

Cullen, Countee (1903-1946)

Encyclopedia Article

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Among the most conservative of the Harlem Renaissance poets, Harvard educated Countee Cullen exploded onto the New York literary scene with the publication of *Color* (1925) and solidified his reputation with *Copper Sun* (1927) and *The Black Christ and Other Poems* (1929). His verse defied the expectations of white audiences. Where earlier black poets like Paul Laurence Dunbar had written in dialect, Cullen's tributes to black life echoed the classical forms of Keats and Shelley. The young poet was the leading light of the African-American literary community during the 1920s. Although his reputation waned after 1930 as he was increasingly attacked for ignoring the rhythms and idioms of Black culture, Cullen's ability to present black themes in traditional European forms made him one of the seminal figures in modern African-American poetry.

Further Reading:

Baker, Houston A. *Afro-American Poetics: Revisions of Harlem and the Black Aesthetic*. Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1988.

Ferguson, Blanche E. *Countee Cullen and the Negro Renaissance*. New York, Dodd Mead, 1966.

Harris, Trudier, editor. *Afro-American Writers from the Harlem Renaissance to 1940*. Detroit, Gale Research Co., 1987.

Turner, Darwin T. *In a Minor Chord: Three Afro-American Writers and Their Search for Identity*. Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1971.