Threnody for a Brown Girl

Author(s): Countee P. Cullen

Source: *Poetry*, May, 1925, Vol. 26, No. 2 (May, 1925), pp. 78-80

Published by: Poetry Foundation

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/20575048

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at https://about.jstor.org/terms

Poetry Foundation is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Poetry*

This content downloaded from 128.6.37.87 on Thu, 01 Feb 2024 22:46:09 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

THRENODY FOR A BROWN GIRL

Weep not, you who love her—
What rebellious flow
Grief undams shall recover
Whom the gods bid go?
Sorrow rising like a wall,
Bitter, blasphemous—
What avails it to recall
Beauty back to us?

Think not this grave shall keep her,
This marriage-bed confine;
Death may dig it deep and deeper—
She shall climb it like a vine.
Body that was quick and sentient,
Dear as thought or speech,
Death could not, with one trenchant
Blow, snatch out of reach!

She is nearer than the word
Wasted on her now,
Nearer than the swaying bird
On its rhythmic bough.
Only were our faith as much
As a mustard seed,
Aching hungry hands might touch
Her as they touch a reed.

This content downloaded from
128.6.37.87 on Thu, 01 Feb 2024 22:46:09 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Life, who was not loth to trade
Her unto death, has done
Better than he planned, has made
Her wise as Solomon.
Now she knows the Why and Wherefore,
Troublous Whence and Whither;
Why men strive and sweat, and care for
Bays that droop and wither.

All the stars she knows by name,
End and origin thereof,
Knows if love be kin to shame,
If shame be less than love.
What was crooked now is straight,
What was rough is plain;
Grief and sorrow have no weight
Now to cause her pain.

One to her are flame and frost;
Silence is her singing lark.
We alone are children—lost,
Crying in the dark.
Varied features now, and form
Change has bred upon her;
Crush no bug or nauseous worm
Lest you tread upon her.

Pluck no flower lest she scream;
Bruise no slender reed

This content downloaded from
128.6.37.87 on Thu, 01 Feb 2024 22:46:09 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Lest it prove more than it seem,
Lest she groan and bleed.
More than ever trust your brother,
Read him golden, pure—
It may be she finds no other
House so safe and sure.

Set no poet carving
Rhymes to make her laugh;
Only live hearts starving
Need an epitaph.
Lay upon her no white stone
From a foreign quarry;
Earth and sky, be these alone
Her obituary.

Swift as startled fawn or swallow,
Silence all her sound,
She has fled; we cannot follow
Further than this mound.
We who take the beaten track,
Trying to appease
Hearts near breaking with their lack,
We need elegies.

Countee P. Cullen

This content downloaded from
128.6.37.87 on Thu, 01 Feb 2024 22:46:09 +00:00
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms