



“I’m a bad man”: When Langston Hughes traduces the reflexive bad effects of white people’s racism on black individuals who refuse “Feelin blue” in his poem “Bad man” or the blues poem

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Abstract

This paper aims to study the bad effects of racism on blacks’ psychology, resulting in the acceptance of racial and negative social constructed stereotypes such as considering oneself as being “a bad man”. The acceptance of such negative stereotypes cast on blacks by white people, is possible because some blacks reject the fact of “feelin blue”. This aspect highlights the use, need and importance of blues in blacks’ lives in a racist environment. Following a sociocriticism, psychoanalytic, and stylistics perspectives; this paper reveals that blues is very important in blacks’ lives and especially in their relationship with racist white people because without blues they end up thinking they are “bad” persons. That is why Hughes writes a blues poem in order to justify how much blues has been important for blacks to overcome and bear the racist society of white people considered as “the edge of hell”.

Keywords: racism, reflexive bad effects, blues, negative stereotypes, moral strength, black people

1. Introduction

For centuries, racism ^[1] has structured the relationship between white people and black people in terms of superiority and inferiority, good and evil ^[2], in terms of opportunity and right ^[3] but also in all domains of life about the way in which black people suffer from the prejudice and the cruelty of white people. And concerning the context of this study, it should be said that racism constitutes a landmark in the American society and in race relation in United States.

Set up in the context of the American society, the most visible manifestations of racism on black people, which are notions such as segregation, discrimination, physical abuse and brutality, race riots, lynching and Jim Crow laws ^[4] have been so much spotlighted that the hidden, invisible and psychological bad effects of racism on the Negro individuals were most of the time forgotten while being as dangerous as the visible ones.

Devoted "to explain and illuminate the Negro condition in America and obliquely that of all human kind" ^[5] and also to “express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or

shame” ^[6], Langston Hughes, one of the leading black writers of the Harlem Renaissance, while criticizing those most visible manifestations of racism ^[7]; will traduce in a remarkable poem the reflexive bad effects of racism on the Negro individuals ^[8]. It is in this perspective that his poem “Bad Man” denounces the way racism plays on or impacts negatively the reaction, behavior, morality and psychology of the black people.

Indeed, a thorough analysis shows that, this poem focuses especially on the reflexive bad effects of racism resulting from the frustration and anger but also sadness, hopelessness and confusion black people feel in front of racism. And we may observe that these reflexive bad effects develop themselves around the use of violence, the lack of moral strength to bear racism and finally the acceptance of the negative stereotypes thrown on them by the white people. That is why the central question in this paper is therefore to know: how racism can affect negatively the reaction, behavior, morality and finally the psychology of the Negro individual so that he can end up accepting the negative stereotypes ^[9] and consider himself as being “a bad, bad man”?

¹ Defined as "the belief in racial superiority: the belief that people of different races have different qualities and abilities, and that some races are inherently superior or inferior" and also as the "animosity towards other races: prejudice or animosity against people who belong to other races"¹ in Microsoft® Encarta® 2009. © 1993-2008 Microsoft Corporation. Tous droits réservés.

² Traditionally, in Western culture black symbolizes evil, and white stands for good.

³ For example, there is the old saying amongst Negroes: If you're black, stay back; if you're brown, stick around; if you're white, you're right.

⁴ These Jim Crow laws were implemented namely in the South of the United States.

⁵ "My seeking has been to explain and illuminate the Negro condition in America and obliquely that of all human kind" Hughes is quoted as saying. In Rampersad, 1988, vol. 2, p. 418.

⁶ "The younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly, too. The tom-tom cries, and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain free within ourselves." "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (June 1926), *The Nation*.

⁷ Langston Hughes criticizes those most visible manifestations of racism (segregation, discrimination etc.) through poems such as “Puzzled”, “Who But the Lord?”, “Ballad of the Landlord”, “Freedom Train” etc in *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1979).

⁸ Spotlighting at the same time those hidden, invisible and bad effects of racism on the psychology of the black people.

⁹ the negative stereotypes thrown on blacks by white people which in this precise context is “bad man”

The theoretical background that will be used in analyzing the reflexive bad effects of racism on the Negro individuals will be theories such as sociocriticism, psychoanalytic criticism, and stylistics and as approach; it will be a hermeneutics analysis of the poem "Bad Man".

It is important to precise in terms of theoretical background that stylistics is really important here because Langston Hughes in his literary creation has written this poem in the form of blues patterns or a blues poem. And it is stylistically very important to understand why the poet Hughes has used such a poetic device which is the blues concerning this specific poem and its major concern: the psychological bad effects of racism on Negro individuals. Moreover, stylistics is an interesting theoretical approach necessary in this work, because it will enable us to identify "the sense of style" ^[10].

Sociocriticism is useful in this study because racism is a race relation problem and it has existed in a stark way in the American society and black people have suffered from it namely through segregation, discrimination and Jim Crow laws. Psychoanalytic criticism is important because of the reflexive and psychological bad effects of racism on the Negro individuals via their reaction, behavior, morality and finally their psychology.

This study will revolve around three parts. We will first present the stereotype of being "a bad man" as a product of racism and a race relation problem. Secondly, we will study the reflexive bad effects of racism on the Negro individuals; focusing the personal level through the use of violence, the moral level through the need for moral strength; the psychological level through one's self conception and the acceptance of negative stereotypes. And thirdly, we will present the use of blues in terms of form of this poem as the adequate weapon against racism and its psychological damage.

2. "Bad Man" And Racism: A Race Relation Problem

As far as black people are concerned, the sticker of being "a bad man" and the meaningless or worthless human value incorporated in the fact of being "a bad man" do not date from the time of publication of this poem of Langston Hughes ^[11]. And the best testimony is that of Phillis Wheatley when she relates and confesses the way "with scornful eye" the white people have characterized (at the very beginning) her land, her race, her soul, herself, and her colour:

'Twas mercy brought me from my *Pagan* land,
Taught my benighted soul to understand
That there's a God, that there's a *Saviour* too:
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
Some view our sable race with scornful eye,

¹⁰ Translated from this expression: «le sens du style».

