



The Sport of the Gods

Paul Laurence Dunbar

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Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906) was one of the first African American writers to gain national notoriety, and in his very short career amassed a wonderful collection of short stories, novels, plays, songs, essays and poetry. Dunbar used two very distinct styles in his writing: the standard, classical English, and the dialect of the black community at the turn of the century. Because of this, he was highly popular with both white and black readers, and was revered by such important figures as Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, William Dean Howells, and Frederick Douglass. As Dunbar's health declined from tuberculosis and the alcohol prescribed for it, he took the opportunity to write one final work, "The Sport of the Gods". It was the most naturalistic of all Dunbar's works. The story of the fall of the Hamiltons, a relatively wealthy African American family in the South, surprised Dunbar's readers. The dark, sentimental tone of the novel gave readers their first taste of "non-Plantation literature."

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