoke and felt the trembling of the ground . . . the ground trembled as a ghost train rumbled by"(8). This lyrical imagery gives the South a supernatural, mythical quality—the power of folklore.

This Southern lyricism empowers *Cane's* characters. The first part alludes to these Southern characters who have near supernatural powers:

"Becky if dead might be a hant, and if alive—it took some nerve even to mention it" (8). Of Carma, Toomer says: "She does not sing; her body is a song. She is in the forest, dancing. Torches flare . . . juju men, greegree, witch-doctors . . . The Dixie Pike has grown from a goat path in Africa" (12). Toomer claims of Fern that "a sort of superstition crept into their consciousness of her being somehow above them. . . . She became a virgin" (16). The exotic and primitive powers of these characters create a supernatural South and give texture to *Cane's* tales.

In addition to the lyrical phrasing, Toomer modifies the power of song in the first section, an essential element of Southern folklore. His characters often sing as expression of their human spirit. Karintha sings and awakens her community, puts "one's ears to itching" (3). Carma, the strong woman, does not sing; rather "her body is a song" (12). Fern whose "body was tortured with something it could not let out" (19) expresses herself in song: "like boiling sap it flooded arms and fingers till she shook them as if they burned her. It found her throat, and sputtered inarticulately in plaintive, convulsive sounds . . . and then she sang" (19). And Toomer concludes the first section with Louisa compelled to sing to the "evil" moon (36). The Southern women use song to express and overcome their oppression and fear.

Besides these Southern, lyrical depictions and singing characters, Toomer uses specific Southern art forms, the African-American work song and

the rhythmical call-and-response sermon to embellish his fiction. From Southern fields and backroads, Toomer heard the voices of Southern workers, working and singing in the fields. Their work songs would become the model for the African-American call-and-response. Sharing in the oldest literary tradition, the oral tradition, African-Americans would take the work song into their churches. The verbal exchange heard in the fields would become an exchange between a preacher, or caller, and his chorus. Ultimately, this patterned exchange would structure the improvisation of jazz players, the ones heard in Northern cities and streets. During his visit to the South, Toomer would realize that an African-American art form had found its way into American culture.

At one time, Toomer wanted to become a composer, and he demonstrates his interest in music when he uses musical cadences, rhythms, and arrangements to create *Cane's* structure. Gorham Munson states that "Karintha" fuses literary forms with musical ones. He claims that the section begins with a "song, presents a theme, breaks into song, develops the theme, sings again, drops back into prose, and dies away in song" (63). Munson, however, does not apply this interpretation to other pieces in *Cane*. Extending this reading, I believe that *Cane's* form is partially based on the work songs Toomer heard in the South and in African-American sermons.

In Part One the stories include repeating poetic lines that function similarly to choruses in songs, more specifically, the work songs that Toomer

heard from the Southern fields. Poetic lines usually begin each sketch. However, these musical arrangements do more than introduce: Lines also embed themselves within the story. The short sketch "Carma" exemplifies this technique. The sketch begins, "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" (12). Later, these same lines appear within the prose similar to choruses in songs. Again imitating the structure of a song, the sketch concludes with the refrain of the chorus, thus ending "Carma." The musical prose within *Cane* represents the African-American rhythms that Toomer felt in the South.

Barbara Bowen's "Untroubled Voice: Call-and-Response in *Cane*" explains that in the call-and-response the "antiphonal phrases repeat and respond to each other," and the speakers assent to "membership in a group and affirm that their experience is shared" (13). The songs provide, therefore, a sense of community between speaker and audience. To see better this "responding voice," Toomer indents most of these passages. Demonstrating the call-and-response in "Karintha," the community replies in poetic stanza: "Sun is setting/ Sun going down on skin/ Her skin is like dusk/ When the sun goes down" (3, 4). Unlike the indented stanzas of some pieces, in "Esther," the audience's interaction is included in the prose. But, still the call-and-response spiritual is obvious. Barlo cries: "He called me to His side an said, 'Git down on



your knees beside me son, Ise gwine t whisper in your ears.' An old sister cries, 'Ah Lord.' 'Ise agwine t whisper in your ears.' . . . 'Ah, Lord. Amen. Amen'" (22-23). Barlo preaches and his audience responds. The rhythm of work songs and call-and-response sermons will evolve eventually into blues and jazz.

