



The Short Stories

Langston Hughes , Arnold Rampersad (Introduction) , Akiba Sullivan Harper (Editor)

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The Short Stories of Langston Hughes

This collection of forty-seven stories written between 1919 and 1963--the most comprehensive available--showcases Langston Hughes's literary blossoming and the development of his personal and artistic concerns. Many of the stories assembled here have long been out of print, and others never before collected. These poignant, witty, angry, and deeply poetic stories demonstrate Hughes's uncanny gift for elucidating the most vexing questions of American race relations and human nature in general.

The Short Stories Details

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Frank says

This collection will make a fine addition to the independent reading list for my Reading and Writing Fiction class. The stories, mostly brief, have the feeling of magazine pieces from the first half of the 20th century, a sort of Guy de Maupassant formality. Whenever I would begin to think that they were merely mass market products churned out by a writer whose real talents lay in the production of other genres, however, these stories surprised me with an unexpected poignant or satirical twist. Some of them, true, are merely the fingernail parings of a literary master, but all told there are at least twenty that will be worthwhile and accessible reading experiences for high school seniors. I look forward to seeing how students respond to them.

Carl Mcdonald says

Every story makes me wish there was a full version of the short stories. Very great book. Full of variety. I actually read this book twice

Jenny Jaeckel says

This collection of remarkable short stories by the legendary Langston Hughes offers a kaleidoscope of windows into the lives of black people, and some others, in straightforward, gently poetic and finely wrought prose. Hughes is largely known for his poetry, but he was prolific in many forms. Heartbreaking, funny, hopeful, strange, and despairing, these stories will expand your soul.

Steve Comstock says

Brilliant. I've been a longtime fan of Hughes' poetry, but this is my first exposure to his fiction. He writes with a poets grasp of repetition. His stories dance with the rythm of individual dialects and straightforward prose.

Mickey says

Like any short story collection, this contains hits and misses. Looking at writings from his entire career, you can see some progression in his work. However, I think he suffers from a short-sightedness that prevents him from being exceptional. He may be one of those authors who represents a certain time and is of interest to historians but no one else. I wish he had tried for more universal themes.

Nina autajay says

At first glance, "On the Road" is an interpretation of The Biblical story of The Good Samaritan. A man walking through the snow looking for a place to stay for the night gets turned down by a pastor and then gets beat by the police after he tries to find shelter in a church. You'd think that the third person to cross his path would be the Good Samaritan. Instead, a literally cold stone Jesus walks in his direction and then they part ways. Christ replies with "You had to pull the church down to get me off the cross" This addresses the hypocrisy of the Christian Church. The church is known for a place of refuge; where you can go in time of dire need. Yet, they beat the crap out of the Sargeant when he tried to do so. Maybe he was delusional from the cold, but he got Christ off the cross. Christ on the cross represents that he died for everyone's sins, that he treated his comrades the way he wanted to be treated. Yet, Christ's people forgot his values when they had the opportunity help a brother in need. The Sargeant broke the pillars of the church and stone Jesus fell off his cross. When Jesus says that the Sargeant had to pull the church down to get him off the cross, he meant it literal as well as symbolic. Maybe Christ's people-his supposed Christian followers- did not see the error of their ways, but Christ saw what his people were doing. It took a moment of judgment for Christ to maybe finally realize that his own people did not know the values of his teachings. This may have been a delusion in itself, but it showed that if Christ was alive in the story, the real Christ would have know that his people have lost touch with the values of Christianity.

John Bohnert says

I didn't care for the first few stories. Then the writing and stories got better and better.

Jaime says

I can't believe I've come this far in life and as a reader, diving into Langston Hughes' poetry, without knowing about his short stories. Blind spots. It's a metaphor--for many things these days. And this is another book for these times/all times. I'd like to hand out copies of many of these stories, along with his poem, "I, too, sing America," to people who shout about "all lives" at Black Lives Matter protests. I'd like us to read more.

This collection is also special in bravely including some of Hughes' earliest work, in the appendix. As a writer, I'm comforted to feel the evolution of the writer's voice through these and all the stories in this collection.

Jo says

Ah-maz-ing! Truly a craftsmen with the pen. He makes you feel sadness and outrage and happiness occasionally all at the same time.

Aaron Wolfson says

A fine collection. Poetic, as you'd expect. Hughes focused on the difficult circumstances of persons of color,

dealing with poverty, discrimination, and interactions with white people.

The standout is the story of a high school girl who wins a scholarship. This is one of the best stories I've ever read. You simply have to read this. It's freely available as a PDF.

Serge says

Loved it--I had no idea about this writer until recently. The style of writing is (to me) sublime. While it is nominally about black Americans in the early-mid last century, it's really about all of us, and how most of us go through life almost blindly, with just the occasional bursts of real insight into who we are. All his stories are intensely human and rewarding. (I also suspect Toni Morrison might owe at least a bit to Langston Hughes, who like her, was way ahead of his time.)

