Touching the Sun, Again

Contemporary African-American Women Writers in The Ward M. Canaday Center

February 26 - May 29, 1998 · The University of Toledo
Touching the Sun, Again:

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in The Ward M. Canaday Center

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Catalog by Todd Doyle and Robert A. Shaddy

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**Table of Contents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maya Angelou</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toni Cade Bambara</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwendolyn Brooks</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucille Clifton</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jayne Cortez</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rita Dove</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mari Evans</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikki Giovanni</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorraine Hansberry</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zora Neale Hurston</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audre Lorde</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry McMillan</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toni Morrison</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria Naylor</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia Sanchez</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ntozake Shange</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mildred Taylor</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Walker</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret Walker</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

In 1989, Myra Ann Best directed an exhibit that featured the works of twenty-two black women novelists, poets, essayists, playwrights, and juvenile authors. That exhibit, "Touching the Sun: Contemporary Afro-American Women Writers," was quite successful and garnered many positive comments. In fact, the special collections department of Oberlin College borrowed a selection of the materials for an exhibit at that college. The current exhibit, "Touching the Sun, Again: Contemporary African-American Women Writers," features eighteen of the same writers presented in the earlier exhibit. However, most of the materials on display in 1998 have all been acquired since 1989. Highlighted, therefore, is the ongoing development and strengthening of our collection of African-American literature. This represents very good news indeed for those interested in the varied experiences of African-American women. These experiences were marked as themes in the first exhibit and continue in this one, also: racial pride, confrontation, oppression; along with the everyday events of living: domestic duties, interaction of mother and children, wife and husband, and friends; and, finally, the pride of being a woman.

In addition to supporting the acquisition of many outstanding research materials, The University of Toledo has evidenced its commitment to the needs and interests of African-American women and those in the larger community by recently adding two new departments: Women’s Studies and Africana Studies. It has been a pleasure, through the course of preparing this exhibit, to have been able to work with the respective directors of these programs, Dr. Harriet Adams and Dr. Abdul Alkalimat. We are all hoping that the sunshine generated from "Touching the Sun, Again" will illuminate and spark even more interest in the Canaday Center’s research collections, along with the Women’s Studies and Africana Studies programs. My thanks to Dr. Adams and Dr. Alkalimat for their support and participation.

As with every other Canaday Center exhibit, many individuals participated in the shaping and execution of this one. We want to recognize Todd Doyle, the Center’s Rare Books Graduate Assistant for his work with the exhibit catalog, preparing and installing the exhibit, and participating in the development and execution of related programs. Thanks and appreciation go to the faculty and staff of the Canaday Center, including our student assistants, for their considerable efforts. Support by Terry Fell of Audio-Visual Services for photography and Jan Vezner of the Publications Office for design and layout of the catalog was invaluable. Finally, I am extremely grateful to the Friends of The University of Toledo Libraries for its financial support of this project.

Robert A. Shaddy

Director, The Ward M. Canaday Center
Maya Angelou

Before finding her niche as a writer of poetry and autobiographical prose in the early 1970's, Maya Angelou's life was shaped by the sometimes unsavory but always distinguishing experiences which form the raw material of her four autobiographical novels, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970), *Gather Together in My Name* (1974), *Singin' and Swingin' an gettin' Merry Like Christmas* (1976) and *The Heart of a Woman* (1980). Born Marguerite Johnson on April 4, 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri, Maya Angelou grew up in Stamps, Arkansas, where her grandmother owned and operated a country store. According to Angelou's own accounts, the "High spots in Stamps were usually negative... droughts, floods, lynchings and deaths," but living in Stamps brought the writer into touch with such severe racial prejudice, that the strong anti-racist stance of her literature should not surprise us.

Angelou left Stamps for San Francisco when her mother moved the family to California, indulging her desire to become a professional gambler. Evidence of Maya Angelou's resiliency and drive abound in her San Francisco years. While attending George Washington High School, she worked as the first black woman streetcar conductor, took dance and drama lessons and, at age sixteen, one month after her high school graduation, she gave birth to a son, Guy. From San Francisco, Angelou moved to San Diego, where the collapse of a brief (10 day) stint as a madam prompted her return to Stamps. This homecoming proved to be only a brief visit, however, because the Ku Klux Klan threatened to retaliate against her for having talked back to a store clerk.

Angelou then moved back to California, where she rescued herself from the allure of a drug-using underworld through her dancing talent, procuring a role in a European touring troupe. Though the call of motherly responsibility brought her back to America, it was not long before her calling as a civil rights activist whisked her back across the Atlantic, to Africa. In the company of fellow activist and romantic companion, Vusumzi Make, Angelou lived for several years as the common-law wife of this flagrantly womanizing racial activist. When the limitations of conservative African tribal customs became too restrictive for her, Angelou returned to the United States. Here she remains, committed to authorship and activism.

In 1993, Angelou joined company with Robert Frost as one of only two poets to read at a presidential inauguration. Today, Angelou continues to hypnotize audiences with her strong stage presence and musical verses. Her poems and autobiographical works testify to her endurance of hardship and her commitment to uplifting, by example, the beleaguered soul of her race. Indeed, Angelou has transfigured her individual struggles into an art which speaks to readers upon many levels.
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
Autobiographical novel about the development of a character who moves from "being ignorant to being aware of being aware." First edition, first printing, with dust jacket.

Just Give Me A Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Die
New York: Random House, 1971
Lyrical poems about "innocence." First edition with dust jacket.

Gather Together in My Name
New York: Random House, 1974

All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes
Franklin Center, PA: Franklin Library, 1986.
Author's memoir of her life in the west African country of Ghana during the early 1960s. "This limited first edition... has been privately printed, and personally signed by Maya Angelou, exclusively for members of the Signed First Edition Society." Gilt-edged, bound in green leather with marbled end papers.

Mrs. Flowers: A Moment of Friendship
Story of friendship between a young girl and an aristocratic black woman who helps her protégé develop pride in her heritage and an appreciation for great literature. First edition, second printing, with gift envelope. Illustrated by Etienne Delessert, designed by Rita Marshall.

Shaker Wh. Don't You Sing?
New York: Random House, 1983
Poems. Uncorrected page proof.

All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes
First Random House edition, with dust jacket.

I Love the Look of Words

On the Pulse of Morning

Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now
Autobiographical essays which survey the author's lifetime experiences. Of the first edition, 500 copies have been signed by the author, and specially bound in maroon cloth with lettering stamped in gold. This copy, number 482 of 500, is autographed: "Joy! [signed] Maya Angelou."
My Painted House. My Friendly Chicken, and Me.

New York: C. Potter, 1994
Children's book about the children of a South African family who choose the amusements of their native community over modern (Western) playthings such as whistles and bicycles. First edition with dust jacket. Photographs by Margaret Courtney-Clarke.

Phenomenal Woman: Four Poems Celebrating Women

Poems. First edition with dust jacket. Designed by Carol Lowenstein.

A Brave and Startling Truth


Even the Stars Look Lonesome

“This wise book is the wonderful continuation of the bestselling Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now.” It is a collection of insights on love, home, Africa, Oprah, age, sexuality and fame. First edition with dust jacket.
Toni Cade Bambara

Toni Cade (who assumed the name Bambara in 1970 when she discovered it as part of a signature from a sketch book she found in her great-grandmother's trunk) attributes much of her outlook on life to the strength of her mother. The head of a single-parent family, Helen Cade would periodically march into her daughter's classroom and set the teacher straight on matters of Afro-American history and people. Bambara has said of her mother: "She was my mother, but she was everybody's champion." Today, Bambara has assumed a similar public role. She is recognized as a writer, teacher and activist who is strongly committed to both academic and community leadership.

