



**Challenging Stereotyped English in Paul
Dunbar's Selected Poems**

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Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906), a prominent African American novelist and poet, is known for his poetry that tackles the black race in a close association with the natural world. The purpose of this paper is to examine Dunbar's employment of dialect vs standard English in selected poems. It argues that Dunbar's dialect poetry neither romanticizes nor pictures his black race through rose-tinted glasses. Instead of using black dialect to represent the stereotypical and simple rural life of black slaves, Dunbar transcends this limitation and challenges white and black public preference. Dunbar's use of the standard English becomes his method to reveal his black race's sorrow, pain, and segregation whether within a hostile or friendly rural or cultural or social environment. The paper endeavors to discuss the following questions: Why did Dunbar find literary English or the standard English a better tool instead of the black vernacular as an alternate tool to speak of his black race? How does he connect his use of language with the natural world that the blacks inhabited? Does his use of black dialect and standard English in connection to a racialized nature make his poems part of the plantation tradition? Fanon's postcolonial concepts such as "cultural identity" and "language and communication," mentioned in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), as well as W.E.B. Du Bois' sociological concept, "double consciousness" mentioned in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), are applied to the selected poems. **Keywords:** Dunbar, standard English, black vernacular, dialect poetry, natural world, American rural South, Fanon

المستخلص

يعد بول لورنس دنبار (١٩٠٦-١٨٧٢) من أبرز الروائيين والشعراء الأمريكيين من أصل أفريقي. يعف شعوه باستخدام اللهجة العامية للسود واللغة الانجليزية الفصحى على حد سواء والموتبتطين لرتباطاً وثيقاً بعالم الطبيعة. يهدف هذا البحث الى دراسة استخدام دنبار للهجة العامية للسود امام استخدامه للغة الإنجليزية الفصحى في قصائد مختلة له، مؤكداً بان استخدام الشاعر للغتين لا يصور الحياة الريفية للأمريكان من أصل افريقي بشكل نمطي او رومانسي بعيد عن الواقع، وانما يتجاوز دنبار هذا النمط، ويتحدى ما يفرضه القرئ الأبيض وحتى الأسود. يستخدم دنبار الإنجليزية الفصحى كطريقة في الكشف عن الحزن والألم والغزلة التي يتعوض لها العرق الأسود سواء في بيئة ريفية أو ثقافية أو اجتماعية معادية أو ودية. يسعى البحث إلى مناقشة الأسئلة التالية: لماذا وجد دنبار الإنجليزية الأدبية أداة أفضل من اللهجة السوداء للحديث عن عرقه الأسود؟ كيف يربط دنبار استخدامه للغة بعالم الطبيعة الذي سكنه السود؟ هل يجعل استخدام دنبار لكل من اللهجة السوداء والإنجليزية الفصحى في التواصل مع الطبيعة المتحولة عرقياً قصائده جزءاً من تقاليد المزرعة؟ تُطبق مفاهيم قانون ما بعد الاستعمارية مثل "الهوية الثقافية" و "اللغة والتواصل" المذكورة في كتابه "معذبو الأرض" المنشور عام (١٩٦١) بالإضافة إلى مفهوم دو بويز الاجتماعي "الضمير الزوج" المذكور في كتابه "أرواح السود" المنشور عام (١٩٠٣) على قصائد مختلة من شعر دنبار الكلمات المفتاحية: دنبار، الإنجليزية الفصحى، اللغة العامية السوداء، عالم الطبيعة، الويف الأمريكي الجنوبي، قانون

Dunbar's dialect and standard poems exemplify how nature and culture are interconnected. They contribute to the African American literary canon and have been recognized through the relations between race and space, the traumatic memory, the value of natural aesthetics, and the history of violence against African Americans. Dunbar's poetry fuses the racial and spiritual as an articulation of the black identity and explores the value of oral heritage, music, and plantation culture. Dunbar reveals the African Americans' struggles, portraying their pleasures and sorrows, hopes and anxieties, and the difficulties they faced in a hostile society. Reviewed by William Dean Howells (1837- 1920), Dunbar's poetry shows an acute division: the dialect poems expose the "difference of temperament between the races"; the standard English poems are "especially notable except for the Negro face of the author." Dunbar's authentic dialect poems denote a "finely ironical perception of the Negro's limitations" (xix). Although preceded by prominent poets, Dunbar is the first African American poet who published poems and earned his living writing poems, novels, and essays. Dunbar's creativity and intellectuality make him "the first poet from the Negro race in the United States" with national eminence (Johnson 100). The role of language, which is highlighted in Dunbar's dialect or standard best poems, is problematic. It is regarded by Shira Wolosky as a predicament tackled in multiple ways: Dunbar reclaims stereotypes by dramatizing viewpoints and transforming utterances into self-conscious acts of representation [...] he uses richly resonant figures tied to African and African-American culture, including the mask, black religious modes, spirituals, and songs.

