

**‘We have tomorrow bright before us like a flame’: Pronouns,  
enactors, and cross-writing in *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems***

**Marcello Giovanelli**

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**1. Introduction**

Langston Hughes (1902-67) was a renowned and celebrated twentieth-century African-American poet who contributed significant literary outputs in the cultural movement known as the Harlem Renaissance. He also published poetry for children including *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* (Hughes 1932, 1994). Literary scholars regard this collection as an early example of cross-writing, a genre that communicates to both adult and child readerships. Critical commentary on the collection frequently concentrates both on its representation of children and its quality of dual-voice. This chapter draws on these literary-critical concerns to explore Hughes’ use of first-person pronouns in order to demonstrate how ambiguous, dual referents are an important stylistic feature of Hughes’ status as an early cross-writer. In this chapter, I refer to work within cognitive linguistics to frame my discussion of pronouns and pronoun use. More specifically, I use Text World Theory (Werth 1999; Gavins 2007) and its notion of the text-world enactor to provide cognitive poetic analyses of two of Hughes’ poems from *The Dream Keeper*: ‘I, Too’; and ‘Youth’.

This chapter begins with a brief overview both of Hughes as a poet and of the Harlem Renaissance, placing *The Dream Keeper* within the context of what was an important historical, cultural and literary movement. I then sketch out a working definition of cross-writing, a term that has received a great deal of recent critical

attention in the field of children's literary studies. In the remainder of the chapter, I undertake a Text World Theory analysis of my chosen poems to show how drawing on the notion of the enactor can offer a rigorous and principled way of exploring pronoun patterning in the poems.

## **2. The Harlem Renaissance, Hughes and *The Dream Keeper***

The Harlem Renaissance had its origins as a cultural movement in the northern migration of African-Americans from southern states between 1920-1930. Although migration took people to various cities on the north-eastern coast, a large African-American community was established in the Harlem area of New York City. The movement has been largely characterised as reinventing black cultural identity through artistic and intellectual engagement with historical narratives, and with the establishing of an African-American literary tradition that drew on and celebrated folk culture, political debate and the vernacular as legitimate forms of expression (Chaney 2007; Hutchison 2007). Langston Hughes is generally viewed as an integral part of the Harlem Renaissance both as a thinker and a poet, and his writing shows a deep interest in some of its central concerns: aesthetics, politics, the vernacular tradition and the socially-oriented focus of literature, and in particular poetry. According to Sanders (2007: 107), Hughes was the “veritable icon of the Harlem Renaissance”, a binding force whose own unswerving commitment towards equality and the promotion of a shared collective identity meant that he was keen to break down perceived barriers amongst communities and to draw readers from different backgrounds and generations towards the shared pleasures of literature.

The *Dream-Keeper* was not a new collection of Hughes' verse. Following a request from a children's librarian for a selection of poetry that would appeal to young readers, Hughes selected fifty-nine poems from both from his first poetry collection, *The Weary Blues* (1926), and from material that had previously been published in journals and magazines. *The Dream Keeper* was originally published by Alfred Knopf in 1932 and then later re-issued by the same publisher in 1994 with revised accompanying illustrations and some additional poems (see Ostrom 2002: 105-6 for full details). Literary critics have discussed Hughes' wide ranging portrayal of the human spirit (Johnson 2003), his belief in the child as the centre of cultural re-invention in the Harlem Renaissance and as visionary and agent of social change (Capshaw Smith 2011). The collection is viewed as promoting both a strong cultural identity (Hogan 2004) and cross-generational dialogue (Tracy 2002; Anatol 2007).

