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Paul Laurence Dunbar and Turn-into-the-20th-Century African American Dualism

Paul Gilroy has powerfully claimed that the notion of double consciousness in which the black subject “ever feels his twoness” was used by W. E. B. Du Bois to figure a diasporic, and sometimes transatlantic black modernity expressing the ambivalent location of people of African descent simultaneously within and beyond what is known as “the West” (111-45). Certainly, Du Bois’s articulation of dualism has remained a powerful trope available to a wide range of artists and intellectuals both inside and outside of the United States down to the present. However, to understand why Du Bois’s formulation of the concept has had such force, one has to examine its relationship to similar expressions of African American dualism, within the political and cultural context in which these various articulations appeared. As Ernest Allen, Jr., points out, Du Bois’s notion of double consciousness in *The Souls of Black Folk* as an appropriate description of the literally divided spiritual and psychological conditions of individual black artists and intellectuals at the turn into the twentieth century is dubious at best—however powerful the metaphor seemed to later generations (217-20). However, as a figuration of the divided political status of African Americans, and their ambivalent position in what might be thought of as the consciousness of the nation as expressed in law, historiography, literature, art, popular culture, and so on, the concept of double consciousness and other tropes of African American dualism were convincingly apt.

Du Bois’s *The Souls* is often seen as sounding a note of dissent within what has been termed the age of Booker T. Washington in African American thought and politics—though, to extend the musical metaphor, one can see it in many respects as a variation on Washington’s theme or a revision of a Washingtonian riff. Yet it is worth recalling that it was also the age of Paul Laurence Dunbar, whose critical and professional success as a literary artist among black and white readers was unprecedented for an African American author. As Countée Cullen claimed in the introduction to the 1926 anthology of black poetry *Caroling Dusk*, black and white readers assigned (and long continued to assign) to Dunbar a “uniquity as the first Negro to attain and to maintain a distinguished place among American poets, a place fairly merited by the most acceptable standards of criticism” (x-xi). Dunbar, in fact, was among the most successful poets of his era. James Weldon Johnson recalled about an extended visit that Dunbar paid his family in Jacksonville in 1901, that when Dunbar sent off poems to the leading literary journals of the era, acceptance notes (and checks) followed almost immediately. Dunbar’s work also inspired black literary societies devoted to the reading of his poetry (Johnson 160; Knupfer 23-24).

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The age of Dunbar, Washington, and the early Du Bois is one of paradox. Dunbar (born 1872) and his African American age cohort, including Du Bois (born 1868), Johnson (born 1871) and even the older Washington (born 1856), Anna Julia Cooper (born 1858), and Charles Chesnutt (born 1858), were the first generation to grow up after Emancipation. Unlike his parents, who had been enslaved, Dunbar was born free after the passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments. Yet the hopes and promises of Reconstruction were clearly being wiped out by the early 1890s even though those amendments were not repealed, but remained part of the Constitution, requiring a considerable capacity for contradiction on the part of the Supreme Court to rule them consonant with the new Jim Crow laws of segregation and black disenfranchisement in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and *Williams v. Mississippi* (1898). This legal and political dualism was mirrored, though perhaps in the distorting manner of a circus funhouse, by a similarly double and ambivalent black cultural position with the simultaneous emergence of a relatively distinct African American trans-regional popular culture and of a linked and similarly national “mainstream” popular culture that excluded African Americans in some respects and absolutely depended on the representation and recreation of black bodies, black voices, and black culture in others. As one might imagine, this situation could produce a sense of contradiction or doubleness in someone who was told in words, deeds, and laws that he or she was a citizen and yet not a citizen. And, of course, by the early twentieth century the problems of, in Du Bois’s words, “the color line,” of where and of what one might be a citizen or a potential citizen took on a new urgency for African Americans, perhaps most clearly seen in the establishment of the Universal Negro Improvement Association by Marcus Garvey (a great admirer of Washington), especially with Garvey’s founding of a New York branch in 1917.