Toomer uses the African-American work song and call-and-response sermon to create *Cane's* structure in the first section. In the second section of *Cane*, Toomer, for the most part, turns to a more conventional, European-American literary structure. His prose changes from short, lyrical sketches of the first part into a more developed narrative. The pieces in the second section are easily identified as short stories with plots, complex characters, and fluid prose. The first section uses fragments of imagery; the second uses more complete sentences.

Toomer does not, however, abruptly abandon the Southern folklore he used in the first section. Instead, the European-American literary conventions of Part Two blend with Southern folklore. In blending the features of folklore and European literary conventions, Toomer bonds the experiences of the Southern and African American with the Northerner and Caucasian, thus illustrating the tie between American peoples. W. Edward Farrison makes an insightful connection between Fern and Avey, characters from the first and second sections. He proposes that if Fern had lived in Washington, her story could have been Avey's; if Avey had lived in Sempter, then her story could have been Fern's (299). In

bringing characters' fates across regional boundaries, Toomer links the human experience. Beyond this thematic link, he recognizes the infusion of cultural art forms, meshing all people into one race, one culture.

On a small scale—ignoring paragraphs and stories for a moment—the language in the second section is different from the first. The lyrical language of Part One contrasts with the more formal narratives of Part Two. The first lines of each section will demonstrate this. Part One begins with the stanza: "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" (3). In this passage, the words have a song-like quality. It is in verse with a metrical rhythm. And the speaker seeks interaction from his audience, giving the words an unrehearsed sound. Toomer begins Part Two: "For a long while [Avey] was nothing more to me than one of these skirted beings whom boys at a certain age disdain to play with. Just how I came to love her, timidly, and with secret blushes, I do not know" (44). Words have a written formality: "whom," "disdain," and "timidly." The language is contrived, seemingly not improvised.

Besides the changed language, Toomer's methods in depicting scene and developing characters initially appear to follow European-American literary traditions. Whereas, in the tradition of Southern literature, Toomer uses a lyrical presentation of scene and creates a mystical quality to characters in Part One, the majority of his descriptions of scene and character change in Part Two.

In "Theater," Toomer writes: "John is the manager's brother. He is seated at the center of the theater, just before rehearsal" (52)—a formal introduction, sounding similar to stage directions. In "Box Seat," "Dan turns into a side-street, opens an iron gate, bangs it to. Mounts the steps, and searches for the bell" (59). Traditional characters perform in a discernable setting, contrasting with the poetic descriptions in Part One.

Part Two, however, does include lyrical descriptions. Close readings of the second section reveal that Toomer blends the Southern literary techniques into the second section. Whereas some sections of the stories may sound like formal European-American prose, the poetic strains of Southern lyricism introduce the story, "Box Seat." Toomer writes: "Houses are shy girls whose eyes shine reticently upon the dusk body of the street. Upon the gleaming limbs and asphalt torso of a dreaming nigger . . . Dark swaying forms of Negroes are street songs that woo virginal houses" (59). These lines provide actors and scene in poetic, mythical words. Part Two has oral elements as well. By beginning one short story with conventional prose and another with lyricism, Toomer suggests that literary techniques intermingle in Part Two—that the oral tradition is absorbed into the written tradition.

The changing style is also discernable when listening to the narrator of each section. In "Karintha" the narrator claims: "Her skin is like dusk on the eastern horizon" (4), and he interacts with his reader: "O cant you see?"(4). The

narrator relies upon the interaction of the Southern community—a call seeking a response. In these sermons there is a sense of improvisation. The caller in “Karintha” spontaneously creates, so the text is in flux—the reader relies upon his audience's opinion. In Part Two, the description reappears in “Avey”: “just as the time when dusk is most lovely on the eastern horizon”(47). With the deliverance of these lines, though, the narrator adjusts the diction and the form. For example, Toomer places these lines within the prose, unlike the off-set stanza in “Karintha.” The lines of “Avey” appear more fixed; the descriptions demonstrate the structure of a written tale. In accordance to the written narrative, the narrator does not expect an interaction with an audience, so the descriptions are determined by the narrator alone. In “Avey,” the narrator evaluates with omniscient voice. He tells us that the image “is most lovely.”

