

Black Magnolias

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Black Magnolias is published quarterly by Psychedelic Literature.

Subscription Rates: single issue \$12.00, annual subscription \$40.00. Outside the U.S. add \$7.00 postage for single issue and \$28.00 postage for annual subscription. All payment in U.S. dollars drawn on an U.S. bank or by International Money Order, made to Psychedelic Literature.

Postmaster: Send address changes to *Black Magnolias*, c/o Psychedelic Literature, 203 Lynn Lane, Clinton, MS 39056.

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Cover Art

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Black Magnolias III, 2002
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Prose

Richard Wright: The Enduring Challenge of His Legacy

(Presented at the 2001 Oxford Conference for the Book, March 30 - April 1, 2001)

by Jerry W. Ward

It is a matter of simple fact that I read Richard Wright and treasure his works because we share a few things in common. We spent our childhood and youth in the State of Mississippi. We lived briefly in Chicago. We read books for purposes that expose the functions of literacy in a racialized society. As a writer, teacher, and critic, I share a symbolic kinship with Wright rather like the self-conscious analogy Ely Houston establishes between himself and Cross Damon in *The Outsider*. The exchanges I have had with Wright since my early discovery of *Uncle Tome's Children* and *Black Boy*, to be blunt and truthful, have contributed greatly to my definition of self. My reading of the 1945 version of *Black Boy* initiated an emotional and cognitive entanglement across time: being sensitive and intelligent males in Mississippi in different historical moments, Wright and I grew up to despise who were determined to ensure that "black boys" should have low ceilings of human possibility. In time, our resentment would be transformed into a positive use of words, of words as our weapons.

It was through the portal of language that I came to sense a correspondence at the level of life-vision between myself and Richard Wright, one of the quintessential writers and thinkers of the twentieth century. Although our kinship of the spirit never became one like that chilling moment in American literature when the viewer in Wright's poem, "Between the World and Me," becomes the thing viewed, I have often felt we were driven to articulate our experiences by rather similar motives. We were driven by what, from living not theory, we knew of the dialectics of the concrete¹; that hard-earned knowledge led us to treat our origins as terrifying but absolutely essential grounds for adventures in global humanism.

The enduring challenge of Wright's legacy is to **read his words**, so that as modern readers we are neither straitjacketed in our local, regional, or national identities nor, on the other hand, duped to believe that mere existence, change, and ideas shall by magic make us world citizens. The challenge is the **project of thinking**, exercising reason and imagination as preparation for making a world "worthy of man as we dream of him and what him to be."²

One signal of books worth having as equipment for our living, to alter a Burkean truism, and of writers worth reading and rereading is the power of their language to awaken us--even if understanding language of awakening requires ideological dustrags and historical dictionaries. Wright had a keen sense of the perpetual transformation of ideology, so his deft language rarely needs dusting. Nevertheless, the complex simplicity of his prose may require a few visits to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, to the narratives we call history, to philosophical essays, and to the once secret documents of the state. Wright was always aware that the power of language is constituted in acts of communication, in the occasions when we grasp Wright as speech. His Wright does not address the universe. It speaks to us.

We are not mistaken, however, in categorizing much of his work as literature. Such taxonomy is necessary in the West to help us make sense of reality. We are mistaken, and blind, if we cling to the threadbare notion that Wright's work is only literature and is always to be judge as such. What people usually mean when they utter the word "literature" is too constrained by aesthetic and class presuppositions to accommodate Richard Wright. The surviving traces of Wright's efforts, his legacy, can be more fruitfully understood as Wright and as one Mississippian's answer to the existential question, "What is Writing?"

Certain academic approaches to writing, dressed to kill in theoretical hunting jackets, obscure the importance of the writer's addressing everyday life and deflect our attention from the grittiness of one human being's getting along with another or with great numbers of human beings, some of whom possess power. Fortunately, most of these predators stay a proper distance away from Richard Wright. His voice has not been reduced to a trophy. We can hear the perspective in his work even if it is not exactly captured in the writing. For him, the role of writing was direct, even as it used such devices as image, metaphor, and symbol. The purpose of his writing was to discover, to communicate, to enlighten by clarification, to shape or reshape our thoughts and feelings. Always the desired end of writing was enlarged understanding or heightened consciousness.

Reflecting on three instances of Wright's comments on writing help to make the point clearer. The first is Wright's essay, "Blueprint for Negro Writing" (1937), where he hints that people might think seriously of writing as "something as a guide in their daily living."³ The writer must be aware of "his role as a creator of the world in which he lives, and as a creator of himself" (44). For Wright, perspective was never found directly on the page. "It is that fixed point in intellectual space," he writes, "where a writer stands to view the struggles, hopes, and sufferings of his people" (49). But Wright also urges that there be "no limit to technical and stylistic freedom," only that craft be so refined to allow first-rate work to lift "the level of consciousness higher" (49). This is what Wright attempted to realized in the stories collected under the title *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938), stories that demonstrate his remarkable fidelity to his own theorizing. There he remembered "that in the creative process meaning proceeds *equally* as much from the contemplation of the subject matter as from the hopes and apprehensions that rage in the heart of the writer" (47). The writing in these stories is an articulation of what in a certain moment of twentieth-century Southern cultural history was suppressed, denied, or terminally silenced through such rituals as lynching.

Wright's "blueprint" was only an early sketch for the house he would progressively build. In his autobiography, *Black Boy*, Wright is more personal and specific about his origins as a writer and the locus of Wright in the practice of everyday life. He had provided evidence of his juvenile desire to write by publishing the legendary "Voodoo of Hell's Half-acre" in a Jackson, Mississippi newspaper. His desire was quickened by his discovery in Memphis of H. L. Mencken and the languages of naturalism and realism, but he could not yet write. As understated as it is in the autobiography, the moment of epiphany came when Wright understood the Communists

had a program, but they needed a language his mother could understand. The moment of recognition is projected and preserved in the poem, "I Have Seen Black Hands." Wright became a writer in that moment when the severe logic of Marxism was wed in his mind to the truth-telling of common speaking. There we find the wisdom of Blyden Jackson's argument in his magnificent essay, "Richard Wright in a Moment of Truth"⁴ Wright's understanding of what writing should accomplish comes straight out of his Southern youth. "Out of that youth," in Jackson's estimation, "he derived not only his practical sense of hard reality but also the home country for his artistic imagination" (45).

The third instance where Wright affirms the life of writing occurs in his lecture, "The Literature of the Negro in the United States," from the 1950s. After quoting the final stanza of "I Have Seen Black Hands,"

I am black and I have seen black hands
Raised in fists of revolt, side by side with the white fists of white workers
And some day---and it is only this which sustains me---
Some day there shall be millions of them,
On some red day in a burst of fists on a new horizon!

Wright guessed that his auditors may wonder, "what value there is in Wright like they; [they] may feel that we ought to write like Phyllis Wheatley, Alexander Dumas, or Alexander Pushkin." Wright's answer to the implied question is stunningly prophetic:

Well, we simply cannot; our world is not their world. We write out of what life gives us in the form of experience. And there is a value in what we Negro writers say. Is it not clear to you that the American Negro is the only group in our nation that consistently and passionately raises the question of freedom? This is a service to America and to the world (*White Man, Listen!* 105)

In his apprenticeship and in his maturity as a writer, Wright insisted that writing was not remote from everyday problems, or selfishly indulgent, but intimate with these problems even as it might have been critical of them. My conviction that Wright's legacy offers us so much to learn from and argue with sustains me.

