

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FL 9797

LANGSTON HUGHES  
from Selected Poems

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# MARGARET WALKER

reads Poems by  
Langston Hughes  
& Margaret Walker

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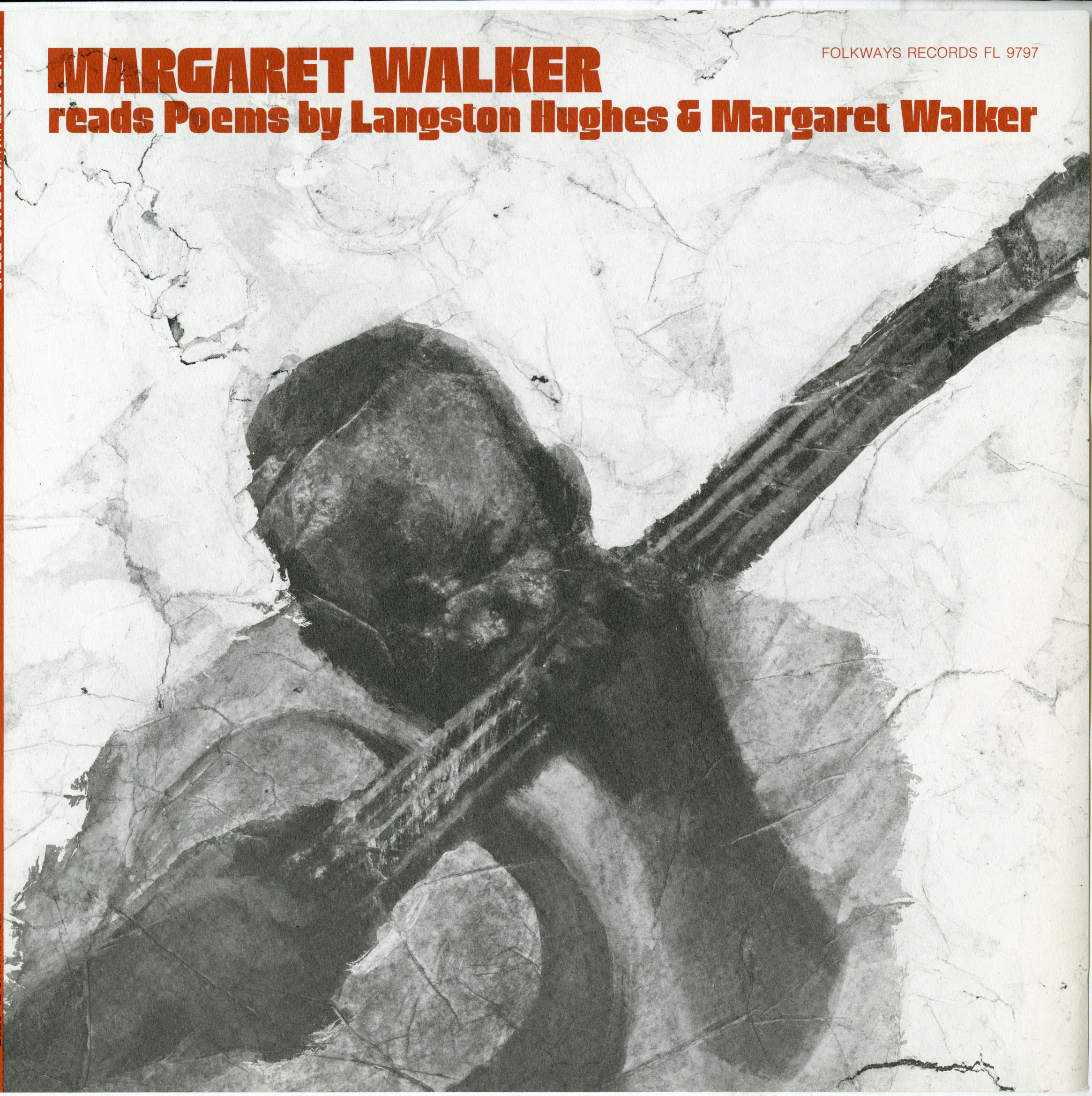
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# MARGARET WALKER

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## SELECTED POEMS

Of Langston Hughes  
Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1958

From "Madam To You"

### MADAM'S PAST HISTORY

My name is Johnson—  
Madam Alberta K.  
The Madam stands for business.  
I'm smart that way.

I had a  
HAIR-DRESSING PARLOR  
Before  
The depression put  
The prices lower.

Then I had a  
BARBECUE STAND  
Till I got mixed up  
With a no-good man.

Cause I had a insurance  
The WPA  
Said, We can't use you  
Wealthy that way.