The second section does, however, use another form of the call-and-response sermon. In “Rhobert” the story depends upon the interaction of the chorus. The narrator involves the audience: “Lets give it to him. Lets call him great when the water shall have been all drawn off. Lets build a monument and set it in the ooze where he goes down. . . Lets open our throats, brother, and sing ‘Deep River’ when he goes down”(42-43). In response, the chorus repeats the narrator's lines and concludes “Rhobert.” This selection imitates the folktale by using the interaction of the audience—much like a call-and-response—and by concluding with a moral; folktales are intended to teach or comment on the

behavior of the community. Accordingly, in "Rhobert," the narrator tells his audience that Rhobert, "who wears a house, like monstrous diver's helmet, on his head" (42), is drowning in his materialism. By relying upon the interaction of a listener, the piece has an oral quality.

In Part Two of *Cane*, different uses of language depict character and scene, and narration fluctuates between a literary narrator and the oral storyteller. The lyrical blends into the narrative. Besides the different uses of language, Toomer folds the art forms of Part One into Part Two: the work song and the call-and-response sermon fuse into the second section of *Cane*. At home in the North, Toomer heard these Southern call-and-response sermons and its secular work song in the form of blues.

I am not the first to examine *Cane's* use of blues. In 1970, B. F. McKeever claimed that blues is a building block for *Cane's* stories, all personal tragedies. McKeever states that "blues is an appropriate description of *Cane*," and uses Ralph Ellison's definition: 'blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically.' McKeever argues that "*Cane* is not the autobiography of a man, but rather the chronicle of the fate of an idea, 'an idea whose time has come'" (193) and that the "Negro is not an apprentice to equality but a journeyman in suffering" (193). McKeever, like most critics, sees *Cane* concerned with "Black humanity" (193). I too believe that blues is an "appropriate description of *Cane*," but I believe Toomer uses the art form to

represent American culture.

Just as the setting of *Cane* moves from the cane fields of Georgia to the urban streets of Chicago and Washington, D. C., *Cane's* narrative and form move from the lyrical, oral traditions of the South to the "sophistication" of Northern prose. Toomer's intention is to break through all walls of race and class.

The musical soloist and his ensemble interact. The soloist illustrates his originality and technical skill as the group sounds support and challenges to push the leader toward greater accomplishments. Just as the narrator of the folk tale must create and improvise as he speaks, the jazz and blues player must spontaneously compose. Like the storyteller who has no written form, these musicians often have no sheets of music to follow—a "spontaneous overflow" of *interaction*.

Toomer brings these musical forms to "Seventh Street." Mimicking jazz, he uses the tempo of his prose to illustrate the quicker urban step. His simple sentence structure and isolated phrases set this pace: "Who set you flowing? White and whitewash disappear in blood. Who set you flowing?" (41). The speaker questions his audience. In the short, jerky sentences, the soloist sparks staccato notes: "Split it! In two! Again! Shred it! . . . the sun" (41). This section is jazzed prose. "Rhobert" turns from the uplift-beat of jazz into the slower meter of blues. Although jazz and blues are both musical forms taken from the Negro

spiritual, jazz uplifts, whereas blues typically mourns. The speaker cries, "He is way down. He is sinking. His house is a dead thing that weights him down" (42). And the chorus responds: "Brother, life is water that is being drawn off. Brother, life is water that is being drawn off" (42). This repetition is an element of jazz and blues, that allows the player time to create his next improvisation.

The folk tales and musical forms do vary from their traditional forms. Instead of typically showing the speaker encouraged by his community, the narrator of Toomer's tales usually shows that the community alienates a character, thus focusing on modern humanity's alienation. For example, characters, such as Dan Moore, Dorris, and Paul, find themselves cast away from the community. So the struggle emerges between a character and his or her desire to be with another character and the power of the community to keep them apart. The call-and-response's communal spirit becomes a power that alienates its members instead of uniting them.

