

Historical interpretation of hughess poems

Literature



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Historical Interpretation of Hughes's Poems Historically Black Literature during Hughes' period witnessed economic and social crises along with the oppression of the black race. Some authors, like Hughes, reflect their own historical situation and write to address people of their own time and place. The social attitudes of the time about the black people in America were colored by racial attitudes. From this atmosphere of hatred and oppression arose the literature of protest. Harlem was the center of this renaissance movement and Langston Hughes gets his place in American Literature as a writer who stood for this awakening. He wrote about the sufferings and tortured life of these suppressed people. He was committed to social justice, freedom, and he enriched American poetry with his great love of music. The thrust of this paper is on two of Hughes's poems, "Theme for English B" and "The Negro Mother", for a historical interpretation of them. In "Theme of English B" Hughes deals with an assignment given to a black student by his English teacher: This event takes place in Harlem. It is through the subject matter of the assignment that the life of the student gets revealed: "Go home and write/ a page tonight. / And let that page come out of you--- /Then, it will be true" (Hughes). This home work prompts the student to have an examination of his real self. What he has in this life and what he has not. It also enables him to realize what others in America get. Therefore, he writes that he wants "to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love. / I like to work, read, learn, and understand life" (Hughes). The poem thus enables the readers to have a social and historical understanding of the Harlem Renaissance period, illuminating the history of America. The discrimination becomes acute when the boy realizes that "I am the only colored student in my class" (Hughes). Finally by posing a question to the teacher the boy exposes the American

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reality: why the teacher does not want to be a “ part of me”, “ as I am a part of you. / That's American” (Hughes). The irony in the poem touches its highest watermark here. Hughes, like Martin Luther King, dreams of a world without racial discrimination, a world full of joy and happiness, a world full of freedom: “ but now through you, / Dark ones of today, my dreams must come true”, says the negro mother in “ The Negro Mother” (Hughes). The poet packs this poem with words reflecting the plight of all black women, the plight of the Black Americans. “ All you dark children in the world out there, / Remember my sweat, my pain, my despair”, tells the mother (Hughes). It must be noticed that Hughes speaks very optimistically, “ For I will be with you till no white brother / Dares keep down the children of the Negro Mother”. (Hughes). From the streets of Harlem the poet paces out and embraces the world through his poems, or, to put it in a better way, the poet looks at the world through the soul of a black American. Thus, by looking from the historical perspectives, the readers can easily understand how the social attitudes of the people of America in the early part of twentieth century get reflected in Hughes’s poems. The poems speak truths which are universal. By looking at Hughes’s poem from the historical perspective the readers not only get the past illuminated, but also find that the theme of love, liberty, and equality which is part of the American constitution is pervasive in the poems. As Nancy R. Comely says, “ He became both a model and active helper in the careers of other black writers” (Nancy, 700). Hughes’ sense of improvisation and his originality have helped him in capturing the historical and artistic development of the black people in a superb manner. Reference Hughes, Langston. “ The Themes for English B”. http://www.eecs.harvard.edu/~keith/poems/English_B.html “ The Negro <https://assignbuster.com/historical-interpretation-of-hughess-poems/>

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