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978-0-521-11430-1 - Langston Hughes: The Contemporary Reviews

Edited by Tish Dace

Excerpt

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# Introduction

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Langston Hughes published his first book in 1926, when he was just turning twenty-four. His most recent volumes have appeared posthumously, and others may follow. Most of his more than sixty books have been reviewed, some by fifty or more publications, yet Donald Dickinson, for instance, lists only a brief selection of these in his *Bio-bibliography of Langston Hughes*, second edition, revised (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1972), and Richard K. Barksdale, attempting in *Langston Hughes: The Poet and His Critics* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1977) to comment on the reception of Hughes's books of poetry, has been forced to generalize on the basis of a small proportion of each work's reviews. In his introduction to the thirty-five reviews he reprints in his *Critical Essays on Langston Hughes* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1986), Edward J. Mullen likewise reaches inaccurate conclusions based on insufficient examples, maintaining, for example (p. 13), that only Alfred Kreymborg gave *Shakespeare in Harlem* a favorable notice, whereas, in fact, the majority of the reviews praised this work. Mullen especially misses the mark in his assessment of the generally glowing reviews of *Not Without Laughter* as representing a "mixed but generally lukewarm critical response" (p. 16). In the interest of saving space and time, even Arnold Rampersad in *The Life of Langston Hughes* (2 vols.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, 1988) generalizes from small samples of reviews. The present volume will make readily available for the first time the primary documents necessary to assess fully reviewers' receptions of Hughes's books.

The absence of knowledge of, and access to, Hughes's reviews in the past led to some hyperbolic and inaccurate generalizations. For instance, Lindsay Patterson in "Langston Hughes: The Most Abused Poet in America?" *New York Times*, 29 June 1969, p. 30-D (a record review of *The Poetry of Langston Hughes* by Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee—Caedmon-TC-1272), falsely states in his first paragraph: "Critically, the most abused poet in America was the late Langston Hughes. Serious white critics ignored him, less serious ones compared his poetry to Cassius Clay doggerel, and most black critics only grudgingly admired him." "The Check List," *American Mercury*, 52 (October 1940), 245, errs likewise by insisting: "The Negro literati have consistently attacked him and his work. He has found patronage and appreciation almost exclusively among the whites."

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The response to Hughes's books was considerably more favorable than we have believed. His free verse forms, his prose and dramatic dialect pieces, and his "lowdown" subject matter did earn him particularly partisan vituperation, but also won him more champions than detractors. The very qualities in his work that caused some offense early in his career ultimately assured his position as the preeminent African-American writer, one who excelled at poetry, fiction, drama, and the essay, and who communicated effectively to readers of varied races and classes. Never were the majority of Hughes's reviews negative.

Hughes's scrapbooks attest to the comparative lack of attention he gave to his reviews. Although he did employ a clippings service, he must not have scrutinized the reviews carefully. Into the section on *Fields of Wonder* he has stuck one on the book *Alcoholic*, by another Langston Hughes.

To evaluate these reviews, we must know something of Hughes's relations, personal and professional, with the people who wrote them. Rampersad's biography, in particular, provides motives in such "friends" of Hughes's as Alain Locke and James Baldwin for reviews whose negativity may not reflect objective assessments. This collection could make possible examination of the dynamic between personal contact and critical detachment.

Of course, labeling the reviews as favorable, unfavorable, or mixed proves tricky, and each reader doubtless will regard them differently. As a reviewer myself for more than twenty years, I believe few notices emerge as 100 percent raves, yet the critic intends largely positive reviews as praise. I have, therefore, categorized 75 percent or so admiration as the laudatory response I feel the writer intended, a review that is thoroughly ambivalent as mixed, and a wholeheartedly condemning piece as negative. To increase the difficulty of grouping reviews in this manner, some of the most patronizing or, to modern tastes, seemingly obtuse remarks occur in the largely favorable reviews, and some of the critics who appear to understand what Hughes was doing are most deprecatory. In addition, the critical viewpoint sometimes contradicts our expectations formed in response to the nature of the periodical publishing the review—diverse indeed, considering they encompass everything from *Seventeen* and the *Junior League Bulletin* to the *Daily Worker*.