The call-and-response sermon in the second section blends into the European-American drama. In "Box Seat" and "Theatre," Toomer introduces characters using drama tag-lines, "Dan: " (59), "John: " (52), and "Dorris: " (53). These introductions, however, do not precede speech, but rather thoughts, thus a stream-of-consciousness, a mental call-and-response. Thereby, this method offers a more distinct break between characters. These breaks mark change of speaker, or soloist. It sounds as if one instrument responds to

another. For example in "Theater," using the rhythms of the jazz players who have come to play for Dorris and the other dancers, Toomer shifts his narrative voice to a jazzed vernacular discourse. The jazzed, musical exchange between Dorris and John becomes a stream-of-consciousness. The music begins, and as one player sings out another quickly replies:

John: Her head bobs to Broadway. Dance from yourself. Dance!

O just a little more. (54)

Dorris replies.

Dorris: I bet he can love . . . Maybe he would. Maybe he'd love. I've

heard em say that men who look like him will marry if they

love. O will you love me? (55)

In this passage, Toomer allows his two characters to fuse. Through the medium of fused art forms—call-and-response and stream-of-consciousness—the isolated characters mentally meet in a Freudian dream:

Dorris dances . . .

John dreams:

. . . John's melancholy is a deep thing that sells all senses but his eyes, and makes him whole.

Dorris knows that he is coming. . . . Of old flowers, or of a southern canefield, her perfume. . . .

They are in a room. John knows nothing of it. Only, that the



flesh and blood of Dorris are its walls. Singing walls. Lights, soft,  
as if they shine through clear pink fingers. (55)

Soon the music ends, and Dorris's dance is over: "The pianist crashed a bumper chord. The show stage claps. Dorris, flushed, looks quick at John" (55).

The music stops and the spell is broken. To emphasize the break, Toomer drops his dramatic tag-lines and delivers the conclusion in conventional form. The two have been separated. "'I told you nothin doin,' is what Mame says to comfort her" (56). The communal voice responds to Dorris's call to John. The voice of Mame tells Dorris that the two will not be together. The varied use of a modern theme and technique—alienation and stream-of-consciousness—and exemplify Toomer's search for his literary genius.

By using Southern art forms in the first section and by fusing them with European-American techniques in the second section, Toomer demonstrates that the fusion of multi-cultural forms creates a new form. *Cane's* structure represents this fusion of aesthetics. With *Cane* and this assimilation in mind, Toomer set his objective: to show his reader how America's many cultural art forms, such as traditional European narratives and the African-American call-and-response, Southern work songs, and blues create the American literary form.

## Chapter Four

'The Power of Realized Kinship': The Poetic Expression of Jean Toomer

*Throughout the Earth, men-as-egotist and separatistic groups were clashing. These facts contributed to my understanding of the human situation. But neither did they stop me. The power of realized kinship made way for me to enter.*

*Jean Toomer*

Jean Toomer's use of the alienated mulatto and his innovations with literary structure make him a representative Modernist. In an autobiographical essay, "The Experience," Toomer refers to humanity branched like a tree: "Men as bodies are separate, but not as separated as they appear to the eye. Like the leaves of a tree ['the fillers-out'] they are distinct as *forms*, but each and all are organically related to one another through their connection with the one tree" (*Reader* 74). Chapter Three has illustrated Toomer's fusion of African-American and Southern art forms with American-European conventional literary forms in *Cane's* prose, which demonstrates that *Cane* is not merely a multi-genre book, but a multi-cultural one as well. Toomer parallels humanity to form: at first both appear "separate to the eye," but he emphasizes that both are "joined." With another allusion to a tree's structure, Toomer explains the importance of structure: "a tree in summer. Trunk branches: structure. Leaves: the fillers-out

... so my own stuff ... will have more to do with conscious structure" (*Reader* 21-22). Toomer's vision of a fused American race and literary structure is represented by the theme and form of *Cane*. Whereas Chapter Three discusses the structure of *Cane*'s prose, this chapter will focus on its poetry.

Oddly, criticism of Toomer's poetry is scarce. In the early 1970s, Bernard Bell acknowledges the transitional uses and thematic relationships of the poetry within *Cane*. He sees the poems as unifying elements among the sketches and prose pieces ("Key" 251 and "Portrait" 13). In 1988 Nellie McKay and Robert Jones co-edited the first collected volume of Toomer's poetry, *The Collected Poems of Jean Toomer*. Jones in his introduction recognizes that Toomer's poetry gives us "the most revealing commentaries on Toomer as artist and philosopher" (ix).