I said,  
DON'T WORRY 'BOUT ME!  
Just like the song,  
You WPA folks take care of yourself—  
And I'll get along.

I do cooking,  
Day's work, too!  
Alberta K. Johnson—  
Madam to you.

Langston Hughes

### MADAM AND HER MADAM

I worked for a woman,  
She wasn't mean—  
But she had a twelve-room  
House to clean.

Had to get breakfast,  
Dinner, and supper, too—  
Then take care of her children  
When I got through.

Wash, iron, and scrub,  
Walk the dog around—  
It was too much,  
Nearly broke me down.

I said, Madam,  
Can it be  
You trying to make a  
Pack-horse out of me?

She opened her mouth.  
She cried, Oh, no!  
You know, Alberta,  
I love you so!

I said, Madam,  
That may be true—  
But I'll be dogged  
If I love you!

Langston Hughes

### MADAM'S CALLING CARD

I had some cards printed  
The other day.  
They cost me more  
Than I wanted to pay.

I told the man  
I wasn't no mint,  
But I hankered to see  
My name in print.

MADAM JOHNSON,  
ALBERTA K.  
He said, Your name looks good  
Madam'd that way.

Shall I use Old English  
Or a Roman letter?  
I said, Use American.  
American's better.

There's nothing foreign  
To my pedigree:  
Alberta K. Johnson—  
American that's me.

Langston Hughes

### MADAM AND THE RENT MAN

The rent man knocked.  
He said, Howdy-do?  
I said, What  
Can I do for you?  
He said, You know  
Your rent is due.

I said, Listen,  
Before I'd pay  
I'd go to Hades  
And rot away!

The sink is broke,  
The water don't run,  
And you ain't done a thing  
You promised to've done.

Back window's cracked,  
Kitchen floor squeaks,  
There's rats in the cellar,  
And the attic leaks.

He said, Madam,  
It's not up to me.  
I'm just the agent,  
Don't you see?

I said, Naturally,  
You pass the buck.  
If it's money you want  
You're out of luck.

He said, Madam,  
I ain't pleased!  
I said, Neither am I.

So we agrees!

Langston Hughes

### MADAM AND THE NUMBER WRITER

Number runner  
Come to my door.  
I had swore  
I wouldn't play no more.



He said, Madam,  
6-0-2  
Looks like a likely  
Hit for you.

I said, Last night,  
I dreamed 7-0-3.  
He said, That might  
Be a hit for me.

He played a dime,  
I played, too,  
Then we boxed 'em.  
Wouldn't you?

But the number that day  
Was 3-2-6—  
And we both was in  
The same old fix.

I said, I swear I  
Ain't gonna play no more  
Till I get over  
To the other shore—

Then I can play  
On them golden streets  
Where the number not only  
Comes out—but repeats!

The runner said, Madam,  
That's all very well—  
But suppose  
You goes to hell?

Langston Hughes  
MADAM AND THE PHONE BILL

You say I O.K.ed  
LONG DISTANCE?  
O.K.ed it when?  
My goodness, Central,  
That was then!

I'm mad and disgusted  
With that Negro now.  
I don't pay no REVERSED  
CHARGES nohow.

You say, I will pay it—  
Else you'll take out my phone?  
You better let  
My phone alone.

I didn't ask him  
To telephone me.  
Roscoe knows darn well  
LONG DISTANCE  
Ain't free.

If I ever catch him,  
Lawd, have pity!  
Calling me up  
From Kansas City

Just to say he loves me!  
I knowed that was so.  
Why didn't he tell me some'n  
I don't know?

For instance, what can  
Them other girls do  
That Alberta K. Johnson  
Can't do—and more, too?

What's that, Central?  
You say you don't care  
Nothing about my  
Private affair?

Well, even less about your  
PHONE BILL does I care!

Un-humm-m! . . . Yes!  
You say I gave my O.K.?  
Well, that O.K. you may keep—

But I sure ain't gonna pay!

Langston Hughes  
MADAM AND THE CHARITY CHILD

Once I adopted  
A little girl child.  
She grew up and got ruint,  
Nearly drove me wild.

Then I adopted  
A little boy.  
He used a switch-blade  
For a toy.

What makes these charity  
Children so bad?  
Ain't had no luck  
With none I had.

Poor little things,  
Born behind the 8-rock,  
With parents that don't even  
Stop to take stock.

The county won't pay me  
But a few bucks a week.  
Can't raise no child on that,  
So to speak.

And the lady from the  
Juvenile Court  
Always coming around  
Wanting a report.

Last time I told her,  
Report, my eye!  
Things is bad—  
You figure out why!