In his first book, *The Weary Blues*, and its successor, *Fine Clothes to the Jew*, Hughes presents poems to two fundamentally different audiences. He wrote both types fluently and must have taken pride in both, but few readers were likely to appreciate these often radically different styles. Therefore a few reviews are mixed, praising the one type but damning the other. Among the more uniform reviews, he is admired by those reviewers who accept the unconventional free verse forms and free-spirited flouting of behavioral norms. And he is castigated by those critics—sometimes middle-class blacks—for whom his earthy and hip poetry proves embarrassing; they would prefer him to stick to the traditional conventions of Western poetry. Yet his notices do not reflect a clear racial dichotomy. He is both lauded and lambasted by members of both

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racess. These reviews tell us a lot about their writers and the times and climes that spawned them.

Hughes replies to unfavorable aspects of Countee Cullen's mixed review of *The Weary Blues*, to other criticism from the "talented 10th," and most immediately to George Schuyler's essay for the *Nation* entitled "The Negro-Art Hokum" in his "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," *Nation*, 122 (23 June 1926), 692–4, where he recognizes "this is the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America—this urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible" (692) and concludes triumphantly, "We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame" (694).

In the argument about whether the Negro writer should develop his own style and content (which Hughes advocates) or excel in modes and on matter set by white writers (which Cullen, Schuyler, and others contend), Carl Sandburg weighs in on Hughes's side in "The New Negro Writer," *Chicago Daily News*, 29 September 1926, p. 15. Although he says the truth lies somewhere between, his analogy to singing spirituals, where he contrasts Roland Hayes to the "blacker" Paul Robeson, works all to Hughes's advantage.

Yet, despite such controversy, most of the reviews of Hughes's first book are favorable. The only two that altogether repudiate *The Weary Blues*—as insufficiently true to Occidental poetic conventions—appear to be Donald Davidson's in the *Nashville Tennessean* and Jake Falstaff's in the *Akron Beacon Journal*, the former contrasting it to Countee Cullen's *Color* and concluding Hughes "has rushed into publication before he was mature as a poet," the latter judging Claude McKay a superior poet and dismissing Hughes's volume as offering "hardly enough real poesy to make five good poems."

Five other critics provide mixed assessments. Howard Mumford Jones writes in the *Chicago Daily News* that Hughes in imitating tired literary modes creates insincere "Verlaine and water," but admires "the genuine and authentic blues." Thus Jones recognizes the superiority of Hughes writing in an original African-American mode to Hughes tritely echoing Western conventions. Not surprisingly—given the difference between Cullen's embrace of Western modes and Hughes's frequent departure from them, not to mention the fact the title poem had beaten Cullen's own entry in the *Opportunity* contest—Countee Cullen weighs in with those who prefer the poems resembling his own. His *Opportunity* review praises Hughes's distinctive individuality but regrets that the blues and jazz poems "will be most admired," because he objects to their "dissociation from the traditionally poetic" and regards them "as interlopers," not really poems, even though they prove as affecting as the "frenzy and electric heat of a Methodist or Baptist revival meeting." Cullen does not deny Hughes's skill, but imposes his own definition of a poem as a "quiet way of communing . . . more spiritual for the God-seeking heart." Because Hughes's essay in the *Na-*

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tion obviously responds in particular to the negative parts of Cullen's judgments and because some writers have quoted Cullen's repudiation of "The Cat and the Saxophone"—"I can't say *This will never do*, but I feel that it ought never to have been done"—as though he speaks of the entire book, we might be tempted to conclude Cullen panned *The Weary Blues*; clearly that view does not fit the facts, nor would it characterize the reviews in the *Independent Weekly Review*, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, or *New Masses*, none of which agree with Cullen's preference for the tamer poems or damn the book outright.

