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*The Love Project:*

*A Marriage Made in Poetry*

Wanda Coleman and Austin Straus

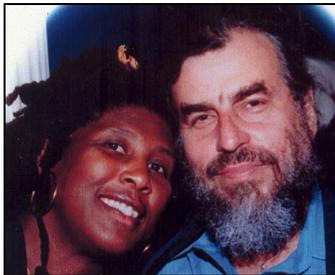
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Wanda Coleman  
and  
Austin Straus

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# *The Love Project*

## *A Marriage Made in Poetry*

Wanda Coleman and Austin Straus

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Wanda Coleman and Austin Straus's tell-all paean to a marriage that crisscrosses the racial and cultural Maginot Lines of American society.

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There's plenty of love between Wanda Coleman and Austin Straus, but it has an edge: every kiss, every snuggle, every touch is political. How to make a marriage work under the unyielding pressures of racial bigotry and cultural bias? How to maintain their creativity and independence as poets and artists faced with the daily pressures of survival? For over three decades, Coleman and Straus have grappled with these questions—and with one another. Together, they have built a wall of desire, carnal and spiritual, to shield them from an often unwelcoming world. *The Love Project* sings their blood oath in an open and jazzy verse that holds nothing back, offering to the world some of the better that has flowered between them.

### **Praise for *The Love Project: A Marriage Made in Poetry***

“One of the royal couples of the L.A. poetry scene.”

—*LA Weekly*

“Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize winner Coleman joins with her husband, poet/painter Straus, to offer the story of a marriage that crosses racial and cultural lines. An affecting, even sweet, account touched by a political knife's edge.”

—Barbara Hoffert, *Library Journal*

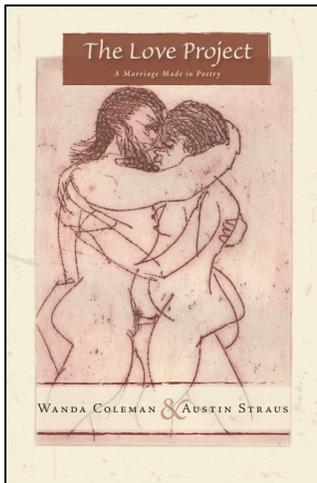
“If any young, wistful romantics out there suppose marriage might be an easy ride, let them read *The Love Project* and be wiser. If there are cynics who scoff at the idea that a certain man and a certain woman can be bound together by destiny and their own immortal love, and, in the whole galaxy, there could be no one better suited for either of them than each other, then those jaded ones must read *The Love Project* and promptly admit before all creation—and on YouTube—that they were wrong. The rest of us, meanwhile, will celebrate this fascinating collaboration by one of the region's premier poet couples because it provides what has been lately hard to come by: naked, tender, fierce and funny love poems for our times.”

—Suzanne Lummis, author of *In Danger*

### **Biographical Note**

**Wanda Coleman** was the author of the poetry collections *Bathwater Wine*, winner of the Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize, and *Mercurochrome*, a finalist for the National Book Award, as well as many other books of poetry, fiction, and essays. She won an Emmy Award as a writer for *Days of Our Lives*. A Los Angeles native, she lived there for many years with her husband, Austin Straus. She died in November, 2013.

A poet and painter, **Austin Straus** is the author of the collections *Drunk with Light* and *Intensifications*, for which he also did the cover art. Born in Brooklyn, he has lived for years in Los Angeles, many of them with his late wife, Wanda Coleman.



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**Praise for Austin & Wanda**

“The paradox of Wanda Coleman is that despite her underclass stance and winks from the bottom of the racial and economic deck, she is perhaps L.A.’s most nationally prominent poet.... The quality of her work transcends the socio-politics of modern literary multicultural America.... She is the real thing... a sophisticated beat hipster with echoes of Ginsberg, Blake, and Hughes.”

—*Vice & Verse*

“In the unique geography of any marriage, there are many and varied landscapes, cityscapes, main arteries, side streets, and dark alleyways. Wanda Coleman & Austin Straus have mapped theirs with courage, passion, anger, joy, exasperation, and gratitude in language that speaks—and sings—to anyone openhearted enough to hear.”

—Stephen Kessler, author of *Moving Targets: On Poets, Poetry & Translation*

“Few contemporary poets can match the honesty and anguished yet celebratory fierceness of Coleman’s vernacular and highly literary voice.”

—Judges’ Statement, The Shelley Memorial  
Award, Poetry Society of America, 2012

“Translating their marriage into poetry, Wanda Coleman and Austin Straus have composed an unsettling love potion of inner demons, tumultuous ‘scènes de ménage,’ euphoric portraits of each other, and succulent make-up sex. These writings are not for the faint of heart.

—Alta Ifland, author of *Death-in-a-Box* and *The Snail’s Song*

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**From *The Love Project***

SONNET FOR AUSTIN

—after a line by E. Ethelbert Miller

I love you as the grave loves the stone

I do not love you as if you were salt-pork or opal  
or the sorrow of grass widows tending fields.  
I love you as uncertain fingers foil tenderness  
in public, where all eyes witness our covetings.

I love you as the wind loves the tumbleweed  
and carries it across the sand to its lair of secrets.  
I love you as chocolate loves cinnamon risen  
from my breath to revive the poem in your eyes.

I love you as today loves yesterday—the way Billie loved Prez