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Recommended Citation

Charles L. James. (2001). "Bontemps, Arna". *The Concise Oxford Companion To African American Literature*. 41-42.

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Black Notes" (1933) and the two-part story "Tin Can" (1934), which won the 1933 literary prize. The various stories thematize issues of colorism, marital betrayal, family strife, and poverty. "A Sealed Pod" (1936), an unflattering image of peas not touching despite their closeness, metaphorizes Frye Street while it chronicles the murder of a young woman by her lover. Three stories published in 1939, "The Makin's," "The Whipping," and "Hungry Fire," differently depict the corrosive effects of the urban environment on children. "Patch Quilt" (1940), set in the rural South, resists the contemporary tendency to romanticize the southern small town, portraying the environment as confining rather than pastoral. Occomy's last published short story, "One True Love" (1941), again illustrates the double bind of the African American woman's position described in "On Being Young—A Woman—and Colored."

Marita Bonner Occomy died in 1971 from injuries sustained in a fire in her Chicago apartment. Publishing for only sixteen years, her literary contribution to African American literature is significant. Her characterization of urban environments as destructive and corrupting prefigures, even perhaps influenced, Richard Wright's portrayal of the urban in *Native Son* (1940). Her ability to traverse genres and treat a myriad of themes demonstrates not only the versatility of her talents but also the diversity of African American culture and experience during the interwar era.

* Diane Isaacs, "Bonner, Marita/Marita Odetta," in *The Harlem Renaissance: A Historical Dictionary for the Era*, ed. Bruce Kellner, 1984, p. 45. Margaret Wilkerson, introduction to *Nine Plays by Black Women*, 1986. Joyce Flynn, introduction to *Frye Street and Environs: The Collected Works of Marita Bonner*, eds. Joyce Flynn and Joyce Occomy Stricklin, 1987. Joyce Flynn, "Marita Bonner Occomy," in *DLB*, vol. 51, *Afro-American Writers from the Harlem Renaissance to 1949*, ed. Trudier Harris, 1987, pp. 222–228. Nellie McKay, "What Were They Saying? Black Women Playwrights of the Harlem Renaissance," in *The Harlem Renaissance Re-Examined*, ed. Victor Kramer, 1987, pp. 129–147. Elizabeth Brown-Guillory, ed., *Wines in the Wilderness: Plays by African American Women from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present*, 1990.

—Kim Jenice Dillon

BONTEMPS, ARNA (1902–1973), novelist, poet, and librarian. Born in Alexandria, Louisiana, the first child of a Roman Catholic bricklayer and a Methodist schoolteacher, Arna Wendell Bontemps grew up in California and graduated from Pacific Union College. After college he accepted a teaching position in Harlem at the height of the Harlem Renaissance, and in 1926 and 1927 won first prizes on three separate occasions in contests with other "New Negro" poets. The same years marked his marriage to Alberta Johnson and the start of a family of six children.

Bontemps's first effort at a novel (*Chariot in the Cloud*, 1929), a *bildungsroman* set in southern Califor-

nia, never found a publisher, but by mid-1931, as his teaching position in New York City ended, Harcourt accepted *God Sends Sunday* (1931), his novel about the rise and notoriety of Little Augie. This tiny black jockey of the 1890s, whose period of great luck went sour, was inspired by Bontemps's favorite uncle, Buddy.

While teaching at Oakwood Junior College, Bontemps began the first of several collaborations with Langston Hughes, *Popo and Fifina: Children of Haiti* (1932), a colorful travel book for juveniles that portrays two black children who migrate with their parents from an inland farm to a busy fishing village. The success of this new genre encouraged him to make juvenile fiction an ongoing part of his repertoire.

Residence in the Deep South proved fruitful for his career, for in quick succession he published his best-known short story, "A Summer Tragedy" (1932), the compelling narrative of a simple yet dignified couple worn weary by a lifetime of sharecropping on a southern plantation; wrote a dozen other tales of the South that were compiled years later under the title *The Old South* (1973); completed yet another profitable juvenile book, *You Can't Pet a Possum* (1934), for its time a charming rural Alabama story about an eight-year-old named Shine Boy and his yellow hound, Butch; initiated contact with composer and musician W. C. Handy to ghostwrite Handy's autobiography; and, in a visit to Fisk University in Nashville, "discovered" its rich and seemingly forgotten repository of narratives by former slaves.

Late in 1932 Bontemps started writing *Black Thunder: Gabriel's Revolt: Virginia 1800* (1936), his singular and inspired representation of an actual slave insurrection that failed because of weather and treachery. This work establishes the concept of freedom as the principal motif of his ensuing works and evokes questions regarding differences between writing and orality as racial and cultural markers. But because he was forced out of Oakwood at the end of the 1934 school year, the novel was completed in the cramped space of his father's California home, where the family had retreated.

