

Harlem Renaissance Poetry Selections

American Literature

Name: _____

Any Human to Another

BY COUNTEE CULLEN

The ills I sorrow at
Not me alone
Like and arrow,
Pierce to the marrow,
Through the fat
And past the bone.

Your grief and mine
Must intertwine
Like sea and river,
Be fused and mingle,
Diverse yet single,
Forever and forever.

Let no man be so proud
And confident,
To think he is allowed
A little tent
Pitched in a meadow
Of sun and shadow
All his little own.

Joy may be shy, unique,
Friendly to a few,
Sorrow may be scorned to speak
To any who
Were false or true.
Your every grief
Like a blade
Shining and unsheathed

Unlike most other poets of his time, Cullen used traditional forms and methods.

He was born in New York City and graduated from New York University and later earned his master's degree from Harvard.

Cullen was one of the leaders of the movement to construct an intellectual and aesthetic culture for blacks in America, especially for those who had come from the South to New York City in the early 1900s.

In "Any Human to Another" notice the tension between words, images, and sentiments designed to deal explicitly with the African American experience and those designed to deal more with universal experience.

The Tropics in New York

BY CLAUDE MCKAY

Bananas ripe and green, and ginger-root,
Cocoa in pods and alligator pears,
And tangerines and mangoes and grape fruit,
Fit for the highest prize at parish fairs,

Set in the window, bringing memories
Of fruit-trees laden by low-singing rills,
And dewy dawns, and mystical blue skies
In benediction over nun-like hills.

My eyes grew dim, and I could no more gaze;
A wave of longing through my body swept,
And, hungry for the old, familiar ways,
I turned aside and bowed my head and wept.

In much of his work, McKay evokes the rich colors and the rhythms of life on his native island of Jamaica. The son of poor farm workers, McKay did not arrive in the U.S. until 1912, at the age of 22. He briefly attended the Tuskegee Institute (founded by Booker T. Washington), found himself shocked at the racism he encountered (particularly in the South), and, after transferring to Kansas State University, discovered W.E.B. DuBois, whose work would have a profound and lasting effect on McKay's life and poetry.

"The Tropics in New York" is marked by a nostalgia for his homeland, and explores the ways in which displaced or uprooted blacks—in America broadly and New York specifically—find ways to retain their culture, while at the same time embracing a new existence.

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The Negro Speaks of Rivers

BY LANGSTON HUGHES

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.