



Aphrodite's Daughters: Three Modernist Poets of the Harlem Renaissance

Maureen Honey

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The Harlem Renaissance was a watershed moment for racial uplift, poetic innovation, sexual liberation, and female empowerment. *Aphrodite's Daughters* introduces us to three amazing women who were at the forefront of all these developments, poetic iconoclasts who pioneered new and candidly erotic forms of female self-expression.

Maureen Honey paints a vivid portrait of three African American women—Angelina Weld Grimké, Gwendolyn B. Bennett, and Mae V. Cowdery—who came from very different backgrounds but converged in late 1920s Harlem to leave a major mark on the literary landscape. She examines the varied ways these poets articulated female sexual desire, ranging from Grimké's invocation of a Sapphic goddess figure to Cowdery's frank depiction of bisexual erotics to Bennett's risky exploration of the borders between sexual pleasure and pain. Yet Honey also considers how they were united in their commitment to the female body as a primary source of meaning, strength, and transcendence.

The product of extensive archival research, *Aphrodite's Daughters* draws from Grimké, Bennett, and Cowdery's published and unpublished poetry, along with rare periodicals and biographical materials, to immerse us in the lives of these remarkable women and the world in which they lived. It thus not only shows us how their artistic contributions and cultural interventions were vital to their own era, but also demonstrates how the poetic heart of their work keeps on beating.

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