These cross-cultural exchanges take place, moreover, in both his Standard and dialect poems, whose division itself moves from opposition and contrast to mutual address and transformation. (155-6) It is implied that Dunbar's usage of standard English and dialect is not a straightforward binary but rather a sophisticated and dynamic interaction between various cultural viewpoints and modes of communication. In addition to different sub-genres of poetry, Dunbar employs the plantation tradition as a widespread genre at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. In this sense, Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu defines it as "a body of literature that offers a nostalgic representation of "the Old South" as well as a highly romanticized portrait of the institution of slavery," stating that it is composed by white Southern writers to deal with life on agricultural southern estates. She continues: Literature of the plantation tradition insists on the nobility of the white southern aristocrat and the virtuous passivity of the white southern belle and contests the image of slavery as a violent and dehumanizing institution that was presented in antebellum slave narratives. (709) The nostalgic representation of the Old South, to the white writers, sheds light only on the white aristocrats' nobility but not the black slave humiliation. Accordingly, the vision of plantation tradition concerning black writers is blurry. Hence, works like Frederick Douglass's Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (1845) and Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852) produced the slave narrative as a counterpart (Beaulieu 709). What concerns Dunbar the most is that the plantation tradition ignores the physical, psychological, and sexual abuse of slaves and the desire for liberation. The plantation community is portrayed as living a pleasant-sounding life in which the relationship between masters and slaves is like that between parents and their children. Such a representation is based on African American docile slaves/servants. Racist stereotypes like the "Mammy" figure in Margaret Mitchell's Gone with the Wind (1936) are presented extensively. "Mammy" presents an image of a simple-minded black woman who is loyal to her white mistress. Her counterpart is the "Sambo" figure, a childlike and submissive male who pleases white masters in minstrel shows (Beaulieu 710). The African Americans' emancipation and the deconstruction of their "Old South" socioeconomic structure are affected by the Civil War (1861-1865). Still, it did not terminate the plantation tradition. Such a genre was developed during the post-Reconstruction era with the publication of Thomas Page Nelson's In Ole Virginia (1887). It emphasizes the African Americans' simplicity and pleasure with political implications. Before the Civil War, plantation literature responded to the influence of abolitionists; after Reconstruction, it promoted segregation and supported the expansion of racial oppression. Plantation literature depicted the antebellum South ideally and posited a connection between social order and racial control. Likewise, Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu proclaims: [P]lantation literature's stereotypical portrayal of African Americans led to the construction of other racist character types such as the Jezebel figure, an overly sexualized and morally deviant black temptress, and what has been termed 'the Black beast,' an image of an animalistic and violent black male. (711)

Dunbar's Dialect Poetry: Songs of Joy and Sorrow

As a poet of black dialect verse, Dunbar complained against the post-reconstruction literary canon which witnessed a political and social change, particularly for African Americans who were emancipated from slavery. They lacked opportunities to publish and gain recognition in the mainstream. Motivated by the abandonment of Reconstruction, Dunbar represented blackness in American literature better than his predecessors did, showing a sentimental tendency toward the American mainstream. Dunbar succeeded in composing dialect poems among white and black audiences even though his poetry is seen as a symbol of racial inferiority (Ayers 366). Critics praised Dunbar's dialect poems and ignored other standard English ones. Similarly, Dunbar's wife, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, explained that the latter poems were more preferred by her husband than the former ones, justifying: "it was in the pure English poems that [Dunbar] expressed himself" and they were "his dearest dreams." Still, Dunbar's dialect poems portray African-American life from various perspectives (Dunbar-Nelson 325). According to Shira Wolosky, Dunbar, who writes in dialect, is "suspected of being complicitous with white stereotypes of black language," similar to racist representations of plantation literature or minstrel shows (153). Employing dialect in his poems to capture the speech, culture, and experiences of African Americans, Dunbar was influenced by his parents, who were former slaves, and by the oral traditions of African American folklore and music. His dialect shows linguistic skills and authenticity and increases his popularity among white audiences. Although Dunbar never lived in the South, he learned dialect and mastered it as a literary technique (Wolosky 155). His mother, Matilda, taught him to read and showed him the traditions of dialect; sharing stories that helped him shape his literary voice and his perspective on African American traditions. He grew up listening to songs, pious hymns, and spirituals about his mother's life as an enslaved household worker in Kentucky.

