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FOREWORD

The March has been a long and dangerous one: traps and snares, wide rivers, wicked dogs, scarce food, bitter weather, villains to the left and to the right. But the journey has not been all bad: friendships, unexpected kindness from strangers, reversals of fortune, and, perhaps most precious, the discovery of inner strength and love—the only true definition of courage and of victory.

This volume contains many accounts from various points of view of the rough road, the collective long walk home black folk have made over the last 250 years in North America. These voices do not always agree, and well they should not, for what good would be a chorus of voices sounding constantly the same note throughout the ages? Rather, we have a rich testament—in every form and manner of artistry—bearing witness to the multiple experiences that being of African descent in America has engendered.

Central to the ongoing March toward self-definition for African Americans has been their continual assertion of their humanity. Some might balk at what seems so undeniably obvious, yet again and again what is readily apparent to any thinking person has in fact been denied, revoked, "discredited," disregarded, argued, laughed at, sneered at, misconstrued, misshapen, and misunderstood. Therefore, none should take for granted that every American—even to this day and age—sees African Americans as full human beings, and it behooves us all to say it again and again. This reality makes this volume all the more important.

For those of us, like the authors represented here, for whom the knowledge of the humanity of black folk is a foregone, unshatterable conclusion, there nevertheless remains much to be learned and absorbed, a vast body of works that reveal feelings and facts—the bone of history itself and the sinew of centuries of thought and connective perception. Moreover, herein you will find the artistry spun and respun through the generations, riffs and retakes on the great themes: love, death, and the loneliness of life. These words and images are like vitamins for us all. If you read carefully you can see latter-day Octavia Butler talking to Harlem Renaissance Nella Larsen, and Nella Larsen speaking with antebellum Harriet Jacobs; if you read deeply you can understand how colonial Olaudah Equiano speaks directly to Black Power activist and poet Haki Madhubuti, and how Haki Madhubuti's words reach back and chime with those of Frederick Douglass. Despite the effects of history and time, there are common elements, large and small, that resonate throughout this volume, from slave to freedom fighter, from jazz poet to Reconstruction novelist. The methodology, the specifics of the politics and its circumstances—and even to some extent the language—may have altered, but the core tenets are amazingly similar.

And therein, in that odd contradiction of time and space, in that paradox of art, where so much has changed and yet so much remains constant, we beneficiaries of these gems can tease out the multivarious commonalities that link these extraordinary voices with our own.

Lastly, in the grand enterprise of listening to, reading, and studying these lasting voices, we, as Americans, can begin to see how these linkages are also true for the Irish and for the Chippewa, for the Jew and for the Chinese—for, if we are attentive enough and open our eyes wide enough, we will see that these folk speak not just for African Americans but for all Americans.

Randall Kenan

PREFACE

TO THE STUDENT

This text presents a wide range of African American literature, from colonial times to the present, in a multitude of genres: poetry, drama, fiction, autobiography, nonfiction, music, and art. We, the coeditors, employ an approach that places African American aesthetic contributions within historical context. The anthology is divided according to historical period, moving you through the African American literary tradition in a chronological manner. We believe that you need to understand how African American literature is connected to American society, to see the experiences of African American people within the changing political, social, economic climate of our country. You will learn as much about history as literature: As the book illustrates, one defines the other. We learn about history through literature, and we learn about literature through history.

Placing the literature in historical context is a way to learn about various aspects of history and how African American literature provides a response to historical movements, tensions, and controversies. For example, during the black aesthetics movement, from 1960 to 1969, African American writers produced literary works filled with protest and pride. The voices of writers that had been silenced by racism were being heard because of the changing state of race relations. As this anthology illustrates, freedom of expression for African American writers has increased as limitations based on race have gradually become less stringent. To highlight this move toward freedom, we have chosen "slavery versus freedom" as the book's primary theme—a theme that runs consistently throughout, helping you make connections between authors, genres, and historical events.