The large majority of *The Weary Blues's* reviews praise it either unreservedly or with few demurrers. Thus the *Toledo Times* refers to Hughes as "destined to be one of the great poets of his race," whereas the *Cleveland Herald* calls him "a young poet of amazing promise" and exults in the book's "exquisite unusualness." The *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, after expressing a few reservations, commends it as a "contribution not merely to American Negro poetry but to poetry in general."

Frequently reviewers love the originality of Hughes's jazz rhythms, as when Corinne Meaux in the *New York Amsterdam News* proclaims, "These verses mark a new stride in the poetical field" and the *Double Dealer* commends the "fluidly sensuous rhythm, rich and colorful." Du Bose Heyward in *New York Herald Tribune Books*, however, recognizes that Hughes's rhythms have precedents in the work of Carl Sandburg and Amy Lowell, but praises him for catching the "very essence" of the blues. Heyward regrets that in "one or two places . . . the artist is obscured by the propagandist," but continues, "Far more often in the volume the artist is victor."

The *Chicago Defender* and the *Sioux City Journal* prefer the quiet, descriptive poems. Likewise the *New York Times* acknowledges a distaste for jazz poetry (while conceding Hughes writes this better than other poets do) and expresses high regard instead for "Cross," "The Jester," and "Poème d'Automne." The *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, despite recognizing flaws and conceding some Southerners will be offended, lauds the book as "good" and "unquestionably one of the most interesting of the year." The *Daily Oklahoman* prints another commentary colored by a "southern" perception, expressing astonishment at *The Weary Blues*, "astonishing because of its poetic qualities and because Langston Hughes is a Negro." Somewhat condescendingly, the reviewer nevertheless pays homage to the poetry, particularly to everything subsequent to the opening jazz section. A second *Opportunity* review, by Robert T. Kerlin, although it never refers to Cullen's reservations, praises the Harlem lyrics as "akin to the deathless ones in all languages—Sappho's, Horace's, Herrick's, but most of all the Hebrew Song of Songs."

The *Pittsburgh Courier* appreciates the poet's reflection of his thoughts in his forms, whereas *Crisis* observes, "Never is he preoccupied with form," praises instead his spontaneity, and asserts, "While I do not think of him as a protagonist of color—he is too much the citizen of the world for that—I doubt

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if anyone will ever write more tenderly, more understandingly, more humorously of the life of Harlem.” Theophilus Lewis in the *Messenger* notes, “Six lines of his are painted on a six-foot sign in the lobby of the Harlem YMCA,” which he terms evidence “this pagan poet is fast becoming a religious force. . . . [I]n giving concrete and definite expression to the incoherent feelings and impulses of his people he is functioning as a unifying spiritual agent. This is the chief work of the artist—this and to crystallize the beauty of his people.” Lewis equally and specifically extols Hughes’s craft and his originality. Ethel Arnold Tilden in *Voices* understands how Hughes proves characteristic of his race, universal, and distinctively himself—all in one volume. Llewellyn Jones in *American Life Magazine* praises Hughes’s protest against injustices in “The South,” yet asserts the poems “are not works of propaganda but of art.” Another thoughtful reviewer, Alain Locke in *Palms*, proclaims, “The Negro masses have found a voice,” identifies in the race poems the products of “a poet who has gone to the cabaret for some of his rhythms and to the Bible for others,” and praises a “mystic identification with the race experience . . . instinctively deeper and broader than any of our poets has yet achieved.”

Not until Knopf on 4 February 1927 issued his second, more controversial volume of verse did some reviewers truly trash Hughes’s poetry.

Most reviews of *Fine Clothes to the Jew* praised it, yet the negatives approach the vitriol leveled by the press at Ibsen’s *Ghosts*. Although the greatest outrage was reserved for his matter, many complaints greeted the manner as well. These pans disqualified his verse as poetry. All reviews, favorable and unfavorable alike, tend to agree as to its attributes—its accurate evocation of low-life African-American spirit—but disagree as to the value of such poetry.

