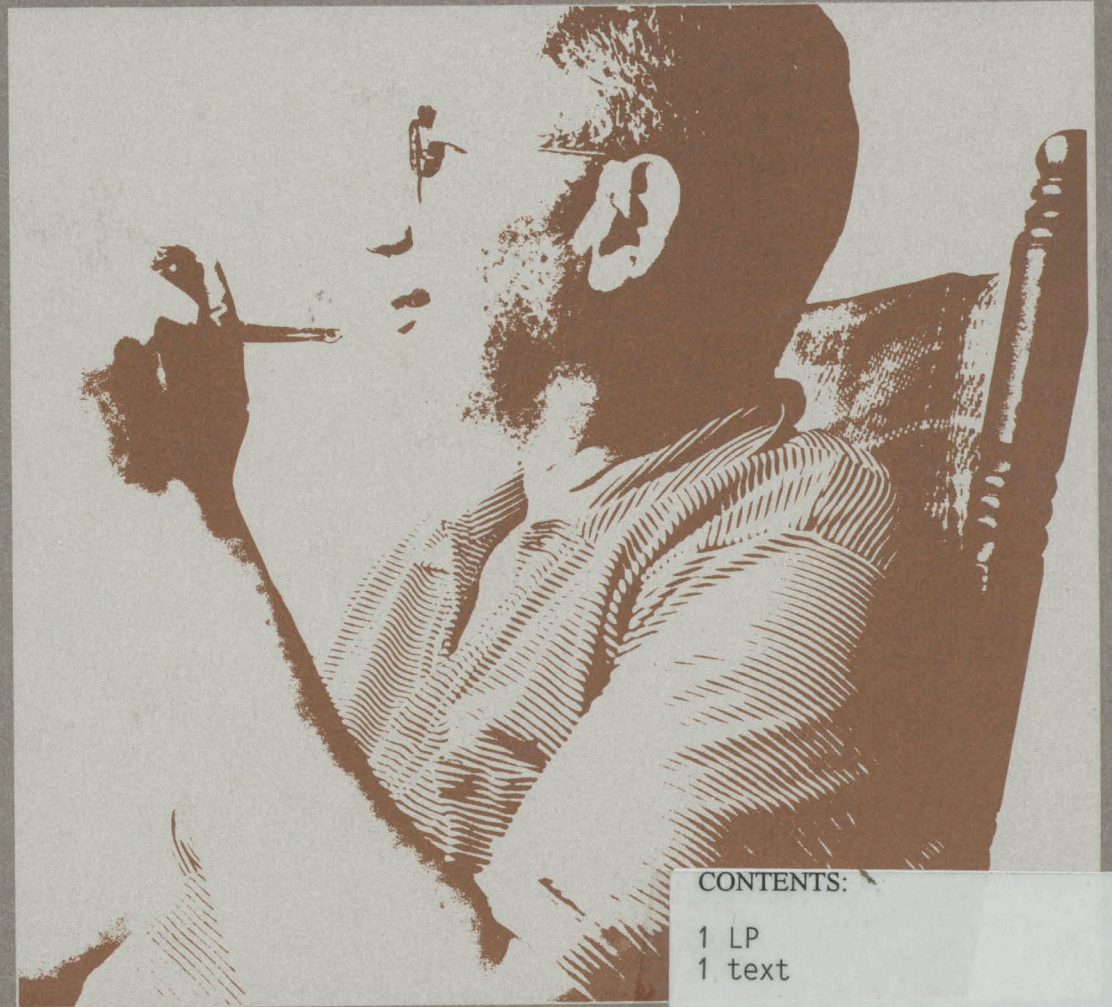


FOLKWAYS RECORDS FL 9794

*16 Poems of
Sterling A. Brown
read by
Sterling A. Brown*



CONTENTS:

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1 text

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FOLKWAYS RECORDS FL 9794

SIDE 1

1. The Long Track Blues (3:39)
2. Sporting Beasley (2:00)
3. Sam Smiley (2:58)
4. After Winter (1:29)
5. Conjured (:54)
6. Childrens' Children (1:46)
7. Putting on Dog (2:29)
8. Uncle Joe (3:34)
9. Parish Doctor (2:52)

SIDE 2

1. Clotile (3:03)
2. Old Lem (2:36)
3. Break of Day (2:02)
4. Transfer (2:40)
5. Remembering Nat Turner (4:07)
6. Ballad of Joe Meek (5:19)
7. Strong Men (3:06)

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER PHOTO BY FREDERIC RAMSEY, JR.