Historical overviews introduce each part or section of the text, providing important background information—starting points for the study of African American literature and history during particular time spans. Of course, since one of our goals is to show the breadth of this material, we could only include a limited view of the historical context of which African American literature is a part. In the same way, the readings in the text are a limited representation of this literature. Since we have only skimmed the surface, part of your responsibility as a student using this book is to supplement the text material through both primary and secondary research. Always think of yourself as a source of information; your opinions are valid if you can support them. Use the literature as a point of departure, a way to examine important issues, such as race, in your own lives. Race is not, however, the only issue that students using this text can discuss in spoken and written form.

African American aesthetic contributions to society address not only racial issues but also universal ideas and themes. You do not have to be African American to be able to relate to the anthologized material—the only requirement is that you be human.

An appreciation for differences is just as important as an appreciation for commonalities. The aspects of identity that make us unique individuals, such as language, culture, and experience, should be valued. Problems surface when difference or diversity is used to place limitations on people, to discriminate against persons or groups, or to set people apart because of perceived notions of inferiority. We should strive to know more about those who are different from us, and we should strive to learn more about ourselves. This anthology provides an opportunity to learn about life through African American literature.

Other text components emphasize the importance of reading, writing, and critical thinking skills. In addition to the section overviews, other features of the text include research topics, a Writing About Literature section, a compact disc, art, a timeline, biographical sketches, oral tradition material, and an index. The possibilities for writing are numerous. We encourage you to make connections. For example, you can examine a piece of writing within other contexts, those presented by other races, genders, ethnicities, and viewpoints. In your study of African American literature, focus on topics that you feel strongly about, that you are most interested in, that you can relate to, or that stir emotions within you. Be able to put yourself into your writing; don't view the material as existing outside of your reality. After all, the human element is always a common denominator.

You will gain the most benefit from the works and supplementary material collected in this anthology if you agree to read, write, and discuss the work with an open mind. Narrow points of view will limit your ability to appreciate the African American literature included. A willingness to consider other points of view and appreciate diverse responses to literature is the key to an environment conducive to learning about both literature and writing.

TO THE INSTRUCTOR

This anthology offers a chronological survey of African American literature from the 1700s to the present, with a wide range of selections, including poetry, prose, and drama. In addition, biographical sketches, historical overviews of the literary periods, artwork, topics for research, a timeline, and an oral literature component (including a CD) enhance the distinct qualities of this text. Also, we have provided instructors with a manual to assist in developing strategies for teaching African American literature. The anthology focuses on a unified theme—slavery versus freedom—and traces that theme through several literary periods and movements in the African American literary tradition. The impetus for the text grew out of the coeditors' desire for a comprehensive anthology of African American literature that would be both teacher- and student-friendly in its depth, breadth, and scope.

In pursuit of this goal, the coeditors have chosen the structure very carefully. The text begins with the Introduction, which offers an overview of the key social, historical, and political contexts in which the selections featured in this anthology of African American literature were produced.

The central structure of the anthology is divided into parts that focus on each literary period: The Colonial Period, 1746–1800; The Antebellum Period, 1800–1865; The Reconstruction Period, 1865–1900; The Harlem Renaissance, 1900–1940; The Protest Movement, 1940–1959; Black Aesthetics Movement, 1960–1969; and Neorealism Movement, 1970–Present. Each part has an introduction. This overview frames the social, historical, and political context for the period, emphasizing both literal and figurative examples of the theme, slavery versus freedom. Within each part are selections of works of African American literature from a variety of genres; and at the end of each part is a Topics for Research section, which challenges students to find new directions for examining African American literature.

The coeditors are particularly proud of the oral literature component of this anthology: Oral Traditions sections within each part feature examples of the rich oral tradition in African American literature, including spirituals, folktales, and speeches; and the companion CD adds music and spoken word to the oral tradition and should enhance the breadth and the accessibility of the anthology, particularly for students who are auditory learners. In addition, the anthology contains artwork by African American visual artists. These works reflect the social, political, historical, and economic issues embedded in the oral, written, and musical works we have selected. This distinctive feature further broadens the anthology and will specifically assist visual learners in comprehending the thematic concerns of the African American literary tradition. The oral and visual components reflect our belief in a holistic approach to the teaching of African American literature and cultural traditions.

