

NAOMI LONG MADGETT

2012 KRESGE EMINENT ARTIST



THE KRESGE FOUNDATION

The Kresge Eminent Artist Award honors an exceptional artist in the visual, performing or literary arts for lifelong professional achievements and contributions to Metropolitan Detroit's cultural community. Naomi Long Madgett is the 2012 Kresge Eminent Artist. This monograph commemorates her life and work.



FOREWORD.....3
 By Rip Rapson
 President and CEO
 The Kresge Foundation

ARTIST'S STATEMENT.....5

INTRODUCTION
 Naomi Long Madgett:
 The Heart of African American Poetry.....7
 By Sue Levytsky

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL EXCERPT
 First Sunday from *Pilgrim Journey*.....14

OPEN TO INTERPRETATION
 By Naomi Long Madgett.....19

SELECTED POETRY

Midway.....20

Grand Circus Park.....21
 Seagulls in the City.....22
 Boy on a Bicycle.....23
 City Nights.....24

He Lives in Me.....25
 Reluctant Light.....26

On Corcovado Mountain.....28

Remember Bahia.....29

Fifth Street Exit, Richmond.....30
 The Sun Do Move.....33

From *Connected Islands*
 Phillis.....34
 Abandoned.....36
 Connected Islands.....37
 Fragments of a Dream.....38
 Genesis: The Missing Chapter.....39
 The Last Happy Day.....40
 Packrat.....43
 Without Condition.....44
 Mortality.....46
 Renewal.....47

From *Octavia: Guthrie and Beyond*
 Teacher.....48
 Desert Song.....49
 Missouri.....50
 708 South Second Street.....51

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL EXCERPT
 A Fellowship of Poets from
Pilgrim Journey.....53

THE POETS OF LOTUS PRESS...58

**THE STARLIT POETRY OF
 NAOMI LONG MADGETT**
 By Melba Joyce Boyd, Ph.D.....60

**OTHER VOICES: TRIBUTES
 AND REFLECTIONS**

Marcus Belgrave.....76
 Terry Blackhawk.....77
 Sheila Carter-Jones.....76
 Paulette Childress.....78
 Toi Derricotte.....79
 Bill Harris.....80
 Charles McGee.....79
 Baraka Sele.....81
 Marilyn Wheaton.....80

BIOGRAPHY.....82

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY.....87

KRESGE ARTS IN DETROIT
 Our Congratulations.....92
 From Michelle Perron
 Director, Kresge Arts in Detroit

A Note from Richard L. Rogers.....93
 President, College for Creative Studies

Kresge Arts in Detroit Advisory Council...93

The Kresge Eminent Artist Award.....95

Kresge Eminent Artist Award Winners...95

About The Kresge Foundation.....96

The Kresge Foundation Board of
 Trustees.....96

Acknowledgements.....96

Credits.....96

Cover picture: The young Naomi Long Madgett, age 13. Opposite: Naomi Long Madgett, 1958.

Naomi Long Madgett at her Detroit home, February, 2012.



“We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty.”

Maya Angelou

It is a singular honor for The Kresge Foundation to name Naomi Long Madgett the 2012 Kresge Eminent Artist. Her career as a poet began at age seven, her first book of poetry followed at age 17. As she contributed to the canon of American literature and raised her daughter, she established Lotus Press in Detroit in 1972, making it possible for other African American poets to publish and distribute their work. She “never intended to be a publisher,” yet became one.

Insight, depth of emotion and indomitable beauty define her art and her constitution, making her life and her work very nearly one. Her influence in Metropolitan Detroit and throughout the nation has made it possible for other artists to chart their poetic paths.

Join us in celebrating this extraordinary woman. Between the covers of this monograph, you will experience her prolific creativity and witness her deep and abiding commitment to Metropolitan Detroit and its artists, young and old.

RIP RAPSON
PRESIDENT AND CEO
THE KRESGE FOUNDATION



“If God had not given me whatever talent I may have, I would not have been able to put together words, some of which I hope will have meaning for others long after I am dead. If my wonderful parents and some teachers had not encouraged me, I might have become a closet poet, keeping work hidden away in drawers. And if such poets as Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and Sterling Brown had not assured me that my words were worthy of being published, I might never have had the courage to share them with others. If I had never had a college student named Baraka Sele, I might never have started publishing books by numerous other poets with no monetary compensation for my efforts.

I have been blessed with a much more fortunate life than many other people. I therefore feel that I have a duty to live my life in service to others. The concept of noblesse oblige applies. The Bible says it in another way: “To whom much is given, much is required.” As I have grown older, I have considered the purpose for which I was born. It was only when I gave myself away that I found myself. There is a hymn I love that begins, “If I can help somebody as I pass along, then my living will not be in vain.”

Naomi Long Madgett beside the lotus pool at Cairo's Museum of Antiquities, Egypt, 1977. Naomi named her new publishing company Lotus Press, i.e., Flower of the Nile, to reflect the African roots of the writers she would publish.



NAOMI LONG MADGETT: THE HEART OF AFRICAN AMERICAN POETRY

By Sue Levytsky



2012 Kresge Eminent Artist Naomi Long Madgett is vivacious and welcoming when we meet in her Tudor home on Detroit's northwest side. She's comfortable in sweater and slacks, with her ever-present cross at her neck. Her face is luminous, with cheekbones that wing out beneath brilliant, omniscient eyes.

Yet on this day she's stumped, speechless for a bit as she reflects on the question of what has brought her happiness in her long and storied life. Sitting back in her armchair she finally responds. "I don't think about being happy. I take refuge in my work," she says. "I *am* happy that maybe a few of my poems will live on after I'm gone and have meaning for people, for generations to come. And I'm happy to have published a number of other poets. I believe that is a more important achievement than my getting published as one person."

Such modesty regarding her accomplishments belies the trajectory of an illustrious career as poet, educator, editor and publisher, one that has seen "her win almost every award the State of Michigan has to offer a distinguished woman of letters," said *The Detroit Free Press* in April of 2001, announcing her appointment as Detroit's Poet Laureate by then-Mayor Dennis Archer.

A professor emeritus of English at Eastern Michigan University, Madgett is the author of 10 books of poetry, a pair of textbooks and "Pilgrim Journey," her autobiography. Her poems have been included in anthologies both at home and abroad. In her work with Lotus Press, which she founded in 1972, she has published more than 90 collections of poetry from emerging and established poets, including now major voices in poetry such as Haki Madhubuti and Toi Derricotte.

At the age of 89, she continues to work every day — editing poetry manuscripts, giving readings, and introducing new poets to the public.

"Naomi's genius is her *energy*, her ability to work like that. Ordinary people can't do it," says Toi Derricotte in a recent conversation. "They cannot go on like that — with Naomi's kind of commitment — without the normal everyday rewards that people expect."



Naomi Long Madgett editing a manuscript at her home in Detroit, February, 2012.



A solitary and imaginative child, Naomi treasured the company of her beloved pet cat.

EMERGING GIFTS

Naomi Long Madgett has dedicated her life to the pursuit of excellence, a discipline instilled by her beloved father, the Rev. Clarence Marcellus Long, Sr. and mother, Maude Selena Long. The youngest child and only girl in her family, Naomi was born in Norfolk, Virginia in 1923. When Naomi was 18 months old, the family moved north to East Orange, New Jersey, where her father became pastor of Calvary Baptist Church. The Longs remained in East Orange until Naomi went to high school.

Young Naomi idolized her father, a love reflected in a childhood nickname bestowed by her brothers, Clarence and Wilbur. “They called me Preat, which was short for “Preacher” to signify the stance I would take in imitation of my father as he preached to the congregation from the pulpit,” says Madgett, demonstrating the gesture. “I learned a lot about composition and the use of language from my father’s sermons.”

Naomi’s literary gifts blossomed early. “I was a lonely little girl with a terrific imagination. I had no one to play with even though my two brothers and their friends gathered in our yard every day. When I was in second grade, my cousin and her mother came to live with us. They stayed with us for two years and when they left, well, I was just back where I was before. And so I wrote my first poem at the age of seven:

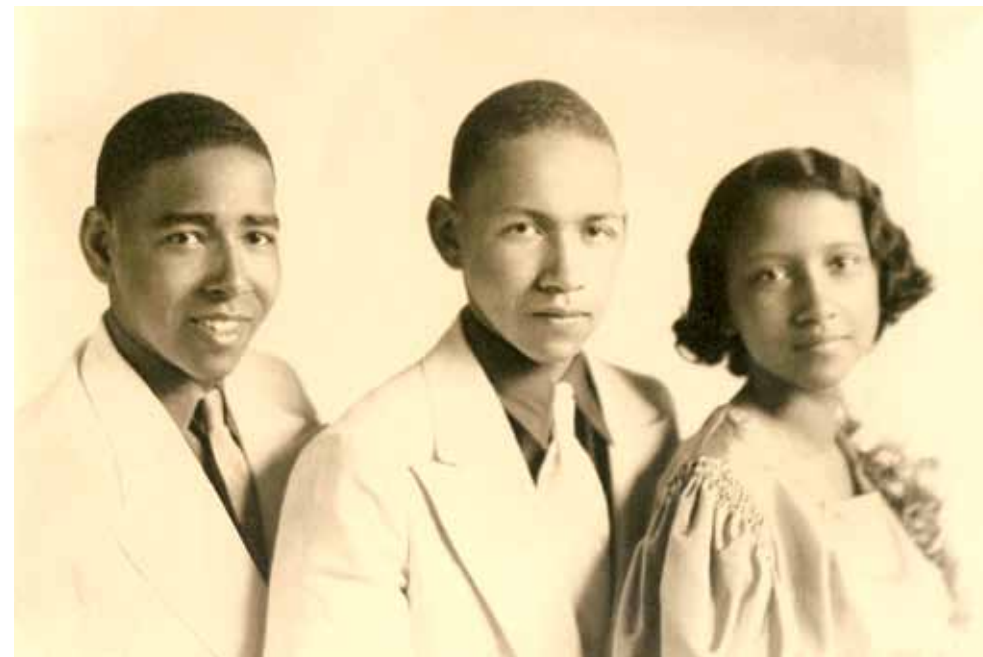
*If anybody has a little playmate,
Will you share her with me?
I am very lonely,
As lonely as a child can be.*

*I used to have some playmates
But they all went away.
So don't forget I'm lonely
And I want to play.*

The Long family moved to St. Louis, Missouri in 1937. The Gateway City was a welcome change from New Jersey’s East Orange, which Madgett remembers as “such a prejudiced place.”

Despite the color barriers, Naomi had already published her first poem, which appeared in 1935 when she was thirteen, in the “Poet’s Corner” of *The Orange Daily Courier*.

Naomi’s standards for excellence were set at Sumner High School, an all-black school that would produce a host of illustrious alumni, including baritone Robert McFerrin, comedian-activist Dick Gregory and tennis superstar Arthur Ashe. She was an honor student at Sumner — fifth in her class ranking — a distinction previously denied her as an African-American student in the schools of East Orange. With race no longer a barrier to academic recognition, Naomi soared. “At Sumner, everything was focused on academic excellence and I found this very inspiring,” she recalls of her time at the



Clarence, Wilbur and Naomi Long in June of 1937. Naomi’s brothers had just graduated from East Orange High School in New Jersey; Naomi from the 8th grade of Ashland Grammar School.

school. “Those years became the turning point in my life.”

Naomi published her first book of poetry, “Songs to a Phantom Nightingale,” a few days after high school graduation in 1941. The publication of the book by Fortuny’s Publishers, through a contract negotiated by her father, is significant in that it predates the publication of fellow poets Gwendolyn Brooks and Margaret Walker’s first books.

Naomi enrolled at Virginia State University (then Virginia State College) and graduated in 1945. She met Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen as a student and the support these Harlem Renaissance poets gave her fueled her artistic aspirations.

POETIC JUSTICE IN DETROIT

Marriage to Julian Witherspoon brought Naomi to Detroit in 1946, where she began working as a staff writer at the *Michigan Chronicle*, the city’s black-owned and operated daily newspaper. Naomi’s only child, daughter Jill Witherspoon Boyer, was born in 1947. The marriage proved short-lived and Naomi, determined to provide for her young child, took a job as a service representative at Michigan Bell Telephone and she continued her writing in scarce spare moments.

Naomi married William Harold Madgett, her second husband, during the 1950s. (She would wed once more following her divorce from Madgett, to Leonard P. Andrews, her husband



Sumner High School honors graduate Naomi Long, 1940.

of twenty-four years until his death.) Naomi not only managed a blended family during this busy period but the completion of a master's degree at Wayne State University, which allowed her to begin teaching in Detroit's public school system in 1955.

As an educator, she became a leader in the fight for better representation of literature by African-Americans in textbooks. She spent twelve years teaching at Northwestern High School, where she introduced the first course in African-American literature, as well as the first accredited course in creative writing available in Detroit's public schools.

"I was one of the pioneers in getting textbook changes when I was at Northwestern," she explains. "The English textbook used in the school had one poem by Gwendolyn Brooks, one from James Weldon Johnson, and an article about George Washington Carver." She would eventually create her own textbook, incorporating the work of African-American authors she knew from her father's library.

Madgett began teaching as an associate professor at Eastern Michigan University in 1968 and went on to integrate the English curriculum there as well, introducing EMU's first undergraduate class in African-American literature and later, a graduate class in the Harlem Renaissance. She published "A Student's Guide to Creative Writing," a college level textbook, while a professor at EMU. In 1973, she became a full professor, retiring in 1984.



Four generations of Long women: mother Maude, Naomi, daughter Jill and granddaughter Malaika.

POET BECOMES PUBLISHER: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF LOTUS PRESS

The 1960s proved an evolutionary period in Madgett's literary and professional life. She became closely involved with writers and poets in informal workshops, meeting with fellow poets Dudley Randall, Margaret Danner, Harold G. Lawrence, Oliver LaGrone and others during this particularly vibrant period in Detroit's literary history.

Active with teaching and family, Naomi also was prolific in her writing, turning out her second collection of poetry, the critically hailed "One and the Many" in 1956 through Exposition Press with Harlo Publishing bringing out "Star by Star," her third poetry collection, in 1965.

One of her greatest contributions to African-American poetry was the formation of Lotus Press in Detroit, where she published her fourth book, "Pink Ladies in the Afternoon," in 1972. Madgett and her husband Leonard Andrews bought the home-based publishing business to print and distribute "Pink Ladies" after the manuscript received lukewarm responses from both traditional publishing houses and small independent black presses. (It was thought that her quiet, reflective poems



Naomi Long Madgett and former mayor Dennis Archer, center, amid Lotus Press board members at the 30th Anniversary celebration of the founding of Lotus Press, Detroit, Michigan, 2001.

did not mirror the strident, political style of the then-fashionable Black Arts Movement.)

Naomi "never intended to be a publisher" and initially felt that Lotus Press ("Flower of the Nile") might be a temporary enterprise. However, the work of Baraka Sele (then Pamela Cobb), a gifted writer in one of her classes, convinced her otherwise. Compelled to publish the poems of her talented student, Madgett turned Sele's manuscript into "Inside the Devil's Mouth." "I owe her so much," says Sele, now an independent arts consultant. "I would not be where I am today without her encouragement and her publication of my book."

Detroit poet Herbert Woodward Martin, speaking in the documentary "Star by Star," notes Madgett's importance in fostering a groundswell of black poets and their works: "Publishing has allowed Naomi to give to the canon of American literature and to the academy a variety of poets they would have normally ignored or missed."

Lotus Press remains a small, literary press, still headquartered in Madgett's basement. Madgett continues as sole editor, publisher and, as she says, "chief cook and bottle washer" in her mission to give voice to the words of deserving poets.

"She is a great editor," said Bruce A. Jacobs, winner of the 1996 Naomi Long Madgett Poetry Award in a 1996 interview with black arts journal "about...time." "Some editors have too heavy a hand. She doesn't."

Madgett is also famously indefatigable, working through pain and disability to make it happen for her writers. Toi Derricotte recalls Madgett editing her manuscript even though "she had just been in a car accident that broke her neck. She called me to discuss changes while she was in a brace that immobilized her from neck to waist."

Madgett established the annual Naomi Long Madgett Poetry Award in 1993 to "recognize an outstanding book-length manuscript by an African-American poet." The award, which includes publication and a \$500 prize, has helped shine a spotlight on a

"The stamp of her genius is unmistakable in the vibrant beauty of the lines, in the zest and vigor with which she writes... those who know and appreciate good literature predict for Naomi Long a brilliant career."

Review of "Songs to a Phantom Nightingale" in the *St. Louis Call*, June 29, 1941

number of writers, young and old — and attract the attention of major publishing houses.

Madgett has no regrets regarding sacrifices she made with her own work in order to shepherd the poets of Lotus Press to success. She has been quoted as saying “I have found my greatest fulfillment in my work, foremost in my writing, but inextricably intertwined with that and reinforcing it, my teaching, editing, and publishing.” She now says, reflecting upon the path her life’s work has taken, “I’m not intended to be a star. I’m intended to be a ladder for others.”

Her daughter Jill Boyer, also a poet, knows better. “I think my mother is a genius,” she says from her home in California. “She hasn’t always been a publisher but she’s always been passionate about whatever work she’s doing. It’s not just her writing but what energies she has attracted and fed into the creative writing experience all over the country.”

For Naomi, there is no greater joy than harnessing her own talents and powers in the service of others, a credo she sets forth in her autobiography. She writes in the epilogue:

“I have learned that happiness should never be pursued. It is an elusive bird whose swiftness in flight increases in proportion to the fever of the quest. There is no magic salt that will halt it in midair and bring it to our outstretched hand.

“It was only when I gave myself away that I found myself. Service, I have learned, is where true happiness lies. It has provided me with a compassion that I didn’t have in my youth. It has permitted me to walk in the shoes of many and feel the warmth of their feet as well as the pebbles that injured them. I have discovered that cheerfulness, kindness, and helpfulness bring as much joy to the one who extends them as to the ones who receive them — perhaps a good deal more.” 🌸

Madgett still presides at Lotus Press, most recently working with 2012 Lotus Press Poetry Award winner Sheila Carter-Jones to edit her prize-winning collection of poetry, “Three Birds Deep.”



FIRST SUNDAY

Excerpt from *Pilgrim Journey*, pp. 36-41.
By Naomi Long Madgett



Mrs. Jeter, white-aproned and bespectacled, was perhaps in her early or mid-eighties. Probably because she was younger than her husband, it didn't seem unusual to me then that a woman of her advanced years should still be cooking for company and doing all her own household chores. Everything she served was delicious, but her specialty — big, yellow rolls lightly dusted with flour — always elicited comments. Although I detested bread in most forms, Mrs. Jeter's rolls delighted even me. They were so unusual that several times Dad implored her to share her recipe with some trusted friend, or perhaps even sell it so that it would not be lost, but she resisted his advice. To the best of my knowledge, her secret died with her; I have never seen or tasted rolls like hers again.

After a sumptuous meal and adult conversation, to which we children listened quietly, we headed back up the hill to church at about three o'clock. When we arrived, there were already a few people engaged in singing and testifying. Others drifted in gradually even after the formal service had begun.

I don't recall an organist or choir at Communion, and there was no set agenda for this informal part of the service. Occasionally there were brief periods of silence. Then from somewhere in the pews would come a low moan, followed perhaps by humming. As soon as the tune was recognized, others joined in on some familiar old hymn or Negro spiritual, often with the lead singer "lining" the words before the congregation repeated them in song. (This practice of lining was a carryover from the poor churches of the South that couldn't afford hymn books and had many members who would not have been able to read them anyhow.) Sometimes it was a good old traditional gospel song of the Thomas A. Dorsey variety, sung with the genuine emotion conjured up by the words, music, and foot-thumping rhythms alone and not accompanied by the more sophisticated theatrics of modern day gospel music. These songs moved me deeply and inexplicably; only later did I under-



A teenaged Naomi with her parents and brothers.



Naomi, photographed in 1927 at age four.

stand the sources of their fervor. The singers moaned, they intoned, they wailed, they pleaded, they praised, they exulted. Springing from the gut of bitter frustration, growing in trust, and blossoming into a fine upward-spiraling supplication, these songs were the most honest, intimate, and splendid expression of the oppressed but triumphant human spirit that I have ever witnessed. I am sure that my love of choral music — and of black folk music, in particular — was born in the informality of those afternoon Communion services at Calvary and not in later classroom instructions and choir rehearsals that concentrated on printed sheet music and some composer's degreed expertise. It was all I needed to learn of the cruelty and treacheries of slavery and Reconstruction, segregation, injustice, weary backs bending in a brutal southern sun, migration, and the hunger and want of the current Great Depression.

Interspersed between the songs were spontaneous prayers and testimonies of personal experiences, happy and sad; gratitude for various blessings, ordinary and spectacular; and assurances that the speaker "loved everybody" although, even as children overhearing adult conversations, we knew that relationships among some members were not always as harmonious and benevolent as the speaker would have everyone believe.