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FL 9794

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16 Poems of
Sterling A. Brown
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Sterling A. Brown



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NOTES TO THE RECORDINGS
by Frederic Ramsey, Jr.

Introduction

The citation which accompanied bestowal of the degree, Doctor of Humane Letters, honoris causa, upon Sterling A. Brown at the University of Massachusetts May, 1971, reads in part:

"America's foremost authority on black literature, poet, connoisseur of jazz, and man of letters, you have been a distinguished teacher at Howard University for more than 40 years. In your teaching and writings you have challenged the stereotype of the black American, describing the whole man and searching for that spark of creativity with which each individual has been endowed...The list of those who have discovered their own unique gifts under your tutelage reads like a who's who of black authors in America."

Six days later, Howard University conferred the degree of Doctor of Literature, honoris causa upon Sterling Brown. In October, 1972, an award for "Outstanding Achievement in Letters" was presented to Brown by the Fellows of the Black Academy of Arts and Letters, in New York City. And on June 16, 1973, a third honorary degree came from Northwestern University.

To those who had followed Sterling Brown's career, these honors seemed long overdue. Long before they came, the evidence was abundant; Brown had made, as he continues to make, substantial and brilliant depositions in the field of American letters - as teacher, essayist, editor, poet, historian, lecturer, reader of poetry, and human being.

These achievements had prompted an astute reporter for the Washington, D.C. Post (the paper that goes down

in history for its investigative reporting on Watergate), Hollis I. West, to dig into Brown's career, to interview those who knew him or knew about him, and to tape-record an interview at Brown's home in Washington. His findings were published in the Post in 1969 -- before the degrees.

West talked with Dr. Kenneth Clarke, "the psychologist whose theories lie behind the 1954 Supreme Court school desegregation decision," who said of Brown: "He opened my eyes to a lot of things -- the awe, the wonder, the fascination of human creativity." And Ossie Davis: "His teachings had a very liberating impact on me -- a black boy from Waycross, Georgia. He was a scholar, but Sterling was homey, Negro, grits and gravy."

Another former student of Brown's, Charles Campbell, now assistant professor of English at D.C. Teachers College, told West: "He was not only a good teacher but a good friend."

James Butcher, drama professor and colleague at Howard, asserted that Brown "was willing to go out and meet and talk with folk characters, and I don't mean in a condescending way."

Two of the poems by Sterling Brown heard in the recordings, "Uncle Joe" and "Parish Doctor" reveal, without calling attention to it, how simply Brown establishes relationships with people anywhere, any time.

"Visitors to Brown's home," remarked Hollie West, "were as likely to find him playing host to Leadbelly as Ralph Bunche." Reference to Brown's home - his living room and study are book-lined with an extraordinary collection of Americana, and recordings of jazz and folk music cram crannies and overflow into storage areas -- brings strong memories to any one who has been welcomed there. It's an "informal lyceum" where poets, students, graduates, writers, jazz musicians, actors, blues singers, playwrights come to listen, and to exchange ideas and observations. Its atmosphere has engendered more learning, exchange,

good humor and good fellowship than can be got from an entire semester of "quality education" on any certified campus.

Dr. Kenneth Clarke recalled that when Sterling Brown "talked about the blues, the poetry of the Negro or Negro culture, he was putting them in a context of the creativity of man." Ossie Davis' recollection is that Brown "was doing a black thing from a black point of view when it wasn't sylish...We have a tradition, a heritage, a straight line of thought, and Sterling is one of the progenitors -- still unable to count his children."

Career

Sterling A. Brown was born May 1, 1901, at Washington, D.C., the son of the Rev. Sterling Nelson Brown, a member of the city's Board of Education and early pastor of Lincoln Temple Congregational Church.

Brown attended the public schools of Washington and Dunbar High School; got an A.B. from Williams College, 1922 and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. At Harvard University, 1923, won his M.A. degree. This was followed later by graduate studies in English at Harvard, 1931-32.

Brown began his teaching career at Virginia Seminary and College, 1923-26; from there, went to Lincoln University in Missouri, 1926-28; to Fisk University, 1928 - 29; to Howard University in 1929, where he has taught from then to now.

