



The New York Public Library
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,
Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Guide to the

Rosa Guy papers

ca. 1970-2010

Sc MG 903

Processed by Steven G. Fullwood and Candice Carr, ca. 2015.

Summary

Creator: Guy, Rosa

Title: Rosa Guy papers

Date: ca. 1970-2010

Size: 13.17 linear feet (35 boxes)

Source: Purchased from the Estate of Rosa Guy, 2013.

Revision History: Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

Abstract: The Rosa Guy papers contain material related to her personal life, her writing, and her professional career. The personal matter includes correspondence and biographical information. The material in the writing series includes drafts, notes, and proofs, among other documents, for Guy's published and unpublished writing. Professional papers consist of correspondence, grant applications, and materials related to professional organizations.

Preferred citation: [Item], Rosa Guy papers, Sc MG 903, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by Steven G. Fullwood and Candice Carr, ca. 2015.

Separated Materials:

Transferred to the Art and Artifacts Division: drawings and paintings

Transferred to the General Research and Reference Division: books

Transferred to the Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division: audio materials. For more information, please contact the division at schomburgaudiovisual@nypl.org or 212-491-2270.

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs

Related Materials:

Maya Angelou papers, Sc MG 830, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

Creator History

Rosa Guy was an internationally acclaimed, award-winning author. With more than 20 published works, Guy was a respected literary voice of the Black experience and an active member of the Harlem community. Guy's success enabled her to support herself and her family financially, exclusively, as an author and lecturer, a privilege not afforded many Black female authors of her time.

Guy was born in Diego Martin, Trinidad, on September 1, 1922. Although there is some debate about the actual year she was born, most documents support 1922. Her parents, Henry and Audrey Cuthbert, emigrated from Trinidad to Harlem, New York, in 1927. Guy and her sister, Ameze, left Trinidad in 1932 and joined their parents in Harlem. Shortly after Guy's arrival in Harlem, her mother fell ill and sent Guy and her sister to live in Brooklyn with a cousin. In Brooklyn, Guy was exposed to Garveyism and Black Nationalism, which help shape her worldview at a young age. After the death of her mother in 1934, Rosa and her sister lived in Harlem with their father until he passed in 1937, leaving the sisters orphaned. At the age of 14, Guy dropped out of Wadleigh High School and started working in a factory in the garment district to support her and her ailing sister, while they lived in foster homes and orphanages. In Guy's own words she "had the good fortune of dropping--or of being dropped--out of the New York City school system at a very young age and so escaped its paralyzing effects."

In 1941, Rosa married Warner Guy and gave birth to Warner Guy, Jr., a year later. While her husband was serving in World War II, she continued to work in factories and sweatshops in the garment district of New York City. During that time, one of her co-workers introduced her to the American Negro Theatre, where she studied acting. After the end of World War II, Guy moved to Connecticut with her husband and son. Her marriage ended in 1950 and she returned to New York City with her son.

The same year, Guy founded the Harlem Writers Guild with John O. Killens, John Henrik Clarke, Willard Moore, and Walter Christmas. The Guild provided an informal setting for aspiring black writers to critique one another's work. As its membership grew and its reputation spread, it became one of the most influential Black literary organizations of its time. Its membership included Killens, Clarke, Moore, Christmas, Maya Angelou, Paule Marshall, Audre Lorde, Alice Childress, Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, and Douglass Turner Ward.

After years of sharpening her craft and briefly returning to school at New York University, Guy's first book, *Bird at My Window*, was published by J.P. Lippincott. Guy is well-known for her award winning trilogy about three Black girls coming of age in Harlem, which includes *The Friends*, *Ruby*, and *Edith Jackson*. Her novel *My Love, My Love: or The Peaseant Girl*, has been made into the award-winning musical *Once on This Island*.

Guy loved to travel and often found inspiration for her writings during her travels to Africa, the West Indies, and Europe. No matter where her travels took her, she always considered New York City home. On June 3, 2012, Guy lost her battle with cancer and passed away in New York City.

