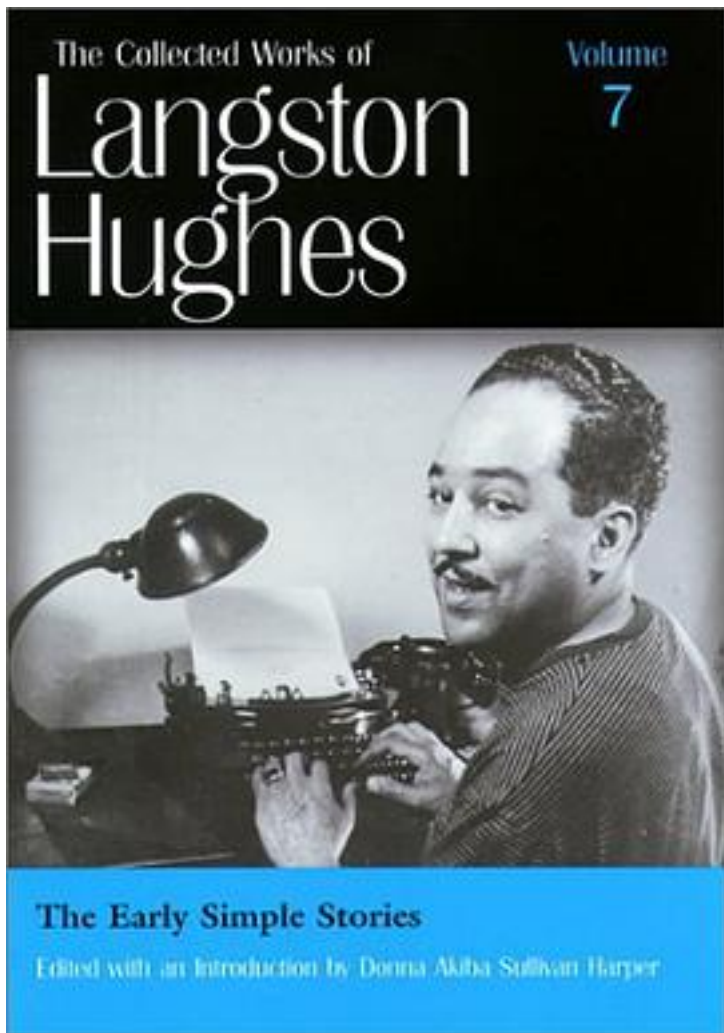


The Collected Works of Langston Hughes



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出版者:Univ of Missouri Pr

出版时间:2004-4

装帧:HRD

isbn:9780826214775

Although Langston Hughes had a lifelong engagement in theater and other

performance arts, his work in this area is the least known of his rich and complex contributions to African American expressive culture. This volume focuses on Hughes's plays after 1942, along with all of his other work written for performance, including operas, musicals, radio plays, ballet libretti, and song lyrics, all of which demonstrate his strong determination to inject an African American presence into a range of cultural forms. In 1943, Hughes brought into being what would become his most famous character, Jesse B. Semple--not for the stage, but for a newspaper column he would write for the Chicago Defender for fifteen years and then for the New York Post until 1965. Hughes revised and collected the stories into four books, and following the success of his second collection, Simple Takes a Wife, composed a play of the same name, which he later turned into the musical Simply Heavenly. Although well known, this work was atypical of Hughes's interests during the postwar period. It was African American music that engaged him, particularly gospel music, which was, in the 1950s, acquiring significant crossover success. Aside from a few educational or occasional pieces, virtually all of Hughes's stage writing after 1942 incorporated music in some form. He wrote five complete operas, as well as musicals, gospel plays, several cantatas, two very successful Broadway productions, and the more than thirty plays that he provided to community theaters and collegiate, church, and amateur groups. It was inevitable that Hughes, the most prolific of African American playwrights at that time, would seek to employ the musical genre that dominated Broadway during the 1940s and 1950s to tell his own kind of stories. Hughes's intense engagement with theater and other performance arts lasted more than thirty-five years. In every genre he attempted, Hughes left unforgettable and inspiring work, giving rise to the range and richness of contemporary African American theatrical achievement.

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