

BETWEEN THE COVERS RARE BOOKS

112 Nicholson Rd, Gloucester City, NJ 08030 (856) 456-8008 betweenthecovers.com

Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes

Five Playscripts, with Related Ephemera from the Author's Estate

\$20,000



A collection of five playscripts from the poet Countee Cullen, a central figure of the Harlem Renaissance, which includes two variant typescripts each for his unproduced plays *The Medea of Euripides* and *Heaven's My Home*, along with a typescript for *Saint Louis Woman*, a stage adaptation of Arna Bontemps' novel *God Sends Sunday* on which he collaborated with Bontemps and Langston Hughes, and which was later adapted into a Broadway musical. These are accompanied by additional material related to him and his wife, Ida, including a Signed Christmas Card, theatre programs, newsletters, and assorted ephemera. Overall the typescripts are very good or better with general rubbing, wear at the extremities of the wrappers, one play has a tidemarks on the wrappers and another with the first three sheets are pulled from their brads and creased; the ephemera is near fine, with light general wear including minor toning, nicks and tears.

After early success as a poet, Cullen turned his attention to the stage, first trying his hand at adapting and updating Euripides' *Medea* in the early 1930s immediately followed by an adaptation of his lone novel, *One Way to Heaven*, in collaboration with writer Harry Hamilton in 1935. Neither work was ever produced despite much effort from his literary agent Leah Salisbury, who offered the work to interested producers. The two copies of each play included here show variations, particularly *The Medea of Euripides* which present the story in both one act and two act versions and with notable differences to each text.

Cullen finally found success with *Saint Louis Woman*, based on Bontemps' novel *God Sends Sunday* on which he collaborated with the author beginning in the mid-1930s. The copy here incorporate revisions by Langston Hughes who was brought in by Bontemps because of his experience writing scripts. The play debuted at the Karamu Theatre in Cleveland in 1935 for a short run before being adapted into a musical eleven years later on Broadway starring Pearl Bailey with songs by Johnny Mercer and Harold Arlen, including "Come Rain, Come Shine."

Despite the play's modest success, the endeavor to bring it to Broadway contributed to Cullen already declining health. Among the stresses was friction with Hughes who altered much of the original story (likely prompting the note scrawled on the front of the script's front wrapper "obsolete"). Later came a deal between Bontemps and Hughes giving Hughes a sizable slice of the royalties from the production for his work, and finally bad press from the black community over the depiction of some of the play's less-than-favorable black characters which they said reinforced negative stereotypes and resulted in Lena Horn pulling out of the show. Sadly Cullen died just three months before the musical's Broadway debuted.

Additional material includes two playbill for *St. Louis Woman*, one from its debut run at the Martin Beck Theatre on March 30, 1946; a **Signed** Christmas Card; a 1944 issue of the *Douglass Bulletin*, a Fredrick Douglass High School student newspaper overseen by Cullen; two sympathy cards following his death in 1946; various flyers and programs for memorial events honoring Cullen including one from the New York Public Library branch named in his honor; a collection of material from the Afro-Arts Bazaar, an African arts gift show in Harlem where Ida worked as manager, including her business card, brochure, an invitation to two cocktail receptions; and clippings related to their marriage and his death.

A compelling collection of unpublished and early drafts from late in Cullen's career as playwright, including his collaboration with other notable figures of the Harlem Renaissance.

Playscripts:

1. *The Medea of Euripides*. 45pp. [Circa 1934]. Carbon typescript sheets laid into the printed green wrappers of literary agent Leah Salisbury with her stamp on the first page. Appears to be only one act. *OCLC* locates no copies.
2. *The Medea of Euripides*. 34pp. [Circa 1934]. Carbon typescript sheets laid into a manila folder. An alternate version of the play lacking the title page but divided into two acts of 22 and 12 pages. *OCLC* locates no copies.
3. *Heaven's My Home*. 118p. 1935. Carbon typescript in bradbound printed green wrappers of literary agent Leah Salisbury with her stamp on the first page. An unproduced play adapted from Cullen's novel *One Way to Heaven* written in collaboration with Harry Hamilton. *OCLC* locates no copies.
4. *Heaven's My Home*. 109p. 1935. Carbon typescript in bradbound printed green wrappers of literary agent Leah Salisbury with her stamp on the first page. The first three pages have pulled from the brads but are present. An alternative version of the play. *OCLC* locates no copies.
5. *Saint Louis Woman*. 112p. [Circa 1936]. Carbon typescript in bradbound printed green wraps of literary agent Leah Salisbury with note on the front wrap in pencil that reads "obsolete." A stage adaptation of Arna Bontemps' novel *God Sends Sunday* on which he collaborated with Cullen with revisions by Hughes. The play was adapted into a musical debuting a decade later on Broadway in 1946. *OCLC* locates no copies.

