"PROPHETS FOR A NEW DAY": THE CULTURAL ACTIVISM OF MARGARET DANNER, MARGARET BURROUGHS, GWENDOLYN BROOKS AND MARGARET WALKER DURING THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT

Melba Joyce Boyd
Wayne State University

ABSTRACT

This essay presents an aspect of literary history that heretofore has not been discussed. It illustrates how the personal interaction and activities of these women writers prior to the Black Arts Movement (1965-1977) had direct bearing on the success of that cultural revolution. It also contextualizes this era relative to its historical circumstances and the interconnectedness of cultural periods that preceded it. This discussion considers the especial aesthetics and politics of each writer as well as their relationships to each other and other major literary figures of the time.

The Black Arts Movement (1965-1977) was an outgrowth of the Civil Rights Movement, and the impetus of this cultural revolution was the consequence of an artist/activist consciousness that embraced the notion of race pride, self determination and the need to engage in institution building. In the Midwest, Chicago and Detroit were key cities during this era because they contained large and industrious African American populations and housed major cultural institutions. The Du Sable Museum of African American History and Art, The Kuumba Workshop, the Organization of Black Art and Culture and *The Negro Digest* operated in Chicago; while the Broadside Press, Rappa House, Concept East and the Shrine of the Black Madonna were the loci of much activity in Detroit. Sustained through collective interests and burgeoning activities, interaction between the two cultural communities was largely the result of proximity and personal histories.

Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses, No. 37, 1998, págs. 55-67

The Black Arts Movement is usually associated with those artists whose careers became most visible. The younger writers, such as LeRoi Jones (Imamu Baraka), Don L. Lee (Haki Madhubuti) and Nikki Giovanni are often the focus of discussion and their militant styles delineate what is regarded as characteristic of the literature. However, no era stands independent of previous time periods. Even though the vocabulary of the Black Arts Movement was influenced by the Black Liberation Movement, the leadership responsible for the institutions that provided the forums for literary militancy stood on the shoulders of writers whose expertise and experience were grounded in the preceding decades.

For some undetermined reason, prominent cultural leaders were often poets. Perhaps, as prophets and visionaries they were particularly suited for the role of institutional directors. At any rate, women poets were as critical to the era as their male counterparts and counterpoints. The poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks, Margaret Walker, Margaret Danner, who died in 1984, and to a lesser extent, Margaret Burroughs, greatly influenced the aesthetic development of the younger poets. Although these women writers embraced the goal of African American freedom and their aesthetic expressions articulated race pride in imagery configured to counter the inhumane stereotypes of black people, there was also a class consciousness that permeated their poetry because their historical development during the Great Depression (1930s) and the Labor Movement (1930-40s) encouraged a deeper understanding of the economics of discrimination.

All of these women poets at one time or another lived in Chicago, and for a very brief period, Margaret Danner lived in Detroit; however, they all frequented Detroit throughout their careers. Their poetry was published by Broadside Press during the late 1960s and early 1970s, and they gave readings to enthusiastic crowds in Detroit and Chicago during the Black Arts Movement. But in as much as a romantic recollection would be more satisfactory for the reconstruction of a noble history, a closer examination of relationships revealed the differences and difficulties within the camp. The politics of personalities sometimes strained friendships and created conflicts. Hence, it was a challenging and colorful period when the pretense of race solidarity was the reigning rhetoric, but not necessarily the practice.

As individual artists, Margaret Danner, Margaret Burroughs, Margaret Walker and Gwendolyn Brooks had already achieved considerable artistic acclaim during the Post-Renaissance period (the 1930s-1950s). But collectively, their distinct styles and variegated politics sometimes converged and sometimes clashed, as cultural nationalism turned the community inside-out in an attempt to define the new black aesthetic. This discussion will consider the ins and outs of four women writers who exerted considerable influence on the Black Arts Movement as artists and as institution builders.

Because 1965 was the year the term "Black Power" first appeared in the cultural vocabulary and 1977 marked the decline of black arts activities across the nation, this discussion will operate within the premise that the Black Arts Movement was from 1965-1977. But as explained earlier, the cultural activities that took place during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, and especially during the Civil Rights Movement (since 1954) will be considered relative to the Black Arts Movement. Indeed, some of the foremost institutions that serviced the activities of the late 1960s and 1970s were founded prior to 1965, and when the paradigm shifted from integration and civil

rights to self determination and black liberation, so did the consciousness of these institutions. They demonstrated what to do and how to do it.

