

The Poetry of Jill Scott

Reviewed by Jeffrey Dessources

The Moments, the Minutes, the Hours: The Poetry of Jill Scott

By Jill Scott

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Jill Scott is best known for being a Neo-Soul vocalist, platinum selling artist, and Grammy award nominee. She can now add poet and author to her array of talents. In her first work of poetry *The Moments, the Minutes, the Hours: The Poetry of Jill Scott*, Scott's poems make the transition from a personal journal to the general public. While intently exploring the complexities of African American women she also touches on topics ranging from poverty and culture to love and religion.

Within the introduction Scott remarks "I felt riveted to read something so close to my own experience"(xiv). This search led her to discovering such visionaries as Emily Dickinson and Nikki Giovanni. It is Giovanni's influence that is strongly present throughout the pages of this text. Scott channels the great poet to help create a literary voice for a new generation writers on many levels. Her topics, language use and experiments with style are important approaches towards reaching out to a broad audience. The poems have a great feeling of an old and new style of poetry.

Beginning with chapter one, *All the Evil and All the Love*, Scott keys in on the long tradition of love poems. The poems that focus on the relationships between men and women are taking place in diverse locations such as the home, church, and nightclubs. With these tactics readers are able to get a sense of Scott's vulnerability. Within the poem *Across Your Bread* the lines "As much as I didn't want / I have stumbled / tripped / fallen ova myself in love with every molecule of / you" (1) reveal a great deal of Scott's emotions. She connects to readers with her ability to present ideas relatable to daily experiences of relationships. In *King at Clubs*, readers find themselves partying in a nightclub in search of a significant other. "Every Friday night my sistas are going to the Funky Blue Jazz Club on 42nd and Whatever" (7) are lines that call on the African American traditions of Funk, Blues and Jazz music to

aid in the storytelling process. The stirring sound of her music is brought to paper with vivid descriptions of feelings and excitement shared by her and the audience. As Maya Angelou has done before her Jill Scott's voice on the struggles of love and relationship is heard loud and clear. This chapter is full of lyric poetry and spoken word poetry that adds a unique flavor to a deep topic.

Jill Scott continues to create change by adding a new twist to an ancient poetic technique. *The Moments, the Minutes, the Hours: The Poetry of Jill Scott* has a chapter devoted to the short three line poem, the haiku. These poems reflect the tales that Scott has woven through each page. The short pieces exhibit simplicity and directness to bring out complex situations. Haiku #1 wonderfully presents a case of expression and vision:

It was a loud cry

When I was brought to this world

Been loud ever since (33)

This is petite in length yet carries a piercing tone. The combination of style and content records the essence of everyday situations and links to the reading public.

Chapter four entitled *Us Sistahs Sometimes* mirrors Giovanni's ability to use words to connect to women of color. The poem *When the Women Gather* speaks on female diversity. She uses an efficient technique of questioning to point out unique differences. "Ever watch the women?/bend from the waist/Like wind make wheat do" (67) asks readers to reflect on a seemingly simple question. Metaphorically throughout she makes exquisite comparisons between the beauty of nature and women that add a breath of fresh air to the piece. *Mrs. Bird* is a poem that introduces readers to Nokia. Scott's imagery gives this character independence and strength. "Nokia walked in high heels/Long before crawling class was through" (69) is line that demonstrates the ambition of a strong woman, whose voice is jumping off of the page. Throughout the text but especially in chapter four Scott sheds light on an assortment of female roles. Here on is can feel the impact of the great Sonia Sanchez whose words have touched and liberated women across the world. From cover to cover readers are able to relate to mothers, sisters, grandmothers, godmothers, housewives, working women, musicians, prostitutes, girlfriends and many more. She creates a map of the African American female experience that speaks to a number of listeners.

In creating a voice Jill Scott ignites a cultural response with her use of vernacular. *Untitled #2* is an example of how she uses dialect as a call for remembrance and movement. She states that she "Won't shuck and jive / Not gonna coon / Not I / Too many ancestors' tears stains on my face" (54). Scott effectively uses certain colloquial speech to place emphasis on

the mission and expression. The first line of the opening poem of the text successfully does so by stating “I’m juss gon say what I need to” (1). Although not Standard English readers are able to relate to and comprehend what is happening in this line. Using such terms helps Scott reach different ages, cultures and classes. These techniques and ability to cross-reference adds honesty to the process. She is unafraid to take chances in speaking to various audiences.

Being an accomplished performer and musician has given Jill Scott a solid fan base. Her shows will continue to garner fans waiting to hear her sultry and soulful voice. *The Moments, the Minutes, the Hours: The Poetry of Jill Scott* now creates an additional arena for such a moving and emotional voice. The energy of a stage performance has transferred to the pages of this text. She is concise with her readers and reflects images in ways that simultaneously solicit joy and pain. She mixes the extraordinary power of greats Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni and Maya Angelou with her own Philadelphia flow. Such a mélange is able to connect to countless generations and provide inspiration and a much needed voice. Jill Scott has not reached the level of excellence as the aforementioned poets but with this work she is well on her way.

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