### **3. Cross-writing**

Cross-over fiction is generally defined as either fiction primarily written for adults that is read by children, or fiction that is primarily written for children that is read by adults (Beckett 2009). Whereas cross-reading is the act of what Falconer (2009: 368) calls "crossing a boundary", a reader's deliberate repositioning of the self to engage with literature that was meant for a different age group, cross-writing is a consciously crafted attempt by a writer to address both children and adults in the same text. For some critics, the concept of cross-writing involves explicit attention in varying degrees to this double audience. For example Shavit (2009) argues that in cross-writing, the child is simply a "pseudo-addressee" (p.71) while the real implied reader is an adult one. Similarly, Wall (1991: 35) suggests that cross-writing may involve

either “double address”, speaking to a child and adult readership at different points, or “dual address” (rare in her opinion) whereby children and adults are simultaneous narratees. However, the adult-child distinction is questionable (see for example Rudd 2010 on why a static notion of a ‘child reader’ is problematic) and might be better replaced by Gubar’s (2013) notion of kinship that emphasises continuities between adult and child readers and takes a more fluid stance to readerly identity; we can after all read as an adult and as a child. In this chapter, I acknowledge this problematic notion of identity and readership by instead framing my analysis within the definition proposed by Knoepflmacher and Myers (1997). Treating cross-writing as a genre that explicitly sets up its parameters to force a kind of interplay between readerly identities, Knoepflmacher and Myers argue that cross-writing is always “a dialogic mix of older and younger voices” that invites readers to engage in a “colloquy between past and present selves” (1997: vii).

#### **4. Text World Theory and pronouns**

Text World Theory is a cognitive discourse grammar that offers a coherent apparatus for analysing both context and text. Text World Theory scholars work within a framework of three conceptual levels. First, discourse participants communicate within the parameters of the discourse-world, “the immediate situation which surrounds human beings as they communicate with one another” (Gavins 2007: 9). Participants may share the same discourse-world (as in face-to-face communication) or, as in the case of the majority of written discourse, the discourse-world may be split between participants who are separated in time and/or space. Through their interaction, participants create text-worlds, rich mental representations of the

discourse itself. Text-worlds are set up deictically through world-building elements (aspects of time, place and characters) and developed through function-advancing propositions (actions and events that drive the narrative and modify the contents of the initial world). All text-worlds are fleshed out through inferencing and have varying degrees of richness as a result of a reader's background knowledge, experience and emotional state at the time of reading.

Text World Theory deals with the vast mass of knowledge a reader might have by proposing a principle of text-drivenness (Werth 1999: 103), which accounts for the fact that only knowledge specifically activated by word choices in the text becomes salient in the discourse-world and may be used to develop a text-world. The final level in the model involves any subsequent number of world-switches (Gavins 2007: 48) where a shift in time or place, the introduction of a different narrative point of view, or any instances of metaphor, negation, or hypotheticals re-configure attention away from the initial text-world.

Within the parameters of Text World Theory, pronouns are integral aspects of text-world creation and maintenance in so far as they are used to signal important entities in the text-world, and are likely to refer back to previously introduced noun phrases in a process known as "reference-chaining" (Werth 1999: 158). Personal pronouns are an important part of the model since they are used almost exclusively to refer to characters in the text-world or in any subsequent world-switches (an exception, for example, would be in instances of personification). Updating Werth's work, Gavins (2007) adopts Emmott's notion of the enactor (Emmott 1997: 188), to replace Werth's term character (and associated phrases), as a more explicit way of understanding entities as present, past, and future conceptual realisations of a given referent. In this way, Text World Theory is well-placed to explore how

characterisation develops as a result of the various kinds of world-building and instances of world-switches that take place. As Stockwell (2009: 147-152) notes, part of the experience of tracing the development of a character across a literary text involves keeping track of how a composite version is built up through the various enactors that appear across different text-worlds. The enactors that are created through world-switches are therefore a fundamental way in which we track characters across discourse.

## **5. Analysis**

In the following section I use the Text World Theory model, outlined in Section 4, to analyse the use of pronouns in two of Hughes' poems.

### **5.1 I-enactors in 'I, Too'**

'I, Too' was first appeared in *Survey Graphic* in 1925. Its echoes of Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself* have been noted (Ostrom 2002). The poem consists of eighteen lines and is reprinted below in full (lines numbers have been added).

#### **I, Too**

I, too, sing America. [1]

I am the darker brother.

