

Harlem Renaissance Handout

At April

Angelica Weld Grimké, 1924

Toss your gay heads,
Brown girl trees;
Toss your gay lovely heads;
Shake your brown slim bodies;
Stretch your brown slim arms;
Stretch your brown slim toes.
Who knows better than we,
With the dark, dark bodies,
What it means
When April comes a-laughing and a-weeping
Once again
At our hearts?

Tableau

Countee Cullen, 1925

Locked arm in arm they cross the way
The black boy and the white,
The golden splendor of the day
The sable pride of night.

From lowered blinds the dark folk stare
And here the fair folk talk,
Indignant that these two should dare
In unison to walk.

Oblivious to look and word
They pass, and see no wonder
That lightning brilliant as a sword
Should blaze the path of thunder.

Excerpt from Smoke, Lilies and Jade

Richard Bruce Nugent, 1926

the street was so long and narrow...so long and narrow...and blue...in the distance it reached the stars...and if he walked long enough...far enough...he could reach the stars too...the narrow blue was so empty...quiet...Alex walked music...it was nice to walk in the blue after a party...Zora had shone again...her stories...she always shone...and Monty was glad...everyone was glad when Zora shone...he was glad he had gone to Monty's party...Monty had a nice place in the village...nice lights...and friends and wine...mother would be scandalized that he could think of going to a party...without a copper to his name...but then mother had never been to Monty's...and mother had never seen the street seem long and narrow and blue...Alex walked music...the click of his heels kept time with a tune in his mind...he glanced into a lighted cafe window...inside were people sipping coffee...men...why did they sit there in the loud light...didn't they know that outside the street...the narrow blue street met the stars...that if they walked long enough...far enough...Alex walked and the click of his heels sounded...and had an echo...sound being tossed back and forth...back and forth...someone was approaching...and their echoes mingled . . . and gave the sound of castanets...Alex liked the sound of the approaching man's footsteps...he walked music also...he knew the beauty of the narrow blue...Alex knew that by the way their echoes mingled...he wished he would speak...but strangers don't speak at four o'clock in the morning...at least if they did he couldn't imagine what would be said...maybe pardon me but are you walking toward the stars...yes, sir, and if you walk long enough...then may I walk with you I want to reach the stars too...*perdone me señor tiene usted fósforo*...Alex was glad he had been addressed in Spanish...to have been asked for a match in English...or to have been addressed in English at all...would have been blasphemy just then...Alex handed him a match...he glanced at his companion apprehensively in the match glow...he was afraid that his appearance would shatter the blue thoughts...and stars...ah...his face was a perfect compliment to his voice...and the echo of their steps mingled...they walked in silence...the castanets of their heels clicking accompaniment...the stranger inhaled deeply and with a nod of content and a smile...blew a cloud of smoke...Alex felt like singing...the stranger knew the magic of blue smoke also...they continued in silence...the castanets of their heels clicking rhythmically...Alex turned in his doorway...up the stairs and the stranger waited for him to light the room...no need for words...they had always known each other..... as they undressed by the blue dawn...Alex knew he had never seen a more perfect being...his body was all symmetry and music...and Alex called him Beauty...long they lay...blowing smoke and exchanging thoughts...and Alex swallowed with difficulty...he felt a glow of tremor...and they talked and...slept...

Prove It on Me Blues

Ma Rainey, 1928

Went out last night, had a great big fight
Everything seemed to go on wrong
I looked up, to my surprise
The gal I was with was gone.

Where she went, I don't know
I mean to follow everywhere she goes;
Folks say I'm crooked. I didn't know where she took it
I want the whole world to know.

They say I do it, ain't nobody caught me
Sure got to prove it on me;
Went out last night with a crowd of my friends,
They must've been women, 'cause I don't like no men.

It's true I wear a collar and a tie,
Makes the wind blow all the while
Don't you say I do it, ain't nobody caught me
You sure got to prove it on me.

Say I do it, ain't nobody caught me
Sure got to prove it on me.

I went out last night with a crowd of my friends,
It must've been women, 'cause I don't like no men.
Wear my clothes just like a fan
Talk to the gals just like any old man

Cause they say I do it, ain't nobody caught me
Sure got to prove it on me.