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

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AMERICAN CRITICAL ARCHIVES 10

Langston Hughes: The Contemporary Reviews

The American Critical Archives is a series of reference books that provide representative selections of contemporary reviews of the main works of major American authors. Specifically, each volume contains both full reviews and excerpts from reviews that appeared in newspapers and weekly and monthly periodicals, generally within a few months of the publication of the work concerned. There is an introductory historical overview by the volume editor, as well as checklists of additional reviews located but not quoted.

This book is the first comprehensive collection of contemporary reviews of the writing of Langston Hughes from 1926 until his death in 1967. Most of the reviews have never before been listed in a Hughes bibliography, and many of the reviews are reprinted from hard-to-find newspapers and periodicals. Their collection here, by replacing myths with the actual historical record, will make possible a reassessment of Hughes's initial critical reception.

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University of Massachusetts Dartmouth



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This book is dedicated to the memories of
Glenn Carrington
and
George Houston Bass

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Series Editor's Preface

The American Critical Archives series documents a part of a writer's career that is usually difficult to examine, that is, the immediate response to each work as it was made public by reviewers in contemporary newspapers and journals. Although it would not be feasible to reprint every review, each volume in the series reprints a selection of reviews designed to provide the reader with a proportionate sense of the critical response, whether it was positive, negative, or mixed. Checklists of other known reviews are also included to complete the documentary record and allow access for those who wish to do further reading and research.

The editor of each volume has provided an introduction that surveys the career of the author in the context of the contemporary critical response. Ideally, the introduction will inform the reader in brief of what is to be learned by a reading of the full volume. The reader then can go as deeply as necessary in terms of the kind of information desired—be it about a single work, a period in the author's life, or the author's entire career. The intent is to provide quick and easy access to the material for students, scholars, librarians, and general readers.

When completed, the American Critical Archives should constitute a comprehensive history of critical practice in America, and in some cases Great Britain, as the writers' careers were in progress. The volumes open a window on the patterns and forces that have shaped the history of American writing and the reputations of the writers. These are primary documents in the literary and cultural life of the nation.

M. THOMAS INGE

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Preface: Using This Book

The reviews reprinted and cited in this book were found primarily among those preserved by Hughes himself and now located at Yale University's Beinecke Library, in the New York Public Library's Schomburg Collection, and at Lincoln University (Hughes's alma mater) in Pennsylvania. Of course, other likely libraries (such as those of the University of Kansas and Howard University) also have been searched, roughly forty serial and review indexes have been consulted, and in some cases whole runs of periodicals likely to have reviewed Hughes also have been searched. I have omitted mere announcements of publication unaccompanied by an evaluative review. Otherwise, I would appreciate being notified of any omissions. Readers should also note that the Beinecke continues to add to its review collections; recent acquisitions will not be found here.

These sources of scrapbooks and clippings collections do not always provide dates or periodical titles for the reviews, and when they do these now and then err. Thus, the review of *An African Treasury* that the Beinecke file leads us to believe appeared in *American Import and Export Bulletin* (no date) did not appear in any issues published between 1959 and 1967, despite four searches carried out in the copies at Columbia University, the New York Public Library, and the Library of Congress. Although I considered that these three libraries might contain a variant page from other copies because the March 1961 issue (vol. 54, no. 3) should, according to the index, contain reviews on p. 249 but does not, I also checked out the possibility that the review instead appeared in another magazine from the same publisher. Voilà! The elusive review shows up in the December 1960 issue of *Air Transportation*. Perhaps two hundred dates on clippings at the Beinecke likewise proved incorrect. For instance, Olive C. Robinson's "Reviews of Recently Published Books: Negro Humor" turned up in the *Lewiston Daily Sun* of 26 March, not 10 April, and E.D.I.'s "Younger Readers" appears in the 31 January 1953, not 1 December 1952, *Kansas City Star*. Moreover, hundreds of clippings lack authorship credit.

Locating the reviews in newspapers, magazines, and journals, verifying dates, and supplying page numbers and other missing information has taken me not just to research and public libraries but also to libraries for business,

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education, and divinity schools, and for children's books. This work has occupied me since 1977. Even where errors did not slow the search, merely ascertaining that no copy of that publication for that date had survived or figuring out the periodical's origin and location often took months. For example, one of the Beinecke scrapbooks contains a review of *Fine Clothes to the Jew* by P. H. from the 15 April 1927 issue of *The Library*. A printed page cannot qualify as a bibliographical ghost. This review certainly appeared; the question was, Where? The journal title sounded simple enough—some kind of library journal. But not, as research proved, *Library* (Newark), the Bibliographical Society's *The Library*, *Library Association Record*, *Library Journal*, *Library Literature*, *Library Occurrent*, *Library Quarterly*, *Library Review*, *Library Service* (Detroit Public Library), *Library World*, *Libraries*, or the *Texas Library Association's News Notes*. The 1926 Ayer's does not list this title, and I could not locate a librarian who had heard of it, not even at the library-school libraries of Yale and Columbia. Returning to the Beinecke to recheck the review as it appears in the scrapbooks, I was temporarily stalled by the disappearance of the scrapbooks (though not the clippings boxes). Since they had still not been catalogued (as of the summer of 1989), the available librarians told me I had hallucinated the scrapbooks, which must, they maintained, never have existed. In mid-September, a letter assuring me they had been located ("They had been removed to a special area for cataloguing and the person who knew that was away on vacation") brought me back to New Haven. Although the review yielded no clue, I finally culled from a nonreview clipping from *The Library* pasted to another page the scrawled pencil notation "New Mexico." Letters to every library in the state that had existed in 1927 elicited a few responses providing the publication's provenance: New Mexico Military Institute. And Kathy Flanary, the librarian at the Paul Horgan Library at NMMI, explained—you guessed it—that Paul Horgan had edited the periodical and written the laudatory review.