MARGARET DANNER

Margaret Esse Danner Cunningham was born in Kentucky but spent most of her adult years in Chicago, where she attended Loyola and Northwestern Universities. Danner achieved national recognition as a poet when she was awarded the John Hay Whitney Fellowship for "Far From African: Four Poems," which was published in the premier publication *Poetry* in 1951. Of the four, only Margaret Danner Cunningham lived for some time in Detroit (1962-64). During this time, she was the poet-in-residence at Wayne State University and the founder of Boone House for the Arts, which placed her at the center of a burgeoning literary community.

Boone House brought together Detroit black artists for the first time. From these humble beginnings, connections were made which became even more manifest during the Black Arts Movement. Dudley Randall and Naomi Madgett, who first met at Boone House, forged a lasting friendship and a cooperative association that benefited the poetry community. Randall founded Broadside Press in 1965 and Madgett founded Lotus Press shortly thereafter. They published each other's poetry and developed poetry presses that altered the perception and reception of black poetry for the next thirty years.

Poem Counterpoem (1966), co-authored by Randall and Danner, was the first Broadside Press book. Subsequent to that publication, Randall published *Impressions of African Art Forms* (1968) by Danner. Although the Randall-Danner connection essentially became a poem-counterpoem when she circumvented their joint publishing venture to publish *To Flower*, her solo collection of poetry through Robert Hayden's Counterpoise Series, Randall resolved to transcend this transgression by focusing on the poetry and thereby managed to sustain a prickly friendship.

When Danner returned to Chicago in 1964, she was deeply disturbed by the politics of the cultural community. She wrote unsettling letters to Hayden, which claimed there was a conspiracy to discredit her work and her reputation. She viewed herself and Hayden as outsiders and as kindred spirits because they disagreed with the racial dynamics emphasized by the movement and because they were both members of the Baha'i faith. The isolation of Hayden and Danner fostered their perceptions of a hostile literary community. But rather than a conspiracy to destroy their literary reputations, the tension and the talk was more the consequence of ideological warfare that was larger than any one or two writers. In her letters to Hayden, Danner reflects an ongoing discussion between them regarding contention in the community and a conflict between Danner, Brooks and Burroughs:

> You have such a kind heart and are so sensitive that it bothers you to think they have him [Dudley Randall]. They don't. And when the other day here in Chicago (the home of all devilish activity) Margaret Burroughs had a "thing" for Langston Hughes and Gwen invited Dudley and Don Lee, in order to keep in with them and show Margaret up as not inviting them and the auditorium was

> filled to capacity which was about 3,000 people... after they had done all that they could to take advantage of everything to push themselves, Dudley Randall, who Gwen had invited got up and told the people how I had struggled at Boone House and how I had been maligned and lied on. I had not mentioned him at all when I read my poem to Langston and so Gwen who thought she had hurt me and Margaret in reality only opened the door for someone to say something good about me and Dudley WILL BE THE SAME WAY ABOUT YOU IF HE THINKS PEOPLE ARE WRONGING YOU.[1]

The intrigue expressed in Danner's correspondence to Hayden persisted as did her obsessive impressions of her contemporaries. This letter illustrates how the subterfuge contributed to the friction between writers.

That same year Randall published *Impressions of African Art Forms* (1968) by Danner, a chap book (sixteen pages) that contains poetic responses to various forms of African imagery in artistic expressions and black life. This book, which includes Hoyt Fuller, the editor of *Negro Digest* in the acknowledgment list (an editor who promoted the ideology of the younger, militant writers) centers thematically around Africanity. Even though Danner is opposed to most of the new black aesthetic, her earliest poetry converges with its Africanist, metaphorical thought. Danner's themes confront issues of ignorance and embrace the new enlightenment regarding the underrated and misrepresented impressions that distort mainstream interpretations of Africanity in art and culture. Despite her opposition to the impetus of the Black Arts Movement, her expertise and exploration in this area anticipated subsequent attempts to adapt authentic African aesthetics into the features of African American expressions and identity:

> Africa: I turn to meet
> this vast land of bitter-sweet.
>
> Africa: whose creviced walls
> cradle myriad waterfalls.
>
> Africa: where black men stride
> toward freedom ever inching tide.

