Miller, May,


The daughter of a Howard University sociologist, Miller grew up in an intellectual household in which W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington were frequent guests. She graduated from Howard University in 1920, earning an award for her one-act play Within the Shadows. Afterwards she taught secondary school and continued to write.

A prizewinning play, The Bog Guide (1925), helped establish Miller in the black cultural scene, and she became the most widely published woman playwright of the Harlem Renaissance. She openly addressed racial issues in plays such as Scratches (1929), which commented on colour and class bias within the black community; Stragglers in the Dust (1930), about African-Americans in the military; and Nails and Thorns (1933), which dramatized lynching. She also wrote many historical plays, four of which (including Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth) were anthologized in Negro History in Thirteen Plays (1935).

Miller retired from teaching in 1943 and became a prolific poet, publishing seven volumes that included Into the Clearing (1959) and Dust of Uncertain Journey (1975). She also held several posts as a visiting faculty member.