A section on Writing About African American Literature provides students with the strategies needed for literary analysis. It provides tools students will employ, including discussions of literary terms and strategies for organizing and evaluating literary texts from a variety of genres. Professors may use this section as a means of facilitating writing about African American literature for their students. Next, a timeline marked by important social, historical, and political events from the colonial period to the present will allow students to place the selections they read in a broad framework of both national and international events and will further facilitate their understanding of the contexts for African American literature. The timeline also reinforces the underlying theme of the text—slavery versus freedom.

The anthology ends with a list of sources and an index. The coeditors hope that this bibliography will be valuable for instructors in directing students to the sources of or about the selections in the anthology, particularly since some are published in full while others are excerpts. The index will enable professors to more easily identify page numbers for specific works and names in the anthology. This will make the text more useful as both a research and a teaching tool for professors who teach African American literature.

We view this anthology as a contribution to the study, analysis, and discussion of African American literature in the classroom. This anthology allows the instructor flexibility in terms of the type of course the text can be used in, from surveys in

African American literature to composition and rhetoric courses, and from courses in ethnic American literature to history and interdisciplinary courses as well. The teaching possibilities remain limitless as the desire to explore the African American literary tradition continues to increase and expand due, quite directly we feel, to the universality and relevance of the oral, written, and visual representations of human experience these selections reveal.

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Rochelle Smith
Sharon L. Jones

LIVING WORDS

AN AUDIO CD OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ORAL TRADITIONS

Oral traditions are a vital component of studying African American life. It is most readily in such traditions—represented by speeches, songs, storytelling, poetry—that the connections to African (and for that matter, Caribbean) cultures are evident; and that the particular rhythms and urgency of texts come alive. On this audio CD, we aim to capture a general sense of the richness oral legacy of African Americans. The selections included here nicely compliment the readings in the anthology.

The CD opens with a piece of Ghanian drum music. Ghana is one of the African countries which serves as a metaphorical and genealogical home to African Americans. The drum rhythms on this track closely parallel similar rhythms in music in the Caribbean, and the United States, which is evidenced here in the Negro spiritual "I Just Came from the Fountain" which follows. It is relevant that the CD open with two musical pieces, because, in the early years of enslavement, it was in music that African traditions were sustained, as many Africans spoke different languages, and were given little (if any) access to education, including reading and writing. The influence of music is not overstated, for music is a central base for the literary and cultural production, and life experiences, of African Americans.

Other musical selections on the CD represent a variety of traditions, and reflect historical moments in African American life. The most common music genre in this collection is the spiritual, one of the earliest African American oral traditions which informs many of the other music genres that develop. The selections here include famous songs performed by equally famous singers: "Go Down Moses" (perhaps the most famous spiritual) by Bill McAdoo; "Come By Hyar" by Bernice Reagon; "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" by Paul Robeson; "I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray" by the Fisk Jubilee Singers; and "I Sing Because I'm Happy" by Mahalia Jackson. Many spirituals were re-recorded by each generation of African Americans often to give voice to the political and social context of their time. It was in this vein that Marian Anderson's stirring version of "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands" was included in the historic March on Washington in 1963, and "Wade in the Water" became a Civil Rights Movement standard.

The blues and work song traditions learn from and contribute to the spirituals. In Pete Seeger's version of the African American work song classic "Pick a Bale of Cotton," the use of repetition provides an inspiring work rhythm, and resonates with similar uses of repetition in spirituals. Lead Belly performs "Backwater Blues," capturing the blues tradition, and revealing the intimate relationship between blues and spirituals, especially the way both traditions describe everyday and common events as sacred.

The last track, "Zum Zum" is a recording by Six Boys in Trouble in New York. This piece represents an interesting early version of dub poetry and beats which later influences rap and hip hop music. Also, its rhythms and use of drums mirror

the opening piece of Ghanian drum music, reflecting the strong overlap between contemporary African American music traditions, and those of the past.