They send me to eat in the kitchen

When company comes,  
But I laugh, [5]  
And eat well,  
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,  
I'll be at the table  
When company comes. [10]  
Nobody'll dare  
Say to me,  
"Eat in the kitchen,"  
Then.

Besides, [15]  
They'll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

Gavins (2007: 64) argues that discourse-world participants will inevitably identify with text-world enactors to some degree. This may do this by allocating a particular role to an enactor, or by aligning the enactor to a particular discourse-world entity. In 'I, Too', the use of the first-person pronoun "I" might suggest to some readers that the discourse-world participant Langston Hughes and the speaking voice of the text-world are closely related. In this way, the poem has the potential to be read as

autobiographical and a reader might make close connections between the contents and sentiments expressed in the poem and Hughes' own stance as a writer and historical figure in the Harlem Renaissance. As Semino (1995: 147) notes, where there is considerable extra-textual detail to support equating the speaker with the poet, readers often assume an autobiographical element to first-person verse.

Alternatively, it is possible for a reader to view the poem's voice as a more general persona created by Hughes and speaking on behalf of an individual or a group, or, by projecting oneself into the poem's text-worlds, imagine "I" as a version of oneself. Interestingly, these are common stances adopted by readers discussing the poem on online reading fora, personal websites and blogs. For example, here are three responses.

1.

The poem describes [...] how each person has their own right and shouldn't be discriminated.

(‘Terence’ 2014)

2.

I chose it because of the clear, uplifting feelings of hope and inner strength from the narrator, despite the poem being set in times of racial segregation in America. I have such admiration for the narrator and his self-assurance, and think we can all look up to characters like him when we are in need of a confidence boost and optimism in our daily lives.

(‘Lisa’ 2014)

3.

I am America because I give it flavor. I am America because my ancestors labored in building the country into what it is today.



(Ward 2014)

The readers provide alternative interpretations of “I”. Reader 1 reads the speaking voice as a general commentator on moral and ethical issues. Reader 2 emphasises the *I*-enactor’s words as an influence on her own life, suggesting a universal attraction and status as a motivational figure. She uses the first-person plural pronoun “we” to stress what she perceives as the inspirational effect the speaker’s words may have on many people. Reader 3, however, aligns herself with the *I*-enactor on a more personal level, drawing on her own sense of self-identity, and projecting herself into the poem as an articulator of “I am America”. Overall then, these responses demonstrate that the pronoun “I” is what Fludernik (1995: 100) terms a “radically ambiguous” discourse strategy in that it offers the strong potential to be interpreted in different ways.

Cognitive linguistics more generally draws attention to how, in the absence of an establishing noun phrase, the use of a pronoun implies a greater conceptual closeness between the speaker and the entity to which it refers. van Hoek (2003) uses Langacker’s stage model (Langacker 1985) to demonstrate how the pronoun *I* marks the speaker both as the subjective viewer of discourse (the off-stage region) and as an object of attention (the on-stage region). *I* thus “signals that the person on whom the speaker and addressee are now focusing their attention is the same as the speaker” (van Hoek 2003: 174). In text-world terms, this can account for a closely felt connection between discourse-world and text-world entities. Second- and third-person personal pronouns can be conceived similarly. *You* operates in the same way as ‘I’ but refers to the addressee rather than the speaker. The use of *He* places a concept of a person as the object of attention but assumes that the person is also a salient part of the mental context that forms the off-stage region in which the discourse takes place.

Pronouns are therefore a sign of greater accessibility (Ariel 1990) and can imply a strong sense of conceptual proximity (see Giovanelli 2014 for discussion in relation to poetic effects).