Langston Hughes  
MADAM AND THE FORTUNE TELLER

Fortune teller looked in my hand.  
Fortune teller said,  
Madam, It's just good luck  
You ain't dead.

Fortune teller squeeze my hand.  
She squinted up her eyers.  
Fortune teller said,  
Madam, you ain't wise.

I said, Please explain to me  
What you mean by that?  
She said, You must recognize  
Where your fortune's at.

I said, Madam, tell me—  
For she was Madam, too—  
Where is my fortune at?  
I'll pay some mind to you.

She said, Your fortune, honey,  
Lies right in yourself.  
You ain't gonna find it  
On nobody else's shelf.

I said, What man you're talking 'bout?  
She said, Madam! Be calm—  
For one more dollar and a half,  
I'll read your other palm.

Langston Hughes  
MADAM AND THE WRONG VISITOR

A man knocked three times.  
I never seen him before.  
He said, Are you Madam?  
I said, What's the score?

He said, I reckon  
You don't know my name,  
But I've come to call  
On you just the same.

I stepped back  
Like he had a charm.  
He said, I really  
Don't mean no harm.

I'm just Old Death  
And I thought I might  
Pay you a visit  
Before night.



He said, You're Johnson—  
Madam Alberta K.?  
I said, Yes—but Alberta  
Ain't goin' with you today!

No sooner had I told him  
Than I awoke.  
The doctor said, Madam,  
Your fever's broke—

Nurse, put her on a diet,  
And buy her some chicken.  
I said, Better buy two—  
Cause I'm still here kickin'!

Langston Hughes

#### MADAM AND THE MINISTER

Reverend Butler came by  
My house last week.  
He said, Have you got  
A little time to speak?

He said, I am interested  
In your soul.  
Has it been saved,  
Or is your heart stone-cold?

I said, Reverend,  
I'll have you know  
I was baptized  
Long ago.

He said, What have you  
Done since then?  
I said, None of your  
Business, friend.

He said, Sister  
Have you back-slid?  
I said, It felt good—  
If I did!

He said, Sister,  
Come time to die,  
The Lord will surely  
Ask you why!  
I'm gonna pray  
For you!  
Goodbye!

I felt kinder sorry  
I talked that way  
After Rev. Butler  
Went away—  
So I ain't in no mood  
For sin today.

Langston Hughes  
MADAM AND HER MIGHT-HAVE-BEEN

I had two husbands.  
I could of had three—  
But my Might-Have-Been  
Was too good for me.

When you grow up the hard way  
Sometimes you don't know  
What's too good to be true,  
Just might be so.

He worked all the time,  
Spent his money on me—  
First time in my life  
I had anything free.

I said, Do you love me?  
Or am I mistaken?  
You're always giving  
And never taking.

He said, Madam, I swear  
All I want is you.  
Right then and there  
I knowed we was through!

I told him, Jackson,  
You better leave—  
You got some'n else  
Up your sleeve:

When you think you got bread  
It's always a stone—  
Nobody loves nobody  
For yourself alone.

He said, In me  
You've got no trust.  
I said, I don't want  
My heart to bust.

Langston Hughes

#### MADAM AND THE CENSUS MAN

The census man,  
The day he came round,  
Wanted my name  
To put it down.

I said, JOHNSON,  
ALBERTA K.  
But he hated to write  
The K that way.

He said, What  
Does K stand for?  
I said, K—  
And nothing more.

He said, I'm gonna put it  
K—A—Y.  
I said, If you do,  
You lie.

My mother christened me  
ALBERTA K.  
You leave my name  
Just that way!

He said, Mrs.,  
(With a snort)  
Just a K  
Makes your name too short.

I said, I don't  
Give a damn!  
Leave me and my name  
Just like I am!

Futhermore, rub out  
That MRS., too—  
I'll have you know  
I'm Madam to you!

Langston Hughes

#### From Montage of a Dream Deferred:

##### BALLAD OF THE LANDLORD

Landlord, landlord,  
My roof has sprung a leak.  
Don't you 'member I told you about it  
Way last week?

Landlord, landlord,  
These steps is broken down.  
When you come up yourself  
It's a wonder you don't fall down.

Ten Bucks you say I owe you?  
Ten Bucks you say is due?  
Well, that's Ten Bucks more'n I'll pay you  
Till you fix this house up new.

What? You gonna get eviction orders?  
You gonna cut off my heat?  
You gonna take my furniture and  
Throw it in the street?

Um-huh! You talking high and mighty.  
Talk on—till you get through.  
You ain't gonna be able to say a word  
If I land my fist on you.

