

Kwanzaa Poetry

We Wear the Mask

by Paul Laurence Dunbar

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,--
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be otherwise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
We wear the mask!



As I Grew Older

by Langston Hughes

It was a long time ago.
I have almost forgotten my dream.
But it was there then,
In front of me,
Bright like a sun--
My dream.
And then the wall
rose, Rose slowly,
Slowly,
Between me and my dream.
Rose until it touched the sky--
The wall.
Shadow.
I am black.
I lie down in the shadow.
No longer the light of my dream before
me, Above me.
Only the thick wall.
Only the shadow.
My hands!
My dark hands!
Break through the wall!
Find my dream!
Help me to shatter this darkness,
To smash this night,
To break this shadow
Into a thousand lights of sun,
Into a thousand whirling dreams
Of sun!



A New Song

by Langston Hughes

I speak in the name of the black millions
Awakening to action.
Let all others keep silent a moment
I have this word to bring,
This thing to say, This
song to sing: Bitter was
the day When I bowed
my back Beneath the
slaver's whip.



That day is past.
Bitter was the day
When I saw my children unschooled,
My young men without a voice in the world,
My women taken as the body-toys
Of a thieving people.
That day is past.
Bitter was the day, I say,
When the lyncher's rope
Hung about my neck,
And the fire scorched my feet,
And the oppressors had no pity,
And only in the sorrow songs
Relief was found.
That day is past.
I know full well now
Only my own hands,
Dark as the earth,
Can make my earth-dark body free.
O thieves, exploiters, killers,
No longer shall you say
With arrogant eyes and scornful lips:
"You are my servant,
Black man-
I, the free!"

That day is past-
For now,
In many mouths-
Dark mouths where red tongues burn
And white teeth gleam-
New words are formed,
Bitter
With the past
But sweet
With the dream.
Tense,
Unyielding,
Strong and sure,
They sweep the earth-
Revolt! Arise!
The Black
And White World
Shall be one!
The Worker's World!
The past is done!
A new dream flames
Against the
Sun!

Sympathy

by Paul Laurence Dunbar

I know what the caged bird feels, alas! When
the sun is bright on the upland slopes;
When the wind stirs soft through the springing
grass, And the river flows like a stream of glass;
When the first bird sings and the first bud opes,
And the faint perfume from its chalice steals--
I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wing
Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
For he must fly back to his perch and cling
When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;
And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
And they pulse again with a keener sting--
I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,--
When he beats his bars and he would be free;
It is not a carol of joy or glee,
But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings--
I know why the caged bird sings!



For A Lady I Know

by Countee Cullen



She even thinks that up in heaven
Her class lies late and snores

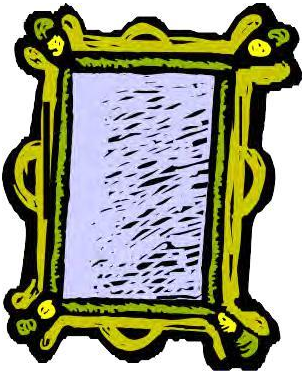
While poor black cherubs rise at
seven To do celestial chores.

Lolotte, Who Attires My Hair

by Jessie Redmon Fauset

Lolotte, who attires my hair,

Lost her lover. Lolotte weeps;
Trails her hand before her eyes;
Hangs her head and mopes and sighs,
Mutters of the pangs of hell.
Fills the circumambient air
With her plaints and her despair.
Looks at me:
'May you never know, Mam'selle
Love's harsh cruelty.'



On Being Brought from Africa to America Phillis Wheatley

'Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan
land, Tought me benighted soul to understand
That there's a God, that there's a Saviour too:
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
"Their colour is a diabolic die."
Remember, Christians, Negros, black Cain,
May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.

To S.M., A Young African Painter, on Seeing His Works
Phillis Wheatley

TO show the lab'ring bosom's deep intent,
And thought in living characters to paint,
When first thy pencil did those beauties give,
And breathing figures learnt from thee to live,
How did those prospects give my soul delight,
A new creation rushing on my sight!
Still, wondrous youth! each noble path pursue;
On deathless glories fix thine ardent view:
Still may the painter's and the poet's fire,
To aid thy pencil and thy verse conspire!
And may the charms of each seraphic theme
Conduct thy footsteps to immortal fame!
High to the blissful wonders of the skies
Elate thy soul, and raise thy wishful eyes.
Thrice happy, when exalted to survey
That splendid city, crowned with endless day,
Whose twice six gates on radiant hinges ring:
Celestial Salem blooms in endless spring.
Calm and serene thy moments glide along,
And may the muse inspire each future song!
Still, with the sweets of contemplation blessed,
May peace with balmy wings your soul invest!
But when these shades of time are chased away,
And darkness ends in everlasting day,
On what seraphic pinions shall we move,
And view the landscapes in the realms above!



There shall thy tongue in heavenly murmurs flow,
And there my muse with heavenly transport glow;
No more to tell of Damon's tender sighs,
Or rising radiance of Aurora's eyes;
For nobler themes demand a nobler strain,
And purer language on the ethereal plain.
Cease, gentle Muse! the solemn gloom of night
Now seals the fair creation from my sight.

Lines on the Death of John Quincy Adams

By James Monroe Whitfield

THE great, the good, the just, the true,
Has yielded up his latest breath;
The noblest man our country knew,
Bows to the ghastly monster, Death;
The son of one whose deathless name
Stands first on history's brightest page;
The highest on the list of fame
As statesman, patriot, and sage.
In early youth he learned to prize

The freedom which his father won;
The mantle of the patriot sire
Descended on his mightier son.
Science her deepest hidden lore
Beneath his potent touch revealed;
Philosophy's abundant store,
Alike his mighty mind could wield.
The brilliant page of poetry
Received additions from his pen,
Of holy truth and purity,
And thoughts which rouse the souls of men,
Eloquence did his heart inspire,
And from his lips in glory blazed,
Till nations caught the glowing fire,
And senates trembled as they praised.
While all the recreant of the land
To slavery's idol bowed the knee-
A fawning, sycophantic band,
Fit tools of petty tyranny-
He stood amid the recreant throng,
The chosen champion of the free,
And battled fearlessly and long
For justice, right, and liberty.
What though grim Death has sealed his doom
Who faithful proved to God and us;
And slavery, o'er the patriot's tomb
Exulting pours its deadliest curse?
Among the virtuous and free
His memory will ever live;
Champion of right and liberty,
The blessings, truth and virtue give.

