1975

For Paul Laurence Dunbar 1872-1972

Margaret Walker

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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