Brown has also been visiting professor at Atlanta University for several summer sessions; at Vassar College, first semesters in 1945, 1946; at the University of Minnesota, summer, 1945; New School, spring, 1947; New York University, summer 1949, 1950; and at University of Illinois (Chicago Circle) summer 1967, 1968.

A complete bibliography of Brown's published works is too massive for inclusion in notes to recordings. But some require mention. "Negro Poetry and Drama" was first published in 1938, and "The Negro in American Fiction" appeared the same year. Brown was senior writer and editor of "The Negro Caravan" (with Ulysses Lee and Arthur F. Davis) first published 1941. When "The Negro Caravan" was re-issued in 1969, Julius Lester wrote in the New York Times: "Few books acquire the status of legends, but this is one. It was first published in 1941, and the outbreak of the war caused it to be even more ignored than it would have been normally. However, it acquired a place in the lives of black intellectuals, and those able to acquire a copy congratulated themselves for being the recipients of one of the Lord's few modern miracles. At long last, it is once more available... "The Negro Caravan" is important not only for the works presented, but for the point of view it exemplifies."

Besides editing and shaping a point of view for "The Negro Caravan," Sterling Brown was contributing editor to "The Reader's Companion to World Literature." His other editorial services include many significant contributions: as Editor on Negro Affairs, Federal Writers Project (his participation in the work of the Federal Writers Project is discussed in Jere Mangione's "The Dream and the Deal"); as Staff Member, the Gunnar Myrdal Study ("An American Dilemma"); as Member, Committee on Negro Studies of American Council of Learned Societies (findings of this Committee were source materials which fed into many study disciplines, and are widely used); as Member, Editorial Board of The Crisis; as Member, Board of Directors of the American Folklore Society and the Institute of Jazz Studies. With Rayford W. Logan, Brown wrote the article on the American Negro in Encyclopedia Britannica.

In 1937 - 1938, Brown was awarded Guggenheim Fellowships. He became a Rosenwald Fellow in the fall of 1942.

He has contributed articles and reviews to Crisis, Esquire, Folk Say, Journal of Negro Education, Journal of Negro History, The Nation, The New Republic, Opportunity, Phylon, Poetry, Portfolio, The Record Changer, The South Today, Survey Graphic, and other periodicals.

Essays by Sterling Brown have appeared in numerous books, among them: Brown and Roucek, "One America, Our Racial and National Minorities"; Logan, "What the Negro Wants"; Bucklin Moon, "A Primer for White Folks"; Locke and Stern, "When People Meet"; Cromwell, Dykes, and Turner, "Readings from Negro Authors"; Watkins, "Anthology of Negro American Literature"; Gleason, "Jam Session"; Hughes and Bontemps, "The Book of Negro Folklore"; Logan, "The New Negro Thirty Years Afterward."

pp. 12a, 12b in table form (2 pp.) perhaps box with lines set apart. List of 16 Poems of Sterling Brown Read by Sterling A. Brown - Side, Band Numbers and Publications Sources, etc.

Poems

Sterling A. Brown's poems first began to be published in the early 1920's. They appeared in magazines and anthologies of the period; among them, James Weldon Johnson, "The Book of American Negro Poetry"; Cullen, "Carolina Dusk"; Nancy Cunard, "Negro"; Willard Thorpe, "A Southern Reader." An early essay on Brown's poetry by Alain Locke also appeared in "Negro." Early recognition also came from James Weldon Johnson who wrote of Brown as "one of the outstanding poets of the younger generation." This was in "The Book of Negro Poetry," first pub-

lished 1922, rev. and enl. 1931. Johnson also stated that "More than any other American poet he has made thematic use of the Negro folk epics and ballads... He has perceived that one of the cardinal traits of Negro folk poetry is terseness -- a trait at complete variance with the general idea of Negro diffuseness -- and strictly adhered to it. He has, in fact, done the only thing that justifies the individual artist in taking material of this sort; he has worked it into original and genuine poetry."

Sterling Brown's first book of poems, "Southern Road," was published by Harcourt, Brace in 1932. Four of the poems included in this record of Brown's readings are from that book - - "Sporting Beasley" (Side 1, Band 2); "Sam Smiley" (Side 1, Band 3); "After Winter" (Side 1, Band 4); and "Childrens Children" (Side 1, Band 6).

