



Langston Hughes: A Study of the Short Fiction (Twayne's Studies in Short Fiction)

Hans Ostrom

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Perhaps the single best-known and most highly regarded African-American writer of his time, Langston Hughes (1902-1967) has left a profound mark on American letters. Taking the environment of urban blacks, Hughes captured in verse and prose its joys and pains, bringing a new realism to the subject. His language, while unadorned in style, remained spirited and true to colloquial speech, and his work was among the first by a black man to gain a multi-racial and national audience. Hughes is primarily remembered for his poetry, with which he established his reputation in the 1920s. He did not even publish his first collection of short fiction, *The Ways of White Folks*, until 1934. But precisely because it appeared after he had undergone an extensive process of artistic and personal development, it possesses an unusual coherence and power. It deals unflinchingly with racial, class, and sexual issues, as does his second collection, *Laughing to Keep from Crying* (1952). In 1950 a number of satirical sketches featuring Hughes's character Jesse B. Simple began appearing in collected form. These represent a tradition distinct from his other work. Hans Ostrom examines Hughes's short fiction canon in great detail, bringing in a wealth of information on Hughes's background and times to provide a fuller understanding. He discusses events such as the Harlem Renaissance and how they relate to Hughes, as well as sensitively examining the issue of race. Within a clear and coherent organizational scheme, Ostrom adds excerpts from interviews and letters and a section on the best previous scholarship and criticism. The result is a truly useful study.

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