Matilda communicated to her son the bright as well as the dark sides of her life, focusing on happy and bitter memories. She would read to him and his siblings from books, despite her limited education. This impact inspired his finest poems. Essential to people's life, nature cannot be separated from civilization, literature, and spirituality. Likewise, "the natural world represents the source of all these and even more, the source of inspiration and regeneration" (Al-Zubaidi and Noor 29). While in Florida to give readings of his poetry, Dunbar met his old friend James Weldon Johnson, who was employed as a school principal. The two men talked about poetry and the former wanted his readers to like his poems in dialect and standard English, telling his friend: I didn't start as a dialect poet. I simply came to the conclusion that I could write it as well, if not better, than anybody else I knew of, and that by doing so I should gain a hearing [...] and now they don't want me to write anything but dialect. (Johnson 161) Johnson responded that Dunbar had transformed traditional dialect poetry to its utmost level, filling it with charm, beauty, simplicity, and historical facts. Dunbar's dialect poems which are "marginal, "subordinate," and "unrepresentative of American identity as a whole" "express a racial identity in tension with established literary language remote from it" (Wolosky 154). Dialect poems, which cover half of Dunbar's poetic output, are written in different regional varieties, such as Southern and Midwestern. He employs phonetic spelling, grammatical features, and vocabulary that reflect his characters' speech patterns. Utilizing humor, irony, and satire to convey his people's joys and sorrows, hopes and struggles, and resilience, Dunbar expresses concepts of oppression, resistance, identity, and love in connection to nature in his dialect poems. For example, Dunbar begins "On the Road," which appeared in *The Complete Poems*, with a horrible night atmosphere: I 's boun' to see my gal to-night—Oh, lone de way, my dearie! De moon ain't out, de stars ain't brighOh, lone de way, my dearie! Dis hoss o' mine is pow'ful slow, But when I does git to yo' do'Yo' kiss 'll pay me back, an' mo', Dough lone de way, my dearie. (lines 1-8) Dunbar displays his cultural identity and background through a gloomy night in a dialect that is reminiscent of the speech of African Americans in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The speaker, who is riding at night to see his beloved, has his journey described as lonesome, frightening, and long. The speaker/rider looks forward to the reward of his beloved's kiss The speaker emphasizes his loneliness and longing for his beloved by repeating "Oh, lone de way, my dearie!" at the end of each stanza. He uses terms like "lone," "skeered," "night," and "kiss" repeatedly. Each of the four stanzas AABBCDD has a rhyme scheme to create a musical effect that contrasts with the dark and gloomy mood of the night: De night is skeery—lak an' stillOh, lone de way, my dearie! 'Cept fu' dat mou'nful whippo'willOh, lone de way, my dearie! De way so long wif dis slow pace, 'T 'u'd seem to me lak savin' graceEf you was on a nearer place, Fu' lone de way, my dearie. (lines 9-16) By using powerful imagery, Dunbar describes his environment, makes passive references to the moon, stars, owl, watchdog, whip-poor-will, and sky, and equates his partner's kiss with saving grace. Linguistically, Dunbar introduces a speaker whose dialect distinguishes him to be black and uses "dis" instead of "this," "o'" instead of "of," and "pow'ful" instead of "powerful," to show his pronunciation and accent. The speaker uses "yo'" instead of your, "ll" instead of "will," "an'" instead of "and," and "mo'" instead of "more," to express his informal and casual tone. Dunbar is aware of how stereotypes have been reinforced by the use of dialect in romanticized depictions of the vanished plantation, exalting white Southern culture and alienating black perspectives: [D]ialect itself arose out of the suppression and loss of the African tribal languages in the passage to America and enslavement. Once in America, the black peoples had available only a dominant English language to which they had limited access [...] Dialect, from this point of view, signaled cultural deprivation. (Wolosky 155) The tone combines sorrow and hope and conveys the speaker's worry about traveling by himself in a dangerous region while demonstrating his optimism about getting to his objective and seeing his beloved: I hyeah de hootin' of de owlOh, lone de way, my dearie! I wish dat watch-dog would n't howl:— Oh, lone de way, my dearie! (lines 17-20) How the speaker's journey reflects his experience as a colonized subject in a racist society is emphasized. The speaker, throughout his route, must navigate several hazards and risks, including darkness, quietness, animals, and hostile noises. He experiences loneliness and insecurity that imply his living in a hostile environment where he is not welcome. Going far to see one's beloved suggests that the rider lacks access to opportunities that make his life happier: I whistles so's I won't be fearedOh lone de way, my dearie! But anyhow I's kin' o' skeered, Fu' lone de way, my dearie. De sky been lookin' mighty glum, But you kin mek hit lighten some. (lines 25-30) Despite these difficulties, the speaker never gives up his quest. He expresses his excitement for the opportunity to see and kiss his beloved. Using humor and music as coping mechanisms for his anxiety and unhappiness, the rider possesses a sense of agency and resilience that allow