¹¹ "The social problem of racism and discrimination in America existed long after the Civil War ended. Discrimination was seen in different parts of America in the twentieth century. American literary writers clearly portrayed racism in America. Such writers as Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Zora Neale Hurston, and Gwendolyn Brooks expressed the theme of racism in America throughout their poetry and short stories" in "Segregation and Integration" by Jacob Lawrence, From a poverty of segregation to a richness of diversity: themes in James McBride's *The color of water*.

"Their colour is a diabolic die."

Remember, *Christians, Negros*, black as *Cain*,
May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train ^[12].

Indeed, since the first contact between white skin people and dark skin people and all along their relationship, racism has become a major social problem because white skin people have considered themselves as superior and at the same time, they have considered the dark skin people as inferior and namely inferior to them:

«les nègres sont naturellement inférieurs aux blancs» ^[13],
«la nature a subordonné à ce principe ces différents degrés
et ces caractères des nations, qu'on voit si rarement se
changer. C'est par là que les Nègres sont les esclaves des
autres hommes» ^[14], «la race nègre est (...) la plus
dégradée des races humaines, dont les formes s'approchent
le plus de la brute, et dont l'intelligence ne s'est élevée
nulle part au point d'arriver à un gouvernement régulier»
^[15].

With such negative preconceived ideas about the black people (for instance "la race nègre est (...) la plus dégradée des races humaines") and with such negative terms or offending terms ^[16] about the black people; white people will forever reflect in terms of white people superiority over black people and they established many racial theories and theorems on the basis of race, racism, hatred, and "scornful eye" such as the following one:

Dans l'assertion de «La Religion Nationale de l'Allemagne»: «la race blanche doit dominer. Les peuples tétons sont purs. Le nègre est inférieur et le restera. L'homme blanc le plus bas sera toujours plus que l'homme noir le plus élevé. Tout cela est la preuve des desseins de la providence» ^[17].

We notice clearly through this assertion that the superiority of white people implicates the inferiority of black people and this interrelationship between the superiority of the white people implying implicitly the inferiority of the black people and especially an obligatory inferiority: "Le nègre est inférieur et le restera *l'indigénat*" will oblige white people to implement a dramatic project with the objective of "Imposer, garantir et sauvegarder la supériorité de l'homme blanc sur l'homme noir a été une grande préoccupation des deux codes. *Le Code noir* et *Le Code de l'indigénat*" ^[18].

¹² "On Being Brought from Africa to America" by Phillis Wheatley written in 1773

¹³ Selon David Hume dans son texte «Sur les caractères nationaux», Vol III.

¹⁴ Selon Voltaire dans son texte «Essai sur les mœurs», (Genève, 1755), t. XVI, p. 269-270.

¹⁵ Selon le zoologist G. Cuvier dans son texte "Recherches sur les ossements fossils", (Deterville, Paris, 1812), Volume 1.

¹⁶ "my *Pagan* land, my benighted soul, our sable race, "Their colour is a diabolic die.", black as *Cain*"

¹⁷ Charles Pascal Tolno, *Afrique du Sud, "Le rendez-vous de la violence"*, (Imprimerie Nationale «PATRICE LUMUMBA», Conakry, Juin 1984), pp.30-32.

¹⁸ Ambroise Kom et Lucienne Nguoué, *Le Code Noir et L'Afrique*, (Nouvelles du Sud, Rue Barbès, 1991), pp.58-59.

Therefore giving birth to hatred and “scornful eye”, racism and its corollaries will perform bad relationships between whites and blacks giving way to these historical slavery and persecutions from European nations toward black people: Slave trade, Slavery, colonialism, ill-treatment, lynching, violence, work in plantation, segregation, discrimination, ku Klux klan, Jim crow laws etc.

Summarizing racism, hatred and “scornful eye” by the expression “you don’t love me”, the poet Langston Hughes will pinpoint the veritable problem in race relation or in race relationship between whites and blacks occasioning blacks predicaments, sufferings, and plight since the first contacts when he affirms clearly that:

V1 Cause you don’t love me
 V2 Is awful, awful hard.
 V5 There ain’t no good left
 V6 In this world for me.
 V9 I don’t know what
 V10 Po’ weary me can do.
 V11 Gypsy says I’d kill my self
 V12 If I was you ^[19].

Thus it is clear-cut that the negative stereotype of the black man being “a bad man” is a social constructed negative stereotype on the basis of racism, hatred, scornful eye and complex of superiority of white people. And all those negative stereotypes about Negroes become therefore fundamental race relation problems and veritable social problems. Because to qualify the black man of being “bad” or “a bad man” or “a bad, bad man” or further “a bad human being” is simply the product of a race relation problem between white people and black people and is simply a social constructed negative stereotypes of the white man’s racism, hatred and hegemonic superiority toward the black man. This reality is clearly what the poet Hughes tells us through this first stanza of his poem entitled symptomatically “Bad man” ^[20]:

V1 I’m a bad, bad man
 V2 Cause everbody tells me so.
 V3 I’m a bad, bad man.
 V4 Everbody tells me so.
 V5 I takes ma meanness and ma licker
 V6 Everwhere I go.

On the basis of racism, white people qualify black people of being “bad” not in terms of evaluation (or not in a specific term) but in terms of stereotyping the black race in general. And the ideal here is that the lexical unit “bad” and the notion of “bad man” and the stereotype of being “a bad, bad man” encompass all the other negative stereotypes cast by white people on the black race. Because this lexical unit “bad” means also that the black man can be defined or identified as a person:

¹⁹ Langston Hughes, “Bad Luck Card”, *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1979), p. 41.