MARGARET BURROUGHS

Margaret Taylor Goss Burroughs' reputation as a writer pales by comparison to her acclaim as a visual artist. Her commitment to the notion of cultural revolution was grounded in her leftist politics; hence, she engaged the Black Arts Movement within a broader political framework, enlisting her socialist ideals to expand the cultural nationalism that dominated the era. As an artist, Burroughs recognized the necessity to bring artists of color together in order to accommodate their special aesthetic and career considerations. This marginalization of black artists made a Black Arts Movement an inevitability, and the need to establish community-based arts or-

ganizations was another obvious conclusion. Burroughs was an artist with the historical vision and the unrelenting, tenacity to execute plans to build something tangible.

Her institutions made her a beacon for the black arts community in Chicago. In particular, as one of the founders of the National Conference of Artists (NCA) in 1959, which predates the Black Arts Movement, and as the primary force behind the founding the Du Sable Museum of African American History and Art in 1961, she had already assumed the responsibility of institution building, a major tenet of the Black Arts Movement. The establishment of the National Conference of Artists, which ultimately grew into chapters throughout the nation, in thirteen different states within ten years, still provides conferences, forums, educational programs and galleries for developing and mature visual artists.

Likewise, the founding of the Du Sable Museum of African American History and Art facilitated even broader concerns. By combining history with art, this institution linked artistic expression to documentation, thereby demonstrating that cultural memory is a critical aspect of African American aesthetics, which draws much of its subject and thought from metaphors grounded in historical narrative. The museum holdings include literature, visual art, audio recordings, and biographical and bibliographical materials on almost all facets of black life and culture.

As a writer, Burroughs entered the genre as a children's author. *Jasper, The Drummin' Boy* was published in 1947 (Viking Press). She developed an interest in children's rhymes and poems, which she collected and published. For the most part, her poetry did not surface until the Black Arts Movement. In a 1957 article about her that appeared in *The Milwaukee Journal*, Burroughs revealed that, "she had at least twenty manuscripts that had been rejected."[2]

As a major cultural force, she attracted the attention of the younger, aspiring poets, especially Don L. Lee (Haki Madhubuti) who was employed by the museum. It was at the museum that Lee made his acquaintance with Randall, who became Lee's primary publisher during the Black Arts Movement. Many of the young Chicago writers who were members of the Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC) benefited from the institutional vision of Burroughs and the creative support of Gwendolyn Brooks, who sponsored OBAC.

But even before the founding of the museum and the NCA, Burroughs' home was known as a center for intellectuals and artists in Chicago. Brooks relates in her autobiography how important these parties were:

> Margaret Goss lived above a Michigan Avenue barn. Triumphantly, Margaret and her second husband later originated what was at first the Ebony Museum [Du Sable Museum] in the Quincy Club, the ancient mansion that fronted the barn. Her home supplied the South Side artist contingent with its most fascinating parties. Parties? But it was always open house at Margaret's. Three people would "fall in." Then three more. Before evening deepened there might be twelve. There would be your "party." You might meet any Personality there, white or black. You might meet Paul Robeson. You might meet Peter Pollock. On any night you might meet Frank Marshall Davis, the poet, Robert A. Davis, the actor, artists Eldzier Corto, Hughie Lee-Smith, Charles White, Elizabeth Catlett; sculptor Marion Perkins (father of the enterprising young poet Eugene

> Perkins); once every couple of years you might get lucky enough to run into Margaret Walker.[3]

Burroughs and Brooks had been life-long friends. According to Brooks, she met her husband, Henry Blakely, through Margaret Burroughs. But this friendship was marred by an accusation of plagiarism when Burroughs wrote the poem, "What Shall I Tell My Children Who Are Black?," which begins with:

> What shall I tell my children who are black?
> Of what it means to be a captive in this skin?
> What shall I tell my dear one fruit of this dark womb
> When everywhere they turn, they are filled with
> abhorrence of black.
>
> The night is black and so is the boogie man.
> Black dirt. Black villains with black hearts. A black cow
> gives no milk.
>
> A black hen lays no eggs. Bad news bordered in black.
> Mourning clothes, black. Storm clouds, black.
> Black is evil and evil is black.