Eventually my father emerged from the back room, knelt at his chair, then took his position at the lectern, a sign that the formal service was about to begin. I remember little about the details of that part of the service. I'm sure we sang a hymn or two, still without instrumental accompaniment. Dad probably preached a short sermon. Perhaps he called on one of the deacons to pray.

Every time a particular deacon prayed, my mother was certain to have to chastise us kids because we anticipated phrases and whole passages that that person always repeated. We would recite them under our breath, then giggle when the deacon repeated them a second later. We knew at what point he would begin his emotional intoning, rocking back and forth on the same two notes and rising in volume, and on what phrase he would reach the climax. Immediately would follow the tempered and quiet closing that invariably began, “And now, oh Lord, reach down with thy lily-white hand . . .” I later came to understand what conditioning had caused to pray to a Caucasian God, but I still have trouble singing hymns that implore Him to “wash me whiter than snow.” At other times, an elderly “jackleg” minister, who had no official position in the church but often sat on the pulpit with Dad, was called on to pray, and again we would crack up with laughter when he got to the word *unctions*, which, although a legitimate word, was unfamiliar to our ears and therefore excruciatingly funny.

After preliminaries, the observation of Communion began. At various churches I have seen other kinds of bread or wafers used, but at Calvary we had a special small loaf with no crust that had been purchased at a religious supply store. It was as white as angel food cake and as finely textured. I craved a taste of this loaf because I expected it to be as sweet as the confection it resembled. When, after my baptism, I was allowed to partake of it, I was disappointed to find that, with all its whiteness and fine texture, it tasted like ordinary bread. Its ceremonial symbolism was temporarily lost to me then. Dad would hold this loaf in both hands and break it in half as he recited the this-is-My-body-broken-for-you scripture, placing each half on a silver plate held by a deacon who then moved with it from row to row until everyone was served. Each member would pinch off a small piece. During this time someone would strike up another chorus and everyone would join in, singing a familiar hymn such as “I want



Naomi Long Madgett's birthplace, the parsonage of the Bank Street Baptist Church in Norfolk, Virginia, where her father was pastor.

Jesus to walk with me. I want Jesus to walk with me. All along my pilgrim journey, Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.”

When the deacons returned to the front, Dad served each of them; then one of them would take back the plate and hold it for him to be served. After that he would repeat the do-this-in-remembrance-of-Me passage, and the small wads of bread would be consumed. The same routine followed with the grape juice, symbolic of Christ's shed blood, with more impromptu singing.

At the end of this ritual, Dad would quote: “And they all sang a song and went out to the Mount of Olives,” bringing the service to a close. The members again joined their voices in a hymn, most often “What a Fellowship,” as they turned to shake hands with one another, moving as they sang out into the afternoon sun.

As the years passed, the Communion ritual changed in subtle ways in the several other churches I attended, and I sublimated the conscious memory of my earliest impressions. It was not until my father retired that it all came back to me with shattering force. It was at Bethesda Baptist Church in New Rochelle, New York, and Dad had asked his best friend and protégé, the Rev. Dr. J. Raymond Henderson, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Los Angeles, to be the guest speaker at his last service as a pastor. I had grown up, married, and moved away to Detroit but on this occasion I was home on vacation. I was always happy to see “Joe,” whose “little sugar plum” I had always been, but if I had been able to anticipate my emotional state, I think I would have skipped church that day.

At Bethesda the Communion was observed directly after morning worship, so after Joe concluded his sermon, Dad took charge of the last Lord's Supper at which he would ever officiate. It was the end of a major part of his life and, in a way, my own as well. I don't know at what point I began to cry, but my tears, which started as a catch in the throat, first trickled, then gushed in an uncontrollable flood.

At first I thought my reaction was due solely to the end of Dad's long service as a pastor, but later I realized that it was just as much the Communion service itself as I had first known it and never would experience again. It was like suddenly discovering that a valued old keepsake is forever lost. As if you haven't seen this treasure for a long time but haven't really missed it because you've always known it was there. But then when you stumble upon the empty space where it ought to be, you suddenly know how lost you feel without it. Surely it was that memory of lost innocence and truth that devastated my spirit that morning — that spirituality that had been awakened long ago by the saints at Calvary on first Sunday as they went out singing, praying, and testifying their brave and wondrous lives into the garden of my years. 🌸



The Reverend Clarence Marcellus Long, Sr.

Naomi Long Madgett reading from "Octavia" at the Atlantic Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia.



People say they don't understand poetry. They don't understand it because they expect to read it the way you read prose. In a composition class, for example, you want clarity. You want support for what your claim is, and you want to be able to understand everything you read the first time you read it.

Poetry isn't written like that. You have to read between the lines. I have read many poems and didn't understand them. If I read a favorite poem that I haven't read in 10 years, I read it in a different light because I have changed. The poem is so condensed that it's like taking a glass of milk and reducing it to just a spoonful of powder — you have to use your imagination to make it come alive.

That's why we talk about interpreting poems.

"Midway," for example. I never thought of it as anything but a Civil Rights poem yet when I went to St. Louis for my 50th year high school reunion, one of my classmates took me to his church to meet his pastor because the pastor loves my poetry, especially "Midway." The pastor didn't see it as a Civil Rights poem but as the story of his life and experiences.

I did a reading of "Midway" in Oak Park High School years ago and the students interpreted it according to their own experience. A Jewish student felt the history of the Jewish people was brought out in the poem. Another student suggested I "could have been talking about truth itself." Yet another offered "you were talking about the early persecution of Christians." An African-American student said "You are talking about the history of black people" and of course, that's what I was talking about. But because I was not specific in the poem, it could be interpreted in many ways.

That's the good thing about poetry — it has meaning for you according to your own experience.

Naomi Long Madgett, 2012

MIDWAY –

I've come this far to freedom and I won't turn back.
I'm climbing to the highway from my old dirt track.
 I'm coming and I'm going
 And I'm stretching and I'm growing
And I'll reap what I've been sowing or my skin's not black.

I've prayed and slaved and waited and I've sung my song.
You've bled me and you've starved me but I've still grown strong.
 You've lashed me and you've treed me
 And you've everything but freed me
But in time you'll know you need me and it won't be long.

I've seen the daylight breaking high above the bough.
I've found my destination and I've made my vow;
 So whether you abhor me
 Or deride me or ignore me
Mighty mountains loom before me and I won't stop now.



GRAND CIRCUS PARK

(Twenty Years Later)

Old men still drowse on gray park benches
Watching a dubious sun leak through
the dying branches of elms.

 “The axe shall be laid (Hew, hew!)
 to the root of the trees . . .”

It is hard to realize
they are not the same old men,
Grizzled and bleary-eyed as memories.

Bold, raucous pigeons flaunt themselves
before the glazed, glaucomic stares.
Young mothers quickly look away, caress
with special tenderness their infants' proper curls.
 “. . . and every tree that bringeth not forth
 good fruit. . .”

The Cadillac bus still stops at the same spot,
but the passengers are not the same
and the point of exit is no longer home.
Even the wind is dying, and an autumn fog
settles like a shroud upon the old men's shoulders.
Do they dream of sputtering logs
in open fireplaces,
or do they shake with the impotent rage of trees
 “hewn down and cast into the fire”?



SEAGULLS IN THE CITY

Seagulls fly inland from the Detroit River
to scrounge in the debris of supermarket parking lots.

Their black-tipped wings circle with elegance and grace,
rise, and then descend to perch on light posts.

Shoppers returning to their cars with bags of groceries
curse the excrement dropped on their windshields

But the gulls' airy cries connect me to all waters I have known.
Our mothers must have heard them on the Nile

And shackled to the walls on Gorée Island
before they lost the sun-gold shores of home.

Slaves in Bahia and the cotton fields of Mississippi
listened as they flung their discontent into the wind.

And we, like seagulls, settle on posts of light,
seeking sustenance in history's discarded pages.

BOY ON A BICYCLE

(Summer Solstice, Detroit)

Slim bluejeaned legs pump laboriously
up a wet incline while a steady drizzle
films a dark young face with satin mist.
Summer vacation has just begun.

It is midmorning, the twenty-first of June.
The daylight will be longer than any other
day of an uncertain year, but it is doubtful
that anyone will see the sun. The streets
are slick and treacherous.

Where is he going, young black boy
In a city full of clouds and shadows
pedaling two wheels up a hill in the rain?

CITY NIGHTS

My windows and doors are barred
against the intrusion of thieves.
The neighbors' dogs howl in pain
at the screech of sirens.
There is nothing you can tell me
about the city
I do not know.

On the front porch it is cool and quiet
after the high-pitched panic passes.
The windows across the street gleam
in the dark.
There is a faint suggestion of moon-shadow
above the golden street light.
The grandchildren are asleep upstairs
and we are happy for their presence.

The conversation comes around to Grampa Henry
thrown into the Detroit River by an Indian woman
seeking to save him from the sinking ship.
(Or was he the one who was the African prince
employed to oversee the chained slave-cargo,
preventing their rebellion, and for reward
set free?)
The family will never settle it; somebody lost
the history they had so carefully preserved.

Insurance rates are soaring.
It is not safe to walk the streets at night.
The news reports keep telling us the things
they need to say: The case
is hopeless.

But the front porch is cool and quiet.
The neighbors are dark and warm.
The grandchildren are upstairs dreaming
and we are happy for their presence.

HE LIVES IN ME *(In memory of Clarence Marcellus Long, Sr.)*

My father was a strong and stalwart man.
Slight of build, he towered over cities
and had the might of armies.
Light of skin, he was the blackest man I knew.
In the unbeautiful years, he taught me pride;
when despair was ready to engulf me,
he rescued me with hope. By his hands,
in his arms, I was immersed in waters
of integrity and truth.

I learned my lessons at his knee:

The just shall live by faith.

If a beggar asks for food but isn't hungry,
that's his problem. If you turn him away
and he really is, it's yours
(and it isn't your responsibility
to take the measure of his guile
or honest need).

If you see a toy with jagged edges
(any obstruction)
dropped on the floor or in the way,
it doesn't matter if you put it there
or not; you see it; you must remove it or
you're just as guilty (maybe more so)
as the one who left it there.

I am my father's daughter. I make no apologies
for being who I am, for learning integrity
early in life — make no excuses that my neighborhood
was heaven because my parents loved me
and loved each other
and made our home "rock in a weary land."
I go out of my way
to kick banana peels or broken glass
from sidewalks — try to remove obstacles, no matter
who put them there. I will not apologize.
I cannot speak of him in metaphor or symbol.
My father was upright, noble, and uncompromised,
and he gave me all I needed to be proud,
moral, and black — and whole. I can only praise him now
with hallelujahs, trumpets, cymbals, and drums.





RELUCTANT LIGHT
(In memory of Maude Selena Hilton Long)

Mother, I didn't mean to slight you but
it wasn't you that I adored.
You hid your energy in shadows
and I was dazzled by the sun.

I idolized the one whose voice soared to prophetic heights,
whose words rejuvenated epics of the ages. Some fine June Sundays,
slender and magnificent in morning coat, he would electrify the pulpit
with eloquent pronouncements of doom and glory so divine
the very gates of heaven seemed to part, bathing the atmosphere in crystal light.
Seeking his favor, I rehearsed raising my hand like his in benediction,
earning the childhood name of Preacher, shortened in time to Preat.

You gave us daily sustenance but there was never
a choir's fanfare or the soulbeat of the mighty to grant applause.
You baked the bread for which we seldom thanked you,
canned pears for winter and mended Depression-weary clothes,
scrubbing sheets on a washboard, humming hymns to lift your sagging spirit,
and cultivating beauty in endless flower pots.
The summer when he toured the streets of ancient Palestine and Rome,
you consoled yourself by painting pictures of the Appian Way
using the kitchen table for an easel.

You coached me in my homework, rejoiced
in my small triumphs and prepared me to confront the enemy,
tapping your umbrella against my fifth grade teacher's desk
to punctuate your firm demand for justice. I didn't recognize
your subtle power that led me through blind, airless caves,
your quiet elegance that taught me dignity — nor could I know
the wind that bore *him* high into the sunlight
emanated from your breath. I didn't want your journey,
rebelled against your sober ways.

But I have walked through my own shadows and, like you,
transcended glitter. I have learned
that I am source and substance of a different kind of light.

Now when they say I look like you and tell me
that I have deepened to your wisdom, softened
to your easy grace, I claim my place with honor
in that court of dusky queens whose strength and beauty
invented suns that others only borrow. And Mother,
I am glad to be your child.



ON CORCOVADO MOUNTAIN

High above the sands
of Rio, clouds veil
the impassive face

of the Redeemer.
Momentarily
pale sunlight steals through

seeking refuge in
folds of the stiffly
fluted skirt. Below

in deeper shadows,
in crevices of
precarious hills

crouch faceless squalid
children whom those out
stretched arms will never
hold, never redeem.



REMEMBER BAHIA *(Lembrança do Senhor do Bonfim da Bahia)*

Stumbling into someone else's dream,
came to old Pelhourinho.
Climbed the steep cobblestones
where African women hawked their sweet
concoctions in Portuguese.
Entered through narrow doorways
to watch ballooning white skirts swirl
around black ankles dancing in praise
of Yorub deities. And in Felinto's art shop,
soothed the carved nailtorn hands
of a writhing Christ. (Beneath scarred ebony feet
entwined in agony, mask of an African
endures with dry impassive eyes.)

At the Church of the Good End,
hung up my home-lost spirit
among the wounded plastic limbs
of those who came to pray for miracles
and left it there.

Stumbled into someone else's dream
And made it mine.



FIFTH STREET EXIT, RICHMOND

1.

Leave the freeway at this point.
Drive off where a chainlink fence
separates the road from a patch of weeds
and forces you past a row of ancient houses dying
from the fever of progress. Hurry past.
Proceed with cautious speed down Fifth Street
to Main, beyond the place where death lurks, where
airy ghosts peer through the dust of floor-long
windows and scream with hollow, voiceless mouths.

2.

The phantom children are calling,
they are calling my name.
They are playing hide-and-seek
by yellow streetlight and
they cannot find me. I am busy
chasing fireflies.
The phantom children are calling,
calling my name.

3.

I could go back if I wanted to.
I could join the dance again
bouncing my feet with theirs
on the sidewalk of uneven brick
as they jump jump
and jump Jim Crow.
I could learn again to make
The swooping gesture
*Cotton needs a-pickin' so-o-o bad
I'm gonna pick all over this land.*
I could do it again.
If I wanted to.

4.

The clop-clop-clop of horses' hooves,
the clatter of wagon wheels on cobblestones
bring the street vendor to the shade
of our magnolias.

Above the horses' whinnying
his cindery voice, half-song, half-wail,
bellows, blasts across
the heavy air.

*Get your fresh watermelon,
Sweet melon, cold melon,
Black-seeded juicy melon,
Ripe melon sweet.*

Oh, the spicy redolence of summer!
Oh, the freshfruit glories of Southern
summertime!

*Watermelon, sweet melon,
Black-seeded fresh melon,
Come buy your watermelon,
Ripe melon sweet.*

5.

Wil and Clarence and Dadie and Lew
played mumble-de-peg by the curb, and Suzie
whimpered and put up your hair in balls
while Bubba chased me around the yard, and

Grampa died and Bubba cried
and knocked me down and gashed my head
and Dadie's father stitched my wound
and Sadie cut my hair that summer

and seasons came and long years went
and Richmond just kept coming back
and we were grown before we guessed
the wonder that those summers meant.

6.

I wish I *could* go back
to the cool green shuttered dark
that hid us from the boisterous sun,
from the explosion of color and fragrance outside,
back into the cocoon,
back to the Concord grapes ripening
in the arbor where the swing hung still
patient waiting for the evening cool —
afternoon baths and starched white
eyelet dressed with blue sashes
and patent leather shoes
 Richmond summers chocolate
 as childhood's toothsome delights.
I wish I could.

7.

Azalea petals fell for the last time
one spring and tried in vain
to fertilize the asphalt garden.
The bricks crumbled and were hauled away,
the green shutters fell to dust
and where Grandma's white-pillared porch
once welcomed Sunday callers
a chainlink fence went up to mark an exit
from Wherever, U.S.A. to Main Street, Richmond.

Leave the freeway at this point and don't,
oh, don't go back. Don't listen
to the children's hollow voices
chanting elegies to the whirl
of wheels turning, turning.

"THE SUN DO MOVE"*

Who wouldn't believe,
who wouldn't,
who wouldn't believe?

Camp meeting outside
the city limits.
Corn-high, the yellow wave
of faith, gushing
on his word.

And God said . . .
 Preach it, brotha!
The Good Book reads . . .
 Yes, it do, Lawd, it do!

Day climbing over the southeast
corner of the earth,
grasping for the truth.

*Tell it, John Jasper,
 Hallelujah!*

All day long, all Sunday afternoon
the fields outside of Richmond rocking.
Sun melting down like lard
on the griddle of the world,
the hungry square of each swallowing
it up again.

Come, Jesus!

Who wouldn't believe,
who wouldn't, who
wouldn't believe!

*John Jasper [1812-1893 or 1901], a former slave turned minister, believed the entire Bible was literally true and, through exhaustive study, was able to "prove" from Scripture the mobility of the sun and the flatness of the earth. His famous sermon, "The Sun Do Move and the Earth Am Square," drew crowds of worshipers to his church, as well as to all-day camp meetings in the country. So thorough was his research, so convincing his sincerity and powerful his oratory that even those who knew better were convinced, even if only momentarily, of the authenticity of his claim.

PHILLIS*

I hardly remember my mother's face now,
but I still feel
at my bosom a chill wind
stirring strange longings for the sturdy back
I used to lean against for warmth and comfort
when I had grown too tall to ride.

And I am blinded by
the glint of sunlight
striking golden fire from the flint
of seafoamed rocks below me
on some island not too far from home.

After that, the only light I saw
was a few wayward chinks of day
that somehow slanted into the airless tomb
where chains confined me motionless to a dank wall.

Then the sun died and time went out completely.
In that new putrid helltrap of the dead
and dying, the stench
of vomit, sweat, and feces
mingled with the uneasy motion
of the ship until my sense failed me . . .

I do not know how many weeks or months
I neither thought nor felt, but I awoke
one night — or day, perhaps —
revived by consciousness of sound.

I heard
the pounding of the waves against the shipside
and made believe its rhythm
was the speech of tribal drums
summoning in acute need the spirit
of my ancestors. I dreamed I saw
their carven images arrayed
in ceremonial austerity. I thought I heard
their voices thundering an answer
to my supplication: "Hold fast.
Sur / vive sur / vive sur / vive!"
And then I slept again.

Once more the sunlight came, but not the same
as I remembered it. Now it sat silver-cold
upon the indifferent New England coast. Still
it was good to see the sun at all.
and it was something
to find myself the bright dark mascot
of a blind but well-intentioned host.
A toy, a curiosity, a child
taking delight in anyone's attention
after so long a death.

As I grew older, it was not enough.
That native lifesong once again burst free,
spilled over sands of my acquired rituals —
urged me to match the tribal rhythms
that had so long sustained me, that must
sustain me still. I learned to sing
A dual song:

My fathers will forgive me if I lie
for they instructed me to live, not die.
"Grief cannot compensate for what is lost,"
they told me. "Win, and never mind the cost.
Show to the world the face the world would see;
be slave, be pet, conceal your Self — but be."

Lurking behind the docile Christian lamb,
Unconquered lioness asserts, "I am!"



*Phillis Wheatley (c. 1752-1784) colonial slave poet, brought here as a child, probably from Senegal.

ABANDONED

my muse has left me has crept from my bed in the night
she has stolen my images flown to the treetops
to give them to sparrows for straw in their nests
has fled to the seashore and buried my metaphors in sand
where waves will lap them up she has scattered my song
to the wind has left me without a note of goodbye
on the nightstand a kiss a caress she has
stripped me of spirit and soup Euterpe has left me
alone and tuneless and naked and cold and I
am nothing without her



CONNECTED ISLANDS

Disjointed words and phrases come to me
in dreams like scattered islands. Rising

from secret places, they flow to the surface
of consciousness, spill onto empty pages.

But I tell you this: They will all come together.
Everything means and nothing is isolated.

Rock-a-bye baby on the tree top . . .
A mother in Africa rocks her infant

dying of starvation, belly distended.
When the bough breaks . . . A sergeant,

in Baltimore on furlough, scribbles a note
before she leaps from a ninth floor ledge.

“So long, Badness. I did love you. See you there.”
Her broken bones lie at awkward angles on the sidewalk.

The next week, her married soldier lover follows her
in suicide. *I cover the waterfront* searching for a love

that cannot live yet never dies. A woman shivers
under the boardwalk in Atlantic City with only a box

for shelter. In a funeral home in London
the ringlet-covered head of a year-old baby

rests on a pillow in a small white casket. Nearby
the shriveled hands of a woman in her nineties

hold a rose. *With His sheep securely fold you.*
The space between them is heavy with formaldehyde,

ends and beginnings. *Change and decay . . .*
They are alone, they are together.