As a writer, Bambara finds the short story her medium of choice. This is because, she says, "I am a sprinter rather than a long-distance runner." Included in this exhibit are two of her short story collections, Gorilla, My Love (1972), and The Sea Birds are Still Alive (1977) as well as The Salt Eaters (1980), a novel. In addition, this exhibit includes Bambara's anthology of writing by black women, called simply The Black Woman (1970), which is the first collection of its kind. Writing for and editing this book was important for Bambara as it enabled her to highlight the views of black women, distinct from their male counterparts, at a time when all blacks were thought to be preoccupied only with racial equality.

Bambara has engaged herself in such humanitarian and cultural organizations as the Southern Collective of African-American Writers, the Neighborhood Cultural Arts Center, Inc., in Atlanta and Colony House in Brooklyn. However, for Toni Cade Bambara, writing too, has a communal activist effect. In fact, this author considers writing not only as an occupation or a way to express oneself, but as a true gesture of activism. She claims, "I think it was in 1973 [while visiting Cuba] when I really began to realize that [writing] was a perfectly legitimate way to participate in a struggle."

The Black Woman

This collection is comprised of poems, essays and stories from such authors as Nikki Giovanni, Audre Lorde, and Bambara herself: "Their voices are sharply individual, their views are varied. But all are proudly Black." Signet paperback edition. First printing August, 1970.

Gorilla, My Love

A collection of short stories which focus on the relationships between black Americans in the urban North as well as the rural South. First edition with dust jacket.

The Sea Birds are Still Alive

A collection of short stories whose characters are often involved in socio-political organizations, here and abroad. First edition with dust jacket.

The Salt Eaters

A novel about the underlying similarities among people within and outside the black community. First edition with dust jacket.
Gwendolyn Brook's poetry has been a source of inspiration and reader pleasure ever since her first poem was published in *American Childhood* magazine in 1930. Indeed, by the time Brooks had turned sixteen, her poetic talent had not only caught the attention of several of her school teachers, but had even prompted Langston Hughes to encourage her to continue writing. From the 1940s onward, Brooks' skillfully crafted verses have earned her accolades from a host of respected critics, black and white. While her literary success has been sure and swift, the story of Brooks' own life history has been marked with much greater challenges than her quick acceptance by the literary community would have us believe. Born June 7, 1917 in Topeka, Kansas, the burgeoning poet was a victim, early on, of intra-racial prejudice because she lacked "good hair" and light colored skin. The rejection and alienation which she endured within the black community proved to be even more painful than the interracial prejudices she experienced among whites. Time and again, Brooks was forced to abandon many of her romantic girlhood aspirations in the face of inter- and intra-racial discrimination.

Poetry became for Gwendolyn Brooks a relief from the disapproval of her peers. Eloquent and finely crafted, even her early poems impress readers with their technical precision and their impressive originality. Yet, far from intimidating her readers with lyrical sophistication, her poetry has helped to unite black and white audiences together through a warm mixture of the artfulness of the classroom and the earthiness of the urban neighborhoods of Chicago where she continues to make her home. Moreover, though Brooks built her literary reputation by appropriating many of the literary traditions of the white elite, the poet's more mature work moves away from poetic conventions. In fact, referring to her break with poetical rhyme, for example, Brooks declared in 1967: "I've written hundreds... of sonnets, and I'll probably never write another one, because I don't feel this is a sonnet time. It seems to me it's a wild, raw, ragged free verse time."

Gwendolyn Brooks was the first black woman to receive the Pulitzer Prize (1950), as well as the first black woman to hold the office of Poetry Consultant to the Library of Congress (1985-86). She was named Poet Laureate of Illinois in 1968 and has received numerous honorary degrees from colleges and universities across the country. Her dedication to the art of poetry is evidenced not only in her teaching, but in her private financial support of a number of scholarships and poetry awards for young writers. Through her poetry, teaching, and financial generosity, Brooks has shown herself committed to a policy of racial activism which, in the words of Janet Overmeyer from the *Christian Science Monitor*, "neither foolishly pities nor condemns," but creates.
A Street in Bronzeville

Annie Allen
Poems about the maturation of a young black girl. First edition with dust jacket.

Maud Martha
New York: Harper, 1953
Novel about the joys and disappointments of a maturing young girl. First edition with dust jacket.

Maud Martha

Bronzeville Boys and Girls
A collection of children's poems highlighting the buoyant personality of several young individuals. First edition with dust jacket. Illustrations by Ronni Solbert.

We Real Cool
Ironic poem about the glory of low aspirations. White letters on black ground simulating the writing on a chalkboard. Printed on single broadside sheet. Designed by Cledie Taylor.

The Bean Eaters
Poems celebrating the strength and endurance of people in hardship. First edition with dust jacket.

Selected Poems

The Wall
Poem about black activism. Printed on single broadside sheet.

In the Mecca
Series of poems which describe the difficult lives of the tenants inhabiting a half-block-long apartment complex. First edition with dust jacket.

Family Pictures

Riot
A poem in three parts about the disturbances in Chicago following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. First edition second printing. Signed by the author: "For the Tangs, Sincerely, [signed] Gwen Brooks."

Aloneness
Children's book stressing the difference between aloneness and loneliness. First edition, first printing. Illustrated by Leroy Foster.

Family Pictures
First hardbound edition, with dust jacket.
The World Of Gwendolyn Brooks
Anthology of poetry and prose. First edition with dust jacket.
Inscribed by the author: "For Arin Borsten, Sincerely, [signed] Gwendolyn Brooks."

Aurora
Optimistic poem about the "early period of anything." One broadside sheet. Black printing on rose/green ground. One of 500 copies.

Report from Part One
Collection of autobiographical poetry and prose which chronicles the author's family history, marriage, children, life influences, teaching and publishing successes. First edition, second printing. Inscribed by the author: "Hi Jean! All the little 'nuances' are in here! Gratefully, [signed] Gwen Brooks."

The Tiger Who Wore White Gloves
Children's book about being proud of who you are and what you look like. First edition, first printing. Illustrated by Timothy Jones.

Beckonings
Poems. First edition, first printing.

Paul Robeson
Poetic tribute to Paul Robeson, "the major voice." In the hand of the poet, [197?].

Primer for Blacks

To Disembark
An anthology of poems collected from previous publications, including Riot, Beckonings, and Family Pictures. First edition with dust jacket.

To Disembark

Black Love

Mayor Harold Washington and Chicago
the I Will City
Collection of three poems celebrating the poet's hometown, Chicago, and its mayor. First edition signed by the author: "Gwendolyn Brooks."

Very Young Poets

Blacks
Anthology of the author's prose and poetry. Paperback, fourth printing.

Winnie
In the second decade of the 1800s, Lucille Clifton's great-grandmother, Caroline Donald Sale, was captured from her home in Africa and brought to the United States. When she was only eight years old, this remarkable woman walked from New Orleans to Virginia. The heroic determination of Caroline Sale and those like her has become for Clifton the ideal to which young blacks in the twentieth century should aspire. While Clifton's poetry addresses the afflictions of alcoholism and poverty which often besiege black families living in the ghetto, she does so by way of a contagious optimism which uplifts rather than finds fault with the characters she depicts. For her, modern-day heroes are responsible parents and caring community members who prevail in spite of their disadvantages.