Pulling out once more the literary trope of immortality, I would say that Richard Wright is as alive as is our continuing to read his works with care, openness, sympathy, and a critical will to understand. That is how any writer's gifts survive--first as something recorded, later as ideas that are inspected, remembered, forgotten to be remembered in a time of need, or used in shaping daily action.

The last novel Wright published in his lifetime, *The Long Dream* (1958), returned to the familiar landscape and mindscape of Mississippi. Wright attempted in this work to recapture or recover themes that had genuine personal meaning for him. Critics were not enthusiastic about the book. The claimed Wright had lost touch with racial reality, with progress. A man living in Paris in the 1950s obviously did not have direct contact with the hypocrisy of American segregation. If, however, that man was from Mississippi and

had a privileged view of the psychological reactions of oppressed people in a world rapidly decolonizing, he certainly had authority to speak of the unhealed wounds of dehumanizing law and custom. Yes, *The Long Dream* is about racial abuse. It is also about fathers and sons, the hidden machinery of business, the death of innocence. Family, order and disorder, economics, exploitation, and the burden of adapting to what is radically new are primary themes in Wright's fiction and nonfiction. His work is always provocative, capable of spinning readers off center. We must be cautious about saying what Wright is not in touch with. Disciplined attention to the nuances of his work reveals many angles of vision, many perspectives that matched his evolving awareness of global complexity, his quest for words to mediate the sense of complexity. Reading him wisely, we begin to see through and behind what we often and carelessly take for granted.

The two books by Wright that are best known are *Native Son* and *Black Boy*. *Native Son* raises continuing questions about crime and environment, social norms and the consequences of ignoring human aspirations. Perhaps *Native Son* should not be read without also reading Wright's essay, "How 'Bigger' Was Born." Wright did tell us that all the Biggers in America were not black. We were in denial until reality slapped us in the face. Some Biggers do not live in the inner city now. Some of them live in nice suburbs, come from good families, and act out their desire "to use their classmates for target practice."⁵ Perhaps the newer versions of Bigger find their fictional prototype in the novella *Rite of Passage* (1994). Wright has an uncanny knack of making us look in the mirror of our nightmares.

When young men think of their lives, they can profit from Wright's self-portrait in *Black Boy*. The book is about choices, determination, and the will to overcome disadvantages. Young Wright knew he was not on this earth to cooperate with the assassination of his person or his spirit. It did not matter whether the would-be-killers were his relatives or those who sought to institutionalize his being a "boy" all his days or those who bid him to pray to gods who failed. Wright resisted. He would not minimize himself, his potential, his humanity. The book is classic in its rendering of the cost as well as the rightness of having a mind of one's own and of hungering to achieve something.

Many years ago, I identified *hunger* as the governing metaphor in Wright's development as a writer. The success of the books he published before he chose exile--*Uncle Tom's Children*, *Native Son*, *12 Million Black Voices*, and *Black Boy*--only intensified his awareness that the hunger of the human spirit is implacable.. In the works he produced after 1946, we find Wright yearning for authority and freedom. Like Cross Damon, the protagonist in his 1953 novel, *The Outsider*, Wright hungered to be somewhat free of responsibility to race as the paramount issue, to nation and petty civic ceremony, to the barriers that preclude the creation of "self" and identity. Yet, he recognized that absolute freedom is a mere abstraction or a philosophical figment. Wright accepted the burden of being an authentic writer. He observed and reported in an effort to provoke interrogation of just how the world was put together. Whether he was analyzing nationalism in the Gold Coast (Ghana) as well as his ambivalent feelings about his African ancestry in *Black Power* (1954), reporting on the Bandung Conference and

wondering what the Third World would become come in *The Color Curtain* (1956) or examining the symbiosis of fascist politics and Catholic religion in *Pagan Spain* (1957), Wright never became the distanced, disciplined observer. He was brother in suffering. Wright did not disguise the investment he had in issue of modern civilization and the emergence of the African and Asian elite in *White Man, Listen!* (1957) or his investment psychology in *Savage Holiday* (1954), a tragic study of alienation that oddly complements the tragicomic study of the same subject in *Lawd Today!* (1963). The hunger to know and to experiment is there also in *This Other World* (1998), the collection of 817 haiku, which Wright's daughter Julia poignantly described as "poetry of loss and retrieval, of temperate joy and wistful humor, of exile and fragments of a dreamed return,"⁶ Wright's hunger to know and to locate his being in this world through writing increases, for me, the force of his declaring in the introduction of *White Man, Listen!* that aloneness "seems the natural, inevitable condition of man" (xxix). It is, in greater and lesser degrees, the condition of any intellectual who questions the world.

In the first years of the twenty-first century, it is assuring to know that Richard Wright has influenced so many lives. The journalist Nathan McCall noted in his autobiography, *Makes Me Wanna Holler*, that he "broke down and sobbed like a baby" the morning he finished reading *Native Son*.

Native Son confirmed for me that my fears **were***n't* imagined and that there were rational reasons why I'd been hurting inside.

I developed through my encounter with Richard Wright a fascination with the power of words. It blew my mind to think that somebody could take words that described exactly how I felt and put them together in a story like that.⁷

Writing boomerangs in time, for it was something other than tears that *Native Son* was written to provoke. But if Wright's words empowered "a plain everyday brother" in prison like McCall who was to become a respected writer and a dedicated American, let us applaud the clashing of the writer's intention and the reader's reaction.

One of the most prescient Southern thinkers of my generation, Houston A. Baker, Jr., recently championed Richard Wright against Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin with regard to intelligence about "the dynamics of an unfolding world of postcolonial colored people."⁸ Answering the old charges that Wright's views had become "dated" a few years before his death, Baker contends "that Wright's astute awareness of interconnections among race, power, economics, urbanity, and technology in the United States (an understanding conditioned precisely by his southern **racial** memory and his own brand of Marxist analysis) enabled him to join a global company of thinkers intent on achieving black, global, empowering modernity" (8-9). In this way, Baker recognizes what I know to be the core value of Wright's legacy, its most enduring challenge: unblind thyself and see southerly.

The book (and our preserving the idea of the book through the practice of writing) allows Richard Wright to give us his published legacy as material that can, as he

concluded in *Black Boy* (1945), help people “win some redeeming meaning for their having struggled and suffered her beneath the stars.” And Wright never disguises the fact that such redemption is never easy.

End Notes

1. See Karel Kosik, *Dialectics of the Concrete*. (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing, 1976). Kosik’s critique of Marxist ideas illuminates the value of an outsider’s checking, “in the course of appropriating and changing, of producing and reproducing reality,” the authenticity of inauthenticity of a world in which she or he historically exists (47).
2. Richard Wright, *White Man, Listen!* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1995), 142. Subsequent citations are marked by page numbers in parentheses.
3. Richard Wright, “Blueprint for Negro Writing,” *Richard Wright Reader*, eds. Ellen Wright and Michel Fabre (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 37. All citations refer to this edition.
4. Blyden Jackson, *The Waiting Years: Essays on American Negro Literature* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1976).
5. Tim Wise, “School Shootings and White Denial,” *AlterNet*. 6 March 2001 <<http://www.Alternet.org/print.html! Story ID = 10560>>
6. Julia Wright, introduction, *This Other World* by Richard Wright, ed. Yoshinobu Hakutani and Robert L. Tener (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1998), xii.
7. Nathan McCall, *Makes Me Wanna Holler* (New York: Random House, 1994). 158.
8. Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Critical Memory* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 9.