Police! Police!  
Come and get this man!  
He's trying to ruin the government  
And overturn the land!



Copper's whistle!  
Patrol bell!  
Arrest.

## HARLEM

What happens to a dream deferred?

Precinct Station.  
Iron cell.  
Headlines in press:

Does it dry up  
like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore—  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over—  
like a syrupy sweet?

MAN THREATENS LANDLORD  
.....

TENANT HELD NO BAIL  
.....

Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.

JUDGE GIVES NEGRO 90 DAYS  
IN COUNTY JAIL  
.....

Or does it explode?

FOR MY PEOPLE  
By Margaret Walker  
Yale University Press. New Haven, 1942

## DARK BLOOD

There were bizarre beginnings in old lands for the making  
of me. There were sugar sands and islands of fern  
and pearl, palm jungles and stretches of a never-  
ending sea.

There were the wooing nights of tropical lands and the cool  
discretion of flowering plains between two stalwart  
hills. They nurtured my coming with wanderlust. I  
sucked fevers of adventure through my veins with my  
mother's milk.

Someday I shall go to the tropical lands of my birth, to the  
coasts of continents and the tiny wharves of island  
shores. I shall roam the Balkans and the hot lanes of  
Africa and Asia. I shall stand on mountain tops and  
gaze on fertile homes below.

And when I return to Mobile I shall go by the way of Panama  
and Bocas del Toro to the littered streets and the one-  
room shacks of my old poverty, and blazing suns of  
other lands may struggle then to reconcile the pride  
and pain in me.

## SOUTHERN SONG

I want my body bathed again by southern suns, my soul  
reclaimed again from southern land. I want to rest  
again in southern fields, in grass and hay and clover  
bloom; to lay my hand again upon the clay baked by  
a southern sun, to touch the rain-soaked earth and  
smell the smell of soil.

I want my rest unbroken in the fields of southern earth;  
freedom to watch the corn wave silver in the sun and  
mark the splashing of a brook, a pond with ducks and  
frogs and count the clouds.

I want no mobs to wrench me from my southern rest; no  
forms to take me in the night and burn my shack and  
make for me a nightmare full of oil and flame.

I want my careless song to strike no minor key; no fiend to  
stand between my body's southern song—the fusion  
of the South, my body's song and me.

## SORROW HOME

My roots are deep in southern life; deeper than John Brown  
or Nat Turner or Robert Lee. I was sired and weaned  
in a tropic world. The palm tree and banana leaf,  
mango and cocoanut, breadfruit and rubber trees know  
me.

Warm skies and gulf blue streams are in my blood. I belong  
with the smell of fresh pine, with the trail of coon,  
and the spring growth of wild onion.

I am no hot-house bulb to be reared in steam-heated flats  
with the music of "L" and subway in my ears, walled  
in by steel and wood and brick far from the sky.

I want the cotton fields, tobacco and the cane. I want to  
walk along with sacks of seed to drop in fallow  
ground. Restless music is in my heart and I am eager  
to be gone.

O Southland, sorrow home, melody beating in my bone and  
blood! How long will the Klan of hate, the hounds  
and the chain gangs keep me from my own?

Margaret Walker

## DELTA

### I

I am a child of the valley.  
Mud and muck and misery of lowlands  
are on thin tracks of my feet.  
Damp draughts of mist and fog hovering over valleys  
are on my feverish breath.  
Red clay from feet of beasts colors my mouth  
and there is blood on my tongue.

I go up and down and through this valley  
and my heart bleeds with my blood here in the valley.  
My heart bleeds for our fate.  
I turn to each stick and stone, marking them for my own;  
here where muddy water flows at our shanty door  
and levees stand like a swollen bump on our backyard.



I watch rivulets flow  
trickling into one great river  
running through little towns  
through swampy thickets and smoky cities  
through fields of rice and marshes  
where the marsh hen comes to stand  
and buzzards draw thin blue streaks against evening sky.  
I listen to crooning of familiar lullabies;  
the honky-tonks are open and the blues are ringing far.  
In cities a thousand red lamps glow,  
but the lights fail to stir me  
and the music cannot lift me  
and my despair only deepens with the wailing  
of a million voices strong.

O valley of my moaning brothers!  
Valley of my sorrowing sisters!  
Valley of lost forgotten men.  
O hunted desperate people  
stricken and silently submissive  
seeking yet sullen ones!  
If only from this valley we might rise with song!  
With singing that is ours.

## II

Here in this valley of cotton and cane and banana wharves  
we labor.  
Our mothers and fathers labored before us  
here in this low valley.