him to fend off persecution and uphold his humanity. He has a feeling of love that inspires and supports him. The poem asserts that the colonized people can use their culture, language, sentiment, and struggle as means of achieving their freedom. In this respect, Frantz Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, states: Reclaiming the past does not justify the promise of a national culture. It triggers a change of fundamental importance in the colonized's psycho-affective equilibrium [...] Colonialism is not satisfied with snaring the people in its net or of draining the colonized brain of any form or substance [...] it turns its attention to the past of the colonized people and distorts it, disfigures it, and destroys it. (148-9) Colonizers oppress the colonized materially, attack their cultural identity and history, and reclaim their national culture, too. Based on this premise, the journey of the speaker has both physical and psychological perspectives: the speaker/poet moves from isolation to love, from fear to hope, and from darkness to light. Dunbar who represents his history through dialect, proves to be a loving and lovable human being (Dutta et al 62-3). Despite his modest looks, the speaker expects that she will embrace him warmly. He thinks that her kiss will cheer up his depressing attitude. Dialect reveals a difference between the speaker and his beloved, who seems to be more refined and educated and contributes to the concept of love triumphing over challenges. In this sense, Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, believes that language is a crucial component of colonialism and the process of decolonization. He makes the case that the development of a national language can be a key component of decolonization and the creation of a new national identity. Language can be an instrument for resistance and freedom: "A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language" (5). In *Black Skin, White Faces*, Fanon uses language as a recognition of cultural hegemony: "To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization" (17-18). Language and culture are linked, and the fight for linguistic and cultural emancipation is part of the fight for socio-political freedom (Zeiny 301). Dunbar's reputation is criticized for insulting African Americans by introducing pejorative caricatures of the minstrel shows and plantation tales. It is an endeavor to detect the humor, misconceptions, and flaws of his black people by which he "transcended the boundaries of the plantation tradition" and "resorted to the subterfuge of employing white characters, rather than attempting a serious literary portrait of the Negro" (Bone 37). Dunbar is accused of adhering to race as a subject matter; his attempts are discerned as ironic protests. He writes to please white readers at the expense of his race. To establish a distinctive voice that conveys the rhythms and nuance of African American speech, Dunbar combines dialect with standard English. He uses dialect to portray the plantation heritage, a way for enslaved African Americans to express their culture. Dunbar honors this heritage and emphasizes the African Americans' history and culture. He uses standard English to reject the restrictions and preconceptions that were prevalent at the time for African American writers. Dunbar conveys the complexity of African American lives by fusing vernacular and formal English (Bergner 450-1). Appeared in *Lyrics of Lowly Life*, "A Banjo Song" tackles a banjo player who entertains the white audience at the expense of himself and his people. Dunbar depicts African American traditions through the speaker who combines the solaces of a historically significant man with the sentiments of a hard day's laborer: Yet dere's times when I furgit 'em, -Aches an' pains an' troubles all, -An' it's when I tek at ebenin' My ol' banjo f'om de wall. (lines 5-8) African American slaves created the modern banjo, which was based on common instruments in Africa. The colonies of those nations involved in the slave trade received these early banjos. After a long day of work, African Americans used something they invented but that was popular among white people. Dunbar associates natural elements with playing the banjo: 'Bout de time dat night is fallin'An' my daily wu'k is done, An' above de shady hilltopsI kin see de settin' sun; When de quiet, restful shaddersIs beginnin' jes' to fall,-- Den I take de little banjoF'om its place upon de wall. (lines 9-16) Dunbar exhibits a sense of traditionalism and expresses his affinity for black music in front of white readers rather than just hinting at it. Describing how he likes to play his banjo at the end of a long day, the speaker amuses his family. Connected to his roots, the speaker feels proud of himself, playing the banjo which contrasts the ease of the nighttime with the arduousness of the daily job. "While concerned with recording the history" of his people, Dunbar "deals with the impact of slavery on the black psyche as represented by the consciousness of [an African American] who wishes to be up to the white standards of beauty" (Taher 84). Spectacular imagery, sound effects, dialect, and phrases like "shady hilltops," "peaceful, tranquil shadders," "fadin' o' de light," and "sparklin' o' de stars" are employed to evoke a sense of serenity but bleakness and natural beauty. Alliteration, assonance, consonance, repetition of "An'," and "Den," and rhyme help produce a melodic rhythm and tone that go along with the banjo