**A Critical Comparison of
Antigone and Martin Luther King, Jr. as Christ-like Figures**
by Kimberly Hill

Throughout the history of African American struggle on American soil, many black leaders have created hope for the black liberation movement. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Medgar Evers are just a few individuals who have qualities of being a Christ-like figure. All three men sacrificed their lives for justice and equality for black Americans, just as Antigone sacrificed her life to bring her culture--her community--into accord with the proper principles of God's law. What is important about my comparison of King, X, and Evers to Antigone is that rarely are African American individuals raised to the titanic symbolism of white icons, even when they are real-life characters. This is important to note because "literature remains one of the most powerful forms of propaganda" (McInnis 2002). Traditionally, we see white characters, both fictional and real, treated in larger than life presentations. Most recently, this occurs in American film, where the likes of John Wayne and *Braveheart* are raised to divine heights. "The film has taken the place of the Greek epic as national propaganda where the protagonist becomes a symbolic figure representing all that is good, right and virtuous about a country in the manner that Achilles and Odysseus do for Greece in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*" (McInnis 2002). If we understand this important role of literature and film, we then begin to understand why major film and publishing houses do not "green light" works to put black figures in the same light as John Wayne. To do so would be an act of revolution against the system that sustains them. However, the purpose of this paper is to merely show King as a Christ-like figure in the vein of an Antigone. By doing this, it is my hopes that my discourse will raise questions about both the black and human liberation movements, but also raise questions about the arbitrary line of right and wrong and how we deal with this arbitrary line in our issues of social and political justice. At the core of any Christ-like figures struggle is the struggle to redefine for the masses what is "right" and what is "wrong." By using Jesus, the most noted "Christ-like" figure, as a model, my goal is to define what makes one a Christ-like figure and show how King fulfills that role.

Using the model supplied by C. Liegh McInnis in his lecture "Antigone and the History of Christ-like Figures," we find that there are five primary aspects that a character must fulfill to be a Christ-like figure: 1) The character must have divine knowledge that the other humans do not have. 2) The character must face the character assassination of the propaganda of insanity. 3) The character must speak for those who have no voice. 4) The character must, at some point, have doubt as to whether or not he has embarked upon the proper course. 5) The character must face all internal demons, conquer them, and pay the ultimate price to bring his people to truth--or the above mentioned divine knowledge. Beginning with Jesus, we see he fulfills the aspects perfectly, of course. The divine knowledge that he possess is that he is the way, the truth and the light. Secondly, we know that Jesus was charged with heresy, which is akin to both blasphemy and insanity. Thirdly, Jesus speaks for the Jews, who are the oppressed people of the State. More generally, all of the leaders in the Bible speak for some oppressed people who need to be delivered, specifically Moses and David. Fourthly,

Jesus displays, very vividly--on two occasions--his doubts as to whether or not he has embarked on the right course. The first display is when Jesus goes to the garden to pray. When Jesus prays, "take this bitter cup away from my lips," he is asking God if there is not a better way to save his people than by his own death. Jesus displays both doubt and fear, for the "bitter cup" represents his concern for the horror of his impending crucifixion" (McInnis 2002) Jesus' second display of doubt is when he is on the cross and utters, "My God, why has thou forsaken me?" Yet, for all of his doubt and fear, Jesus fulfills his role as Christ-like figure by allowing himself to be crucified so that others may be saved.

Now, while it is obvious to see Jesus as a Christ-like figure, before we get into our primary discussion of Antigone and King, McInnis gives us a brief look at Hamlet so that we can see clearly how fictional literary figures can be adapted as Christ-like figures and then later used as cultural propaganda. Hamlet, of course, has divine knowledge because it is his dead father who tells him who killed him and gives him the job of avenging his death. It seems that Shakespeare has ripped this one right from the Jesus story because Hamlet has been sent to save the world by his father who is a spirit. Secondly, Hamlet is branded as insane by the masses as well as by his fiancée. Thirdly, Hamlet is speaking for his voiceless father, which is obvious, but Hamlet is also speaking for the masses by trying to save them from a corrupt regime. Ironically, the masses do not want Hamlet's help, and this point figures greatly in my discussion of King as a Christ-like figure. Fourthly, Hamlet is forced to face his fears and doubts, which comes to a head with the famous "To Be or Not To Be" speech, where Hamlet is contemplating suicide. Yet, Hamlet opts against suicide and continues with his mission of delivering the truth to the people.

Of course the question arises, since Hamlet fits so perfectly with the Christ-like figure motif, why not compare King to Hamlet rather than to Antigone? Antigone is more political than Hamlet, and, thus, she strikes a deeper chord with the black leaders than does Hamlet. Where both Antigone and Hamlet have, at their core, a discourse about ethics and power, Shakespeare keeps Hamlet's battle a rather singular battle. He is the lone individual fighting against everyone, whereas Antigone is more symbolic in her ability to represent the masses. In fact Sophocles makes sure that we equate her to the people of the Greeks evolving new, democratic republic by having Creon's son relate to him how the people support Antigone. "But it's for me to catch the murmurs in the dark/ the way the city mourns for this young girl/ 'No Woman,' they say, 'every deserved death less,/ and such a brutal death for such a glorious action'" (Rosenberg 42) She is a champion of the people. Her mere narrative alone opens itself to discussions about "Feminism and the Female Protagonist," as well as to discussions about "The Letter of the Law versus the Spirit of the Law" or the "Rights of the State versus the Rights of the Individuals." "At its core, Antigone is a play about politics and boundaries--about the circular and fragile relationship between leaders and masses." (McInnis 2002). All of these themes and motifs give rise to the discussion of people's relationship to people, making Antigone more relatable to the Civil Rights work of King.

Some of the most noted Christ-like figures have been: Antigone, Jesus, Hamlet,

Nat Turner, Martin L. King, and Malcolm X. It is my assertion that the Christ-like figure has been more prevalent in the modern era in the black community because black people continue to look for a messiah character to deliver them from their socio-political hell and because the American government has proven, time and time again, that it is willing to identify, isolate and kill any single member of the underclass who wishes to bring liberation to his people--hence the term, "Christ-like figure." For we must remember that "Christ" is not Jesus' name; it is his title. As a "Christ," Jesus is acting in a position. Thus, Antigone is a "Christ-like" figure long before Jesus. This, along with the fact that she is not a deity, is what makes her more relatable to the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement.