This poet's positive outlook is reflected in the titles of her published collections, especially *Good Times* (1969), and *Good News About the Earth* (1972), as well as in her commitment to producing children's books designed to help children cultivate meaningful, responsible lives, and to help them make sense out of a world which often seems senseless. All in all, Lucille Clifton's works encourage their readers to renew their appreciation of the ordinary and to find stability in extraordinarily difficult circumstances through an understanding of their relationship to family members, both living and deceased. In speaking of her work as a poet, Clifton has stated: "I am interested in trying to render big ideas in a simple way . . . in being understood rather than admired."


**Good Times**


Poems about those forced to endure hardship. First edition, first printing, with dust jacket.

**The Black BC's**


Children's letter book focusing on black pride. First edition with dust jacket.

**Good News About the Earth**


Poems about "a certain kind of white arrogance." First edition with dust jacket.


Poem of one's joyful reflections upon the mysteries of ancestral heritage.
All of Us
"This is a poem about love." First printing on one broadside sheet. Maroon type on light orange paper. Bottom edge deckled, all others trimmed.

An Ordinary Woman
Poems centered around Clifton's "roles as a woman and a poet." First edition with dust jacket.

My Brother Fine with Me
Children's story about sibling rivalry and reconciliation. First edition with dust jacket.

Generations
A collection of photos and prose anecdotes about Clifton's family. Uncorrected first proof. The subtitle, "A Celebration in Prose," was later changed to "A Memoir by Lucille Clifton."

Two-Headed Woman
A collection of uplifting and spiritual poems. First edition with dust jacket.

Good Woman

Next
Poems about the "universal human heart." First edition with dust jacket.

Quilting
Poems which explore the metaphorical relationship between a heterogeneous quilt and the complexities of life. First edition with dust jacket.

Quilting
First paperback edition.

Ten Oxherding Pictures
A series of allegorical poems attributed to 12th century Chinese Zen master, Kaku-An Shi-En, composed as a training guide for Chinese Buddhist monks. 200 copies were designed and printed by Felicia Rice and her typography class... sponsored by the UCSC art board.

The Book of Light
Poems of joy and reflection. Uncorrected proof.

The Book of Light
First edition with dust jacket.
Jayne Cortez: "Jazz Poetry"

For Jayne Cortez, poetry and music are inseparable. Not only is her own poetry built on strong musical foundations, many of her poems pay direct tribute to jazz music and the musicians who make it. Often punctuated with percussive, chanting refrains: "a," "oh," and "uh-huh," Cortez's living poetry pushes the written word to its limits. In fact, it is Cortez's performances and audio recordings of her vivacious readings which have assured her place in the canon of poetic innovation. From her first published collection, *Pissstained Stairs and the Monkey Man's Ware's* (1969), Cortez's unique stylistic blend of black speech, clever metaphorical combinations and musical allusions to blues and jazz forms began to take shape. With the publication of each successive collection, *Festivals and Funerals* (1971), *Sacrifications* (1973), *Mouth on Paper* (1977), *Firespitter* (1982), and *Coagulations* (1984), Cortez's poetry has become more refined, more philosophical, and more musical. Indeed, some of her lines are pure music with little linguistic sense on the printed page. Consider, for example, the following line from the poem "Chocolate," published in *Mouth on Paper* (1977) "aye ya ya ya ay o Chocolate" which Cortez vocalizes in her performances in such a way as to mimic the sounds of a blues trumpet.

While her poetry eagerly embraces the oral tradition from which it grew, it is not musically based only for the sake of being so. Rather, music, for Cortez, is the means through which her revolutionary messages can be made accessible to audiences who otherwise would not look to poetry for the answers to difficult questions. And Cortez's messages are strong; justice, for this poet, should exist between races as well as among them, and injustice is condemned in African nations with the same vehemence as it is denounced in Vietnam and America. Furthermore, if Cortez's work is revolutionary, it envisions a revolution tempered with realism. In a verse meant, perhaps, to remind listeners of the futility of ideological and military revolutions which merely transfer the role of oppressor from one group to another, one hard working character from Cortez's *Festivals and Funerals* laments: "do you think a revolution is what I need?" Like the musical forms to which she looks for inspiration, the poetry of Jayne Cortez is provocative and complex as well as entertaining.

**Festivals and Funerals**
*New York: Cortez, 1971.*
Poems about people "who see themselves as poised between the extremes of creation and destruction." Paperback. First edition with drawings by Mel Edwards.

**Mouth on Paper**

**Firespitter**
*New York: Bola Press, 1982.*

**Coagulations**

Poem of exhilaration.

Poem of exhilaration.
Rita Dove

Born August 28, 1952 in Akron, Ohio, Rita Dove is one of several poets featured in this exhibit whose work celebrates her family's history. Born of well-to-do parents, Dove excelled in school from an early age. In high school, for example, Rita Dove was honored as one of the top 100 seniors in the nation, and paid a visit to the White House as a Presidential Scholar. Having graduated *summa cum laude* from Miami University (Ohio), the budding poet went on to become a Fulbright Scholar and to teach at the prestigious Iowa Writer's Workshop.

While Rita Dove's first published works were not unanimously praised, critical approval increased as her poetic talents matured. In 1987, Dove joined Gwendolyn Brooks as one of only two black women to have received the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry. Her prize-winning collection, *Thomas and Beulah*, recounts the early life and love of her maternal grandparents from the perspective of each grandparent in turn. Dove's poetry is evocative and nostalgic, but critics agree that her appeal is not limited to African-American audiences alone. As Kirkland Jones has declared, Dove “appreciates the aesthetics of race and gender but does not feel the need to raise the color problem for color's sake.”

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**Ten Poems By Rita Dove**
A collection of ten early poems. Hand-printed text with hand-colored fingernails on title page. This copy is number 188 of 200. Bound in brown wraps, with printed manila envelope.

**Museum**
Poems. First edition with dust jacket.

**Fifth Sunday**

**Thomas and Beulah**
A collection of poems which explore the author's family history. First edition with dust jacket.

**Grace Notes**
Autobiographical poems. First edition with dust jacket.

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**Through the Ivory Gate**
Novel about a gifted young black woman who takes a position as artist-in-residence at an elementary school in her hometown of Akron, OH. Advance Proof copy.

**Selected Poems**
An anthology of poetry including selections from *Ten Poems, Thomas and Beulah, and Museum*. First edition with dust jacket.

**Three Days of Forest, a River: Free**
Poem on one broadside sheet. From the Heaven poster series, #57. Illustrated with a photo, “Lantern Tree,” by Paul Quenon. Signed by the author at end of poem: “Rita Dove.”

**The Darker Face of the Earth**

**Mother Love: Poems**
Poems about the love between mother and daughter. First edition with dust jacket inscribed by the author: “Rita Dove June 5, 95.”

**The Poet's World**
Mari Evans

Born in Toledo in 1923, Mari Evans has been a television producer and director in addition to writing numerous plays, short stories, critical essays and poems. After having attended The University of Toledo to study fashion design, Evans claims that she “drifted” into a career as a poet. She has held several academic positions in Indiana, Missouri, Illinois and New York as a creative writing teacher and a poet-in-residence. Evans claims that she increasingly came to understand the poet’s duty as a social one, in which the writer must listen, watch, warn and tell about the people and events he or she experiences.