The problem of dualism, whether in Du Bois’s semi-psychological proposition of two more or less unintegrated consciousnesses existing simultaneously in one body, Dunbar’s notion of the masking of one’s true nature (with the proto-Althusserian dilemma that Du Bois identifies as only seeing one’s self through the eyes of others who see only the mask), or a more strictly legalistic sense of post-Reconstruction Jim Crow segregation, is this problem of being a citizen and yet not a citizen (and, by extension, of being legally human and not quite human at the same time) in an increasingly urbanized and industrialized United States. How does one respond? Through integration or separatism—or through a sort of separate development of a group culture and politics that would enable the group to force itself into the “mainstream” of culture and power in the United States? And if one tries to represent what one might consider the distinctly African (American) portion of black subjectivity, what might that be? The folk culture? Who then defines or constitutes the folk, and how does one allow the folk subject to speak? How does one represent and/or recreate his or her culture without being contaminated by minstrelsy, “coon songs,” and plantation literature, by popular and so-called “high” culture appropriation or misappropriation? How does one deal with the doubleness of popular culture as seen in minstrelsy, the cakewalk, the “coon song,” ragtime, and the ambivalence of African American minstrel-influenced vaudeville?

Dunbar engaged these questions most directly in verse written in what William Dean Howells described as “literary English” (Introduction, *Lyrics of Lowly Life* xix). “The Poet and his Song,” apparently among the most consistently performed “literary English” poems in Dunbar’s readings to African American audiences, is second to appear in his 1896 *Lyrics of Lowly Life*.¹ The familiar pastoral conceit of the poem is that the artist is a sort of arborist who sings as he works. But after an initial stanza that sets the scene, the following three stanzas

each feature a problem causing the poet disappointment, dissatisfaction, and, eventually, anger and feelings of rebellion: no one acknowledges or praises his songs; he works hard while “others dream within the dell” (“The Poet and His Song” l. 22); his garden suffers from a strangely malignant drought or rapacious blight that seems to have singled him out. The poet appears able to quell these feelings with a certain stoicism that many of Dunbar’s contemporaries, particularly those writing in the plantation tradition, said was a defining feature of African American folk psychology, declaring “And so I sing, and all is well.” (“The Poet and His Song” l. 32). Still, each time the feelings rise higher and the tone of the poet’s transition to the calming refrain feels more strained, and by the end, near hysterical so that the reader wonders if the next rise of passion will overwhelm him entirely, much like the speaker of Cullen’s “Heritage” —or tear him apart to invoke Du Bois’s image in *The Souls of Black Folk*.² That the poet submerges or hides these emotions in cheerful song recalls Dunbar’s early mentor and patron Frederick Douglass’s famous comments in his autobiographies about the hidden meanings and frequent misreadings of slave music.

Douglass’s remarks about the meaning and reception of slave music are addressed even more directly in “A Corn-Song,” which sets the musical expression (and the understanding of that expression) of the exhausted slaves returning to the quarters after a long day of labor in the fields against that of “the master in his seat,” who is moved to tears listening to the “mellow minor music” as his slaves trudge by (ll. 23, 25). Where the master perceives a moving sweetness, the poem suggests another interpretation on the part of the slaves, a complicated combination of sorrow, endurance, and protest that perhaps echoes the more overt protest of the slave song that Douglass interpolates into *My Bondage and My Freedom*.³ Like Chesnut’s stories in the 1898 *The Conjure Woman*, Dunbar’s poem directly engages the sort of claim made by Joel Chandler Harris in the Introduction to *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings* that the songs and stories of the black folk are “a part of the domestic history of every Southern family” (4)—and, one might add, the domestic history of every American family through the literary efforts of Harris, Thomas Nelson Page, and others in the plantation tradition, including, to some extent, Dunbar himself. Dunbar’s poem allows that Harris may be correct, that the song the master hears (like the stories that Uncle Remus tells the boy in the first part of *Uncles Remus*) are no doubt part of the domestic history of the master and his family as well as part of that of the slaves.

However, the poem also expresses what should be the obvious point that Douglass, too, makes: there are different communities of meaning based on different histories, or perhaps different locations in the same historical space. Of course, the issue is complicated by the recession of vision for the black subject who is at least partially forced to look at her- or himself through the peculiarly disposed eyes of a white subject who claims a strange ownership of black culture in a manner uncomfortably reminiscent of the slave era. Both “The Poet and his Song” and “The Corn-Song” raise the complicated masking of the black artist working in the minstrelsy-influenced tradition of the popular stage as well as in the intersecting popular culture variations of plantation literature that are foregrounded in ways strangely more direct and more oblique in “We Wear the Mask.”