In 1989, H. William Rice looks specifically at two of *Cane*'s poems, "Cotton Song" and "Harvest Song." Rice shows the changing voice of the speaker in each of these "songs," pointing out the communal composition of the work song and the eventual loss of the interaction between speaker and community. Rice concludes with a discussion of "Kabnis." When Rice digresses from poetry and into "Kabnis," he loses the focus of his essay and places his interpretation with the majority of *Cane*'s critics, by explaining that although these two poems or work songs show a breakdown of communication, "Kabnis" claims the community's "singing bring[s] together the African past with

the present" (599). But Rice, like other critics, does not connect Toomer's innovations with poetic form to the poetic theme, a theme exploring how the identity and role of a group can change as individuals come to terms with their own identities.

Although Robert Jones argues that the poetry in the first section of *Cane* represents celebrations of heritage (ix), I can not detect "celebration" when looking at the bleak images of the first several poems and when hearing the speaker's remorseful tone. This poetry mourns the ending of an era and the resulting change of lifestyle. In "Reapers" sharpened scythes begin their bloody "silent swinging" (5). These reapers represent the swing of Father Time. Using the classical blason form in "Face," Toomer describes an aging woman "nearly ripe for worms" (10) and implies that the age is coming to an end. Dusk, another depiction of an ending, is the main metaphor for poems such as "Georgia Dusk" and "Evening Song." These images present the conclusion of a way of life.

How do people adapt to the end of an era? Toomer proposes that the survival of the African-American culture depends on its assimilation into the American culture. Extending the imagery of an ending way of life in the first section, Toomer shows the African American meshed with the Euro-American in poems such as "Georgia Dusk": "Race memories of king and caravan,/ High-priests, an ostrich, and a juju-man,/ Go singing through the footpaths" (15). Here the African-American community makes its way through a romanticized Southern

canefield with encouragement from the speaker to sing songs and to embrace Christianity. The poem concludes: "Bring dreams of Christ to dusky cane-lipped throngs" (15). Besides showing the different cultures co-existing, Toomer illustrates the difficulty they have in fusing. Using flashes of white and black conflicting images in "November Cotton Flower," Toomer alludes to the changing times and society's fear when *white* fuses with *black*. The poem refers to the dying "pinched" branches of the cotton "vanishing" (6). The winter white flower lies on the dark barren dirt, causing fear to arise: "Old folks were startled" (6). These poems, taken from the first section, depict the changing era and the country's races mixing.

Toomer strengthens the fused race theme in the second section's poetry. Some critics define the short sketches that introduce this section as prose whereas others explain them as poetry. In the lyrical language of "Seventh Street," Toomer shows the African American fusing with the European American: "A crude-boned, soft-skinned wedge of nigger life breathing its loafer air, jazz songs and love, thrusting unconscious rhythms, black reddish blood into the white and whitewashed wood of Washington" (41). Toomer believed that either the African-American culture would change or die. "Socially: 'my position here is transient. I'm going to die, or be absorbed.' When I come up to Seventh Street . . . a wholly new life confronts me . . . a beauty that is in solution" (*Reader* 24-25). Perceiving that America's many races were changing the culture of

America, Toomer presents that the "realized kinship" between African Americans and Caucasians would be America's "beauty in solution."

Toomer suggests that in the changing world, no individual could place himself or herself solely into one category. Likewise no artist could separate himself into the experience of one race. Toomer, as an artist, could not isolate himself into one racial category. With the poems in the second section of *Cane*, he demonstrates the speaker's break from his audience, a reference to Toomer's personal loss of an empathetic union with the African-American consciousness. The speaker of the call-and-response could no longer speak to only a small group.

The fused cultures, referred to in previous poems, create a dilemma for the speaker who must break from the smaller group to extend his message to a larger audience. In "Beehive" the persona of the poem lies prostrate with wishes to escape the "black hive" and to "fly out past the moon/ And curl forever in some far-off farmyard flower" (50). Toomer's estrangement from his African-American heritage culminates with the concluding poem, ironically entitled "Harvest Song." With the analogy of a beehive and workers, the reader would expect a union between the speaker and his chorus; however, this speaker is no longer bound to nor is able to communicate for his brothers, "whose voices deafened me" (71). He cries: "I am a blind man who stares across the hills, seeking stack'd fields of other harvesters"; yet "I am a deaf man who strains to

hear the calls of other harvesters whose throats are also dry" (71). The connection Toomer felt with African Americans has become, like images of the dying South in Part One, a glimpse of a setting sun. The final images of the poem show a man unable to carry on a connection with a particular community.