Evans remains an important figure on the literary scene not only because of her own poetry, but also because of her efforts to support the work of other black writers. In 1984, she published an important anthology which aimed to endow black authors of talent with the attention they deserve but had not hitherto received. In fact, Evans’ Black Women Writers 1950-1980 was the first book of its kind to highlight the achievements of many of the gifted authors represented in this exhibit, including Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, Audre Lorde and Nikki Giovanni.

Evans’ poetry is characterized by simple diction and stylistic innovation. In her own words: “I insist that Black poetry, Black literature, if you will, be evaluated stylistically for its imagery, its metaphor, description, onomatopoeia, its polyrhythms, its rhetoric ....” She goes on to say, “I require something of my poems visually as well as rhetorically. I work as hard at how the poem ‘looks’ as at crafting; indeed, for me, the two are synonymous.” More important for Evans than all of her poems’ technical prowess, however, is her readership which she envisions as primarily black. She continues, “If there are those outside the Black experience who hear the music and can catch the beat (of my poetry), that is serendipity; I have no objections. But when I write, I write according to the title of poet Margaret Walker’s classic: “for my people.”

A bitterly ironic love poem.

Poem for freedom.

I Am A Black Woman
Poems of black pride and black love. First edition, paperback.
Review copy.

I Look At Me!

Nightstar
Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, 1981.

Poem about the grim results of violence.
Nikki Giovanni emerged as a formidable force in black women's literature during the turbulent 1960s. Following on the heels of the assassinations of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and two Kennedy brothers, it is not surprising that Giovanni's early poetry urges militant action on the part of all black Americans. Reflecting upon King's death in 1968, the poet writes, "The assassination of Martin Luther King is an act of war." Pronouncements such as this one and a host of more explicit condemnations of the white western world's outrages led to her work being labeled "hate poetry" by Arthur Davis in 1973. However, perhaps prompted by her introspective autobiography, Gemini, or by the birth of her son, Tommy, in 1969, Giovanni's later poetry moves away from the violent urgings which marked her 1960s collections, and begins to champion the cause of individual self-realization rather than collective revolutionary action.

Giovanni was educated at Fisk University, where she graduated magna cum laude with a history degree. She then undertook graduate study at Columbia University and at the University of Pennsylvania, before accepting a teaching position at Queen's College in New York. Evidence of her sincere commitment to advancing the cause of black artists is found in her key role in establishing the first Cincinnati Black Arts Festival in 1967, and in her move to found a publishing cooperative, NikTom, in 1970, dedicated to printing and distributing the work of black writers.

Giovanni's poetry is noted for its fluid transitions between words and moods, her rhythmic lyricism and her unflinching self-assessments. Consider, for example, the following verse culled from the title poem of her 1978 collection, "Cotton Candy on a Rainy Day": "I am cotton candy on a rainy day/ the unrealized dream of an unborn idea."

Although her later work eschews the violent outbursts which often characterized her earlier poems, a lingering tension still permeates her writings. For example, in the poem "Boxes," from the same 1978 collection, Giovanni writes, "I am a box/ on a tight string/ subject to pop/ without notice." Whether it encourages activism or shares self-revelations, however, Giovanni considers her poetry an instrument for enriching both readers and writers.

In her 1983 collection, Those Who Ride the Night Winds, she maintains, "If you want to share... a vision... or tell the truth... you pick up... your pen... and take your chances."

Black Feeling Black Talk
n.p., Private Printing, 1968
These 18 poems comprise Nikki Giovanni's first published collection. "All you can say after reading her is 'yeah.'" First edition, first printing.

Black Judgement
"Love poems for the Black Revolution." First edition, first printing.

Black Feeling Black Talk
Third edition, fourth printing

Black Feeling Black Talk Black Judgement
A compilation of the works from her previous two collections. "Dig it."
Lorraine Hansberry

Lorraine Hansberry was born in 1930, to an influential Chicago family deeply involved in black art and politics. In 1938, her father risked imprisonment to protest discriminatory Chicago real estate statutes and, with the help of the NAACP, won his case two years later in the U.S. Supreme Court. Though Hansberry matriculated at the University of Wisconsin from 1948-50, she abandoned formal college training for the educational environment of the editorial room at the radical black newspaper, Freedom, in 1950. Here she wrote and published a series of articles and reviews and assumed the post of associate editor in 1952, leaving Freedom only one year later to dedicate herself exclusively to her own creative writing.

Hansberry's first play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, tells the story of one black family's struggle to decide how best to spend the proceeds of a sizable insurance policy payoff. The piece became a hallmark in the development of black theater. Not only was it important as the first Broadway play written by a black woman, it also paved the way for future black productions to be performed in Broadway theaters. While Hansberry's three subsequent plays, *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window, To Be Young, Gifted and Black, and Les Blancs*, were less well received than her first, all of these appeared on Broadway. Meanwhile, *A Raisin in the Sun* continued to engage large audiences even after its Broadway career was ended as Columbia pictures produced its own screen adaptation of Hansberry's original drama.

In 1965, while Hansberry was only 34, she died of cancer in a New York hospital. At her request, Hansberry's former husband, writer Robert Nemiroff, assisted in completing some of the works she had left unfinished at the time of her death. Though her first play is the best known of her writings, all of Lorraine Hansberry's works are notable for their clever dialogue and their believable characters.

*A Raisin in the Sun*
Hardbound with photograph inset. With dust jacket.

*The Movement*

*A Matter of Colour*
English edition of *The Movement*.

*The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*
Drama about racial injustice and certain characters' attempts to overcome it, set in a Greenwich Village apartment. Hardbound edition with dust jacket.

*To Be Young, Gifted and Black*
Compilation of previously published and hitherto unpublished works which elucidate Ms. Hansberry's "unique view of the human spirit [and] her unswerving belief in the possibilities innate in human nature."
Hardbound edition with dust jacket. Includes original drawings and art by the author.

*Les Blancs*
This edition of the "collected last plays" of Lorraine Hansberry includes *Les Blancs, What Use are Flowers?, and The Drinking Gourd*. The title selection is a penetrating exploration of the making of a black revolutionary. First edition with dust jacket.

*Freedomways*, 194 (1979)
This special issue, devoted to Lorraine Hansberry which includes essays by Nikki Giovanni, Adrienne Rich, and Margaret B. Wilkerson, was intended by the publishers to "introduce and, in some cases, reintroduce Hansberry to those who are unaware of the range of her work."

*A Raisin in the Sun*
"The unfilmed original screenplay." Bound in yellow wrappers, printed in black. First edition, first printing.
Zora Neale Hurston was born and raised in the all-black community of Eatonville, Florida, where her father served three terms as mayor. Quickly after her mother's death in 1904, Hurston's father remarried and, for the sake of his new wife's convenience, sent Hurston and two younger siblings away to a Jacksonville school. For the next few years, as a young teenager, Hurston shuffled back and forth between working as a domestic servant in the homes of wealthy whites and suffering the haphazard care of her father's house. She later enrolled at Howard University, where she began her literary career by publishing her first short story, "John Redding Goes to Sea," through a literary society. Though this was Hurston's first published effort, "John Redding Goes to Sea" contains many of the cornerstones (such as credible dialogue, male characters who feel trapped, and a backdrop of folklorish black magic) which characterize its author's later works.