The “mellow minor music” also points to how these complications are embedded in the title of the 1895 collection *Majors and Minors*. *Majors and Minors* is organized into two sections: the first, “Majors and Minors,” consisting, for the most part, of poems in “literary English,” and the second, “Humor and Dialect,” largely poems in various sorts of “dialect.” As “A Corn-Song” (included among the “literary” poems despite its description of a moment on the plantation and the interpolation of black folk voices) suggests, Negro music was, and had long

been, associated with “minor music” as the nearest approximation of the tonality of this African American vernacular music on traditional European scales. One sees, then, a certain linking of African American culture to the “Minors” — though, typically, that is not directly stated by Dunbar. The “Majors and Minors” section not only includes such allegedly raceless poems (which many commentators have read as faux white) as “Ere Sleep Comes Down to Soothe the Weary Eyes” and “The Meadow Lark,” but also some of Dunbar’s most militant lyrics of race pride, such as “Frederick Douglass,” “Ode to Ethiopia,” and “The

“We Wear the Mask,” a straightforward rondeau, is the most influential literary expression of African American dualism after *The Souls of Black Folk*, period.

Colored Soldiers.” Likewise, the poems of the “Humor and Dialect” section not only include such clearly “Negro” dialect pieces as “A Negro Love Song” and “The Party,” but also poems in rural Midwestern dialect in which the race of the speaker is impossible to determine, such as “Spellin’ Bee” and “The Ol’ Tunes.” In short, Dunbar seems consciously to confound any easy linkage of racial categories to divisions of high, folk, and popular literature.

One might see a similar sort of complication of the racial (and class and regional) associations of different poetic (and musical) modes in the title of Dunbar’s next volume of poetry (and the first issued by a major commercial publisher), *Lyrics of Lowly Life*, which includes the “Majors” and “Minors” of the previous volume along with some additional poems. Unlike *Major and Minors*, *Lyrics of Lowly Life* is not organized into sections, but mixes “literary English” poems with “dialect” pieces, suggesting that “Ere Sleep Comes Down to Soothe the Weary Eyes” is as much a lyric describing the “lowly life” as “When Malindy Sings” or “The Party.”

As noted above, “We Wear the Mask,” first collected in *Majors and Minors*, is the volume’s most obvious invocation of African American dualism, and the most influential literary expression of this sort of dualism after *The Souls of Black Folk* (and insofar as poetry is concerned, perhaps the most influential, period). With the possible exception of “Sympathy,” “We Wear the Mask” is almost certainly Dunbar’s best-known and most anthologized poem today. Formally, it is a fairly straightforward rondeau — an old French lyric that enjoyed a vogue among such English poets as Algernon Charles Swinburne, Henry Austin Dobson, and Ernest Dowson in the late nineteenth century. This straightforwardness is actually relatively unusual in Dunbar’s so-called “standard” poetry since he loved to play with the meter and rhyme scheme of received European poetic forms in a variety of ways that challenge the still much repeated notion of his “standard” poetry as conservative in any simple manner.

Geoffrey Jacques has provocatively argued that Dunbar’s poem is a “rewriting and recasting” of Thomas Wyatt’s rondeau, “What ‘vailthe trowth? Or, by it, to take payn?” However, as Jacques points out, Dunbar “modernizes” Wyatt’s work in a manner that is akin to symbolist poetry, and the melancholy symbolist-influenced poetry of Dunbar’s English contemporary Dowson, in a sort of linguistic tour de force that reminds the reader that Dunbar’s literary competency stretches, at least, from Petrarch (and the earliest English adaptations of the Petrarchan lyric) through to Swinburne, Dowson, Arthur Symons, a wide range of local color and dialect poetry, the “coon song,” and the popular black theater of his cultural present. This sort of range and a back to the future linking of

medieval and Renaissance verse to a racialized popular culture would, as scholars like Jacques, Michael North, Ann Douglass, and Aldon Nielsen in their various ways note, become standard operating procedure of many of the “high” modernists.