Several critics prefer *Fine Clothes to the Jew* to *The Weary Blues*. V. F. Calverton in the *New Leader* proclaims the second book “well-nigh equal . . . to the Coleridge and Longfellow imitations of the old ballads.” Hunter Stagg’s *Richmond News-Leader* acclaims *Fine Clothes* as “better art.” Howard Mumford Jones in the *Chicago Daily News* regards it as superior because “he has contributed a really new verse form to the English language. . . . Hughes is dangerously near becoming a major American poet.” Dewey R. Jones in the *Chicago Defender* regards the second as “more subtle,” appreciating the gap Hughes fills: “We have needed someone to interpret the emotions—the inner feelings—the dreams, even, of the great masses of us who are so far down in the scale of things.” The *Washington Post* greets Hughes as “in a fair way to assume the laurels of Paul Laurence Dunbar as the poet laureate of his race.”

Du Bose Heyward in *New York Herald Tribune Books*, on the other hand, prefers the “high spots” of *The Weary Blues* to the more uniform quality of *Fine Clothes*, although he also affirms the new book “does appreciably increase the number of first-rate poems to the credit of Langston Hughes, and it renews his high promise for the future.” Theophilus Lewis in the *Messenger* likewise expresses a mild preference for the former volume, nevertheless remarking simi-

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larities between Hughes's later blues and the "ascetic delicacy one finds in the lyrics of Thomas Hardy and A. E. Housman."

Some other periodicals that approve *Fine Clothes* include the *New York World*, *New York Sun*, *Brooklyn Citizen*, *Detroit Free Press*, *Independent*, *Bookman*, *Poetry*, *New Republic*, *Baltimore Afro-American*, *New York Age*, *Boston Chronicle*, *Lincoln News*, *Crisis*, *Kappa Alpha Psi Journal*, and *Opportunity* (all three reviews, including, mirabile dictu, Countee Cullen's). Margaret Larkin's *Opportunity* review compares Hughes to Burns and dubs him "Proletarian Poet." Sigmund Spaeth in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* commends Hughes as—"when he speaks in his natural idiom"—"a great poet." T. Bernard Pace in the *Asheville Times* endorses Hughes's realism and emotional force and exults, "One does not read his poems. One sings them, laughs them, prays them." Alice Dunbar-Nelson in the *Washington Eagle* reminds "some of our folks [who] don't like it" that Aristotle "said that poetry is an imitation of life." R. E. Cureton in *Oracle* affirms the poems' realism and the right of Hughes's subjects' lives to be celebrated in verse. "This latest volume of Brother Hughes'," Cureton continues, "deserves to be read; his reputation has been sustained." Alain Locke more than concurs; he raves about the book, about its tragic vision (comparable to that of the Greeks), and also approves it as "notable as an achievement in poetic realism in addition to its particular value as a folk study in verse of Negro life." Frank Luther in the *Des Moines Register* strikes the same note: "The tragic lot of the black-skinned in a white-skinned civilization is apparent again and again, but there is no explicit propaganda; there is no appeal for help or pity."

Subsequent double Pulitzer-prize winner Paul Horgan in *Library* applauds, "The poet's heart yields beauty here"; and Lewis Alexander in *Carolina Magazine* dismisses those who object to Hughes's originality by arguing: "Those who understand anything about the matter at all will concede that the essence of real poetry certainly does not lie in conventionality." Katherine Garrison Chapin in the *Junior League Bulletin* adulates Hughes: "Here is a young man who . . . has stepped out of the ranks where any social or racial discriminations might hold him, and walks easily among the best writers of his day." But William Russell Clark spoils his favorable review in the *Dallas Times-Herald* by his racist stereotyping of Hughes and other African-American writers: "Many Negroes are poets without half-way trying to be or knowing that they are. A superstitious race, their imaginations run riot."