Even separate islands are connected by some sea
and we are sisters touching across the waters

of our disparate lives, singing our untold stories
in a harmony of undulating waves.

FRAGMENTS OF A DREAM

A letter has fallen out of my name. It tumbles
over and over itself. I can't retrieve it
and without it I don't know who I am.

I follow it to St. Mark's Square but it turns
into pigeons that turn into worms. Everywhere
I step they squish and squirm and I have no wings.

I am clinging to the edge of a star trying to capture
the missing letter. I can't hold on much longer.
I will disintegrate before I hit the earth.

Even the smallest deletion changes the alphabet,
the order of the universe, as a stuck piano key
alters a song, and I am falling, incomplete, anonymous.

My heart still pulsing. I feel the air move as the lid
of my coffin is lowered. My mouth is full of sand
and I can't cry out for someone to give me back my self.

I want to die easy when I die. This is no way
to go, sod heavy on my chest. My eyes are glued shut
and I can't read the name on my headstone.

GENESIS: THE MISSING CHAPTER

And when God had created the world and all things in it
and sat down on the seventh day to rest from his labors,
he was pleased with his view of mountains
and islands of clouds floating in a sea-blue sky.
He delighted in the scent of hyacinths and frankincense
and the taste of salt and honey.
The bark of trees and the fur of rabbits
were pleasant to his touch.
But when humans uttered sound,
their speech fell like a dull thud, earthbound —
a babble, discordant to his ear. And he said,
“There is something I have forgotten, something
I still must do.” And he thought and thought about it
until he noticed the trilling of a tiny bird.
So on the eighth day, God took the lilt of birds
and called it Joy.
He borrowed the rhythm of the ocean
and called it Supplication.
The roar of thunder he named Despair.
He gathered the many voices of the wind
and called them Exaltation,
and he named the rustle of leaves Thanksgiving.
The whisper of rain became Love
And the murmur of a brook, Faith and Hope.
He bound them all together and called them Music
and planted it in the human voice.
Then he created poets
so that music could be sung in words.
And choirs rejoiced, organs consecrated,
violins implored, drums celebrated,
clarinets wailed, trumpets praised,
trombones lamented,
and saxophones glorified God in the highest.
And God said, “Now my world is truly complete.
Hereafter, whenever humans seek to communicate
with each other and with me,
music will forever be the purest vehicle
for carrying the varied messages of the soul.”

THE LAST HAPPY DAY
(In memoriam: Alfred and Irene Williams)

JULY PHOTOGRAPHS

1. *The Godchild and Her Daughter*

The prepubescent girl circles her mother's waist
with spindly arms growing too fast for her body.
Behind them a jovial sun dazzles the depths of green
and scarlet in leaves and blood-ripe roses.

Just out of sight, the old pair,
whose love is deep-rooted as ancient olive trees,
smile at their little girl
now grown to womanhood and mother of the child.

Nobody asks, "Where will tomorrow take us?" Enough
to be together here encircled by a wreath of sunlit love.

*We too have grown gnarled together.
We count the common rings
in the trees we have become.
Our roots sink into deep soil
and our bark is impervious
to wind and weather.*

2. *The Man*

Cameras catch the sunlight's vigor
dancing in his eyes. In the velvet dark
his face turns like a sunflower to the brightness
he can no longer see. His fingers remember
the soil's rich balm, the profusion of petals —
daylilies and roses — splashed with gold.
His laughter is a deep-throated bird among them.

Suddenly a shadow falls
across his brow, his hair's
cool silver the one
remaining light.

*Nine days to doom,
nine days to paradise.
One perfect hour before
the daylight dies.*

SEQUEL: THE WOMAN

Summer does not dissolve
to autumn, then winter
but jolts and quakes
as the widow's tears
gush in vain to soothe and mend
the broken earth.

DECEMBER FINALE

1. And then,
as though his spirit called her
(but not so full of terror
and surprise!)
as though
he spoke her name
(but never wishing her goodness
to deliver her to evil!)
she was wrenched away.

2. Morning and conversation with a friend,
interrupted by insistent jangling at the door.
"The boy is back, says he dropped the lunch
I packed for him. Claims somebody in a car
was chasing him. I'd better hang up now.
Talk to you later."

Stealthy fingers rifle
the open purse. How to confront him, how
reprimand the audacity of one so frequently
befriended? Suddenly, raw energy unleashed,
animal eyes ferocious. Phone yanked from mooring
by hands no longer boy's but brutal hammers pounding,
bashing. A single scream for him who can
no longer hear, whose blind eyes, even if he could
be with her, would leave him helpless to defend.
Then the length of rope produced from nowhere,
whipped into place, stretched taut against tender
flesh, vulnerable cartilage. The mouth open
gasping for air, the bulging eyes pleading until
the kindness of eternal dark engulfs her.

*By what shall we remember you? Not
the eggs spilled on the kitchen floor
or the now rotting meat intended to relieve
his savage hunger. Not your stifled wait
beating forever against our throats, or the sound
of your head bumping down the basement steps —
the congealed blood under the pulp of your face —
the broomstick left protruding from your anus.*

*Ironic now the photographs in summer's
idyllic garden on the last happy day
we shared. But "nothing worth keeping
is ever lost in this world." Even in this world
may the love-deep roots of trees
conquer evil's senseless blight
and the perennial flowering of your memory
sustain us through whatever winter weather
we still may know.*

PACKRAT

My trouble is
I always try to save
everything

old clocks and calendars
expired words buried
in open graves

But hoarded grains of sand
keep shifting as rivers
redefine boundaries and seasons

Lengths of old string
rolled into neat balls
neither measure nor bind

nor do shelves laden with rancid sweets
preserve
what ants continually nibble away

Love should be eaten
while it is ripe
and then the pits discarded

Lord give me at last
one cracked bowl holding
absolutely nothing

WITHOUT CONDITION

All these years
I have loved you
without condition of return,

laid my sacrifices
at the altar
of your need.
Spring

never spiraled through
reluctant soil without
my touch, or
summer

surged through sun
and azure wind
without my presence
at your rebirth.

I have wished you
cardinals and lemonade,
lake water stroking your hand,
sunrise

and songs
my frail voice could not
sing but only
say.

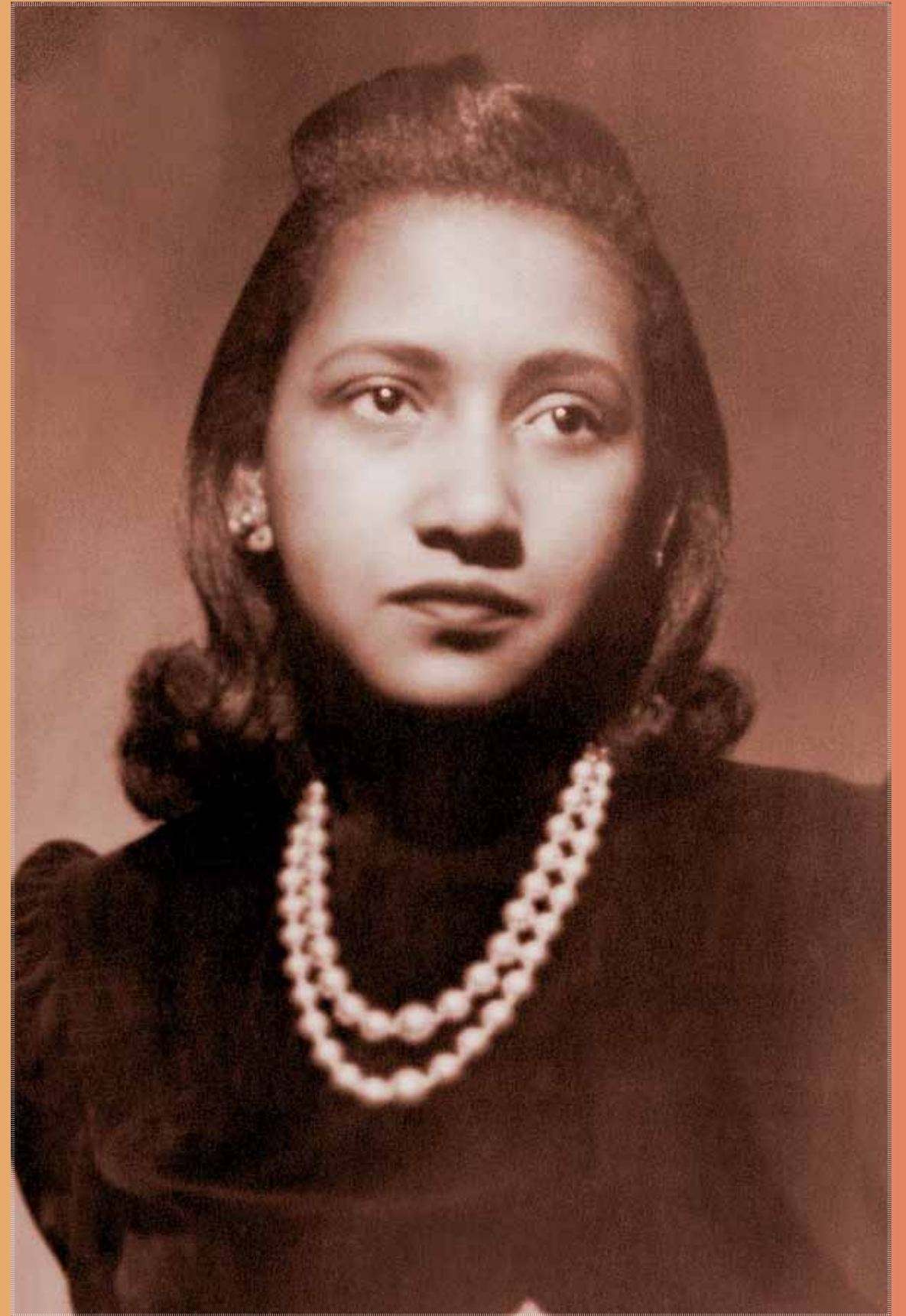
When the first
green leaf turned
scarlet or gold,
I have been

there always.
When winter blanketed
dead leaves in snow, I have
been there.

So what if now
another voice sustains you,
another hand teaches you what
love means?

It's all right, it really is
all right because

I have loved you all
these years
without
condition of return.



MORTALITY

This is the surest death
of all the deaths I know.
The one that halts the breath,
The one that falls with snow
are nothing but a peace
before the second zone
for Aprils never cease
to resurrect their own,
and in my very veins
flows blood as old as Eve.
The smallest cell contains its privileged reprieve.
But vultures recognize
this single mortal thing
and watch with hungry eyes
when Hope starts staggering.

RENEWAL

June is forever and forever returning.
Howling headlines will not prevent it.
Statistics cannot deny that which will be.

In my springtime heart I know that earth
will have its ways. October, that old faker,
coloring its leaves in deceptive gaiety,

all the time meaning brittleness and brown
death, doesn't fool me. December's
snowflakes and gossamer enticements, hiding

sludge and dirt under the wings of Christmas
angels, can't forever deceive. I know
what I know. There is something in the nature

of things that is assuring, that tells me the people
emerging from their dark lives to front porches
and sunlight when the warm days come

know the secret the universe sometimes tries
to conceal. Life forever rejuvenates
itself. Whatever else happens, life lives.

Excerpts from *Octavia: Guthrie and Beyond*

TEACHER

Hatless, you trudge through alabaster days
over the railroad tracks
raised above the level
of all but the severest floods
to your fifth grade class at Lincoln School,
raw winds biting your fingers,
dust searing your eyes.

The furnace is slow to heat
and the only light available
comes through the windows.

Mama's first grade classroom
on the floor below
is even colder, but by ten o'clock
both will be quite comfortable.

The sweet, high voices of children
cheer you.
The adoration in their eyes
warms the dismal atmosphere.
You touch your light to their dark lamps.

Winter, 1909-10
Guthrie, Oklahoma

DESERT SONG

*Years in the desert have left me thirsty
and alone. No oasis calls me. My mouth is full
of the taste of sand. I am convinced I will die
of dehydrated dreams.*

*The pungent odor of rain teases my nostrils
with unkept promises. My tongue swells.
It is always high noon, and there is no tree
to cast a shadow. I have felt*

*the underground rumbling of trains
but where is the station where I may get on board?
I long to ride away from here before the talons
of vultures can tear apart this rotting flesh.*

In the imagined voice of Octavia Long
December, 1910





NOTE: At this point, Octavia is dying of tuberculosis.

MISSOURI

Robert's wife will not come near you.
Reluctantly she has agreed
to let you stay in the drafty barn,
but she begrudges you what meager comfort
such shelter can provide.

The isolation of a leper plagues you
like flies buzzing around an open wound.
You long for a tin cup of water
to cool the fever of long Missouri midnights.
You welcome the company of bats,
study with awe the symmetry of spiders' silk.

When the weak morning light finally
leaks through the planks, you drift
into deranged shadows of sleep.

Your brother stands by silent and sad.
Physician to others, he is helpless to cure
his own subordination to his wife's
indomitable will.

1919
St. Louis, Missouri

NOTE: The author visits Guthrie.

708 SOUTH SECOND STREET

A slim tree leans against this ruined house
forlorn and silent now, grieving
for long dead children.

The base is gutted by the curiosity of squirrels.
Gray siding falls away. Boards blind the windows
that once looked out on boys tossing a ball.

Around my face insects buzz coded messages
I cannot decipher. A kitten
peeps at me through the back fence.
Only a few short yards away
the rusty waters of Cottonwood Creek beckon.

Long ago the overflowing Cimarron River
reddened the gurgling creek. Disturbed now
only by a sluggish breeze, the waters murmur:
"Listen. Her footsteps often sounded
on the little bridge above me.
Her tears melted into my ripples.
If you are searching for her spirit, listen.
Be still and listen to my song."

May, 1987
Guthrie

A FELLOWSHIP OF POETS

Excerpt from *Pilgrim Journey*, pp. 349-55.
By Naomi Long Madgett



In the first few years of my arrival in Detroit I became moderately active as a lecturer and reader. A friend of mine who was a member of the Detroit Study Club, which had been organized at the turn of the century as the Browning Study Club, asked me to present the annual Robert Browning lecture, which I did on at least two occasions. I also lectured at a church in Windsor, Ontario and read my poetry at various places, including the Detroit Unitarian Universalist Church. It became important to have a book available, so in 1956 my second book, *One and the Many*, was published by Exposition Press, a subsidiary company.

Nationally it was a very dry period with few collections of poetry by black authors being published, and I didn't know of any other African-American poets in Detroit. This was the year that Dudley Randall returned to Detroit, but I hadn't met him yet. The publication of my book was so refreshing an event during this drought that all the black newspapers, *The Michigan Chronicle*, the *Pittsburgh Courier* (Detroit edition), and the short-lived *Detroit Metro* carried feature stories about me. I was interviewed on the Dick Harris Show, aired on Station WJR in Detroit on December 11, and a lady who had read about my book invited me to do a reading for her literary club in Grand Rapids. A glowing review by critic J. Saunders Redding appeared in the national *Afro-American Newspapers* on January 5, 1958, and I made my first commercial flight on February 21 to do a reading in Philadelphia.

I later met Oliver LaGrone, a poet and sculptor. He was author of a chapbook, and his poetry had received some national attention. It was good to make contact with a kindred spirit, who, as far as I knew, was the only other serious black poet in Detroit. On several occasions, we were interviewed together and conducted dialogs on radio.

On the night before Thanksgiving in 1959, I was visited by Dr. Rosey E. Pool, a Dutch scholar then living in London. She was in Detroit doing research at Wayne State University and had been told of my work. During our conversation I learned that she had become interested in African-American poetry in 1925 when she discovered Countee Cullen's first book in the University of Amsterdam library. Time spent in a concentration camp during World War II led her to a deeper identification with the plight of African Americans. She later began to correspond with several authors, including Langston Hughes and James Edward McCall, lectured on African-American poets on British radio, and edited a series of anthologies published in London and Amsterdam. She gave me a copy of one of them, *Ik Zag Hoe Zwart Ik Was* (I Saw How



Naomi Long Madgett with writer Harold G. Lawrence (later Kofi Wangara) and poet and Broadside Press founder Dudley Randall at Detroit's Boone House in 1963.

Black I Was) and I reciprocated with a copy of *One and the Many*. On December 14 she ended a television lecture with the first stanza of one of my poems, "Not I Alone." The next day I attended a program at Northeastern High School to which the assistant principal, Wesley Rhea, had invited me. Students and faculty members, including David Boone, presented James Weldon Johnson's *God's Trombones*, and several Negro spirituals were sung under the direction of a Jewish teacher. Again Dr. Pool closed her lecture with "Not I Alone," a practice that she continued.

Her presence in Detroit was the catalyst for a significant period of local literary activity. A number of things happened. Her series of lectures and readings on educational television, entitled "Black and Unknown Bards," drew together other local black poets who had not known each other before. A verse choir publicly performed poems by black authors, and dance teacher Vera Embree directed a video performance that featured local black artists representing various disciplines, including a dance which she choreographed. At some point several of the poets visited Dudley Randall's apartment for a purpose I don't recall. A small group of black poets began to meet in each other's homes for informal discussions and workshops. In addition to Randall, LaGrone and me, they were James W. Thompson, Harold Lawrence, Edward Simpkins, Alma Parks, Betty Ford, and a talented high school student, Gloria Davis. I don't recall at what point Margaret Danner joined our group.

Dr. Pool's first visit to Detroit was interrupted by a trip to Mexico, Margaret Thomas hosting a gathering for her on December 27. When she returned she brought gifts for some of the poets, following the Dutch tradition of giving rather than receiving birthday presents. Her gift to me was a piece of unpolished jade which an archeologist friend in Mexico had just excavated. After one of our discussions I wrote "Midway," giving her a copy to use as she saw fit. Soon after that, she returned to London, having gathered material from the poets she had met here for a new anthology, *Beyond the Blues*, published by Hand and Flower Press in Kent, England in 1962. She also included poets in our group in *Ik Ben de Nieuwe Neger* (I Am the New Negro), a bilingual volume published in the Netherlands in 1965.

Margaret Danner had left her husband and sixteen-year-old daughter in Chicago and come to Detroit, probably early in 1960, the year after receiving a grant from the American Society of African Culture to visit Africa. She became poet-in-residence at Wayne State University and lived at 81 Orchestra Place. According to an article in the *Detroit Free Press*: "After a series of July lectures at McGregor Memorial Building, she will sail for Africa and on October 1 will watch as Nigeria celebrates its independence from Great Britain. Mr. Whitney's award, plus \$700 from the American Society of African Culture and \$350 from the African Culture Studies Association should last through Christmas in Africa."

But instead of going to Africa, she received permission from the Rev. Theodore S. Boone, pastor of King Solomon Baptist Church on Fourteenth Street, to live in an unoccupied house next door to the church and use it for her own writing and as a community art center. Her occupancy in what has



Book jacket back cover of "One and the Many," Madgett's critically received second book of poetry published in 1956 when she was 33.



Madgett was juggling work as a teacher, single parent and increasingly successful poet and writer when this family portrait was taken in celebration of her parents' 50th wedding anniversary in 1963. Left to right: nephew Clarence Marcellus Long III, brother Clarence Marcellus Long, Jr., father Clarence Marcellus Long, Sr., mother Maude Long, Naomi Long Madgett, daughter Jill Witherspoon.

come to be known as Boone House lasted from 1962 to 1964 during which time she and Dudley Randall worked on the poems for a small cooperative collection.

We poets met there each month on Sunday evenings and took turns reading our work to each other and to a handful of people who rarely numbered more than five or six. The most regular attendants were the late Ron Milner, who shared the house with Margaret for awhile, and Arthur and Carolyn Reese, educators and civil rights activists. Only Danner and LaGrone had published chapbooks and I had published two collections of poetry, the second full-length, but we met as equals who shared the spotlight and were qualified to be mutually helpful in our critiques. No one individual stood out as a leader or star. To my knowledge, these readings represented the most visible activity of the house. Except for a few children's drawings I once saw on display, I don't remember any other significant community arts activities. (Though Randall, in a 1971 interview by A.X. Nicholas, mentioned jazz sessions and creative writing classes for children, he later didn't recall any such activities. He was also mistaken in that interview about the name of the church which owned the house, naming instead the one where Aretha Franklin's father was pastor.)

The old house was beautiful in its details but in poor condition. The furnace was evidently inoperable, some of the lights didn't work, and the toilet lacked a seat, but we were glad to have this meeting place and to huddle together good-naturedly in front of the fireplace in cold weather. Rosey Pool returned to Detroit in the spring of 1963. Except for her lecture and reading there on May 11, celebrating the publication of *Beyond the Blues*, and Langston Hughes' very brief visit on February 8, 1964, with

no readings or other activity going on, I know of no connection that any other poets such as Robert Hayden, who was living and teaching in Ann Arbor, Hoyt Fuller, or Owen Dodson had with Boone House. (This disputes erroneous information and assumptions made in an entry written about Dudley Randall in *A Dictionary of Literary Biography*.) At Rosey Pool's lecture on May 11, she read my poem "Alabama Centennial" (except for the reference to Selma that I added later), which I had just written that day, and Harold Lawrence's "Black Madonna," which he wasn't present to hear.

