

Guide to the Gwendolyn Bennett Papers

JWJ MSS 106



by H. Dean

December 2013

P. O. Box 208330
New Haven, CT 06520-8330
(203) 432-2977
beinecke.library@yale.edu
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
P. O. Box 208330
New Haven, CT 06520-8330
(203) 432-2977
beinecke.library@yale.edu
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

CALL NUMBER: JWJ MSS 106

CREATOR: Bennett, Gwendolyn, 1902-1981

TITLE: Gwendolyn Bennett Papers

DATES: 1918–1976

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 0.63 linear feet (2 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The collection provides evidence of the personal and professional life of Gwendolyn Bennett. The papers are comprised of correspondence, writings, and personal papers, which shed light into Bennett's career as a writer and educator, as well as her private life, particularly her relationship with her parents.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.bennettg>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.bennettg>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Purchased from William Reese Company on the Danford N. Barney, Jr. Fund and the George B. Alvord Fund, 2013.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

The Gwendolyn Bennett Papers is the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

Gwendolyn Bennett Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Processing Information

Collections are processed to a variety of levels, depending on the work necessary to make them usable, their perceived research value, the availability of staff, competing priorities, and whether or not further accruals are expected. The library attempts to provide a basic level of preservation and access for all collections, and does more extensive processing of higher priority collections as time and resources permit.

Gwendolyn Bennett (1902-1981)

Gwendolyn Bennett, American writer and artist, was born to Joshua Robin Bennett and Mayme Abernathy on July 8, 1902. When her parents divorced in 1909, Bennett became estranged from her mother and was raised in Brooklyn, New York, by her father and stepmother, Marechal Neil Bennett.

Bennett attended Brooklyn's Girls' High (1918-1921) and then studied fine art at Columbia University (1921) and the Pratt Institute, where she graduated with a degree in fine arts in 1924. While still an undergraduate, Bennett published poetry in *Crisis* (November 1923) and *Opportunity* (December 1923), and also created cover art for the former (December 1923 and March 1924).

Upon graduation Bennett taught fine art at Howard University before moving to Paris where she lived from June 1925 to September 1926 and studied art at the Académies de la Grande Chaumière, Julian, and Colarossi, and at the École du Panthéon. Bennett also studied art at the Barnes Foundation in Merion, Pennsylvania, for which she received a scholarship (1928).

Bennett published poetry in *Opportunity*, *Crisis*, *Palms*, and *Gypsy* and contributed to anthologies, including *Caroling Dusk* (1927) edited by Countée Cullen and *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1931) edited by James Weldon Johnson. Bennett also wrote a column for *Opportunity*, "The Ebony Flute" (1926-1928), and served as editor for *Black Opals* (1927).

Throughout her career Bennett balanced administrative and teaching positions with her artistic life. She taught at the Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College and the Federal Art Teaching Project, worked for the Department of Information and Education of the Welfare Council of New York, served as the director of the Harlem Community Art Center, and as a correspondent for the Consumers Union. Bennett married Alfred Jackson, a doctor, in 1928 and they remained married until Jackson's death in 1936. They lived in Eustis, Florida, and Hempstead, New York. In 1941 Bennett married Richard Crosscup, a teacher.

Bennett died of congestive heart failure on May 30, 1981.

Scope and Contents

The collection provides evidence of the personal and professional life of Gwendolyn Bennett. The papers are comprised of correspondence, writings, and personal papers, which shed light into Bennett's career as a writer and educator, as well as her private life, particularly her relationship with her parents.

Correspondents include Langston Hughes, who accompanied his letters with four poems inscribed to Bennett: "Hotel Boy" (1926), "Stalingrad" (1942), "Goodmorning, Stalingrad" (1943), and "Give Us Our Peace" (1945). Correspondence between Bennett and her father Joshua Bennett, mother Mayme Abernathy Pizarro, and stepmother Marechal Neil Bennett, in particular, provide insight into Bennett's life and work.