As a quick aside, I want to note that King and Antigone are Christ-like figures because of the five above mentioned aspects. I am not attempting to explore the question, "Was their revolution successful?" Nor am I addressing whether or not one's revolution has to be successful for one to be considered a Christ-like figure. That depends on what one deems as a success. Most Christians will say that Jesus was successful, but most Jews will claim that although he was a good prophet, he failed in his mission to bring complete liberation to this people (For further analysis of this, one should look at the debates between James--Jesus' Brother--and St. Paul.) For the sake of this paper, a successful Christ-like figure is one "who delivers the message of truth to the oppressed people. Nat Turner surely did not have a successful revolt--as he had planned--but he did embody the spirit of freedom in the slaves and sent a message to whites that blacks planned to get free--somewhat, somehow." (McInnis 2002). And if we really understand Jesus' agenda, he is merely sent here to show us the way. It becomes our decision if we want to follow. Jesus, like Antigone, Hamlet, Turner, King, and X, is an idea man. And even though we look for and need physical evidence to judge a people's progress, we must continue to understand that "it is our principles that allow people to become human" (McInnis 2002). I would like to take this notion further and assert that it's our principles that allow us to evolve to a higher plane of existence, into the metaphysical realm. And accordingly, every generation has and needs a Christ-like figure to force them to see the possibilities of what their physical eyes cannot see. This is primarily why one of the aspects of being a Christ-like figure is fighting the "propaganda of insanity." Haki R. Madhubuti puts it best when he asserts that black people who believe that they have the right to be and the ability to be free are considered "crazy." Madhubuti asserts in his poem "Poem Resulting from a Television Ad for the Color Purple" that black women who love their men are "crazy." His point is that the oppressed is often labeled crazy by the oppressor when the oppressed attempts to free himself. Additionally, it is often the members of the oppressed group, such as Antigone's sister Ismene or the preachers and black middle class who ask King to "slow down," who perpetuate this notion of insanity on any who wish to be free. Thus, the Christ-like figure, as in Hamlet's case, must fight against both the oppressor, who is his uncle--as in Antigone's case--as well as against those he is trying to free--such as his mother and the masses of people who all see Hamlet as insane, or the crowd who wished to see Barabbus freed instead of Jesus.. And this is made clear when Cornel West asserts that when one is seeking to help black people, one must understand that he is seeking to help people who do not know that they need help and, therefore, often to do not want the help, which

causes them to label the Christ-like figure as “crazy.” Returning to Madhubuti’s poem, then, we understand what he means when he states “...black people who refuse to mentally die/ or buy are crazy...black people who refuse to mentally/ die or buy into america’s/ nightmare are positively/ crazy” (Madhubuti 272-273) And any leader who wishes to free black people from their physical and mental oppression must be crazy.

Jesus has a divine knowledge and understanding of truth as it relates to the people whom he is trying to save. Antigone and King possess this same devout knowledge of truth. It is a type of “spiritual humanism” that Margaret Walker Alexander chooses to celebrate in *Vyry*. Antigone knows that it is proper in the eyes of the gods to give every man a proper burial. She fears that by not obeying the laws of the gods, she will suffer a retribution--an eternal and natural retribution--more harsh than one that Creon could deliver. This is evident early in the play when she asserts to her sister, Ismene, “...I have longer/ to please the dead than please the living here:/ in the kingdom down below I’ll lie forever./ Do as you like, dishonor the laws/ the gods hold in honor” (Rosenberg 19). Antigone is motivated by a fear of eternal damnation--a fear of not ever being all that she, as a human being, is able to be or become. This, for her, is the cost of disobeying the gods that she is not willing to pay. And King asserts this same concern that disobeying the laws of god will keep humanity from being all that they can be. “We love men not because we like them, nor because their ways appeal to us, nor even because they possess a divine spark; we love every man because God loves him” (Albert and Hoffman 138). In this statement, King is moving past man’s physical understanding, logic, truth and reality to understand the law on more divine and metaphysical terms. “King worked with a concept of natural law as the source of constitutional God-given rights” (Albert and Hoffman 141). To break God’s law is to break natural law, which means, ultimately, to cause chaos in the natural order of things.

Because of this fear of “natural retribution” Antigone and King are willing to die for that in which they believe. This is evident in King’s speeches, such as “I Have a Dream” and “I’ve Been to the Mountain Top.” “‘I Have a Dream’ expresses King’s immortal longing for freedom, a longing that is familiar to every person who dares to imagine a future beyond unjust laws and unfair customs” (Dyson 5). Unlike other political leaders who preached the gospel according to numbers and majority, all of King’s assertions about what is right are based on treating a neighbor as one wants to be treated. In this, we see King rising above the logic of the law of the land to show how illogical the law of the land is in comparison to the law of God. This is what King wishes to show when he asserts that following the logic of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth “will leave us all blind and toothless.” For King and Antigone, to follow any man-made law over the law of god is insanity. Thus, death is the only recourse for King, as it is for Antigone. To live in a world that is counter to the law of God is, in itself, a sin. So, better for one to leave this physical world fighting for righteousness than to be absorbed in its wickedness. Thus, the dangers that King faced, such as threats and assassination attempts, were insignificant to his higher calling. Even an attempt on his life by a deranged woman would not deter King. In fact, it seems that the woman’s mental state is, indeed, metaphoric. In the case of a Christ-like figure, he is considered mentally imbalanced by the masses for not assimilating to the will of the masses, when in fact it is

the masses who are insane for not being able to see past their warped physical existence. So, the deranged woman represents a deranged society, and King is attempting to elevate their understanding of justice and sanity. And it is in this same manner that Antigone raises the stakes of political righteousness when she asserts “And even if I die in the act, that death will be glory. I’ll die with the one I love by him an outrage to God!...in the kingdom down below I’ll live forever” (Rosenberg 19).

To truly understand King as a Christ-like figure, you must understand the moments when King is forced to confront his father, his wife, and the religious leadership in the same way that Antigone is forced to confront her sister and the elders. Much like Antigone, King finds it quite easy to confront the very defined and identifiable enemy of white oppression in the manifestations of Jim Crow and white mobs. Yet, King’s most difficult battle is when he has to confront those he loves and those who love him. At the core of these moments arises the question, “What is one willing to do or sacrifice for righteousness?” We must always remember that the “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” was not written to those who had identified themselves as white racists. “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” was written to those who had identified themselves as being on the side of the Negro, but more importantly, on the side of righteousness.

“For years now I have heard the word ‘Wait!’...This ‘Wait!’ has almost always meant ‘Never!’ We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists that ‘Justice too long delayed is justice denied.’...There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair...You express a great deal of anxiety over our willingness to break the law. This is certainly a legitimate concern. Since we so diligently urge people to obey the Supreme Court’s decision of 1954, outlawing the segregation in public schools, at first glance it may seem rather paradoxical for us conscious to break laws. One may well ask: ‘How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?’ The answer lies in the fact that there are two types of laws: just and unjust. I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. Conversely, one has a moral obligation to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that ‘an unjust law is no law at all.’”

Not only is King in agreement with St. Augustine, he is echoing the sentiments of Antigone, which puts him the line of Christ-like figures as she asserts to Creon that “Nor did I think your edict had such force/ that you, a mere mortal, could override the gods/ the great unwritten, unshakable traditions/ They are alive, not just today or yesterday;/ they live forever, from the first of time/...These laws--I was not about to break them,/ not out of some man’s wounded pride” (Rosenberg 33). Thus, King, in the mode of Antigone, is calling into question not only their desire to help the Negro, but he is calling into question their honor by showing how their actions are not in line with their rhetoric of ultimate or divine law and honor. By distinguishing between man-made laws and divine law, King becomes the Christ-like figure by pointing the leadership to a higher truth and calling with his divine knowledge. This becomes one of his primary issues in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech. “How does one determine whether a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of

God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law...Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust." So, for both Antigone and King, laws that deny any person or group the equal treatment of humanity are unjust and immoral. Further, to follow these unjust/immoral laws is not just to be out of order, but one is also a danger to humanity for not being in harmony with God's law, meaning that mankind will not be able to evolve to its highest level. King is not merely talking about following the law for the sake of social order. We must understand that what King is really doing is placing himself and the movement at the crossroads of human progress and transformation, much the same way that he tries to do so in "Address Delivered in Acceptance of Nobel Peace Prize." In his acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize, King is asserting that if we do not strive for God's higher law, we will never reach or fulfill our human potential.

"nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral questions of our time: the need for man to overcome oppression and violence without resorting to violence and oppression. Civilization and violence are antithetical concepts... nonviolence is...a powerful moral force which makes for social transformation. Sooner or later, all the peoples of the world will have to discover a way to live together in peace, and thereby transform this pending cosmic elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood. If this is to be achieved, man must evolve for all human conflict a method, which rejects revenge, aggression, and retaliation. The foundation of which is love."

Along with preaching love as the way of righteousness, King asserts that the righteous should not bow down to unjust people or systems. In "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," King is responding to the established clergy, both black and white, who want him to "slow down." Even in his "I've Been to the Mountain Top" speech, King is echoing the ideals of Antigone that the laws that he follows are superior to the laws of Bull Connors and J. Edgar Hoover, who are to him as Creon is to Antigone.

"...there was a power here which Bull Connors couldn't adjust to...God sent us by here to say to you that you're not treating his children right. And we've come by here to ask you to make the first item on your agenda fair treatment where God's children are concerned. Now if you are not prepared to do that, we do have an agenda that we must follow...I just want to do God's will."

King's words should be read and understood in the same manner as when Antigone asserts, "It wasn't Zeus, not in the least, / who made this proclamation--not to me./Nor did that Justice, dwelling with the gods/beneath the earth, ordain such law as for men./Nor did I think your edict had such force/that you, a mere mortal, could override the gods,/...[The laws of God]--I was not about to break them,/ not out of some man's wounded pride,/and face the retribution of the gods..." (Rosenberg 33). It is clear that King, like Antigone, feels he has a responsibility to a higher calling, especially in relation to laws that, in his view, keep certain people from obtaining the fullness of humanity. This, for King, is the ultimate abomination, the ultimate sin, to keep a man from being human, and, like Antigone, he is willing to sacrifice everything to stay in accord with the

laws of God, even if it means breaking and suffering the consequences of banishment or death.

Often that ultimate price creates a tension that reveals the heroic quality of the figure. The receivers of Antigone's and King's words always perceive the tension in their words. On the surface, we assume that the tension is the force of their will battling against the will of injustice. Yet, if we look deeper, we see that the gist of that tension is the civil strife--the internal struggle--of each to reconcile their actions--to reconcile their ideologies (their metaphysical) to their physical reality. King asserts:

"I prayed out loud that night. I said, 'Lord, I'm down here trying to do what's right. I think I'm right. But Lord, I must confess that I'm weak now. I'm faltering. I'm losing my courage. And I can't let the people see me like this because if they see me weak and losing my courage, they will begin to get weak'"

This is not the only moment of doubt for King. He is often credited with the statement, "I think that I've integrated my people into a burning house." Thus, King is in line with Antigone when she endures her moments of self doubt. "You went to far, the last limits of daring smashing against the high throne of Justice! Your life's in ruins, child-I wonder...do you pay for your father's terrible ordeal?" (Rosenberg 47). And, they are both in line with Jesus when he asked, "My God, My God, why has thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46).

When King is giving his "I've Been to the Mountain Top" speech, there are two voices speaking. It is at this moment that King comes face to face, as do Jesus and Antigone, with the reality that *they* [the American government] are coming to get him. His reaction is to allow his metaphysical self to separate from his physical self, allowing himself to create a bigger and more powerful self, "a self to which Houston Baker alludes in *Critical Memory*, where the individual is guided by a more powerful sense of collectivity of history and spirit" (McInnis 2002). In "I've Been to the Mountain Top," we see King transcending his physical self. "I may not get there with you, but I want you to know that we as a people will get to the promised land." McInnis shows us that has his moment when he shows us that we can be bigger and better than what your limited physical minds know and understand.

"When King asserts that 'I may not get there with you,' He is consoling his people from the fear of death by asserting to them that we all live as dual beings. He is invoking the African sensibility of being unable--in both a symbolic and physical manner--to separate the individual from the collective. Yet, instead of finding turmoil, King is able to allow his metaphysical self to take over and guide his physical self as all Christ-like figures must do" (McInnis 2002).

So, there is a war going on inside King, much like the war in Jesus and Antigone when they are forced to face their moment of truth. We first hear the physical King speak.

“Longevity has its place. Like any man I would like to live a long time.” That is the fear of the physical body. Then, King gives us his spiritual self. “I just want to do God’s will...And so I’m happy tonight; I’m not worried about anything. I’m not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.” It is at this moment when King achieves his role as a Christ-like figure, in the same manner as when Antigone utters “Very well: if this is the pleasure of the gods,/ once I suffer I will know that I was wrong./ But if these men are wrong, let them suffer...that death will be a glory/...I have longer/ to please the dead than please the living...” (Rosenberg 47). Like Antigone, King fulfills his role of a Christ-like figure by claiming his spiritual victory in the certain face of death in “I’ve Been to the Mountain Top.” “I just want to do God’s will. And He’s allowed me to see the mountain. and I’ve looked over, and I’ve seen the promise land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we as a people will get to the Promise land” Even according to Ralph Abernathy “That speech was a cleansing of his own fear of death” (Posner 21).

Why write about King, in relation to Antigone, as a Christ-like figure? Again, it is my hopes to show King, not as an anomaly, but as a symbolic icon of black people, their culture and their heroic character. What Sophocles embeds in Antigone is “the initial evolution toward democracy, making Antigone a symbol of democracy as well as a guide as how to get there” (McInnis 2002). Unfortunately, black leaders are singled out as special. It has been only recently that we have gotten films, such as *Boycott*, that show black leaders as what McInnis calls “manifestations of the will of the people.” By examining the play, *Antigone*, and the text of King’s speeches, we are able to understand our literary icons as reflectors of the people. Also, a close examination of Antigone and King reveals to us the power of literature to connect us by showing the similarities of human desire and condition, no matter the time period.

More importantly, a Christ-like figure is often a cultural hero, where, as in the epic, “he becomes the symbol for all that is good and right about a people” (McInnis 2002). So, in viewing King as a Christ-like figure, we view him not as a god or a messiah, but as a cultural icon, a man who is “a manifestation of the will and desire of his people” (McInnis 2002). We understand this more clearly, when we understand what Jesus meant when he asserted that “Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in me.” From a literary standpoint, the Christ-like figure is more of an affirmation than a leader. It becomes an affirmation of the value and worth of a people and their culture. Antigone affirms and pontificates the issues of her culture. Jesus affirms and pontificates the issues of his culture. In this mode, King fulfills the role perfectly.

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The Satire of Black Folks: A Look at Black Comedy by Kenneth Stiggers

“...Indeed, the negro is the only one treated as an objectionable alien in this country. And the irony of it all is that he is expected to smile and be pleasant always...But he is going to stop smiling some of these days and settle down to some serious thought. Already some of these laughing ones are like Victor Hugo's Laughing Man whose face of constant laughter hid a heart full of bitterness.” --J.A. Rogers, *From Superman to Man*

Ladies and gentlemen, I come to you without funny jokes and punch lines. I will be proper without props, and won't gag you with gags. I promise not to molest you with antics or gimmicks. I just want to touch your minds and not your behinds. I'm one who makes the people erupt with laughter or smile in embarrassment. I'm an African-American satirist and proud in spite of being misunderstood by the community I try to serve and by others who relax their politically correct facades and, with ridicule, secretly laugh at black folk. Please allow me to share with you the type of comedy I write, perform and present from a black perspective-- satire, sometimes called black humor or black comedy.