Where an entry mentions multiple appearances of a review for which the first reference has been verified, in a few instances I have skipped a search for complete information on the other entries in order to ensure that this volume will appear before the century's end. These few entries simply omit data. In nearly all other instances the entries provide complete, verified information. Where the data may err or the source could not be located, a question mark appears within brackets. Should a reader locate and verify any of these queried entries, please contact me through the publisher. Such assistance will be acknowledged in any subsequent edition.

Failure to locate the source of a review has occurred for one of two reasons. Either no copy of that periodical for that date exists (despite occasional entries in research libraries' card catalogs that originally suggested the periodical had survived) or, in that periodical for that date, the review itself does not appear,

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and searching elsewhere likewise did not locate the review in its original context.

Users of the scrapbooks and clippings boxes at the Beinecke (and of notations drawn from them in Arnold Rampersad's invaluable two-volume *Life of Langston Hughes*) should exercise caution in accepting the dates and periodical titles attached to these clippings, in view of the many errors contained in Hughes's collection. In most instances the mistakes can be attributed to his clippings service. (A dyslexic friend has confided that he once worked for such a service; enough said.) This book should prove useful to anyone using that and the other collections in either verifying or correcting those attributions.

The reviews reprinted or cited here include only those published in the United States, with two notable exceptions, both from English-language periodicals published in Mexico. Because they seem likely to give the reader difficulty in obtaining copies, I provide these reviews—Alain Locke's of *The Weary Blues* in *Palms* and Lois de Banzie's of *Tambourines to Glory* in *News*—for readers' convenience. I cite no other foreign reviews, no articles (whether published in books or periodicals), and no mere passing references.

Space limitations have prevented reprinting every word of every review. Those reviews omitted entirely tend to be nonjudgmental, repetitive of other reviews, or easy to find in many libraries. Sections omitted in reprinted reviews deal with other books not by Hughes, or repetitively quote from the book under review, or simply do not add substantively to what already has been quoted. No review has been edited so as to alter or censor its critical judgment of Hughes's work. Bibliographical information about the book's publisher and price, as well as section headings in reviews, generally have been silently excised, and typographical errors have been silently corrected.

Hughes included negative reviews along with the raves. No matter how scathing, even in the earliest scrapbook he pasted in the invectives. We can therefore conclude that these reviews do provide a representative and fairly complete representation of the responses in the U.S. print media to those books by Hughes prepared for publication by the time of his death. This book does not consider reviews of those volumes compiled or completed by others after his death on 22 May 1967. These include *Black Misery*, *Don't You Turn Back*, *Anch'io sono America*, *Good Morning Revolution*, *Langston Hughes in the Hispanic World and Haiti*, and *Arna Bontemps—Langston Hughes Letters: 1925–1967*.

The twenty-eight major books appear here in chronological order, as do the reviews within each section and the checklists of additional reviews. The appendix provides checklists (as well as a few reprints) of five of the six poetry volumes that appeared as limited editions or pamphlets, of the children's tale *Popo and Fifina*, of the five "First" books, the three "Famous" books, the nine books Hughes edited, and three of the four books he translated, as well as selected

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reviews of fourteen selected scripts by Hughes in production. (Another volume should be devoted to the complete reviews of all the scripts.) In short, my search covered seventy titles; for only two of these (*Dear Lovely Death* and the translation of Federico García Lorca's *Romancero Gitano: Gypsy Ballads*) did this search prove fruitless.

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My sixteen years' research for this book depended mightily on the kindness of strangers. The institutions and individuals who helped me locate material or, in a few instances when I could not travel to a library, verified dates or located page numbers for me constitute an amazingly large group. So great is my indebtedness, however, that I hope I do not omit anyone in thanking:

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Kansas; Lincoln (Penn.; Sophy H. Cornwell); Los Angeles Harbor (Sally Gogin); Massachusetts Amherst (J. Merriam); Massachusetts Dartmouth (Charles McNeil, Linda Zieper, Jane Booth, Lucille Fernandes, and especially Ross T. LaBaugh); Michigan (Tom Burnett); New Mexico (David Null); New Mexico State (Marie Garcia, Karen Stabler); New York University (Angela Chin); Northwestern (Dan Britz); Ohio State (Saragail Lynch); Pittsburgh; Pratt (Josephine McSweeney); Princeton (Emily Belcher, John Logan, Denise M. Shorey); Rutgers; St. Meinrad (Ind.; Doris Hanebutt); San Jose State (Rosemary Thorne); South Carolina (Eleanor M. Richardson); Southern Methodist (John Goolsby); Stanford (James M. Knox); Sul Ross State (Tex.; Eleanor Wilson); Syracuse (Marcella Stark); Tennessee at Chattanooga (E. Ray Hall); Texas at El Paso (Andy Schramm); Toledo (Kathleen J. Voigt); Tulsa; Virginia State; Wilberforce (Ohio; Jacqueline Brown); Yale (Beinecke: Donald Gallup, Patricia C. Willis, George Patterson, Karen Marinuzzi, Anne Badger).

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I was fortunate to be granted release time from one course, one semester, by

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I thank all my predecessors who have published scholarship and criticism about Hughes. Special acknowledgment must be made to Arnold Rampersad, whose monumental *Life of Langston Hughes* paved the way for whatever books and articles on Hughes follow it.

I am indebted to Carl Van Vechten for his foresight in persuading Langston Hughes to keep every scrap of paper about himself and regularly send all these items to Yale University.

Finally, I owe an enormous debt to Langston Hughes himself, who had the talent to deserve a book like this one and the wisdom to see to it Yale acquired the sort of collection that facilitated its compilation.

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