Chester Himes: A Primary Bibliography

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Chester Himes at age 35. Used with permission, Professor Joseph S. Himes, Jr.
CHESTER HIMES: A PRIMARY BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Few Afro-American writers in the past fifty years have had the impact of the late Chester Himes. Since critical commentary first began to appear on his work in the late 1940s, critics both Black and white have been sharply divided on whether Himes was a brilliant, angry genius, a dangerous racist bent on stirring up racial unrest, or a militant separatist preaching organized Black revolution.

Himes' reputation is based on a number of novels he published between 1945 and 1969. These novels show a remarkable range and include stark sociological protest, revealing autobiographical fiction, satire, and crime novels. Most are at least well known to critics and some, particularly the so-called "Harlem Domestic Series" gained a wide popularity both in the United States and abroad.

Himes' life was a difficult and peripatetic one. Before he was out of his teens he was imprisoned at Ohio State Penitentiary for robbery. Upon his release during the Great Depression, he bounced from one menial job to another as he attempted to make a name for himself, first as a short story writer and finally as a novelist. In the early 1950s, fed up with the racism he saw at every turn and the failure of all of his writing to gain for him any critical or financial success, he expatriated himself to France. He wandered about Europe for a number of years before he was rediscovered by the French and finally achieved the popularity he was denied at home.

Himes began writing short fiction while he was in prison and because much of his early work was published in now defunct Black periodicals and newspapers, it has been largely unknown to scholars and Himes enthusiasts. At the same time, Himes himself never kept track of the many short stories and articles he wrote in his early days. As a result, when scholars first began to evidence some interest in this output, so much time had passed that even Himes could not remember where all his work had appeared. This has often resulted in vague or completely mistaken bibliographic entries which have tended to confuse rather than enlighten the researcher interested in Himes' roots as a writer. This has been compounded by the few other bibliographers who have attempted to document Himes' writing career.

While scholars and critics have tended to disagree on Himes' importance to American and Afro-American literature, it is undeniable that there is both a scholarly and popular interest in his work. New
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editions of his work and new reappraisals of it have both appeared recently. Because of this, the authors decided that the time was right to attempt to present a bibliography of Himes' major and minor work that would approach comprehensiveness. A number of the items in this bibliography were discovered by accident and it is possible that we will never know the full extent of Himes' writing.

SECTION I
THE NOVELS

Himes' novels are listed in order of their chronological appearance. Each entry lists first and second American, French, and British printings. Titles appearing first in French are listed ahead of subsequent American printings.


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SECTION II
THE SHORT FICTION

Those who have attempted to organize a bibliography of Himes work in earlier times have been forced to rely on Himes' own recollections, some of which have proven to be faulty. A good example of this is a claim by Himes that a story by him appeared in the weekly Pittsburgh Courier around 1932. A page-by-page investigation of this newspaper from the time of Himes' imprisonment through 1935 has, thus far, yielded no text by Himes. One can only surmise that Himes did submit a story but that it was not accepted for publication.

Himes also claimed to have published a story in The Bronzeman. Unfortunately, a complete set of this magazine has not been located anywhere in the United States and the available issues do not contain any work by Himes.

His short fiction shows not only the roots of his later crime fiction, but also his interest in creating strong, proletarian Black characters and the canny ear for Negro street talk that characterized so much of his dialogue.

Below are listed all first periodical appearances of short fiction in their chronological order of appearance. When stories have been anthologized, the works in which they appear are also noted.

28. "To What Red Hell." Esquire 2(October 1934), 100-1, 122, 127
29. "The Visiting Hour." Esquire 6(September 1936), 76, 143-4, 146.
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34. “Looking Down the Street.” Crossroad (Spring 1940), pages not numbered.
35. “Face in the Moonlight.” Coronet 9(February 1941), 51-63.
37. “Strictly Business.” Esquire 17(February 1942), 55, 128.
41. “Heaven Has Changed.” The Crisis 50(March 1943), 78, 83.
42. “So Softly Smiling.” The Crisis 50(October 1943), 314-6, 318.
43. “All He Needs Is Feet.” The Crisis 50(November 1943), 332.
45. “All God’s Chillun Got Pride.” The Crisis 51(June 1944), 188-9, 204.
46. “He Seen It in the Stars.” Negro Story 1(July/August 1944), 5-9.
50. “There Ain’t No Justice.” Esquire 23(April 1945), 53 (Although subtitled “Article”, this dialogue appears to be a work of fiction.)
52. “Make With the Shape.” Negro Story 2(August/September 1945), 3-6.
53. “A Night of New Roses.” Negro Story 2(December 1945/January 1946), 10-14 (Original manuscript title was “A Night of Neuroses.” Published title was a misprint.)
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56. “Journey Out of Fear.” Tomorrow 7 (June 1948), 38-42.
57. “To End All Stories.” The Crisis 55 (July 1948), 205, 220.