According to Burroughs, she consulted Brooks about the title of the poem because she felt the title and theme had arisen so naturally, that it might be the name of a poem she had encountered elsewhere. She phoned Brooks and asked her if she had written a poem by that title. "Mrs. Brooks immediately assured her that she did not had never used such a title nor would she."[4] "Unfortunately, after the work had been presented publicly and had gained fame, her friend called and accused Mrs. Burroughs of stealing the title from her."[5]

According to Burroughs, this led to a serious breakdown in their relationship. Perhaps the discrepancy was related to a line from one of Brooks' more famous sonnets, "What Shall I Give My Children?" which opens with the line: "What shall I give my children? who are poor?" Whatever the case, "What Shall I Tell My Children Who Are Black" was published with a parenthetical epigraph, "(With apologies to Gwendolyn Brooks)." The tension from this difference manifested itself in the Chicago arts community in subtle and undoubtedly painful outcomes as reflected in Margaret Danner's account of rather tense encounters between Danner and Brooks, and between Brooks and Burroughs at the party for Langston Hughes.

At the Du Sable Museum, Burroughs functioned both as curator and publisher. She would send out subscription forms for proposed book projects. With the subscriptions she received, she would finance the publication of the books. Impressed by Burrough's ingenuity and tenacity, Randall enlisted her as his co-editor for the first book planned by Detroit's Broadside Press, *For Malcolm X: Poems on the Life and Death of Malcolm X* (1969), an idea inspired by Margaret Walker's reading of the poem before Randall and Burroughs. Subsequent to the appearance of this work, which includes a poem by Burroughs, "Brother Freedom," poetry by Burroughs be-

gan to appear in noted anthologies, such as Woodie King's *The Forerunners: Black Poets in America*. But Burroughs never published a collection of her own poetry.

Although situated squarely on the political left, Burroughs was likewise capable of cutting across political lines. To some extent, the poems in *For Malcolm* display these ambivalent ideological stances, including a poem by Danner. While Burroughs supported and interacted with the more nationalist tendencies of the movement, she also organized a delegation of black artists to visit the Soviet Union in 1966. Moreover, the inclusion of a poem by the Afroamerican Russian poet, James Patterson, in *For Malcolm* represents their internationalist politics of its editors. Randall, who was a member of the delegation, was so inspired by the tour that he decided to publish *Poem Counterpoem* as the first Broadside book upon returning to Detroit.

Since Burroughs' institutions were so critical to the developing arts community, she maintained contact with Danner and Brooks, no matter how strained the encounters became. A similar bitter-sweet ambiguity registers with Burroughs' publishing efforts, for most of her poetry resides in manuscript form in her private collection: "Some had been published, some written for special presentations, then filed away. The creations located at this site alone filled six file containers."[6]

GWENDOLYN BROOKS

When the Pultizer Prize-winning poet Gwendolyn Brooks shifted from Harper and Row in upscale New York to Broadside Press in blue-collar Detroit, it was a statement that resounded throughout the black and white literary communities. Randall explains the impact of Martin Luther King's death on Brooks' poetry and publishing:

> When I started the Broadside Press Series and asked her [Brooks] for a poem, she said "You can use any poem I have." We used her poem "We Real Cool" in our first group of Broadside. After the assassination of Martin Luther King, she told me she was doing a little book and wished to donate it to Broadside Press. Titled *Riot*, it was published in 1969. All proceeds from the book went to Broadside. It was followed by *Family Picture*, and *Aloneness,* a children's book.[7]

In a more detailed discussion about Brooks' support of Broadside, he elaborates on Brooks' generosity and financial sacrifice in order to support Broadside as a black cultural institution:

> Regarding the need to sign "major" writers, Gwendolyn Brooks has demonstrated how that is done. She simply decided to leave Harper, although they had been fair to her, because she saw the need to help a Black publisher. I remonstrated with her, warned her that she'd lose money, told her that Broadside Press could give her neither the advances nor the promotion that Harper could, but she insisted on giving a major work, her autobiography, *Report from Part One*, to Broadside Press. When I saw that she was determined, and that if Broadside Press didn't take the book she would give it to another Black publisher, I gratefully accepted it.[8]

On a more personal level, Brooks hosted writers and intellectuals in her home as Burroughs did:

> As for my husband and myself, our own best parties were given at East 623 Street, our most exciting kitchenette. 623 was right on the corner, the corner of 63rd and Champlain, above a real estate agency. If you wanted a poem, you had only to look out of a window. There was material always, walking or running, fighting or screaming or singing.[9]
>
> "We squeezed perhaps a hundred people into our Langston Hughes two-room kitchenette party. Langston was the merriest and the most colloquial of them all. "Best party I've ever been given!" He enjoyed everyone; he enjoyed all the talk, all the phonograph blues, all the festivity in the crowded air. And —I remember him dropping in unexpectedly some years later. His dignified presence decorated our droll little quarters. We asked him to share our dinner of mustard greens, ham hocks and candid sweet potatoes, and he accepted. "Just what I want!" exclaimed the noble poet, the efficient essayist, the adventurous dramatist.[10]

