This thesis aims at studying the traumatic effects of the collective trauma of slavery and shame that face the Afro-American identity through the psychoanalytic analysis of the poetry of, Langston Hughes, the African American poet. The study is mainly based on relating the psychoanalytic theory of collective trauma to Hughes’ poetry as a representative example for the Afro-American identity problems. The end goal of the study is to prove that literature represented in the poetry of Langston Hughes is a true expression of both the individual and collective traumatic experiences. Also the study stresses the supplementary and strong relation between the field of psychoanalysis and literature.

The study is divided into an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion. The introduction handles the development of the psychoanalytic literary criticism, since Freud and after. Then it sheds light on the modern trauma theory and the complex and supplementary relation between the theory and literature. After that, the introduction shows the role of the theory in studying the problems of the Black American identity. At the end, it handles The Harlem Renaissance Movement as a true expression of these identity problems, introducing Langston Hughes as Harlem poet laureate and his poetry as a reflection to this traumatic identity formation.
Chapter one handles the effects of the memory of slavery on the formation of the Afro-American identity in the light of the theory of cultural trauma. Firstly, the chapter introduces a historical background of slavery and the suffering of the Blacks under its burden and after its abolition. Secondly, the chapter introduces the critical theory of cultural trauma shedding light on the collective memory and its role in forming the collective trauma in general. Then the chapter relates the theory of cultural trauma to the collective memory of slavery, and its effects on the formation of the Afro-American identity, taking the poetry of Langston Hughes as a representative example.

Chapter two explores the Black American shame experience and its effects on the formation of their identity through different generations. This chapter also shows the Afro-Americans’ treatment of shame during the Harlem Renaissance and how that sense of shame turned into a strong sense of pride through the poetry of Langston Hughes. The third chapter handles language as a vital source for the representation of trauma since Freud and after, shedding a light on its important role in discovering and treating trauma. The chapter shows the effects of the collective trauma of slavery and shame on the poetic language of Langston Hughes. Also the chapter explains how the problems of the black identity are represented in Hughes’ poetry, concentrating on the use of certain words, symbols, and imagery. This is done through the analysis of his significant poems, “The Negro Mother”. The conclusion stresses the result of the study and shows the important points that are discussed through the study.