Edward Simpkins edited the October 1962 issue of *The Negro History Bulletin*, which focused on Detroit writers. Featured were Margaret Danner, Harold G. Lawrence, Alma Parks, Betty Ford, James W. Thompson, Edward Simpkins, Dudley Randall, Oliver LaGrone, and me, all members of our group. Also included was the elderly poet James Edward McCall. Two beginning poets who were not a part of our group were also represented, along with several other writers and playwrights, including Woodie King and Powell Lindsay.

On March 22, 1963, our group presented to a large and enthusiastic audience at Hartford Avenue Baptist Church a joint performance of our work entitled "Poetry Unlimited" and reported in the *Michigan Chronicle* as "An Exposé in Talent."

In April, 1963, I entertained Rosey Pool at my home on Santa Barbara Drive. Among the guests were Irma Wertz, Margaret Danner, Tamunoemi David-West, a Nigerian who is the subject of one of Danner's poems and later one of mine, and Oliver LaGrone. Margaret brought a photographer to record the occasion. He took a photograph, in my living room of Margaret, Oliver handing Rosey one of his sculptures, and me. Danner's collection, *To Flower*, came out in October of that year. Shortly after the gathering at my home, Rosey left Detroit to lecture at black colleges in the South. The poets continued to meet periodically at each other's homes to critique each other's work. In my journal I noted a meeting at Betty Ford's house December 28, 1963, and on another occasion we met at Oliver LaGrone's flat to meet Owen Dodson, who was visiting in Detroit.

The elder Detroit poet, James Edward McCall, blind newspaper publisher and author of the early poem, "The New Negro," died. On December 31, 1963 Oliver and I attended his funeral at Plymouth Congregational Church, and Oliver read a tribute from the Boone House poets.

In late July, 1964, Ebenezer AME Church presented a Festival of Arts which was reported in an article in *The Detroit Courier*. LaGrone, Randall, and I participated.

Earlier in 1964, the group began to disperse. Margaret Danner suddenly dropped out of sight. (A year or so later, a front page article in the *Detroit Free Press* reported that her disappearance from the current scene was due to her having spent the grant money intended for her trip to Africa. She was finally planning to make the long-delayed voyage.) James Thompson moved to New York, and Harold Lawrence changed his focus to history and his name to Kofi Wangara and moved to Africa.

Nevertheless, those of us who were left continued to thrive individually. Hughes' anthology, *New Negro Poets: USA*, included some of our work in 1964. In 1965 Oliver and I began our participation in Detroit Adventure, forerunner of the Michigan Council for the Arts and its Creative Writers in the Schools program. My poems continued to appear in anthologies, journals, and magazines such as *Negro Digest*, later named *Black World*. That year my third book, *Star by Star*, published by Harlo Press, went into the first of two printings, to be followed in 1972 with the first of several printings of a second edition by Evenill, Inc. By the time the cloth first edition was

published, I already had orders for almost 200 signed copies. Dudley sat with me in my den while I signed the copies I had ordered. (At that time Harlo Press, was publishing books, not just printing them, and my book was published on a royalty basis.)

I won the statewide competition for the first Mott Fellowship in English and began the school year as research associate at Oakland University. Dudley Randall founded Broadside Press that year with the publication of his poem, "Ballad of Birmingham." In 1966 his first chapbook, *Poem Counterpoem*, with which he and Margaret Danner had been collaborating, each contributing ten facing poems, was published.

Eventually, a second informal workshop group was formed to include from the old group LaGrone, Randall, Gloria David and me, in addition to Joyce Whitsitt and a few other newcomers, including Wardell Montgomery. We were joined by several white poets — Juliana Geran, a brilliant and talented young Romanian Jew, Professor Louis J. Cantoni of Wayne State University, Ethel Grey Seese, Sheila Pritchard, and Robert Honigman, a young Jewish lawyer. From our association came the anthology *Ten: Anthology of Detroit Poets* published in 1968 by South and West, Inc. (Contrary to what has been recently published, we did not pool our money and have it printed ourselves.)

Such workshops were a boon to us who for a while found a wonderful companionship to buffer the loneliness of our profession. We had moved a long way forward from the dry period in which *One and the Many* was born. 🌸

THE POETS OF LOTUS PRESS

Abba Alethea (James W. Thompson) • Samuel Allen
Gilbert Allen Monifa Atungaye • **Houston A. Baker, Jr.** • *Jill Witherspoon Boyer* • **BETH BROWN**
Kiarri T-H. Cheatwood • **ROBERT CHRISMAN** • Pamela Cobb
(Baraka Sele) • **LOUIE CREW** • **Selene de Medeiros**
Tom Dent • Toi Derricotte • **James A. Emanuel**
RONALD FAIR • **Naomi F. Faust** • *Ray Fleming*
Bill Harris • **EUGENE HAUN** • Beverly V. Head • **Kamaldeen**
Ibraheem • **BRUCE A. JACOBS** • **Lance Jeffers** • Gayl
Jones • *Agnes Nasmith Johnston* • **NUBIA KAI**
SYBIL KEIN • Dolores Kendrick • **James C. Kilgore** • Ruth
Ellen Kocher • Oliver LaGrone • **PINKIE GORDON LANE**
Anthony A. Lee • **Monifa A. Love** • Naomi Long
Madgett • *Haki R. Madhubuti* • **Herbert Woodward Martin**
IRMA MCCLAURIN • DAVID ADAM MILLER • E. Ethelbert
Miller • **May Miller** • **GUNILLA NORRIS** • *Tanure Ojaide*
Mwatabu Okantah • Dudley Randall • **Isetta**
Crawford Rawls • **SARAH CAROLYN REESE** • DAVID L. RICE
PHILIP M. ROYSTER • *Satiafa (Vivian V. Gordon)*
Helen Earle Simcox, Editor • **GARY SMITH**
Peggy Ann Tartt • **RON WELBURN** • Jerry Wemple
Paulette Childress White • **CAROLYN BEARD WHITLOW**
James R. Whitley • **Claude Wilkinson** • **Willie Williams**



Naomi Long Madgett with Lotus Press author and Louisiana Poet Laureate Pinkie Gordon Lane, 1994.

THE NAOMI LONG MADGETT POETRY AWARD

Created by Dr. Madgett with the intent of helping new poets of merit get their work published. In addition to offering a cash prize of \$500, the winner's book of poetry is published by Lotus Press, Inc. The award is sponsored and supported by Lotus Press, Inc.



Naomi Long Madgett with Gloria House, Paulette Childress, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Alvin Aubert at Wayne State University.

WINNERS OF THE NAOMI LONG MADGETT POETRY AWARD

- Adam David Miller, *Forever Afternoon* (1993)
- Beverly V. Head, *Walking North* (1994)
- Bruce A. Jacobs, *Speaking Through My Skin* (1995)
- Bill Harris, *Yardbird Suite, Side One: 1920-1940* (1996)
- Claude Wilkinson, *Reading the Earth* (1997)
- Ruth Ellen Kocher, *Desdemona's Fire* (1998)
- Jerry Wemple, *You Can See It from Here* (1999)
- James R. Whitley, *Immersion* (2000)
- Peggy Ann Tartt, *Among Bones* (2001)
- Monifa A. Love, *Dreaming Underground* (2002)
- Mendi Lewis Obadike, *Armor and Flesh* (2003)
- Anthony A. Lee, *This Poem Means* (2004)
- Carolyn Beard Whitlow, *Vanished* (2005)
- Remica L. Bingham, *Conversion* (2006)
- Nagueyalti Warren, *Margaret* (2007)
- Crystal Williams, *Troubled Tongues* (2008)
- Edward Bruce Bynum, *Chronicles of the Pig & Other Delusions* (2009)
- Carmen Gillespie, *Jonestown: A Vexation* (2010)
- Sheila Carter-Jones, *Three Birds Deep* (2011)
- Esperanza Cintron, *What Keeps Me Sane* (2012)

THE STARLIT POETRY OF NAOMI LONG MADGETT

By Melba Joyce Boyd, Ph.D.



I was first introduced to the poetry of Naomi Long Madgett through Dudley Randall's anthology, "The Black Poets," which contains several of her poems: "Quest," "Star Journey," "Dream Sequence Part 9," "The Race Question," "Pavlov," "Midway," and "Alabama Centennial," which led my graduate research to her collection, Star by Star, as referenced in the permissions section of Randall's seminal anthology. In the autumn of 1972, I met Naomi Long Madgett in the flesh at a poetry reading at the Highland Park Public Library, a beautiful building on Woodward Avenue. As a neophyte poet, having my first poetry reading with Naomi Long Madgett and Dudley Randall was an amazing moment. No doubt, I felt like I was walking on air, between these two stars of Black Poetry.

After the reading, Naomi graciously complimented my poetry. In retrospect, I think she was being really nice, because only one of the poems I read ever made it into print. But, her complimentary words encouraged me to continue to write, and over time, her friendship, wisdom and poetry have been guiding stars for me when struggling with aesthetic choices in a poem, when confounded by academic politics or dealing with difficult personalities in the poetry community.

Naomi Long Madgett, Detroit's poet laureate and the 2012 recipient of the Kresge Eminent Artist Award, is highly regarded for her contributions to the publication and preservation of African-American poetry. As the founding editor of Lotus Press in 1972, she

has since ushered in over 90 collections of poetry, giving voice to a plethora of fine poets. Her capacity to accomplish this Herculean task is not only the result of her editing skills, but it is also because of her talent as a poet.

Naomi's first book was published in 1941 when she was only 17 years of age. Since this debut, Naomi's poetry has flourished, and she now has ten books of poetry. Her poetry has appeared in over 180 anthologies, which places her works securely in the American literary canon. Moreover, Naomi's poetry has gone beyond the page. There are two documentary films dedicated to her work: *A Poet's Voice* (Vander Films, 1997) and *Star by Star: Naomi Long Madgett, Poet and Publisher* (penULTIMATE, Ltd., 2011). Moreover, her autobiography, *Pilgrim Journey*, was released in 2006, and she is the proud editor of *Adam of Ife: Poems by Black Women in Praise of Black Men*. In addition, many awards have heralded her literary contributions: an American Book

Award, an Alain Locke Award, the Michigan Artist Award, induction into three halls of fame, and four honorary degrees, to name a few.

Despite these amazing accolades, there is a disturbing absence of literary criticism about Naomi's poetry. There is considerable biographical information, wherein her talent is identified, but there are only a few critical discussions about her craft. In this poet's opinion, Naomi's accomplishments as a publisher have overshadowed her stature as a poet. However, when one considers her productivity as a poet, averaging a book for every decade of her life, it is an impressive body of work, especially in lieu of how much of her time has been devoted to teaching and publishing.

In 1985, I wrote an essay, "Out the Poetry Ghetto: Poets as Publishers," for *The Black Scholar: Journal of Black Studies and Research*, wherein I discussed Naomi Long Madgett's latest book at the time, *Exits and Entrances*. This essay was an effort to counter the paucity of criticism on these wonderful writers, who sacrificed so much of their time to publishing. One of the problems of being "the keeper of the flame" is that many don't see past the blaze.

NAOMI'S RISING STAR

Born on July 5, 1923 in Norfolk, Virginia to Rev. Clarence Marcellus Long and Maude Selena Hilton Long, Naomi was raised by educated, strong-willed parents during the Great Depression and an era of intense racial discrimination against blacks in the United States. Rev. Long held four degrees, including a doctorate in Divinity Studies, and Mrs. Long, who graduated from Virginia normal school with a teaching certificate at the age of 16. This school became Virginia State College, where Naomi received her B.A. in English. (It subsequently evolved into Virginia State University.) Maude Selena Hilton taught in one-room country schools in Virginia until she married, and became Mrs. Long.

Despite the prevailing and pervasive odds against a young, black girl pursuing poetry, Naomi's goal seemed realizable due to parental support and early exposure to literary culture. In the poem "He Lives in Me," in memory of her father, she writes: "In the unbeautiful years, he taught me pride;" and "My father was upright, noble and uncompromised . . ." Like her father, she excelled academically, and she read and wrote poetry voraciously. When she was not justly acknowledged for her academics, her mother provided fortitude, and actually confronted the white teacher of a class where Naomi was the only black child:

You coached me with my homework, rejoiced
in my small triumphs and prepared me to confront the enemy,
tapping your umbrella against my fifth grade teacher's desk
to punctuate your firm demand for justice.

(from "Reluctant Light")

Because her father was a Baptist minister, the family lived in different locations, including East Orange, New Jersey, St. Louis, Missouri and New Rochelle, New York. "While my father was the most important single influence on my life," Naomi relayed, "growing up in East Orange, NJ in one of the most prejudiced northern cities I have ever heard of was also a strong (mostly negative) influence. Moving to St. Louis just after I started high school and attending historic all-black Sumner High School was the positive turning point of my life."

The Longs were not well off financially because Rev. Long's congregations were often poor; so poor, in fact, he voluntarily reduced his salary since the church had

a problem raising the money to pay him. However, he had a distinguished career and unusual opportunities. He was a delegate to the World Baptist Alliance in Berlin in 1934 and spent the rest of the summer touring Europe, the Holy Land, and Egypt.

“Access to a book in Dad’s study, *Negro Poets and Their Poems* by Robert Kerlin, published in 1923,” she said, “was a major influence” on her writing. While she studied mainstream poets, such as Byron, Tennyson, Browning and Keats, as well as the popular lyrics of Edward A. Guest, she relished poetry by African Americans, such as Langston Hughes, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Countee Cullen, Anne Spencer and Paul Laurence Dunbar. Indeed, the Rev. Long “adorned his desk” with a bust of Dunbar, a visual reminder that poetry was not beyond his daughter’s reach, and it was her father who secured a publisher for her first book, *Songs to a Phantom Nightingale*. About the title, she explains, “It is a small Old World migratory bird noted for its melodious song” and, that “the bird was a phantom anyhow, as elusive as my dreams of happiness, as other-worldly as my youthful fantasies.” In her early poems, she contemplates questions of identity, pines over loves lost, and rebukes racial adversity.

Naomi began writing during the Harlem Renaissance, and her determination and talent attracted the attention and praise of two famous Harlem Renaissance poets, Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen. She first met Hughes in St. Louis, and re-encountered him when she was a student at Virginia State College. When her family moved to New Rochelle, New York, she visited Countee Cullen in nearby Tuckahoe, New York in 1944. Their encouragement and recognition of her talent reiterated her devotion to the craft.

During one of Langston Hughes’ readings at Virginia State College, he recited some of Naomi’s poetry and announced her as the author. Subsequently, he included her poetry in *The Poetry of the Negro, 1746-1949*, co-edited by Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps. It should be noted that at this time such comprehensive collections of black poetry were rare, and inclusion in this anthology signified status among a literary elite. Langston Hughes’ interest in Naomi’s work set an example of the kind of writer she would become—one who aspires to help other poets.

CRITICAL ATTENTION

In 1956, a review of Naomi’s second book, *One and the Many*, by the literary scholar, Saunders Redding, appeared in the *National Afro-American* (December 29, 1956, A, p.2), in which Redding exclaims:

“What surprises you first—and happily—in *One and the Many* is that the poet’s lyric conceptions are as fresh and vigorous as spring rain . . . The poet’s ideas, and generally, her subjects are simple, but she enriches them with a kind of rapt creativeness and firm craftsmanship.” Redding further elaborates: “If she does not excite the intellect as much as some might desire, she certainly provokes the imagination; and if her poetry is not singular, this is because it is the product of a lively intuition playing upon common experiences, and common ideas.”

Indeed, it is Naomi’s capacity to “provoke the imagination” that makes her a great poet, and her “intuition playing upon common experiences, and common ideas” is what carries her words beyond an academic audience into the hearts of a general readership. Contrary to Redding’s assessment of Naomi Madgett’s poetry, I propose the subtle nuances employed in her poetic constructions perhaps convey the appearance of intuitive intelligence rather than painstaking craftsmanship; however, within these lines levels of insight are transposed and articulated with aesthetic awareness and skill.

Indeed, many of these poems are cerebral and beyond the vocabulary of an

uneducated audience. She contemplates the challenges of life’s contradictions and her identity as the poet. In particular, “Sonnet to Byron,” written in this classic form, was initially published in anthology, *The Muse of 1944*. The poem considers the psychological condition of Byron relative to Naomi’s complicated and entangled thoughts:

Byron, I know your own tempestuous ways;
I understand your driven, haunted life
Doped with a futile need that robbed your days
Of faith in man, and left you only strife.

Naomi explores Byron’s tortured soul in the poem with compassionate empathy. Though her life does not mirror his, she does identify with the suffering of the poet’s soul:

I, too perch on a clipped and helpless wing—
A bird which, since it cannot soar, must sing.

The poem “The Lost” (1945) likewise pursues this theme of alienation and despair.

I am Youth being blown up like a balloon
Brushing against a pin’s prick:
In a split-second I am shattered Nothing—
Broken bubbles, pierced balloons.
I am lost, resigned Despair watching the black, swirling
river from a bridge—
Searching for a Lethe, screaming to forget it all—

RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE

When considering Naomi’s voice, one must acknowledge the impact of her religious upbringing. Her father was a Baptist minister, with a doctorate in Divinity Studies. As an English professor at Eastern Michigan University, she even taught a course on “The Bible as Literature.” Many of her poems are endowed with religious intensity, reflective of biblical verse and inscribed with hymns and Negro spirituals. In fact, her first name is biblical, and to this day, she continues to sing in her church choir. “Prayer for Faith,” “Prayer for Forgiveness,” and “What Peter Said,” are a few examples of her religious poems, while “Trinity, A Dream Sequence,” a long poem about an illicit love affair, contains religious references. On a more experiential level, poems such as “Sunday Afternoon” and “Saturday Night at the Parsonage” impart images related to her religious upbringing in day-to-day life:

Just before prayers and bed, I get to lick
the spoon and run my finger around the bowl
of batter from the gingerbread now browning
in the oven. *Oh, what a foretaste,
What a foretaste of glory divine!*

A similar application appears in the setting and persona in a later poem, “Deacon Morgan”:

Little and popeyed in our pew,
we never ceased to marvel

that he could strut when he got happy,
walk the narrow straitly,
and even drive a car.
Surely an understanding Jesus
had laid His hands on him.

It is important to note that the title of Naomi's memoir, *Pilgrim Journey*, is taken from a line in a hymn and a Negro spiritual. The title brings the poet's guiding purpose: to help others as she travels through life. Her example confirms her religious belief in Christianity, and how it should be exercised in one's day-to-day life, and not something practiced conveniently on Sundays.

FAMILY POEMS

In more subtle forms, biblical lines and beliefs appear within poems that are not necessarily religious in theme, but the moral content is effectively so, as in "White Cross" (*Negro Digest*, April 1963) a poem she wrote when her brother, a Tuskegee Airman, was missing in action during World War II. For several months the family did not know if Wilbur was dead or alive. "He is actually fused in this poem with my cousin's boyfriend," Naomi relayed, who was "also a fighter pilot, who had gotten killed in action not long before my brother's plane was shot down." "Lonely Eagle" was written for the same brother shortly after he died suddenly of a ruptured abdominal aorta.

Biblical allusions also appear in lines of her poem for her daughter, "To Jill" (1947, the year of Jill's birth):

For life shall flow from life as Adam from the sod
Became a heart that could not die and eyes to see
The wonders of a shining world. And only God
And I will understand how such a thing can be.

"Midday," "Kin," and "Fantasia" are later poems written for Jill, reflective of various stages of her daughter's life. These poems are only a few of the many dedicated to her family, which reveal aspects of Naomi's personal life. As referenced above, she has written poems for her father, her brothers, her mother, her granddaughter, and her husband, Leonard; one of her most recent poems, "Reluctant Light," for her mother, she said, took her "years to complete."

A UNIQUE VOICE

Naomi Long Madgett's oeuvre is extensive. She began writing in the aftermath of the Harlem Renaissance and during the Modernist Period in literature. Her mastery of traditional poetic forms and her awareness of African-American literary tradition are evident in the range and breadth of her expressions, which are rich in social consciousness and stylistic elegance. Naomi's literary influences from previous generations and cultures are readily apparent. In addition to Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen and Sterling Brown, as well English and traditional American poets, her writing is in tandem with her ethnic contemporaries: Robert Hayden, Dudley Randall, Gwendolyn Brooks, Margaret Walker, and Melvin B. Tolson, to name a few. These poets, who emerged during the 1930's, 40's and 50's, consistently and simultaneously demonstrated cultural consciousness and artistic individuality and are the forerunners for subsequent generations of African-American poets. Their mastery and improvisation of classical poetic forms is characteristically African American, and is the primary creative force

that informs their unique styles and the individuality of each voice. They expanded the parameters of the genre, and Naomi Long Madgett's work illustrates this aesthetic sensibility.