Ironic relief arrived a year later from the Adventists in the form of a principalship at their Shiloh Academy on Chicago's battered South Side. The venture was bright with promise because the city and the university had attracted a young and savvy coterie of social radicals including Richard Wright, Margaret Walker, and Jack Conroy. Favorable critical reception of *Black Thunder* assured Bontemps's celebrity among the group, and his application to the Julian Rosenwald Fund to research and write a third novel met with success. In *Sad-Faced Boy* (1937), he relates the travels to Harlem of three quaint Alabama boys who in time nostalgically discover the charm of their own birthplace. In 1938 he secured an appointment as editorial supervisor to the Federal Writers' Project of the Illinois WPA. He sailed for the Caribbean in the fall of 1938

and put the finishing touches on *Drums at Dusk* (1939), his historical portrayal of the celebrated eighteenth-century black revolution on the island of Santo Domingo.

With great relief he completed *Father of the Blues* (1941), the "autobiography" commissioned by the ever-testy W. C. Handy; he edited his first compilation, *Golden Slippers: An Anthology of Negro Poetry for Young Readers* (1941); he then published a humorous American tall tale for children coauthored with his WPA colleague Jack Conroy titled *The Fast Sooner Hound* (1942); he was awarded two additional Rosenwald grants to pursue a degree and to write a book on "the Negro in Illinois"; and in 1943 he completed a master's degree in library science at the University of Chicago, clearing the way to his appointment as librarian at Fisk University.

In 1946 the controversial musical based on his first novel reached Broadway as *St. Louis Woman* for a short but successful run. Arguably his most distinguished work of the decade was *The Story of the Negro* (1948), a race history since Egyptian civilization that won him the Jane Addams Children's Book Award for 1956. Then, with Langston Hughes, he edited *The Poetry of the Negro* (1949), a comprehensive collection of poems by blacks and tributary poems by nonblacks.

An assortment of histories and biographies, largely written with youths in mind, emerged from Fisk throughout the 1950s and the succeeding civil rights years. Bontemps and Hughes's collaboration produced two anthologies during this period, *The Book of Negro Folklore* (1959) and *American Negro Poetry* (1963).

After Hughes's death in 1967, Bontemps compiled *Hold Fast to Dreams* (1969), a montage of poems by black and white writers. But compilations of a more personal sort rounded off his long career. They include *The Harlem Renaissance Remembered* (1972), featuring an introductory reflection by Bontemps and twelve critical essays on literary figures from the era; *Personals* (1963), a collection of his own poems reissued in 1973 as a third edition with a prefatory personal history; and *The Old South: "A Summer Tragedy" and Other Stories of the Thirties* (1973), which opens with the personal essay "Why I Returned," places most of his short fiction under a single cover.

Retirement from Fisk in 1966 brought recognition in the form of two honorary degrees and distinguished professorial appointments at the University of Illinois (Chicago Circle), Yale University, and back at Fisk as writer in residence. Following his death in 1973, early estimates of his career from Sterling A. Brown and Aaron Douglas noted that he deserves to be known much better than he has been. Aptly, the Yale appointment included the title of Curator of the James Weldon Johnson Collection at the Beinecke Library, for prevalent views have come to regard him as a chronicler and keeper of black cultural heritage. It is worth noting that

the vast and unique body of extant correspondence with his friend Langston Hughes is housed in this archive. Bontemps's most distinctive works are ringing affirmations of the human passion for freedom and the desire for social justice inherent in us all. Arnold Rampersad called him the conscience of his era and it could be fairly added that his tendency to fuse history and imagination represents his personal legacy to a collective memory.

• Charles H. Nichols, ed., *Arna Bontemps–Langston Hughes Letters, 1925–1967*, 1988. Kirkland C. Jones, *Renaissance Man from Louisiana: A Biography of Arna Wendell Bontemps*, 1992. Charles L. James, "Arna W. Bontemps' Creole Heritage," *Syracuse University Library Associates Courier* 30 (1995): 91–115. Daniel Reagan, "Achieving Perspective: Arna Bontemps and the Shaping Force of Harlem Culture," in *Essays in Arts and Sciences*, 25 (1996): 69–78.

—Charles L. James

BOYD, CANDY (b. 1946), born Marguerite Dawson, educator, activist, and novelist. Educating people about their positive potential has long been Candy Boyd's priority. As a high school student, she tried to stop block-busting in her native Chicago by convincing three of her friends, an African American, a Jew, and a Protestant, to join her in personal visits to more than two hundred white families. She withdrew from college to work as an organizer for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. When she finally earned her bachelor's degree from Northeastern Illinois State University, she became, in her own words, a "militant teacher." She worked with Operation PUSH, organized neighborhood beautification projects, and used her Saturdays to take students on excursions to parks, theaters, and other neighborhoods.

When Boyd moved to Berkeley, California, and began teaching in a more diversely multicultural setting, her frustration with literary stereotypes and negative depictions of African Americans was exacerbated by her discovery that Asians, Latinos, and many Euro-Americans suffered similar literary treatment. She decided to write books for children that were honest, interesting, and inspiring. Though she had earned a PhD in education from the University of California and had been teaching for several years, Boyd prepared for this task by taking courses in writing for children and by reading every children's book in the Berkeley Public Library.

Named Professor of the Year at St. Mary's College in 1992, Candy Boyd is renowned for training teachers and creating organizations that encourage and develop reading among young people. In her books, schools are sites for learning and developing responsibility outside the family. Her characters encounter bullies, liars, and other misdirected classmates and teachers. They also build relationships with adults and children who inspire and guide them.

Candy Boyd's books explore complex and perplexing questions about the world and the emotions en-