Translation

By Anne Spencer

We trekked into a far country,

My friend and I.

Our deeper content was never spoken,

But each knew all the other said.

He told me how calm his soul was laid

By the lack of anvil and strife.

“The wooing kestrel,” I said, “mutes his mating-note

To please the harmony of this sweet silence.”

And when at the day’s end

We laid tired bodies ’gainst

The loose warm sands,

And the air fleeced its particles for a coverlet;

When star after star came out

To guard their lovers in oblivion—

My soul so leapt that my evening prayer

Stole my morning song!

Harlem

By Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

      Does it dry up

      like a raisin in the sun?

      Or fester like a sore—

      And then run?

      Does it stink like rotten meat?

      Or crust and sugar over—

      like a syrupy sweet?

      Maybe it just sags

      like a heavy load.

      *Or does it explode?*

If We Must Die

By Claude McKay

If we must die, let it not be like hogs

Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,

While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,

Making their mock at our accursèd lot.

If we must die, O let us nobly die,

So that our precious blood may not be shed

In vain; then even the monsters we defy

Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!

O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!

Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,

And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!

What though before us lies the open grave?

Like men we’ll face the murderous, cowardly pack,

Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

**Incident**

**By Countee Cullen**

For Eric Walrond

Once riding in old Baltimore,
Heart-filled, head-filled with glee.
I saw a Baltimorean
Keep looking straight at me.

Now I was eight and very small,
And he was no whit bigger,
And so I smiled, but he poked out
His tongue, and called me, “Nigger.”

I saw the whole of Baltimore
From May until December;
Of all the things that happened there
That’s all that I remember.

Nineteen-twenty-nine

By William Waring Cuney

Some folks hollered hard times

in nineteen-twenty-nine.

In nineteen-twenty-eight

say I was way behind.

Some folks hollered hard times

because hard times were new.

Hard times is all I ever had,

why should I lie to you?

Some folks hollered hard times.

What is it all about?

Things were bad for me when

those hard times started out.