Naomi's arsenal of poetry is thematically broad and culturally diverse. Her poems are local and yet cosmic; specific to ethnic identity and yet universal in human scope. Her ethnic identity is central to origins of expression, but does not limit the broader dimensions of her themes. At the same time, many of her earlier poems are embedded with racial pride and protest. "Song for a Negro" (1942) and "Midnight Magnolias" (1942) contain strong political statements against racial discrimination:

I walk here while your highborn ladies,
Your blond children who learn "nigger" with their alphabet,
Your pedigreed horses, your dogs, your cream-fed kittens
Are asleep.

I walk here because I have nowhere else to be.
I press my lips to magnolia petals
Because I am weary and magnolias may be the last scent I
Ever know
And the softest kiss I'll ever feel again.

(from "Midnight Magnolias")

Naomi dedicated the poem "Simple" to her idol, Langston Hughes. In the poem, she reanimates the voice of Simple, a character from Hughes' newspaper column, which was ultimately published as a book, *The Best of Simple*. In another instance, "Monday Morning Blues" should also be regarded as a tribute to Hughes, as she employs the blues form that Hughes introduced to Afroamerican poetics. It is an ethnic indicator that demonstrates her adaptation of indigenous culture as a resource for poetic expression, and it affirms Langston Hughes' aesthetic influence on her work.

All night my bed was rocky, all night nobody by my side;
My bed was cold and rocky, all night no good man by my side.
The radiator sputtered, the furnace gave a groan and died.

(From "Monday Morning Blues")

Finally, "Black Poet" was written as a tribute to Langston Hughes upon his death in 1967.

"Sterling Brown was also an influence," Naomi said. "We exchanged letters when my brothers were attending Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri (where he was a professor) and we later got to know each other." Naomi's attention to the "common folk" is reflective of Brown's work, especially in her incorporation of voice and folk forms. Reminiscent of Brown's "Strong Men," "Alabama Centennial" expresses the determination of black people never to go back to things as they were before Brown vs. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas in 1954:

And other voices echoed the freedom words.
"Walk together children, don't you get weary."
Whispered them, sang them, prayed them, shouted them.
"Walk!"

(from "Alabama Centennial")

Her poem “Echoes,” dedicated to Duke Ellington, is a tribute to one of the geniuses of African-American culture. By relying on oblique rhyme, she created a rhythm pattern that recalls and reiterates like echoes of jazz:

But those perfect stones
tossed into timeless canyons
will reverberate in concentric melody
that will go on
 and on
 and . . .

Likewise, Naomi’s poem, “Phillis,” for Phillis Wheatley (the eighteenth century, internationally renowned, African-American poet) is a tribute to a fellow poet, who transcended slavery to make her literary mark on the planet. About Phillis Wheatley Naomi said, “She showed to the world the face the world would see,” a common strategy in early African-American literature. It is a longer poem, written in the first person from the perspective of Phillis. In free verse, the poem simulates the slave narrative, as the persona recalls glimmers of her mother, the ocean voyage on the slave ship, the repression of her African soul and identity, and her survival as she learns “to sing a dual song” and “asserts: “I am.”

Then the sun died and time went out completely.
In that new putrid helltrap of the dead
And dying, the stench
Of vomit, sweat, and feces
Mingled it with the queasy motion
Of the ship until my senses failed me. . .

I do not know how many weeks or months
I neither thought nor felt, but I awoke
One night—or day, perhaps—
Revived by consciousness of sound.

The black woman in various forms is also a recurring image in Naomi’s poetry. In addition to “Phillis,” poems such as “New Day” and “The Old Women” are compassionate portraits that reveal admirable qualities that are often unrecognized and underappreciated by society. “New Day” begins with an epigraph with lines from a Negro spiritual: “Keep-a inchin’ along, keep-a inchin’ along.”/Jesus’ll come bye an’ bye . . .” and continues with language that coincides with its theme of endurance and persistence:

She coaxes her fat in front of her
Like a loaded market basket with defective wheels.
Then she pursues it, slowly catches up, and
The cycle begins again.
Every step is a hardship and triumph.

The poet empathizes with her subject’s courageous resilience in a hostile atmosphere:

I feel the thunderous effort
of her movement reverberating through
a wilderness of multiple betrayals.

In “The Old Women” the primary images are of “hands” and “mouths.” Unlike “New Day,” which contains precise, concrete imagery, the imagery in this poem is abstract and surreal:

They see the gnarled hands raised
and think they are praying.
They cannot see the weapons hung

between their fingers. When the mouths
gape and the rasping noises
crunch like dead leaves.

They laugh at the voices
They think are trying to sing.

This attention to anonymous persons redirects Naomi’s vision to encompass the unassuming, unglamorous lives that, for the most part, comprise the basic reality of black life in America. The purpose of the poem is also to illuminate the resistance of the women. “The actions of the old women also (are) misunderstood by young people who never knew how subtle protests once had to be,” Naomi said.

Naomi’s sense of literary freedom persisted even during the 1960s, when politics of the Black Aesthetic commanded certain thematic and stylistic limitations, which she ignored because, as indicated in earlier poems as well as current ones, her poetics are embedded in black consciousness, exemplifying racial identity and pride “in the unbeautiful years.” However, her genteel style may not have been didactic enough for popular taste.

Dudley Randall’s “Ballad of Birmingham” and Margaret Walker’s “For Andy Goodman, Michael Schwerner, and James Chaney” are two classic poems by Naomi’s contemporaries about the activities and events of the Civil Rights Movement. Naomi’s “Alabama Centennial” and “Midway” also reverberate this era and these poems have been anthologized several times in a wide range of anthologies; but to her dismay, the poem “Midway” has become possibly her most popular and most anthologized poem and crosses-over to so many cultural tastes that it has become a classic American poem. “Midway” appears in *Star by Star* with the note:

“I have included “Midway,” not for its dubious literary merit, but because of general popular demand. This poem, which I wrote in 1959, has been reproduced without permission, misquoted, and even published anonymously since its first legitimate appearance in print in 1961. This is the original, authentic version.”

Naomi also stated in the documentary film, *Star by Star*, that “Midway” is her most contentious poem. She is not satisfied with it, “But I don’t know how to fix it,” she said. However, “it has,” as she puts, “taken on a life of its own.”

Because of its popularity and its lyrical structure, it can be easily adapted to

song, and “Midway” has been set to music by two musicians and performed in concert. The poem adheres to the African-American spiritual in form, containing end rhyme and classic cultural symbolism. The imagery succinctly and clearly identifies slavery and lynching, while it answers oppression with religious allusions and faith, a key aspect of the refrain. “Midway’s” uplifting rhythm epitomizes the attitude of unrelenting resistance and the pursuit for racial justice. Its popularity, in part, is due to its accessible vocabulary for audiences that span generations and educational levels. The following lines comprise the middle stanza of the poem:

I’ve prayed and slaved and waited and I’ve sung my song,
You’ve bled me and you’ve starved me but I’ve still grown strong.
 You’ve lashed me and you’ve treed me
 And you’ve everything but freed me
But in time you’ll know you need me and it won’t be long.

It is not unusual for a poem to take on its own life, and in this way, Naomi is like a midwife, unsure that the poem was fully formed when she delivered it. Perhaps, like children, the muse insisted that this poem come through her rather than from her.

Another poem that has been placed in the limelight is “Woman with Flower.” It too has been anthologized several times and in a major anthology of African-American poetry, which speaks to the subjectivity of its editor. Its most interesting experience, however, is its inclusion in *Change Your Thoughts, Change Your Life*, a book by the motivational speaker, Dr. Wayne W. Dyer. Hopefully, this reprinting of the poem will lead Dyer’s readership to more of Naomi Long Madgett’s poetry. This broader appeal speaks to the abstractness of the theme and the flexibility of its core metaphor, which can be applied to a myriad of circumstances and human relationships, such as parent-child, teacher-student, and even romantic love:

Much growth is stunted by too careful prodding,
Too eager tenderness.
The things we love we have to learn to leave alone.
(from “Woman with Flower”)

“OCTAVIA:” NAOMI LONG MADGETT’S GREATEST LITERARY ACCOMPLISHMENT

Octavia (1988) is possibly Naomi Long Madgett’s most challenging and complex work. The second release, *Octavia: Guthrie and Beyond* (2002), contains updated biographical information on her family, which complements the experience of several poems that comprise the larger, book-length poem. Naomi recalls her family history and re-envisions them as a part of her present. She invokes the past, and through her vision transports the audience to another time. While the prologue deals with her sense of identification with Octavia, the epilogue restores Naomi’s sense of her own identity. This personal frame of reference creates a bond with the reader, who enters and exits with the poet into the thoughts and images of a particular time and place where African Americans struggled under severe circumstances and restrictive, racial discrimination.

Another benefit to this poem is that it defies stereotypes and historical ignorance of African Americans during previous centuries. The poem recognizes Naomi’s grandparents as exemplary blacks, who managed to succeed and excel despite persistent opposition to including blacks in the national narrative.

The central figure, Octavia, is Naomi’s deceased aunt, and the eldest sister of her father. When she was young, Naomi strongly resembled Octavia, and reflected similar personality traits. Consistent comparisons of Naomi to this relative created an identification, and ultimately an obsession with Octavia, who hovered like Naomi’s own shadow, a ghost whose death preceded her birth:

Years in the desert have left me thirsty
And alone. No oasis calls me. My mouth is full
Of the taste of sand. I’m convinced I will die
Of dehydrated dreams.

(from “Desert Song”)

Octavia is perhaps Naomi’s most accomplished work, comprised of various settings, myriad points of view, and vocabulary particular to personae and their times. While the poem begins and ends with the poet’s identity as the omniscient narrator, Naomi incorporates voices from the past by constructing poems out of found letters, thereby providing an internal narrative.

My dear Son,
Your long, looked for letter came yesterday,
much to our joy and pleasure.
Of course I am not well but at work
and trying to keep up.
But sometimes I almost give out,
but I must try to keep on going
at least till someone else can take hold
and carry on.

(from “Drexel Street”)

As reflected in the above excerpt, this complex composition not only illustrates the life of Octavia, it also reveals the values of this educated black family, whose dedication to racial uplift through education and Christian spirituality stands as testament to human fortitude and perseverance. Naomi secured these letters, as well as photographs and documents from her parents’ family records and even an old piano to assist in this reconstruction of memory. To the reader’s delight, photos are included in the book along with more biographical details about the family.

In addition to this primary material, Naomi did what any serious writer must do; she visited the town of Guthrie, Oklahoma to sensually experience the setting, and to see the crumbling home where the Long family once lived:

A slim tree leans against this ruined house
forlorn and silent now, grieving
for long dead children.

(from “708 South Second Street”)

She visited the barn where Octavia, infected with tuberculosis, was “quarantined” by her sister-in-law. She inhaled the minutia of details, noted the fauna and genus of trees and bushes, identified rivers and roads, detailed the shades of sunsets and recalled the aggression of storms and shifting seasons, and then etched it all into vibrant imagery.

Long ago the overflowing Cimarron River
reddened the gurgling creek. Disturbed now
only by a sluggish breeze, the waters murmur:
“Listen. Her footsteps often sounded
on the little bridge above me.
Her tears melted into my ripples.
If you are searching for her spirit, listen.
Be still and listen to my song.”

(from “708 South Second Street”)

The poet found portals into the past through the imaginative voices of elderly women, who were once students in Octavia’s classroom. Naomi sipped ice tea, inhaled their talk and quoted them in the poetry:

“Octavia Long was my high school English teacher,”
they all tell me.
And one, ten years their senior,
Puffing on a slim brown cigarette,
Nails lacquered wicked red,
Steady on high-heeled shoes:
“I knew the whole Long family.
Marcellus tried to court me
But I was too young for him.”

Octavia: Guthrie and Beyond is a brilliant composition and will eventually receive the acclaim it deserves. It was required reading in the Detroit Public Schools for eleventh grade English classes, and Naomi printed a study guide to assist teachers. *Octavia* should become required reading in American literature classes everywhere, because it is a marvelous and enchanting work of art.

DETROIT POEMS

In a special issue of *Michigan Quarterly Review* (25, 2: 316, Spring 1986) Dorothy H. Lee’s essay, “Black Voices in Detroit,” discusses Madgett’s poetry and prominence: “Randall and Madgett are certainly among the most significant literary figures the city of Detroit has produced.” Lee cites the following lines from the poem “The Ragman”:

Misfortune perched on his shoulder
Like a bird he once fed
And could never get rid of.

He could neither cage it
Nor shoo it out the window.

So, it just sat there,
Domiciled in pleasure of his pain,
Without even giving a song
In return for its bread.

The critic then comments that: “Such candid, uncomplicated snapshots of urban solitaires and urban sorrow derive ironically from the free-verse vignettes of city life etched by Whitman in *Leaves of Grass*, and constitute a mockery of Whitman’s hope for American cities.”

Naomi Long Madgett is not mocking Whitman’s vision, but she is conveying truth about the city’s underbelly, about its disenfranchised, about its poverty. Even in this sense, she injects poignant and salient insight with a subtle turn of phrase. The line, “Domiciled in pleasure of his pain,” explains how submission to defeat finds comfort through familiarity. The genius of the line is derived from its subject. The language is unassuming and the imagery is nearly static. However, contrary to Lee’s conclusion, there is hope in Naomi’s city poems. “City Nights” captures the honest truth about the dangers and distractions that characterize reality, but it also underlines the tenderness and promising outlook the citizens assume despite a legacy of strife. The poem opens with:

My windows and doors are barred
against the intrusion of thieves.
The neighbor’s dog howls in pain
at the screech of sirens.
There is nothing you can tell me
about the city
I do not know.

Madgett lays it out there and challenges the most cynical reader with the assurance that can only come from a Detroiter; “There is nothing you can tell me/ about the city/ I do not know.” However, it is not a poem about the horrors of the city, but about the warmth and strength of life despite distress and difficulties:

On the front porch it is cool and quiet
After the high pitched panic passes
The windows across the street gleam
In the dark.
There is a faint suggestion of moon-shadow
above the golden street light.
The grandchildren are asleep upstairs,
and we are happy for their presence.

The second stanza answers the accusations and the assaults in the first. The poet juxtaposes the trepidation of darkness and imposed fears in the beginning of the poem with imagery that is calm, peaceful, warm and even magical. Words like “gleam,” “moon-shadow,” and “golden” facilitate this transition, while the joy of sleeping grandchildren punctuates a feeling that is ultimately optimistic. While the poem considers family lore that takes the front porch conversation back to slavery, the last two stanzas return to contemporary strife and resolution:

Insurance rates are soaring.
It is not safe to walk the streets at night.
The news reports keep telling us the things
they need to say: the case
is hopeless.

Like a blues refrain, Naomi answers the paradox by returning to the imagery in the second stanza, but with a slight shift of emphasis, she affirms faith in the future:

But the front porch is cool and quiet.
The neighbors are dark and warm.
The grandchildren are upstairs dreaming
and we are happy for their presence.

CONCLUDING: STARLIT POETRY

Lotus Press was founded to publish *Pink Ladies in the Afternoon*, Naomi's fourth book of poetry, and to distribute her third book, *Star by Star*. This title is taken from a line in the poem "Quest," initially collected in *One and the Many*. In a related sense, "star" is a consistent and abiding image/symbol in Naomi Long Madgett's poetry. It appears in the title of two poems, in the title of a book, and in at least a dozen of her poems.

Directed at her first husband, "who scoffed at my poems and thought they were unimportant," the poem "Quest" declares in the opening lines:

With or without you I will go my destined way
Singing the stars and heralding the dawn.
Alone or with you I will give my dreams their say
From now on.

This solitary pursuit is reiterated in "Star Journey," which opens with: "Alone I tiptoe through the stars"; and closes with: "while my soul/Tips through the stars alone." The theme contrasts the difference between the body, which is earthbound, and the soul, which "tiptoes" on stars through the heavens. Considering the star motif in Naomi's poetry to the quote from Wordsworth that prefaces her poem "Family Portrait," might illuminate some understanding of Naomi's starlit imagery:

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting.
And cometh from afar."

In the first case, the pursuit of poetry is her "life's star." It is a spiritual "quest" as well as the perfection of craft, a labor with words to be imparted on Earth. This imagery is also enlisted by the inclusion of lines from the Negro spiritual, "Lay This Body Down": "I know star rises," and "I walk in starlight," which appear at the beginning of the poem, "Poets Beyond the Blues," and these lines are adapted within the body of the poem.

By contrast, "The Race Question" includes the star image as a momentary gaze, a personal escape from racial protest, but in "Discards," a fallen star retrieved from a wastebasket is symbolic of a failed romance: "I emptied the wastebasket the other day/ and found the star I gave you once, when we were walking on air." A similar star imagery appears in the love poem "If Not in Summer."

Whereas "Tivoli" seems to intertwine both the spiritual and the romantic symbolism of the star:

We caught our breath, the suddenness of a lone star
In all that awesomeness of space and height
Startling us into new discovery.

"Anonymous Witness: A Minor Christmas Vision" references the star that led the wise men to the baby Jesus:

all of a sudden such a starburst split the sky
that I leaped—or fell—from my camel in fear and dread
and sank to my knees in the sand.

"Odyssey," a deeply philosophical poem, engages a more cosmic symbolic sense of the symbol and a possible intersection with the Wordsworth quote:

How many stars must burn to ash and death
While you tip edges of their alien shores
In search of worth?

The star motif in Naomi's poetry can be traced from her earliest to her most recent poems, and in these diverse settings, it traces her quest to empower her poetry with her life's spirit, rising to tiptoe through the heavens.

CONCLUDING AND CONNECTING

Naomi Long Madgett's latest book, *Connected Islands: New and Selected Poems*, contains many of the poems I've discussed in this essay, as well as selections from previous books. The theme of *Connected Islands* appears implicitly in the title poem; everything is connected. A significant number of these poems reiterate Naomi's religious grounding, including quotes from the Bible, lines from Negro spirituals and contemporary hymns. There are starlit poems dedicated to her pastor, a tribute to her church choir at Plymouth Church in Detroit, and to her favorite hymnal songwriter, Charles A. Tinley (1851-1933). There are, of course, pensive poems that are philosophical, and reflective poems about her family, friends and colleagues. There are troubled poems about Detroit, as well as serious and humorous poems about aging. It is a collection that encapsulates her oeuvre, connecting her past and her present to her vision of the world.

When Naomi expanded her publishing purposes to accommodate the talents of other poets, Lotus Press became a North Star for many black poets. This noble gesture is an extension of her creed to serve others, but ironically, this accomplishment as an editor has been a distraction for literary scholars who do not realize it is her poetry that is the foundation of the press. Indeed, since some Lotus Press poets have gone on to win national poetry prizes and to be published by mainstream publishers, literary critics have forgotten the service small presses continue to provide for the good of America poetry.

Poet-publishers, like Naomi Long Madgett, have a keen eye for talented poets, and Naomi is still dedicated to, as she puts it, "the most neglected American art form." She continues to sustain Lotus Press with poetry awards, finely crafted books and a legacy of her own starlit poetry.

I am clinging to the edge of a star trying to capture
the missing letter. I can't hold on much longer.
I will disintegrate before I hit the earth.

(from "Fragments of a Dream") 

Melba Joyce Boyd is Distinguished Professor and Chair of Africana Studies at Wayne State University and the author of thirteen books, including "Wrestling with the Muse: Dudley Randall and the Broadside Press." She is also the Associate Producer of the documentary film "Star by Star." Her original essay was written expressly for this publication.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Boyd, Melba. "Out the Poetry Ghetto: Poets as Publishers," 35 *The Black Scholar: Journal of Black Studies and Research*, 4: 33-43, 1985.
- Lee, Dorothy. "Black Voices in Detroit," 25 *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 2: 313-338, 1986.
- Madgett, Naomi Long, ed. *Adam of Ite: Poems by Black Women in Praise of Black Men*. Detroit: Lotus Press, 1992.
- Madgett, Naomi Long. *Connected Islands: New and Selected Poems*. Detroit: Lotus Press, 2004.
- Madgett, Naomi Long. *Exits and Entrances*. Detroit: Lotus Press, 1978.
- Madgett, Naomi Long. *Octavia: Guthrie and Beyond*. Detroit: Lotus Press, 2002.
- Madgett, Naomi Long. *Songs to a Phantom Nightingale Juvenilia*. Detroit: Lotus Press, 1981.
- Madgett, Naomi Long. *Pilgrim Journey*. Lotus Press, 2009.
- Madgett, Naomi Long. *Pink Ladies in the Afternoon*. Detroit: Lotus Press, 1990.
- Madgett, Naomi Long. *Remembrances of Spring*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1993.
- Madgett, Naomi Long. *Star by Star*. Detroit: Evenill Inc, 1970.
- Madgett, Naomi Long. *Teacher's Guide for Octavia and Other Poems*. Detroit: Lotus Press, 1997.
- Randall, Dudley, ed. *The Black Poets*. New York: Bantam Books, 1971.
- Redding, Saunders. "Review of One and the Many," *National Afro-American*, December 29, 1956, Sec. A, p 2.
- Shock, David. *Star by Star: Naomi Long Madgett, Poet and Publisher*. penULTIMATE, Ltd., 2011.
- Vander, Kathryn. *A Poet's Voice*. Vander Films, 1997.