‘I, Too’ has a single first-person reflector, which is maintained across its eighteen lines. The opening of the poem is filtered through a subjective conceptualisation of events; in Text World Theory terms, the opening text-world is therefore strictly an epistemic-modal world (Gavins 2007: 132), containing an enactor of the speaking voice. In the first line there is, however, no further world-building information (location and time are not specified), and there is initially only a single function-advancing proposition, the remainder of the clause, ‘sing America’. Although one of the prominent features of the poem is its repetition of the pronoun *I*, which is part of its overall cohesion, a Text World Theory analysis of the poem reveals a complexity in the distribution of different enactors that are realised through subsequent world-switches. In this way, I would argue that the reader is led through a series of different versions of *I*, all of which help to contribute to the reader’s sense of a composite character at the end of the poem. These different conceptualisations of enactors across world-switches can support a reading of cross-writing as a type of colloquy. The remainder of my analysis will therefore concentrate on how these different enactors are established and tracked in the poem.

I start by labelling the enactor in the initial text-world E1. This initial text-world is developed through a further clause, “I am the darker brother”, which adds some minimal further information to our knowledge of the enactor. In line 3, a further function-advancing proposition, “They send me to eat”, introduces further text-world enactors, referred to through the use of a third-person plural pronoun. The prepositional phrase “in the kitchen” also alters the deictic parameters of the poem by

spatially relocating the reader's attention. This initiates a world-switch, where a new world develops and is foregrounded for as long as it is textually maintained. The syntactic patterning of the main clause "They send me", subordinate complement clause "to eat in the kitchen" and subordinate clause "When company comes" foregrounds the agency of "They" and emphasises the relative passiveness of the poem's speaker. This lack of agency contrasts with the pattern established in the first two lines of the poem where the *I*-enactor is the subject at the head of the clause and the first word in the verse line. The world-switch also builds a distinct distance between "I" and "They". This new text-world has the world-building elements of location (the kitchen) and an *I*-enactor and the reader has to reconceptualise "I" as a different enactor (E2), temporally remote from the initial text-world.

This text-world continues to be developed through further function-advancing propositions. In contrast to the foregrounded lack of agency exhibited by E1 in line 3, E2 is now the subject and agent at the head of three clauses that complete the second verse paragraph. Furthermore, the verbs "laugh", "eat", and "grow", are positively oriented. The final two explicitly refer to growth and the development of the self, both central thematic concerns in children's literature (Lukens 1982; Stephens 1992). From a cognitive linguistic perspective, the concept of physical growth is underpinned by the conceptual metaphor GOOD IS UP (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), which in turn affords another metaphor GROWING UP IS GOOD that is used to conceptualise mental and spiritual maturity in terms of upwards growth (see Trites 2014 for a detailed study of the concept of growth in children's and adolescent literature from a cognitive literary perspective).

Reading 'I, Too' as a cross-written poem therefore invites different interpretations of the growth metaphor. Reading E2 as the speaking voice of a child

means conceptualizing growth in largely physical as well as mental and emotional terms; the adult E2 may also be interpreted as such of course and the notion of growth is also relatable to the journey of a culture towards equality and acceptance. Indeed it seems to me that E2 offers the potential to be interpreted as adult or child speaker in an emerging interplay of voices of past and present selves: the adult understands the metaphorical growth of cultural identity; the child is represented as an enactor in a more literal sense and as a future agent of change in being an alternative version of the “darker brother”, E1. Of course, as a reader, I am drawing on my own discourse-world knowledge of Hughes and the Harlem Renaissance to account my reading of this section of the poem but the point remains that the growth metaphor centred around E2 functions as a contrast between past and future text-world ‘I’ enactors in the poem.

More complex world-building occurs in the third verse paragraph where a further world-switch is initiated by the single line “Tomorrow”. Here, the world-building elements are another *I*-enactor (E3), “the table” and an immediately conceived temporal frame triggered by the adverb “Tomorrow”. The use of the definite article “the” in “the table” suggests that this may well be the same physical location as in the previous verse paragraph, since generally the use of a definite article introduces an entity that is already in our awareness. A similar patterning of clauses occurs: the main clause “I’ll sit at the table” precedes a subordinate clause “When company comes”. In this instance, however, the *I*-enactor is given clausal prominence and grammatical agency. In this switched-world, an instance of negation, “Nobody’ll dare” creates further world complexity.

