

Cross

By Langston Hughes

1926

My old man's a white old man
And my old mother's black.
If ever I cursed my white old man
I take my curses back.

If ever I cursed my black old mother
And wished she were in hell,
I'm sorry for that evil wish
And now I wish her well.

**My old man died in a fine big house.
My ma died in a shack.
I wonder where I'm gonna die,
Being neither white nor black?**

Summary

The narrator of the poem is a young mulatto, expressing his frustration at being both black and white but never fully belonging to either of the two races. He is not accepted by blacks because he is half white, and he is shunned by whites because he is half black. The historical significance of this is that, during the 1920s (in the U.S.), the cultural and racial segregation of African Americans and Caucasians were very defined and apparent. As such, the narrator is stuck in a sort of purgatory/gray area/limbo, for he is deprived of the chance to be immersed in either race due to racial pride. Thus, he is left in a state of confusion, suffering an identity crisis. He has no one with which he can identify.

As the narrator matures, he realizes that he can't blame or hate his parents for who he is. It doesn't make any sense. At the end of the day, he'll still be who he is, so why hate?

The last stanza emphasizes the poverty of the Blacks versus the wealth of the Whites during this time period. For, the narrator says that his father died in a big house while his mother died in a shack. He still doesn't know how to categorize himself in terms of identity, but he accepts the issue as it is. Once he decides which path to lead--life as a black man or life as a white man--then he'll know where he'll die.

Analysis:

Connotation

Connotation, in literary terms, describes the association that are attached to certain words. For example, the word "gun" has a negative connotation. Instead of associating guns with a positive thing like "protection," most people associate the word "gun" with death, blood, murder, etc. Connotation is what separates two identical words. So, we all know that "house" and "home" are both places of dwelling and their definitions are almost entirely identical. However, what separates the two words are their meanings. When you say "house," it is impersonal and

objective, but when you say "home," we associate things like family, warmth, safety, with it. Get it?

In "Cross," the word *cross* has many connotations. It can mean practically anything. Although it is not directly written in the poem, the word encompasses the entire essence of the poem.

The young narrator of the poem is:

-multiracial, multicultural, mulatto, **cross**-breed.

-His hybridity is a burden--a **cross to bear**. This brings about the image of the crucifix, making the narrator or subject of the poem somewhat of a Jesus figure. For, like Jesus, he suffers from constant persecution.

-He is at a **cross-roads**. Which world does he fit into: white or black?

-He **makes a crossover** from his previous emotions. At first, the narrator admits that he was angry or **cross** at both of his parents, but, he later lets go of that hatred and forgives them both.

Who is the Poem Really About?

Some critics argue that the poem is about Mr. Hughes's ethnic roots, reflecting the life of African Americans during the 1920s. The stark poverty of the black population in comparison to the white community showcases the intensity of the racial tensions of the time as well as the injustice of the persecution of blacks.

On the other hand, some literary scholars insist that the poem may be a commentary of the slavery and the long lasting effects that it may have on future generations. As we well know, white slave owners often took advantage of their black female slaves, resulting in mulatto children. Thus, the narrator could easily be the child of a former slave.

Cross Poem Analysis

Thesis: Langston Hughes reflects the continuous struggling relationship between White and Black individuals through the connotation in the poem *Cross*. The connotation in the title itself resembles two connected ideas that share a middle ground, which can be physically seen by the image of a cross, where Hughes reflects upon his mother and his father, and ultimately questioning where he will eventually die.

- A. Langston Hughes purposely titles this poem *Cross* to symbolize a connection between his mother and his father, since both were of different racial backgrounds based on the poem.
 1. Hughes includes the lines "My old man's a white old man / And my old mother's black" (1-2) to provide an introduction regarding his parents. The prime issue that immediately arises from the start of the poem is how Hughes is able to connote both "white old man" and "mother's black" to refer to the slavery that was still present during the parents' lifetime. This contrast provokes some sort of question that will be introduced in the end of the poem.
- B. The connotation and the structure of the poem involuntarily tells a story, yet the poet's main goal is to engage the readers in a serious question regarding the poet's racial status compared to his parents', thus relating back to the connecting ideas (mother and father) that meet on a common ground (the final line in the poem).
 1. Hughes introduces the poem in a quatrain that describes both his mother's and father's races, and states that if he had ever "cursed" (line 3) his man, he sincerely apologizes for it. Hughes repeats this concept with his mother, referring to her as "my black old mother" (5). In the second stanza, Hughes connects the connotation of "hell" (6) and "evil" (7) to prove that evilness associates with hell. Hughes incorporates an antithesis between the first two stanzas

