

Literary Migrations: Transnationalism in the Poetry of Langston Hughes

by

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The Harlem Renaissance represents a significant movement of cultural expression during the early part of the twentieth century. Individuals who wrote literary texts, performed, and created visual art associated with this movement illustrate through their migrations (whether physical or imagined through a creative construct) a kind of transnational impulse in their relationship with the rest of the world. Langston Hughes represents a figure that migrated physically as well as creatively in his life and literary outputs. As one of the most central figures of the twentieth century, Langston Hughes created poetic texts which highlighted the importance of history, heritage, and identity in relationship to African American cultural expression. His poetry calls attention to the ways in which many African American writers illustrate the connection between the United States and other parts of the world in their writing. For Langston Hughes, his employment of Africa as an important site in his poetry illustrates the connection of Hughes with transnationalism. In poems such as "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" and "Negro" Langston Hughes presents numerous geographical spaces and places to show a connection between history, heritage, and identity and a merging and collapsing of boundaries. He takes the reader on a type of migration and through word choice he explores the significance of Africa to African Americans and by extension to Americans in

general. The literary migration he employs in these poems illustrates a transnational impulse in his poetry, which still has meaning and resonance today.