Text-world theorists have taken a particular interest in negation, viewing it as a prototypical kind of textual attractor (see for example Gavins 2013; Giovanelli

2013; Hidalgo Downing 2000; Nahajec 2009). In broad terms, negation is a type of comparison between a real situation that lacks some element and an imaginary situation that contains it (Lawler 2010). Text-world theorists draw on this notion by viewing negation as the process by which some text-world aspect is conceptualised as present but then is pushed into the background in favour of its negative counterpart, which maintains conceptual prominence through being grammatically or lexically marked for negation (see Givón 1993). In this instance, the use of the negative indefinite pronoun “Nobody” means that somebody daring (i.e. the positive counterpart) must first be conceptualised before it is backgrounded in favour of the negative counterpart. Here the complexity of the world-switch is magnified by the fact that “Eat in the kitchen” is presented with a reporting clause as direct speech and so, according to the principles of Text World Theory, involves another world-switch since the deictic parameters of the text-world are now reconfigured from the point of view of the unnamed enactor uttering those words. Arguably, the instance of direct speech is itself embedded in a modal world if we view “dare” as a modal verb (e.g. in Palmer 2001). The negated switch therefore means that the reader navigates movement across three world boundaries with the unnamed entity speaking to another *I*-enactor (E4) of the speaker before all of this is backgrounded as part of the overarching negation.

There are some very clear conceptual effects generated by the combined use of negation and pronouns in this part of the poem. First, the effects of moving fairly rapidly across world edges is likely to be keenly felt by the reader. This edgework (Giovanelli 2013: 95-7; Stockwell 2009: 123-7) is foregrounded through the very clear conceptual leaps the reader makes in tracking the two enactors across the several world-switches that exist between them; E4 in the modal-world consequently appears

to be conceptually very distant to E1/E2. Second, the use of negation both draws attention to the backgrounded status of the positive counterpart and also highlights the fact that discourse-world expectations have been defeated. As Werth (1999: 251) argues:

You cannot [...] negate something unless there is good reason to expect the opposite to be the case. The explanation for this is perfectly common-sensical: to deny the existence or presence of an entity, you have to mention it. The very act of denying brings it into focus.

In this instance, the expectation is that the *I*-enactor in this text-world will be similarly displaced. Yet here, the negation works to suggest a brighter future, also evident in the world-builder “tomorrow”, which conceptually suggests both a soon-to-be time that is not quite the present. Thus the negation explicitly reminds us of the current status of affairs, which serves to imply that although societal change is close, it is not yet possible for progress to be made. Interestingly, the distal “Then” used along with “Tomorrow” to frame the entire verse paragraph supports a reading of this section of the poem as looking to the future but acknowledging the reality of the present.

The final part of the poem maintains the opposition between *I*- and *they*-enactors. The text-world introduced by “Tomorrow” is retained since the spatial and temporal parameters remain the same, and the reference-chain extends back to the “They” of the previous verse paragraph who are now ashamed by the attributes shown by the *I*-enactor. Read in this way, the *I*-enactor exists as a further updating of E3. We can also equate the verb “see” as synonymous with ‘understand’, drawing on the fact that we often conceptualise our understanding of knowledge through metaphors of

perception such as ‘see’ and ‘feel’ so as to give an abstract entity or some kind of knowledge a more concrete and experiential quality (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; and see Gavins 2007: 82).