²⁰ Poem «Bad Man» written in 1927 by the poet Langston Hughes.

of poor quality: below an acceptable standard in quality or performance_unskilful: lacking the skill or competence to perform a task adequately_not functioning properly: not functioning properly because of a fault_incorrect: incorrect according to the normal rules, especially those governing the use of language_wicked: morally evil, blameworthy, or unacceptable_misbehaving and disobedient: troublesome or annoying, usually through rudeness, disobedience, or mischievousness_angry and unpleasant: characterized by anger and unpleasantness towards other people_offensive: likely to cause offence to other people because it deals with a taboo subject or expresses violent feelings_harmful: liable to damage health or cause injury; etc ^[21].

Even if in the lexical unit “I’m a bad, bad man”, the expression is said at the first person narrative thanks to the use of the personal subject pronoun “I” ^[22]. It must be said in terms of discourse analysis that the fact that the negro says “I’m a bad, bad man” – [meaning also that he has internalized this negative stereotype or this negative saying and image about him]- does not derive from him at first. It is not his own responsibility at first, but it is other persons who cast this negative stereotype, and attribute him this negative stereotype: “Cause everbody tells me so. Everbody tells me so.”

Thus the main concern in this part is not the fact to accept such negative stereotype according to the meaning of this poem or the fact to say it thanks to the use of the first person narrative “I”. But it is the fact that at origin, this negative stereotype is the product of race relation problem, and a social problem like it is well precised by the poet himself: “I’m a bad, bad man, Cause everbody tells me so.”

And the most important aspect here is this factor or precision about the others persons being responsible of the fact that the black man is or is considered “a bad, bad man”, meaning also that it is the other persons who consider; treat or qualify him as “a bad, bad man” but not himself. The factor of other persons symbolized by the lexeme “everbody” introduces us semantically to all people and metaphorically to the majority of white people in United States.

Relating to the meaning and semantics of some lexemes in Phillis Wheatley’s poem (1768) ^[23], we realize that this definition and qualification of the black man being “a bad, bad man” dates from long-time that is why the speaker says clearly “I takes ma meanness and ma licker Everwhere I go.” ^[24] It means clearly that the black man takes with him this meaningless human value and sticker of being “a bad, bad man” from Africa to Europe and from Europe to America, so everywhere in the world.

Racism is the main factor for which the black man is treated to be “bad” by others and namely by white people. The fact to be “bad” is not intrinsic to the black man, because he is not

²¹ «Bad» in "dictionnaire anglais." Dicos Encarta. Microsoft® Encarta© 2009 [DVD]. Microsoft Corporation, 2008.

²² Which means that it is the speaker who is responsible of the saying

²³ Since her living period the black man is characterized by negative terms or offending terms (“my *Pagan* land, my benighted soul, our sable race, "Their colour is a diabolic die.", black as *Cain*")

²⁴ This African American dialect “I takes ma meanness and ma licker Everwhere I go” means simply: “I takes my meaningless and my sticker Everwhere I go”

declared to be bad by God himself the creator but he is told or treated or qualified to be bad by white people because of racism, because of hatred, because of scornful eye.

Since the beginning the plight of blacks or Negroes at the hands of white people has always been characterized by negative stereotypes symbolized by the notion of “bad man” and the “quality” of being “a bad, bad man” or better “a bad, bad human”.

And the veritable struggle is to do not internalize or trust what the white people say about the black people because when a black man begins to trust the bad things or negative stereotypes the white people says about him and behave this way; consequently he suffers from reflexive bad consequences. And as far as racism is concerned, the way it operates in the society towards the black people there are many symptomatic reflexive bad consequences the black man suffers from. This analysis opens the way to the reflexive bad effects of racism on the Negro individuals.

3. "Bad Man" And the Reflexive Bad Effects of Racism on the Negro Individuals

When you are referred to as a "bad man" because you are black, when you are treated awful and white people call you some stereotyped names beware to be brainwashed and to believe that you are really a “bad man” or “a bad, bad man” or a “bad human”. Indeed the Negro individual should avoid internalize he is a “bad man” and in general all the Negro individuals should beware to do not internalize those social constructed negative stereotypes cast on them and summarized in the notion of being “bad man” because there are so many reflexive bad consequences related to racism on the negro individuals.

3.1 The Personal Level: The Use of Violence

The use of violence seems to be both the outside and inside reaction black people have when they are confronted to racism or racial difficulties, problems, and events. On the one hand, an example of the use of violence at the outside level can be noticed in the novel *Invisible Man* ^[25] in which the narrator relates an incident in which he almost killed a white man in the street for insulting him ^[26]. On the other hand, an example of the use of violence at the inside level can be noticed in the novel *Black Boy* ^[27] in which the use of violence between blacks is frequent and begins when black boy's mother beats

²⁵ Novel written and published by Ralph Ellison in 1952

²⁶ One night I accidentally bumped into a man, and perhaps because of the near darkness he saw me and called me an insulting name. I sprang at him, seized his coat lapels and demanded that he apologize. He was a tall blond man, and as my face came close to his he looked insolently out of his blue eyes and cursed me, his breath hot in my face as he struggled. I pulled his chin down sharp upon the crown of my head, butting him as I had seen the West Indians do, and I felt his flesh tear and the blood gush out, and I yelled, "Apologize! Apologize!" But he continued to curse and struggle, and I butted him again and again until he went down heavily, on his knees, profusely bleeding. I kicked him repeatedly, in a frenzy because he still uttered insults though his lips were frothy with blood. Oh yes, I kicked him! And in my outrage I got out my knife and prepared to slit his throat, right there beneath the lamplight in the deserted street, holding him by the collar with one hand, and opening the knife with my teeth—when it occurred to me that the man had not seen me, actually; that he, as far as he knew, was in the midst of a walking nightmare!