Scope and Content Note

The Rosa Guy papers contain material related to her personal life, her writing, and her professional career. The personal matter includes correspondence and biographical information. The material in the writing series includes drafts, notes, and proofs, among other documents, for Guy's published and unpublished writing. Professional papers consist of correspondence, grant applications, and materials related to professional organizations.

Arrangement: Arranged into three series: I. Personal; II. Writing; and III. Professional.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American women authors
Authors, Black
Authors, Caribbean
Trinidadians -- United States
Writers' workshops

Names

Angelou, Maya
Dee, Ruby
Feelings, Tom
Guy, Rosa
Guy, Rosa. My love, my love
Association of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars
Harlem Writers Guild Inc.

Container List

Personal ca. 1970-2009

This series contains biographical information, personal correspondence, notes, journals, and articles about Guy. Of note in the biographical information files are Guy's accounts of her career and writing, resumes, articles about Guy, publication lists, fellowship and grant applications, contact lists, awards, medical records, speeches, family history, obituaries (of John Henrik Clarke and Walter Christmas), and a Maya Angelou file, which contains a transcript of an intimate interview between Guy and Angelou. In an account of her career, Guy references "Benidine" as her first completed novel, which was never published. That reference, and a note in an inventory list of Guy's library from 2003, are the only references to the unpublished novel.

- b. 1 f. 1-6 Biographical information
- b. 1 f. 7 Speeches
- b. 1 f. 8 Family history
- b. 1 f. 9 Interviews
- b. 1 f. 10 Obituaries
- b. 1 f. 11 Angelou, Maya
- b. 2 f. 1-3 Correspondence
- b. 2 f. 4 Notes
- b. 2 f. 5 Award
- b. 3-4 Journals

Writing ca. 1970-2000

This series, the largest, contains drafts, excerpts, and illustrations from most of her published books; articles, essays, and reviews written by Guy; and literary reviews of her published works.

Arranged into two subseries: (1) Published and (2) Unpublished.

Published

This subseries contains papers on various published books by Guy, grouped by original publication date; it includes manuscripts, galleys, typescripts, drafts, scripts, and cover art. In some cases, there are numerous drafts but Guy rarely dated them. Additionally, articles by Guy and reviews of her writings by others can be found in this series. There are no files for *Bird at My Window*, *Children of Longing*, or *Billy the Great* in this series, although they are referenced in other series.

Arranged chronologically, by publication date, with books first followed by articles and essays.

Books

The Friends trilogy ca. 1973

Originally published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973.

The *Friends* files include all documents related to the trilogy, *The Friends*, *Ruby*, and *Edith Jackson*; they include draft treatments, draft screenplays, publicity, draft playscripts, and a copy of the typescripts, as well as typescripts for *Ruby* and *Edith Jackson*.

- b. 5 *The Friends*
- b. 6 f. 1-5
- b. 6 f. 6 *Ruby*
- b. 6 f. 7-10 *Edith Jackson*
- b. 6 f. 11 Cover art

Writing (cont.)

Published (cont.)

Books (cont.)