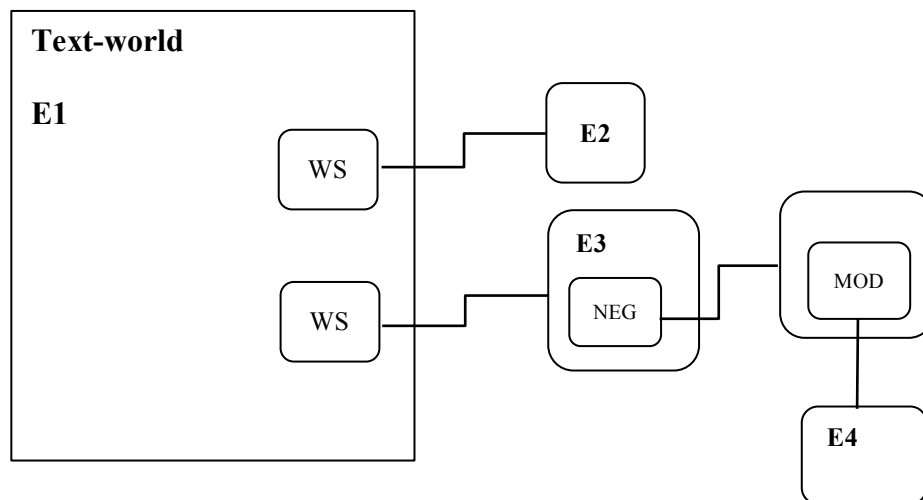
The final line of the poem is more ambiguous. On the one hand, the *I*-enactor of the final line can be read as an updated version of E3. The fact that there is a near echo in the lines “I am”/“I, too, am...” supports such a reading, and would provide continuity from the temporal change in line 8. Yet in this reading, readers never return to the initial text-world of the poem and the *I*-enactor remains in the second of the two main switched worlds. Alternatively, the deliberate construction of the poem into single lines of verse at the beginning and end could be read as signalling a shift back to a previous *I*-enactor and a return to the initial text-world of E1. Indeed there are syntactic echoes in the first and last lines of the poem and the shift back to the present tense in the final line that make this a plausible reading. In fact in my own initial reading, I did instinctively re-align the *I*-enactor with E1 in order to give a sense of completion to the poem. In doing so, I re-read both the opening and closing lines of verse as a framing device, marked by the shift from a verb of action, “sing”, to a more confident state of being, “am”, and consequently revised my numbering of the enactors as follows:

E1 “**I**, too, sing America”/“**I** am the darker brother”/“**I**, too, am America’

E2 “They send **me** to eat in the kitchen”

E3 “**I**’ll sit at the table”/“They’ll see how beautiful **I** am”

E4 “Nobody’ll dare say to **me**”.



**Figure 1** Broad text-world diagram for ‘I, Too’

Overall then, a broad world diagram of ‘I, Too’, based on this second reading, is shown in Figure 1. This reading of the poem updates the *I*-enactor to determine an enactor that is foregrounded in the final verse line as an agent of social change. This composite enactor is defined through its relationship to other *I*-enactors that are presented in the multiple text-worlds, and which “enrich” (Stockwell 2009: 149) our mental representation of the poem’s enactor at the very end. Indeed, read in this way, the poem not only projects a narrative of individual and cultural growth, but also activates its central message to its readership through the various world-switches and enactors of the speaking voice. The fact that these voices can both be read either as adult and child speakers draws attention to the importance of cross-generational dialogue, and mark the poem as one that gives emphasis to different participant roles: adults as inspiration for children; and children themselves as torchbearers for change in the not-too-distant future. The voices are therefore an explicit enactment of what Knoepfmacher, and Myers (1997: viii), in their discussion of cross-writing, refer to as “traffic between phases of life”.



## 5.2 *We*-enactors in ‘Youth’

The second poem that I analyse in this chapter was originally published by Hughes in *Crisis* in 1924 under its original title ‘Poem’ (again line numbers have been added).

### **Youth**

We have tomorrow [1]

Bright before us

Like a flame.

Yesterday

A night-gone thing, [5]

A sun-down name.

And dawn-today

Broad arch above the road we came.

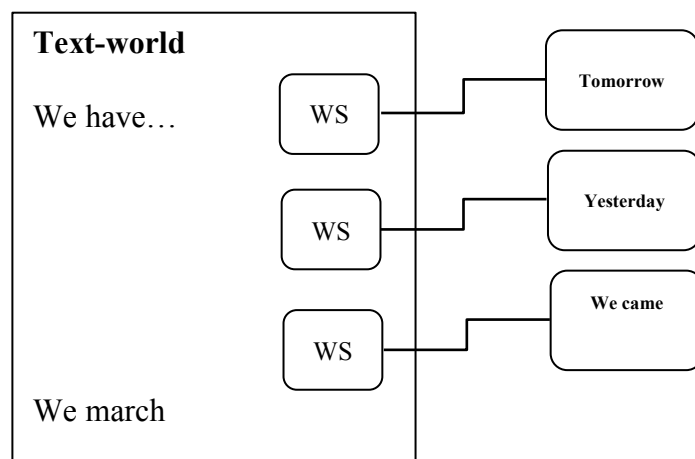
We march!