*Fine Clothes* received five mixed reviews. The *New York Evening Post Literary Review* pronounces, "It is quite limited, but there is a purity of quality about most of it that cannot be equaled by the studied simplicity of the sophisticated." George S. Schuyler in the *Pittsburgh Courier* finds the verse "both too free and too blank" but credits Hughes with "knowing the Negro proletarian." The *Boston Transcript* condemns the cynicism but praises the blues and spirituals. The *Princeton Literary Observer*, after complaining the collection "does

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not maintain the same plane of excellence which was attained in his earlier work," adds, "There is much to praise in the volume." Herbert S. Gorman in the *New York Times Book Review* judges the book "uneven and flawed but it displays flashes of authentic inspiration and when it is at its best, as in some of the 'blues' experiments, it gives a vivid sensation of the Negro spirit."

Those who dislike *Fine Clothes*, however, excoriate Hughes. O.C.E. in the *Philadelphia Tribune* avers, "The book leaves, a very bad taste in the mouth," and on the same page Eustace Gay laments, "It's been a long day since I have read anything 'uglier,'" concluding "let us have some books . . . dealing with something else besides the cabaret hounds and 'primitive types of American Negro.'" Both writers object to the free verse. As Gay puts it, "There is no meter, unless it is a gas meter." In the same newspaper's third review, Orrin C. Evans—presumably the same reviewer who launched the first diatribe against *Fine Clothes*—laments both form ("decidedly free verse") and content ("his apparent obsession for the more degenerate element"). William M. Kelley in the *New York Amsterdam News* fulminates, "It reeks of the gutter and sewer." J. A. Rogers's *Pittsburgh Courier* review blasts the book as "trash," accounts for its failure by surmising it "is designed for white readers," and calls upon readers of his African-American newspaper to "discourage this marketing of such books, books that help but to tighten the chains of social degradation."

The *Chicago Whip* castigates both Hughes as the "poet 'low-rate' of Harlem" and Carl Van Vechten—to whom Hughes dedicated the volume—as "a literary gutter-rat." The poems this critic dismisses as "unsanitary, insipid and repulsing." This anonymous purveyor of invective takes offense at Hughes's subject matter, "lecherous, lust-reeking characters." Taking another approach, Roger Didier in *Light and Heebie Jeebies* seems less shocked at Hughes than convinced he displays a trivial talent: "He is an artificer forcing words into odd combinations that sometimes incite a pleasing imagery which means very little." Thereafter, O.C.E. returns to the fray once more, faulting *Fine Clothes* for the third time in the *Philadelphia Tribune*, thereby contributing fully one-third of the book's total venomous reviews and inflating a later generation's erroneous impression that Hughes's second book fared poorly with critics. The reader will notice that most of the negative assessments come from the black press, although by no means all the reviews from this sector prove negative. The sole reviewer to damn the book in the nonblack press, Harry Alan Potamkin writing in the *Nation*, objects, not to the subject matter but to what he regards as lack of superior poetic talent.

In the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* for 27 February 1927, under "Praised and Damned," Hughes writes, "They miss the fact that every 'ugly' poem I write is a protest against the ugliness it pictures." He likewise responds to his critics in two articles in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, for 9 and 16 April 1927, entitled "These Bad New Negroes: A Critique on Critics," as well as in a letter in the September 1928 *Crisis*.

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Only three reviews of Hughes's first novel, *Not Without Laughter*, should be characterized as negative—two in the African-American press, the other in a large-circulation Chicago paper. Writing in the *Boston Guardian*, Lillian Lewis Feurtado maintains the novel “leaves a bitter taste” because its “immoral, vulgar, low-down 3rd rate Colored people” may “make the white reader feel that segregation is justifiable.” She errs factually in her objection that Hughes has failed to provide “young men with high aspirations,” for clearly the protagonist, Sandy, embraces those and, indeed, represents Hughes himself. The reviewer acknowledges the novelist's talent and calls upon him to “write another novel and put in as principals some girls and boys worthy of admiration” so as to “make the whole race proud of him.”