Like drama, comedy in the form of satire requires deep thought and sensitivity to life's issues. Ironically, commercial television, situation comedies and some “chitlin' circuit” theater plays have provided the public--especially African-Americans--with one aspect of comedy--a form of entertainment filled with amusing wisecracks and slapstick routines as Miss Cleo “da psychic” prophesy to rapper M.C. Get Down, Lil Woof Dog and the Jerry Springtime Double Wide Trailer Park Trash Family Singers vs. The Hoochie Momma and Baby Daddy Cha-Cha Slide Clique live from Club Booty in the daytime. Most people expect that type of comedy. It's usually seen on BET's *Comic View* and sometimes on the *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* or the *Jamie Foxx Show*. I'm not trying to knock any one in particular. I've watched these shows, and they do have some funny stuff from time to time. I believe, however, that comedy has several aspects, and the point of view from which I operate is satire.

According to C. Hugh Hillman's *A Handbook to Literature*, satire is a literary manner which blends a critical attitude with humor and wit for the purpose of improving human institutions or humanity. True satirists are conscious of the fragility of institutions of human devising and attempt through laughter not so much to tear them down as to inspire remodeling. Therefore, doing satire is like being that innocent little boy who was plain and honest enough to tell the “bucky naked” emperor to turn both of his nasty butt cheeks and put on some clothes--“Good-gawd-a-mighty!”

So, what is my mission as an African-American satirist? Answer: to raise the consciousness of black people through humor. And I certainly do stand on some great shoulders. In a weekly column for the *Chicago Defender*, around 1942, Langston Hughes wrote a discussion between a satirical character named “Jess B. Semple,” a black man not afraid of speaking his mind, and an adversariously who represented a passive, bourgeois point of view. Hughes' column, an admixture of wit, humor and political commentary, generated further dialogue within the black community. The “Jess B.

Semple” stories also reveal two types of thought within the black community during World War II: 1) Self-determination and racial pride and 2) Reconciliation and passivity. The irony is that sixty years after Hughes was often criticized for being too political. The debate between self-determination and reconciliation continues among the black masses because their plight continues. As for graphing this continuum, we can point to the work of Richard Pryor as evidence that the black community continues to grapple with the issues raised by Hughes and that their humor continues to be one of the major forms of social discourse and criticism.

Who hasn't been greatly influenced by the comedy of Richard Pryor? He is more than just a funny man. His live performances contain humor, satire and wit mixed with folklore and socio-political commentary. But Pryor's true satirical genius--like Hughes--is characterization. Everyone remembers that intoxicated, hilarious griot named Mudbone who tells very "fascinatin'" stories that provoke as much reflection and thought as they do laughter. For example: "You learn something when you listen to old people... They ain't all fools. You don't get to be old being a fool...A lot of young, wise men deader than a motherf*cker..." On the live album *Is It Something I said?*, Pryor creates a characterization that pokes fun at the "tuna sammich eatin' black preacher" who delivers a sermon from the book of Wonder--Stevie Wonder that is. This one bit by Pryor contains all of the aspects that make Hughes' "Semple" such powerful art--class tension, an insightful inquisitive nature, and the affirmation and celebration of black culture. The preacher, like Semple, is not a member of the middle-class but is depiction of the working-class who is rarely given a voice. Accordingly, the preacher's sermon is not one of declaration but more of inquisition. And along with the questioning attitude, the character's language and citing of Stevie Wonder work to celebrate the beauty of black culture. In the past, it has been acceptable for white preachers to quote Shakespeare or The Beatles because their work is both cerebral and meaningful. Pryor, by juxtaposing the sacredness of the Bible and general cultural respect of white art to that of black art, is asserting that black art is just as poignant and powerful as white art, which, of course, is an assertion that black culture is as poignant and powerful as white culture. And at the same time, Pryor is raising the question of cultural hypocrisy in our definitions of high art and low art and the division of the secular and the profane. By using Wonder, a pop artist, to place such enlightened words into the vernacular of a lower-economic citizen, Pryor is forcing us to reexamine our stereotypes, biases, and evaluation of proper and useful art. Thus, some of Hughes' literary works and Pryor's comedy are prime examples of formal satire. According to *A Handbook to Literature*, two types of formal satire exist:

1. Horatian Satire, which is gentle, urbane, smiling; it aims to correct by gentle and broadly sympathetic laughter.
2. Juvenalian Satire, which is biting, bitter, angry; it points with contempt and moral indignation to the corruption and evil of human beings and institutions.

The genius of both Hughes and Pryor is their ability to combine these two forms.

On the surface, Semple and Pryor's preacher are constructed as figures who are seemingly not as smart as the reader or the people whom they directly address or question. This slyly submissive demeanor lulls the receiver to sleep. Even if our feelings are hurt, their calculating language choices keep us believing that "They don't mean nothing by it." Both are embedded with just enough "Country Bumpkinness" that we believe that what do say is in love and is completely lacking of malicious intent. It is only when Semple begins to reiterate his questions in a redundant manner toward the end of the pieces do we actually see Hughes turning the knife that is stuck deeply into our ignorance or hypocrisy. The same formula holds true for Pryor's preacher and his many other characters that cause us to laugh to keep us from feeling so badly about just how hypocritical and flawed we are. This duality or diversity in comedic form is typical of the historical African-American experience. In fact, it may be black comedy that, more than any other artistic form, best exemplifies and struggles with W.E.B. Du Bois' notion of "Double Consciousness" because black people have been forced to learn to laugh at themselves and their conditions to ease their pain, show the hypocrisy of the world and their oppressors, and to make sense of this hellish existence by means of using humor to provide perspective.

Remember the "Dozens?" "Yeah, I saw yo' momma on the TV set. She was playing football fo' the New York Jets." The "Dozens" takes me back to my catholic school days when my fellow black classmates and I would sit at our favorite spot in the cafeteria during lunch, and we would "capp" on each other. In the same manner that Hughes used humor to interject their cultural selves into their American existence, as children we were using the "Dozens" as a way to make our "integrated" situation seem more like home. The mere playing of the game allowed us to simultaneously hone our verbal prowess as well as create our own cultural space through language. The "Dozens" is similar to one of those ed-u-ma-cated literary phrases called "hurling invectives." Actually, invectives are harsh, abusive words directed against a person or cause. Yet in the African American tradition, the "Dozens" or the "hurling invectives" are not just literary techniques nor are they purely malicious tools. They are tools of defense and empowerment, where that little, fat or ugly person can have the last word and laugh. With lethal words of wit this social underdog hurls those invectives with surgeon like precision and embarrasses even the strongest opponent. That's how the underdog earns respect. I was told that the "Dozens" was practiced in Ancient Africa. Two people would stand toe to toe, face to face and insult each other until one person gives up. In the black community, playing the "Dozens" used to develop the character and wit of black folk. Hey, as long as you're black, you will be insulted in some way or form. So, you might as well be prepared. So even though the work on BET's *Comic View* represents the "Dozens" on steroids or the "Dozens" being exploited by Hollywood (white) dollars, the core is still the need to highlight and belittle a flaw before someone else can. Unfortunately, the popularization of black comedy for the sake of earning an economic profit is producing more comics with an abundance of punch lines but with no understanding of history or the cultural importance of humor.