The presence and development of African American music influences other expressions of orality. Many of the aesthetic innovations in poetry echo the repetitions evident in various African American music forms. Furthermore, just as music was intimately connected with reflecting and commenting on social and political condition, so to is the poetry interested in all aspects of life in African America. Harlem Renaissance writer Arna Bontemps reads Lucy Terry's "Bars Fight," the first published poem by an African American. Phillis Wheatley's elegant mediation, "On Being Brought from Africa to America," is read here by Jean Brannon. These two poets establish a foundation for all African American writers who proceed them. The CD also includes a reading of Paul Laurence Dunbar's "Dawn" and James Weldon Johnson's epic piece "The Creation," both read by Bontemps. Claude McKay is heard reading his own poem, "If We Must Die," and Langston Hughes delivers his own "I've Known Rivers" and "I Too." Both of these writers became widely famous during the Harlem Renaissance era, and are best known for the poems they are reading here. Pulitzer Prize winner Gwendolyn Brooks reads her wonderful piece "Song of the Front Yard." Of more contemporary poets, there is Sonia Sanchez reading "liberation/poem," and Nikki Giovanni delivering "Woman."

Finally, there are a variety of prose pieces gathered on this companion, capturing many key moments in African American history. The first are two pieces by former slaves, chronicling their experience. Spoken narratives as these were often the first step toward the production of written autobiographies (for example slave narratives.) In many cases, there are no written accounts by prominent African American figures, but there are stories of their lives and texts of their speeches. Jean Brannon takes a piece of Sojourner Truth's life story, and turns it into a stirring reading about her name and identity. Brannon also offers a glimpse at Harriet Tubman's life, similarly drawing from documents on the great freedom fighter. Maria W. Stewart's speech "What If I Am a Woman," is given a new life here in Ruby Dee's reading; similarly, Frederick Douglass's "If There is No Struggle, There is No Freedom" is vitalized in Ossie Davis's voice.

We hear Booker T. Washington's voice delivering an excerpt from his famous "Address at the Atlanta Exposition," and a contemporary of his, W.E.B. DuBois, in an interview talking about the creation of the N.A.A.C.P. There is Martin Luther King, Jr., delivering a speech at a mass meeting, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. It is inspiring to hear King at a smaller gathering, and to get a sense of the widespread commitment to political action that existed in the Sixties, manifesting on both national and local fronts. Then, there is Angela Davis's voice of protest, in an interview she gave while still in prison in the early 1970s, a snapshot view of the woman who would become the impressive figure we know today.

The movement of the CD is organized to reflect the diversity of African American oral presentations that exist in our history; and still, it is clear, upon listening to the selections, that there are incredible overlaps, and that many of the pieces are speaking with and in contradistinction with each other and U.S. history. The rhythms, the words, the urgency . . . they are all there in these living words of African American life.

Kevin Everod Quashie
Stuart L. Twite

INTRODUCTION

African American literature from the colonial period to the present represents a journey from slavery to freedom, both literally and figuratively, for African American writers. Social, political, historical, and cultural events shape African American literature as poets, playwrights, novelists, short-story writers, and orators seek to express themselves through the oral and written traditions. An understanding of these movements and the conditions that precipitated these periods in African American literature will enhance the appreciation and evaluation of these rich traditions. The theme of slavery versus freedom unites the authors featured in this anthology, illustrating a common link among the chorus of voices comprising the African American literary tradition.

The history of African Americans dates back to the "divided" selves of blacks transplanted from Africa to the New World via the Middle Passage, the route slave ships followed from Africa to the American colonies. Many African American writers of the colonial period (1746–1800) were slaves who managed to acquire literacy in the English language, such as Phillis Wheatley, Jupiter Hammon, and George Moses Horton. Their literary output and their emphasis on the theme of slavery versus freedom testify to the paradox of slavery in colonial America, particularly in the context of the American Revolutionary War (1775–1781), when the issues of individual and collective liberty gained precedence.

By the antebellum period (1800–1865), resistance to slavery had grown as more blacks achieved literacy and penned tales about the inhumanity of slavery in hopes of achieving freedom for themselves and other African Americans. Blacks and whites cooperated through the establishment of the Underground Railroad, and abolitionist periodicals such as *The Liberator* proliferated as the wave of anti-slavery sentiment swept across the land. Ex-slaves like Frederick Douglass, author of *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself,* and Harriet Jacobs, author of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself,* testified to the injustice of slavery and the need to abolish it. Black

literature, like the spirituals, focused on the abolition of slavery, the pressing issue of the day.