High above us and round about us stand high mountains  
rise the towering snow-capped mountains  
while we are beaten and broken and bowed  
here in this dark valley.

The river passes us by.  
Boats slip by on the edge of horizons.  
Daily we fill boats with cargoes of our need  
and send them out to sea.

Orange and plantain and cotton grow  
here in this wide valley.  
Wood fern and sour grass and wild onion grow  
here in this sweet valley.

We tend the crop and gather the harvest  
but not for ourselves do we labor,  
not for ourselves do we sweat and starve and spend  
under these mountains we dare not claim,  
here on this earth we dare not claim,  
here by this river we dare not claim.  
Yet we are an age of years in this valley;  
yet we are bound till death to this valley.

Nights in the valley are full of haunting murmurings  
of our musical prayers  
of our rhythmical loving  
of our fumbling thinking aloud.  
Nights in the houses of our miserable poor  
are wakeful and tormenting,

for out of a deep slumber we are 'roused  
to our brother who is ill  
and our sister who is ravished  
and our mother who is starving.  
Out of a deep slumber truth rides upon us  
and we wonder why we are helpless  
and we wonder why we are dumb.  
Out of a deep slumber truth rides upon us  
and makes us restless and wakeful  
and full of a hundred unfulfilled dreams of today;  
our blood eats through our veins with the terrible  
destruction of radium in our bones and rebellion in our brains  
and we wish no longer to rest.

## III

Now burst the dams of years  
and winter snows melt with an onrush of a turbulent spring.  
Now rises sap in slumbering elms  
and floods overwhelm us  
here in this low valley.  
Here there is a thundering sound in our ears.  
All the day we are disturbed;  
nothing ever moved our valley more.  
The cannons boom in our brains  
and there is a dawning understanding  
in the valleys of our spirits;  
there is a crystalline hope  
there is a new way to be worn and a path to be broken  
from the past.

Into our troubled living flows the valley  
flooding our lives with a passion for freedom.  
Our silence is broken in twain  
even as brush is broken before terrible rain  
even as pines rush in paths of hurricanes.  
Our blood rises and bursts in great heart spasms  
hungering down through valleys in pain  
and the storm begins.  
We are dazed in wonder and caught in the downpour.  
Danger and death stalk the valley.  
Robbers and murderers rape the valley  
taking cabins and children from us

Killing wives and sweethearts before us  
seeking to threaten us out of this valley.

Then with a longing dearer than breathing  
love for the valley arises within us  
love to possess and thrive in this valley  
love to possess our vineyards and pastures  
our orchards and cattle  
our harvest of cotton, tobacco, and cane.  
Love overwhelms our living with longing  
strengthening flesh and blood within us  
banding the iron of our muscles with anger  
making us men in the fields we have tended  
standing defending the land we have rendered  
rich and abiding and heavy with plenty.



We with our blood have watered these fields  
 and they belong to us.  
 Valleys and dust of our bodies are blood brothers  
 and they belong to us:  
 the long golden grain for bread  
 and the ripe purple fruit for wine  
 the hills beyond for peace  
 and the grass beneath for rest  
 the music in the wind for us  
 the nights for loving  
 the days for living  
 and the circling lines in the sky  
 for dreams.

We are like the sensitive Spring  
 walking valleys like a slim young girl  
 full breasted and precious limbed  
 and carrying on our lips the kiss of the world.  
 Only the naked arm of Time  
 can measure the ground we know  
 and thresh the air we breathe.  
 Neither earth nor star nor water's host  
 can sever us from our life to be  
 for we are beyond your reach O mighty winnowing flail!  
 infinite and free!

FOR MY PEOPLE  
 By Margaret Walker  
 Yale University Press, 1942

Poems by Margaret Walker - Read by Miss Walker:

#### MOLLY MEANS

Old Molly Means was a hag and a witch;  
 Chile of the devil, the dark, and sitch.  
 Her heavy hair hung thick in ropes  
 And her blazing eyes was black as pitch.  
 Imp at three and wench at 'leben  
 She counted her husbands to the number seben.  
 O Molly, Molly, Molly Means  
 There goes the ghost of Molly Means.

Some say she was born with a veil on her face  
 So she could look through unnatchal space  
 Through the future and through the past  
 And charm a body or an evil place  
 And every man could well despise  
 The evil look in her coal black eyes.  
 Old Molly, Molly, Molly Means  
 Dark is the ghost of Molly Means.

And when the tale begun to spread  
 Of evil and of holy dread:  
 Her black-hand arts and her evil powers  
 How she cast her spells and called the dead,  
 The younguns was afraid at night  
 And the farmers feared their crops would blight.  
 Old Molly, Molly, Molly Means  
 Cold is the ghost of Molly Means.