²⁷ *Black Boy* by Richard Wright written in 1945

him ^[28].

We observe that the use of violence at a personal level may be both side: some African Americans react outside towards white people when they feel resentment against racism or racist acts, and others react inside towards their own kinsmen to cope with their frustration and confusion like it is the case with the victim of racism (an African American) in this poem and whose first reaction against racism is the use of violence against both his wife and his mistress:

V7 I beats ma wife an'
 V8 I beats ma side gal too.
 V9 Beats ma wife an'
 V10 Beats ma side gal too.
 V11 Don't know why I do it but
 V12 It keeps me from feelin' blue.

In this quotation, the use of violence is stressed by the repetition (four times) of the word “beats”, showing a kind of insistence on the physical abuse made by “I” on both his “wife an’ side gal too”. So from verse 7 to verse 10, we observe the presence of violence and such use of violence represents negative African American stereotypes that white people applied to black people like it was the case of “Trueblood” having incest with his daughter ^[29]. But also the violence present reflects the reality of the everyday life of the African American in the racist environment that governs them like was the case of the presence of many scenes of violence in the novel *Black Boy*.

Without knowing it, violence has a utility or better the use of violence has a utility which is much more moral than physical because it cools down the Negro who feels resentment after being victim of racism. After the use of violence the mood of the victim of racism is temperate or calm, it means also that without this use of violence, the Negro cannot control himself. That is why the meaningful utility of violence or use of violence is to prevent the victim of racism to feel blue meaning also to feel sad or unhappy or have depression.

Indeed the counterpart of violence is moral strength, when the negro does not have the moral strength “to bear nobly his life-long hate”, when the negro does not have moral strength to support and overcome this feeling of sadness, unhappiness, of low spirits and depression; therefore he fall into violence because violence or the use of violence avoid this period or mood of blues as clearly stated: “It keeps me from feelin’ blue.”

In a word, the black man may feel sad or unhappy or be of low spirits because he does not have the moral strength “to bear nobly his life-long hate” that is why in the face of racism or in a racist environment, moral strength becomes a necessity. And blacks need moral strength to live in the white racist America.

²⁸ His mother beats him until he nearly dies. He begins the story with that beating, which sets the scene for the violence all around him. He views violence as a way of life, from the moment he is born until the end of the story.

²⁹ [Jim Trueblood's farm (Chapter 2)] One of the character in the novel *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison

3.2 The Moral Level: The Need for Moral Strength

The stake of the moral level is justified by the moral strength black people need to resist a racist environment. In other words, black should “possess the courage and the grace to bear their anger proudly and unbent”^[30] when they are dominated by a racist environment. As victims of racism, moral strength is the first internal and moral tool black people need when they face racism or racial events that is why this moral strength is also called metaphorically by the poet Claude McKay: “the superhuman power”. Because it is really a “superhuman power” when as human, one resist any kind of racial frustration, anger, sadness, confusion etc. It is a “superhuman power” to avoid falling into violence when being victim of racism.

Indeed the moral strength represents a kind of power that the black people need “to keep their heart inviolate against the potent poison of white people’s hate”^[31]. And in fact, this power should be “a superhuman power”, a power that goes beyond the capacity of a human being because black people need more, black people need a veritable moral strength or a power which goes beyond their “human power” to cope everyday with frustration, anger, sadness, hopelessness and confusion they feels in front of racism, in front of racist white people in a racist America where racial stereotyping has at times proved to be very hurtful and oppressive.

When there is a lack of this moral strength and the black man who lives in a white America is not able to get this moral strength (this “superhuman power”) so that:

Deep in the secret chambers of [his] heart
[He] muse [his] life-long hate, and without flinch
[He] bear it nobly as [he] live [is] part^[32].

Therefore, he will of course plunge himself into violence, and most of time this violence is toward the relatives so an inside violence as we notice it in the poem with the expression “I beats ma wife an’ I beats ma side gal too.”

Black people need of course moral strength to bear nobly their life-long hate because all the frustration, anger, sadness, hopelessness and confusion provoke a kind of madness which is justified by the outbreak of violence: either against white people, or either against black people in black community.

And when there is violence, when there is this physical reaction, it means also that there is a lack of moral strength, this “superhuman power”, that is why violence is used in replacement. Violence is used to calm or equilibrate or satisfy the mood of the victim of racism in lack of moral strength and the proof is that the speaker says: “Don’t know why I do it but It keeps me from feelin’ blue.”

Indeed the use of violence permits the black person who is victim of racism to avoid “feelin’ blue”^[33] or to avoid feeling

blue and the only way to avoid feeling blue is to possess a moral strength.

V7 I beats ma wife an’
V8 I beats ma side gal too.
V9 Beats ma wife an’
V10 Beats ma side gal too.
V11 Don’t know why I do it but
V12 It keeps me from feelin’ blue.

The fact to refuse to feel blue by using violence or by replacing this step by violence is a very bad attitude on the part of the victim of racism or the African American who is victim of racism in this white America. Because to refuse to feel blue is in other words to refuse to have moral strength to overcome the kind of racial events he goes through. It means also symbolically, to refuse to “emerge as a character fortified by his natural reliance on the art of his culture”.

Because “as a means through which black Americans deal with the pain of life”, the blues has a vital place in black American life. Indeed, this African American music is part of his heritage, and he should plunge into the blues anytime he needs a moral strength to face reality and tell the truth. The blues is such a music which gives hope and exaltation. It is a spiritual that grants a certain freedom and it lies in loving not hating and also in the power of self-expression. The blues serves as antidote for pain and describe with humorous exaggeration the quality of his reality.

The black man learned from blues of the wisdom of his forefathers, the humors, bitterness, love, disappointment and the will to endure. The blues shield against destruction of identity, and plays for maturity, freedom, consciousness, self-awareness and emergence. It is a sort of music that permits metamorphosis and transformation for it is displayed in a tragicomic language.