The small first printing of "Southern Road" was soon exhausted, and those who made decisions at Harcourt, Brace never ordered a second. This writer was employed at Harcourt, Brace from 1936 through October, 1939, was among those who protested the book's going out of print, and can remember the answer that came back from the head of the sales department: "It wouldn't pay us." Possibly not.

Against this, it is good to be able to write that a new edition of "Southern Road" is being published by The Beacon Press and that Sterling Stuckey, a young historian who teaches at Northwestern and is one of the founders of the Armistad Society, will be adding commentary and seeing it through the press.

But a question that remains unanswered is why 41 years had to go by between first and second printings of "Southern Road," especially in the

light (or is it those lightning bugs again?) of current assessments of Brown's stature? For example, Robert Bone of Teachers College at Columbia University wrote in his 1968 Preface to the new edition of "Negro Poetry and Drama and the Negro in American Fiction" of Brown's "firm commitment to Negro folk material. For it is this material that is most vulnerable to raids and depredations by the whites. To guard and cherish and interpret his own folk tradition thus became the cornerstone of Brown's career." "Southern Road" is living testament to that commitment. And Bone summarizes: "Sterling Brown belongs to a generation of Negro literary scholars who must not be forgotten by the young...This generation of scholars kept the faith when blackness was unfashionable, and on their pioneering efforts all future scholarship in the field of Afro-American studies will be compelled to build."

The young have not forgotten. In 1966, the Sterling Brown Renaissance was given encouragement by John Henrik Clarke when he wrote of Brown as "the dean of American Negro poets."

Young writers like Mollie West began picking up the threads of Brown's career. Excerpts have been quoted above from the 1969 interview that resulted from West's inquiries. His personal reaction to Brown's poetry appears in the same piece. It is interesting because he is not a professional or academic poetry critic, or anthologist, but a young man reporting how something has hit him.

"Brown's poetry is simple and direct," wrote West. "He frequently writes of death, but his work contains a broad strain of optimism. At a time when Negro poets had discarded conventional dialect, Brown went back to black folk verse for his inspiration. He absorbed its spirit but did not parrot its language. He deepened the meaning of Negro folk symbols and stamped his personal imprint on the black literary tradition."

With new interest in Brown's poetry manifested by members of a younger generation, so much has been published that it has become increasingly difficult to keep track of where Brown can be found, and in whose anthologies. These are some of the books in which poems and essays have appeared from the 1960's until now: John Henrik Clarke, "American Negro Short Stories," Harlem, U.S.A."; Abraham Chapman, "Black Voices"; James Emanuel and Theodore Gross, "Dark Symphony"; Addison Gayle, "Black Expression"; Jules Chametsky and Sidney Kaplan, "Black and White in American Culture"; Robert Hayden, "Kaleidoscope"; Arthur P. Davis and J. Saunders Redding, "Cavalcade"; Richard Long and Eugenia Collier, "Afro-American Writings," An Anthology of Prose and Poetry; Rosey E. Pool, "Beyond the Blues"; Houston Baker, Jr., "Black Literature in America"; Austin, Fenderson and Nelson, "The Black Man and the Promise of America"; Adams, Conn and Slepian, "Afro-American Literature"; June Jordan, "Soulscript"; Dudley Randall, "The Black Poets"; Bernard Bell, "Modern and Contemporary Afro-American Poetry"; Alan Dundes, "Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel"; Richard Alcarean, "Richard Wright's Native Son, A Critical Handbook"; Lidsay Patterson, "Anthology of the American Negro in the Theatre"; Charles L. James, "From the Roots"; Helen White and Redding S. Sugg, Jr., "From the Mountain."

Recent criticism is by Stephen Henderson, whose "Understanding The New Black Poetry" includes several of Brown's poems, and a commentary. Others with commentary are Huggins, "The Harlem Renaissance," and S.P. Fullinwider, "The Mind and Mood of Black America."

Foreign anthologies are beginning to pick up on Brown's poems; he is represented in Sweden, the U.S.S.R., Chile, Czechoslovakia, and Japan. Two recent works -- Janheinz Jahn, "Neo-African Literature", (Germany) and Jean Wagner, "Les Poètes Nègres des Etats-Unis" have frequent citations and commentary. The French work has recently been translated.