playing. The use of dialectal terms such “dere’s,” “ol’,” “wu’k,” “kin,” “shadders,” and “fom” conveys the speaker’s authenticity and sincerity as well as his cultural and linguistic identity. In this sense, Wagner states, a “few sad notes, along with tears of pity, are to be observed in “A Banjo Song.” The slave’s weariness, overwhelmed by distress and worries, “cannot long resist the consoling tones of the banjo” (83). Dunbar sees dialect as a crucial component of African Americans’ historical consciousness as well as a valuable and important tool for cultural expression and personal salvation. Dialect makes a challenge that undermines stereotypical forms and claims his ancestry for his “creation and identity” (Sundquist 470). Writing to Alice, his future wife, Dunbar says that their relationship is a choice of “preserving by Afro-American writers these quaint old tales and songs of our fathers” (qtd in Braxton xiv). How the speaker resists the oppression and alienation imposed by colonialism through his music and culture is a Fanonian concept that argues: Decolonization [...] alters being and transforms the spectator crushed to a nonessential state into a privileged actor, captured in a virtually grandiose fashion by the spotlight of History. It infuses a new rhythm, specific to a new generation of men, with a new language and a new humanity. Decolonization is truly the creation of new men. (2) With his family, who adore and support him musically, the speaker fosters a sense of belonging and togetherness, allowing his daily struggles to crush his soul or stifle his voice. The speaker rebels against the colonial order that robs him of his freedom and dignity, defending his history which has been distorted. Dunbar develops a radical culture that represents his experiences, showing every phase of a negro’s life as if caught by a camera. After years of leaving their country of origin, African Americans still lament losses such as [H]omeland, family, language, ancestors, identity, property, [and] status in the community [...] the history of hypocritical juridical exclusions of African American reveals a social structure that prevent the immigrant to find closure to these losses by investing in new objects. (Al-Kafaji and Nour 622) Dunbar longs for representing God and nature in his poetry and raises awareness of racial discrimination, aspiring, as he says, “to be a worthy singer of the songs of God and nature. To be able to interpret my own people through song and story, and to prove to the many that after all, we are more human than African” (The Selected Literary Letters, 73). Indeed, he underlines a message to both the black and white that people of all races are equal. “Music” as Fanon sees it, is “a means of communication between men or between man and supernatural forces” (15). A way of living, music is a form of entertainment for African Americans. Fanon continues: “Music was also a weapon of resistance against colonial oppression; it was a way of affirming one’s identity and dignity in front of the colonizer” (15). Although Dunbar realizes how the plantation tradition gives rise to dialect poetry, he strives not to present it as a literary genre that romanticizes the South. He does not employ dialect to support unfavorable racial stereotypes. Instead, he protects the plantation tradition from the most degrading features of the past and makes use of the problematic plantation tradition background. Dunbar and other “poets moved dialect poetry away from caricature [...] toward the presentation of a distinctive African-American cultural heritage rooted in the folk life of the rural South” (Palmer 610). When he writes in standard English, Dunbar is alleged to be divulging the African American identity. His poems are not only formal in lyricism but also “conventional,” and “genteel” “imitations” (Simon 116). Dunbar laments the passing of this beautiful era and longs for its restoration in his “The Deserted Plantation,” which appeared in Lyrics of Lowly Life, which depicts an abandoned estate where slaves formerly lived and worked contentedly while singing and telling tales. Written in a dialect that resembles Southern enslaved people’s, the poem presents a speaker whose voice is authentic and engaging. By using phonetic spelling, grammatical faults, and colloquial idioms, the poem contrasts the state of a plantation abandoned by its owners since the end of the Civil War: Oh, de grubbin’-hoe ’s a-rustin’ in de co’nah, An’ de plow ’s a-tumblin’ down in de fiel’, While de whippo’will ’s a-wailin’ lak a mou’nah When his stubbo’n hea’t is tryin’ ha’d to yiel An’ de big house stan’s all quiet lak an’ solemn, Not a blessed soul in pa’lor, po’ch, er lawn; (lines 1-4; 9-12) When enslaved people sang songs, told stories, prayed, worked, loved, and dreamed, the plantation used to be joyful and active. Dunbar presents “productive language and democratic space through the written and the spoken word in order to promote a homecoming for the essential factors of human rights and universal equality (Yousif 47-8). Even though it is founded on exploitation, the speaker expresses a sense of loss and longing for this past: An’ de banjo’s voice is silent in de qua’ters, D’ ain’t a hymn ner co’n-song ringin’ in de air; But de murmur of a branch’s passin’ waters Is de only soun’ dat breks de stillness dere. Whah ’s de da’kies, dem dat used to be a-dancin’ Evry night befo’ de ole cabin do’? (lines 13-18) The poem captures Dunbar’s conflicted feelings about his identity. He does this to appeal to white audiences who anticipated him to write in dialect about slavery. He critiques this tradition by

exposing its irony and dishonesty. In Fanon's view, colonialism results in oppression and violence that can only be rectified by decolonization. In this respect, "colonialism is not a machine capable of thinking, a body endowed with reason. It is naked violence and only gives in when confronted with greater violence" (23). Dunbar demonstrates how slavery is a sort of colonization that dehumanizes both Black and White people, fabricating a false sense of racial harmony and contentment while concealing the truth of exploitation and suffering: Dey have lef' de ole plantation to de swallers, But it hol's in me a lover till de las'; Fu' I fin' hyeah in de memory dat follers All dat loved me an' dat I loved in de pas'. So I'll stay an' watch de deah ole place an' tend it Ez I used to in de happy days gone by. 'Twell de othah Mastah thinks it's time to end it, An' calls me to my qua'ters in de sky. (lines 29-36) The weeds have taken over the fields where golden grain once swung in the wind. Buildings have been overtaken by swallows, and the master's large estate is silent. The joyful music of the banjo is no longer heard. The former slave has returned despite this picture of desolation out of loyalty. Wagner says that "the self-proclaimed war of liberation" turns Negroes "into rootless creatures who instinctively make their way back home" (88). Dunbar's poem shows that decolonization took place after the Civil War and suggests that the process is neither flawless nor satisfactory. A lack of understanding of his independence is seen in the speaker's lamentation over the end of the plantation lifestyle. The absence of resistance by the speaker against his past captors suggests that he lacks empowerment. For decolonization to succeed, a new national culture based on the beliefs and customs of the colonized people must be developed. Similarly, Fanon states, National culture is no folklore where an abstract populism is convinced it has uncovered the popular truth. It is not some congealed mass of noble gestures [...] National culture is the collective thought process of a people to describe, justify, and extol the actions whereby they have joined forces and remained strong. (168) Although there is no description of such a culture for African Americans in the poem, the speaker's memories are engulfed by white culture. The speaker demonstrates no sense of national identification in either his African ancestry or his citizenship, seeing no potential for himself or his people. Dunbar's dialect poems are concerned with depicting the plantation negroes as being preoccupied with hunting possums and coons. However, Okeke-Exigbo believes that "Dunbar relies not on [...] stereotype of the Negro nor local gossip and national prejudice, but [...] on his direct observation and intuition, ethnic instinct, and knowledge of the Afro-American oral tradition." These poems, which are influenced by Dunbar's personality, have been appealing because of their "immediacy, relevance, and verisimilitude" (63). For instance, Dunbar presents African Americans as having a good time hunting in "Hunting Song," which appeared in *The Complete Poems*. It is interpreted as an expression of "antebellum slave life" that tends to present a "group of men and hounds inspect a trail" (Gelmi 78): Tek a cool night, good an' cleah, Skiff o' snow upon de groun'; Jes' 'bout fall-time o' de yeah W'en de leaves is dry an' brown; Tek a dog an' tek a axe, Tek a lantu'n in yo' han', Wakin' an' skeerin' de po' whippo'wills, Huntin' fu' coon an' fu' 'possum we goes. Blow dat ho'n dah loud an' strong. (lines 1-6;11-13) This poem is a form of rebellion against the oppressive system that enslaves African Americans, but also about a group of black hunters. The poem presents hunting as an act of reclaiming one's dignity, autonomy, and identity. A way of challenging the dominant culture that denies opportunities, hunting means solidarity and community-building among oppressed people who share a common struggle and history. In this respect, Fanon claims: The [...] starving peasant is the exploited who very soon discovers that only violence pays [...] Colonization or decolonization: it is simply a power struggle. The exploited realize that their liberation implies using every means available, and force is the first. (23) The poem, which critiques hunting as a form of internalizing the violence imposed by colonialism, introduces it as escapism and distraction from reality. Fanon says that "[t]he colonized man finds his freedom in and through violence" (86). The hunter stands for the black person who is enslaved while the raccoon stands for the slave owner or white oppressor. The dog, axe, and lantern stand for weapons of rebellion.