Then one dark day she put a spell  
 On a young gal-bride just come to dwell  
 In the lane just down from Molly's shack  
 And when her husband come riding back  
 His wife was barking like a dog  
 And on all fours like a common hog.  
 O Molly, Molly, Molly Means  
 Where is the ghost of Molly Means?

The neighbors come and they went away  
 And said she'd die before break of day  
 But her husband held her in his arms  
 And swore he'd break the wicked charms;  
 He'd search all up and down the land  
 And turn the spell on Molly's hand.  
 O Molly, Molly, Molly Means  
 Sharp is the ghost of Molly Means.

So he rode all day and he rode all night  
 And at the dawn he come in sight  
 Of a man who said he could move the spell  
 And cause the awful thing to dwell  
 On Molly Means, to bark and bleed  
 Till she died at the hands of her evil deed.  
 Old Molly, Molly, Molly Means  
 This is the ghost of Molly Means.

Sometimes at night through the shadowy trees  
 She rides along on a winter breeze.  
 You can hear her holler and whine and cry.  
 Her voice is thin and her moan is high,  
 And her crackling laugh or her barking cold  
 Bring terror to the young and old.  
 O Molly, Molly, Molly Means  
 Lean is the ghost of Molly Means.

#### BAD-MAN STAGOLEE\*

That Stagolee was an all-right lad  
 Till he killed a cop and turned out bad,  
 Though some do say to this very day  
 He killed more'n one 'fore he killed that 'fay.  
 But anyhow the tale ain't new  
 How Stagolee just up and slew  
 A big policeman on 'leventh street  
 And all he knowed was tweet-tweet-tweet.  
 Oh I 'speck he'd done some too-bad dirt  
 Wid dat blade he wore unnerneaf his shirt

And it ain't been said, but he coulda had  
 A dirk in his pocket 'cause he sho was bad.  
 But one thing's certain and two things's sho  
 His bullets made holes no doc could cyo.  
 And that there cop was good and done  
 When he met Stagolee and that blue boy's gun.  
 But the funniest thing about that job  
 Was he never got caught by no mob  
 And he missed the lynching meant for his hide  
 'Cause nobody knows how Stagolee died.



Bad-man Stagolee ain't no more  
But his ghost still walks up and down the shore  
Of Old Man River round New Orleans  
With her gumbo, rice, and good red beans!

#### POPPA CHICKEN

Poppa was a sugah daddy  
Pimping in his prime;  
All the gals for miles around  
Walked to Poppa's time.

Poppa Chicken owned the town,  
Give his women hell;  
All the gals on Poppa's time  
Said that he was swell.

Poppa's face was long and black;  
Poppa's grin was broad.  
When Poppa Chicken walked the streets  
The gals cried Lawdy! Lawd!

Poppa Chicken made his gals  
Toe his special line:  
"Treat 'em rough and make 'em say  
Poppa Chicken's fine!"

Poppa Chicken toted guns;  
Poppa wore a knife.

One night Poppa shot a guy  
Threat'ning Poppa's life.

Poppa done his time in jail  
Though he got off light;  
Bought his pardon in a year;  
Come back out in might.

Poppa walked the streets this time,  
Gals around his neck.  
And everybody said the jail  
Hurt him nary speck.

Poppa smoked his long cigars—  
Special Poppa brands—  
Rocks all glist'ning in his tie;  
On his long black hands.

Poppa lived without a fear;  
Walked without a rod.  
Poppa cussed the coppers out;  
Talked like he was God.

Poppa met a pretty gal;  
Heard her name was Rose;  
Took one look at her and soon  
Bought her pretty clothes.

One night she was in his arms,  
In walked her man Joe.

All he done was look and say,  
"Poppa's got to go."

Poppa Chicken still is hot  
Though he's old and gray,  
Walking round here with his gals  
Pimping every day.

Margaret Walker

KISSIE LEE

Toughest gal I ever did see  
Was a gal by the name of Kissie Lee;  
The toughest gal God ever made  
And she drew a dirty, wicked blade.

Now this here gal warn't always tough  
Nobody dreamed she'd turn out rough  
But her Gramma Mamie had the name  
Of being the town's sin and shame.

When Kissie Lee was young and good  
Didn't nobody treat her like they should  
Allus gettin' beat by a no-good shine  
An' allus quick to cry and whine.

Till her Gramma said, "Now listen to me,  
I'm tiahed of yoah whinin', Kissie Lee.  
People don't never treat you right,  
An' you allus scrappin' or in a fight.