Marc Kohlman says

Very resonant and incredibly human stories. I was assigned to read this book in a college course on Hughes work two years ago but did not have the time to. Hughes wrote with such direct and satirical insight, sensitivity and ideas on issues at the core of 20th century US society and his own experiences as an African American. Eleven select stories from this book were of particular interest to me which I will center on in this review. "Slave on the Block" relates to Hughes resentment of how African Americans were represented in a false light and how their art and music is admired but not respected. The Carraways hiring of Luther only to be displayed like an animal is an example of racist justifications during the time. This image is perpetuated and very patronizing in this story. Mattie and Luther's individualized characters are statements that African Americans, nor anyone, should be treated as property to be used for pleasure. "Cora Unashamed" is a deep, tragic and honest story on what African Americans, particularly women like Corra endured- especially those of mixed race. I was struck immensely by Corra's speeches and how liberating they are judging from their tone. Picturing Hughes himself speaking the lines makes them more metaphorical. The Colonel is such a scoundrel even though he cares for Corra and their children to an extent. He is walking a line but keeps falling off it. Bert's character I had a minimum degree of sympathy for due to his racist views and lack of responsibility. While he was socially and racially mistreated by the white people around him, Bert finally took control of his fate. Even though it cost him his life. The ending was not very positive. Corra lost both her son and husband to the corruptible influences of racism and white supremacist ideals. On the flip side, Bertha and Sallie are able to pass as white and pursue goals which free them from the 'prisons' they are confined in. Hughes gives readers a picture of inept racist performance and how African Americans must not be stagnant. "The Blues I'm Playing" leaps off from the previous opinions in "Slave on the Block". Mrs. Ellsworth's joy at seeing Ocela because of her skin color drives the blatant objectification of African Americans to the forefront. Hence Ocela's skepticism of Ellsworth and reluctance to pen up clearly represents how offensive racial stereotyping is. The blend between first and third person narratives and their shifts show how Ocela is cut off from all others, thus distinguishing herself. Hughes use of this reluctant technique illustrates the distrust that African Americans such as Ocela have for the Ellsworths who want to keep them in golden cages. Ocela's questioning at Ellsworth's racial mindset is a message for the readers to not stand for such abuse. The concluding line to the story is sarcastic where Ellsworth thinks of herself as better, when she is really blinded by her viewpoints and can only look at the stars she has made. Ocela not being one of them. "Why You Reckon" and "Spanish Blood" are stories that explore the cons on why white people wanted to hang out in Harlem plus racial stereotyping both outside and within. This is also revealed in "Big Meeting" and "One Friday Morning". Hughes uses emotion and religion to tell it like it is. African Americans in 20th century USA were seen as means of entertainment for white people- an ideal that needed

to be dispelled. "Tain't So" I found interesting by Hughes incorporation of traditional and supernatural medical methods plus contrasting views from the Northern and Southern states. The same dispute can also be seen in "Who's Passing For Who", especially with African Americans of mixed race who are able to move up the social ladder because they appear to be white. "On The Way Home" was a sad story yet uplifting toward the end as Carl wrestled with his alcoholism and running away from his family and responsibilities. "Something In Common" breaks the racial gap down in a comedic manner. Samuel Johnson and Colonel McBride are different races and clearly hate each other. Yet when it comes to their honor 'disgraced' by the bartender, they unite for mutual views however distasteful they may be. People who are long time fans of Hughes or have recently begun reading his work should definitely delve into this book.

Ally says

Beautifully poignant. Funny at times as well. I really enjoyed it but don't exactly know how to describe it.

Bruce Welton says

With simple, exact language, Hughes uncovers the black experience of the America of his day through a strand of rich and riveting tales about poverty, prejudices, patronage, religion, racial divide and loneliness as seen from a black perspective. This volume was an amazing revelation to me of the immense talent of a master storyteller and social critic at work.

Andy Oram says

These sensitive and visceral stories show how Hughes grasped the many aspects of oppression and the strange ways people deal with it. An unexpected and very humanistic twist winds up many of the stories. Among his memorable characters are a naive white boy thrown into the rough life of a ship, a man who has limited the cope of his life scope to honor a mother who is now dying, and a jealous wife who spends most of her life mourning a husband she tried to kill. Such gems make it worth reading through the few stories that are more polemical. This book spans Hughes's career with many important pieces, so you can watch his evolution from somewhat conventional sentimentality to a ribald but life-affirming cynicism. Some of his stories are less than two pages long, offering enchanting vignettes, and allowing him some innovative narrative styles such as scattered quotations from people in a crowd.