Encouraged by her early literary success, Hurston soon moved to New York and established important ties with some key figures of the Harlem Renaissance. Here, together with Langston Hughes and Wallace Thurman, she helped to establish Fire!!, a short-lived literary magazine for young black writers. In 1926, after a collection of her writings, Eatonville Anthology, was published serially in the pages of Messenger, Hurston shifted her attention from fiction to folklore. Bolstered by a sizable fellowship grant, Hurston returned to the South to study the "songs, customs, tales, superstitions, lies, jokes, dances and games of Afro-American folklore." Her project met with little success, however, since the educated dialect Hurston had acquired at college caused her to be looked upon with suspicion by the very subjects she intended to study.

Many critics contend that Hurston's dual pursuit of both academic and creative writing prevented her from living up to her potential in either field. Whatever the truth of this accusation, Hurston's literary career was irreparably damaged when New York police officers arrested her in 1948 on charges of child molestation, for which she was later acquitted. In spite of this acquittal, her reputation was permanently sullied and Hurston was again compelled to employ herself at odd jobs which included teaching, domestic service and nonfiction authorship. She suffered a stroke in 1959 and died shortly afterwards in January, 1960, in obscurity and in debt. In fact, her friends and relatives needed to postpone her burial for a week while they procured the necessary burial fees.

Despite her hardships, Hurston was the most prolific black woman writer of her time. Her fictional works, which poignantly portray the black dialect of the South, have expanded our understanding of the crucial role of folklore in black communities while they address many of the issues common to blacks and whites alike: marital strain, domestic violence, and a longing for uninhibited freedom.
A clever tale of a washwoman's revenge on her unfaithful husband. Originally published in the periodical, Fire!: A Quarterly Devoted to Younger Negro Artists in November 1926. Though Fire! produced only a single issue, a facsimile edition of that original issue was published in 1982. This copy is one of 1400 produced by The Fire! Press, Metuchen, NJ.

This is the original publication of a story about the complex causes and results of marital infidelity.

Jonah's Gourd Vine
Philadelphia: Lippincot, 1934.
Hurston's first published novel, Jonah’s Gourd Vine tells the story of a preacher who has little interest in upholding his religious spiritualism outside the pulpit.

Mules and Men
Philadelphia: Lippincot, 1935.

Mules and Men

Their Eyes Were Watching God
Philadelphia: Lippincot, 1937.
When Janie Crawford finds little satisfaction in her conventional life, she seeks a better life beyond the horizon. First edition with dust jacket.

Their Eyes Were Watching God

Dust Tracks on the Road
Philadelphia: Lippincot, 1942.
A “partially accurate, partially fictionalized” autobiography. First edition with dust jacket.

Dust Tracks on the Road
Second edition with dust jacket.

Seraph on the Suwanee
New York: Scribner's, 1948.
Novel about a poor, neurotic white woman, Arvay Henson, who learns the subtle art of self-appreciation. First edition with dust jacket.

I Love Myself When I Am Laughing
An anthology of fiction, essays, and articles by Zora Neale Hurston. Paperback.

The Sanctified Church
“A collection of Hurston’s ground-breaking essays on Afro-American folklore, legend, popular mythology and, in particular, the unique spiritual character of the Southern Black Christian Church.” Paperback.

Spunk
A collection of short fiction which focuses on life in rural Eatonville, Florida and in Harlem during the height of the Harlem Renaissance. Paperback.

Tell My Horse

Mule Bone
An “energetic and often farcical play” by Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes revolving around Jim and Dave, “a two-man song-and-dance team, and Daisy, the woman who comes between their singing and dancing.” First Harper Perennial edition with dust jacket.
Audre Lorde

Born in New York in 1934, Audre Lorde worked for eight years as a librarian before devoting herself fully to the writing of poetry in 1968. Since then, Lorde has shown herself to be a prolific writer producing seven poetry collections over the next ten years. Her poetry is original as well as cathartic, voicing her rage against injustice as often as testifying to her love of her children and her partners. Indeed, the 1972 publication of *Cables to Rage* caused a quite a stir because of the strong homosexual overtones which pervade one of the poems. In 1980, Lorde published *The Cancer Journals*, a nonfiction work which addresses the author's difficult struggle with breast cancer.

Lorde's work is notable for its commitment to preserving the dignity and honorableness of marginal individuals, whether they be gay, black, or female. Putting her poetic pronouncements into practice, Lorde has played an instrumental role in the work of *Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press*, a feminist publishing endeavor dedicated to the work of black artists. In addition, she founded the humanitarian organization *Sisters in Support of Sisters in South Africa*. Today, Lorde divides her time between writing, public lecturing, and teaching at Hunter College in New York.

"I am Black, Woman and Poet," writes Audre Lorde, "— all three facts are outside the realm of my choice... I was not born on a farm or in the forest but in the center of the largest city in the world—a member of the human race hemmed in by stone and away from earth and sunlight. But what is in my blood and kin of richness, of brown earth and noon sun and the strength to love them, comes the roundabout way from Africa through the sun islands, to a stony coast; and these are the gifts through which I sing, through which I see."

**The First Cities**

**Cables to Rage**
Poems which address “the transience of human love, the existence of human betrayal, birth and love.” First edition.

**From a Land Where Other People Live**
Poems about love, family, womanhood, and “quiet rage.” First edition, first printing.
New York Head Shop and Museum
Poems about the author's "involvement in and feelings about social and political issues." First edition, first printing.

Between Ourselves
"The difference between poetry and rhetoric / is being ready to kill / yourself / instead of your children." Published in an edition of 1,100 copies. Brown ink on brown board paper. Calligraphy and cover design by Barbara Lakshmi Khan. Ashanti designs executed by Audre Lorde.

Coal
A compilation of poems from Lorde's first two books, The First Cities and Cables to Rage. First edition with dust jacket.

The Black Unicorn
Poems about the land, culture, and people of Africa. Advance Proof copy.

The Black Unicorn
First edition with dust jacket.

A Litany For Survival
s.l.: Blackwells Press, 1981
Poem against fear. Single Broadside sheet. "100 copies of this broadside were printed from the Black Unicorn especially for the Great Midwestern Bookshow in April 1981. Designed and printed at Blackwells Press by Nick Zachreson." Autographed by the poet.

Chosen Poems Old and New
"Here are the words of some of the women I have been, am being still, will come to be." Uncorrected proof.

Chosen Poems Old and New
Paperback edition signed by the author: "Audre Lorde."

Zami: A New Spelling of My Name
A treatment of the difficult relationship between a mother and her daughter. Paperback.

Sister Outsider
A collection of essays and speeches. Paperback.

Apartheid U.S.A.
Informational pamphlet against "institutionalized racism grown more and more aggressive in the service of shrinking profit-oriented economies." Freedom organizing series #2. First edition, second printing. Published along with Our Common Enemy, Our Common Cause, by Merle Woo.

Our Dead Behind Us
Poems that explore "differences as creative tensions, and the motivating force—activism." First edition with dust jacket.

A Burst of Light
A collection of essays, diary entries and interviews by Audre Lorde meant to address "that part of each of us which refuses to be silent." Hardbound edition.

Need: A Chorale for Black Women Voices.
Pamphlet created "for particular use in classes, small community meetings, families, churches and discussion groups, to open a dialogue between Black women and Black men on the subject of violence against women within our communities." Freedom organizing series #6. First edition, first printing.

