
IN MEMORIAM

Cheryl A. Wall, 1948-2020

It is with a heavy heart that we mourn the loss of Professor Cheryl A. Wall who passed away on April 4, 2021 in her Highland Park, NJ home. For almost fifty years, Wall mentored students and colleagues of Afro American literature, Black feminist theory, and the oeuvre and example of Zora Neale Hurston—a writer she championed and consistently theorized. Her essential scholarship includes the paradigm shifting anthology *Changing Our Own Words: Criticism, Theory, and Writing by Black Woman* (1989), *Women of the Harlem Renaissance* (1995), the inimitable *Worrying the Line: Black Women Writers, Lineage and Literary Tradition*, *Savoring the Salt: The Legacy of Toni Cade Bambara* edited with Linda J. Holmes, as well as multiple scholarly volumes of Hurston's work.

I spent the afternoon with her in Seattle prior to the official outbreak of Corona virus, celebrating the release of her latest study, *On Freedom and the Will to Adorn: The Art of the African American Essay*— a study that includes an extraordinary meditation on our comrade Amiri Baraka's famous essay "Cuba Libre". Professor Wall was an institution builder and someone who gave her life to a body of literature, a community, and a vision of the future that never postured its militancy or denigrated its commitments for professional gain.

Wall attended Howard University with the likes of titans: Baraka, A.B. Spellman, and Toni Morrison, a writer whose work she profoundly engaged throughout her career. With her colleagues Professors Donald Gibson, Wesley Brown and others she built Rutgers as an epicenter for the study of Afro American literature. She changed the lives of so many formed by her patient and penetrating readings of the work of writers such as Morrison, Gayl Jones, and Alice Walker; foregrounding the focused militancy of Toni Cade Bambara, and the capacious imagination and rigor of Hurston and Nella Larson. It is beyond calculation the amount of scholars and teachers whose lives and work she molded. I will never forget her lucid readings of Morrison's *Sula*, the times in her office when she gently challenged my youthful dogmatism encouraging me to read Trotsky's *Art and Revolution*, her penetrating advocacy of such work as Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* and Bruce Robbins's *The Servant's Hand*.

Annotations from a novel, marginalia notes from a collection of Black feminist interventions or a volume of sermons from Cheryl's seminars conjured the kind of heft and militant seriousness that worlds are made of. Rest well, beloved teacher of so many.

—Jeremy M. Glick