Despite the abolition of slavery in 1865 at the end of the Civil War, African Americans found themselves facing rampant discrimination in terms of jobs, housing, and education during the Reconstruction period (1865–1900). The *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1896 sanctioned "separate but equal" policies as the law of the land, upholding legalized segregation of blacks and whites. Still, African Americans fought on for social justice, as revealed in the fiction of Charles Chesnutt; in novels such as *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* by Frances E. W. Harper; and in Anna Julia Cooper's *A Voice from the South: By a Black Woman of the South*, a series of essays and speeches. These authors focused on education and moral and spiritual uplift, and they analyzed race, class, and gender prejudice as they sought true emancipation for blacks.

During the Harlem Renaissance (1900–1940), the quest for freedom continued. This interdisciplinary movement in art, literature, politics, and music sought to define the New Negro, a concept that presented blacks as strong, articulate, educated, empowered, and possessing an appreciation of African and African American history and heritage. Harlem Renaissance writers produced many works of lasting value. Activist and writer W. E. B. Du Bois penned *The Souls of Black Folk;* Alain Locke edited *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, which served as a manifesto of the Harlem Renaissance; Zora Neale Hurston critiqued race, class, and gender to provide a female perspective in *Their Eyes Were Watching God;* Langston Hughes illustrated the beauty of African American musical forms through his poetry, which articulated the rhythm of jazz and blues. With their attention to African American aesthetics and their desire to combat racial oppression through organizations such as the NAACP (publisher of *The Crisis*) and the Urban League (publisher of *Opportunity*), artists of the Harlem Renaissance took an important step on the journey from slavery to freedom—a struggle that would be continued by writers of the protest era, the black aesthetics movement, and the neorealism movement.

With their novels, short stories, poetry, drama, and nonfiction, African American writers during the protest movement (1940–1959) helped to advance the journey toward freedom. Although the institution of slavery had been eliminated, African Americans still lived with overt racism. Limited resources and few opportunities for advancement kept blacks in an inferior position, unable to totally break the shackles. The African American male's plight is illustrated in the works of writers such as Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, and Robert Hayden. Female perspectives came from Margaret Walker Alexander, Ann Petry, Gwendolyn Brooks, Lorraine Hansberry, and others. These writers presented stories that gave readers insight into what it was like to be an African American facing insurmountable race barriers. For example, in *Native Son* and *Black Boy*, Wright shows the implications of fearing white society, feeling restrained, dehumanized. Fear, as Wright demonstrates, can lead to death, both spiritually and physically. Ellison's protagonist in *Invisible Man* is treated not as an individual but only as a low-class "element" who must endure persecution because of his race. Baldwin explores religious issues, and Hayden deals with political issues. Brooks often writes about African American women in the roles of mother and mate. African

American male and female writers during the 1940s and 1950s clearly painted portraits of blacks enslaved by the dominant societal sector. African Americans protested covertly through their written and oral texts, helping to bridge distance and fill gaps for the audience. Protests outside the literary realm also brought African Americans closer to freedom. Some indicators of the increased freedom were the 1948 ban on segregation in the military, the Supreme Court's 1954 ruling against racial segregation in public schools, and the Alabama bus boycotts brought on when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white man, which led to the ruling that segregated seating on public transportation was unconstitutional.

Overt protests in literature as well as in society characterized the black aesthetics movement (1960–1969). Some hallmark historical events occurred during this time: the Vietnam War, the March on Washington (for which Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech), and the assassinations of King and Malcolm X. The voices, written and oral, of African Americans during the black arts movement carried politically charged messages. In fact, the primary purpose of black art was to promote racial equality. Hence, speeches such as those written and delivered by King and Malcolm X were considered art forms within the black literary arena. Rhetorical analysis of these texts reveals a mastery of the stylistic devices used for persuasion. Amiri Baraka (formerly LeRoi Jones) wrote poetry and essays that exposed the bare truth about living in the grip of racism. His writing has been controversial because he does not "hold his tongue"; he "lets it rip," using a forceful, often angry tone. Haki R. Madhubuti also wrote about controversial topics such as the role of African American race leaders like Malcolm X. Sonia Sanchez and Nikki Giovanni provided strong female voices that dealt with political and social concerns in their poetry. Speaking loudly through their art, African American writers and singers distinguished black aesthetics from white aesthetics. The African American oral and written traditions merged to create a revolutionary period like the Harlem Renaissance, in which the role of the black artist was to move African Americans farther from slavery and closer to freedom.