The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance:
Poems 1987-1992
An Anthology of poems treating Lorde's "lifelong themes of love, anger, family politics, sexuality, and the body of the city." Uncorrected proof.
Terry McMillan's novels and short stories delve into the heart of urban hardship. Her first novel, *Mama* (1987), uses the feisty character of Mildred Peacock to depict the struggles of contemporary black city dwellers on the brink of spiritual and economic ruin. Her next novel, *Disappearing Acts* (1989), which sparked a multimillion dollar defamation suit from the father of McMillan's only son, uses a Brooklyn brownstone setting to combine a Romeo & Juliet-like tale of star-crossed, and sometimes violent, lovers with a story of the unlikely aspirations of an overweight, aspiring singer.

Critical assessments of McMillan's work have been far from unanimous. Readers have yet to decide if McMillan's authorial talent does indeed, as some critics contend, rival that of Hurston, or whether, as the critic David Nicholson has argued, McMillan's refusal "to perpetuate the well-worn conventions of black women's writing" amounts to nothing more than a "post-feminist black urban romance novel."

For McMillan, however, whose latest novels include *Waiting to Exhale* (1992), and *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* (1996), critical judgments good or bad, were not always easy to come by. When her first novel was released, the author was so unsatisfied with the sparse publicity her book received that she personally wrote over three thousand letters to bookstores, colleges and universities to promote the work herself. McMillan dismisses the charges of critics who find her character's profane dialogue offensive. "That's the way we talk," she claims in defense. Besides, as she has written elsewhere, her generation of black writers is "a new breed, free to write as we please... because of the way life has changed."

**Mama**

Novel about the hard times of "Mildred Peacock, mother of five, black, and fed up with poverty and the jealous rampages of her husband, Crook." First edition with dust jacket.

**Disappearing Acts**


**Breaking Ice: An Anthology of Contemporary Black American Fiction**


**Waiting to Exhale**

The story of "four African-American Women who lean on each other while... waiting for that man who will take their breath away." Hardbound edition with dust jacket. First published in 1992 by Viking Penguin.
When Toni Morrison was honored in 1993 as the first black woman to receive the Nobel Prize in literature, she maintained in her acceptance speech that storytelling is a cooperative effort between the author and her readers. “How lovely it is,” she declares, “this thing we have done—together.” Christened Chloe Anthony Wofford in Lorain, Ohio, the author now known as Toni Morrison grew up in a family whose rich musical and storytelling traditions played an instrumental role in her development. As a child, Morrison read voraciously. Surprisingly, though, the literature of other black writers was not included in her reading repertoire until she was an adult. Thus, if her work resembles the writings of other black authors for whom the black literary tradition played a formative role, she concedes this is because “the world as perceived by black women at certain times does exist.”

Educated at Howard University and Cornell University, Morrison spent nearly a decade as an editor in New York City before devoting her life entirely to teaching and writing. Her fictional works, which include The Bluest Eye (1970), Sula (1973), Song of Solomon (1977), Tar Baby (1981), and Jazz (1992), combine her unique and masterful narrative skill with the poetic lyricism of the black language which is her heritage. The Pulitzer Prize winning Beloved (1987), perhaps Morrison’s best known work, recounts the story of Margaret Garner, a slave who murdered her own child in order to protect her from the horrors of American slavery.

Toni Morrison contends that “if you study the culture and art of African Americans you are not studying a regional or minor culture. What you are studying is American.” In spite of the wide-ranging cultural relevance she understands her writings as having, she insists, “I want to write for people like me, which is to say black people, curious people, demanding people . . . people who can’t be faked, people who don’t need to be patronized, people who have very, very high criteria.”

The Bluest Eye
An account of how the Western notion of idealized beauty, consisting of blond hair and blue eyes, turns “self-esteem in the black community into self-loathing.” First edition with dust jacket.

The Bluest Eye
London: Chatto & Windus
First English edition with dust jacket.

Sula
The story of two childhood friends who grow apart as they grow older. First edition with dust jacket.

Sula
**Song of Solomon**  
The story of Macon Dead, Jr., son of the richest black family in a midwestern town. First edition with dust jacket.

**Song of Solomon**  
First English edition with dust jacket.

**Song of Solomon**  
Everyman Library edition with dust jacket.

**Tar Baby**  
The story of a diverse group of people on a Caribbean island who are compelled to reconcile their conflicting value systems. Uncorrected proof.

**Tar Baby**  
Uncorrected proof for English edition.

**Tar Baby**  
Franklin Center, PA: Franklin Library, 1981.  

**Tar Baby**  
First trade edition, with dust jacket. Autographed by the author: "Toni Morrison."

**Beloved**  
Story of Margaret Garner, a slave who murdered her own child in order to protect her from the horrors of American slavery. First English edition with dust jacket. Signed by the author: "Toni Morrison."

**Jazz**  
The story of Joe Trace, a mid-fifties door-to-door salesman who murders his lover, eighteen-year-old Dorcas. First trade edition with dust jacket.

**Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination**  

**Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power**  

**Conversations with Toni Morrison**  
A collection of interviews and discussions with the author of *The Bluest Eye, Song of Solomon, Tar Baby, Beloved* and *Jazz*. Paperback.
Gloria Naylor

Gloria Naylor’s self-proclaimed authorial goal is to “articulate experiences that want articulating.” Rather than merely lamenting that the multiplicity of black American experiences has been underrepresented in black literature, Naylor’s fiction has assumed the task of setting the record straight. Naylor’s works record the wide breadth of cultural experiences which together constitute the “black experience” in America. In The Women of Brewster Place (1982), for instance, Naylor introduces her readers to a small dead-end-street neighborhood whose inhabitants represent a broad spectrum of different ages, political inclinations, sexual orientations and socioeconomic backgrounds, who share what Naylor has called “a common oppression . . . a spiritual strength and a sense of female communion.”

Following The Women of Brewster Place, Naylor published two novels which align major figures of the white literary canon with the richness of the black experience in America. In Linden Hills (1985), for example, Naylor combines the structural framework of Dante’s Inferno with the theme that those who renounce their African-American heritage become increasingly besmirched as they embrace white suburban standards of success. Mama Day, which some critics have contended is reminiscent of Shakespeare’s The Tempest, combines a desert-island setting with a family struggle whose resolution may depend solely upon the title character’s mysterious conjuring powers.

The winner of numerous literary honors, including the 1983 American Book Award for best first novel (The Women of Brewster Place), this New York native worked alternatively as a telephone operator, a Jehovah’s Witnesses missionary, and a hotel clerk before settling down as a full time writer, at the age of 31, in 1981. In addition, she has held Visiting Professorships at Brandeis, Cornell, Princeton and New York University, to name just a few. Naylor writes, she has said, “for those readers who reflect the subject matter, black readers, and for those who don’t—basically white middle class readers.”
The Women of Brewster Place
New York: Penguin, 1983
“A novel in seven stories,” wherein seven women who have only an address in common, “fight against—and sometimes transcend—the fate of black women in America today.” Paperback.

Linden Hills
A story of social success and moral decay in an upscale suburban neighborhood. First edition with dust jacket.

Linden Hills
First English edition with dust jacket.