¹ Unless otherwise identified in the text, the quotes from Naomi Long Madgett are from an interview by the author with Dr. Madgett in her home on June 15, 2012, or from subsequent dialogues during the writing of this essay.

Long lineage: generations of Naomi's relatives smile from photographs in her Detroit home.



I first became aware of Naomi Long Madgett in 1991, when she was nominated for the Governor's Arts Award. I had no idea at that time that our lives would come to parallel positions in the arts. I am highly honored to be in her company as an Eminent Artist. She has done so much for so many people, it is amazing how her life has touched and inspired so many other artists. I congratulate her on this Kresge Eminent Artist Award.

Marcus Belgrave, master jazz trumpet artist, 2009 Kresge Eminent Artist

I am more than pleased to show great appreciation for Naomi Long Madgett whom I consider not only an African-American woman of great presence but also a woman of great vision. Her vision extends over the past, the present and the future. With such far-reaching sight, she has gazed upon me when I needed to be seen. This ability to see fledging African-American writers is what Mrs. Madgett has developed into a gift for others. It is through her efforts to bring African-American writers to light that the hopes and dreams of many novices have taken form in reality.

As the 2012 winner of the Naomi Long Madgett Poetry Award, I thank you. I particularly thank you for your careful guidance and encouragement in supporting my revolutionary process of coming to light. It is both my determination and prayer that I bloom into a true flower of your *New Nile*. I hope to complement the many other African-American writers you have given seed and continue to nurture in your beautiful garden.

Though *Thank you* is a small couple of words, taken together as a concept it is my expression to repay in some small way a debt of gratitude. And, further it is an invitation for you to share in the dream you helped me make real.

Thank you so much!

Sheila Carter-Jones, Ph.D., author of "Three Birds Deep," winner of the 2011 Naomi Long Madgett Poetry Award

Warmest congratulations, Ms. Madgett! We at InsideOut Literary Arts gave a collective cheer at the news that Naomi Long Madgett was selected as the 2012 Kresge Eminent Artist. At 89, and going strong, Ms. Madgett continues to be a powerful, generous force for poetry in Detroit and around the country.

I became friends with Naomi Madgett in the 1980s at Mumford High School, where I taught her *Octavia and Other Poems*, then adopted for use in Detroit Public Schools. The poems are poignant, exquisite meditations on her Aunt Octavia, a teacher, who died of tuberculosis before Naomi was born, and they gave my students insights into many things: pride and love of family; the independent spirit of Octavia (clearly passed on to Naomi herself!); a rich historical period, as the family moved out of the South into some of the first free, all-black towns in Kansas and Oklahoma after the Civil War; the use of documents, letters and photographs. After the students wrote their papers, Naomi came to hear them read. She continued to visit my students, as did other Lotus Press authors she had published: Toi Derricotte, Nubia Kai, Bill Harris, and all the way from Brazil, Selene de Madeiros.

Naomi Madgett is tireless in her dedication to poetry and to poets. She founded Lotus Press in 1972 so that the songs of black poets would not go unsung. Over the years Lotus Press has published the work of over 90 African-American poets, including, since 1995, winners of the Naomi Long Madgett Poetry Award given to an outstanding manuscript by an African-American poet. For years, until Wayne State University Press took over distribution, she ran Lotus Press almost single-handedly — attending to book design, publicity, correspondence, order fulfillment, mailings and more. This past year, when the IRS abolished the nonprofit status of Lotus Press (along with over 200,000 other small organizations), she undertook the arduous process of reapplying, doing all the paperwork and filings, and got the status reinstated.

Determined and undaunted, witty, sharp and down to earth — Naomi Long Madgett embodies impeccable standards, both personal and poetic. As the guidelines for the Madgett Award state: "We are not interested in poetry by amateurs. Poets must have studied their craft." Naomi knows the value of hard, careful work — in life and on the page — and she knows what it means to a poet's career to have a book. It's thrilling to see how Lotus Press has contributed to the careers of so many fine poets, and to think of the many lives Ms. Madgett has touched, mine included. (Full disclosure: I often serve as first reader for the Madgett Award; my third book, *The Dropped Hand*, is in its second edition as a Lotus Press title.)

Naomi still makes visits to InsideOut classrooms. In announcing the Eminent Artist Award, Kresge Foundation President Rip Rapson praises her for "reaching across generations to spark in young people a love of words and writing." In this spirit, Naomi initiated the Lotus Press High School Poetry Prize, now in its 13th year. Each year she judges poems from students in InsideOut classrooms and presents the winner with a \$100 prize and a broadside of the poem that she herself creates. It's always a pleasure to see our students live up to Ms. Madgett's high artistic standards for craft and originality.

Terry Blackhawk, Founder/Director, InsideOut Literary Arts Project, Detroit

My relationship with Dr. Naomi Long Madgett transformed my life. Years before we met, I had read some of Naomi's poetry with great admiration. Then in 1974, I came across a newspaper notice that she was to lead a poetry workshop at a local church, so I typed "Big Maybelle," one of my first poems, and submitted it for her consideration. I was a young wife and mother with little knowledge of literature and no higher education. To my surprise, Naomi singled out my poem for discussion and asked me to remain after the event. We spoke briefly and exchanged phone numbers. Her generous interest in my little poem was probably of small consequence to her on that day, but I went home glowing with one of the most valuable gifts I have ever received — a new vision for my future.

Naomi had just established Lotus Press and was in the process of identifying young poets for publication. She encouraged me to work on my poems, with the promise that if I could produce a worthy manuscript, she would serve as my editor and publisher. In 1975, Lotus Press published a slim volume of my poems titled *Love Poem to a Black Junkie*. I also began volunteering at Lotus Press during those early years as I soon discovered Naomi needed assistance in the operation of the Press, which was housed in the basement of her home. Thus began my wonderful days and years with Naomi. We sat knee to knee at her desk, preparing poems, and together we circled the table stacked with pages, assembling books by hand. Naomi became not only my mentor, she also became my dear friend and confidante, the master teacher who would as gently correct my grammar as encourage my hopes of attaining higher education. In "Woman with Flower," she observes, "The leaf's inclined to find its own direction." She mentored accordingly.

During my many busy years as wife, mother of five sons, and eventually student, I worked less often with Naomi at Lotus Press. Nevertheless, I remained involved, contributing what I could as friend, board member, visual artist, and in time, assistant editor. Naomi's intelligence and professional accomplishments were also highly inspirational to me when I began my college education. In many a late night telephone conversation, she encouraged me with an attentive ear and sound advice.

In 1984, I was awarded the State of Michigan Creative Artist Award for poetry to support my writing of *The Watermelon Dress*, my second book of poetry, which was published later that year by Lotus Press. Although my interest in writing poetry has waned over the years, my appreciation of the art and of Naomi's dedication to preserving its value and vitality remain constant. My poetry, my short fiction, and my attainment of B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. degrees are attributable in no small measure to the love, guidance, and support of Naomi Long Madgett — my dear friend; my talented, generous mentor; and my first publisher.

Paulette Childress, Ph.D., poet, short story writer and educator

She posts passages of time in delicate nuanced beauty.

Charles McGee, artist, educator, 2008 Kresge Eminent Artist

Once you're touched by someone like Naomi — as I was touched and so many other people were touched — you end up having to pass it on. It's part of a chain. Naomi's father and mother were part of a particular African-American tradition, where you've got to put something in the pot; you've got to repay the ancestors. Little did I know when Lotus Press published *The Empress of the Death House*, my first book of poetry, that 30 years later I'd be co-founding an organization [Cave Canem] to make the voices of African-American poets safe and heard. That's what Naomi's work has been about, bringing forth voices that would not have been heard, that would have been silenced because of racism. She passed that on to me, that responsibility to other people.

When I think of Naomi, I think of her enormous courage. I think, too, of my mother and my grandmother and others in their generations who were fortunate enough, for whatever reason, to share the kind of drive and incentive that Naomi possesses. These people have made it easier for the next generation. It's glorious, really, what Naomi has done with this time and this place in history. She's the one that became the bridge. I think silence and oblivion were on one side of the bridge, if you go back to times when it was illegal for anybody to teach a slave to read and write (as late as 1843). She has been part of a redemptive act, and as such, a powerful agent of change. So much would not have happened if she had not been there to do it.

There were almost no African-American poets published when Naomi started publishing. Yet in the past three or four years, you've had the most prestigious honors for poetry in America going to African-American poets: Natasha Trethewey winning the 2007 Pulitzer Prize and being named the Poet Laureate of Mississippi, Terrence Hayes winning the National Book Award for Poetry in 2010, Nikki Finney winning the National Book Award in 2011. Tracy K. Smith just won the 2012 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for "Life On Mars." Naomi has led the way in making this possible.

I'm so glad she's being recognized. What a wonderful gift that is to me, to all of us! She's been so humble and not expecting much recognition. She's really a genius, with her will, her vision, her energy. This is all genius stuff, just extraordinary. It's a really important honor.

Toi Derricotte, poet, educator, founder of Cave Canem Foundation

1 is What You Do

I think of Naomi Long Madgett and think also of the many super strong black cultural factions she epitomized during my formative years as aspiring writer.

Coming of age in Detroit in the 60s wanting to be an artist, rather than say a municipal bureaucrat, or an on the steel slinger for Mr. Ford, was not an idea automatically tossed into the Get-Real-Fool container, and dumped with that evening's trash. Mrs. Madgett proved that.

Seeing her read from or having her latest volume of poems in hand was the assurance that my hope was not total folly. She was far from being a garret dwelling no account, subsisting on stale crackers, catsup soup, and muscatel. She was a professor, ran a publishing company, and wrote poems steeped in ancestor worship and love of self, was political without being polemic, and personal without picking at scabs.

But it was not just the subject of her work that gave me hope. She went about her business with an unquestioned naturalness and confidence in that Detroit way that prevailed in all the artists, writers, musicians, and painters prevalent on the scene at that time. Plus she did it with a technical proficiency that rivaled that of the national and international masters I was also aggressively studying.

Her exquisite writing was as precise as her manner. She had the light but persistently swinging touch of Detroit pianists, e.g., Tommy Flanagan, Bess Bonnier, Sir Roland Hanna, and Kenny Cox. All of the parts: conception, content, approach, and execution fit. Each word and image was considered through the filter of the culture of which she was a part, and to which she felt a responsibility. The writing was sharp without being shrill or cut to a formulaic, predetermined screed and was clear eyed, stout hearted and enduring as the fount from which it was dipped.

Ella Fitzgerald was only half right when she sang, 'T'Ain't What You Do, Its The Way That You Do It.' I thank Naomi for showing me it is both, and both can be done with purpose, style, and grace.

Congratulations to Naomi, forever POET 1.

Bill Harris, writer, educator, 2011 Kresge Eminent Artist and winner of the 1996 Naomi Long Madgett Poetry Award

Naomi Long Madgett...her name alone is poetic, as is every aspect of Naomi's life.

When I agreed to serve on the 2012 Kresge Eminent Artist Award panel, I had no idea the names of artists we would be considering for this prestigious award. Naomi Long Madgett's nomination was a pleasant surprise. Like the first three Kresge Eminent Artist Award recipients, Naomi is a long time friend who I love, admire and respect.

While the panel discussed the numerous merits of this distinguished artist, I found myself telling the story of Naomi being named Poet Laureate of Detroit in 2000 by the Hon. Dennis Archer when he was Mayor and I was director of the Cultural Affairs Department.

Dudley Randall, Detroit's first Poet Laureate appointed by Mayor Coleman Young in 1981, had died on August 5, 2000. Naomi and her work with Lotus Press had recently been recognized with an award, and the Detroit City Council acknowledged her many accomplishments. It occurred to me to suggest to Mayor Archer that he honor Naomi by naming her Poet Laureate of Detroit. He was quick to respond affirmatively and sent Naomi a letter asking her to accept

Naomi Long Madgett is not only an author, educator, and publisher – she is a visionary.

She has been an encouragement and inspiration to myself and many others – she has, literally, launched careers. Naomi's students and the poets published by Lotus Press have become noted educators, creative writers, and they have established organizations, such as Toi Derricotte's Cave Canem, that support fellow poets.

I first enrolled in a class with Naomi Long Madgett in the fall of 1971. The course was entitled "Afro-American Literature." I am almost embarrassed to say that, at that time, I was completely naive about African-American authors. I also enrolled in her Harlem Renaissance class in 1975. Since then, I've had an opportunity to present, work with, and read on the same program with some of the

writers I studied 40 years ago under Naomi's tutelage: Amiri Baraka; Dudley Randall; Gwendolyn Brooks; Haki Madhubuti; Jayne Cortez; Ishmael Reed; Kalamu Ya Salaam; and Sonia Sanchez.

Naomi has not only taught literature and writing. She has taught the best of human values – what it is to give back – what it is to reach out and offer an opportunity and a platform for the next generation.

There is no question that publication of "Inside the Devil's Mouth" in 1975, when I was a graduate student in the English Department at Eastern Michigan University, directly led to my 30 year career as a performing and literary arts curator, consultant, producer, as well as a poet. I am honored to say that throughout those 30 years I have received national and international awards, press, and recognition for my work. I have traveled extensively throughout the United States, as well as Africa, Asia, Europe, North and South America.

Finally, Naomi has not only been my mentor. She blessed me when she agreed to become my Godmother after my graduation from EMU. We have remained close ever since.

Baraka Sele, poet and independent arts producer and consultant

this important appointment. Fortunately for all Detroiters, Naomi accepted this position of distinction.

I recall vividly the reception that Mayor and Mrs. Archer hosted at the Manoogian Mansion in honor of Naomi. The garden was filled with tables and chairs and dozens of Naomi's friends and colleagues. She read some of her poems with the Detroit River as the backdrop. I understood clearly that I was in the presence of greatness.

Mayor Archer invited Naomi to include selections of her poetry in the Detroit 300th birthday time capsule that will be opened in 2101. As she read the poem she composed for the occasion to a captivated audience before placing it in the time capsule, I recall my feelings of gratitude for knowing this gifted woman. She has given so much to Detroiters, especially to African-American writers and poets.

Naomi Long Madgett continues to serve in perpetuity as Detroit's Poet Laureate.

Marilyn Wheaton, Director of the Marshall M. Fredericks Sculpture Museum and former Director of Cultural Affairs for the City of Detroit

BIOGRAPHY: NAOMI LONG MADGETT

Born: July 5, 1923 | Norfolk, Virginia

EDUCATION

1941
Sumner High School
St. Louis, Missouri

1945
B.A., Virginia State University

1955
M.Ed. (English Education),
Wayne State University

1980
Ph.D., International Institute for
Advanced Studies, Clayton,
Missouri (later Greenwich
University, Hilo, Hawaii)

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

1946
Staff Writer
Michigan Chronicle
Detroit, Michigan

1955-65
Service Representative
Michigan Bell Telephone
Detroit, Michigan

1955-65; 1966-68
High School English teacher
Detroit Public Schools
Detroit, Michigan

1965-66
Research Associate
Oakland University
Rochester, Michigan

1968-73
Associate Professor
Department of English Language
and Literature
Eastern Michigan University
Ypsilanti, Michigan

1970-71
Lecturer
Department of English
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan

1972-
Founder, Publisher, Editor
Lotus Press, Inc.
Detroit, Michigan

1973-84
Professor
Department of English Language
and Literature
Eastern Michigan University
Ypsilanti, Michigan

1984-
Professor Emerita
Department of English Language
and Literature
Eastern Michigan University
Ypsilanti, Michigan

1993-1998
Poetry Editor
Michigan State University Press
East Lansing, Michigan

APPOINTMENTS

1966-91
Creative Writers in the Schools
Michigan Council for the Arts
Lansing, Michigan

1980-1984
Council Member
Michigan Council
for the Humanities
East Lansing, Michigan



1994
**Community Advisory Board
Member**
Department of Africana Studies
Wayne State University
Detroit, Michigan

1995
Judge
National Endowment for the Arts
Education Panel
Washington, D.C.

2001-2002
**Arts Project Literature Program
Review Panelist**
Michigan Council for
Arts and Cultural Affairs
Lansing, Michigan

COMMISSIONS

1975
Inaugural Poem
Inauguration of
Governor William Milliken
Lansing, Michigan

RESIDENCIES

1995, March
Artist-in-Residence
Greater Holland Middle Schools
Holland Area Arts Council
Holland, Michigan

1995, November
Artist-in-Residence
North Carolina Writers Network
Charlotte, North Carolina

1997
Residency
Creative Writers in the Schools
Holland, Michigan

1998
Artist-in-Residence
Michigan Youth Arts Festival
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan

1998
Artist-in-Residence
Waldorf School
Detroit, Michigan

SELECTED AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

1965
First Mott Fellow in English
Oakland University
Rochester, Michigan

1969
Distinguished Soror of the Year
Alpha Rho Omega Chapter
Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.
Chicago, Illinois

1981
Citation
Poet, Publisher and Educator for
helping to restore to history
those missing pages of literature
contributed by black people.
The Chesapeake/Virginia Beach
Links, Inc.
Norfolk, Virginia

1982
Testimonial Resolution
Detroit City Council
Detroit, Michigan

1982
Testimonial Resolution
Michigan State Legislature
Lansing, Michigan

1983
Citation
Charles H. Wright Museum of
African American History
Detroit, Michigan

1984
Black Caucus Award
National Council of Teachers
of English
Urbana, Illinois

1984
Distinguished Soror of the Year
Alpha Rho Omega Chapter
Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.
Chicago, Illinois

1984
Testimonial Resolution
Michigan State Legislature
Lansing, Michigan

1984
Citation
National Coalition of 100 Black
Women
New York, New York

1984
Honorary Member
Stylus Society
Howard University
Washington, D.C.



Madgett with husband Leonard Andrews.

1985
Robert Hayden Runagate Award
“For outstanding contributions
to American Literature as Poet,
Educator, Publisher and
Founder of Lotus Press.”
Writers Series
Your Heritage House
Detroit, Michigan

1985
Arts Achievement Award
Wayne State University
Detroit, Michigan

1985
Testimonial Resolution
“The Detroit City Council extends
its congratulations to Dr. Naomi
Long Madgett for the outstanding
contribution she has made to
the intellectual and cultural life
of Detroit.”
Detroit City Council
Detroit, Michigan

1987
Creative Artist Award
Michigan Council for the Arts
Lansing, Michigan

1988
**Creative Achievement Award:
Octavia and Other Poems**
College Language Association
Tallahassee, Florida

1989
In Her Lifetime Tribute
Afrikan Poets Theatre
Jamaica Queens, New York

1990
**Arts Foundation of Michigan
Literature Award**
Arts Foundation of Michigan
(now ArtServe Michigan)
Wixom, Michigan

1990
Woman of the Year in Letters
Hartford Women United
Hartford Memorial Baptist Church
Detroit, Michigan

1991
**Honorary Doctor of Humane
Letters**
Siena Heights University
Jackson, Michigan



Naomi's poem "Pavlov" was featured in the syndicated comic strip "Herb & Jamaal" in 1998, shown in this clipping from her collection.

