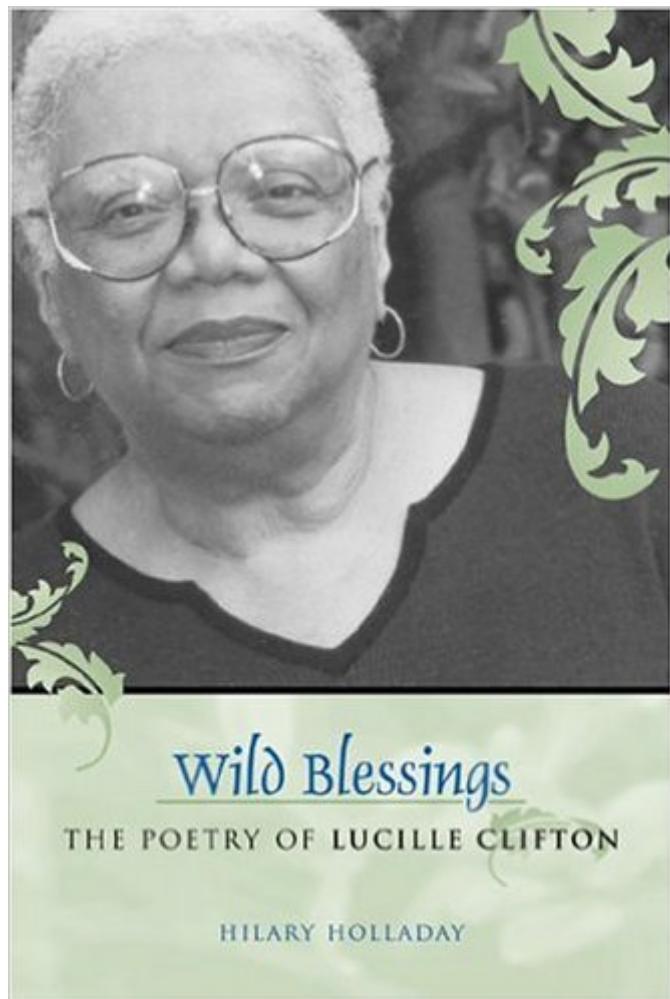


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# Wild Blessings: The Poetry Of Lucille Clifton (Southern Literary Studies)



## **Synopsis**

Widely acclaimed for her powerful explorations of race, womanhood, spirituality, and mortality, poet Lucille Clifton has published thirteen volumes of poems since 1969 and has received numerous accolades for her work, including the 2000 National Book Award for *Blessing the Boats*. Her verse is featured in almost every anthology of contemporary poetry, and her readings draw large and enthusiastic audiences. Although Clifton's poetry is a pleasure to read, it is neither as simple nor as blithely celebratory as readers sometimes assume. The bursts of joy found in her polished, elegant lines are frequently set against a backdrop of regret and sorrow. Alternately consoling, stimulating, and emotionally devastating, Clifton's poems are unforgettable. In *Wild Blessings*, Hilary Holladay offers the first full-length study of Clifton's poetry, drawing on a broad knowledge of the American poetic tradition and African American poetry in particular. Holladay places Clifton's poems in multiple contexts -- personal, political, and literary -- as she explicates major themes and analyzes specific works: Clifton's poems about womanhood, a central concern throughout her career; her fertility poems, which are provocatively compared with Sylvia Plath's poems on the same subject; her relation to the Black Arts Movement and to other black female poets, such as Gwendolyn Brooks and Sonia Sanchez; her biblical poems; her elegies; and her poignant family history, *Generations*, an extended prose poem. In addition to a new preface written after Clifton's death in 2010, this updated edition includes an epilogue that discusses the poetry collections she published after 2004. Readers encountering Lucille Clifton's poems for the first time and those long familiar with her distinctive voice will benefit from Hilary Holladay's striking insights and her illuminating interview with the influential American poet.

## **Book Information**

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## Customer Reviews

Hilary Holladay's *Wild Blessings* is a well-written, well-researched critical study. It offers insight into the professional, as well as private, world of famed poet Lucille Clifton. Clifton is an incredibly talented writer, as well as a prolific speaker and activist. Holladay makes good use of these talents and brings them to the forefront in this illuminating book about the artist. Personally, after reading *Wild Blessings*, I had a better, much deeper, appreciation for Clifton and her work. *Wild Blessings* is a must read for literary scholars and students alike.

On Mar 15, 2015, at 12:11 PM, Cynthia Rich wrote:I read some of Clifton's work some years ago and recall feeling its power--however I hadn't thought of it in recent years. I happened on Holladay's wonderful discussions of that body of poetry, and it sent me back eagerly to the source. *Wild Blessings* is a generous opening to the poetry and for myself even a kind of advanced guide to reading poetry, since Holladay has made me far more welcoming to a poem's ambiguities or multiple meanings as a richness rather than a discomfiture. The factual research is wide and deep, and Holladay seems to have absorbed it at a cellular level--that is, her comfort with the wide-ranging material, including exploring realities and issues of race, feminism, class--feels truly integrated. Unlike too many critical analyses, not only does she provide us with an immensely valuable gloss to this amazing poetry, her work allows us to feel the greatness of Clifton's insight and emotional depth on the prose page, so that there's a kind of seamlessness between the analysis and the poem under investigation.I felt slightly distracted by the inclusion, in the chapter on motherhood, of discussions of Sexton and Plath--rather like an earlier essay that was folded into this book on Clifton. Perhaps because I experience Clifton as the greater poet, it felt slightly disrespectful of her. However, the chapter was interesting in itself, and Holladay may have included the other poets simply because, as she observes, there is so little poetry that seriously investigates women's experience of motherhood.This work is fully accessible--add absorbing and moving--to any lover of poetry or the Black Arts. I am very glad I found it.

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