The racial ideology and the fused forms that Toomer uses in the prose of *Cane* emerge in the poetic sections as well. When I discussed *Cane's* prose, for the sake of clarity, I examined the book based on its divisions, but my discussion of *Cane's* poetry will be organized by the type of poem. *Cane's* poems are scattered throughout the text (See Appendix for listing of order), but are thematically and structurally connected. Like *Cane's* prose, the poetic themes deal with races blending and changing. To represent this racial fusion, Toomer plays distinctly with the structure of two art forms, both from different cultures, the African-American work song and the European sonnet.

Toomer experiments with the physical framework of poetry through the development of *Cane*. Indeed, he uses a variety of poetic forms from the classical blason to modern imagism and from the European sonnet to the African-American work song. Although most readers would not recognize any particular order to the poetry, close readings reveal that Toomer presents us with a pattern. Poetic structures deliberately deconstruct as the reader progresses through the text. These structural "decays" represent the fusion of forms and play with the reader's expectations of poetry. As he progresses

throughout the text, Toomer puts his poetic forms through transformations. These forms metamorphose the traditional sonnet and the African-American work song into new, fused poetic forms.

The representative sonnets in *Cane* include "November Cotton Flower," "Beehive," and "Prayer." The sonnet structure, a fourteen-line poem in iambic pentameter, evolves through an orderly procession in *Cane*. Unlike other African-American poets, Countee Cullen and Claude McKay, who used the sonnet form as a type of protest "for unrequited socio-economical justice" (Smith 11), Toomer's sonnets show a vanishing past and the separation of the individual from a group. Toomer initially follows the European structure of a "unified patterned octave which leads to a volta or turn of thought in the more varied sestet" (Preminger 781). For example, in the first sonnet, "November Cotton Flower," Toomer utilizes a variation of the Italian sonnet. In this sonnet, the initial octave depicts the dry and "pinched" autumn cotton fields, and the responding sestet describes the unnatural blooming and beauty of a November flower:

Boll-weevil's coming, and the winter's cold,  
Made cotton-stalks look rusty, seasons old,  
And cotton, scarce as any southern snow,  
Was vanishing; the branch, so pinched and slow,  
Failed in its function as the autumn rake;



Drouth fighting soil had caused the soil to take  
 All water from the streams; dead birds were found  
 In wells a hundred feet below the ground--  
 Such was the season when the flower bloomed.  
 Old folks were startled, and it soon assumed  
 Significance. Superstition saw  
 Something it had never seen before:  
 Brown eyes that loved without a trace of fear,  
 Beauty so sudden for the time of year. (6)

For the first portion of the poem, Toomer maintains a rhyme scheme: *aabbccdd*, *old—cold*, *snow—slow*. However, the scheme breaks with the insertion of lines 11 and 12, *saw—before*. This break creates tension within the poem. But Toomer puts his reader back at ease with the calming effect of the final rhyming pair—oddly with the word *fear*. With the insertion of the unrhymed pair, lines 11-12, Toomer emphasizes the change and the fear of transition created by "the old folks' superstition." Moreover, "November Cotton Flower" does not follow a consistent iambic meter. It begins, for example, with a dactyl, "Boll-weevil's." Likewise the content of this poem speaks of a change in tradition. Life in the South was changing, and Southern traditions were becoming as "scarce as any southern snow,/Was vanishing."

The next sonnet, "Beehive," departs further from a traditional rhyme

scheme:

Within this black hive to-night  
There swarm a million bees;  
Bees passing in and out the moon,  
Bees escaping out the moon,  
Bees returning through the moon,  
Silver bees intently buzzing,  
Silver honey dripping from the swarm of bees  
Earth is a waxen cell of the world comb,  
And I, a drone,  
Lying on my back,  
Lipping honey  
Getting drunk with silver honey,  
Wish that I might fly out past the moon  
And curl forever in some far-off farmyard flower. (50)

Instead of rhyming words, some of the ending sounds are repeated words. In addition to the loss of rhyme, the sonnet also loses its meter. However, the fourteen lines indicate the sonnet form. Additionally, there is an initial octave that poses the situation and a sestet that responds to the situation. The speaker no longer wants to be a part of the "hive" or the "waxen cell of the world," but instead wants to "fly out."