1992
Award of Excellence
The Black Scholar Magazine
Oakland, California

1992
Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters
Loyola University
Chicago, Illinois

1993
Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan

1993
American Book Award
Publisher/Editor Category
Before Columbus Foundation
Oakland, California

1993
Michigan Artist Award
Concerned Citizens for the Arts in Michigan (now ArtServe Michigan)
Wixom, Michigan

1993
Creative Contributors Award
The Gwendolyn Brooks Center for Black Literature and Creative Writing
Chicago State University
Chicago, Illinois

1994
Creative Artist Award
Michigan Council for the Arts
Lansing, Michigan

1994
Lifetime Achievement Award
Furious Flower Poetry Center
James Madison University
Harrisburg, Virginia

1995
George Kent Award
Gwendolyn Brooks Center for Black Literature and Creative Writing
Chicago State University
Chicago, Illinois

1996
Arts Foundation of Michigan Award
Arts Foundation of Michigan (now ArtServe Michigan)
Wixom, Michigan

1997
Special Tribute to Naomi Long Madgett, "A Literary Legend"
The 12th District/
The 89th Legislature
Michigan State Legislature
Lansing, Michigan

1998
Spirit of Detroit Award
Detroit City Council
Detroit, Michigan

1999
Proclamation
Naomi Long Madgett Day in the City of St. Louis
St. Louis City Council
St. Louis, Missouri

1999
Induction/Honored Griot and Lifetime Member
National Literary Hall of Fame for Writers of African Descent
Chicago State University
Chicago, Illinois

2001
"A Poet's Voice: *Octavia and Other Poems*"
Gold Apple Award of Excellence
National Educational Media Network
(Presented to Vander Films)
Oakland, California

2001
Poet Laureate: City of Detroit
Appointed by
Mayor Dennis W. Archer
Detroit, Michigan

2001
Ford Freedom Award
Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History
Detroit, Michigan

2002
Life Achievement Award
Induction into Michigan Women's Hall of Fame
Lansing, Michigan

2002
Testimonial Resolution
"That the Detroit City Council salutes Dr. Naomi Long Madgett along with the former Mayor Dennis W. Archer, who appointed her Poet Laureate of the City of Detroit and asked her to write a tricentennial poem, 'A Mandate for Remembrance.'"
Detroit City Council
Detroit, Michigan

February 24, 2002
Special Tribute to Honor Dr. Naomi Long Madgett
The Fourth District/91st Legislature
Michigan State Legislature
Lansing, Michigan

March 6, 2002
Testimonial Resolution
"The Wayne County Commission salutes and commends Naomi Long Madgett for her outstanding service and applauds her as the Plymouth Go-Getters honor her service."
Wayne County Commission, District 4
Detroit, Michigan

2003
Lifetime Achievement Award
Gwendolyn Brooks Center
Chicago State University
Chicago, Illinois

2003
Testimonial Resolution
Detroit City Council
Detroit, Michigan

March 6, 2003
Influential African-American Women in Metropolitan Detroit Women's Informal Network Award
Detroit, Michigan

March 6, 2003
Testimonial Resolution
A Most Influential African-American Woman in Metropolitan Detroit
Michigan State Legislature
Lansing, Michigan

2003
Alain Locke Award
Friends of African and African American Art
Detroit Institute of Arts
Detroit, Michigan

March 6, 2003
Spirit of Detroit Award
City Council of Detroit
Detroit, Michigan

2004
Honoree
Fourth Annual Charles H. Wright Dinner
Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History
Detroit, Michigan

2004
Honoree
Detroit's Most Enterprising Women
Detroit Historical Society Exhibit
Detroit Historical Museum
Detroit, Michigan

2005
Local Author Award
Mayor's Award for Literary Excellence
Detroit, Michigan

2006
Motown Literary Author of the Year
The Essence of Motown Literary Conference
Detroit, Michigan

2007
Creative Scholarship Award: Pilgrim Journey
College Language Association
Atlanta, Georgia

2007
Honoree/Literary Arts
"The Living Legends Showcase of the Arts"
The Society for Youth in the Arts, Inc.
Greater Detroit Chapter
Detroit, Michigan

2008
Honoree
FESTAC/Festival of African American Arts and Culture
Dakar, Senegal

2008
Heritage Award
27th Black History Month Celebration
Ford-employees African Ancestry Network (FAAN)
Dearborn, Michigan

March 5, 2008
Distinguished Service Award
Detroit City Council
Detroit, Michigan

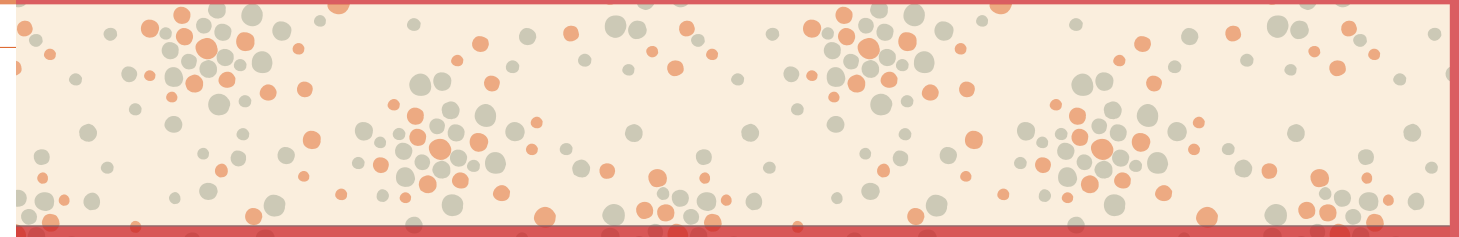
2008
Spirit Award
Rho Sigma Foundation/Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority
Southfield, Michigan

2009
Book Woman Award
Women's National Book Association
Detroit Chapter
Detroit, Michigan

2009
Poet Laureate
Plymouth United Church of Christ
Detroit, Michigan



The Long family in 1945. Brother Wilbur, center, was a pilot with the Tuskegee Airmen during WWII.



SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

2010
Literary Lotus Award
ebonyLotus Creatives
Keller, Texas

2010
First Annual InsideOut Literary Legacy Award
InsideOut Literary Arts Project
Detroit, Michigan

2011
Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters
Wayne State University
Detroit, Michigan

2011
State History Award: Media
“Star by Star: Naomi Long Madgett, Poet & Publisher”
(Presented to filmmaker David Schock)
Michigan Historical Society
Lansing, Michigan

2012
Kresge Eminent Artist Award
The Kresge Foundation
Troy, Michigan

2012
Honoree
Soros Literary and Arts Club
Detroit, Michigan

ARCHIVED PAPERS AND COLLECTIONS

Naomi Long Madgett Papers/ Lotus Press Archive
Special Collections
Harlan Hatcher Graduate Library
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Early Madgett Papers
Special Collections
Fisk Library
Fisk University
Nashville, Tennessee

SELECTED DISTINCTIONS

1978
Poetry Recording
National Archives
Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.

1980
“I’ve Come This Far to Freedom”
Lyrics by Naomi Long Madgett
(Based on her poem “Midway”)
Original music by Gerald Savage
Published by Lotus Press
Detroit, Michigan

1988
Octavia and Other Poems made Required Reading
Detroit Public High School System
Detroit, Michigan

1993
Establishment of annual Naomi Long Madgett Poetry Award
Designated for an African-American Poet
Sponsored by Lotus Press
Detroit, Michigan

1998
“Pavlov” by Naomi Long Madgett featured in Stephen Bentley’s syndicated comic strip “Herb and Jamaal”
Detroit Free Press
Detroit, Michigan

2005
“Naomi Long Madgett”
Bronze
Sculptor: Artis Lane
Permanent Collection
Charles H. Wright Museum of African American Art
Detroit, Michigan

AFFILIATIONS

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. (member since 1942)
Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History (member)
College Language Association (life member)
Detroit Working Writers (life member); (formerly Detroit Women Writers)
Langston Hughes Society (life member)
Michigan Council for the Humanities (past member)
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (member)
Plymouth (Congregational)

United Church of Christ (member; historian, 1969-1987, 1989-1994)
Southern Poverty Law Center (member)
Tuskegee Airmen, Detroit Chapter

SELECTED REFERENCES

History Makers
Website and documentary
Chicago, Illinois

Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series, Vol. 23
Gale Cengage Learning
Independence, Kentucky, 1996

Oxford Companion to African-American Literature
Oxford University Press
New York, New York

Dictionary of Literary Biography: Afro-American Writers, 1940-1955
Volume 76 (critical essay by Robert Sedlack; Gale Research, 1988)

Black Women in America
Edited by Darlene Clark, 1994

Black Writers
Edited by Sharon Malinowski, 1993

Notable Black American Women
Edited by Jessie Carney Smith, 1992

Drumvoices: The Mission of Afro-American Poetry
Eugene B. Redmond
Anchor/Doubleday
New York, New York, 1976

Living Black American Authors
Ann Allen Shockley and Sue P. Chandler
R.R. Bowker
New Providence, New Jersey, 1973

Black American Writers Past and Present, Volume II
Theresa Gunnels Rush, Carol Fairbanks Myers, and Esther Spring Arata
William Morrow
New York, New York, 1965

BOOKS

Songs to a Phantom Nightingale
(Poetry under name Naomi Cornelia Long)
Fortuny’s Publishing, Inc.
New York, New York, 1941

One and the Many
(Poetry)
Exposition Press
New York, New York, 1956

Star by Star
(Poetry)
Harlo Printing Co.
Highland Park, Michigan, 1965
Evenill, Inc.
Detroit, Michigan, 1970

Success in Language and Literature/B
(With Ethel Tincher and Henry B. Maloney)
(Secondary School Textbook)
Follett
River Grove, Illinois, 1967

Pink Ladies in the Afternoon
(Poetry)
Lotus Press
Detroit, Michigan, 1972, 1990

Teacher’s Guide for Deep Rivers: A Portfolio of Poems by African Americans
Lotus Press
Detroit, Michigan, 1974

Exits and Entrances
(Poetry)
Lotus Press
Detroit, Michigan, 1978

A Student’s Guide to Creative Writing
(Textbook)
Penway Books
Detroit, Michigan, 1980

Phantom Nightingale: Juvenilia
(Poetry)
Lotus Press
Detroit, Michigan, 1981

Octavia and Other Poems
(Poetry)
Third World Press, Inc.
Chicago, Illinois, 1988

Remembrances of Spring: Collected Early Poems
(Poetry)
Michigan State University Press
East Lansing, Michigan, 1993

Teacher’s Guide for Octavia and Other Poems
Lotus Press
Detroit, Michigan, 1997

Octavia: Guthrie and Beyond
(Poetry)
Lotus Press
Detroit, Michigan, 2002

Connected Islands: New and Selected Poems
(Poetry)
Lotus Press
Detroit, Michigan 2004

Pilgrim Journey
(Autobiography)
Lotus Press
Detroit, Michigan, 2006

EDITED ANTHOLOGIES

A Milestone Sampler: Fifteenth Anniversary Anthology
Lotus Press
Detroit, Michigan, 1988.

Adam of Ifé: Black Women in Praise of Black Men
(with preface)
Lotus Press
Detroit, Michigan, 1992

ANTHOLOGIES

“Mother America” and “Memorial”
(Under the name Naomi Cornelia Long)
America Speaks
Edited by Ann G. Kurdt
Horizon House
New York, New York, 1942

“To a Man with Wings” and “Sonnet to Byron”
(Under the name Naomi Cornelia Long.)
The Muse of 1944
Edited by Ethel R. Forbes
Horizon House
New York, New York, 1944

“Refugee”
(Under name Naomi Long Witherspoon)
The Poetry of the Negro, 1746-1949
Edited by Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps
Doubleday Publishing
New York, 1949

“Quest,” “The Poet Deserts His Ivory Tower,” “Not I Alone,” and “City Thought”

(Under name Naomi Long Witherspoon)
Negro American Poetry
Edited by Herman Dreer
Macmillan
New York, New York, 1950

“After,” “For a Child,” and “Poor Renaldo”

Beyond the Blues
Edited by Rosey E. Pool
Hand and Flower Press
Kent, England, 1962

“Mortality” and “Midway”

New Negro Poets: USA
Edited by Langston Hughes
Indiana University Press
Bloomington, Indiana, 1964

“Alabama Centennial” (“Alabama’s eeuwfeest”)

ik ben de Nieuwe Neger (I Am the New Negro)
Edited by Rosey E. Pool
Bert Bakker Publishing
Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 1965

“The Reckoning,” and Numbers 4 and 18 from “Trinity: A Dream Sequence”

Kaleidoscope
Edited by Robert Hayden
Harcourt, Brace & World
New York, New York, 1967

“Midway”

Les Noirs Américains
Edited by Michel Fabre
Librairie Armand Colin
Paris, France, 1967

“Native,” “The Race Question,” “Her Story”

Black Voices
Edited by Abraham Chapman
New American Library
New York, New York, 1968

“The Lost Muse,” “September Lament,” “The Divorcee,” “Sarah Street”

Literature for Listening
Edited by Keith Brooks, Eugene Bahn, and L. LaLont Okey
Allyn and Bacon
Boston, Massachusetts, 1968

“For a Child”

Poems to Enjoy
Edited by Dorothy Petit
Macmillan
New York, New York, 1970

“Beginning and End,” “Mortality,” “Woman with Flower,” “Destiny,” “Refuge,” “Tree of Heaven,” “Sunny”

Ten: Anthology of Ten Detroit Poets
Edited by Oliver La Grone
South And West
Detroit, Michigan, 1968

“Midway”

Britain America
Edited by L. Maradet and G. Merle
Delagrave Edition
Paris, France, 1970

“For a Child”

Right On!
Edited by Bradford Chambers and Rebecca Moon
New American Library
New York, New York, 1970

“Nocturne” and “Alabama Centennial”

Black American Literature
Edited by Darwin T. Turner
Charles E. Merrill Publishing
Columbus, Ohio, 1970

“For a Child”

Cavalcade: Negro American Writing from 1760 to the Present
Edited by Arthur P. Davis and Saunders Redding
Houghton Mifflin
Boston, Massachusetts, 1971

“The Race Question,” “Tree of Heaven,” “Her Story,” “Midway,” “White Cross,” and “Mortality”

Black Insights
Edited by Nick Aaron Ford
Ginn and Company
Waltham, Massachusetts, 1971

“Quest,” “Star Journey,” “Dream Sequence,” “Part 9,” “The Race Question,” “Pavlov,” and “Alabama Centennial”

The Black Poets
Edited by Dudley Randall
Bantam Books
New York, New York, 1971

“Native,” “Mortality,” “Midway,” and “The Race Question”

Modern and Contemporary Afro-American Poetry
Edited by Bernard Bell
Allyn and Bacon
Boston, Massachusetts, 1972

“Sally: Twelfth Street,” “Brothers at the Bar,” “Souvenir,” and “The Twenty Grand”

New Black Voices
Edited by Abraham Chapman
New American Library
New York, New York, 1972

“Nocturne” and “The Race Question”

Afro-American Writing: An Anthology of Prose and Poetry, Volume II
Edited by Richard A. Long and Eugenia W. Collier
New York University
New York, New York, 1972

“Reply” and “Somewhere in the City”

A Rock Against the Wind
Edited by Lindsay Patterson
Berkley Publishing Group
New York, New York, 1973



“Mortality,” “Simple,” “Her Story,” and “Black Woman”

The Poetry of Black America
Edited by Arnold Adoff
Harper & Row
New York, New York, 1973

“Black Woman”

One Little Room, an Everywhere
Edited by Myra Cohn Livingston
Atheneum Books
New York, New York, 1975

“Simple,” “Black Woman,” “Woman with Flower,” and Offspring”

The Forerunners: Black Poets in America
Edited by Woodie King, Jr.
Howard University Press
Washington D.C., 1975

“Nocturne II: Still,” “Seascape: Union Pier,” “Small Wind,” and “Grand Circus Park”

Poems by Blacks, Volume III
Edited by Pinkie Gordon Lane
South and West
Detroit, Michigan, 1975

“Her Story”

I Hear My Sisters Saying
Edited by Carol Konek and Dorothy Walters
Thomas Y. Crowell Company
New York, New York, 1976

“Packrat”

A Change of Weather: Midwest Women Poets
Edited by Peg Carlson Lauber
Rhiannon Press
Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 1978

“Lördagskvall I kvärteret” (“The Twenty Grand”) and “Mitt livs novell” (“Her Story”)

Låt världen bli en svart dikt
Edited by Bo Anderson and Gunilla Jensen
Forum
Stockholm, Sweden, 1978

“Mufflejaw, I Remember You”

Ocarina
Edited by Sanra Fowler
Free India
Madras, India, 1979

“Deacon Morgan,” “Exits and Entrances,” “Midway,” “Nomen,” “New Day,” and “Black Woman”

Black Sister: Poetry by Black American Women, 1746-1980
Edited by Erlene Stetson
Indiana University Press
Bloomington, Indiana, 1981

“Offspring” and “Black Woman”

The Third Woman
Edited by Dexter Fisher
Houghton Mifflin
Boston, Massachusetts, 1980

“Phillis”

Critical Essays on Phillis Wheatley
William H. Robinson
G.H. Hall
Boston, Massachusetts, 1982

“Sunny”

Homage to Hoyt Fuller
Edited by Dudley Randall
Broadside Press
Detroit, Michigan, 1984

“For Gwen”

Say That the River Turns
Edited by Haki R. Madhubuti
Third World Press
Chicago, Illinois, 1987

“Offspring”

Being and Becoming
Edited by Anne Mills King and Sandra Kurtinitis
Random House
New York, New York, 1987

“City Nights,” “Black Poet,” “Jogging at the Health Club,” and “No Choice”

Contemporary Michigan Poetry
Edited by Michael Delp, Conrad Hilberry and Herbert Scott
Wayne State University Press
Detroit, Michigan, 1988

“Quest,” “Mortality,” “Encounter,” “Of Sleep,” “Woman with Flower,” “Alabama Centennial,” “Phillis,” “Fifth Street Exit, Richmond,” “Washerwoman,” “Catastrophe,” “City Nights,” and “The Survivors”

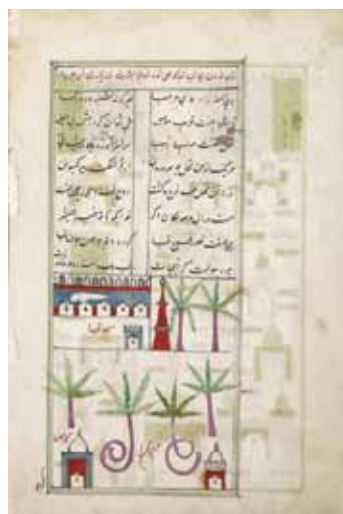
Consonance and Continuity in Poetry: Detroit Black Writers
Edited by Daphne Williams Ntiri
Bedford Publishers, Inc.
Troy, Michigan, 1988

“Images”

An Ear to the Ground: An Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry
Edited by Marie Harris and Kathleen Aguero
University of Georgia Press
Athens, Georgia, 1989

“At Middy”

Double Stitch
Patricia Bell-Scott et al
HarperPerennial
New York, New York, 1991



Arabic translation of NLM poem.

“The Race Question,” “Writing a Poem,” and “Black Woman”
The New Cavalcade, Volume II
Edited by Arthur P. Davis,
J. Saunders Redding, and
Joyce Ann Joyce
Howard University Press
Washington, D.C., 1992

Selected Works

*The Vision of Words: Poetry by
Southeast Michigan Poets*
Edited by M.L. Liebler, published
by photographer John Sobczak
Ridgeway Press
Roseville, Michigan, 1992

“New Day” and “Black Woman”
Daughters of Africa
Edited by Margaret Busby
Pantheon Books
New York, New York, 1992

“Nomen”
More Light
Edited by Jason Shinder
Harcourt Brace & Company
New York, New York, 1993

“Offspring”
The Woman That I Am
Edited by D. Soyini Madison
St. Martin’s Press
New York, New York, 1994

“Black Woman”
In Search of Color Everywhere
Edited by E. Ethelbert Miller
Stewart, Tabori & Chang
New York, New York, 1994

“In Search of Aunt Jemima”
*Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben,
and Rastus*
Marilyn Kern-Foxworth
Greenwood Publishing
Westport, Connecticut, 1994

“First Man”
I Hear a Symphony
Edited by Paula L. Woods and
Felix H. Liddell
Doubleday Publishing
New York, New York, 1994

**“Images” and “The Race
Question”**
*Letters to America: Contemporary
American Poetry on Race*
Edited by Jim Daniels
Wayne State University Press
Detroit, Michigan, 1995

**“A Mighty Rocky Road,” “Black
Poet,” “Cottonwood Creek,”
“Images,” “Toward Eternity,”
“Twice a Child,” and “Without
Condition”**
Black Poetry Now
Edited by Bruce Dick
and Leon Lewis
Appalachian State
University Press
Boone, North Carolina, 1995

**“Echoes” and “Plea for My
Heart’s Sake”**
*The Second Set: The Jazz Poetry
Anthology, Volume 2*
Edited by Sascha Feinsterin &
Yusef Komunyakaa
Indiana University Press
Bloomington, Indiana, 1996

**“Woman with Flower,” “Black
Woman,” “Offspring,” and
“Simple”**
*The Garden Thrives: Twentieth-
Century African-American Poetry*
Edited by Clarence Major
HarperPerennial
New York, New York, 1996

**“Homage,” “Mortality,” “Kin,”
“Exits and Entrances,” and
“Phillis”**
*Trouble the Water: 250 Years of
African-American Poetry*
Edited by Jerry W. Ward, Jr.
Mentor, Penguin
New York, New York, 1997

**“Midway,” “The Old Women,”
“New Day,” “Monday Morning
Blues,” and “A Litany for
Afro-Americans”**
*Call and Response: The Riverside
Anthology of the African American
Literary Tradition*
Edited by Bernard Bell, Trudier
Harris et al.
Houghton Mifflin
Boston, Massachusetts, 1998

**“City Nights,” “Boy on a Bicycle,”
“Conquest,” “On Corcovado
Mountain,” and “Packrat”**
*Century of Voices: Detroit Women
Writers Anthology, 1900-2000*
Edited by Detroit Women Writers
The Detroit Women Writers
Detroit, Michigan, 1999



**“Packrat,” “On Corcovado
Mountain,” “Reluctant Light,”
“The Sun Do Move,” and
“Renewal”**
*New Poems from the Third Coast:
Contemporary Michigan Poetry.*
Edited by Michael Delp, Conrad
Hilberry, and Josie Kearns
Wayne State University Press
Detroit, Michigan, 2000

“Reply”
*The Random House Treasury of
Love Poems*
Random House
New York, New York, 2000