The most arresting and most remembered aspect of the poem is, of course, Dunbar’s metaphor of the mask. It may seem obvious, but, appropriately enough, this metaphor (and its relation to the logic of the poem) is more complicated than it might first appear. After all, the speaker of the poem identifies with a “we” who feel compelled to mask “our” true identities and true emotions from “the world.” Yet there is a sort of game of doubling in this revelation of concealment. The speaker weirdly stands outside of him- or herself, describing the existence and something of the nature of “the mask” that he or she as part of the “we” wears. Or does he or she really stand outside? On the one hand, how is that out-of-body experience possible? On the other hand, is it not a contradiction for the speaker to proclaim that “the world” never really sees “us,” only the disguise “we” put on since this naked exposure would seem to involve a lowering of the mask—unless the revelation about the mask is a mask? Is “the mask” something willingly assumed as a sort of camouflage protection, or is it imposed from the outside—or both? Given the inescapable connection of the metaphor to the practices of minstrelsy and the vaudeville stage, then is “the mask” a stylization of Negroes assumed by white people that is in turn adopted by African Americans in the era of the “coon song” consumed by white (and black) Americans, further setting the “rules of recognition” for the representation and recreation of black bodies, voices, and culture that challenges and constrains African American artists, and on and on? In other words, there is an endless regress in which the possibility of a double-consciousness is asserted, but without the comfort of any absolutely stable features or boundaries—though it is impossible not to notice that certain types of popular culture representations of African Americans and African American cultures circulating in the late nineteenth century had existed for decades and remain remarkably recognizable even today.

This contradiction between concealment and revelation resembles that of Du Bois’s notion of “the veil” and a “double-consciousness” that prevents or inhibits genuine African American self-reflection and self-consciousness, while provoking endless introspection about the nature of the self and identity. In many respects, Dunbar’s version of double conscious here may be more active than Du Bois’s metaphor of the veil. It allows Dunbar to assert indirectly his superiority of understanding to white readers. As in Langston Hughes’s clearly Dunbarian opening to his 1951 lyric sequence, *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, the metaphor of masking makes obvious the act of concealment and its coerced motivation, underpinning militant and historically pointed social criticism—in Dunbar’s case aimed at the rise of Jim Crow; in Hughes’s at the rise of McCarthyism.⁴

Also, as Gavin Jones points out about Hughes’s “Jazz Band in a Parisian Cabaret,” “the vacillation between voices in Hughes’s poem, like the wider oscillation between vernacular and ‘standard’ English in Johnson’s *Fifty Years and Other Poems* (1917), Hughes’s *The Weary Blues* (1927), and Brown’s *Southern Road* (1932), was in fact a continuation of work already begun by Dunbar” (186). Dunbar suggests a new way of reading African American minstrelsy and other forms of African American popular culture as well as his own work. After all, even to this day, there is a strong tendency to read most of Dunbar’s dialect poetry as sentimental productions that issue uncritically from the local color and plantation traditions addressed primarily to a white audience. Exceptions are sometimes made for such pointedly topical dialect poems as “An Ante-Bellum

Sermon" and "When Dey 'Listed Colored Soldiers," but these poems are seen as just that, exceptions—and even these exceptions are rarely considered with respect to the contemporary issues of Reconstruction and its demise with the triumph of Jim Crow segregation and disenfranchisement. However, when one considers the metaphor of the mask, it invites (or challenges) us to change the way we read the "unexceptional" dialect poems, say, "The Party." Again, the recessive nature of masking in the minstrel and minstrel-derived theatrical tradition lends itself to this sort of reading. The familiar minstrel figure of the ridiculous black dandy is, again, in its origin a white artist who adopts the mask of a black man attempting unsuccessfully to don the mask of high white fashion and diction with allegedly hilarious results. Of course, whether consciously understood by a particular artist or audience or not, the ironies of a white artist taking on a stylized African American persona for the purposes of a comic routine based on black misreadings and misperformances of high white fashion, language, and expressive culture are legion. The ironies of such humorous double maskings obviously present enormous possibilities for African American minstrel, "coon song," and vaudeville performers—though an inherent slippage or instability about where the joke might rest gave such performances an uneasy charge. Might not such a double parody implicitly carry an essential claim to human equality, if not moral superiority?

