

Harlem renaissance

Literature



Harlem Renaissance

Introduction

Claude McKay's 'Harlem Shadows' disapproves Reuben's contention that modernist poets do not explicitly concern themselves with gender, race, or class issues. Claude McKay's was a prominent figure of the Harlem Renaissance of 1920s and his literal works challenged the White authority. McKay threatened retaliation for prejudice and defended Black rights. McKay's 'Harlem Shadows' poem is a narrative of what he sees in the negro in Harlem and uses a tone of struggle to demonstrate his anger for inequality in the society. The poem also highlights the class differences in the society since the Blacks live in poverty and how lack of meaningful employment drives the black women to prostitution in Harlem streets. McKay asserts that 'I see the shapes of girls who pass to bend and barter at desire's will' thus outlining the high poverty, homelessness and unemployment among the Blacks (McKay 3-4).

Reuben asserts that modernist poets concentrate on individualism through promoting artistic viewpoints and individual consciousness. In this case, McKay's agrees with Reuben that black minorities need to attain self-consciousness. Accordingly, the author asserts 'little grey feet know no rest' thus demonstrating that African Americans do not appreciate their cultural identity and do not consider themselves as equals in the society (McKay 8). Claude McKay's believes that Blacks should have an alliance with the Whites and also exhibit faith and self-confidence with one another. The phrase 'dishonor and disgrace' manages to pass the impression that marginalization of the minorities in economic participation has led to high poverty among the Blacks (McKay 14). The phrase 'from street to street' implies that blacks

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have started appreciating their identity and expressing their own ideologies through art, music and literature and thus blacks must strive to attain a cultural identity and self-appreciation in order to conquer the existing racial prejudices (McKay line 18).

Langston Hughes has remained a key figure in American Literature and his works such as ‘ Negro Speaks of Rivers’ prose agrees with Claude McKay’s ‘ Harlem Shadows’ that blacks need to appreciate their historical and cultural identity. Langston Hughes ‘ Negro Speaks of Rivers’ aims at outlining African American historical origin and identity through asserting that ‘ I have known Rivers’ that are ‘ ancient than the world’ (Hughes 1-2). Hughes outlines that the early civilization that took place around major rivers such as Nile, Congo and Mississippi rivers and how those rivers flourished live ‘ human veins’ to give and support life (Tracy 74).

The poem demonstrated unstoppable quest for Black identity and inspired Harlem Renaissance movements of 1920s where Black artists started appreciating their cultural identity through music, writers, activists and artists (Hughes 23). The poem connects the heritage and soul of African Americans since the author asserts that ‘ my soul has grown deep like the rivers (Hughes 4). This demonstrates that blacks must show their strength and determination in ending enslavement and attaining equality in the society (Wallace 45).

Conclusion

Both Claude McKay and Langston Hughes disapproves Reuben’s assertion that modernist poets do not explicitly concern themselves with race, gender and class issues since the two authors concentrate on the importance of attaining racial identity and equality in the society. Claude outlines the high

poverty among Blacks while Hughes highlights the historical origins of black community and the need to attain self-identity in order to facilitate the attainment of equality. Claude McKay's challenges the existing racial, gender and class prejudices while Hughes focuses on the struggles and pain that blacks have underwent since early civilization.

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