**“City Nights,” “Grand Circus
Park,” and “Good News”**
*Abandon Automobile: Detroit City
Poetry, 2001*
Edited by Melba Joyce Boyd and
M.L. Liebler
Wayne State University Press
Detroit, Michigan, 2001

“Attitude at 75”
Tenderheaded
Edited by Juliette Harris and
Pamela Johnson
Pocket Books
New York, New York, 2001

**“Reluctant Light,” “The Last
Happy Day,” and “Packrat”**
*Furious Flower: African American
Poetry from the Black Arts
Movement to the Present*
Edited by Joanne Gabbin
University of Virginia Press
Charlottesville, Virginia, 2004

“For a Child”
Poet in the House!
Edited by Gloria House, Semaj
Brown, and Willie Williams
Broadside Press
Detroit, Michigan, 2005

**“Stoletnica Alabame” (“Alabama
Centennial”), “Nov Dan” (“New
Day”), “Na Pol Poty” (“Midway”),
Litanije za Afro-Američane”
 (“A Litany for Afro-Americans”),
“Stare Ženske” (“The Old
Women”) “Blues Ponedeljkeve
Jutra” (“Monday Morning
Blues”), and Drugačna Pokrajina”
 (“Another Landscape”)**
*Govoreči Boben: Antologija
afriško ameriške poezije
po letu 1950.*
Prevedla Kristina Kočan in
Samo Šalamon, eds.,
Slovenia, univcrzitetna knjiznica
Maribor, Slovenia, 2006

“Wedding Song”
Be Mine
Edited by Sally Emerson
Little Brown and Company
New York, New York, 2007

“Woman with Flower”
*The 100 Best African American
Poems*
Edited by Nikki Giovanni
Sourcebooks MediaFusion
Naperville, Illinois, 2010

“Fifth Street Exit, Richmond”
*The Ringing Ear: Black Poets
Lean South*
Edited by Nikky Finney
University of Georgia Press
Athens, Georgia, 2007

JOURNALS

“White Cross”
Negro Digest
Vol. XII, No. 6, April 1963
Negro Digest Publishing Company
Chicago, Illinois

“Autumn Prelude”
Negro Digest
Vol. XII, No. 11, September 1963
Negro Digest Publishing Company
Chicago, Illinois

“Seascape, Union Pier”
Poet (an international monthly)
May 1972

**“Soon I Will Be Done,”
“Packrat,” “The Survivors,” and
“Fifth Street Exit, Richmond”**
Callaloo
*A Journal of African American
and African Arts and Letters*
Vol. 2, No. 5, February 1979
Johns Hopkins University Press
Baltimore, Maryland

**“Soon I Will Be Done,”
“Memorial,” and “Twice a Child”**
The Great Lakes Review,
Vol.6, No. 1, Summer 1979
Central Michigan University
Mount Pleasant, Michigan

“Twice a Child”
The Garfield Lake Review
1980
Olivet College
Olivet, Michigan

**“Jogging at the Spa,” “Peter,”
“Black Poet,” and “The Sun
Do Move”**
Green River Review,
Vol. XIII, Nos. 1 & 2, 1982
University Center, Michigan

“Midnight Magnolias”
Prophetic Voices (an international
literary journal), 1983
Heritage Trails Press
Novato, California

“Twice a Child”
Woman Poet, The Midwest
Vol. 3, 1985
Women-in-Literature, Inc.
Reno, Nevada

“Images”
Michigan Quarterly Review
Vol. XXV, No. 2, Spring 1986
University of Michigan Scholarly
Publishing Office
Ann Arbor, Michigan

**“Remember Bahia,” “In Autumn,”
and “Without Condition”**
The Zora Neale Hurston Forum
Vol. I, No. 2. Spring 1987
Morgan State University
Baltimore, Maryland

“At Midday”
Sage: Mothers and Daughters II
Vol. IV, No. 2, Fall, 1987
Sage Women’s Educational Press

“On Corcovado Mountain”
Michigan Quarterly Review
Vol. XXVII, No. 2, Spring, 1988
University of Michigan Scholarly
Publishing Office
Ann Arbor, Michigan

“Ceremony” and “No Choice”
The Black Scholar
Volume 19, Nos. 4 & 5, July/
August-Sept/Oct 1988
Oakland, California

**“Vrouw met Bloem” (“Woman
with Flower”)**
Iambe, 27, mrt 88
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

“Even Me”
Witness, Vol. 77, No. 4, April 1994
Black Mountain Institute
University of Nevada Las Vegas
Paradise, Nevada

**“I’ll See You in My Dreams” and
“Severance”**
The Drumming
Vol. 2, No. 2, Fall 1996

**“Attitude at 75,” “Boy on a
Bicycle,” “My Mother’s Roses,”
“Packrat,” “Reluctant Light,” and
“Severance”**
The Black Scholar
Vol. 29. No. 2/3, Spring/Summer,
1999
Oakland, California

“Images”
The Black Scholar
Vol. 35, Nos. 1-2, Spring-Summer,
2000
Oakland, California

“City Nights”
Drumvoices Review
Vol. 11, Nos. 1 & 2, Spring-Summer-
Fall, 2003
Southern Illinois University
Edwardsville, Illinois

OUR CONGRATULATIONS

“Whatever else happens, life lives.” These words, from a poem by Detroit’s Poet Laureate Naomi Long Madgett, reflect the strength and determination of a woman singular in her approach to life and language. A gifted poet, publisher, educator and mentor, Madgett is one of Detroit’s living legends. With brave conviction, she created a life for herself and stimulus for countless writers as she embarked, as a teenager, on a writer’s life. In the mid-20th century, she helped establish a voice for African American females in a world where they were not yet heard. She founded the Lotus Press in 1972 to champion the literary accomplishments of under-recognized writers. And, her pioneering efforts for fairer representation of literature by African Americans in high school and college textbooks inspired the Detroit Public Schools to make her book *Octavia and Other Poems* required reading in all public high schools in Detroit. Today, at age 89, she remains a literary heroine, and her influence is immeasurable. It is because of her achievements, service and commitment that Kresge Arts in Detroit is honored to present the 2012 Kresge Eminent Artist Award to Naomi Long Madgett.

Since 2008, Kresge Arts in Detroit has each year honored an exceptional artist in the literary, performing or visual arts for lifelong professional achievements and contributions to the cultural community of Metropolitan Detroit. The Kresge Eminent Artist Award, administered for The Kresge Foundation by the College for Creative Studies, includes a \$50,000 award that acknowledges artistic innovation, integrity and depth of vision.

Nominations for the award are made by the Kresge Arts in Detroit Advisory Council, a volunteer group of leaders in the Metropolitan Detroit cultural community who provide external oversight to the program. Madgett was selected by an interdisciplinary panel of five distinguished members of Detroit’s artistic community: **Larry Gabriel**, writer and musician; **James E. Hart**, musician and educator; **Rebecca Mazzei**, Deputy Director of Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit; **Robin Terry**, Chairman and Executive Director of the Motown Historical Museum; and **Marilyn Wheaton**, Director of Marshall M. Fredericks Sculpture Museum. We are grateful to this group for carrying out this important responsibility, selecting Madgett from among a number of highly influential nominees.

Like the Eminent Artists before her — Charles McGee, Marcus Belgrave and Bill Harris — Naomi is a leader in her field and, lucky for us, has chosen to make Detroit her home. She continues to animate Detroit’s cultural life with tender poems, the resolute Lotus Press, and a legacy of teaching that has brought forth generations of talented writers. All of these accomplishments and more have elevated Naomi to a status that is truly eminent.



MICHELLE PERRON

DIRECTOR

KRESGE ARTS IN DETROIT

A NOTE FROM RICHARD L. ROGERS

The College for Creative Studies is proud to partner with The Kresge Foundation to administer the Kresge Eminent Artist Award. CCS believes strongly in the importance of individual artists to society, and we particularly value the role they are playing today in energizing and reimagining our community. As it is the College’s mission to educate the next generations of artists, we are glad to be part of a program that recognizes people who have devoted their lives to art and who have enriched the lives of so many others.

Naomi Long Madgett is one such artist. Her exceptional career as a poet, editor, and educator, and her ongoing dedication to Detroit’s literary community, put her in a special category of admiration. Not only is she a brilliant poet, but she is a steward of poetry and the literary arts and a shining example of the extraordinary talent that thrives in Detroit’s creative community and makes it so vibrant and connected.

CCS is honored to play a role in honoring such a remarkable poet through Kresge Arts in Detroit. We congratulate Naomi Long Madgett on being named the 2012 Kresge Eminent Artist.



RICHARD L. ROGERS
PRESIDENT
COLLEGE FOR CREATIVE STUDIES

Kresge Arts in Detroit Advisory Council

Kresge Arts in Detroit is guided by an advisory council, a volunteer group of leaders in the Metropolitan Detroit cultural community who select review panels, nominate candidates for the Kresge Eminent Artist Award and provide external oversight to Kresge Arts in Detroit. This council of 2010-2011 selected Naomi Madgett Long as the 2012 Kresge Eminent Artist.

BLAIR ANDERSON
Department Chair
Fine, Performing and
Communications Arts
Wayne State University

TERRY BLACKHAWK
Founding Director
InsideOut Literary
Arts Project

JENNIFER CALLANS
Executive Director
Anton Art Center

ALICE L. CARLE (CO-CHAIR)
Program Director
The Kresge Foundation

LUIS CROQUER
*Deputy Director of Art and
Education*
Henry Art Gallery/University
of Washington

*Director and Chief Curator
(Former)*
Museum of Contemporary
Art Detroit

DAVID DICHIERA
General Director
Michigan Opera Theatre

JENNIFER GALE
Owner/Director
Mount Clemens Arts
Consortium, Inc.

JENNIFER H. GOULET
President
ArtServe Michigan

BARBARA KRATCHMAN
Arts Consultant

GLEN MANNISTO
Writer

GEORGE N’NAMDI
Owner/Director
G.R. N’Namdi Gallery

MAURY OKUN
Executive Director
Detroit Chamber
Winds & Strings,
Great Lakes Chamber
Music Festival,
Eisenhower Dance Ensemble

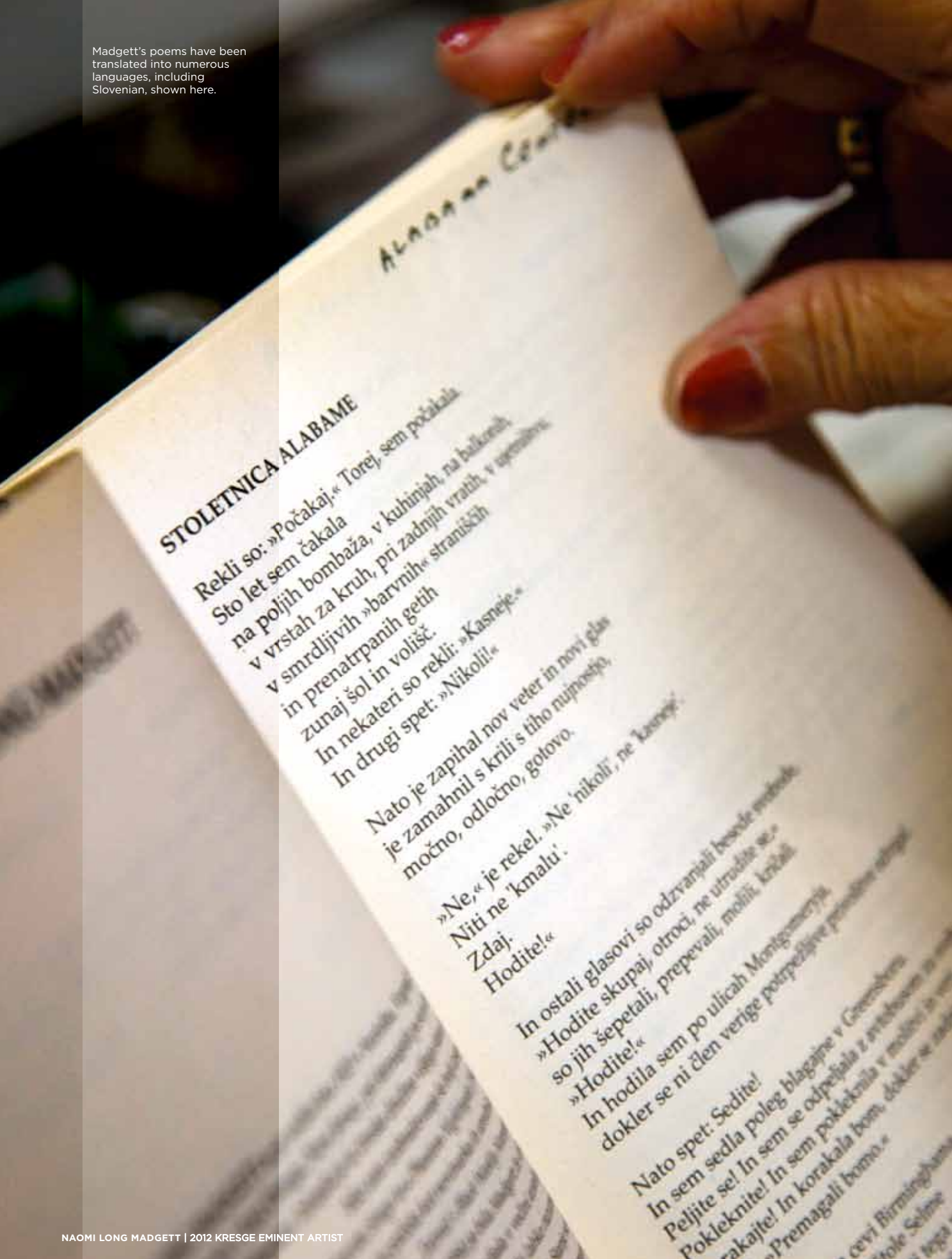
ANNE PARSONS
President/CEO
Detroit Symphony Orchestra

MICHELLE PERRON
(CO-CHAIR)
Director
Kresge Arts in Detroit
College for Creative Studies

OLIVER RAGSDALE, JR.
President
Arts League of Michigan

MARC SCHWARTZ
President
Shortcut Books

Madgett's poems have been translated into numerous languages, including Slovenian, shown here.

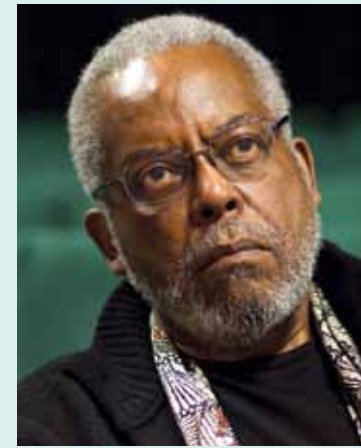


The Kresge Eminent Artist Award

Established in 2008, the Kresge Eminent Artist Award each year honors an exceptional literary, fine or performing artist for lifelong professional achievement and contributions to the cultural communities of Metropolitan Detroit. The Kresge Eminent Artist Award celebrates artistic innovation and rewards integrity and depth of vision with the financial support of \$50,000 as judged by the Kresge Arts in Detroit Advisory Council. The College for Creative Studies administers The Kresge Eminent Artist Award on behalf of the Kresge Foundation.

The Kresge Eminent Artist Award, annual Kresge Artist Fellowships, and multi-year grants to arts and cultural organizations in Metropolitan Detroit constitute Kresge Arts in Detroit, the foundation's effort to provide broad support to the regional arts community.

Kresge Eminent Artist Award Winners



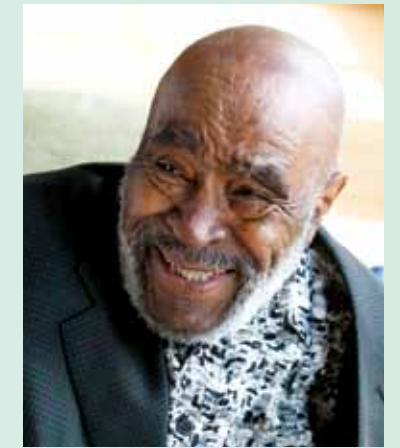
BILL HARRIS
2011 Kresge Eminent Artist

Literary artist and educator Bill Harris has been writing poetry, plays, novels, essays and criticism for more than 40 years, winning acclaim from Detroit to St. Louis to New York City. Harris' plays have received more than 50 productions nationally. He was named a Kresge Eminent Artist for his professional contributions to the literary field as an author and playwright and for his personal dedication, as a Wayne State University English professor and community educator, to cultivating creative writing talent and literary expression among young people in Metropolitan Detroit.



MARCUS BELGRAVE
2009 Kresge Eminent Artist

An internationally recognized trumpeter who long ago chose Detroit as his home, Marcus Belgrave is an icon to musicians and lovers of jazz. After more than five decades, his tireless work, amazing technical abilities, and the joy and spontaneity with which he creates distinguishes him worldwide as an admired and respected jazz master. By spreading the language of jazz to generations of students, he has remained a beloved mentor to young musicians, many of whom have gone on to become great artists themselves. Belgrave's energy, dedication and virtuosity epitomize the distinguishing qualities of a Kresge Eminent Artist.



CHARLES MCGEE
2008 Kresge Eminent Artist

Charles McGee's distinguished career spans six decades and encompasses the kind of activity that astounds in its quality and volume. McGee's work has been celebrated in hundreds of exhibitions from Detroit to New York to Bangkok; he has been a teacher and mentor to thousands of young artists; he has founded galleries and arts organizations, creating opportunities for others to share their work and ideas; his work has been commissioned and collected by institutions and individuals around the world. He has done it all with humility, reverence and a sense of wonder at the power and triumph of art.

About the Kresge Foundation

The Kresge Foundation is a \$3 billion private, national foundation that invests in the bedrock conditions of urban life to reduce disparities, advance pathways of opportunity, and promote cultural vibrancy and environmental sustainability. The foundation works in seven program areas: arts and culture, community development, Detroit, education, the environment, health, and human services. In 2011, the Board of Trustees authorized 346 awards totaling \$170 million; \$140 million was paid out to grantees over the course of the year. For more information, visit kresge.org.

The Kresge Foundation Board of Trustees

Elaine D. Rosen, Chair
James L. Bildner
Lee C. Bollinger
Phillip L. Clay, Ph.D.
Jane L. Delgado, Ph.D.
Susan K. Drewes

Steven K. Hamp
Paul C. Hillegonds
Irene Y. Hirano
David W. Horvitz
Rip Rapson, President and CEO
Nancy M. Schlichting

Acknowledgements

With very special thanks to Naomi Long Madgett for her dedication and commitment to excellence throughout the course of this project. As the author, Mrs. Madgett has graciously granted permission to The Kresge Foundation to print, either as excerpts or in their entirety, her poems and works of nonfiction in this publication. She has also granted permission to reproduce photos from her personal collection.

We would like to thank Dr. Melba Joyce Boyd for her most generous contribution to this project in her essay on the poetry of Naomi Long Madgett.

With additional thanks to Marcus Belgrave, Terry Blackhawk, Jill Witherspoon Boyer, Sheila Carter-Jones, Paulette Childress, Toi Derricotte, Bill Harris, Charles McGee, Baraka Sele, and Marilyn Wheaton for their kind contributions.

Credits

Rip Rapson
President and CEO
The Kresge Foundation

Cynthia B. Shaw
Communications Director
The Kresge Foundation

Judy McGovern
Associate Director of Communications
The Kresge Foundation

Mark Whitney
News Editor
The Kresge Foundation

Sue Levytsky
Creative Direction, Editor, Writer

Julie Pincus
Art Direction, Graphic Design

Essayist
Melba Joyce Boyd

Printer
Colortech Graphics, Inc.

PHOTOGRAPHY
Julie Pincus
Photos appearing on pgs. 2, 7, 13, 27, 36, 75, 84, 94, inside back cover.

ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY
A number of the photos used throughout this monograph come from the personal collection of Naomi Long Madgett. Every effort has been made to locate the holders of copyrighted material. The following have graciously given their permission to reprint their images: Michelle Andonian for photo appearing on pg. 95; Carol Dronsfield for photo appearing on pg. 95; Leisia Duskin for photo appearing on pg. 82; Justin Maconochie for photo appearing on pg. 95; Naomi Long Madgett and Lotus Press Papers, Special Collections Library, University of Michigan for photos appearing on pgs. 6, 9, 18, 52, 54, 55, 58, 59, 88, 89, and 90.

©The Kresge Foundation
All Rights Reserved
kresge.org
ISBN: 978-0-9839654-1-1

The paper manufacturer and the printer are chain-of-custody certified by the Forest Stewardship Council.





Special Delivery

VIA AIR MAIL
SPECIAL DELIVERY VIA AIR MAIL

DETROIT, MICH.
AUG 22
9:30 PM
1952
ROOSEVELT

Mrs Nannie Wittersford
55 Fathers Park,
New Rochelle, N.Y.

c/o C. M. Long



ana



was
Jol
was
A Soc
an Chu
drive is
Rochelle
in cooper
-Star, Don
ed at The
will ack
uch publicatio