“The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one’s aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically^[34].

The refusal of “feelin’ blue” this sadness period and singing blues as the therapy of this sadness period meaning also the refusal of having or getting a moral strength to cope with racial frustration and anger, will conduct the protagonist or speaker to believe or trust psychologically what the white people on the basis of racism say about him because:

Using a similar paradigm, Trueblood emerges as a character fortified by his natural reliance on the art of his culture. After singing his blues he returns home to his family and reasserts his manhood to his wife. In spite of his actions, he refuses a definition imposed by others and insists upon his own, thereby offering the narrator a

³⁰ Poem “the white House “ by Claude McKay, verses 3,4: “But I possess the courage and the grace”-“To bear my anger proudly and unbent”

³¹ Poem “the white House “ by Claude McKay, verses 13,14: “Oh, I must keep my heart inviolate”- “Against the potent poison of your hate.”

³² Poem “the white city “ by Claude McKay, verses 2,3,4: “Deep in the secret chambers of my heart-I muse my life”-“long hate, and without flinch”-“I bear it nobly as I live my part”.

³³ feeling of sadness: a feeling of unhappiness or low spirits

³⁴ Harold Bloom. *Ellison’s Invisible Man*. Bloom’s Guides: Invisible Man, Copyright © 2008 by Infobase Publishing, p. 41.

valuable lesson in the art of identity formation. One's humanity can be determined by general opinion only if an individual consents, and True blood roundly rejects such a possibility. Houston Baker concludes that "the distinction between folklore and literary art evident in Ellison's critical practice collapses in his creative" rendition of True blood [35].

This analysis opens the door to the stake of the psychological level in the poem "Bad Man" which is structured around the fact to internalize the racial and negative stereotypes and "what the white people say about" the black man in general and particularly here, the fact to internalize the black man as being "a bad, bad man"

3.3 The Psychological level: one's self conception and acceptance of racial and negative stereotypes

The self-conception the victim of racism has of him is very important in a racist environment and here the refusal of feeling blue³⁶ and its replacement by the use of violence means metaphorically that the victim of racism trust or believe "what white people say about" him and therefore is no longer himself but a "defeated" person or a "destroyed" person.

And whenever the black man ends up by believing his inferiority vis à vis to the white man and by trusting the racial and negative stereotypes about his inferiority vis à vis to the white man, therefore begin the most dangerous and harmful bad effects of white man's racism on black man's psychology. That is why the black man should not psychologically consider himself as being a "bad, bad man" simply because:

The details and symbols of your life have been deliberately constructed to make you believe what white people say about you. Please try to remember that what they believe, as well as what they do and cause you to endure, does not testify to your inferiority but to their inhumanity and fear [37].

Well, he is dead, he never saw you, and he had a terrible life; he was defeated long before he died because, at the bottom of his heart, he really believed what white people said about him. This is one of the reasons that he became so holy. I am sure that your father has told you something about all that. Neither you nor your father exhibit any tendency towards holiness: you really *are* of another era, part of what happened when the Negro left the land and came into what the late E. Franklin Frazier called "the cities of destruction". You can only be destroyed by believing that you really are what the white world calls a *nigger*. I tell you this because I love you, and please don't you ever forget it [38].

So the psychological "resignation and acceptance of his inferiority vis à vis to white people" [39] will be fatal for the black man in terms of own destruction and lose of hope for he will consider himself definitely as "a bad, bad man" and will affirm an absolute resignation by refusing forever any kind of success or improvement in life:

V1 I'm a bad, bad man
V2 Cause everbody tells me so.
V3 I'm a bad, bad man.
V4 Everbody tells me so.

V13 I'm so bad I
V14 Don't even want to be good.
V15 So bad, bad I
V16 Don't even want to be good.
V17 I'm goin' to de devil an'
V18 I wouldn't go to heaben if I could [40].

This poem shows and reveals how in a reflexive way the phenomenon of racism acts negatively on the psychology of the black man who believe "at the bottom of his heart" "what white people say about" him.

Indeed, the title is composed of two different poetic codes in terms of value (an adjective "bad" and a common noun "man"). And this title means the negative man, the bad man, the null man, the useless man and consequently the man inferior to other men, that is to say, the man whom nature has made "the slave of other races".

The title of this poem is therefore very symbolic first because it encloses in itself all the racial negative stereotypes about the black people. But also it is very symbolic in the sense that it embodies several connotations ranging from "the acceptance of his inferiority vis a vis to the white" to the acceptance of the white supremacy to the "resignation" of the black man toward any success, any progress for future prospects.

It is therefore a title that embodies negative connotations since its denotation through the poetic code "bad", a poetic code which is very different from the word "good" and we may have as elucidation, the following relative connotations between those two opposite words:

Good man = right man= white is right: white, right, good, positivity, purity, joy, awareness, visibility, blessing, light, life, beginning etc.

Bad man = last man= black get back: black, bad, evil, negativity, sin, curse, darkness, death, end, sadness, blindness, invisibility etc.

So the title thanks to its denotation and connotations is intrinsically related to the perspectives described by the verses from the first stanza till the third stanza. And the repetition or refrain six times of the title "bad man" in the poem does traduce and justify the acceptance of "what white people said

³⁵ Michael D. Hill and Lena M. Hill. *Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man A Reference Guide*. Greenwood Guides to Multicultural Literature. Greenwood Press: Westport, Connecticut London, p. P 101.

³⁶ Meaning also the refusal of performing the Blues as an antidote against racism and a therapy to have moral strength.

³⁷ James Baldwin, *The fire Next Time* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963), p. 22.

³⁸ James Baldwin, *The fire Next Time* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963), p. 18.

