

STERLING BROWN &amp; LANGSTON HUGHES

Sterling Brown &  
Langston Hughes

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

Library of Congress Catalogue Card No. R 59-628  
Library of Congress Catalogue Card No. R 59-652© 1967 FOLKWAYS RECORDS & SERVICE Corp.,  
701 Seventh Ave., New York City  
Distributed by Folkways/Scholastic Records,  
906 Sylvan Ave., Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 07632

FOLKWAYS FL 9790

STERLING BROWN reads his: Break of Day, Sharecropper, Slim in Hell,  
Old Lem, Old King Cotton, Putting on Dog.

LANGSTON HUGHES reads from his book "Simple Speaks his Mind":  
Feet Live their Own Lives, Simple Prays a Prayer, Wooing the Muse,  
Landladies.



STERLING BROWN reads his; Break of Day, Sharecropper, Slim in Hell,  
Old Lem, Old King Cotton, Putting on Dog.

LANGSTON HUGHES reads from his book "Simple Speaks his Mind":  
Feet Live their Own Lives, Simple Prays a Prayer, Wooing the Muse,  
Landladies.

Introduction by Arna Bontemps

As poets, Langston Hughes and Sterling A. Brown have much in common. They are also strikingly different. Together they offer as exciting a combination as can be found in the contemporary folk idiom.

Both Hughes and Brown are identified with what James Weldon Johnson once called the "racy, living speech of the Negro." For raw material both have drawn upon the experiences and impulses which in other times brought forth spirituals, blues, Negro folk epics and ballads such as "John Henry" and "Stagolee." They have written poems which are the conscious counterparts of these spontaneous folk expressions, and to this extent they are as much alike as two peas in a pod. But here the similarity ends.

It is not necessary to compare the two styles when the poems themselves are available, but some acquaintance with the backgrounds of the two men is helpful. Sterling A. Brown was born in Washington, D. C., in 1901. He attended school there and later went to Williams College and Harvard. After graduation he began at Virginia Seminary a teaching career which soon shifted to Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, and to Lincoln in Missouri. Then began his long and distinguished association with Howard University in Washington, D. C., an association which though it continues to the present, has at times been interrupted to enable him to take advantage of Guggenheim Fellowships and visiting professorships at Vassar College, the University of Minnesota and the New School in New York. Brown served





as editor on Negro affairs for the Federal Writers' Project and was a staff member of the now famous Carnegie-Myrdal Study of the Negro. His published books include **SOUTHERN ROAD**, 1932, a volume of poetry; **THE NEGRO IN AMERICAN FICTION**, 1938; and **NEGRO POETRY AND DRAMA**, 1938. He was the senior editor of **NEGRO CARAVAN**, 1941.

Langston Hughes, on the other hand, was born in Joplin, Missouri, in 1902. He attended public schools in Lawrence, Kansas, but had moved with his mother to Cleveland by the time he was ready for high school. At Central High he was class poet and editor of the yearbook. A year in Mexico with his father followed and one at Columbia University on his own before Hughes decided to chuck it all and go to sea. Voyages along the African coast and to the ports of Europe took the place of studies and textbooks for the next two years, and in these years, on these voyages, many of the poems by which he first became widely known were written.

He returned to college eventually, of course, graduating from Lincoln University in Pennsylvania in 1929, and has pursued a literary career ever since. His first book of poems was **THE WEARY BLUES**, 1926. His first book of prose, **NOT WITHOUT LAUGHTER**, a novel, appeared in 1930. Many others have followed in each field, but where Brown's creative impulses have expanded to include criticism and college teaching, Hughes' have tended to spill over into the entertainment field. He has written librettos for such operas as **TROUBLED ISLAND** and lyrics for Broadway shows such as the musical version of **STREET SCENE**. Along the way he has had his share of literary approbation, however, Guggenheim and Rosenwald Fellowships, grants from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, honorary degrees. His songs are numerous.

Given these backgrounds, with the difference of mood and tempo which they connote, it is easier to understand James Weldon Johnson's observation that Brown "has made more than mere transcriptions of folk poetry.... he has deepened its meanings and multiplied its implications... without diluting its primitive frankness and raciness, truly re-expressed it with artistry and magnified power." Likewise understandable is Carl Van Vechten's comment on the early poems of Hughes which said, "His cabaret songs throb with the true

jazz rhythm; his sea-pieces ache with a calm, melancholy lyricism... Always, however, his stanzas are subjective, personal."

Where one has used the folk material objectively, the other has employed it subjectively. But certainly both have "multiplied the meanings and implications" of folk poetry, as their readings clearly show.

