

# Four

## Lincoln University

# Poets



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THE A. B. KOGER, COLLECTION

**Four**  
**Lincoln University Poets**

Foreword by  
*President* **WILLIAM HALLOCK JOHNSON**

**WARING CUNEY**  
**WILLIAM ALLYN HILL**  
**EDWARD SILVERA**  
**LANGSTON HUGHES**

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## FOREWORD

THE criticism has often been made that while America has produced a form of government that has been widely copied by other nations and a type of industrial civilization that has been the admiration and envy of other peoples, yet in the realm of art we have been content to copy European models.

This criticism has been in a measure removed by the creation upon our western shores of two new and original forms of musical expression, both the work of a group of Americans of African descent and both now enjoying a world wide popularity. The so-called plantation melodies or "spirituals," growing out of the experiences of slavery days, with their mingling of beauty and pathos, of despondency and triumphant hope have been a distinct contribution to the religious lyrics of the world. They have repeated the lesson of the *Psalms of David*, that religious faith, while beginning its song on the minor key of despondence and complaint, can rise upon the wings of hope and wing itself and sing itself up to God. As James Weldon Johnson recently said of the "spirituals" in an address in Lincoln University chapel, "these songs of sorrow, love, faith and hope are the most precious and most wonderful contribution which the Negro has made to the art of America and the world."

On the lighter side and expressing rather a spirit of reckless jollity and irresponsible mirth, has been the development of jazz music which has achieved a world popularity and has given its name to what, not wholly in compliment, has been called the jazz age.

In the field of poetry the pioneer has been Paul Laurence Dunbar, who has justified his existence as a poet, to use the words of Rabindranath Tagore, by expressing in his lyrics of lowly life "that which is universal in the heart of the unique." In his dialect poems, he has thrown the tender light of romance and humor over the life of his people, and has made the world laugh at the rollicking fun of "The Party," thrill to the music "When Malindy Sings," and weep over the description of "Life:"

*A pint of joy to a peck of trouble,  
And never a laugh but the moans come double;  
And that is life!*

The aim of the poet and the artist is to transcend the limits of finite existence. It is his high office and privilege to show to us in common objects and common experiences a beauty which we cannot see with unanointed eyes. The artist can create for himself and for those who see or read his works an ideal world of beauty, providing for us a means of escape from the shackles of the commonplace and opening vistas into a region even beyond the limits of time and space.

A group of undergraduates on the Lincoln University campus have shown by their activity in the realm of creative imagination that intellectual interest is not confined to the routine of the classroom, and that undergraduate enthusiasm is not monopolized by athletics and campus politics. Among those who have been diligent in cultivating the Muse have been the four young men, samples of whose work in poetry are here reproduced. The leader of these has been Langston Hughes, '29, winner of the Bynner Prize for undergraduate poetry in 1926, and recently spoken of by the *Berliner Tageblatt* as the leading poet of his race in America. The others are William Allyn Hill, '29, whose father and three older brothers graduated before him in Lincoln University; Edward Silvera, '28, now a medical student; and Waring Cuney, ex-'27, who left college to devote himself to the study of music.

The institution that has trained them and sent them forth has reason to be proud of the younger school of Lincoln poets. Their work as shown in the following pages, all of it the product of undergraduate days, has already gained wide appreciation, and gives promise that with a more mature technique, with a fuller mastery of their instrument, and with the insight and experience that come with the years, they will make a contribution even more significant to the artistic and literary life of their country, and will win in larger measure both for themselves and the group they represent the respect and recognition of the world.

WILLIAM HALLOCK JOHNSON.

Lincoln University,  
Pennsylvania.

The poems of Langston Hughes are used herewith by special arrangement with and permission of his publishers, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York City. Thanks are due to the editors of *Opportunity* and *The Crisis* and the publishers of the anthology, *Caroling Dusk*, Harper and Brothers, for permission to use certain of the poems of Waring Cuney and Edward Silvera.

*Four*

## CRUCIFIXION

**I** THINK I see Him there  
With a stern dream on His face.

I see Him there—

Wishing they would hurry  
The last nail in place.

And I wonder, had I been there,  
Would I have doubted, too.

Or would the dream have told me,  
What this man speaks is true.

—WARING CUNEY.

## THE RADICAL

**M**EN never know  
What they are doing.  
They always make a muddle  
Of their affairs.  
They always tie their affairs  
Into a knot  
They cannot untie.  
Then I come in  
Uninvited.  
They do not ask me in;  
I am the radical,  
The bomb thrower,  
I untie the knot  
That they have made,  
And they never thank me.

