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Langston Hughes- a strong idealist



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ABSTRACT

Langston Hughes spends a lifetime climbing the racial mountain for not only affirming of the African American self, but also of other oppressed people all over the world who are suffering from the pangs of splintered self. No doubt he wants to relocate his distorted self, but for that relocation he never adopts violence. In the beginning he tries at his best to get that position which he deserves by reminding the whites about the connectivity of blacks to that of the same land to which they belong. It was only in the mid of his poetic career he becomes a little bit violent but his violence does not harm anybody. But in the end because of his nature, he comes back to his generosity and inspires his people to keep dreaming and to hope for a better future through his various poems.

Keyword: racial mountain, oppressed people, splintered self, relocation, whites

Despite pledges and firm commitment in the Promised Land of America nothing concrete emerges which helps black people live a better and harmonious life. If the world is to be corrected and it has to be cured of its ailing aberrations, a strong idealist is required like the poet and that is precisely Hughes' strength. Hughes strongest attribute is the extreme dislike for the prevailing standards of racial discrimination and he employs the literary medium to express his emotions and feelings. As Jamie has observed that Langston Hughes is a poet of his age, up to date, viewing the same black life through the lenses of the particular day. Whatever the era, his lenses are usually well fitted and focused. He knows what he is looking for, and he captures it with astonishing clarity, in all its beauty, sordidness, or violence.¹

In the midst of Modernist revolution we know as the Harlem Renaissance or the New Negro Movement, Langston Hughes is the figure who sought to change the way we look not only at art and African Americans but also at the world. "His vision is modernistic: experimental, both spontaneous and improvisatory, rejecting artificial middle class values, promoting emotional and intellectual freedom and above all life and love affirming- self affirming."² Certainly Langston Hughes spends a lifetime climbing the racial mountain for not only affirming of the African American self, but also of other oppressed people all over the world who are suffering from the pangs of splintered self.

No doubt he wants to relocate his distorted self, but for that relocation he never adopts violence. Jamie has noted that Longstanding white prejudice against things black is, in Hughes' view no excuse for such

abandonment of self Prejudice has bred self hate-"this urge within the race towards whiteness," so common among the negro middle and upper classes. But the artist's mission is to counter self hate, not to pander to it:

To my mind, it is the duty of the younger Negro artist, if he accepts any duties at all from outsiders, to change through the force of his art that old whispering "I want to be white," hidden in the aspirations of his people, to "why should I want to be white? I am a negro- and beautiful!"³

In the beginning he tries at his best to get that position which he deserves by reminding the whites about the connectivity of blacks to that of the same land to which they belong, by depicting the miserable condition of his people, giving the message of brotherhood, universal peace to whites and by encouraging his own people to feel proud of their own heritage and culture through his poem like "The Negro Speaks of River", "Merry Go Round", "Aunt Sue Stories", "The White One", "Lament for the Dark People" and so on. His legacy is to inspire a parade of other Afro-American writers to pen their inner beauty with dignity as in a piece for *Nation* he writes:

One of the promising of the young negro poets said to me once, "I want to be a poet- not a negro poet," meaning, "I want to write like a white poet"; meaning subconsciously, "I would like to be a white poet"; meaning behind that "I would like to be white." And I was sorry the young man said that, for no great poet has ever been afraid of being himself....⁴

Hughes expresses his determination to write fearlessly, shamelessly and unrepentantly about low-class black life and people in spite of opposition to that.

Hughes asks the black writers and artists not to worry to please the white people not to feel fear or ashamed as in "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" he has written:

We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. . . . If coloured people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We know we are beautiful, And ugly too.⁵

Hughes' whole aim was to encourage us. Arnold Rampersad has noted that Langston Hughes set a tone, standard of brotherhood, and friendship and co-operation, for all of us to follow. You never got from him, 'I am the negro writer, 'but only 'I am a negro writer'. He never stopped thinking about the rest of us.⁶ He writes this simple short poem to celebrate African American people and their black heritage. Through this poem he is trying to inspire his people to feel a sense of dignity and self respect as far as true self is concerned:

*The night is beautiful,
So the faces of my people.
The stars are beautiful,
So the eyes of my people.
Beautiful, also, is the sun.*

Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people.⁷

It was only in the mid of his poetic career he becomes a little bit violent but his violence does not harm anybody. He inspires blacks to participate in democracy without any fear as he says in his poem "Democracy":

*Democracy will not come
Today, this year
Nor ever*

Through compromise and fear.⁸

But in the end because of his nature, he comes back to his generosity and inspires his people to keep dreaming and to hope for a better future through his various poems for example "Still Here", "Hope for Harlem", "Freedom's Plow", "I Dream a World", "Motto", "Argument" etc. Forty years after his death, we may evaluate the world and the dreams of which Hughes speaks as he prefers:

*Hold fast to dreams
For if dream die,
Life is a broken winged bird
That cannot fly.⁹*

It is Hughes's belief in humanity and his hope for a world in which people could sanely and with understanding live together. The need for the realistic portraiture of black life is a theme that Hughes returns to again and again. To do this, of course, implies a proper valuation of black culture, the communal recognition, in other word, of a black esthetic. Only by giving importance and by feeling proud to one's own self, one can get attention from others.¹⁰

At the end of his life he was proud to be the only major African American writer still living in the midst of a typical urban black community not with a splintered but mending self and not in a superb or in voluntary, comfortable exile in Turkey or Spain or some similar place. By the end of his life Hughes is almost universally recognized as the most representative writer in the history of African American literature and also as probably the most original of all black American poets. He thus becomes the widely acknowledged Poet Laureate of the Negro Race. Evidently, he radiates joy and humanity and this is how he is remembered after his death.

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