SECTION III
NON FICTION

Even more tantalizing than his missing short fiction are the missing nonfiction publications that Himes is reported to have done during his early years. For example, Himes is reputed to have acted as a kind of reporter for the Cleveland News around the year 1939. In a letter he wrote he said:

“the editor of the Cleveland daily News, one N.R. Howard, gave me an assignment writing vignettes about various places in Cleveland, street scenes, etc., of the various ethnical groups of which Cleveland was chiefly composed at that time. These ran in a box on the editorial page, under the heading THIS CLEVELAND, and signed by ch.”

(Chester Himes to John A. Williams, October 31, 1962, pp. 4-5)

Himes indicated that about fifty such columns were published. Only one was found in draft form among Himes’ papers at Yale University. The entire publisher’s run of the Cleveland News is located at the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland. Searches by the staff of the Historical Society have discovered unsigned advertisement-like text in the paper called “In Cleveland” but sufficient differences exist between the items and Himes’ description to make it impossible to attribute them to him.

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Himes also reported that he worked on a history of the C.I.O. Archivists at the George Meany Memorial Archives (official archives of the AFL-CIO in Silver Spring, Maryland) discovered such a history, entitled CIO: What it is...and How it Came to Be. This 46 page pamphlet, Number 12 in the C.I.O. Publications Series, was published in October of 1937. Similarities in style, the publication date, and the fact that much of the C.I.O.'s publication activity came out of Cleveland during this period provide strong indications that the booklet could, indeed, be Himes' work.

Himes also reported working on a history of Cleveland for the Ohio WPA Guide. Lack of any indication of authorship makes it impossible to attribute this piece to Himes, either.

Other Himes checklists have also noted "Equality for 125,000 Dead", reputed to be in a 1945 issue of the Chicago Defender, and a review of Ann Petry's The Street, reputed to be in an issue of New Masses. Although a typescript of the latter was found in Himes' papers, neither of these items has yet been positively identified.

Books and Book Appearances


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Magazine Appearances

68. “A Modern Fable—of Mr. Slaughter, Mr. McDull, and the American Scene.” Crossroad No. 2 (Summer 1939), 5 unnumbered pages.

69. “Native Son: Pros and Cons.” New Masses (May 21, 1940), 23-4 (A letter discussing various aspects of Richard Wright’s Native Son.)

70. “Now Is the Time! Here Is the Place!” Opportunity 20 (September 1942), 271-3, 284.

71. “Zoot Suit Riots Are Race Riots!” The Crisis 50 (July 1943), 200-1, 222.


75. “A Letter to the Editor of Commentary.” Commentary 5 (May 1948), 473-4. (Himes protests Milton Klonsky’s scathing review of Lonely Crusade that appears in Commentary 5 (February 1948), 189-90. Note that Klonsky rebuts Himes’ protest on page 474 of the May 1948 issue.)


83. “The Making of a Black Writer.” Intellectual Digest (December 1971), 24-7 (excerpt from The Quality of Hurt [Item #66])
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86. Letter to Jazz Hot (Paris) dated April 18, 1972. Jazz Hot 38(July/August 1972), 14. (Himes sends greetings to the magazine, which carries articles about him and his work).

SECTION IV
COLLECTIONS

This final section of the bibliography consists of collections of short fiction and articles by Himes. Some material was not previously published and, where this is the case, it is so noted.

