



The Cathedral
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**HARLEM RENAISSANCE AUTHOR JEAN TOOMER TO BE CELEBRATED
WITH INDUCTION INTO THE AMERICAN POETS CORNER
AT THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE**

*Induction ceremony and unveiling of commemorative stone to take place on Sunday,
November 12*

The Cathedral of St. John the Divine will celebrate the legacy of American novelist, poet, and essayist **Jean Toomer** (1894 –1967) with his induction into its **American Poets Corner** on **Sunday, November 12, from 4:00 PM – 5:30 PM, at The Cathedral of St. John the Divine, located at 1047 Amsterdam Avenue (at 112th Street), Manhattan.**

Toomer's formal induction will take place during the traditional Evensong service sung by the Cathedral Choir and conducted by Director of Cathedral Music **Kent Tritle**, featuring the traditional African American spiritual "Joshua Fit The Battle of Jericho," arranged by Moses Hogan. The Sunday Evensong will also include comments by **Marilyn Nelson**, the Cathedral's Poet in Residence. Joining Marilyn Nelson for this celebration will be a number of the distinguished writers who make up the Cathedral's Board of Electors to the Poets Corner, along with special guest, poet and editor **Quraysh Ali Lansana**.

Throughout Toomer's life and work, the issue of racial identity, especially race as a binary both fateful and profound, was an irritant and a beguilement. Jean Toomer was born Nathan Pinchback Toomer in Washington, DC, in 1894. His grandfather, P.B.S. Pinchback, was a Union soldier and the first person of African-American descent to serve as (acting) governor of a U.S. state (Louisiana, during Reconstruction). As a child in segregated Washington, D.C., Toomer was identified as black and attended all-black schools; later on, in New Rochelle, NY, he was identified as white and attended an all-white school. From an early age, Toomer felt both black and white, or perhaps neither, in an either-or society.

As a young man Toomer settled in New York City and began publishing stories and poems, becoming welcomed as an influential member of the Harlem Renaissance arts movement of the



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1920s. The novel *Cane*, published in 1923, is considered his masterpiece, uniting Southern folklore with a profoundly modernist exploration of the complexities of racial identity and the fully realized New American self.

The American Poets Corner, established in 1984 to memorialize and celebrate American writers, is modeled after a similar alcove at Westminster Abbey in London. Previous inductees include Emily Dickinson, e e cummings, Tennessee Williams, James Baldwin, Flannery O'Connor, Zora Neale Hurston, and last year's honoree, Eugene O'Neill. The American Poets Corner and Cathedral poetry events have become an integral part of the literary landscape of New York.

For more information, please visit <http://www.stjohndivine.org/programs/american-poets-corner>.

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About The Cathedral

The Cathedral of St. John the Divine is the Cathedral of the Episcopal Diocese of New York. It is chartered as a house of prayer for all people and a unifying center of intellectual light and leadership. People from many faiths and communities worship together in services held more than 30 times a week; the soup kitchen serves roughly 25,000 meals annually; social service outreach has an increasingly varied roster of programs; the distinguished Cathedral School prepares young students to be future leaders; Adults and Children in Trust, the renowned preschool, afterschool and summer program, offers diverse educational and nurturing experiences; the outstanding Textile Conservation Lab preserves world treasures; concerts, exhibitions, performances and civic gatherings allow conversation, celebration, reflection and remembrance—such is the joyfully busy life of this beloved and venerated Cathedral.

About the American Poets Corner

Poets, fiction writers, essayists, and dramatists: the American Poets Corner memorializes the literature of our nation in all its surprise, wit and beauty. The Poets Corner, beloved by visitors, has earned respect for its choices of inductees, and for the high quality of its Electors and Poets in Residence, which include 17 U.S. Poets Laureate and winners of every literary prize an American writer can aspire to, including the Nobel. Every spring, the Poet in Residence invites each Elector to nominate a writer deceased for at least 25 years. Since 2000, one writer has been inducted each year.