

The Poems: 1951-1967 (Collected Works of Langston Hughes, Vol 3)

Langston Hughes

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Volume 3 collects the poems of the last period of Hughes's life. Montage of a Dream Deferred (1951) brilliantly fused the modernist dissonances of bebop jazz with his perception of Harlem life as both a triumph of hope and a deepening crisis ("What happens to a dream deferred?"). In the tumultuous following years, he refused to relinquish the mantle of the poet, as may be seen in his inspired last two books of verse, Ask Your Mama (1961) and The Panther and the Lash (1967). The former demonstrates Hughes's continuing alertness to the significance of black music as a guide to American reality; here, avant-garde jazz rhythms and allusions fueled an intensity of language that predicted the cultural upheavals of the sixties and seventies. Hughes's last volume, combining old and new poems, emphasized the struggle for civil rights in the face of reactionary defiance, on the one hand, and the volatility of Black Power, on the other. Vigorous and versatile to the end, Hughes concluded his career as he had begun it: a master poet dedicated to observing and celebrating African American culture in its full complexity.

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