Review of In His Own Voice

Babacar Mbaye

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mountaineers," he also suggests that wide-scale land restoration for the Jeffersonian independent farmer is achievable through a simple commitment to acquiring and applying traditional farming and gardening practices. There is also something disconcerting about a bunch of people happily doing the same thing and living the same way with no real sense of individuality. Still, *The Man Who Created Paradise* is an important social commentary on the land for rural, agricultural, environmental, and regional historians seeking a creative alternative to the usual monograph.

Ginette Aley
Virginia Tech


Since the 1970s, many critics have attempted to find Paul Laurence Dunbar's unpublished writings and present them to readers. Complementing the works of Jay Martin, Gossie H. Hudson, Peter Revell, Benjamin Brawley, and Joanne M. Braxton, Herbert Woodward Martin and Ronald Primeau's *In His Own Voice: The Dramatic and Uncollected Works of Paul Laurence Dunbar* brings together plays, songs, essays, short stories, and poems by Dunbar previously never collected or published. Martin and Primeau canonize Dunbar as a prolific writer who mastered a wide range of literary genres and conventions and used them in order to show his devotion to freedom, social uplift, and the memory of his ancestors.

Dunbar's literary talent is visible in the drama "Herrick," which is inspired by eighteenth-century English poetry and comedy of manners. In the play, Bob Herrick, a poet, falls in love with Cynthia, the daughter of a wealthy Englishman called Sir Peter. Resisting Sir Peter's attempt to ridicule him in from of Cynthia and her numerous suitors, Herrick says: "Poets know not only how to twang the lute and make a song, but how to wield a soldier's arm as well. And if these gentlemen singly come to put affront upon me, name your own weapons, and you shall find me deft as well with steel as with quill" (33). Herrick's
statement suggests Dunbar's use of poetry and courage as means of resistance against social alienation. From a literary viewpoint, "Herrick" conveys Dunbar's attempt to show that "he could master the language and the nuance of British comedy" (4).

In "The Gambler's Wife," Dunbar uses irony and trickery as weapons against social and economic oppression. In the play, a woman called Madge plans to betray Caesar, her playful husband, and marry Ralph Darrel, her wealthy lover. The dictum "Necessity is the mother of invention" that guides Madge's intention becomes absurd when Caesar proposes to leave her if she can give him half the settlement that she will receive from her second marriage (94). Caesar's counter-trickery conveys Dunbar's search for subversive strategies against poverty.

Later, Dunbar uses dialect in order to comment on the relations between African-Americans and Africa. In the musical "Jes Lak White Fo'ks," a Black man called Pompous wants his daughter Mandy to restore his family tree by marrying Juju, who is an African king from Madagascar. Pompous sings: "I an goin' get no bargain counter duke for my daughter, huh-uh . . . She [Mandy] is going to marry a prince. She done get her diploma from Vassar, and I has been engaged in diplomatic negotiations wid an 'Fican King" (136). This statement suggests Dunbar's pride in his African ancestry.

Unlike the plays and musicals, the essays in In His Own Voice are social commentaries. In "Of Negro Journals," Dunbar criticizes Black newspaper editors of the 1890s for not upholding the high standards of journalism that the Freedom's Journal, the Ram's Horn, and the North Star had created earlier to pave the way to emancipation (172). Urging the Black journalists to avoid partisan politics and racial sensationalism, Dunbar writes: "The black race in America is hungry for right, knowledge, and valuable information" (175). "Our New Madness," "The Tuskegee Meeting" and "Higher Education" allow Dunbar to take part in the controversy between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois on the issue of the types of education that African-Americans needed to have in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to Dunbar, art, science, literature, carpentry, tannery, and brick-masonry can equally contribute to the development of African-Americans (181).

In his poems, Dunbar shows strong devotion to African-Americans. Poems such as "Remembered" and "After the Struggle" acknowledge the struggles and sacrifices of his ancestors. Pay-
ing a tribute to those who have died while fighting for his freedom, Dunbar writes: "The harvest of their labors now they reap / While all the toils that wearied them are done" (278). "After the Struggle" celebrates the national glory and peace that came

Out of the blood of a conflict fraternal,
Out of the dust and the dimness of death. (282)

In His Own Voice represents Dunbar as an esoteric Black writer who mastered diverse literary genres and conventions and used them to celebrate the memory and sacrifices of those who have died in order to free African-Americans. Martin and Primeau have provided an uplifting and patriotic collection that scholars and students of African-American culture will appreciate greatly. Readers will enjoy In His Own Voice, since the editors establish Dunbar as a multitalented Dunbar who had strong views about race, memory, and nationhood.

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One day in the autumn of 1818, frontiersman Simon Kenton arrived at the home of Jonathan Alder, erstwhile Indian captive and Ohio settler. Alder asked his guest "to be seated and...after supper, we would tell some hard stories to the children" (167). Thanks to Larry L. Nelson's new edition of Alder's memoir, some of the "hard stories" told that night and many others will find a twenty-first century audience. Cast in the mold of the captivity narrative, A History of Jonathan Alder makes it clear why books of that genre were best-sellers from the seventeenth century onwards. It leaps right into the action, quickly engages the reader's sympathy for the protagonist, and grants us entry into culturally alien worlds—and for today's readers, this includes Euro-Americans of 200 years ago as well as Natives.

Nelson's introduction provides the historical background to allow readers to better understand and appreciate the experiences Alder relates, as well as the overall importance of the work. For example, Nelson's introduction explains that Natives