In some ways, the African American literature that followed the overt protest of black aesthetics is not easy to define. During the neorealism movement (1970–present), African American writers moved even closer to freedom—enjoying wide appreciation from their audience for their work. Also during this time, Jesse Jackson ran for president of the United States, gathering some enthusiastic support, and Martin Luther King Day became a national holiday. Black women writers such as Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison have become primary writers with classic works. To a large degree, African American literature has been incorporated into the canon of American literature. Along with this integration comes a separation: specialists in African American literature and Afro-American studies programs became increasingly prominent from the 1970s through the 1990s. English departments have filled academic and cultural gaps by hiring scholars of black literature and multicultural literature. Diversity has become a priority in terms of teachers, students, and course material—across the curriculum. The dominant characteristic of neorealist African American literature is variety, a sense of freedom in artistic presentation. While the common theme of black experience prevails, the neorealism

movement represents a culmination of the African American literary tradition from colonial times to the present. Ernest Gaines in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* and Charles Johnson in *Middle Passage* provide historical perspectives; Audre Lorde and June Jordan present political perspectives, Octavia Butler writes science fiction; Walter Mosley succeeds at mystery writing; and Randall Kenan explores magic realism. African American literary critics research the important issues of each historical period; as the Los Angeles riots of 1992 emphasized, race is still a major issue in America. Scholars continue to critically examine the vast body of black literature—its authors, rhetorical style, and political leanings.

We have come a long way, but we still have a long way to go. African American literature has a rich and varied history, as this anthology illustrates. During a time when they were not allowed to read and write, blacks used a strong sense of determination and hope to learn in spite of the restrictions. Amazingly, during those early years, they used their voices in speech, writing, and song to argue for equality, and those voices have gotten stronger and more abundant. The use of language for a multitude of purposes—professional and personal—when put in context becomes more meaningful as it is connected to history. Hence, this text puts African American literature within historical context, showing its connections to other aspects of American society. African American writers, singers, and speakers reveal the complexity of the African American experience using a theme that embodies the struggle, the theme of this text: slavery versus freedom.

PART 1

THE COLONIAL PERIOD 1746–1800

INTRODUCTION

Most slaves traveled to colonial America through the Middle Passage (the route from Africa to the New World across the Atlantic Ocean). Cramped inside slave ships with tight, unsanitary quarters, the Africans who were seized, captured, and transported to the New World faced a perilous journey. The Middle Passage, one of the central factors in the history of the African presence in America, is an important theme in African American literature, reflecting the experience of transition between Africa and the New World, the past and the present, freedom and bondage, and oral and written traditions.

In *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (pp. 9–19), Olaudah Equiano captures the tumultuous and frightening nature of his transport from Africa to the New World: "In this situation I expected every hour to share the fate of my companions, some of whom were almost daily brought upon deck at the point of death, and I began to hope that death would soon put an end to my miseries. Often did I think many of the inhabitants of the deep much more happy than myself; I envied them the freedom they enjoyed, and as often wished I could change my condition for theirs" (p. 17). His narrative illustrates the emotional aspects of the perilous passage and the tension between the desire for freedom and the reality of entrapment on slave ships.

Not surprisingly, African American literature of the colonial period directly bears upon the "doubleness," the "divided" selves of Africans who were transplanted, against their will, to colonial America. The experience serves as a context for the poetry, letters, songs, and pamphlets produced by early African American writers. Like Equiano, Phillis Wheatley traveled to America on the perilous Middle Passage and documented her experience in her art. Equiano and Wheatley represent those who survived the Middle Passage; many others died because of sickness, suicide, and mutinies on the slave ships. As a child, Wheatley was captured as a slave, transported to colonial America, and later purchased by a wealthy Boston family. Her poetry and letters reveal a divided self, with ambivalent feelings