As such critics as Gavin Jones and Marcellus Blount have argued, one ironic and seemingly counterintuitive interpretive possibility, suggested by the foregrounding of the mask is that a discerning reader might take many of the dialect poems more or less straightforwardly. In this way, again, "An Ante-Bellum Sermon" can be seen as an intermediate poem between Dunbar's "high" poetry and the more apparently typical dialect poems. Blount notes "An Ante-Bellum Sermon," too, foregrounds masking and interpretation as Dunbar comments on the "new slavery" of the emergent Jim Crow system (a link that Dunbar made directly in the title of the poem "To the South on Its New Slavery") through the conceit of a southern antebellum black preacher commenting on slavery in the United States in a sermon on the deliverance of the Jews from bondage in Egypt. While the preacher weakly denies that his sermon has any application to the present, his intention, if not Dunbar's, is so clear that the reader is forced to take his sermon as straightforwardly pertinent to antebellum slavery (and postbellum Jim Crow) despite his transparently false disclaimers (Blount 590). Following the model of interpretation made obvious in "An Antebellum Sermon," one might reread "The Party" and see that beneath what might seem to be an inherently humorous depiction of a fancy dress dance in the minstrel-"coon song" tradition of the outlandish dandy, where the participants say things like, "Pass dat possum, ef you please!", is a litany of the skilled and stylish manner of black dress, music, dance, cooking, and conversation that are not amusingly altered imitations or transpositions of what might be found at "white" balls or cotillions, having, rather, a distinctly African American accent.⁵

In other words, one possible, if strange attribute of masking, as Bigger Thomas notes about the blindness of white (and black) people in Richard Wright's *Native Son* (542-43) is that it creates a space where a black individual might be him- or herself, or at least something other than what the mask apparently suggests, at least if one were self-conscious enough. In fact, one might find that beneath the mask of dialect literature longstanding African American tropes (for example, the rapacious preacher) and an echo of the notion stated more clearly in perhaps Dunbar's best-known dialect poem, "When Malindy Sings," which he often read before black audiences, that the African American musical tradition is superior to that of Europe ("de music / Of an edicated band" [ll. 57-58]).⁶ Thus, Dunbar's mask anticipates the protagonist Clay's statement in

Baraka's play *Dutchman*, "They say, 'I love Bessie Smith.' And they don't even understand that Bessie Smith is saying, 'Kiss my ass, kiss my black unruly ass'" (*Selected Plays and Prose* 94).⁷

Also, what happens to Dunbar the "high" poet if we eliminate Dunbar the "dialect" or "popular" poet? Many readers are no doubt familiar with Dunbar's characterization of his dialect poetry (or what is assumed to be his dialect poetry) in "The Poet" as "a jingle in a broken tongue" written to please a white audience at the expense of his "real," more literarily "high" work (l. 8). But can one exist without the other? If the so-called "low" or popular work did not exist, wouldn't the "high" poetry be less powerful, less well-defined? And, of course, without the "high" poetry and the split proposed between "real" and "mask", between "art" and box office rooted in a representation and/or recreation of the African American voice, wouldn't the dialect poetry seem far shallower and much more easily conflated with the plantation tradition and the minstrel tradition in some uncomplicated way? In other words, the Dunbarian split here is one in which "high" and "low," "standard" literary and "dialect" are inextricably linked and opposed. This strategy allowed Dunbar to both affirm himself as a poet and to recreate the black speaking subject on the page in a way that acknowledged the problems popular culture posed for the representation of the African American folk subject while at least partially circumventing those problems. And, as I have suggested with my mentions of Hughes and Baraka, Dunbar's metaphor of the mask (and the model of identity it implies) retained its power far beyond the New Negro Renaissance—though by the end of the 1920s new paradigms arose that challenged without completely displacing earlier dualist models.