With a whole generation coming in for a closer look at Brown's poetry one can wonder why it didn't happen earlier. It seems likely that academicians, historians,

and professional critics will find challenging answers. It would be interesting to know, for example, exactly why a poem like "Strong Men," first published 1941, went virtually unnoticed until it began to re-circulate in the early 1960's. Now it can be heard and found everywhere. But the words were there all along, and they haven't changed.

NOTE: Fifteen of the sixteen poems were read by Sterling Brown and recorded in the Ira Aldridge Theatre at Howard University in Washington, D.C. The readings were acknowledgment of an evening of tribute to Sterling Brown by poets, fellow teachers, artists, authors, scholars and friends from all over the world. As conclusion to these recordings, Brown has selected a later recording of "Strong Men" taped July 27, 1973 at The Federal Twist, Stockton, New Jersey. (Side 2, Band 16).

Moses Asch, Director of Folkways, was first to record Sterling Brown's readings of his poems at this writer's suggestion. The resulting Folkways Record FL 9790 is still in print. Brown has also recorded at the Library of Congress in 1973. Bands 1 through 14, and 16, were recorded by Frederic Ramsey, Jr. Band 15, "The Ballad of Joe Meek," was recorded by Otto McLarrin. On Side 1, Band 1, Brown is accompanied by pianist, composer and singer Calvin Bostic.

F.R. Jr.

16 POEMS OF STERLING A. BROWN READ BY STERLING
A. BROWN, Folkways LP

Side One

- | Title | Publications Sources, Anthologies,
Author's Ms. |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. The Long Track Blues | Author's ms. (?) |
| 2. Sporting Beasley | "Southern Road," Poems by Sterling
A. Brown, Harcourt, Brace, New York,
1932 |
| 3. Sam Smiley | "Southern Road," as above |
| 4. After Winter | "Southern Road," as above; and
"This Generation," Anderson &
Walton, n.p., n.d.
"Soulscript," June Jordan, Double-
day, N.Y. 1970
MGM Recording: "A Hand is on the
Gate" (19 ?) |
| 5. Conjured | (Author's ms.?) |
| 6. Children's Children | "Southern Road," as above |
| 7. Putting on Dog | Folkways FL 9790, N.Y., recorded
1946 |
| 8. Uncle Joe | (Author's ms.?) |
| 9. Parish Doctor | (Author's ms.?) |

Side Two

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 10. Clotile | (Author's ms.?) |
| 11. Old Lem | "The Negro Caravan," ed. Sterling
A. Brown (senior writer), Arthur
P. Davis, Ulysses Lee, The Dryden
Press, N.Y.C., c/r 1941; reissued
Arno Press & The New York Times,
N.Y.C., 1969. "This Generation," |

Anderson & Walton, as above. "I Am
the Darker Brother," An Anthology
of Modern Poems by Black Americans,
Adoff, Arnold, Macmillan, N.Y.C.,
1968. "3000 Years of Black Poetry."
ed. Lomax, Abdul, Dodd, Mead, &
Co., N.Y.C., 1970. Folkways FL
9790, as above

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 12. Break of Day | "Negro Caravan," as above; "This
Generation," as above. Folkways
LP FL 9790, as above |
| 13. Transfer | "This Generation," as above |
| 14. Remembering Nat
Turner | "Black Voices," An Anthology
of Afro-American Literature, ed.
Abraham Chapman, New American
Library, New York, 1968. "Afro-
American Poetry," ed. Bell,
Bernard, n.p., n.d. |
| 15. The Ballad of
Joe Meek | "Black Voices," as above. "Afro-
American Poetry," as above.
"Harlem, U.S.A.," John Henrik
Clarke, Collier Books, New York.
n.d. (?) |
| 16. Strong Men | "Negro Caravan," as above. "Black
Voices," as above. "The Black Man
and the Promise of America," Austin,
Fenderson, and Nelson. "Afro-
American Writing," An Anthology
of Prose and Poetry, Long and
Colliers, New York University Press,
New York, 1972. |

Ed. Note: I am indebted to Eloise Y. Spicer, Class of
1961, Howard University Department of English,
for some of the bibliographic source data
which appears above. Her compilation, "The
Works of Sterling A. Brown" (duplicated at
Washington, D.C., n.d.), is a partial listing
which it is hoped she will expand.