

Introduction deposits
(thompson 9). unlike
in i too



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Introduction

James Langston Hughes is regarded as one of the most prominent black writers of the early 20th century. He was born in Joplin, Missouri, on February 1 1902 (Pericles 2).

During his lifetime, he was a force to reckon with in the literature field, having been an established poet, novelist, playwright, columnist among other accomplishments. He is especially regarded as an influential and iconic figure during the Harlem Renaissance during the early and mid 1920s. At his death as a result of cancer in 1967, he had several books, poems, plays and other works of art under his name. Nikki Giovanni is another black writer who is famous for contributions in the American and African literature. This woman who was born on June 7, 1943, is many things rolled into one. She is a prolific poet, an accomplished writer, a civil rights commentator and activist as well as an educator. Today, she is a distinguished professor of English (Thompson 8) at Virginia University.

Background

This paper is going to compare two poems from these two poets.

This author is going to analyze I Too by Langston Hughes and Ego Tripping by Nikki Giovanni. The themes of the two poems, their literary elements and versification are some of the areas that will be comparatively analyzed.

Thesis

The following is the thesis statement for this comparative poem analysis:

Langston's and Nikki's poems are differently similar as they address identical theme of race in different structures and expressions

Summary of the Two Poems

I Too

Langston wrote this poem in 1932 (Pericles 1), and the theme of the poem reflects the situation of the American society at the time.

In 5 stanzas and 18 lines, this poet talks of racial discrimination in America during the 1930s (American Poems 2). It is noted that it is at this time that racial discrimination in the American society was at its worst as a result of the Jim Crow laws. Using imagery and other literary elements, Langston, the persona in the poem, talks of how he is shunned and made to ".....eat in the kitchen/when company comes" (American Poems 4, 5). This is because he is the "darker brother" (line 2), and the family, or the American society at large, is ashamed of him. However, he does not despair. He sees a brighter tomorrow, when he will ".....be at the table/(and)/Nobody'll dare/say to (him)/(to) eat in the kitchen" [lines 8-13] (American Poems 8-13). He sees a tomorrow where black man will be equal to the white man.

The mood of the poem varies from stanza one to the last. Stanza 1, which is made of the line "I, too, sing America", conveys a patriotic tone to those who may be doubting Langston's and the black American's patriotism. It depicts the national anthem and ideal unity of all races in the country. In the second stanza, the tone changes to that of anger and call for strength

(Pericles 9). The persona is not amused by the treatment the society affords him. The third stanza assumes a cautionary tone, where the persona is cautioning the oppressors that things will change in the future.

He will no longer be told to eat in the kitchen. The fourth stanza assumes a sneering tone, where the persona sneers at the reaction of the whites in days to come. The final line assumes the tone of triumph, where he proudly declares that “ I, too, am America” (American Poems 18).

Ego Tripping

Like in the case of I Too, racial theme permeates in this poem by one of most prolific female black writers in America. However, this poem is longer than that of Langston. Whereas Langston’s has 5 stanzas and 18 lines, Nikki’s has 9 stanzas and 51 lines (Nikki 2).

Like in Langston’s poem, Nikki uses the first person narrative to talk of her pride as a black woman, equating herself to “ Allah” in beauty and might. She talks of all the beautiful things that are African, from the gold mines to the oil deposits (Thompson 9). Unlike in I Too where the mood of the persona changes as they progress through their narrative, the mood in Nikki’s poem is the same throughout. She assumes an arrogant mood, and this is vividly depicted in stanza 2, where she says that “ I got hot and sent an ice age to Europe/to cool my thirst” [lines 11-12] (Nikki 11-12). Here, she is showing her arrogance regarding the sunny weather of Africa as compared to the winters in Europe and other countries in the northern hemisphere.

Versification of the Two Poems: A Comparison

As earlier indicated, the number of lines and stanzas in the two poems are different, with Ego Tripping been longer than both in lines and stanzas than I Too. The meter and rhyme of the two poems is also different. For example, Langston uses no rhyme scheme in his poem, and the meter used is more relaxed (Pericles 4) than in Ego Tripping.

Each of the lines is made up of between one and nine syllables, with the third line, " They send me to eat in the kitchen" (American Poems 3) been the longest line in the poem. Lines 8, 14 and 15 are the shortest, having one word each. Langston appears to break the lines in the poem as a way of emphasizing some of the phrases. It appears that, by keeping the lines short, he attracts the attention of the reader to those lines, and allows them to think deeply about them. This is the case in some of the lines such as " But I laugh/And eat well/And grow strong" [lines 5, 6, 7] (American Poems 5-7). On the other hand, Nikki appears to favor a lot of rhyming and a tighter meter in her poem. A case in point is line 19, where she appears to use rhyming to create a flow in the poem. The line reads " with a packet of goat's meat" (Nikki 19), a technique that is repeated in second last stanza when she says "

. so ethereal so surreal" (Nikki 48). Nikki also appears to use a mixture of long and short sentences in the poem. Lines like " the sphinx", " I am bad" and " Jesus" are some of the shortest (Thompson 7). These lines are used to create a breather for the reader, for example in the case of " I am bad", or to create emphasis, like in the case of " Jesus".

Literary Elements in the Two Poems: A Comparison

The two poems seem to conspicuously use the word “ I”. In Langston’s poem, this word is used to create a meaning that is deeper than its literal one. The importance of the “ I” is also emphasized by the fact that it is in the title of the poem, and Langston uses it as the first word in the poem.

The use of the word in the first line “ I, too, sing America” (American Poems 2) is an indication of the fact that though Africans may be different in skin color from the whites, they are all part of America. When used in the line “ But I laugh”, the word carries the meaning of the lightness with which the Africans take the segregation they are subjected to. Rather than crying and sulking, they are just amused by the antics of the whites, safe in the knowledge that with time, this will change. Nikki also uses the word “ I” copiously in the poem, appearing at least twice in every stanza.

Where it is present, the word is placed at the beginning of the line to draw attention to the self, or to the persona in the poem. The only exception is in line 50, where the last “ I” appears inside the line. But even here, the word is emphasized by isolating it from the other words. The two poets also use a lot of imagery and metaphors in the two poems. For example, Langston refers to the future metaphorically as tomorrow, and uses the image of the table to represent the American society in stanza 3. Nikki also uses the same style when she says that “ I am a gazelle so swift/so swift you can’t catch me” (Nikki 34). She uses imagery, for example when she talks of “ My bowels deliver uranium” (Nikki 35).

Conclusion

This comparative analysis points to the fact that the two poems are differently similar in how they handle the themes of race in the society. One of the things that make them similar is for example the fact that they all address the same issue of race in America, albeit at different times in history. Some literary elements such as use of metaphors and imagery make them similar also. However, their differences are highlighted by the varying structure, length among other things.

Works Cited

American Poems. Langston Hughes-I, Too, Sing America. American Poems.

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