

Explication of a poem

[Linguistics](#), [English](#)



Explication of "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" by Langston Hughes To properly explicate Langston Hughes poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers", it would be first necessary to understand Langston Hughes as a writer. He is a writer who best represented the Negro race with his works and used his work to illustrate the struggle of the negro against inequality and racial discrimination against the Negro.

Having this understand will enable us to understand better what he meant by the river of which he profusely spoke of in the poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers". The river was a metaphor of the Negroes collective experience which flowed from ancient history to his present time and along with it are their struggles with injustice and discrimination. This is evident in the line "I've known rivers". The line that says he "bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young" symbolizes that this struggle is as old as the civilization of Euphrates. River is not just the body of waters here but rather symbolic of the long and continuing struggle of the Negroes.

Langston Hughes may have spoken about the river in the poem but this poem does not literally talked about the idyllic or the pastoral quietness of the river but rather the deep struggle that they have been. "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" is actually a political statement of a Negro of his struggle often beset by discrimination and injustice that had gone too long that it already ran deep like the river. The depth of the river or their struggle is not only long in terms of history beginning from the ancient time but also the pain that it can caused them.

The setting of the poem was also carefully chosen. Why Euphrates and Congo, the Nile and the pyramids above it suggesting that it is Egypt? Why

not California or better yet the South region of America where discrimination and oppression was notorious? It is because these are old civilizations where the Negro came from, indicating that he is capable of greatness as the Nile and the pyramids if only not on the bondage that was imposed on him by the white man. So much so that when the river went down to New Orleans, it became muddy indicating that the Negro was free as the river until it reached New Orleans where he is enslaved. The setting of the poem is more than geography, it is a representation of the objects of Langston Hughes topic that he would like to talk about.

The poem is spoken by an old soul who had “ bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young” and that he knew “ Ancient, dusky rivers”. He is not just a regularly old person but an ancient sage who is wise that the reader should take heed of what he is taking about. It is as if he knew that the struggle of the Negro will eventually end, late it may be, as symbolized by the “ muddy bosom” that turned “ golden in the sunset”.