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Handout: Dialect Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar

When De Co'n Pone's Hot (from *Lyrics of Lowly Life*, 1896)

http://www.libraries.wright.edu/special/dunbar/poems/lyrics_of_lowly_life/

DEY is times in life when Nature Seems to slip a cog an' go, Jes' a-rattlin' down creation, Lak an ocean's overflow; When de worl' jes' stahts a-spinnin' Lak a picaninny's top, An' yo' cup o' joy is brimmin' 'Twell it seems about to slop, An' you feel jes' lak a racah, Dat is trainin' fu' to trot-- When yo' mammy says de blessin' An' de co'n pone 's hot.	How yo' gloom tu'ns into gladness, How yo' joy drives out de doubt When de oven do' is opened, An' de smell comes po'in' out; Why, de 'lectric light o' Heaven Seems to settle on de spot, When yo' mammy says de blessin' An' de co'n pone 's hot.	An' you want to jump an' hollah, Dough you know you 'd bettah not, When yo' mammy says de blessin', An' de co'n pone 's hot.
When you set down at de table, Kin' o' weary lak an' sad, An' you 'se jes' a little tiahed An' purhaps a little mad;	When de cabbage pot is steamin' An' de bacon good an' fat, When de chittlins is a-sputter'n' So 's to show you whah dey 's at; Tek away yo' sody biscuit, Tek away yo' cake an' pie, Fu' de glory time is comin', An' it 's 'proachin' mighty nigh,	I have hyeahd o' lots o' sermons, An' I 've hyeahd o' lots o' prayers, An' I 've listened to some singin' Dat has tuck me up de stairs Of de Glory-Lan' an' set me Jes' below de Mahstah's th'one, An' have lef' my hea't a-singin' In a happy aftah tone; But dem wu'ds so sweetly murmured Seem to tech de softes' spot, When my mammy says de blessin', An' de co'n pone 's hot.

The Old Cabin (from *Howdy, Honey, Howdy*, 1905)

<http://www.libraries.wright.edu/special/dunbar/poems/howdy/>

IN de dead of night I sometimes Git to t'inkin' of de pas', An' de days w'en slavery helt me In my mis'ry--ha'd an' fas'. Dough de time was mighty tryin', In dese houahs somehow hit seem Dat a brightah light come slippin' Thoo de kivahs of my dream.	Talk about yo' go'geous mansions An' yo' big house great an' gran', Des bring up de fines' palace Dat you know in all de lan'. But dey's somep'n' dearah to me, Somep'n' faihah to my eyes In dat cabin, less you bring me To yo' mansion in de skies.	We could gethah daih at evenin', All my frien's 'u'd come erroun', An' hit wan't no time, twell, bless you, You could hyeah de banjo's soun'. You could see de dahkies dancin' Pigeon-wing an' heel an' toe.-- Joyous times I tell you people Roun' dat same ol' cabin do'.
An' my min' fu'gits de whuppins, Draps de feah o' block an' lash, An' flies straight to somep'n' joyful In a secon's light'nin' flash. Den hit seems I see a vision Of a dearah long ago Of de childern tumblin' roun' me By my rough ol' cabin do'.	I kin see de light a-shinin' Thoo de chinks atween de logs, I kin hyeah de way-off bayin' Of my mastah's huntin' dogs, An' de neighin' of de hosses Stampin' on de ol' bahn flo', But above dese soun's de laughin' At my deah ol' cabin do'.	But at times my t'oughts gits saddah, Ez I riccolec' de folks, An' dey frolickin' an' talkin', Wid dey laughin' an' dey jokes. An' hit hu'ts me w'en I membahs Dat I'll nevah see no mo' Dem ah faces gethahed smilin' Roun' dat po' ol' cabin do'.

The Turning of the Babies in the Bed
(from *L'il Gal*, 1904)

http://www.libraries.wright.edu/special/dunbar/poems/li%271_gal/

WOMAN 'S sho' a cur'ous critter,
an' dey ain't no doubtin' dat.
She 's a mess o' funny capahs
f'om huh slippahs to huh hat.
Ef you tries to un'erstan' huh
an' you fails, des up an' say:
"D' ain't a bit o' use to try to
un'erstan' a woman's way."