In *Cane's* last sonnet, "Prayer," the form undergoes further changes. The octave and sestet of "November Cotton Flower" and "Beehive," disappear in this poem.

My body is opaque to the soul.  
Driven of the spirit, long have I sought to temper it unto the spirit's  
    longing,  
But my mind, too, is opaque to the soul.  
A closed lid is my soul's flesh-eye.  
O Spirits of whom my soul is but a little finger,  
Direct it to the lid of its flesh-eye.  
I am weak with much giving.  
I am weak with the desire to give more.  
(How strong a thing is the little finger!)  
So weak that I have confused the body with the soul,  
And the body with its little finger.  
(How frail is the little finger.)  
My voice could not carry to you did you dwell in stars,  
O Spirits of whom my soul is but a little finger. (70)

The poem discusses the "weak" persona whose voice is unable to "carry." The poem also discusses the physical "body" as opposed to the internal "soul." Toomer states that the physical does not define the soul. Appropriately, the

poem's structure represents its message that things—or individuals—cannot be judged by physicality. The persona admits that he has "confused the body with the soul." The poem itself "confuses" physicality and content. This fourteen-line poem could be considered a sonnet, but its meter and rhyme break the poem from this classification. Toomer creates further changes to the form by including the chanting line, "O Spirits of whom my soul is but a little finger . . ." (70). The repetition of this line connects the European sonnet form to the work song. By blending the two poetic structures, Toomer proposes that forms evolve and exist outside definable categories and that aesthetic forms mesh to create an American poetic structure. Just as Toomer uses the mulatto to represent the American character, one created by the racial melting pot, this new structure represents the fusion of European-American art forms with African-American forms.

The call-and-response sermons, extensions of the Negro spiritual, developed from the work songs of the enslaved African American culture; thus, these songs often show a shared experience (Bowen 13). Together, the community's voices raise in song. In *Cane's* poetry, Toomer uses the form of the African-American work song in pieces such as "Cotton Song," "Song of the Son," and "Harvest Song."

"Cotton Song" utilizes most components of the African-American work song: "elements of religion, rhythm, syncopation, spontaneity, and the absence

of any feeling of hatred or revenge" (Bowen 13).

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

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

This second stanza repeats and concludes the piece, much like the stanzas embedded in *Cane's* prose. This repetition sounds much like the refrain of a song. It also demonstrates the dialogue between speaker and group. The two work together, one calling, the other responding. The speaker calls to "lift it," and the brother agrees. In the first stanza, the speaker calls to his audience, and in the second stanza, the audience responds. Additionally, Toomer places the "song" in a quatrain form with a rhyme scheme: *abba, cccc, bddb, efbb, cccc*. This meter and rhyme give the poem a song-like quality. As in his sonnets, Toomer begins his poem with perfect rhyme: *abba, cccc, bddb*, but he disrupts the rhyme in the third stanza of "Cotton Song." Toomer does, however, return to the poem's refrain and a sense of poetic order in the last stanza, thus ending

with the brothers singing in unison.

Unlike the four-line stanzas in "Cotton Song," Toomer varies the stanzas' lengths in "Song of the Son." For the most part, stanzas are five lines long, but this length changes in the last two stanzas. Toomer does set up a rhyme scheme: *abbaa, cddcc, effgg, hiih, cccc*. The third stanza begins:

In time, for though the sun is setting on  
 A song-lit race of slaves, it has not set;  
 Though late, O soil, it is not too late yet  
 To catch thy plaintive soul, leaving, soon gone,  
 Leaving, to catch thy plaintive soul soon gone.

O Negro slaves, dark purple ripened plums,  
 Squeezed, and bursting in the pine-wood air,  
 Passing, before they stripped the old tree bare  
 One plum was saved for me, one seed becomes

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

Toomer moves from the five-lines of the first three stanzas to a quatrain form.