- b. 7 *The Disappearance* ca. 1979
Published by Delacorte Press, 1979.
The *Disappearance* files are comprised of typescript copies, commentary by Ruby Dee and Maya Angelou, a playscript, musical score, and Delacorte Press editorial notes.
- b. 8-9 *Mirror of Her Own* 1980-1981
Published in 1981 by Delacorte Press.
Mirror of Her Own files contain manuscript copies, a 1980 galley, a book jacket, and uncorrected proofs.
- b. 10 *Mother Crocodile: An Uncle Amadou Tale from Senegal* ca. 1981
Illustrated by John Steptoe; Coretta Scott King Award Winning book of 1982. Originally published by Delacorte Press in 1981.
Mother Crocodile files include various typescript excerpts and galleys.
- b. 11-12 *A Measure of Time* ca. 1983
Originally published by Henry Holt and Co. in 1983.
A Measure of Time is one of the larger sets of files in this series, and contains editor's notes, typescripts, manuscript copies, and a galley.
- b. 13 f. 1-2 *New Guys Around the Block* ca. 1983
b. 34 f. 6 Originally published by Delacorte Press in 1983.
Includes notes, cover art, and a galley.
- b. 13 f. 3-6 *Paris, Pee Wee, and Big Dog* ca. 1984-1985
Originally published by Gollancz (London) in 1984 and Delacorte in 1985.
Includes a television script, drafts, manuscripts, and uncorrected proofs.
- b. 14 *My Love, My Love or the Peasant Girl* ca. 1985-1990
Originally published by Holt, Rinehard, and Winston in 1985.
Files are comprised of a proposal, drafts with edits, and information about *Once on This Island* (the play based on the novel).
- b. 15 *And I Heard a Bird Sing* ca. 1987
Originally published by Delacorte Press in 1987.
Contains typescripts and manuscripts.
- b. 16 *The Ups and Downs of Carl Davis III* ca. 1989
Originally published by Delacorte Press in 1989.
Includes manuscripts and artwork.
- b. 17-18 *The Music of Summer (Summer of 1985)* ca. 1992
Originally published by Delacorte Press in 1992.
Contains page proofs, cover art, manuscripts, typescripts, and editor's notes.
- b. 19-20 *The Sun, the Sea, a Touch of the Wind* ca. 1995
Originally published by E. P. Dutton in 1995.
Includes early drafts, manuscripts, and excerpts.

Articles, essays, and reviews by Guy

Arranged alphabetically by title.

- b. 21 f. 1 "About a Beauty Contest"
- b. 21 f. 2 "Anniversary"
- b. 21 f. 3 "Billy's Burden"
- b. 21 f. 4 "Dorine Davis"
- b. 21 f. 5 "Georgia, Georgia"
- b. 21 f. 6 "Harlem Today: A Clear Case of Survival"
- b. 21 f. 7 "Imani Jones: Detective"
- b. 21 f. 8 "Past Time of Innocence"
- b. 21 f. 9 "She"

Writing (cont.)

Published (cont.)

Articles, essays, and reviews by Guy (cont.)

- b. 21 f. 10 Talk for Royal Festival Hall
- b. 21 f. 11 "Thanksgiving"
- b. 21 f. 12 "The Man Who Cried I Am"
- b. 21 f. 13 "The Talking Eggs"
- b. 21 f. 14 "What It's Like to Be a Negro Girl"
- b. 21 f. 15 "What Joe Didn't Understand"
- b. 21 f. 16 "Writer's Paradise"
- b. 21 f. 17-19 Various

b. 21 f. 20 Book covers

Reviews of Guy's work

Generally arranged chronologically, by publication date.

- b. 22 f. 1 *Bird at My Window*
- b. 22 f. 2 *The Friends*
- b. 22 f. 3 *Ruby*
- b. 22 f. 4 *Edith Jackson*
- b. 22 f. 5 *The Disappearance*
- b. 22 f. 6 *Mirror of Her Own*
- b. 22 f. 7 *Mother Crocodile*
- b. 22 f. 8 *A Measure of Time*
- b. 22 f. 9 *New Guys Around the Block*
- b. 22 f. 10 *Paris, Pee Wee and Big Dog*
- b. 22 f. 11 *My Love, My Love or the Peasant Girl*
- b. 22 f. 12 *Once on This Island*
- b. 22 f. 13 *And I Heard a Bird Sing*
- b. 22 f. 14 *The Ups and Downs of Carl Davis III*
- b. 22 f. 15 *Billy the Great*
- b. 22 f. 16 *The Music of Summer*
- b. 22 f. 17 *The Sun, the Sea, and a Touch of the Wind*

Unpublished

This series comprises works in progress, novels, television scripts, television treatments, plays, proposals, and memoirs, all unpublished.