Like ‘I, Too’, the poem has a constant first-person reflector but in this poem Hughes uses the plural subject pronoun “we”. The poem therefore opens with an epistemic modal-world with a *We*-enactor (again I will call this E1). The text-worlds of ‘Youth’ are largely undeveloped and fleeting in contrast to the more richly defined worlds of ‘I, Too’.

In the first verse paragraph, the text-world begins in the present but shifts to the future through the use of the noun phrase, “tomorrow”. Although “tomorrow” is positioned as the object of the clause, conceptualised as a possession of the *We*-enactor and therefore part of a function-advancing proposition, it initiates a world-switch since in Text World Theory, noun phrases relating to time have world-building potential (see Lahey 2006). The world-switch, however, is a fleeting one since the text-world of “tomorrow” is never fully realized. Instead, “Bright before us” operates to emphasise the quality of having, and the simile “like a flame” creates a further fleeting world-switch to a world where a flame is burning. This world is subsequently offered as analogous to the opportunity that the *We*-enactor identifies (my own reading draws on the common symbolic use of a flame as hope). Equally, there is no explicit *We*-enactor textually realised in the fleeting world-switch.

A pattern of minimal world-building continues in the second verse paragraph. “Yesterday” also cues a fleeting world-switch, and is followed by two further noun phrases in apposition. As before, the modifiers “night-gone” and “sun-down” offer world-building potential in so far as they relate to time, but rely on a great deal of inferencing on the part of the reader to flesh out the text-world. The head nouns “name” and “thing” are both general and indefinite; their presentation here, I would argue, is to downplay the importance of the past in contrast to the future and present. Equally, there is no additional *We*-enactor. The penultimate verse paragraph is situated in the same initial text-world as the beginning of the poem and adds more world-building elements, “broad arch” and “the road”. However, the use of the past tense in “we came” cues a further fleeting temporal world-switch, which does include an additional, but undeveloped, *We*-enactor, E2. The shift in tense sets a contrast between text-worlds and between the enactors in those worlds. The fleeting world-

switch ensures that the past is backgrounded and the emphasis remains on the initial text-world of the present, evident in the present tense of the final line of the poem “We march”, which projects the we-enactor on a forwards trajectory. A broad world diagram of the poem is shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2** Broad text-world diagram for ‘Youth’

My discussion reveals that there are some important similarities between ‘Youth’ and ‘I, Too’ as well as some key differences that can be highlighted through an analysis of text-worlds and enactors. The focus on time in both poems is evident in the way in which movement across temporal world-switches, even in the fleeting worlds of ‘Youth’, are foregrounded as important. Equally, both poems are clearly concerned with growth, and draw on orientational and growth metaphors. Both poems also appear to draw on the metaphor PROGRESS IS MOVEMENT TO A DESTINATION (Kövecses 2003) in their representations of physical and spiritual movement. However, there are fewer enactors in ‘Youth’ and there is less edgework for the reader to do in navigating the worlds of the poem; the fleeting world-switches mean that the poem appears to be less concerned than ‘I, Too’ with providing a narrative of enactors, and more focused on emphasising the present and the future. Indeed, in

1958, Hughes added an additional two lines to the poem that draw attention to his forward-looking message of solidarity. In his essay *Children's Poetry*, he explains his decision (Hughes 1958: 147-8).

To help us all remember what America is, and how its future belongs to us all,  
recently I added two new lines to an old poem of mine – the last two lines help  
us to remember to walk together

We march!

Americans together,

We march!

