



Paul Laurence Dunbar!

Paul Laurence Dunbar was the first African American to gain national eminence as a poet. Born in 1872 in Dayton, Ohio, he was the son of ex-slaves and classmate to Orville Wright of aviation fame. Although he lived to be only 33 years old, Dunbar was prolific, writing short stories, novels, librettos, plays, songs and essays as well as the poetry for which he became well known. He was popular with black and white readers of his day, and his works are celebrated today by scholars and school children alike. His style encompasses two distinct voices, the standard English of the classical poet and the evocative dialect of the turn of the century black community in America. He was gifted in poetry, the way that Mark Twain was in prose, and in using dialect to convey character.

Summer in the South

The oriole sings in the greening grove
As if he were half-way waiting,
The rosebuds peep from their hoods of green,
Timid, and hesitating.
The rain comes down in a torrent sweep
And the nights smell warm and pinety,
The garden thrives, but the tender shoots
Are yellow-green and tiny.
Then a flash of sun on a waiting hill,
Streams laugh that erst were quiet,
The sky smiles down with a dazzling blue
And the woods run mad with riot.

A Prayer

O LORD, the hard-won miles
Have worn my stumbling feet:
Oh, soothe me with thy smiles,
And make my life complete.
The thorns were thick and keen
Where'er I trembling trod;
The way was long between
My wounded feet and God.
Where healing waters flow
Do thou my footsteps lead.
My heart is aching so;
Thy gracious balm I need.