Dunbar's split between "real" and "mask" (and his vision of a consciousness that is doubled and redoubled practically *ad infinitum* in the sort of appropriations, reappropriations, re-reappropriations, and so on, of African American culture and the black subject that lie at the heart of American popular—and "high"—culture, all under the sign of "authenticity") remained a potent paradigm for the New Negro era with its concern for representing "authentically" the racial (or national) self without being imprisoned by the implicitly or explicitly racist expectations of white readers, actual or potential, or of variously accommodatist black readers. As James Weldon Johnson remarked in his autobiography when reflecting on the difference between Dunbar's dialect poetry and the work of later writers (whom Johnson termed "the folk artists"), say Langston Hughes, Waring Cuney, and Sterling Brown, who drew on versions of African American vernacular English, Dunbar's foregrounded use of what Johnson called "the stereotyped properties of minstrel stage dialect" (159) not only suggested new ways of rereading "high" and popular culture, but also provided a sort of baseline of artistic representation of the black folk and black culture against which the "folk artists" could demonstrate their greater authenticity:

I could see that the poet writing the conventionalized dialect, no matter how sincere he might be, was dominated by his audience; that his audience was a section of the white American reading public; that when he wrote he was expressing what often bore little relation, sometimes no relation at all, to actual Negro life; that he was really only expressing certain conceptions about Negro life that his audience was willing to accept and ready to enjoy; that, in fact, he wrote mainly for the delectation of an audience that was an outside group. And I could discern that it was on this line that the psychological attitude of the poets writing in the dialect and that of the folk artists faced in different directions: because the latter, although working in the dialect, sought only to express themselves for themselves, and to their *own group*. (159)

Dunbar's dialect poetry, then, in a strangely negative way helped later African American poets imagine a distinctly and more "authentic" "Negro" lit-

erature aimed at a black audience. One could argue that this appeal to black insider authenticity goes back at least as far as the entrance of African American performers onto the minstrel stage with the superior veracity of their renditions of African American cultures relative to the offering of blacked up white artists being one of their selling points—a phenomenon that can be seen in Dunbar's time in the billing of the renowned music and comedy team of George Walker and Bert Williams as "two real coons."⁸ One might also see such an appeal to authenticity as a form of advertisement in Howell's claim in his review of Dunbar's 1895 *Majors and Minors* and in the introduction of *Lyrics of Lowly Life*, which was adapted from the review, that Dunbar's "brilliant and unique achievement was to have studied the American negro [*sic*] objectively, and to have represented him as he found him to be, with humor, with sympathy, and yet with what the reader must instinctively feel to be entire truthfulness" (xvii). It is interesting, and perhaps typical of the era, that Howells suggests that Dunbar needed to study "the negro [*sic*] objectively" to produce a representation that the white reader can somehow instinctively verify. One might also object that Dunbar's dialect poetry, much of which is not attributable to a particular racial group, is more closely related to conventions of regional or local color literature, showing an objective study of the work of James Whitcomb Riley more than of "the negro." Still, Dunbar himself may well have had something of this notion of "truthfulness" (or at least relative truthfulness) in mind when he proclaimed to Johnson that he began writing black dialect poetry because he believed that he "could write it as well, if not better, than anybody else" (Johnson 160). Dunbar was unquestionably a close student of poetic technique, again, for example, devoting much attention to the mechanics of Riley's wildly popular dialect poetry. But it does not seem too far-fetched to speculate that when he said "better" "than anyone else," he meant more "real"—anticipating the much later hip hop commonplace.

As Johnson observed, the notion of writing a black literature that made the declaration of a break with minstrelsy and "coonery" a prominent feature, expressing an authentic self rooted in that authentic black culture to a black audience, is something different from the vision of Howells's objective study and entirely truthful representation, which foregrounded an assumed white audience. Johnson's use of Dunbar's work (and his conversations with Dunbar about that work) in his model of the relation of African American writing to black culture, and of black culture to mass culture visions of black culture proposed a dialectic in which the work of black writers would be continuously posed against existing representations of the black folk and their alleged speech and culture, constantly striving for greater (and new) authenticity even against their earlier work. In this regard, Langston Hughes's frequent revision of his poetry (for example, eliminating the locution "gwine") so as, apparently, to correct work that he had once seen as an acceptable rendering of African American vernacular speech, but now felt was too close to mass culture misappropriations (and misrepresentations) of that speech is instructive. This paradoxically linked division of "dialect" and "literary English" (which, again, cannot be said to be simply "white" since it is the mode of the vast majority of Dunbar's most pointed poems of race pride) provided other sorts of writers, say Cullen, another sort of baseline against which they could measure their distance from popular culture appropriations and misrepresentations of black bodies, voices, and cultures in the long era of Jim Crow—and beyond.