This continuation of the sort of objections about subject matter that Cullen had first raised and a few reviewers of *Fine Clothes* had elaborated finds no echo, however, in the other two faultfinders. The *New Freeman* takes Hughes to task for the “shapeless and sprawling” construction and “flat” characters, “types rather than . . . human beings.” The *Chicago Evening Post* dismisses the novel as a “readable, rather trite tale” that “has nothing to add to our conception of Negroes as individuals, as a group, or in their relations to their pale antagonists.” One other mixed review, in the *New York Sun*, condescends to contrast Hughes to “white writers in a similar field,” deciding “his brush is surely not dipped in the magic of *Black April* and *Porgy*.”

Meanwhile, other periodicals greet *Not Without Laughter* enthusiastically, and it is one of only two novels included in the American Library Association's 1931 list of forty outstanding American books of the year. It also outsold Hughes's two Knopf poetry volumes (Dickinson, p. 56, n. 80).

The *Cleveland Press* pronounces it “the soundest Negro book by anyone, black or white, since Cleveland's Charles W. Chestnutt did *The Conjure Woman* 31 years ago.” The *New Yorker* praises its humor, whereas the *Philadelphia Public Ledger* opines, “It leaves his reader not without tears” and predicts it “will rank among the most outstanding volumes of the season.” The *Pasadena Star-News* praises a poignancy that reflects “an aspect of American life that is in its essence pathetic and heroic.” The *Pike County Republican* pays the tribute “Every word is interesting.” Martha Gruening in *Hound and Horn*, impressed with the work's affirmation of Hughes's people, terms it “not only uniquely moving and lovely among Negro novels but among books written about America.” She devotes a paragraph to comparing the novel with Willa Cather's *My Antonia*. The *Pittsburgh Courier*'s George S. Schuyler enthuses, “I haven't read all of the novels written but I haven't read a better one.” Mary Ross in *New York Herald Tribune Books* commends it “to the attention of those who love life and its mirroring in fiction.” Sterling A. Brown in *Opportunity* expresses his approbation: “Its simplicity is the simplicity of great art.” Some reviewers adopt the phraseology “not without” to express their—usually favorable—responses.



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Both African-American and white reviewers rave; both races love Sandy and enjoy the tale of his coming of age, which they find so authentic many suspect—correctly—an autobiographical basis in the character study. The *Oracle* embraces the boy as “an inspiration to the Negro youth of today.” The *Philadelphia Record* calls Sandy “the finest fictional type of a Negro boy that literary America has yet produced.” One woman, however, Isabel Paterson in the *New York Herald Tribune*, instead discusses Aunt Hager as the “heroine,” and Wallace Thurman in the *New York Evening Post* rebukes Hughes for killing off this “indelible” character with more than fifty pages of his tale yet to go. The *Nation* relishes all the characters as “the people who make it live with that quick and intimate reality which is seldom seen in American fiction.” The *New York Times Book Review* judges Sandy the “least-successful creation of them all,” but praises all the rest: “These are the people who live in this novel as few characters have ever lived in a book.” The *Milwaukee Journal* concurs. Herschel Brickell in the *Saturday Review* approves the novelist’s “ability to make the reader feel very deeply the problems of his characters.” Theophilus Lewis in the *New York Amsterdam News* enjoys Hughes’s pioneering effort in portraying “normal Negro life” and argues, concerning his “ability to present character faithfully and vividly, Hughes rates far above any other novelist who has ventured into the field of ‘Negro’ fiction except Du Bose Heyward, and he is easily Heyward’s peer.”

Other publications—among them the *Tulsa Tribune* and the *Tuskegee Messenger*—particularly praise the book’s prose style. Several appreciate the setting—not Harlem but Kansas. Some commend the author’s objectivity; in the words of the *Detroit News*, “Mr. Hughes does nothing to shield his race from just criticism. He depicts Negroes at their best and at their worst and very fairly shows that the black man’s best and his worst closely parallel the white man’s.”