—WARING CUNEY.

## THRENODY

**O**NLY quiet death  
Brings relief  
From the wearisome  
Interchange  
Of hope and grief.  
O body,  
(Credulous heart  
And dream torn head)  
What will wisdom be  
Or folly—  
When you lie dead?  
Life-beaten body  
Bruised and sore—  
Neither hunger nor satiety  
Are known beyond death's door.

—WARING CUNNEY.

## FORGETTING

**N**OT tomorrow  
Or the day after . . .  
Although I have stemmed  
The flow of tears  
With careless laughter,  
Remembrance reminds me:  
The spot in my heart  
Where love's first flower  
Grew . . . is barren now  
Because of you.

—WARING CUNNEY

## NO IMAGES

**S**HE does not know  
Her beauty,  
She thinks her brown body  
Has no glory.

If she could dance  
Naked,  
Under palm trees  
And see her image in the river  
She would know.

But there are no palm trees  
On the street,  
And dish water gives back no images.

—WARING CUNEX.

## FINIS

**N**ow that our love has drifted  
To a quiet close,  
Leaving the empty ache  
That always follows when beauty goes;  
Now that you and I,  
Who stood tip-toe on earth  
To touch our fingers to the sky,  
Have turned away  
To allow our little love to die—  
Go dear, seek again the magic touch.  
But if you are wise,  
As I shall be wise,  
You will not again  
Love over much.

—WARING CUNEX.

## NIGHT WALKS DOWN THE MOUNTAIN

NIGHT walks down the mountain,  
Treads upon the meades,  
Swings an orange lantern,  
Wears the stars as beads.

Quietly she makes her bed  
Just outside my door—  
Then spreads a dewy carpet  
On earth—which is her floor.

She lays her head on daisies,  
Is fanned by gentle breeze,  
Her lullaby is softly sung  
By the swaying trees.

She rises in the morning  
And, dancing mad and high,  
Pulls in all the broken dreams  
That drift across the sky.

She breaks her string of star beads  
And places every one  
In the eyes of babies.  
Just before the sun

Creeps up o'er the hilltops  
In the far, far east—  
She drinks a draught of dawn-wine  
And has an early feast.

Then Night walks down the valley.  
Slowly, far away—  
I see her take her lantern  
And hand it on to day!

—WILLIAM ALLYN HILL.



## LOVE IS NOT YET SPENT

**L**OVE is not yet spent  
Like a well in a summer drought——  
Or a candle—  
Burned from dawn till night.

Love is not yet weary—  
Like an old brown slave  
Treading loam in the sun,  
Or a barge toter—  
Pulling vigorously—along  
A green river.

Love is not yet gone—  
Like my last breath  
Breathed into the night,  
Or your last words——  
That hurt as they fled.

Love is not yet dead—  
Like a swallow—swept from the sky.

Rather it is like a tree  
Passing through winter.

—WILLIAM ALLYN HILL.

## COMPREHENSION

**S**HE knew not why  
She sighed or wept  
Nor why her heart  
Throbbled so,—  
Till Cupid laughed  
And let her see  
His quiver and  
His bow.

—WILLIAM ALLYN HILL.

## FUGITIVE SERFS

DUSK——

A silver thread thrown o'er some distant hill  
Where roam innumerable spotted herds.

Dusk——

Heavy,—with fragrant perfume—  
Of earth—flowers—roses of June.  
We——alone——alone . . .  
Wrapped in a shawl o' amber sun-rays,  
Lulled by the thrumming o' distant cars—  
Rest,—weary——weary.

Down where willows dip  
Green-jade fingers—lady-like—  
Coolly—in silver-blue pools,  
Way down, where the red road melts into the water—  
And green sea-weed sways in the breeze—  
Rest,—weary——weary.

Tired o' the day-song,  
The brightness and glamor of rising—  
Working—lagging and shirking.  
Tired,—our prayer-hands in attitude God-like,  
Despising our bodies . . . divining our souls.

Dusk——

Visions of past days  
Once thought of as future.  
Savory then,—now unpleasant their view.  
Still, to perfect them, we hope . . .  
Completing the old—beginning the new.

Dusk——

The warmth of bodies that hunger,  
Wary of touch,  
Known—unknown—desired,  
Urged by throbs of a tom-tom, a heart beat,—a blood  
call,——  
Yielding in ecstasy life's gifts on a pyre.

Dusk——

And the warmth of an inner fire.

—WILLIAM ALLYN HILL.