When the Black Arts Movement began to take hold of everyone's attention, Brooks encountered what she called the "New Black" at the 1966 Fisk Writers Conference: "Here, I was coldly Respected."[11] She relates the discomfort felt at this event, which was also felt by Danner: "All that day and night, Margaret Danner Cunningham —another Old Girl, another coldly Respected old Has-been— and an almost hysterical Gwendolyn B. walked about in amazement, listening, looking learning. *What was going on!*"[12]

Brooks' response was to embrace the dramatic shift of the movement:

> "I —who have "gone the gamut" from an almost angry rejection of my dark skin by some of my brainwashed brother and sisters to a surprised queenhood in the new black sun— am qualified to enter at least the kindergarten of new consciousness now. New consciousness and trudge-toward-progress.
>
> I have hopes for myself.[13]

Brooks became the queen of the Chicago poets. She availed herself to the needs of the young, Chicago poets in the OBAC and hosted as many black authors at her home as she could manage. Randall's account of the book signing party she gave for him upon the publication of his collection, *Cities Burning* (1968), is reflective of the nurturing role she played in and for the community:

> I met all the Chicago brains —Lerone Bennett; Sterling Stuckey; Ellis, who runs a Negro bookstore; a young sociologist from the U of Chicago. Hoyt Fuller, whom I knew in college, and the novelist Ronald Fair whom I met at Margaret Burroughs', were also there. I met her husband, Henry Blakely a witty and charming host, and her fifteen-year-old daughter Nora. Nora was shy and embarrassed. She said, "Are you really DUDLEY RANDALL?" And I was em-

> barrassed too, at anyone thinking that Dudley Randall was anybody. We were both tongue-tied. Anyway, the brains talked about some article in the *N.Y. Times* which I hadn't read, and all I could do was listen. Gwen Brooks is a charming hostess, a real, nice person.[14]

In addition to hosting black writers in her home and supporting the OBAC, she also hosted writers as their editor. Broadside Press published two anthologies edited by Brooks, *Jump Bad* (1971), a collection of writing from the workshop, and *A Broadside Treasury, 1965-1970* (1971), a collection of poetry by Broadside authors. Brooks often times forwarded manuscripts for Randall to consider for publication, and conversely, he often consulted with her regarding editorial decisions. She worked diligently as an advocate of the younger writers, and went as far as to visit poet Etheridge Knight when he was in the Indiana State Prison.

Brooks' artist-activist shift was a major statement to the literary world, which now had to consider black cultural power a factor when negotiating and determining which writers and which literature would be credited. Brooks not only changed publisher, she also changed her vocabulary. Under the influence of the younger writers, she began writing in a style more in sync with a black consciousness audience. As an institution builder, she gave her reputation, her poetry, her skill and her home in the service of the cultural struggle. By reference, the epigraph for the poem, "The Sermon on the Warpland," which is a quote from Ron Karenga: "The fact that we are black is our ultimate reality," clearly demonstrates Brooks' philosophical embrace of the Black Arts Movement. Her style shifted from conventional sonnets and intricate metaphors, and subtle understatements into vital, free verse expressions with proud, bold words advocating change:

> Build now your Church, my brothers, sisters. Build
> never with brick nor Corten nor with granite.
> Build with lithe love. With love like lion-eyes.
> With love like morning rise.
> With love like black, our black —
> luminously indiscreet;
> complete; continuous.