The echoing last two lines heard in the first three stanzas imply the interaction of the audience with the speaker. This loss indicates the speaker's initial break from the group and indicates that he will "soon [be] gone." In the final stanza, also a quatrain, the persona emphasizes that a way of life and his clinging to the African American community were ending. The chorus's echoing refrains conclude the piece. But the interjection between these lines by speaker's words, "What they were, and what they are to me" (14) implies a sense of discontent with the community. The speaker disrupts the union of the chorus. And the placement of this line within the refrain emphasizes that the experience of the individual speaker disrupts that of the community. "Song of Son" represents a changing era and the speaker's changing attitude towards the community.

The persona's changing attitude in "Song of the Son" becomes a complete break from his "brothers" in "Harvest Song," the final work song in *Cane*. Toomer physically places "Harvest Song" on the page facing the last sonnet, "Prayer." Positioning these poems together serves as a direct commentary on *Cane*'s evolved forms. Poetic structures have evolved by the conclusion of *Cane*. It is difficult even to categorize "Harvest Song" as a poem. Not only does it lose its conventional poetic language, but this African American work song—like its sonnet counterpart "Prayer"—loses its tie with the traditional form. The physical appearance of "Harvest Song" makes it a poem, but it transcends traditional definitions of poetic form. The work songs have evolved

from lyric to prose. "Harvest Song," like "Prayer," emerges as a poetic form independent of European or African-American conventional forms. It reads:

I am a reaper whose muscles set at sundown. All my oats are  
cradled.

But I am too chilled, and too fatigued to bind them. And I hunger.

I crack a grain between my teeth. I do not taste it.

I have been in the fields all day. My throat is dry. I hunger.

. . . I hunger. My throat is dry. Now that the sun has set and I am  
chilled, I fear to call. (Eoho, my brother!)

I am a reaper. (Eoho!) All my oats are cradled. But I am too  
fatigued to bind them. And I hunger. I crack a grain. It has  
no taste to it. My throat is dry . . . (71)

If this piece were put in prose form, it could be considered prose. But, because Toomer sets it up on the page to be a poem, it becomes one. He implies, Is it wise to categorize a piece based on its physical appearance?—Is it wise to categorize people based upon their physical appearances? The speaker's struggle to engage "fellow harvesters" in conversation becomes muffled parenthetical expressions, representing his reluctance to interact with them.



These interjections connect "Harvest Song" with the earlier poem "Cotton Song:" "(Eoho, my brothers!)" (71). Bowen defines the Negro spiritual as an expression for a group's shared experience (13). In this piece, however, the speaker "hungers" for more and can no longer sing while isolated in the African American experience. The speaker has become "chilled" and is afraid and too tired to call the brothers (*Cane* 71). In this final poem, the speaker has become apathetic toward his brothers and struggles to find his own voice. The speaker represents Toomer who slipped ethnic bonds and placed himself outside all categories. Toomer, like the persona of this poem, becomes an artist unable to speak. Because of his decision to slip beyond racial categories, Toomer becomes alienated and, eventually, unheard.

Toomer envisioned a blended race, represented by the mulatto, that could not be separated into distinguishable groups. The vision of a common humanity in his work and his longing to exist outside categorized groups created a paradox for Toomer. His belief that language and art could not isolate themselves *in* one culture ultimately taught him that they could not exist *without* one. Although the labelling of Toomer as an African American ironically empowered his voice, his personal disclaimer of this race makes the placement of his art into white or black traditions problematic. Toomer's desire to exist outside the African-American identity hampered his entrance into the anthologies of literature that were not categorized by race. Toomer who spoke

for a common, fused humanity found himself outside it. Renouncing ethnic lines did not empower his voice or his art; rather, Toomer found that by stepping over those lines he alienated himself from the very groups he sought to join. Jean Toomer exemplifies the difficulty critics and publishers have in viewing artists without considering the writer's race. Even today, in a society so conscious of political fairness, should artists be grouped by ethnicity? As far as Toomer is concerned, his "realized kinship" did not become a "way for [him] to enter," but rather became his source of alienation.

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Appendix  
*Cane's Poetry***Section I**

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6	"November Cotton Flower"
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VITA

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