Petry, Ann,


Born into a family of pharmacists in a small Connecticut town, Petry graduated in 1931 with a degree in pharmacy from the University of Connecticut. From 1931 to 1938 she worked in the family's drugstore before moving to New York City to become a writer. She began her career as a journalist, writing for the Amsterdam News (1938-41) and the Peoples' Voice of Harlem (1941-44), and then studied creative writing at Columbia University (1944-46).

Her first novel, The Street (1946), became a best-seller and was critically acclaimed for its portrayal of a working-class black woman, Lutie Johnson, who dreams of getting out of Harlem but is inevitably thwarted by the pressures of poverty and racism. It was one of the first novels by an African-American woman to receive widespread acclaim. Country Place (1947) depicts the disillusionment and corruption among a group of white people in a small town in Connecticut. Her third novel, The Narrows (1953), is the story of Link Williams, a Dartmouth-educated black man who tends bar in the black section of Monmouth, Conn., and of his tragic love affair with a rich white woman. Although often criticized for its melodramatic plot, it has been lauded for its supple style and its sympathetic characterizations.

Petry's short stories were collected in Miss Muriel and Other Stories (1971). She also published several historical biographies for children, including Harriet Tubman, Conductor on the Underground Railroad (1955) and Tituba of Salem Village (1964).