Dunbar's Standard English Poetry: A Cultural Hybridity

Dunbar's standard English poems demonstrate his command of poetic form and technique, literary distinction, and viewpoint on his race. Unlike his dialect poetry, which constrained his artistic freedom, standard English poems examine subjects like nature, love, death, sadness, hope, and liberation freely. They frequently draw on his own experiences as an African American poet in America at the turn of the 20th century. Appeared in *Lyrics of Lowly Life*, "The Corn-Stalk Fiddle" is a poem that reflects life on the plantation and shows how violent, human, and non-human conditions are in standard English. Suggesting the violence of plantation life through contrast and irony, the poem describes the peaceful plantation where the field mice feast and the corn stalks shimmer like gold: When the corn's all cut and the bright stalks

shine Like the burnished spears of a field of gold; When the field-mice rich on the nubbins dine, And the frost comes white and the wind blows cold; Then its heigho fellows and hi-diddle-diddle, For the time is ripe for the corn-stalk fiddle. (lines 1-6) The reality of enslavement that African Americans endure on the fields runs counter to this image. They use their corn-stalk fiddle to make music and dance as a means of escaping and coping with their enslavement. The use of the interjection "heigho" is to express the fact that one cannot change a situation so it must be accepted. The speaker claims to have a swollen heart as he surveys his sons and daughters, who were born in this area and raised with love and care: When the eve comes on and our work is done And the sun drops down with a tender glance, With their hearts all prime for the harmless fun, Come the neighbor girls for the evening's dance, And they wait for the well-known twist and twiddle, More time than tune—from the corn-stalk fiddle. (lines 7-12) This claim is paradoxical since enslaved individuals had their children taken away from them and sold to other plantations. The speaker's existence is hopeless because nothing without love gilds it. The poem demonstrates how black people in a harsh environment use their creativity to create happiness. Inequality and contrast are used to describe the relationship between colonized and the colonizer. The latter is suggested to be wealthy, affluent, and tyrannical, whereas the former is portrayed as being impoverished, straightforward, and content. Metaphorically, the cornstalks are compared to "burnished spears" that "shine like gold," implying that they are valuable and potent weapons for the colonized. They can be employed to create a fiddle, a musical instrument that stands for enjoyment and delight. Unlike the colonizer, who utilizes violence and exploitation, the colonized people make creative and peaceful use of their resources (Gelmi 79). Dunbar writes evocative, emotive poems that engage the senses and emotions using a variety of poetic methods, including imagery, metaphor, rhyme, meter, and alliteration. Influenced by the Romantics, Dunbar shows creativity and ingenuity in modifying their methods to suit his voice and vision. In terms of imagery, Dunbar uses details like field mice eating nubbins and the approaching white frost to paint a realistic image of rural life among the colonized people. Warmth, a sense of belonging, and harmony with nature are all conveyed by these pictures. The poem does not refer to any part of colonial life or culture, suggesting that they are neither exist nor relevant to the colonized people. The tone conveys that the colonial people find happiness and significance in their traditions and culture despite their deprivation and persecution. By using metaphors like "a field of gold" (line 2), the poet is conveying his optimism for a better future. Unlike Fanon, Dunbar does not support violence in this poem. Instead, he indicates that cultural expression can bring about change or freedom (Gabbin 197). Dunbar's standard English poems emphasize slavery, oppression, and resistance, insert viewpoints of the enslaved and the enslavers, and combine imagery, symbolism, and sarcasm to express the harsh reality and unspoken aspirations of plantation life. In addition to demonstrating black people's strength and tenacity in the face of slavery, Dunbar aims to highlight their humanity and dignity. For instance, in "Disappointed," appeared in *Lyrics of Lowly Life*, the speaker tells a story of an old man who plants and cares for an orchard to have fruit in his old age. But due to a storm, he loses everything, including his orchard. He sobs in desperation, but a voice from the rain encourages him to plant once again. The old man, who has worked hard to maintain himself, is shown to suffer a tragic loss while dealing with issues of oppression, racism, and injustice. The poem is a reflection of Dunbar's struggles with financial difficulty, illness, and career failure and of African Americans' efforts and aspirations. Asking the elderly man to plant again, the voice in the rain is seen as a symbol of faith, tenacity, or spiritual intervention (Gabbin 199). Expressing his personal and cultural identity as an African American poet in a largely white culture, Dunbar frequently draws inspiration from his struggles, encounters with prejudice, and experiences with persecution, as well as from his aspirations for both himself and his people. The poem's simple structure belies its potent message of resiliency and optimism. It employs parallelism and repetition to highlight the central idea. Dunbar's realistic images of the old man's orchard and the storm that devastates it have been expressed by descriptive language: The sun was kind, and the rain befriended; Fine grew his orchard and fair to view" The sweeping winds into white foam lathered The placid breast of the bay, hard by" (lines 3-4; 9-10). Dunbar, who gives human qualities to non-human things, such as the sun, the rain, and the storm, writes: "Then the spirits that raged in the darkened air / Swept o'er his orchard and left it bare" (lines 11-12). Dunbar uses contrast to highlight the difference between the old man's expectations and reality, as well as between his joy and sorrow: Then he said: 'I will quiet my thrifty fears, For here is fruit for my failing years But even then the storm-clouds gathered The old man stood in the rain, uncaring, Viewing the place the storm had swept; And then with a cry from his soul despairing.'" (lines 5-7; 13-15) To underline the poem's central idea, Dunbar uses words and phrases