I don' mean to be complainin',
but I 's jes' a-settin' down
Some o' my own observations,
w'en I cas' my eye eroun'.
Ef you ax me fu' to prove it,
I ken do it mighty fine,
Fu' dey ain't no bettah 'zample
den dis ve'y wife o' mine.

In de ve'y hea't o' midnight,
w'en I 's sleepin' good an' soun',
I kin hyeah a so't o' rustlin'
an' somebody movin' 'roun'.
An' I say, "Lize, what you doin'?"
But she frown an' shek huh haid,
"Heish yo' mouf, I 's only tu'nin'
of de chillun in de bed.

"Don' you know a chile gits restless,
layin' all de night one way?
An' you' got to kind o' 'range him
sev'al times befo' de day?
So de little necks won't worry,
an' de little backs won't break;
Don' you t'ink case chillun 's chillun
dey hain't got no pain an' ache."

So she shakes 'em, an' she twists 'em,
an' she tu'ns 'em 'roun' erbout,
'Twell I don' see how de chillun evah
keeps f'om hollahin' out.
Den she lif's 'em up head down'ards,
so's dey won't git livah-grown,
But dey snoozes jes ez peacefill
ez a liza'd on a stone.

W'en hit 's mos' nigh time fu' wakin'
on de dawn o' jedgment day,
Seems lak I kin hyeah ol' Gab'iel
lay his trumpet down an' say,
"Who dat walkin' 'roun' so easy,
down on earf ermong de dead?"
'T will be Lizy up a-tu'nin'
of de chillun in de bed.

When Malindy Sings (from *When Melindy Sings*, 1903)

<http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=amverse;cc=amverse;view=toc;idno=BAD9541.0001.001>

G' WAY an' quit dat noise, Miss
Lucy—
Put dat music book away;
What's de use to keep on tryin'?
Ef you practise twell you're gray,
You cain't sta't no notes a-flyin'
Lak de ones dat rants and rings
F'om de kitchen to de big woods
When Malindy sings.

You ain't got de nachel o'gans
Fu' to make de soun' come right,
You ain't got de tu'ns an' twistin's
Fu' to make it sweet an' light.
Tell you one thing now, Miss Lucy,
An' I'm tellin' you fu' true,
When hit comes to raal right singin',
'T ain't no easy thing to do.
Easy 'nough fu' folks to hollah,
Lookin' at de lines an' dots,
When dey ain't no one kin sence it,
An' de chune comes in, in spots;
But fu' real melojous music,
Dat jes' strikes yo' hea't and clings,
Jes' you stan' an' listen wif me
When Malindy sings.

Ain't you nevah hyeahd Malindy?
Blessed soul, tek up de cross!
Look hyeah, ain't you jokin', honey?
Well, you don't know what you los'.
Y' ought to hyeah dat gal a-wa'blin',
Robins, la'ks, an' all dem things,
Heish dey moufs an' hides dey faces
When Malindy sings.

Fiddlin' man jes' stop his fiddlin',
Lay his fiddle on de she'f;
Mockin'-bird quit tryin' to whistle,
'Cause he jes' so shamed hisse'f.

Folks a-playin' on de banjo
Draps dey fingahs on de strings—
Bless yo' soul— fu'gits to move 'em,
When Malindy sings.

She jes' spreads huh mouf and
hollahs,
"Come to Jesus," twell you hyeah
Sinnahs' tremblin' steps and voices,
Timid-lak a-drawin' neah;
Den she tu'ns to "Rock of Ages,"
Simply to de cross she clings,
An' you fin' yo' teahs a-drappin'
When Malindy sings.

Who dat says dat humble praises
Wif de Master nevah counts?
Heish yo' mouf, I hyeah dat music,
Ez hit rises up an' mounts—
Floatin' by de hills an' valleys,
Way above dis buryin' sod,
Ez hit makes its way in glory
To de very gates of God!
Oh, hit's sweetah dan de music
Of an edicated band;
An' hit's dearah dan de battle's
Song o' triumph in de lan'.
It seems holier dan evenin'
When de solemn chu'ch bell rings,
Ez I sit an' ca'mly listen
While Malindy sings.

Towsah, stop dat ba'kin', hyeah me!
Mandy, mek dat chile keep still;
Don't you hyeah de echoes callin'
F'om de valley to de hill?
Let me listen, I can hyeah it,
Th'oo de bresh of angel's wings,
Sof' an' sweet, "Swing Low, Sweet
Chariot," Ez Malindy sings.