to contrast the racial background between the mother and the father, yet provides a similarity between the parents by introducing a negative emotion through the connotation of “curses” and “evil”. In the last stanza, Hughes incorporates synecdoche to represent the economic status of his parents. He refers to his mother by describing that she “died in a shack” (10) while his father “died in a fine big house” (9). The “fine big house” is a synecdoche that represents security, protection, and most importantly a high status in society. The “shack” is another synecdoche that represents the mother’s poor economic status, lack of protection, and lack of security based on her color. The point Hughes makes in this poem is that he wants the readers to critically engage in his background, and more importantly come to a conclusion regarding what he technically falls under based on his last question. He states: “I wonder where I’m gonna die, / Being neither white nor black?” (11-12). The specific diction he uses could represent the education white and black people received in the era of slavery, where white individuals received a better education than black people. The denotation in “gonna” resembles a slang word for “going”, which could represent the poor education he received as a child. The denotation in “Being neither white nor black?” shows a better understanding of grammatical concepts to express his thoughts, which could represent his somewhat advanced education he could have received. In general, Hughes includes contrast, antithesis, and synecdoche to identify the different backgrounds he came from and offers a question at the end of the poem to technically stump his audience in knowing the perfect solution to his question, thus causing a sense of confusion by the end of the poem. By forming his poem to fit the symbolism of a cross, he manages to engage the audience in introducing them to the parents, which represent the two connecting points to the middle of the cross, where he ultimately ends the poem with the fairly difficult question.

This poem is clearly about the struggles between Batman and Two-Face. Batman is good while Two-Face is bad. However Two-Face also represents what Batman could've turned into had he not made the right decisions. The threat of succumbing to the evil thoughts in his own mind are at a constant war with his will. Two-Face even physically shows the struggles between Luke and Darth Vader and how that battle itself is symbolic of the Light Side and Dark Side. Moreover, Terminator and Rambo show the struggles between man and machine skdjgf
wrkj.gnbfhjkmfdBLAR

Cross:

This poem isn't about Langston Hughes at all. It talks about slavery, and a time period that African Americans didn't have a say in any aspect of life at all. The speaker of this poem isn't happy about his heritage either. The speaker is angry and confused, because he identifies himself as being a nobody. By the tone of the poem, I'd say that he was much closer to his mother than his father, because when

he said \"I'd take my curses back\" it almost sounded like he was saying it out of fear instead of respect. However when he said rude things to his mother, it almost seems as though he didn't mean what he said, but at the same time he knew that his mother still loved him and would never leave him.

| Posted on 2012-03-31 | by a guest

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This poem is about his ethnic roots. At that time period Caucasians had all the rights and money while African Americans had nothing. That is why his mom died where she did and his father died where he died. He doesn't know where he will end up because he's mixed (biracial) not one race fully. So that is where his confusion is he wonders how he will end up wealthy, rich or poor.

| Posted on 2011-10-25 | by a guest

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The poem \"Cross\" by Langston Hughes is about the speaker's life. However, it is not about Hughes himself but could also reflect to his own life. Hughes made this poem sound like the speaker sometimes regretted the things he/she has ever said to his/her parents when they were alive. Even though he/she always took it back whenever he/she cursed or has said something that might have offended his/her parents, he always felt terrible that he/she ever said it to them now that they are no longer with him/her. So, moral of the story I guess is to always think first before you speak.

| Posted on 2011-06-12 | by a guest

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| Posted on 2011-06-12 | by a guest

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For the record, Hughes is the poet but not the speaker. Both Hughes' parents were African American. He's just relating to someone in that scenario.

| Posted on 2011-05-31 | by a guest

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The speaker in the poem talks about a regretful man who is despondent about sinister aims towards his/her parents. That is to say his parents have different races. And the speaker wishes them well wherever they are such as being in hell. Then, he says that when he hexes them it takes him back. Eventually he comes to a conclusion that everyone dies and it does not matter how he is, black or white.

written by: Iman-T

| Posted on 2011-05-12 | by a guest

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In this poem, Langston Hughes reflected the idea of slavery in America that happened a long time ago. Langston shows this by comparing his mother and his father. Both parents have different races and different treatments by others.

| Posted on 2011-02-15 | by a guest

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Evidently, Langston Hughes married an Asian woman and had white kids. How odd...

| Posted on 2011-01-24 | by a guest

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This poem is clearly about the struggles between Batman and Two-Face. Batman is good while Two-Face is bad. However Two-Face also represents what Batman could've turned into had he not made the right decisions. The threat of succumbing to the evil thoughts in his own mind are at a constant war with his will. Two-Face even physically shows the struggles between Luke and Darth Vader and how that battle itself is symbolic of the Light Side and Dark Side. Moreover, Terminator and Rambo show the struggles between man and machine skdjgf wrkj.gnbfhjkmfdBLARG!

| Posted on 2010-11-09 | by a guest

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I think this poem had a lot of meaning. Hughes is confused about his race but I believe he is going to take it as it comes. As life goes on he will fill in the blanks of his life and heritage