



**DuBose Heyward** was born on August 31, 1885 in Charleston, SC. His father passed away when Heyward was only an infant. His family was poor, and he was constantly ill, but he nevertheless became a major contributor to his family's income when he was only ten years old. His education thus became a minor priority and, therefore, suffered. He dropped out of school before he turned fifteen. He worked a number of jobs until he was in his mid-twenties, when he co-founded an insurance company that brought him great wealth.

With his newfound prosperity came a great deal of free time. With this time Heyward began to write and became an amateur thespian. He used his hometown of Charleston as the setting and theme for many of his early writings. With his mentors and fellow authors, John Bennett and Hervey Allen, Heyward helped found the Poetry Society of South Carolina.

In 1922, Heyward and Allen co-authored a collection of poetry entitled *Carolina Chansons*. The poems are mostly centered on the people and scenery of South Carolina's low country. In the book's preface, the authors write, "To the reader unfamiliar with coastal Carolina, the unique aspects of its landscapes may seem exaggerated in these pages; the observant visitor and the native will, it is hoped, recognize that neither the colors nor the shadows are too strong."

In 1924, Heyward gave up on the insurance business and wrote his first and most famous novel *Porgy* (1925), which records the fate of the title character, a disabled tramp living on the streets of one of the more destitute districts of Charleston. Heyward drew inspiration for Porgy's character on the factual Charleston beggar Samuel Smalls. In the novel, Porgy falls in love with a girl named Bess. Porgy wins her as his own by killing her previous beau, Crown. Porgy is tried and convicted for the death of Crown and is thrown in prison. Upon his release, Porgy attempts to find Bess, but she has left for a better life in New York. By the novel's end, Porgy is prepared to set out and find the woman he loves.

In 1928, Heyward collaborated with his wife, playwright Dorothy Heyward, to adapt the novel into a play called *Porgy: A Play in Four Acts*. In 1935, Heyward collaborated with the musical talents of George and Ira Gershwin to further adapt the story into the opera *Porgy and Bess*.

DuBose Heyward died on June 16, 1940 in Tryon, NC.

- Blake Bolen

## 1987 Inductee to the South Carolina Academy of Authors



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*DuBose Heyward*