repeatedly, such as “old guy” four times, “planted” twice, and “arise” twice, employing parallelism that gives the poem a feeling of rhythm and balance. “Disappointed” can be read as an allegory of the colonial situation, where the old man represents the colonized people, and the storm represents the colonizers. The old man works hard to grow an orchard, which symbolizes his culture, identity, and dignity. He hopes to enjoy the fruits of his labor in his old age, an aspiration for freedom and self-determination. The storm destroys his orchard; he is left with grief (Gabbin 200). The poem offers a glimpse of hope and resistance: the voice can be interpreted as God’s voice or his inner voice of courage. It urges him to not give up on his struggle but to continue to fight for his rights and dignity. Similarly, Fanon sees that “Colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state” (61). He adds that for the sake of “ourselves” and “humanity,” “we must turn over a new leaf [...] we must work out new concepts [...] we must try to set afoot a new man” (316). The poem serves as motivation because it shows how to meet obstacles head-on with perseverance and faith. Linguistically, fluctuating between standard and dialect, Dunbar reflects his predicament of being trapped and constrained and restages fundamental questions of African American identity which enacts the complex and dual identities. This is what W.E.B. Du Bois called “double consciousness,” containing “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals” (35). In this sense, Shira Wolosky clarifies: In Dunbar, this double consciousness takes on a specifically linguistic configuration. But rather than working at cross purposes in ways that deny him his voice, Dunbar’s poetry explores the mutual relation between his languages in a complex form of poetic expression. (154) Dunbar writes in English, using rhyme and meter to create a musical effect. He uses the imagery of nature, such as sun, rain, orchard, and storm to symbolize his hopes and disappointments. His tone is optimistic, despite the tragedy that befalls the old man. Dunbar accepts and adapts to the language of the colonizer, using it as a tool for artistic expression and moral education. He does not challenge the colonial system but hopes for a better future. Fanon resists the language of the colonizer, using it as a weapon for political critique and social change: “The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards” (18). Fanon aims to destroy the colonizers’ system and create a new one: “To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture” (15). Standard English does not “sacrifice African American identity to white linguistic and social norms, [...] joining it to African cultural forms to forge a specific and unique hybrid mode.” Appeared in *Lyrics of Lowly Life*, “Turns South” portrays Dunbar’s yearning for the South, where he and his family belonged. He uses musical imagery and natural images to juxtapose the cold and desolate North with the warm and colorful South. Despite the South’s history of slavery and tyranny, which his people endured, he nevertheless views it as a place of beauty and hope. Personifying the sun as “a lover true” and the mockingbird as “a friend most dear” (lines 11, 12), by showing his affection for nature, Dunbar acknowledges the dark side of the South’s history, saying: “the blood of many a valiant race”/ “Has stained thy soil with crimson hue” (lines 17-18). Dunbar is alluding to his forefathers’ servitude and offers optimism for the South’s future by writing, “Thy faults were bitter, but thy sweets / Were sweeter than I ever knew” (lines 25–26). He illustrates his continued love of the South despite its shortcomings. He expresses his admiration for the music and culture of the South by stating, “thy melodies shall thrill my heart / With every tender strain they bear” (lines 29–30). Wolosky points out: Dunbar is not presenting, but stylizing one kind of black personae: masks that the slaves displayed to their masters as a certain type within African-American history and lore. Dunbar here has his black speakers act the way whites think they do, an imitation of an image, his enactment of an act to which blacks themselves might resort. (157) In contrast to Dunbar, who appears to avoid violence in his portrayal of the South, Fanon sees violence as a necessary and unavoidable tool for achieving independence from colonialism. Fanon, for instance, writes: “The naked truth of decolonization evokes [...] the searing bullets and bloodstained knives which emanate from it” (36). Dunbar says, “The blood of many a valiant race / Has stained thy soil with crimson hue; / But never did they bow disgraced / Who wore thy colors—gray or blue” (lines 16-20). Dunbar does not exalt violence but emphasizes the good things about the South, including its people, culture, and natural surroundings. He accepts racism and the slavery system that persecuted his people in the South as historical facts rather than criticizing them. Instead of encouraging insurrection against the North, he shows his love and appreciation for his native country (Sundquist 25). Except for a few terms like “thy,” “thou,” “thee,” “dat,” “dey,” and “wid,” Dunbar largely utilizes standard English in “Turns South.” He constructs a hybrid language that symbolizes his dual identity as both an American and a Negro. He wants to make the South seem familiar and close to him as if he were speaking to a close friend or lover. According to Fanon, both