"Whin I was a gal wasn't no soul  
Could do me wrong an' still stay whole.  
Ah got me a razor to talk for me  
An' aftah that they let me be."

Well Kissie Lee took her advice  
And after that she didn't speak twice  
'Cause when she learned to stab and run  
She got herself a little gun.

And from that time that gal was mean,  
Meanest mama you ever seen.  
She could hold her likker and hold her man  
And she went thoo life jus' raisin' san'.

One night she walked in Jim's saloon  
And seen a guy what spoke too soon;  
He done her dirt long time ago  
When she was good and feeling low.

Kissie bought her drink and she paid her dime  
Watchin' this guy what beat her time  
And he was making for the outside door  
When Kissie shot him to the floor.

Not a word she spoke but she switched her blade  
And flashing that lil ole baby paid;  
Evvy livin' guy got out of her way  
Because Kissie Lee was drawin' her pay.

She could shoot glass doors offa the hinges,  
She could take herself on the wildest binges.  
And she died with her boots on switching blades  
On Talladega Mountain in the likker raids.

Margaret Walker

YALLUH HAMMUH

Old Yalluh Hammuh were a guy  
I knowed long time ago.  
I seen him pile the san'bags high  
An' holler back fuh moah.

I seen him come on inta town  
Many a Saddy night  
Ridin' high with his jive  
An' clownin' leff an' right.

They wasn't no sheriffs near or far  
Would dare to 'rest dat man;  
An' las' I heerd they wanted him  
For two-t'ree county cans.

Old Yalluh Hammuh lay his jive  
On mens on every side  
And when it come to women folks  
His fame was far and wide.

Now Yalluh Hammuh was so bad  
He killed his Maw of fright  
He swaggered through the county seat  
All full of lip and might.

But Yalluh Hammuh met his match  
One Saddy night, they say,  
He come in town an' run into  
Pick-Ankle's gal named May.

Pick-Ankle now was long and lean  
An' some say he was mean,  
An' if you touched his brown gal, May,  
His eyes turned fairly green.

Well this time Yalluh Hammuh's jive  
Went to town wid his pay;  
He went on in a lil shindig  
An' spied Pick-Ankle's May.

He ax huh to dance; she excep;  
And then he went to town.  
The crowd went wild till here come Pick  
And then they quieted down.

But Yalluh Hammuh don't ketch on  
Ole May was having fun  
Till Pick comes up and calls huh names  
Then Yalluh drewed his gun.



The lights went out and womens screamed  
And then they fit away.  
When Yalluh Hammuh come to hisself  
May was gone with his pay.

#### TWO-GUN BUSTER AND TRIGGER SLIM

Two-Gun Buster was a railroad han'  
Splittin' ties in the backwoods lan'  
Cuttin' logs and layin' down rails,  
Blazin' out the iron horse trails.

Biggest bluff an' cockiest cuss  
Two-Gun never had no fuss  
'Cause all the hands was frightened dead

At Two-Gun's handy way with lead.

Two-Gun Buster got his fame  
Same sorter way he got his name  
Carryin' them two guns in his ves'  
An- scarin' all the mens at mess.

He had a belly he couldn't fill  
With what the cook had on the bill  
An' wasn't no second plates allowed  
So Two-Gun had the mens all cowed.

An' when he finished with his grub  
He made the rest fill up his tub.  
He riz and opened up his ves'  
An' walked the tables in the mess.

The mens drawed back an' give in to him  
Until the Lil Lad cured his whim  
'Cause then when Two-Gun started his stuff  
That Lil Lad just called his bluff.

Lil Lad looked as green as grass  
But he had nerve like brazen brass;  
He split them ties like kin'lin' wood.  
He sho did earn his plate of food.

At supper time he looked around  
When suddenly there warnt a sound  
Two-Gun Buster was eatin' a bait  
Comin' on down to Lil Lad's plate.

He stuck his fork in Lil Lad's meat  
An' Lil Lad rose right to his feet  
He grabbed old Two-Gun in a vise  
An' axed his meanin' in that wise.

Two-Gun went to draw his steel  
But Lil Lad shot him in a reel  
Sprawlin' on the mess hall floor  
An' all the mens falls out the door.

Lil Lad finish his dinner plate  
An' walks on through the camp's big gate;  
Don't say no word, an' stayed away;  
He didn't come back to draw his pay.

But from that time they made a claim  
That they had heerd of him  
So they give the Lil Lad a name  
And they called him Trigger Slim.

#### TEACHER Margaret Walker

The Teacher was a bad man  
Not a milky-mild  
Student with a book or rule  
Punishing a child.

Teacher was a pimp, a rake;  
Teacher was a card.  
Teacher had a gambling den  
Down on St. Girod.

