

“LANGSTON HUGHES AND HIS POETRY”

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Abstract: This thesis delves into the profound impact of Langston Hughes and his poetry on American literature and culture. Hughes, an influential figure of the Harlem Renaissance, employed his poetic voice to passionately address the experiences and aspirations of African Americans during a time of social and political transformation. By examining the recurring themes and influences found within his body of work, this thesis aims to shed light on Hughes' role as a visionary poet who challenged racial inequality, celebrated African American identity, and advocated for social justice.

Keywords: poem, African-American, jazz, Hughes, poetry, play, Harlem Renaissance.

Introduction: Langston Hughes, born on February 1, 1902, in Joplin, Missouri, was a seminal figure in American literature and a prominent voice of the Harlem Renaissance—an intellectual and cultural movement that flourished in the 1920s and 1930s. The Harlem Renaissance was a period of extraordinary artistic and intellectual achievement among African Americans, particularly in Harlem, New York City. Hughes emerged as a leading poet, essayist, playwright, and novelist during this vibrant era.

The significance of studying Langston Hughes and his poetry lies in his ability to capture the essence and struggles of African American life during a time of immense social and political change. Hughes' poetic voice resonated with the African American community, providing a platform for their experiences, dreams, and aspirations. His work challenged conventional notions of race, identity, and equality, and his poetry continues to inspire and influence generations of writers and activists.

Research Objectives: The primary objective of this thesis is to explore the themes and influences in Langston Hughes' poetry, shedding light on his role as a visionary poet who championed African American culture and advocated for social justice. The specific research objectives include:

- Examining the recurring themes in Hughes' poetry, such as racial identity, social inequality, dreams, and love.
- Analyzing selected poems to understand the depth and significance of Hughes' poetic expression.

- Investigating the various influences—cultural, literary, and personal—that shaped Hughes' artistic vision.
- Assessing the impact of Hughes' work on African American literature, the Civil Rights Movement, and its contemporary relevance.

Methodology and approach: To achieve the research objectives, this study will employ a multidisciplinary approach that combines literary analysis, historical research, and biographical study. The primary sources for analysis will be Langston Hughes' poetry, including selected poems that exemplify the themes and influences under investigation. Secondary sources, such as critical essays, biographies, and historical accounts, will provide additional context and scholarly perspectives.

The methodology will involve close reading and textual analysis of Hughes' poems, identifying recurring motifs, symbols, and literary devices. Comparative analysis will be employed to explore the connections between Hughes' work and other literary, cultural, and social movements of the time. Additionally, biographical research will provide insights into Hughes' personal experiences and the socio-political climate that shaped his poetry.

The study will also draw upon historical and cultural frameworks to contextualize Hughes' work within the broader African American literary tradition and the social milieu of the Harlem Renaissance. By examining the impact and legacy of Hughes' poetry, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding and appreciation of his enduring literary contributions.

Results: "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" is one of Langston Hughes' most celebrated and widely studied poems. Published in 1921 when Hughes was just 19 years old, the poem explores the depth and richness of African American history and its connection to the ancient civilizations of the world. Through the metaphor of rivers, Hughes traces the collective memory and shared experiences of African Americans throughout time. The poem emphasizes the endurance, resilience, and cultural legacy of black people, asserting their rightful place in history.

"Harlem" (A Dream Deferred) is a powerful and thought-provoking poem that raises questions about the consequences of deferred dreams. Published in 1951, the poem reflects the frustrations and disillusionment experienced by African Americans whose dreams have been continually postponed or denied. Hughes presents a series of vivid and provocative images, asking whether a dream deferred "dries up like a raisin in the sun" or "explodes." The poem serves as a poignant critique of the oppressive conditions faced by African Americans and the potential consequences of unfulfilled aspirations.

"I, Too, Sing America" is a poem that asserts the dignity, resilience, and aspirations of African Americans in the face of racial discrimination. Published in 1926, the poem challenges the notion of an exclusively white American identity and

asserts the presence and importance of black voices in shaping the nation. Hughes declares that despite being marginalized and excluded, African Americans will not be silenced. The poem expresses a sense of hope and determination, envisioning a future where African Americans are recognized as equal participants in the American experience.

In "Mother to Son," Hughes uses the metaphor of a mother speaking to her son to convey the hardships and challenges faced by African Americans. The poem, published in 1922, presents a mother's empowering and resilient message to her child, urging him to persevere and overcome obstacles. Through vivid imagery and colloquial language, Hughes portrays the struggles of life as a difficult climb up a metaphorical staircase. The poem serves as a poignant reminder of the resilience and strength passed down through generations, emphasizing the importance of perseverance and determination in the face of adversity.

"Let America Be America Again" is a powerful and incisive poem that critiques the false promises and unfulfilled ideals of the American Dream. Published in 1936, the poem challenges the notion of America as a land of opportunity and freedom for all, highlighting the stark realities of inequality and injustice. Hughes presents a contrasting vision of America, one that includes the marginalized and oppressed, calling for a more inclusive and equitable society. The poem serves as a call to action, urging America to live up to its potential and embrace the ideals of liberty and justice for all.

Discussion: the discussion probes the interconnectedness and depth of these motifs, revealing how Hughes' poetic exploration extends beyond artistic expression to encompass social commentary and cultural reflection. By critically examining racial identity, social inequality, dreams, love, and the influences of folklore, music, and spirituality, we gain insight into the multifaceted layers of Hughes' work.

This section also highlights Hughes' enduring contributions to African American literature, emphasizing his role as a transformative figure during the Harlem Renaissance. By challenging prevailing stereotypes, employing innovative language techniques, and inspiring subsequent generations of African American writers, Hughes' poetry has left an indelible mark on literary traditions.

Furthermore, the discussion explores the activist undercurrents within Hughes' poetry. It uncovers how his words served as a vehicle for social and political change, advocating for racial equality, social justice, and empowerment within the African American community. Hughes' artistic activism resonated with the Civil Rights Movement and continues to inspire contemporary artists and activists to this day.

Contextualizing Hughes' poetry within the cultural and historical milieu of the Harlem Renaissance, the Great Depression, and the Civil Rights Movement, the discussion reveals the intersectionality between his work and broader socio-political

movements. By examining the influences of the era, including the blues, jazz, and African American spirituality, we gain a deeper understanding of the rich tapestry of Hughes' poetry.

Conclusion. Langston Hughes stands as a towering figure in American literary and cultural history, leaving an indelible mark on the Harlem Renaissance and beyond. His writings captured the essence of the African American experience with honesty, compassion, and authenticity, making him a voice of the marginalized and an advocate for social justice. Through his poetry, novels, and plays, Hughes challenged societal norms, shed light on racial disparities, and celebrated the resilience and beauty of African American culture.

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