- b. 23 f. 1-5 "Black Heroes"
- b. 24 "Mystic Falls"
- b. 25 f. 1 "Bad Companions"
- b. 25 f. 2-5 "Dessaline"
- b. 25 f. 6 "Dustland" review
- b. 25 f. 7 "Flora: A Scent of Power"
- b. 25 f. 8 "Gwendolyn Brooks"
- b. 25 f. 9 "Hamilton"
- b. 25 f. 10 "Lumumba and Castro"
- b. 25 f. 11 "Lydia"
- b. 34 f. 7

Writing (cont.)
Unpublished (cont.)

- b. 25 f. 12-13 **Memoirs**
- b. 25 f. 14 "Mr. Hobson's Big Chance"
- b. 25 f. 15 "Mr. Hobson's Happiest Day"
- b. 25 f. 16 "One Day in the Life of Kino"
- b. 25 f. 17 "Readers' Guide to Huckleberry Finn"
- b. 26 f. 1 "Sporting Life: Cora"
- b. 26 f. 2 "The Innocents"
- b. 26 f. 3-4 "The Mansion"
- b. 26 f. 5 "The Orphans of New York"
- b. 26 f. 6 "The Play"
- b. 26 f. 7 "The Rage of the Silent Storm"
- b. 26 f. 8 "Time Out in Haiti"
- b. 26 f. 9 "Times, Tides: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston"
- b. 26 f. 10 Unidentified novel
- b. 27 f. 1-2 Unidentified speech
- b. 27 f. 3 Unidentified treatment
- b. 27 f. 4 Unidentified fragments
- b. 27 f. 5-12 Unidentified fragments

Professional ca. 1970-2010

This series contains financial and tax records, including detailed royalty, banking, and tax statements; grant applications for the Guggenheim; personal research; information about professional organizations with which Guy was involved, including the Harlem Writers Guild, the National Writer's Voice Project, and the Association of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars; legal documents and deposition transcripts from various legal proceedings; professional correspondence; and fan letters.

- b. 28 **Royalty statements**
- b. 29 f. 1-2 **Financial documents**
- b. 29 f. 3 **Legal documents**
- b. 29 f. 4 **Contracts**
- b. 29 f. 5-6 **Tax documents**
- b. 30 **Correspondence**
- Organizations and research**
- b. 31 f. 1 "A Gynocritical Approach to the Works of Rosa Guy"
- b. 31 f. 2 Applications for Guggenheim
- b. 31 f. 3 Articles on various subjects
- b. 31 f. 4 Harlem Writers Guild
- b. 31 f. 5 Burgie, Irving
- b. 31 f. 6 Pen American Center
- b. 31 f. 7-8 **Research**
 Includes research on writing.
- b. 31 f. 9 The Association of Caribbean Women and Scholars
- b. 31 f. 10 The National Writer's Voice Project
- b. 31 f. 11-12 **General**
- Other authors**

Professional (cont.)

Organizations and research (cont.)

Other authors (cont.)

- b. 32 f. 1 Turnquist, Charlotte
- b. 32 f. 2 Williams, Gina
- b. 32 f. 3 Brown, Harold
- b. 32 f. 4-5 Woodson, Jacqueline
- b. 32 f. 6 Evans-Charles, Martie
- b. 32 f. 7 Misani
- b. 32 f. 8 Matura, Mustapha
- b. 32 f. 9 Adisa, Opal Palmer
- b. 33 f. 1 Feelings, Tom
- b. 33 f. 2-4 Multiple authors
- b. 33 f. 5 Unidentified authors
- b. 34 f. 1 Reviews
- b. 34 f. 2 Contracts
- b. 34 f. 3 AFRAM Harlem
AFRAM Harlem was a nonprofit educational organization described as a "Afrikan reference library", "Afrikan research movement", and "Afrikan distribution service".
- b. 35 Clippings 1983-1989