Teacher liked his liquor strong;  
Drank his dry gin straight.  
Teacher hung around the Tracks  
Catching juicy bait.

Teacher was as black as Aces  
Of a brand new spade.  
Teacher's lust included all  
Women ever made.

Teacher's women drove him nuts;  
Led him such a chase  
He was stealing extra cash  
For each pretty face.

Women scarred his upper lip;  
Nearly tore his head  
Off his shoulders with a gun  
Kept his eyes blood-red.

Women sent him to his doom.  
Women set the trap.  
Teacher was a bad, bold man  
Lawd, but such a sap!

#### Margaret Walker

##### GUS, THE LINEMAN

Gus, the lineman,  
Route forty-nine;  
Our smartest guy  
Had a smart line.

He had nine lives  
And lived them all.  
He climbed the trees  
From Fall to Fall.

He handled juice  
Whistling a tune;  
Chewed tobacco  
And drank bad moon . . .

Once on his job  
Pains in his side  
Said call the doc  
Or take a ride.

And in the Ward  
They said his side  
Was so bad off  
He should have died.

But Gus come through  
Living the Life  
Back on the job  
'Spite of that knife.

The juice went wild  
And great big chunks  
Of flesh caught fire  
And fell in hunks.

But Gus outlived  
That little fire.  
He soon was back  
Handling live wire.

It got around  
Gus could not die  
He'd lived through death  
And come through fire.

One Saddy night  
Old Gus got high  
Drinking moonshine  
And good old Rye.

He staggered home  
In bitch-black night  
And swayed along  
From left to right.

He fell into  
A little crick  
And went out dead  
Just like a brick.

They found him drowned  
Face in the stream  
A cup of water  
And his drunk dream.

And thus went down  
A mighty guy—  
Gus, the lineman,  
Who could not die.

Margaret Walker

#### LONG JOHN NELSON AND SWEETIE PIE

Long John Nelson and Sweetie Pie  
Lived together on Center Street.  
Long John was a mellow fellow  
And Sweetie Pie was fat and sweet.

Long John Nelson had been her man  
Long before this story began;  
Sweetie cooked on the Avenue.  
Long John's loving was all he'd do.

When Sweetie Pie came home at night  
She brought his grub and fed him well  
Then she would fuss and pick a fight  
Till he beat her and gave her hell.

She would cuss and scream, call him black  
Triffin' man git outa my sight;  
Then she would love him half the night  
And when he'd leave she'd beg him back.

Till a yellow gal came to town  
With coal black hair and bright blue gown  
And she took Long John clean away  
From Sweetie Pie one awful day.

Sweetie begged him to please come back  
But Long John said, "I'm gone to stay."  
Then Sweetie Pie would moan and cry  
And sing the blues both night and day:

"Long John, Baby, if you'll come back  
I won't never call you black;  
I'll love you long and love you true  
And I don't care what else you do."

But Long John said, "I'm really through."  
They're still apart this very day.  
When Long John got a job to do  
Sweetie got sick and wasted away.

Then after she had tried and tried  
One day Sweetie just up and died.  
Then Long John went and quit his job  
And up and left his yellow bride.

#### BIG JOHN HENRY

This here's a tale of a sho-nuff man  
Whut lived one time in the delta lan'.  
His hand was big as a hog's fat ham  
And he useta work for Uncle Sam.  
His gums was blue, his voice was mellow  
And he talked to mules, fellow to fellow.  
The day he was born in the Mississippi bottom  
He made a meal on buttermilk and sorghum  
A mess o' peas and a bait o' tunnips  
And when he finished he smacked his lips  
And went outside to help pick cotton.  
And he grewed up taller than a six-foot shooter  
Skinnin' mules and catchin' barracuda  
And stronger than a team of oxen  
And he even could beat the champion boxin'  
An' ain't nary man in Dixie's forgotten  
How he could raise two bales of cotton  
While one hand anchored down the steamboat.  
Oh, they ain't no tale was ever wrote  
'Bout Big John Henry that could start to tell  
All the things that Big Boy knowed so well:  
How he learned to whistle from the whippoorwills,  
And turned the wheels whut ran the mills;  
How the witches taught him how to cunjer,  
And cyo the colic and ride the thunder;  
And how he made friends with a long lean houn'  
Sayin', "It's jes' John Henry a-giftn' 'roun'."  
But a ten-poun' hammer done ki-ilt John Henry  
Yeah, a ten-poun' hammer ki-ilt John Henry,  
Bust him open, wide Lawd!  
Draped him ovah, wide Lawd!  
Po' John Henry, he cold and dead.