Evidence of Bennett's writing career, including mock-ups for her column for *Opportunity*, "The Ebony Flute," and drafts of articles and a short story, can be found in the papers.

The papers also contain personal papers, including bills, receipts, a book of Psalms, and notes that provide further insight into Bennett's personal life.

Arrangement

Organized into three series: I. Correspondence, 1918-1971. II. Writings, 1926-1976. III. Personal Papers, 1925-1929.

Collection Contents

Series I: Correspondence, 1918–1971

This series contains Bennett's personal and professional correspondence reflecting her career and personal relationships. Most notably the series contains letters from Langston Hughes (some of which include poetry) and correspondence between Bennett and her parents. The letters between Bennett and her parents are particularly rich and contain insight into Bennett's experience as a writer and artist.

Arranged alphabetically by correspondent.

| | | |
|----------------|--|----------------|
| b. 1, f. 1 | Abeworthy, F. M. | 1926 August 28 |
| b. 1, f. 2-4 | Bennett, Joshua and Marechal Includes letters from Gwendolyn Bennett. | 1918-1929 |
| b. 1, f. 5 | Herring, James Vernon | 1937-1941 |
| b. 1, f. 6 | Horne, Frank | 1968-1971 |
| b. 1, f. 7-8 | Hughes, Langston | 1928-1946 |
| b. 1, f. 9 | Jackson, A. J. | 1929 |
| b. 1, f. 10-11 | Pizarro, Mayme Abernathy | 1926-1935 |
| b. 1, f. 12 | ---, Flora Letter from Gwendolyn Bennett to Flora. | 1947 October 6 |
| b. 1, f. 13 | General Correspondence | 1925-1926 |
| b. 1, f. 14 | Empty envelopes | |

Series II: Writings, 1926–1976

This series is comprised of drafts of writings and mock-ups relating to Bennett's writing career, most notably her column for *Opportunity*, articles, and to a lesser degree, poetry.

Arranged chronologically.

| | | |
|-------------|--|--------------|
| b. 2, f. 15 | "Ebony Flute," Opportunity, mock-ups | 1926-1928 |
| b. 2, f. 16 | Poems, typescript Includes poems from <i>Caroling Dusk</i> ("Hatred," "Sonnet") and <i>The Book of American Negro Poetry</i> ("Heritage," "Sonnet - 2"). | undated |
| b. 2, f. 17 | Articles, typescript, corrected Includes "Towards a Permanent Bureau of Fine Arts," "Portraits in Color," "Tokens," "An Almost True Story," and "The James Weldon Johnson Literary Awards." | undated |
| b. 2, f. 18 | Untitled, "Chapter One," typescript | undated |
| b. 2, f. 19 | Untitled, typescript The first line is: "It seemed from the beginning that Bob was marked for a fearless life of tremendous adventure." | undated |
| b. 2, f. 20 | "The Buttonwood Hollow Bulletin" | 1968 July 22 |
| b. 2, f. 21 | Brown, Lloyd L., "Paul Robeson Rediscovered," <i>Occasional Papers Series</i> , Number 19, American Institute for Marxist Studies | 1976 |

Series III: Personal Papers, 1925–1929

This series contains bills, receipts, a book of Psalms, and other papers regarding personal matters.

Not arranged in any particular order.

| | | |
|-------------|---|-----------------------|
| b. 2, f. 22 | Bills and receipts | 1925-1929, undated |
| b. 2, f. 23 | Psalms, with photographs and newspaper clipping enclosed | 1925, undated |
| b. 2, f. 24 | Note regarding Eustis, newspaper clipping regarding Howard University | undated |

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

African American authors -- 20th Century -- Archives
American literature -- 20th Century
Authors, American -- 20th Century -- Archives
Harlem Renaissance
Poets, American -- 20th Century -- Archives
Women authors -- 20th Century -- Archives

Occupations

Authors -- United States -- 20th Century
Poets -- United States -- 20th Century

Names

Bennett, Gwendolyn, 1902-1981
Hughes, Langston, 1902-1967