Charles Bernstein correctly calls the 1913 edition of Dunbar's *Collected Poems* "one of the most unsettling and provocative works of early modernism" (11). However, it is worth noting that nearly all of the qualities that Bernstein credits as provocative in Dunbar's poems and poetry collections were present nearly

two decades before the first appearance of the *Collected Poems*, qualities that had everything to do with the engagement of Dunbar (and Du Bois, Chesnutt, Washington, and many of Dunbar's black contemporaries) with the dualism of black political and cultural citizenship and non-citizenship in a United States where every level of culture, particularly popular culture, was saturated with, really dependent on, representations and recreations of African American folk cultures and black bodies and voices. Dunbar's poetry, rooted in the peculiar moment of Jim Crow's triumph, anticipated and influenced modernist and post-modernist concerns with fragmentation and wholeness, deracination and a return to an authentic folk or popular spirit, and the relation of some notion of the folk or the people to mass culture that continue to speak to us in our own time.

Notes

1. It was also included the 1895 *Majors and Minors*. For a sense of Dunbar's typical repertoire for readings to primarily African American audiences, see the programs in the Paul Laurence Dunbar Papers, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio.

2. It is interesting to note that Cullen uses much the same movement of waves of rising emotion and repression of that emotion in his most famous poem, "Heritage"—though in Cullen it is love and sexual desire that threatens to overwhelm the speaker and not resentment and anger.

3. The song reported by Douglass begins,

We raise de wheat
Dey gib us de corn;
We bake de bread
Dey gib us de crust. ("We Raise De Wheat" ll. 1-4)

As in Dunbar's poem, at this moment black vernacular voices break into the "literary English" (albeit the "literary English" of the genre of autobiography as opposed to poetry), one of the few such in Douglass' narratives.

4. Hughes's poem reads:

Listen to it closely:
Ain't you heard
something underneath
like a—

What did I say? ("Dream Boogie" ll. 10-14)

5. It is instructive to contrast the scene in "The Party" to popular culture images of what might be thought of as collective black dandyism in which African Americans were shown as ridiculous imitators of high society. For examples of such images, see the Currier & Ives "Darktown Series" of lithographs that, among other things, featured the antics of the "Darktown Yacht Club" and the "Coon Club Hunt."

6. Dunbar appears to have frequently performed "When Malindy Sings" for predominantly African American audiences, judging from the programs contained in his papers. "The Party" seems to have also been one of the most popular of his dialect pieces with black audiences. For another discussion of "vernacular masking" as an interpretive guide to reading Dunbar's poetry and short fiction, see Jones 186-202.

7. Baraka has persistently engaged Dunbar's version of double consciousness. His "*An Agony. As Now*" in the 1964 collection *The Dead Lecturer*, begins, "I am inside someone who hates me," thus in many ways a rewriting of "We Wear the Mask" from an incipient Black Arts perspective. Baraka's more recent "Masked Angel Costume: The Sayings of Mantan Moreland," collected in *Funk Lore* (1995), also directly invokes Dunbar and his dualistic metaphor.

8. It should also be noted that white authors, particularly in the plantation tradition, too, frequently included a note or foreword that made an appeal for the superior authenticity of their rendering of black speech (and sometimes other sorts of American vernacular speech) to that circulating in popular culture, especially the minstrel stage. For example, in his first collection of Uncle Remus tales, Joel Chandler Harris claimed, "The dialect, it will be observed, is wholly different from that of the Hon. Pompey Smash and his literary descendants, and different also from the intolerable misrepresentations of the minstrel stage, but it is at least phonetically genuine" (4). Similarly, Thomas Nelson Page,

the dean of post-Reconstruction plantation fiction, prefaced *In Ole Virginia: Marse Chan and Other Stories* with a note explaining some of the syntactical features (as well as his orthographical strategy for notating those features) of the speech of the black folk narrators of the Virginia Tidewater region, in whose voices most of the stories are told. This move resembles that of Mark Twain in his "Explanatory" to *Huckleberry Finn*, a novel with a complex relationship to minstrelsy, the antebellum slave narrative, and the plantation tradition.

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