MARGARET WALKER

After graduating from Northwestern University (BA 1935), Margaret Walker Alexander became active in politically conscious writing circles in Chicago. As Jerry Ward, Jr. explains: "In the years between 1936 and 1939, she benefited from her friendships with the novelists Nelson Algren and Frank Yerby, poets Arna Bontemps and Frank Marshall Davis, the artist Margaret Taylor Goss Burroughs and the playwright Theodore Ward."[15]

However, the foremost influence on Walker's writing was Richard Wright. When Walker relayed her frustration as an isolated, struggling writer to Langston Hughes, he introduced her to Wright: "I tried to press my manuscripts on Langston, but

when I admitted I had no copies he would not take them. Instead, he turned to Wright, who was standing nearby, listening to the conversation and smiling at my desperation. Langston said, "If you people really get a group together, don't forget to include this girl." A few months later, Wright formed the Southside Writers Project in the Spring of 1936: "It was under Wright's influence that Walker made the decision to be a writer for the people."[16] It was during this period that she began work on what would become the novel *Jubilee.* Walker explains: "I felt hopeless about my novel manuscript which became *Jubilee* and of which I had 300 pages in first draft written at that time. We [Wright and Walker] both decided I should put it away until another time."[17]

In 1939, her experience with the Federal Writers Project was terminated and she enrolled in a masters program at the University of Iowa. The poetry that was the text for her master's degree, *For My People*, received the Yale University Younger Poets Award in 1942, and she became a noted poet of national and international fame. However, in 1943 she married and returned South to teach and to raise a family. It was not until 1966, with the publication of *Jubilee* (Houghton-Mifflin), that Walker was reissued to the forefront of black literature. This was the same year of the Fisk Writers Conference, where she encountered Danner, Burroughs, Brooks and Randall. Because Walker's home was in Mississippi, her social interactions with other writers were limited. This geographical isolation removed her from the sharp, competitive edges of cultural conflict.

Randall's comments on Walker's contribution to the innovative adaptation of the sonnet form to subjects dealing with folk culture confirms her pre-eminence in black poetry:

> In her only volume of poetry, *For My People*, published in 1942 in the Yale University Series of Younger Poets, there are ballads or rural southern folk of the witch Molly Means, of "Bad-man Stagolee" and "Big John Henry." And that "the most famous of these is the title poem, "For My People." This poem gains its force not by tropes —turns of language or thought— or logical development of a theme, but by the sheer overpowering accumulation of a mass of details delivered in the rhythmical parallel phrases. "We Have Been Believers" is another powerful poem in a similar form and on a racial theme.[18]

"For My People," with its terse imagery, riveting, rhythmical phrasing and thematic embrace of the black masses, anticipated the aesthetics of the Black Arts Movement. Although her novel was published by a mainstream, New York press, the poetry movement was happening in the community. *Prophets for a New Day* (1970) and *October Journey* (1973), as well as poems that appeared as broadsides, reiterated the significant presence of mature poets such as Walker, whose breath and depth, substance and consistency, undergirded the cultural revolution. With uncanny skill, Walker's powerful civil rights poems, such as "For Andy Goodman —Michael Schwerner—and James Chaney (Three Civil Rights Workers Murdered in Mississippi on June 21, 1964)," exalted this historic moment in the freedom struggle and provided aesthetic direction for aspiring poets:

Three faces turn their ears and eyes
sensitive
intense
impassive
to see the solemn sky of summer
to hear the brooding cry
of the morning dove

Mississippi bird of sorrow
O mourning bird of death
Sing their sorrow
Mourn their pain
And teach us death,
To love and live with them again!

Other poems, such as, "Street Demonstration" and "Girl Held Without Bail," focus on the activities of the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi in particular and the South in general, whereas. "Prophets for a New Day" and "Malcolm X" illuminate the radical shift in political thought and action as the Black Liberation Movement takes hold.

As an institution builder, Walker made a lasting impression with the establishment of the Institute for the Study of the History, Life and Culture of Black People at Jackson State University (renamed the Margaret Walker Alexander National Research Center); and in 1973, she organized the Phillis Wheatley Festival, which was a provocative pronouncement in support of an eighteenth century poet whose poetry came under fire by many of the younger, more militant poets and critics.

CONCLUDING

Margaret Danner, Margaret Burroughs, Gwendolyn Brooks and Margaret Walker were all directly or indirectly influenced by the leftist politics of the 1930s and 1940s, and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. The interconnectedness of the decades is personified by the presence of Langston Hughes (1902-1967) , whose career spans the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and the Black Arts Movement of the late 1960s. Hughes was a symbol of affirmation for the second renaissance as he published with Broadside Press and collected the poetry of the upcoming era in *New Negro Poets: U.S.A.* (1964). Likewise, a sense cultural community was first nurtured in house parties, where personalities mingled and cultural thought flourished. Institutions conceived in these settings captured the enthusiasm of poets who laid the foundation for successful cultural enterprises that followed.