Mama Day
Story of the inhabitants of Willow Springs, a small sea island off the coast of the United States, and the valiant efforts of the island’s matriarch, Moma Day, to save her daughter. Hardback edition with dust jacket.

Mama Day
“Advance reading copy.”

Bailey’s Café
A delicious tale about the “most mythically real eating place you’ve ever walked into,” where every customer has his or her own story to tell. First edition. Paperback.
Sonia Sanchez

Sonia Sanchez's poetry is striking. Letters are often added to, or omitted from, words, and curious spaces frequently creep up between the letters of words which otherwise look familiar to us. Yet, if their appearance on the page may strike us as odd, the rhetorical cadence into which we are pulled is contagious—and unmistakably black. This poet's uniquely black rhythms remind us that poetry is, and always should be, a spoken art.

Born in Birmingham, Alabama in 1934, Sonia Sanchez suffered abuse, neglect, and family instability after her mother died in 1935. When Sonia was nine, her family relocated to Harlem after her father married a third time. Sanchez later began to study poetry at New York University and began publishing her works in black, liberal periodicals early in the 1960s. In 1972, she joined the Nation of Islam, but disappointed with what she viewed as the group's sexist policies, she relinquished her membership three years later.

For Sanchez, writing was a means to free herself from isolation and express herself without the stuttering which impeded her speech since childhood. Her poetry and her life's work aim to recapture the vibrant spirit of the African-American race, which spirit, she feels, had been muted by slavery. Toward this end, she has worked diligently within the educational system to expand the curriculum of the nation's colleges and universities so as to include the field of black studies. Moreover, she has authored several children's books which she claims are intended to "leave a legacy of the history of the black people who have moved toward revolution and freedom ... we must pass this on to our children, rather than a legacy of fear and victimization." Though many of her works are autobiographical, Sanchez believes that the raw material of her writings tell more than a personal story. She asserts, "It might be a personal experience, but the whole world comes into it." Besides, she insists, "You don't have to whitewash yourself to be universal."

Home Coming  
Poems about the author's return to her black roots after immersing herself within the white community in order to earn a college degree. First edition, first printing. Paperback in yellow wraps.

We a BaddDDD People  
Energetic poems about black pride. First edition, first printing. Cover drawing by Ademola Olugebefola.

It's A New Day  
" Poems for young brothas and sistuhs." First edition, first printing with dust jacket. Illustrations by Ademola Olugebefola.

Love Poems  
"These poems are love." First printing November 1973.

I've Been a Woman  
An anthology of new and previously published poems. Paperback.
Homegirls and Handgrenades
Some of these poems are "plaintive and poignant, others are tough and militant, but all are significant." Paperback.

A Sound Investment

Under a Soprano Sky
A poetic "castigation of the social, political, and economic evils that stifle the human spirit." First published in 1987. Hardback edition with dust jacket.
Ntozake Shange

Born Paulette Williams in Trenton New Jersey in 1948, this writer’s African name (pronounced En-to-za-ke Shong-ga) means “she who comes with her own things” and “who walks like a lion.” True to her adopted appellation, Shange’s work combines poetry, music and dancing to imbue these traditional literary arrangements with a leonine swagger.

Having grown up in a well-to-do home whose household visitors included W.E.B. Dubois, Dizzy Gillespie and Chuck Berry, Shange learned to overcome the racist treatment she often experienced in St. Louis school days by looking toward the strong and rich cultural traditions of her family. Nevertheless, she felt that even her privileged childhood was tainted by racism. She writes that it was like “living in a world that defied reality as most black people, or most white people, understood it—in other words, feeling that there was something I could do, and then realizing that nobody was expecting me to do anything because I was colored and I was also female, which was not easy to deal with.”

After earning her Masters degree in American Studies from the University of Southern California (Los Angeles), Shange began dancing and reciting her poetry with the African-American dance troupe, Third World Collective, while she taught humanities in several California colleges. She also spent a brief stint as a war correspondent, an occupation to which Shange still feels particularly attached. In reference to her position as a black woman writer, she maintains, “I am a war correspondent after all, because I’m involved in a war of cultural and aesthetic aggression. The front lines aren’t always where you think they are.”

The production of her first “choreopoem,” For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow is Enuf (1975), introduced audiences to a unique literary experience which featured seven black female characters who dramatized the challenges of emotional hardship. Though Shange has also tried her hand at prose and poetic works, her writings have become increasingly more theatrical since 1975. Her Dramatic/Poetic productions include A Photograph: A Study in Cruelty (1977), Black and White Dimensional Planes (1979), Mother Courage and Her Children (1980), and the fictional work, Liliane: Resurrection of the Daughter (1994). The melange of literary forms which is characteristic of Shange’s writings seem to reflect her own uncertainty about life. Indeed, the author has confessed, “bein’ alive and bein’ a woman & bein’ colored is a metaphysical dilemma I haven’t yet conquered.”
Melissa & Smith  
Story about an unhealthy romantic relationship between a young girl and a poet. This is number 139 of 300 copies designed and printed by Allan Kornblum at the Toothpaste Press and signed by the author: "[signed] Ntozake Shange."

Sassafrass  
A book of verse written by the author to "make her daughter's dreams as real as her menses." Paperback with cover by Felipe Mackleroy.

For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/ When the Rainbow is Enuf  
A "Choreopoem" about seven black female characters who have endured emotional hardship. Paperback with red wraps.

Nappy Edges  
A collection of poetry which comprises a "lyric and tragic exploration into black woman's awareness." Hardback edition with dust jacket.

Spell #7: A Photograph: Lovers in Motion; Boogie Woogie Landscapes  
A collection of three experimental dramatic poems. First edition with dust jacket.

Liliane  
"Through the voices of her childhood friends... we encounter the last moments of legal segregation in Mississippi and the beginnings of a class war within the black community of Queens. The voices of her lovers... reveal Liliane in the more closeted dynamics of romance, both colored and not so colored. But it is in her own work as an artist that Liliane reveals most of what she knows about herself to her world and our own." First edition with dust jacket.
Mildred Taylor

This University of Toledo graduate harbored authorial aspirations since her early high school days. Strongly influenced by the storytelling ability of her father and other relatives, Taylor began her writing career "to paint a truer picture of Black people" than she found in her school textbooks. She writes, "I wanted to show a Black family united in love and pride, of which the reader would like to be a part."

Born in Jackson, MS in 1943, Taylor's work draws upon the oral tradition which played such a formative role in her childhood. By refashioning the tales she was told as a child, Taylor feels she provides a more positive educational foundation to children than was available to her in the biased narratives of her school textbooks which, she claims "always caused me painful embarrassment." She laments that "This would not have been so if [the history of black people in the United States] had been presented truly, showing the accomplishments of the Black race both in Africa and in this hemisphere."

Her first book, *Song of the Trees* (1975) tells of the Logan family's struggle to preserve a number of trees on the Logan's property which their neighbor offers to buy. This novella for young readers was deemed the *New York Times* Outstanding Book of the Year in 1975. The themes of family unity and pride which pervade *Song of the Trees* are sustained in Taylor's later books about the Logan family, which include *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976), and *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* (1981). Taylor's award-winning children's books are evidence of their author's commitment to sharing the benefits of her family heritage to help young victims of oppression. Taylor writes, "It is my hope that to the children who read my books, the Logans will provide those heroes missing from the schoolbooks of my childhood, Black men, women and children of whom they can be proud."

