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The Literary Corner: Introduction to African American Poetry with Eugene Redmond—Part I (side a)

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country, also represented the two basic uh um forks you know in that that literary road, or in that that expression road of expression; one the oral and one the uh the written.

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We had what was called the plantation school,

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where it was called the dialect school of poetry. Now one of the problem with the uh dialect school or the writing of dialect as James Weldon Johnson discussed it in the 1920s,

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was that uh since Blacks did not invent or begin the practice of writing dialect, it was very difficult for them to pull out of basically the two stops or the two um uhh frames of references in to which people thrust the Black personality as soon as they heard dialect; one was humour and the other one was pity or pathos.

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And certainly, the Black personality has more than humour and pathos.

<i>Brooks B. Robinson</i>: Definitely

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<i>Eugene B. Redmond</i>: There's tragedy there, there is a serial comedy, there's comedy/tragedy, there's the mood, that mood encompass everything from the blues, to the ballad,

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to the sermon, to the jig, to the pensive ruminations in the cotton field. You know.

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So because White writers out of a need to pantomime and satirize first their own what's sometimes called Hoosier dialect and others

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and also they wanted to deride and to have some fun with the Black experience,

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started to talk about Black people in a comic, unrealistic dialect.

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Using a dialect that often was imitated (sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously) by later Black writers.

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Then the Black writer was forced to break through, to go through a winnowing, thrashing, breaking phase during which he came up with something that was more representative. The most important name associated with this of course is that of Paul Laurence Dunbar, the first poet after Phillis Wheatley, the first Black poet to make a major



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