This cultural understanding also embraces the notion that humor's greatest source is pain, especially in one's ability to use wit as a way to heal or ease pain. Hence, there are comedic and satirical ways to make poignant statements regarding life's hardships and pain. In this folk secular, written in 1853, Frederick Douglass, abolitionist, statesman, publisher and author, used "sarcasm" to expose the dynamics and pain of chattel slavery and second class citizenship.

"We raise de wheat,
Dey gib us de corn:
We bake de bread,
Dey gib us de crust;
We sif de meal, Dey gib us de huss;
We peel de meat,
Dey gib us de skin;
And dat's de way
Dey takes us in;
We skim de pot,
Dey gib us de liquor,
And say dat's good enough for nigger."

Douglass' words--his juxtaposition of the lives of blacks and whites--gives us a heightened understanding of the gap of humanity that existed under the system of slavery. Even more is that Douglass' words also work to affirm the humanity of blacks by affirming their intelligence because they know that the slave masters are acting in a hypocritical manner and they are able to make due and survive despite the terrible circumstance created by the evil master. And Douglass achieves all of this without ever calling the master a negative or derogatory name. Douglass merely highlights the slave masters' actions, which is enough to reverse the notion of who is evil and who is heroic. So, Douglass' poem serves as an excellent indicator of the power of satire to create social commentary. Going even further, this African-American folk secular, written in dialect, may be considered in the same light as the "sarcastic parody" of the "Lord's Prayer."

"Our Fadder, Which are in Heaben!--
White man owe me 'leben and pay me seben.
'D'y Kingdom come! D'y Will be done!--
An' if I hadn't tuck dat, I wouldn't git none."

We see the slave juxtaposing what is supposedly right with what is actually right. The slave master has given the slave Christianity as a way to make the slave more docile; however, the slave is using the religion as a tool to exploit the gap between the slavemaster's rhetoric and his action. Using humor, the piece is able to affirm Franz Fanon's notion that no slave can get free while following his master's religion, especially when that religion is based on the hypocrisy that some men do not have the moral essence to know God. Yet, it is the slave, not the slavemaster, who has both the intelligence and the moral fiber that is of God. The exposing of the gap between white principles and

white behavior works to undermine the fallacy of white supremacy. This is also done in the example of “irony” from comedienne Jackie “Moms” Mabley commenting about segregation in the south.

“...I was ridin’ along in my Cadillac, you know, goin’ through one of them little towns in South Carolina. Pass through a red light. One of them big cops come runnin’ over to me, say, ‘Hey woman, don’t you know you went through a red light?’ I say, ‘Yeah I know I went through a red light.’ ‘Well, what did you do that for?’ I said, ‘Cause I seen all you white folk goin’ on the green light...I thought the red light was for us!’”

Mabley not only highlights the hypocrisy of Jim Crow, but she also shows how blacks survived this degradation with guile--which is one part wit and one part malicious intent. The malicious intent is not to depredate white people, but to depredate the system of oppression--to be so over the top that only a fool would not be able to see how inhuman the treatment of black folk has been in America.

Artists, such as Mabley and later Dick Gregory, were so adept at using satire to backdoor in social commentary into mainstream “pop” culture that it began to permeate almost every aspect of black life and art, including its music, which has always used satire. Satire is one of the major techniques of Blues music, “Telephone ringing baby, sounds like bad news.” So when funk/r&b groups like Parliament Funkadelic, led by George Clinton, operated in a satirical vein, they were merely acting in their historical tradition. Songs like “Chocolate City” planted in the fertile minds of post-civil rights African-Americans images of the first black president and black leadership at the White House. Of course the satirical irony of “Chocolate City” is that black people have received large amounts of political power due to white flight. So, in the cases of Detroit and Atlanta, white people all but turned over the power of major cities in their haste to be rid of the Negro. However, what was an act of demonization became an act of reverse empowerment. Thus, “Chocolate City” has an air of “lookie, lookie at what has been created” when he asserts, “You don’t need to pull it [the trigger] when you got the ballot...gaming on ya.” Almost twenty years later, during the Bill Clinton era of the 90s, George Clinton and the P-Funk All Stars produced a song called “Paint The White House Black,” which works to reaffirm the power of the black vote, which was created some thirty years ago by white flight. And for twenty years, even the Parliament Funkadelic album covers contained a colorful spectrum of satirical artwork that served to highlight black visions of a better or “far out” future. With just the right combination of serious message coded with exaggerated language, personas and caricatures, Parliament Funkadelic used wit as a way to paint a brighter vision for black people. And they were merely following in the line of jazz great Charles Mingus who used a bit of satire in musical works like “Fable of Faubus.” Mingus, Monk, and Parker all used sound to make satire by exposing the different and warring conditions and sensibilities of a black and white life. The actual satire is that musicians were thought of as purely emotional were taking white sounds and manipulating them in a manner that exposed the truth that white American music was merely a “popularized--whitened” version of black art. And it is this same energy that has been used by black comics to expose American

hypocrisy. So, if the ability to produce comedy, humor or satire is a sign of intellect, then black folk, in an oppressive and abusive society, are geniuses.

To answer those critics of political correctness who whine about not getting away with satirizing black culture, they need to understand that what occurred in the past shapes the future. Spike Lee's film satire *Bamboozled* aggressively confronts American society with this horrid but undeniable truth. Over the past 100 years, comedy, especially satire, has been used to express hatred and domination --courtesy of the "Minstrel Show," which mimicked and ridiculed black culture and life. "Minstrel Shows" featured Caucasians in blackface perpetuating and popularizing a reign of vicious humor and satire that made black folk the laughing stocks of America and the world. And although African-American actors performed minstrel theatre, degrading and ridiculing their own way of life and culture seemed to be the only way they could make a living and practice their craft during the Jim Crow era. And since the presentation of that great Klan propaganda film, *Birth of a Nation*, "Coon Shows" have become as "American as apple pie." Just ask some African-American students who attended predominately white colleges and universities during the late 1990's. They will tell you about their experiences at those predominately white fraternity parties showcasing modern day, pre-millennium minstrel shows. So, African-American art, especially its comedy, is always responding to the history of the "Minstrel Show" and must question, understand and recognize the intent of those individuals who make the most subtle attempt at ridiculing their life and culture. In essence, if it isn't proper, we'll let you know through our art, especially through our comedy.

The problem comes when African-American comics do not know that they are responding to the history of the "Minstrel Show" and merely perpetuate its legacy instead of question it. On the other hand, sometimes I think that some black folk tend to misunderstand the intent of brothers and sisters who present satire. I noticed this phenomenon when I produced a radio program called the *I'm Not Black World Report*. This program was a parody of the late night network news programs, and the host was an egotistical, opinionated black male, "wanna be" media mogul who denies his race to tolerate and make sense out of an oppressive society. Some African-Americans interpreted the radio show's satire as warped "coon show" silliness. A few black listeners were really angry. During the call-in segment of the program, these pissed off listeners expressed their shame and denial regarding the show. For a brief moment I questioned what I did. Then, a flood of listeners called in with very positive feedback and encouraging words. I was not merely encouraged that people liked the show, but that some "got it" and actually wanted art--comedy--that forced them to think about how they view the world, especially in relation to how they view themselves. It's funny how a moment of satire forces some people to think about what they are laughing at and why they laugh. But is not satire about making people examine themselves for the sake of improvement? This means that the prime directive satire is to inspire thought. For our comedy to continue to be as powerful as our literature and our music, we must continue to nurture comics such as Pryor and Gregory who, like Ishmael Reed, demand their audiences to be as literate as they are.