Ephemera:

1. Christmas card. Measuring 5" x 4". [Circa 1940]. **Signed**: "Countee and Ida Cullen."
2. *Branch Library Book News – December 1942*. Quarto. Stapled wrappers. List of children's book printed that year including *My Lives and How I Lost Them* by Cullen with a red check mark next to its listing.
3. *Douglass Bulletin – Issue No. 3, April 26, 1944*. Frederick Douglass Junior High School. Two mimeographed legal-size sheets, both printed on one side. Student newspaper overseen by Cullen.
4. Sympathy Card. [1946]. Stiff printed card. Measuring 4¼" x 3". Two copies.
5. *In Memoriam Countee Cullen 1903-1946*. Single sheet folded twice. Measuring 5¼" x 4¼". Pamphlet for a memorial "Presented by the White Plains Urban League to honor the distinguished American poet." Includes three of Cullen's poems: "Yet Do I Marvel," "Incident," and "The Shroud of Color."
6. [*Playbill*]: *St. Louis Woman*. Martin Beck Theatre: New York 1946. Illustrated stapled wrappers. Playbill for the opening night, March 30, 1946.
7. Afro-Arts Bazaar Material. [1949]. Includes a catalog, business card for "Mrs. Countee Cullen Manager," and two invitation for cocktail receptions in 1949 and 1950.
8. *The Countee Cullen Memorial Foundation*. [1950]. Flyer. Single quarto sheet. Announcement of the foundation goals, membership, and officers. Two copies.
10. *The New York Public Library ... Countee Cullen Branch*. 1951. Single green quarto sheet. Program of the ceremony renaming 135th Street Branch after Cullen. Two copies; one with tape repair.
11. [*Playbill*]: *St. Louis Woman*. The Nashville Community Playhouse 1952. Illustrated stapled wrappers. Playbill for the "One Hundred and Seventh Production" held May 28-June 7, 1952. **Signed** by the cast.
12. *Countee Cullen Memorial Concert*. 1957. Broadsheet. Blue quarto sheet. Announcing the Fourth Annual Concert of Negro Music and Poetry by the Margaret Bonds Chamber Music Society.
13. *Negro History Week Concert of Spirituals and Folksongs*. 1960. Card. Measuring 5½" x 3½". Concert featuring Cullen's poem "Heritage" read to the music of Clarence Cameron White. [WITH] *Heritage*. Program. Quarto. Single yellow sheet folded once with the printed poem.
14. *Harold Jackman Memorial Card*. [1961]. Measuring 4½" x 3½". Jackman was lifelong friend of Cullen and a well-connected member of the Harlem Renaissance, who posed for artists and photographer, as well the model for several characters in novels.
15. *Hamilton Grange Branch ... Fourth Open House*. 1961. Single orange sheet folded once to make four pages. Features a reading of Cullen's poetry by his wife Ida. Five copies.
16. *Hamilton Grange Branch ... Fifth Open House*. [1962]. Single blue sheet printed both sides. Identifies Ida Cullen as Chairman.
17. *The Brooklyn Museum Concerts ... Program in Memory of Countee Cullen and Harold Jackman*. 1965. Broadsheet. Quart sheet. List of performers.
18. *Poets and Heroes: Countee Cullen*. [1969]. Thick with glossy photo postcard. Measuring 8" x 5". Issued by The Metropolitan Museum of Art for the exhibit, Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black American 1900-1968. Two copies.
19. *The Columbia University Chapter of the NAACP*. [No date]. Program. Single sheet folded once to form four pages. Ida Cullen speaking about her late husband. Two copies.
20. "Selected Poems of Students." [No date]. Folder containing 48 typed and carbons sheets. Numerous duplicates. All signed in type and with room number of students from Frederick Douglass Junior High School. [BTC#400375]

" SAINT LOUIS WOMAN "

By

COURTNEY CULLEN and ARNA BONTEMPS

revised by

LANGSTON HUGHES

(R. Rockmore)

From:

Miss Leah Salisbury,
Exclusive agent for this play
234 West 44th Street
New York City.

ACT ONE

SCENE:

The scene is laid outside Jason's house in Corinth. The stage is empty, except for the old NURSE crouching on the steps before the door.

NURSE is swaying and moaning.

The TUTOR and the CHILDREN come in.

Tutor

Why do you sit out there, you old buzzard, mumbling and crying?
Why aren't you inside with your mistress when she needs you?

Nurse

No good servant can be happy when her mistress is sad. Don't you know that?

Tutor

Is she still grieving?

Nurse

You don't know her; her grief grows.

Tutor

And still she hasn't heard the worst!

Nurse

The worst? What is it now?

ACT ONE

The scene is laid outside Jason's house in Corinth. The stage is empty, except for the old NURSE crouching on the steps before the door.

Nurse

Those Greeks! They should never have come to our country. The Argo should never have sailed, and the pines from which her oars were cut should still be standing in the Forest of Pelion. They should never have heard of the golden fleece, the cause of all our troubles.

For then Medea, my mistress, would never have followed Jason across the sea for love; old Pelias would not lie murdered by his daughters; and Medea would not have fled here to Corinth with Jason and their children, hiding from that bloody deed.

For a while all went well; this people welcomed them, and they were happy here, as man and woman are who love. But now all is changed and every vow lies broken. Jason has betrayed his wife and children. He has married the king's daughter. In vain Medea recalls his vows and whispered promises, and calls on the gods to witness what thanks she gets from Jason. She lies in there fasting; grief is her only food, and every hour goes by in weeping at Jason's treachery. She is ashamed; she will not lift her eyes from the ground, but lies there, cold as stone. In her loneliness she sometimes calls to mind all she gave up for this sad fate: home, father, country, all betrayed, all for this man who now betrays her. And in her grief all that she lost seems dearer and more lost.

The sight of her children is hateful to her; not even they can turn her from brooding on her dark designs. For I know her. She is proud, and not one to be hurt without vengeance. And I am afraid.

(She looks off in the distance)

Here come the children now, hot from their play, with no thought of their mother's grief; for they are young.