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**Song of the Trees**

Depression-era story for young readers about a black family's plight to save some special trees from being cut down by an unscrupulous white man. Hardback edition with dust jacket. Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney

**Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry**

"It took the events of one turbulent year ... to show Cassie [Logan] why the land meant so much." This is a story for young readers. Bantam paperback edition.

**Let the Circle be Unbroken**

This book, the sequel to *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, continues the saga of the Logan family in 1935 Mississippi, when hard times stir up racial tensions. Hardback edition with dust jacket.

**The Friendship**

Another children's story about the Logan family, and their friend, Tom Bee, who causes a stir when he addresses a white shop owner by his first name. Hardback edition with dust jacket. Illustrated by Max Ginsburg.
In 1952, eight-year-old Alice Walker was accidentally shot in the eye with a BB gun while playing with her brothers. The accident not only blinded her right eye, but left a scar of which Walker became painfully self conscious. Years later, her three-year old daughter looked into her mother's injured eye and, seeing intense beauty rather than disfigurement, exclaimed "Mommy there's a world in your eye." Walker then made an important realization: just as beauty is a matter of one's self-perception, so is oppression rooted as much in the oppressed person's self image as in the treatment of the oppressor.

This theme underlies many of Alice Walker's writings. In her novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, for example, the title character rebukes his son for blaming the misery of his sharecropper lifestyle on the white landowner: "When [white people] got you thinking that they're to blame for everything they have you thinking they's some kind of gods! You can't do nothing wrong without them behind it... Nobody's as powerful as we make them out to be. We got our own souls don't we?" For Walker, the revolution is within; freedom from oppression begins with loving, and accepting responsibility for oneself.

Alice Walker has worked as a teacher, an editor and a writer of fiction, nonfiction and poetry. Though Walker's own life has often been marked by such adversities as an aborted pregnancy (1965), a miscarriage (1968), a failed marriage (1976), and several periods of suicidal depression, the author feels that undue attention has been paid to her personal life at the expense of her writings. Such treatment, she maintains, is characteristic of the way critics acknowledge black women writers.

Walker's most widely-read novel, *The Color Purple* (1985), uses an epistolary structure to tell the story of an abused woman who frees herself from oppression by acknowledging the godlike part of herself that deserves respect and is willing to fight back. Like many of Walker's writings, *The Color Purple* reflects its author's philosophy that all of us must overcome sexual and racial stereotypes to find peace, unity and wholeness in spite of our individual differences.


Margaret Walker

Born July 7, 1915, the novelist and poet Margaret Walker first gained critical recognition with the publication of her poetry collection, *For My People* (1942). This book, comprised of a series of long ballads, sympathetically portrays a heterogeneous group of characters including Molly Means, Kissie Lee, and Poppa Chicken, an urban drug dealer and pimp. Having won critical and popular praise, even earning Walker the Yale Award for Younger Poets, *For My People* is especially notable for the way in which, as one critic notes, it uses “the language of the grass-roots people” to spin “yarns of folk heroes and heroines: those who, faced with the terrible obstacles which haunt Black people’s very existence, not only survive but prevail— with style.”

The daughter of a Methodist preacher and a musician, Walker grew up in a home where linguistic mastery was almost second nature. In light of her background, it is not surprising, therefore, that Walker chose to pursue a career as an English professor. Despite her passion for words however, academic success did not come easily. She writes, “I’m a third generation college graduate. [But] Society doesn’t want to recognize that there’s this kind of black writer. I’m the Ph.D. black woman. That’s horrible. That is to be despised. I didn’t know how bad it was until I went back to school [as a teacher] and found out.”

After the success of *For My People*, it was twenty-three years before Walker’s next major literary effort, the historical novel, *Jubilee*, appeared. Based largely upon the tales her maternal grandmother used to tell her in her youth, and bolstered by some meticulous historical research, *Jubilee* recounts the story of Vyry, a slave, and Randall Ware, a free black man, both of whom endured, and even triumphed over a host of horrible injustices. Walker, in discussing the many “agonizing” years it took to complete *Jubilee*, reflects: “Most of my life I have been involved with writing this story about my great grandmother, and even if *Jubilee* were never considered an artistic or commercial success I would still be happy just to have finished it.” She comments further, “There’s a difference between writing about something and living through it …. I did both.”

Margaret Walker’s other works include the small poetry collection, *Prophets for a New Day* (1970), which couples many of the major civil rights figures of the 1960’s with biblical counterparts, the collection *October Journey*, and the 1989 poetry compilation, *This is My Century*. In addition, Walker has published a biography of her friend, the influential black novelist Richard Wright (1988), and an anthology of prose essays entitled *How I Wrote Jubilee and Other Essays on Life and Literature* (1990). Walker’s life and work have inspired a whole generation of black women writers. Her determination and persistence have allowed her to succeed as a mother, a scholar and a creative writer, all in the face of racial injustice and adversity. Yet Walker seems to hold no bitterness against the white establishment and, like many authors who follow in her step, offers a hope of reconciliation through the unifying power of literature. Thus she has written, “Writers should not write exclusively for black or white audiences, but most inclusively. After all, it is the business of all writers to write about the human condition, and all humanity must be involved in both the writing and in the reading.”
"For My People." *Poetry, LIII* (1937) 81-83.

A poem "For my people everywhere singing their slave songs repeatedly ... Let the martial songs be written, let the dirges disappear."

For My People


A collection of long ballads in which Walker "draws sympathetic portraits of characters such as the New Orleans sorceress Molly Means; Kissie Lee, a tough young woman who dies 'with her boots on switching blades'; and Poppa Chicken, an urban drug dealer and pimp." The Yale series of younger poets, volume 4. Hardbound edition with dust jacket.


A poem in honor of the people who climbed "From chains of chattel slavery ... To build a race of leaders and a nation more sublime."

Jubilee


"This long, absorbing book is many things at once. It is a great Civil War novel, based on the true life story of the author's great-grandmother. It is an intimate picture of life on a Georgia plantation in all its pre-Civil War glamour and its eventual collapse. But the most striking thing about it is this: for the first time the whole antebellum, Civil War, and Reconstruction story is told from the Negro point of view by a Negro." First printing with dust jacket.

"The Ballad of the Free"


A poetic tribute to those who fought for freedom. "The heroes' list is long. And Freedom still is for the strong." Red printing on single, blue-gray broadside sheet.

Prophets for a New Day


A collection of civil rights poems which pair the civil right demonstrators of the 1960's with prophetic biblical counterparts. First edition, first printing with black paper wraps.

How I Wrote Jubilee


October Journey


A Collection of personal poems, and poetic eulogies. "I want to write the songs of my people," writes Walker, "I want to frame their dreams into words, their souls into notes." First edition, first printing with orange and red paper wraps.

Richard Wright: Daemonic Genius


A portrait of the novelist Richard Wright, from his earliest years in the "hell" of the deep south, to his years as an expatriate in Mexico and France "which culminated with his sudden and mysterious death." This is the first biography of Wright written by a contemporary, and a friend. First printing with dust jacket.

This Is My Century


This collection "brings together one hundred of Margaret Walker's poems selected by the author," including thirty-seven previously uncollected poems. Claiming the century as her own, Walker writes, "I came out of the sun/ and I swam Rivers of blood/ to touch the moon./ I will not flinch before the holocaust/ for I am a deathless soul,/ immortal, black, and free." Hardbound edition with dust jacket.