## ON THE DEATH OF A CHILD

**Y**ou came like the dawn  
With no voice  
To proclaim your calm birth  
Save the song of the lark;  
And when shadows foretold  
That the quick day was done,  
Your little white shroud  
Had already been spun,  
So you stole away in the dark.

—EDWARD SILVERA.

## SONG TO A DARK GIRL

**Y**OUR eyes are bold  
Like all the stars  
That blaze in jungle skies.  
Your lips are sweet  
Like jungle fruit  
That no one sells or buys.

Your breasts are warm  
Like tropic noons,  
Like noons of jungle days,  
Your voice sounds strange  
Like all the winds  
That sing wild jungle lays.

In your embrace  
There's strength and joy—  
And God has given thee  
A flame to fire thy soul  
And burn  
Within incessantly.

—EDWARD SILVERA.

## TO LINCOLN AT GRADUATION

**Y**OUR sunsets  
Were a red gold voice  
Singing a sad  
*Amen,*  
And the gray cloud streak  
Over Oxford way  
Was a finger  
Writing  
*The end.*

—EDWARD SILVERA.

## YOU

**Y**ou are  
The clash of symbols  
In an empty temple.  
You are  
The pointed glimmer  
Of a silver arrow.  
You are  
The quick cool death  
Of a jungle's calm.  
You are  
The rippled fragrance of lilies  
In a pond of shattered crystal.  
You are  
The crimson pain  
Of blood on fire.  
These things you are—  
And mine is the blood on fire.  
You are the clash of symbols  
And I—  
An empty temple  
A crystal pond  
A jungle calm.

—EDWARD SILVERA.

## THE NEGRO SPEAKS OF RIVERS

**I**'VE known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than  
the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.  
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.  
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.  
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln  
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy  
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:  
Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

—LANGSTON HUGHES.

## BEING WALKERS WITH THE DAWN

**B**EING walkers with the dawn and morning,  
Walkers with the sun and morning,  
We are not afraid of night,  
Nor days of gloom,  
Nor darkness—  
Being walkers with the sun and morning.

—LANGSTON HUGHES.

## FEET O' JESUS

**A**T de feet o' Jesus,  
Sorrow like a sea.  
Lordy, let yo' mercy  
Come driftin' down on me.

At de feet o' Jesus,  
At yo' feet I stand.  
O, ma little Jesus,  
Please reach out yo' hand.

—LANGSTON HUGHES.

## CROSS

**M**Y 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?

—LANGSTON HUGHES.

## YOUTH

**W**E HAVE tomorrow  
Bright before us  
Like a flame.

Yesterday  
A night-gone thing,  
A sun-down name.

And dawn-today  
Broad arch above the road we came.

We march.

—LANGSTON HUGHES.

## MOTHER TO SON

**W**ELL, son, I'll tell you:  
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.  
It's had tacks in it,  
And splinters,  
And boards torn up,  
And places with no carpet on the floor—  
Bare.  
But all the time  
I'se been a-climbin' on,  
And reachin' landin's,  
And turnin' corners,  
And sometimes goin' in the dark  
Where there ain't been no light.  
So boy, don't you turn back.  
Don't you set down on the steps  
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.  
Don't you fall now—  
For I'se still goin', honey,  
I'se still climbin'  
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

—LANGSTON HUGHES.

## Notes on the Writers

**W**ARING CUNEY, whose home is in Washington, did not complete his course at Lincoln University, but left at the end of his sophomore year to study music in Boston. His poems have appeared in *Opportunity*, *Palms*, *Caroling Dusk*, and the German anthology of Negro verse, *Afrika Singt*.

**W**ILLIAM ALLYN HILL, '29, of Frederick County, Maryland, is the last of four brothers to be graduated from Lincoln University, representing the third generation of his family at that institution. The poem *Fugitive Serfs* won the Phi Lambda Sigma Literary Prize for 1929 at the University and was later published in *Opportunity*. Mr. Hill is at present a student of singing, in Boston.

**E**DWARD SILVERA, '28, is now in the department of medicine at Howard University. He was Colored Junior Tennis Champion for the State of New Jersey in 1923-24 and a member of the varsity basketball squad at college. His home is in Orange, New Jersey. His poems have appeared in *The Crisis*, *Opportunity* and *Caroling Dusk*.

**L**ANGSTON HUGHES, '29, is the author of two books of verse, *The Weary Blues* and *Fine Clothes to the Jew*. Before coming to Lincoln, he worked as a seaman to the West Coast of Africa, Holland and the Mediterranean. He is now living in the country near New York City, at work on a novel.