³⁹ « Si les romanciers de la conscience noire pensent que la libération ne peut s'obtenir qu'à travers la lutte, ils estiment cependant que le Noir doit mener cette lutte d'abord au niveau individuel, contre sa propre inertie, et surtout contre la résignation et l'acceptation de son infériorité par rapport au blanc »³⁹ in *Le Code Noir et L'Afrique* by Ambroise Kom et Lucienne Nguoué, (Nouvelles du Sud, Rue Barbès, 1991), p.79.

⁴⁰ Poème «Bad man» écrit en 1927 par le poète Langston Hughes.

about him” meaning also to “believe what white people say about you” and meaning at last the acceptance of his inferiority as black man by accepting all the racial and negative stereotypes about him. This repetition of the title works as a kind of ascending gradation when the poet moves from the lexical unit "I'm a bad man" to the lexical unit "I'm so bad" a way for the poet to insist on the fact that the black man finally believed in what the white people say: "Cause everybody tells me so" about him: "I'm a bad, bad man, Cause everybody tells me so"

I'm a bad, bad man.	I'm a bad, bad man.
Cause everybody tells me so.	I'm a bad, bad man
I'm a bad, bad man.	I'm so bad I
Everybody tells me so.	So bad, bad I

As well mentioned by the poet Aimée Césaire when he says: « Je parle de millions d'hommes à qui on a inculqué savamment la peur, le complexe d'infériorité, le tremblement, l'agenouillement, le désespoir, le larbinisme»^[41]. We observe that the thesis "I'm a bad, bad man" or the thesis "I'm so bad I" works very well in the psychology of the black man, in his everyday reality and in his life so that he forgets that « Civilisés jusqu'à la moelle des os ! L'idée du nègre barbare est une invention européenne»^[42] to keep black people in "the inferiority complex".

The black man ends up accepting, marrying and adopting psychologically the semantics of the thesis "I'm a bad, bad man" and finally believes in his inferiority vis-à-vis to the white man. The expression "I'm a bad, bad man" is therefore a feeling shared by many black Americans who believe in their inferiority vis-à-vis to the white man. And such a feeling contributes greatly to their destruction in the society. And we consider that it is the most dangerous destruction of the black people in United States or in the world since the black people is forever resigned to progress, development, success, and achievement:

V13 I'm so bad I
 V14 Don't even want to be good.
 V15 So bad, bad I
 V16 Don't even want to be good.
 V17 I'm goin' to de devil an'
 V18 I wouldn't go to heaben if I could.

The "resignation and acceptance of his inferiority vis à vis to white people" thus becomes a goal of the racist psychology of the white people and a means of destruction of blacks who believe in those different racist sayings and to the fact that they are inherently bad as white people would have us believe. They become therefore “defeated” and “destroyed” persons all their life among racist white people.

4. "Bad Man" And the Use of Blues as a Good Weapon against Racism

In order to show the importance and utility of blues and also

in order to demonstrate that the blues is the good weapon against white people racism^[43], Langston Hughes in terms of form, structure and style will choose to write his poem following the blues patterns, the rhythms of blues and the metrical form of the blues.

Indeed, as we may remark in his literary creation, Langston Hughes uses elements taken from black song and folktales as well as the rhythms of blues and jazz. In many of his poems he employs the metrical form of the blues. His literary creation was an effort to capture the cunning and richness of the idiomatic Black English he had heard both in the rural south and in the urban north. Through it he sought to convey the resilience and strength of the dispossessed as they struggled to develop Art forms that would combat the debilitating monotony, weariness, fear and pain of their lives.

One of many talented poets of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s was Langston Hughes. He embraced African-American jazz rhythms and was one of the first black writers to attempt to make a profitable career out of his writing. Hughes incorporated blues, spirituals, colloquial speech, and folkways in his poetry^[44].

And here, the fact to mention the notion of “feelin blues”; to mention the word “blue” and the fact to write blues^[45] have been a very great stylistic achievement on the part of the poet Langston Hughes in this poem entitled “Bad Man”. Indeed the use of such style or such poetic form in a metaphorical way^[46] and in terms of importance, is a manner to demonstrate the vital place of the blues in black American life “as a means through which black Americans deal with the pain of life” because the theme he deals with in this poem is the reflexive bad effects of racism namely on the psychology of the Negro individual: those racial stereotyping, hurtful and oppressive, and representing more serious, harmful, and resilient issues of concern.

The stylistic achievement in the context of this poem is very interesting, that is why the first incursion in this part is therefore to comprehend why Hughes chooses to write in such poetic device which is the blues. And we can simply say that the use of blues in this context presents the blues as the very good weapon against white people racism, and a tool that black people need. Because on the one hand, the blues is an antidote against the debilitating monotony, weariness, fear and pain of their lives, the blues is a medicament which gives moral strength to black people and is part of their tradition, folklores, and heritage. Then, because on the other hand, the poet Hughes himself being a black individual, he is confronted to racism and he is also a victim of white people racism. So, he needs himself blues as an antidote, a medicament of moral strength^[47].

⁴³ Whereas in the context and meaning of the poem, the Negro victim of racism or the Negro speaker has refused to use it.

⁴⁴ Kathryn vanshipkeren, *outline of American literature-revised edition*; published by the united states department of state; p. 69.

⁴⁵ he writes this poem following the blues patterns, the rhythms of blues and the metrical form of the blues

⁴⁶ The fact to write in blues patterns

⁴⁷ And we may observe that his life and his frequent presence in jazz and blues clubs is a testimony of this fact

⁴¹ Aimée Césaire, *Discours sur le Colonialisme* (Présence Africaine, Paris, 1955), sixième édition, p20.

⁴² Ibid, p.30.

Both in form and content, Hughes therefore uses it as the suitable poetic device to better struggle against the hidden psychological and moral effects of the visible racism of white people on the negro individuals in United States.

