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NATIONAL IDENTITY AND SOCIAL ISOLATION: THE VOICE OF THE POET ON THE MARGINS OF SOCIETY IN THE WORKS OF CHULPON AND LANGSTON HUGHES

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Abstract

This article offers a comparative analysis of the poetry of Chulpon and Langston Hughes, both of whom wrote from marginal social positions yet gave voice to their peoples through imagery, language, and rhythm—a strategy here defined as silent resistance. Chulpon articulated anti-colonial national awakening in Turkestan, while Hughes expressed the voices of African Americans enduring racial oppression. The study highlights themes of cultural identity, social justice, and poetic agency across the two traditions.

Keywords: *marginal voice; national identity; silent resistance*

INTRODUCTION

Literature has long served as one of the most vital forms for expressing humanity's historical, cultural, and social conditions. The works of poets writing from the margins—those socially, politically, or culturally displaced—often reveal the painful realities, contradictions, and unspoken truths of their age [8]. Such poets, excluded for political, cultural, or racial reasons, advance perspectives often absent from dominant cultural discourses. Through their art, they challenge the "center"—the prevailing ideology—with alternative worldviews [10].

This article examines the comparative poetics of the Uzbek poet Chulpon and the African-American poet Langston Hughes. Despite vastly different geopolitical contexts, both early-twentieth-century poets took it upon themselves to serve as the voices of their people. Chulpon addressed the colonial condition of Turkestan under the Russian Empire and Soviet rule, while Hughes transformed African Americans' struggle against racial inequality in the United States into poetry [10; 6].

Both poets foregrounded themes of social justice, national identity, and human dignity. Chulpon's poems such as Awaken, Last Year, and Feeling capture the Uzbek people's hopes for liberation from colonial oppression [9]. Similarly, Hughes's I, Too and The Negro Speaks of Rivers affirm the role, historical depth, and spiritual endurance of African Americans [11; 4].

As Edward Said observed, poetry in such contexts becomes "the rewriting of historical reality through a struggle within language" [8]. Hughes emphasized the awakening of "Negro consciousness," while Chulpon championed the emergence of the Uzbek word as a marker of national self-realization [6].

Accordingly, this study analyzes the poetic strategies of Chulpon and Hughes, their ideological and spiritual engagement with their communities, and their pursuit of equality and freedom through poetic expression. Though emerging in different contexts, both poets share the courage to embody the spirit, pain, and aspirations of their societies.

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Chulpon: National Identity and Colonial Displacement

Chulpon (Abdulhamid Sulaymon o'g'li Yunusov, 1897–1938) was a leading figure of modernism, cultural awakening, and the poetics of resistance in Uzbek literature. His poetry reflects not only literary creativity but also the socio political and spiritual condition of early twentieth century Turkestan. It records the painful process of losing and reclaiming national identity, offering a poetic testimony on behalf of the people [6].

One of Chulpon's most celebrated works, Last Year (Bultur), serves as a cry to awaken a nation described as having slept through the previous year:

"Last year, my people lay asleep, now they have awakened."

Here, "sleep" signifies forced silence and paralysis under colonial domination [9]. A similar motif appears in Awaken, where the poet exhorts:

"Awaken, Turkestan! Not slowly, but all at once!"

Rather than turning his verse into political propaganda, Chulpon initiated a spiritual awakening through imagery, underscoring the primacy of transformation through words [12]. His conception of national identity was rooted in language, historical memory, and cultural heritage. He regarded "Turkestani-ness" as a social identity eroded by colonial rule, striving to restore it through literature. The recurrent use of terms such as *my people*, *Turkestan*, *I saw your tears*, and *with my awakened heart* underscores the voice of a collective *we*, rather than an individual *I* [6].

Viewed through a postcolonial lens, Chulpon's oeuvre exemplifies a "poetics of resistance," giving artistic form to the spiritual anguish of a colonized society [1]. Scholars often describe his position as one of mediation: he did not simply articulate personal pain but became the conduit for his people's suffering [7]. This is especially clear in poems such as *Feeling* and *My Heart*, where personal emotions blend with collective grief.

Language reform was central to Chulpon's vision. Rejecting archaic, heavily Persian-Arabic-influenced styles, he pioneered a modern poetic idiom close to the spoken Uzbek vernacular. This linguistic choice functioned as cultural resistance, defying the marginalization of Uzbek under colonialism [12].