87. Black on Black, Baby Sister and Selected Writings. New York: Doubleday, 1973, 287 p. The contents of this work are as follows:

“All God’s Chillun Got Pride.” (see item # 45)
“All He Needs Is Feet.” (see item #43)
“Baby Sister, A Black Greek Tragedy.” (A script, previously unpublished)
“Black Laughter.” [1946] (previously unpublished)
“Christmas Gift.” [1944] (previously unpublished)
“Da-Da-Dee.” [1948] (previously unpublished)
“Heaven Has Changed.” (see item #41)
“Headwaiter.” (previously unpublished)
“In the Night.” (see item #39)
“Cotton Gonna Kill Me Yet.” (previously published as “Let Me At the Enemy—An’ George Brown”, item #47)
“Lunching at the Ritzmore.” (see item #38)
“Mama’s Missionary Money.” (see item #58)
“A Nigger.” (previously unpublished)
“The Night’s for Cryin’.” (see item #30)
“One More Way to Die.” (see item #55)
“Pork Chop Paradise.” (previously unpublished)
“Prediction.” [1969] (previously unpublished)
“If You’re Scared, Go Home.” [1941] (essay, previously unpublished)

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"Negro Martyrs Are Needed." (essay, see item #72)
"Now Is The Time! Here Is The Place!" (essay, see item #70)
"Zoot Riots Are Race Riots." (title slightly altered, see item #71)


Published in France as Black on Black. Paris: Editions Des Autres, 1979, 243 p. (translated by Maurice Cullez) In this edition, the script to "Baby Sister" and the four political essays were excluded.; Reprinted as Noir sur Noir, Paris: Christian Bourgois, 10/18, 1984, 243 p.

88. Le Manteau de rêve. Paris: Editions Lieu Commun, 1982, 217 p. (translated by Hélène Devaux-Minié). The contents of this volume are as follows:

"Le manteau de rêve." ("On Dreams and Reality", previously unpublished in English)
"Le fantôme de Rufus Jones." ("The Ghost of Rufus Jones", previously unpublished in English)
"Un taulard dingue." ("Crazy in the Stir", see item #27)
"Les tricheurs." ("To End All Stories", see item #57)
"Le gin espagnol." ("Spanish Gin" [1957], previously unpublished in English)
"En taula, on ne peut rein dépenser." ("Money Don't Spend in the Stir", see item #44)
"La dame de la 100e rue." ("Every Opportunity", see item #31)
"Le puceau." ("My, But the Rats Are Terrible", see item # 51
"Son sourire était si doux." ("So Softly Smiling", see item # 42)
"Les deux soldats." ("Two Soldiers", see item # 40)
"Le serpent." ("The Snake", see item # 60)
"Business avant tout." ("Strictly Business", see item # 37)
"Pour l'uniforme." ("A Penny for Your Thoughts", see item # 48)
"Une nuit dans le New-Jersey." ("One Night in New Jersey", previously unpublished in English)
"Keep on Smilin' dit la chanson." ("The Song Says: 'Keep on Smilin'", see item # 49)
"Une vie éternelle." ("Life Everlasting", see item # 61)
"Névrose en noir et blanc." ("A Night of Neuroses", see item # 53)

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“Chanson sous la pluie.” (“In the Rain”, previously unpublished in English)

89. *Faut être nègre pour faire ca...* Paris: Lieu Commun, 1986, 224 p. The contents of this volume are as follows:
- “Moitie d’homme.” (“Friends”, see item #59)
- “Black Rodeo.” (originally entitled “Daydream”, previously unpublished in English)
- “Faut être nègre pour faire ca...” (“The Something in a Colored Man”, see item #54)
- “L’heure des visites.” (“The Visiting Hour”, see item #29)
- “Les visages de la lune.” (“Face in the Moonlight”, see item #35)
- “L’effet que ca fait.” (“He Knew”, see item #25)
- “Messe en prison.” (“Prison Mass”, see item #20)
- “La loi de la chair.” (“The Way of Flesh”, previously unpublished in English)
- “Le mur.” (“There Ain’t No Justice”, see item #50)
- “Son dernier jour.” (“His Last Day”, see item #19)
- “La femme au foyer.” (“Make With the Shape”, see item #52)
- “Le paradis n’est plus ce qu’il etait.” (“Heaven Has Changed”, see item #41)
- “Je cherche pas à te faire mal.” (“I’m Not Trying to Hurt You”, previously unpublished in English)
- “Les enfants d’Hitler.” (“He Seen It In the Stars”, see item #46)
- “Vers quel enfer de flammes?” (“To What Red Hell”, see item #28)

- “Baby Sister” (previously published in English in the collection listed as item #87. Translated by Maurice and Yvonne Cullaz)
- “Joue, Gabriel, joue.” (a script originally entitled “Blow, Gabriel, Blow”, previously unpublished. Translated by Hélène Devaux-Minié)
- “Naturellement, le nègre.” (a script originally entitled “Naturally, the Negro”, previously unpublished. Translated by Hélène Devaux-Minié)