We may conclude in terms of “the writer’s attitude toward his life” that Hughes himself is involved in the blues while writing this poem about a sensitive topic which is racism. That is why he adopts in his writing the form of blues because he himself a victim of racism and the fact to accomplish such a poem which is “a kind of blues-inspired accomplishment” is his struggle to overcome the effects of racism. The blues has a very important place in black American life that is why “in his critical writing, Ellison singles out the blues and jazz as the most authentically American art forms as well as a means through which black Americans deal with the pain of life”^[48].

He argues that Wright’s narrative form develops from his exposure to the blues: “In that culture the specific folk-art form which helped shape the writer’s attitude toward his life and which embodied the impulse that contributes much to the quality and tone of his autobiography was the Negro blues” (*Collected Essays* 129). Thus, Wright’s struggle to overcome his Southern heritage to become a writer represents a kind of blues-inspired accomplishment^[49].

Thus, in terms of “blues-inspired accomplishment”, this poem entitled “Bad Man” is indeed a good accomplishment playing the two functions mentioned above:

V1 I’m a bad, bad man
 V2 Cause everybody tells me so.
 V3 I’m a bad, bad man.
 V4 Everbody tells me so.
 V5 I takes ma meanness and ma licker
 V6 Everwhere I go.

V7 I beats ma wife an’
 V8 I beats ma side gal too.
 V9 Beats ma wife an’
 V10 Beats ma side gal too.
 V11 Don’t know why I do it but
 V12 It keeps me from feelin’ blue.

V13 I’m so bad I
 V14 Don’t even want to be good.
 V15 So bad, bad I
 V16 Don’t even want to be good.
 V17 I’m goin’ to de devil an’
 V18 I wouldn’t go to heaben if I could^[50].

This poem made of 18 verses is structurally composed of three identical stanzas with six verses by stanza, creating the following constant (6 + 6 + 6). The end rhyme is ABACB by

⁴⁸ Michael D. Hill and Lena M. Hill. *Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man A Reference Guide*. Greenwood Guides to Multicultural Literature. Greenwood Press: Westport, Connecticut London, p. P 101.

⁴⁹ Michael D. Hill and Lena M. Hill. *Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man A Reference Guide*. Greenwood Guides to Multicultural Literature. Greenwood Press: Westport, Connecticut London, p. P 101.

⁵⁰ Poème «Bad man» écrit en 1927 par le poète Langston Hughes.

stanza therefore a unique and constant rhyme for all the three stanzas. This constant (number of verses and end rhyme) does that the measure of the poem is balanced and simple to understand. Specifically, through this formal composition of the poem, it appears that this poem is a blues, since the three stanzas are composed in the same way (six verses per stanza), the final rhyme is the same everywhere and the internal form of production of ideas and verses follow the same mould: the first verse of each stanza emits the main idea and the last two verses of each stanza justify the function of this general idea emitted in the first verse:

Stanza 1:

V1 I’m a bad, bad man
 V5 I takes ma meanness and ma licker
 V6 Everwhere I go.

Stanza 2:

V1 I beats ma wife an’
 V5 Don’t know why I do it but
 V6 It keeps me from feelin’ blue.

Stanza 3:

V1 I’m so bad I
 V5 I’m goin’ to de devil an’
 V6 I wouldn’t go to heaben if I could.

There is also the same mould in the production of ideas and verses through each stanza as far as the second, third and fourth verses are concerned as we have the opportunity to observe here:

Stanza 1:

V2 Cause everybody tells me so.
 V3 I’m a bad, bad man.
 V4 Everbody tells me so.

Stanza 2:

V8 I beats ma side gal too.
 V9 Beats ma wife an’
 V10 Beats ma side gal too

Stanza 3:

V14 Don’t even want to be good
 V15 So bad, bad I
 V16 Don’t even want to be good

Such a mathematical literary creation and production respecting the same patterns for each stanza (both in formal structure and in ideas) since the first stanza till the third stanza (number of verse, rhyme, way to produce ideas, metrical repetition between verse one and verse two and between verse three and verse four etc.) confirm very well the fact that this poem follows the blues patterns (the case of same end rhyme for example), the rhythms of blues (respected repetition and respected same ideas by line in terms of meter) and the metrical form of the blues (6+6+6).

Il faut préciser à cet effet que le blues est un poème aux formes imposées et les blues sont des chants profanes à la

différence des spirituals (des chants d'adoration) et donc comme le note John William : « le meilleur jazz vient toujours du blues. Construit sur le blues, construit avec une telle vitesse et une telle complexité que nous ne savons même pas qu'il vient du blues »^[51] (parlant du blues en tant que poème).

This poem is therefore a blues poem^[52] because the blues poem is a poem with imposed forms. And the expression of feeling must therefore flow into a specific mould like it is precisely the case in this poem "Bad Man". And although the poet speaks in the first person through the first personal subject pronoun "I", it must be said that the message of this poem is addressed to « millions d'hommes à qui on a inculqué savamment la peur, le complexe d'infériorité, le tremblement, l'agenouillement, le désespoir, le larbinisme^[53]. » And this very important issue linked to the semantics of the title "Bad Man" is all the more destructive and dangerous since the black man clearly states in this poem with conviction that

V15 So bad, bad I

V16 Don't even want to be good.

V17 I'm goin' to de devil an'

V18 I wouldn't go to heaben if I could

This poem made of 18 verses has two interesting complementary qualities. On the one hand, this poem is a lyrical poem. It is a lyrical poem, since the poet gives his personal feelings about what the white people think about him and also about what he thinks of himself. He therefore speaks in the first person of his own "acceptance of his inferiority vis à vis to the white people" and he speaks of his own "resignation" to a better future. It is a lyrical poem since the first verse when the poet clearly states "I'm a bad, bad man".