Thus, Chulpon's work emerges as an effort to heal historical wounds through poetic word, to reclaim identity, and to move toward spiritual liberation.

Langston Hughes: Racial Equality and Poetic Resistance

Langston Hughes (1902–1967) stands as one of the foremost voices of African-American literature, whose poetry made Black experience central to American letters. A pivotal figure in the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, Hughes sought not validation within the Western canon but the assertion of African Americans' humanity, history, and dreams through independent cultural expression [4].

Speaking from within rather than above the African-American community, Hughes drew on poetry, music, folklore, and jazz. His accessible style earned him wide readership, even as it attracted criticism from conservative literary circles [11].

His poem *I, Too* (1926) has been hailed as a poetic manifesto against racial inequality. Beginning with the powerful line *"I, too, sing America,"* it affirms the rightful place of Black people within the national narrative. Here, the image of eating dinner in the kitchen becomes a metaphor for racial exclusion, transformed into an act of *silent resistance*—quiet defiance rooted in faith in future equality [5].

Another iconic poem, *Let America Be America Again* (1935), exposes the hollowness of the American Dream as a universal promise:

> "Let it be the dream it used to be / Let it be the pioneer on the plain…"

While sharply critical of American history, the poem retains hope, speaking for all marginalized groups—African Americans, the poor, immigrants, and Indigenous peoples alike [3].

Hughes's poetics fused aesthetic dissent with political stance. He helped shape a literary tradition sometimes described as "poetry written with Black tears," combining suffering with resilience, cultural pride, and hope [4]. Notably, Hughes pioneered the integration of jazz rhythms into poetry, giving rise to the genre of "jazz poetry" [10].

From a postcolonial perspective, Hughes's work exemplifies an appeal to the "center" from the standpoint of "the other," while maintaining cultural identity [2]. In doing so, he affirmed African-American culture as inseparable from Western civilization, yet demanded this recognition on critical, not submissive, terms.

Through such strategies, Hughes transformed silence into speech, oppression into artistic testimony, and despair into resilient hope.

Comparative Analysis: Poets on the Margins

Though separated by geography and culture, Chulpon and Hughes share striking parallels. Both wrote from marginal positions—Chulpon within a colonized Turkestan, Hughes within a racially divided America. Yet each challenged dominant discourses, using poetry as a tool of resistance [2].

Central to both was the strategy of *silent resistance*. They refrained from overtly political slogans, instead embedding protest in imagery, metaphor, rhythm, and vernacular speech [1].

In *Awaken*, Chulpon's cry for national revival is not a direct political call but a poetic summons to spiritual and cultural awareness [6]. Similarly, in *I, Too*, Hughes conveys racial

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inequality through metaphorical imagery, expressing not passivity but resilient defiance [5].

Both poets transformed language into a battlefield of cultural resistance: Chulpon by adopting the living Uzbek vernacular, Hughes by incorporating African-American folklore, blues, and jazz [10; 12].

Moreover, both lived precarious personal lives on society's margins. Chulpon fell victim to Soviet repression, while Hughes endured accusations of communist sympathies during McCarthyism. For each, poetry became not only art but a form of endurance and defiance [7].

Their parallel trajectories demonstrate that, despite contextual differences, poets on the margins can assume a global role: defending truth, voicing the silent, and creating spiritual space for future generations.

Conclusion

This study has explored the poetic positions and strategies of Chulpon and Langston Hughes, focusing on their shared use of *silent resistance* to articulate cultural and social defiance. Both poets sought to speak for their people not through explicit political rhetoric but through imagery, rhythm, vernacular language, and symbolic form.

Chulpon's work embodied national awakening, historical memory, and the critique of identity under colonial rule. Hughes's poetry, by contrast, affirmed African Americans' humanity and resilience against racial oppression, blending rhythm, folklore, and hope.

Though marginalized in their respective societies, both poets used poetry to challenge dominant narratives, creating alternative discourses and amplifying silenced voices. Their legacies show how literature, rooted in specific cultural contexts, can move from marginal voices to global dialogue.

In sum, Chulpon and Hughes exemplify how poets on the margins transform cultural displacement into literary resistance, demonstrating the universal power of poetry to shape collective identity and historical memory.

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