Although many mention the absence of a tightly developed plot, most do not find this a fatal flaw, or necessarily a flaw at all, but appreciate the book’s nature, its purposeful focus on Sandy’s rites of passage. Alain Locke in *Opportunity*, for instance, suggests, “Despite immaturity of narrative technique, this novel is one of the high-water marks of the Negro’s self depiction in prose.” The *New York Amsterdam News*’s Aubrey Bowser even insists, “It is just as well for a novel not to have too marked a plot: it tempts the author to make his characters behave unnaturally.” *New Masses*, reading the same novel as Lillian Lewis Feurtado, comes to a contrasting conclusion, that this one avoids vulgarity and instead excels in its depiction of class conflict. Several reviewers suggest Hughes should write a sequel.

Hughes followed his successful novel not with another full-length work of fiction but with the first of a series of limited editions and pamphlets containing poetry and drama. These little volumes, appearing during the 1930s and early 1940s, attracted few—but generally laudatory—reviews. Aubrey Bowser, in the *New York Amsterdam News*, for example, after echoing Hughes’s racial

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mountain essay for the *Nation* by calling for “Negro literature . . . written of the Negro, by the Negro, and, most important of all, for the Negro,” greets *The Negro Mother* (1931) as “a constructive move” towards achieving that goal. The *Boston Evening Transcript* terms *Scottsboro Limited* (1932) a play “which epitomizes in verse and tragedy the industrial plight of the Negro” and compares “Christ in Alabama” to Cullen’s “Black Christ.”

The *Daily Worker* lauds *A New Song* (1938), “The ballads and lyrics have the simplicity, straightforwardness, and plain, rhythmical speech of all folk songs,” and *Fight* raves, “It is a great intellectual, emotional, common sense treat to read . . . the songs of everyday living and suffering and tears and laughter and hope in Chicago, in Spain, in Alabama.” The mainstream daily the *Winston-Salem Journal-Sentinel* finds in this volume “yet another evidence that the best Negro literature is a folk literature, close to the joys and sorrows of the people.”

The *Chicago Defender*, upon the publication of Hughes’s two wartime pamphlets in 1943, compares the title poem in *Freedom’s Plow* to Sandburg and finds *Jim Crow’s Last Stand* shows “there are few poets today who can match Hughes for colorful, lilting, pointed quality.” Carter G. Woodson in the *Journal of Negro History* interprets each poem in the latter volume, then sets them in the context of African-American history, and *Span’s* review of the former pamphlet terms Hughes “one of the great poets of our country” and his poems “gleaming stones in the citadel of a better tomorrow.” Finally, William Rose Benét in the *Saturday Review* describes *Freedom’s Plow* as “more good rhetoric, rhetoric in a good cause,” offering “stirring rhythm. It must be deeply moving, to all who really care about this country.”

Back in 1932, Hughes had published his collaboration with Arna Bontemps, the children’s tale *Popo and Fifina*. Although Alain Locke dismisses this as a “quite flimsy sketch,” four other reviewers greet it more respectfully. The *New York Times Book Review* calls it “a model of its kind,” compares it to the popular *The Dutch Twins*, praises “the beauty of the style,” and concludes the book “tempts us to wish that all our travel books for children might be written by poets.”

Not many more critics reviewed Knopf’s 1932 collection for children entitled *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems*, not only because of the age of its intended audience but also because many poems first had appeared in the earlier two books. Yet those who write do so enthusiastically. The *San Diego Union* approves the poems as especially likely to accomplish their purpose of arousing “an interest in genuine poetry in some young ear.” The *Boston Evening Transcript* commends the selections as “simple, human, vivid, singing with sincerity.” Horace Gregory in the *New York Evening Post* refers to the poetry’s “air of outdoor health and vitality” and dubs Hughes the “Carl Sandburg of Negro poetry.” The *Boston American*, whose reviewer Charles Hanson Towne has tested the poems’ merits by reading them aloud “to my colored