

1975

For Paul Laurence Dunbar 1872-1972

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It is the indicative mood, after desire
The Deerslayer

Now middle aged
Has become lonesome and white again

Rising up out of the continent
That is Chingachgook

Red skinned, red eyed morning light
The myth that has happened to the democratic.

That black man over there:
Slaughtered in the hills of my wife . .

Imagination,
Black and breathing.

I am slaughtered in his wife,
It has happened to meaning.

Fit to be Satan—now:
Cooper, Hawthorne, Melville's

I wear my dark skinned hat—
Irreconcilable

In the final phase. Satanic,
It seems to fit me right.

To walk away alone
Into the sunset of our bleeding children.

For Paul Laurence Dunbar 1872-1972 /
Margaret Walker
(Centennial Celebration, October 19, 20, 21, 1972)

A man whose life was like a candle's flame:
faint, flickering, and brightened with the poet's light.
He came to earth a butterfly of time

and lifted in his hands the spirit-dust;
gave to the world chameleon his singing heart
and sacrificed upon the alter fame
his glowing candle fire of life and love.
Remembering, we pause to honor him
but knowing well the Ages honor beat
his image frail and pure, while millions here
behold his comet-star and see its flaming trail
burst brilliantly across the burning sky.
We hold aloft his laughter-breaking, black,
and bitter songs, and his immortal name.

Two Egyptian Portrait Masks / Robert Hayden

I Nefert-iti

A memory
carved on stelae of
the city Akhenaten built for God—

Fair of face Joyous with the Double Plume
Mistress of Happiness Endowed
with Favor at hearing whose Voice

one rejoices Lady of Grace
Great of Love whose disposition cheers
the Lord of Two Lands—

whose burntout
loveliness alive in stone
is like the living fire of gems

dynastic
death (gold mask and vulture wings)
charmed her with so she would never die.

II Akhenaten

Upon the
mountain Aten spoke
and set the spirit moving