

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

THE A. B. KOGER, COLLECTION

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 CUNNEY.

THE RADICAL

MEN 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 CUNNEY.

THRENODY

ONLY 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

NOT 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

SHE 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 CUNNEY.

FINIS

Now 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 CUNNEY.

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

LOVE 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

SHE 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

YOU 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

YOUR 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

YOUR 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

You 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

BEING 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

AT 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

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?

—LANGSTON HUGHES.

YOUTH

WE 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

WELL, 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

WARING 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*.

WILLIAM 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.

EDWARD 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*.

LANGSTON 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.