'I, Too' and 'Youth' differ in their representation of enactors. I have discussed some of the conceptual effects of an 'I' enactor in my analysis of 'I, Too' and end this section with some consideration of Hughes' decision to use the first-person plural pronoun in 'Youth', particularly given the affordances of the third-person in terms of the degrees of identification that are possible. As Richardson (2006: 14) notes, the first-person plural pronoun "can grow or shrink to accommodate very different sized groups". This coheres with Langacker's explanation of the difference between *I* and *we* in terms of delimitation, the degree or scope of projection that a linguistic expression holds (Langacker 2007). Langacker argues that, in contrast to *I*, which designates an individual person, *we* typically designates a group of two or more people. The meaning of *we* in any given context may be delimited to designate the size of the group. For example, depending on the context, the utterance "we should talk" could designate two friends (high delimitation), a larger group (mid

delimitation), or, if making a general comment, the whole of humankind (low delimitation). The latter example tends to be used in a more impersonal way since it does not select a specific individual or group of individuals for attention (Langacker 2007: 178-180).

The referent of the *We*-enactor in ‘Youth’ is ambiguous precisely because it is difficult to ascertain the degree to which (if at all) the pronoun is delimited. Arguably, reading “we” with a low degree of delimitation might project a more generic (adult) *we* that offers a more panoramic vision of cultural growth and progress in relation to the subject matter of the poem. On the other hand, reading “we” with a greater degree of delimitation to refer to a child *we* consequently makes the reader’s role in the text-world more explicit; the effect is to encourage the child reader to identify more with the text-world enactor. Interestingly, the fact that Hughes later revised the poem and changed its title to explicitly draw attention to its focus on the young is also revealing. Indeed, the different effects of engaging with the title itself are also worthy of consideration. To read the title ‘Youth’ at the level of the discourse-world would mean that the term is most likely understood as a salient contextual entity, informing the reader about the poem but playing no explicit part in world-building. To read the title at the level of the text-world, however, means treating ‘Youth’ as a world-builder in its own right, deliberately incorporating the enactor of a young person into the initial text-world, and reducing ambiguity of reference. This latter reading clearly offers greater potential for delimiting the scope of “we”, and for associating the *We*-enactor with a younger implied discourse-world participant.

## **6. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that using the Text World Theory notion of the enactor can support an analysis of how mental representations are formed across discourse, and specifically how pronoun patterns operate in the two poems I have analysed from *The Dream Keeper*. Drawing on insights from cognitive linguistics, I have demonstrated how an analysis of the poems using Text World Theory accounts for some of the ambiguities in the verse in respect of the claims by literary scholars that Hughes' work is an early example of cross-writing. Specifically, Text World Theory offers a rigorous, principled way of understanding enactors, conceptual proximity, and the ways in which characters are tracked and updated across a text. I have shown how each poem relies on either a complex process of tracking and updating ('I, Too') or a focus on limited world-switches that maintain the initial text-world as the primary focus of attention ('Youth') for its conceptual effects.

In examining Hughes as a cross-writer, this chapter has also highlighted some issues relating to the problematic notion of adult and child readers, which I have suggested might be more helpfully understood as the interplay of ambiguously presented and largely connected voices split across generational time and space. Of course, my own readings of the poems are also influenced by my own discourse-world knowledge about Langston Hughes and the Harlem Renaissance, and by my own willingness to examine the notion of cross-writing through positioning myself in relation to the poems. As Falconer (2009: 370) argues in her discussion of cross-writing:

Not only are the texts themselves often generically hybrid, but readers are hybridising different readerly identities when they 'cross over' to reading a book that was intended, at least ostensibly, for some other and elsewhere.

Finally, and in the spirit of *The Dream Keeper*, I have demonstrated the importance of the first-person pronoun in conveying what academic and non-academic readers have argued is the essence of Hughes' concerns in the collection. In his writing, Hughes presents and projects voices that are engaged in dialogue with their readers, and with enactors of themselves and their culture across various text-world representations. These voices are central to the Harlem Renaissance, offering a vision of progress and a distinctive call for social change.

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