Cullen, Countee,

in full COUNTEE PORTER CULLEN (b. May 30, 1903, Louisville, Ky.?, U.S.—d. Jan. 9, 1946, New York, N.Y.), American poet, one of the finest of the Harlem Renaissance (q.v.).

Reared by a woman who was probably his paternal grandmother, Countee at age 15 was unofficially adopted by the Reverend F.A. Cullen, minister of Salem M.E. Church, one of Harlem's largest congregations. He won a citywide poetry contest as a schoolboy and saw his winning stanzas widely reprinted. At New York University (B.A., 1925) he won the Witter Bynner Poetry Prize and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. Major American literary magazines accepted his poems regularly, and his first collection of poems, Color (1925), was published to critical acclaim before he had finished college.

Cullen received an M.A. degree from Harvard University in 1926 and worked as an assistant editor for Opportunity magazine. In 1928, just before leaving the United States for France (where he would study on a Guggenheim Fellowship), Cullen married Yolande Du Bois, daughter of W.E.B. Du Bois (divorced 1930). After publication of The Black Christ and Other Poems (1929), Cullen's reputation as a poet waned. From 1934 until the end of his life he taught in New York City public schools. Most notable among his other works are Copper Sun (1927), The Ballad of the Brown Girl (1928), and The Medea and Some Poems (1935). His novel One Way to Heaven (1932) depicts life in Harlem.

Cullen's use of racial themes in his verse was striking at the time, and his material is always fresh and sensitively treated. He drew some criticism, however, because he was heavily influenced by the Romanticism of John Keats and preferred to use classical verse forms rather than rely on the rhythms and idioms of his black American heritage.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY.**