colonizers and colonized people experience a distorted and alienated sense of self, and decolonization necessitates a radical reinvention and affirmation of one's selfhood. He claims: The colonized subject also manages to lose sight of himself and ends up by discovering himself as an object in the middle of a sensationalist campaign [...] The colonized man [...] manifest[s] this aggressiveness which has been deposited in his bones against his own people. (52) Fanon views the colonized subject as someone who suffers from a loss of identity and dignity under colonialism. Portrayed as an inferior, savage, and backward being by the colonizer, the colonized is alienated from his own culture and history, which are either distorted or erased by the colonizer. S/he becomes an object of humiliation, rather than a subject of his destiny. In contrast to how he represents the South, Dunbar paints the North as being chilly, desolate, dreary, and lifeless. He associates the South with friendship, love, tenderness, and sweetness while associating the North with dishonor, sympathy, and cheats. These pictures imply that despite the South's problems and shortcomings, Dunbar is trying to convey his emotional commitment and allegiance to it. Like Du Bois, Dunbar does not hesitate to tackle the terrible power of slavery. Still, he highlights the humanity, fortitude, and spiritual abilities of African Americans, especially in the face of the degrading anomie of slavery (Andrews 79-80). He attempts to recover his ancestry and identity from the unfair preconceptions imposed by the white culture. Dunbar demonstrates that he is influenced by the romantic tradition of American writing in which nature is treated as a source of inspiration. In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), W.E.B. Du Bois proposed the idea of "double consciousness" and described it as "this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (44). According to Du Bois, African Americans have to balance their own identities with the standards and prejudices imposed by a racist white culture. Dunbar was renowned for his proficiency in both literary styles, and he employs dialect to capture the true essence and culture of his people while utilizing standard English to reach a wider audience and demonstrate his writing prowess (44). However, Dunbar demonstrates his understanding of and ability to uphold the standards of the white community by utilizing normal English. He reaches a larger audience that might not be familiar with or appreciate his accent (Andrews 81). Dunbar honors African Americans' past and highlights their fortitude in the face of hardship. The misconceptions and prejudices he encountered as an African American poet are challenged by his standard English poems, which proclaim his dignity and value as both a human being and an artist.

Conclusion

Dunbar, a groundbreaking African American poet, not only writes several standard poems about plantation heritage but also employs dialect to give his speakers a genuine voice. By highlighting the complexity, compassion, and suffering of African Americans, Dunbar challenges the plantation tradition, expressing their feelings and views through dialect poems that honor black people. Such people overcome hardships like laborious work, oppression, brutality, and discrimination in the fields as well as their creativity, culture, and spirituality. By showing the innermost feelings and thoughts of African Americans, Dunbar's poetry goes against the expectations and stereotypes of white readers. It serves as evidence of both his artistic talent and his social conscience. To contrast the natural world's harmony and beauty with the brutal reality of slavery and persecution, Dunbar uses nature as a setting for paradox and ambiguity, challenging and dismantling preconceptions. His use of dialect results in a vibrant and expressive vocabulary that captures their culture, feelings, and ideas. Dunbar employs dialect to introduce the humanity and dignity of his speakers naturally and Dunbar creates poetry in standard English to address deeper universal topics that go beyond the context of the plantation. Thus, his poetry belongs to and transcends the plantation tradition. Dunbar's poems written in standard English are still separate, but they are not in opposition. Instead, they take note of the cross-cultural setting in which they both can be found. The multifaceted African American identity reflects his double consciousness as an African American poet who has to balance between his own identity and the expectations of a racist white society. It is an endeavor to create a hybrid language that expresses his dual identity, demonstrates his artistic skill and originality, and addresses the social and historical issues of his time. He reaches a wider audience by crossing the boundaries of dialect. Dunbar never attempts to romanticize African American struggle, but challenges the stereotypic images, and reintroduces poetic representations imposed on his race by both the white and the black. He strikes a balance between opposing assertive and accommodative forces and debates an interaction between complicity and linguistic creativity. Dunbar asserts ownership of an American language that others would dispute and balances between exclusion and transformation and black-and-white perspectives.

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