

James Smethurst: On "Flight"

Gone is the calmly contemplative speaker [in Hughes? Dear Lovely Death] who talks authoritatively and welcomingly of death. Instead the poem's narration is breathless, filled with fear and dissonant voices. The primary speaker of the poem appears to be a partisan observer of lynch violence, urging the fleeing victim onward. However, the voice of the pursued man interrupts the speaker ("No, I didn't touch her / While flesh ain't for me."), as African-American vernacular speech appears directly in the collection for the first time. There is a blurring between the speaker and the subject of the poem, particularly in the last two lines of the poem where the primary speaker's voice changes into a somewhat more colloquial voice ("Hurry! Black Boy, hurry! / They'll swing you from a tree!"). This blurring differs from earlier claims of the commonality of all humanity in the face of death, asserting instead a common racial identity between the speaker and the southern African-American folk subject when pursued by a very specific form of death.

From *The New Red Negro: The Literary Left and African American Poetry, 1930-1946*.
Copyright © 1999 by Oxford University Press.

Publication Status:

[Excerpted Criticism](#) [1]

Publication:

- Private group -

Criticism Target:

[Langston Hughes](#) [2]

Author:

[James Smethurst](#) [3]

Poem:

[Flight](#) [4]

Source URL: <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/criticism/james-smethurst-flight>

Links

[1] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/publication-status/excerpted-criticism>

[2] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/poet/langston-hughes>

[3] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/creator/james-smethurst>

[4] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/poem/flight>