This progressive consciousness, which preceded the Black Arts Movement, affected artistic expression and a strong sense of community responsibility. Conversely, the various cultural activities in which these women poets participated, benefited them individually and collectively. As writers, the Black Arts Movement enhanced their visibility; as editors of books and directors of institutions, they made significant con-

tributions to burgeoning, cultural activities. *For Malcolm*, which was inspired by Walker's poem, co-edited by Burroughs, and contains the poetry of Danner, Burroughs and Walker as well, is an example of this synergistic effect.

Although the green-eyed monster finds much fodder in the competitive field of American social and political conflict, the ongoing quest for African American civil and human rights conversely inspires the spirit of freedom in artistic and cultural expression. Indeed, if the spirit of freedom is a woman, her vision is realized in the voices of Danner, Burroughs, Brooks and Walker. Their reach was deeper than their personal misunderstandings and minor, social digressions. Their lives inscribed powerful messages that will grow with meaning as the next generation of writers discover what these four women writers already know.

> And the dark faces of the sufferers
> Gleam in the new morning
> The complaining faces glow
> And the winds of freedom begin to blow
> While the Word descends on the waiting World below.
> Margaret Walker, from "Prophets for a New Day,"

Notes

[1] Margaret Danner, Letter to Robert Hayden, dated March 30, 1968, in the Robert Hayden Papers, National Baha'i Archives, Wilmette, Illinois.

[2] Marilyn Gardner, "Author Collects Rhymes, Rejection Slips," *The Milwaukee Journal* 17 (February 1957).

[3] Gwendolyn Brooks, *Report from Part One* (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1974) 69.

[4] Carline Williams Strong, *Margaret Taylor Goss Burroughs: Educator, Artist, Author, Founder, and Civic Leader* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services, 1996) 160.

[5] Strong.

[6] Strong 170.

[7] Dudley Randall, "Black Publisher, Black Writer: An Answer," *Negro Digest* 24.5 (1975): 35.

[8] Dudley Randall, *Broadside Memories: Poets I Have Known* (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1975) 5.

[9] Brooks 69.

[10] Brooks 70.

[11] Brooks 84.

[12] Brooks 85.

[13] Brooks 86.

[14] Dudley Randall, "Letter to Etheridge Knight," dated 15 January 1967, the Etheridge Knight Papers, Canaday Collection, The University of Toledo.

[15] Jerry Ward, Jr., *"Margaret Walker," The Oxford Companion to African American Literature* (New York: Oxford UP, 1997) 753.

[16] Margaret Walker, *Richard Wright: Daemonic Genius* (New York: Amistad Press, 1988) 75.

[17] Walker 76.

[18] Dudley Randall, "The Black Aesthetic in the Thirties, Forties and Fifties," *The Black Aesthetic* (New York: Doubleday, 1971) 40-41.

Works Cited

Andrews, William L., Frances Smith Foster, and Trudier Harris, eds. *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 1997. 752-753.

Bailey, Leonead, ed. *Broadside Authors and Artists*. Detroit: Broadside Press, 1974. 25-53.

Boyd, Melba Joyce. *Dudley Randall: Wrestling with the Muse*. (unpublished manuscript).

Brooks, Gwendolyn. *Report from Part One*. Detroit: Broadside Press, 1972. 69-86.

Burroughs, Margaret and Randall, Dudley. *For Malcolm X: Poems on the Life and Death of Malcolm X*. Detroit: Broadside Press, 1968.

Danner, Margaret and Dudley Randall. *Poem Counterpoem*. Detroit: Broadside Press, 1966.

Danner, Margaret. *Impressions of African Art Forms*. Detroit: Broadside Press, 1968.

Etheridge Knight Papers, Canaday Collection, University of Toledo.

Gayle, Addison. *The Black Aesthetic*. New York: Doubleday, 1971.

— *The Negro Digest*, Vol. XII-IX, 1963-1970; Vol. XXIV, 1975.

Randall, Dudley. *Poets I Have Known*. Detroit: Broadside Press, 1975.

Robert Hayden Papers, Box 5, National Baha'i Archives, Willmette, Illinois.

Strong, Carline Williams. *Margaret Taylor Goss Burroughs: Educator, Artist, Author, Founder, and Civic Leader*. Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Services, 1996. 154-161; 166-170.

Walker, Margaret. *Richard Wright: Daemonic Genius*. New York: Amistad Press, 1988. 75-76.