On the other hand, this poem is a didactic poem, since the poem teaches or informs us that the black man ends up believing in his inferiority (racial and negative stereotypes) and he nourishes henceforth a complex of inferiority which participates in his own destruction.

The tone of the poem is a tone of blues first of all since it is a blues poem and moreover, there is a tone of pity and sadness, because there is a total resignation of the black man to look for a better future through his belief in an inferiority complex that will be forever nourished and that will limit his projects. There is sadness because the black man ends up believing in his inferiority. And there is pity because the black man now refuses progress and resigns himself forever.

⁵¹ John William, in "Le blues du pays", II l'engagement, *Littérature Africaine « Textes et Travaux. Tome 2 »* (Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines : NATHAN AFRIQUE, 1978), p.130.

⁵² One of the most popular forms of American poetry, the blues poem stems from the African American oral tradition and the musical tradition of the blues. A blues poem typically takes on themes such as struggle, despair, and sex... African-American writer Ralph Ellison said that although the blues are often about struggle and depression, they are also full of determination to overcome difficulty "through sheer toughness of spirit." This resilience in the face of hardship is one of the hallmarks of the blues poem. <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/blues-poem-poetic-form> Visited on October 03, 2017.

⁵³ Aimée Césaire, *Discours sur le Colonialisme* (Présence Africaine, Paris, 1955), sixième édition, p.20.

As he used to assert: « dans mes poèmes à la manière des blues et des spirituals, j'ai tenté d'introduire le sens de la couleur et du rythme propre à la race noire dans le cadre plus vaste du langage américain »^[54]; the poet Hughes uses a kind of poetic and musical writing (blues) following the composition of jazz music so that it can be sung and danced. The use of the black American dialect can be seen very well in Hughes' poems through the existence of some words and expressions. And as we may notice concerning this aspect, this poem since its beginning till the end contains several expressions derived from black American dialect (the dialect of black in the rural south): "Cause"=because, "everbody"=everybody, "ma"=my, "ma meanness"=my meaningless, "ma licker"=my sticker, "Everwhere"=everywhere, "an"=and, "I beats"=I beat, "feelin"=feeling, "I'm goin' to de devil an'"=I am going to the devil and, "heaben"=heaven. Thus the use of black American dialect by this poet promotes very well the insertion of the rhythm and color of the black race in his writings.

5. Conclusion

Thanks to this thorough analysis, we observe that this poem shed light on the way black people suffer deeply from racism and the hurtful and oppressive racial and negative stereotypes the white people cast on them. We observe that aside the bad and visible manifestations of racism on black people (segregation, discrimination, race riots, lynching, and Jim Crow laws); this poem points out the hidden and most dangerous manifestations of racism on black people: the bad effects racism and its negative stereotypes have on black people's psychology.

Indeed, being the consequences of the difficult relationships between white people and black people and involving notions such as white people superiority, hegemony and dominance. The racial and negative stereotypes have many reflexive bad effects on black people by impacting negatively their reaction, behavior, morality and psychology.

And an in-depth analysis of these psychological bad effects of racism on the Negro individuals via their reaction, behavior, morality and finally their psychology shows that these reflexive bad effects develop themselves around the use of violence, the lack of moral strength to bear racism and finally the psychological acceptance of all the negative stereotypes cast on them by the white people and summarizing themselves in the notion of being "a bad man". Such effects transform therefore the black person into a "defeated" or "destroyed" person refusing forever success and progress.

The self-conception of oneself as being "a bad, bad man" meaning also the acceptance by the negro of all the racial and negative stereotypes and "what the white people say about him" proves that racism acts in a stark way and reinforce the necessity for the black person to look for moral strength^[55] in order to bear difficulties, frustration; anger, sadness, hopelessness and confusion and live safe in the racist environment. Thus moral strength is very essential in terms of

⁵⁴ Langston Hughes, « le blues du pays », *Littérature Africaine « Textes et travaux, Tomes 2 »* (Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines : Nathan Afrique, 1978), p. 129.

⁵⁵ (also called metaphorically "the superhuman power")

salvation because the symptoms of racial and negative stereotypes on the Negro individual are several (black's acceptance of his negativeness, his resignation; his feeling of inferiority, the internalization of "what white people say about him" and the use of violence) and contribute to the destruction of the black person both on the social and psychological levels.

And the poet Langston Hughes presents the blues as the only way for the Negro to get this moral strength necessary to live quietly and free and overcome white people's racism because thanks to blues black people can "possess the courage and the grace to bear their anger proudly and unbent" when they face racism or racial problems. That is why for a better justification of blues' importance and utility in the life of black people; Langston Hughes in terms of literary creation will choose to write his poem following the blues patterns, the rhythms of blues and the metrical form of the blues. Thus on the stylistic level; we note a very nice blues poem showing Hughes capacity to incorporate "blues, spirituals, colloquial speech, and folkways in his poetry".

It is also a way to present stylistically, symbolically and metaphorically the blues as a good and adequate weapon against white people's racism and its psychological damage on black people ^[56].

Intrinsically linked to racism, to racial effects of stigmatization and discrimination of black people, and to the way negative stereotypes on black people can be harmful and oppressive; we realize that the expression "I am a bad, bad man" is a synopsis of the way racism and racial stereotyping proved to be hurtful and oppressive for the black people, and namely for their psychology. And being still topical in today's concern, racism and negative racial stereotypes have structured and continue to structure the relationship between groups of people:

On the negative side, certain stereotypes such as Black people are lazy, illiterate, and don't want to work; Black people are loud, aggressive, and rude; and Black people are criminals and always engaging in illegal activity have really put a strain on their everyday lived experiences within our society. These stereotypes and generalizations have created many obstacles and barriers to success for these individuals; a fact that extends long into history and still remains evident today ^[57].

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⁵⁷ <https://imnotwhoyouthinkiamstereotypes.weebly.com/common-stereotypes.html> visited on 31st October 2017

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