Like the world is a ghetto, the world is also full of ironies (hypocrisy)--just like Aaron McGruder's *Boondocks* comic strip is controversial while Michael Moore's book *Stupid White Men* is very popular. McGruder is African-American, Moore is caucasian, and both satirize about the hypocrisy of American society. Well, that's the nature of satire, I guess. But if satire is used to improve humanity by stirring up thought, dialogue and social progress, then it is, indeed, good (useful) humor. The problem is that black comics/satirists are just as confined as to what they can question as other black artists. Just like Richard Wright was saddled with the label of writing protest and not creating art, so has McGruder come under the same fire merely because what he does as an African American artist questions the fundamentally fabric of America because the core fiber of that fabric is black oppression. Moore is not a threat because his work does not challenge the foundation of white supremacy, which is built on the lie of black intellectual inferiority. However, McGruder, and many before him, is the antithesis of the fallacy of black intellectual inferiority. And where the roles played by Eddie Murphy, Chris Tucker, and Chris Rock display black men outsmarting white men in their "natural element"--the streets, McGruder is outsmarting with intellect in its "so-called" natural element--the realm of philosophical thought. From Semple to Huey--McGruder's protagonist-- philosophy, not jive, is the battlefield, and every time they win, they refute the fallacy of white supremacy.

So let it be known that all comedians, writers, poets and authors can be satirists. African-American Satirists are individuals with a flair for humor who are as influential as the great black leaders, activists, politicians, artists, athletes, etc. This is why I'm honored, as an artist, writer and satirist, to study and work in the tradition of the many African-American greats who entertain, and uplift with thought provoking comedy and humor--something I call The Satire of Black Folk or simply Black Comedy.

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Don't Be Afraid of the Wolf Pack (All Locked Up in Mississippi)
by Jolivet Anderson

If you cut your hair tomorrow, wore it natural, then decided to grow locks, would you be fired from your job? If you say 'yes' or even thought for half a second that you would be fired for wearing locks, you are a Slave.

Locking the hair is an ancient method of grooming black hair. It is unique to those of African decent and would occur naturally if one does not use a comb to groom the hair by choosing to groom the hair with the fingers alone. Associated with the "warrior spirit" the style receives criticism from blacks and whites alike. In this case, ignorance has no color. It wasn't until I cut my locks that I realized how much fear and prejudice there is against people with locks. I watched them smile in my face and congratulate me on the missing locks that use to hang down to my shoulders that I had grown and taken good care of for three years. It was as if they were welcoming me home with their words of kindness but in actuality they were welcoming me to hell. I am reminded of Paul Lawrence Dunbar's poem "Sympathy." Trapped in a cage of blackness (Black Skin), he likened himself and all of Black humanity to a caged bird saying,

I know what the caged bird feels, alas...
I know why the caged bird beats its wing
Till its blood is red on the cruel bars
For he must fly back to him perch and cling
When he fain would be on the bough a swing..." (Dunbar)

This existence, one of caged expression of who you are in your heart of hearts is indeed a place of ill comfort, disgust and disguise that can be called Hell. The hell I was welcomed to was the Hell of other people's need to feel comfortable and their need for me to look like what they think is normal. I preferred to be 'me', as natural and as nappy as I could be, but nappy is negative in the eyes of many and they project their myopia on all who choose this particular path of cultural expression and reality. The question I constantly ask is "What conditions create and maintain this level of self-hate in Black people." Dunbar continues,

"...And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
And the pulse again with a keener sting
I know why he beats his wing." (Dunbar)

They did not seem to understand that the cutting of my locks was a sacrifice, a removal or giving up of something to make room for something else. My covenant with God had been broken; my locks were no longer a part of me. The covenant that allowed me to be in tune with nature, allowed me to see myself in the animals, rivers and trees connected by a life force of blood, water and energy had been broken. An uninterrupted flow of energy from the universe is possible, for me, when the hair that covers the crown of the head (the 7th chakra) is unobstructed with chemicals put on the hair to straighten it. In its natural nappy state its crinkles and kinks act or serve as antenna, the same as radio and

TVs have antenna to pick up waves of light and sound to communicate something to you. God uses the strands of hair to send messages to us through the hair to the crown of the head. It was like I had died. Spiritually and symbolically, I did die, and there is transforming power in knowing that there are lessons in life, death and re-birth. Now, I would have to re-live every success and failure I had made for the last three years just to see if I had learned the divine lessons that were taught to me during my period of growth and spiritual development. Locks are a personal covenant with God and should be respected as such.

How do we (Black folk) see ourselves? Who and what do we identify ourselves with as the standard to be met or surpassed? In her novel, *The Bluest Eye* author, Toni Morrison introduces the reader to the Breedlove (Breed Love) family. Cholly, the patriarch, Mrs. Breedlove, Sammy, and eleven year old, Pecola, who prays fervently to have blue eyes. Morrison does an excellent job of summing up the current psychological state of Blacks in modern times. While each character did their best to deal with the ugliness projected upon them by an “unseen source,” their ugliness, she writes, “...came from their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all knowing master had given each a cloak of ugliness to wear.” It seems that many Black folk see nappy or natural hair as a similar cloak of ugliness. Delving deeper, some see the color of their skin, no matter how “dark” or “light” the shade of black or brown, as a hated shade. Morrison continues,

“The master had said, ‘You are ugly people.’ They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement, saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every bill board, every movie, every glance...and they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it.” (Morrison 39)

While Morrison paints a vivid picture of Black self-hate through characterization in a work of fiction, how does one taste the bitterness of self-hate on the tongue of Black reality? Where is the proof that being Black and expressing self in a natural state sets the stage for self-hate inside of a people who are *caged* into the psychology of ‘white is right’ while being Black? In her autobiography *Assata*, Assata Shakur reflects on her childhood, growing up in the south. She writes that,

“Behind our fights, self hatred was clearly visible. “Nappy head, nappy head, I catch your ass you goin be dead.”... “Act your age, not your color” ... “You gon thank me when ima through with you, ima beat the Black off of you.” Black made any insult worse.... in fact when I was growing up, being called, Black period was grounds for fighting.” (Shakur 30)

With the NBA and NFL players now wearing locks, many youth are now expressing who they are because of a faddish pop culture appearance with no connection to the power and meaning of grooming and growing hair in this fashion. Natural hair especially locks, make a political statement, mainly because of the association with the Rastafarian culture and it’s popularity over the last 30 years with Bob Marley’s revolutionary music and lyrics. While Rastafarianism is much larger than just one man,

Marley is credited with taking reggae music and the style of hair to the world. In the song “Rastaman Live Up” Marley writes,

“...Keep your culture
Don’t be afraid of the vulture
Grow your dread locks
Don’t be afraid of the wolf pack...”

Fear of the “Wolf Pack” is fear of those hungry wolves that visited in the night instilling fear into Blacks and that fear was instilled into Black children by their parents. Those wolves that were being used by the ‘unseen master’ who sanctioned the killings and murders, whose job it is to preserve at all cost the perceived supremacy of the white race. These wolves are who you do not fear when you wear your hair natural or nappy. It is an individual political statement of confidence in knowing you are who you are against all odds. Having a cultural identity in 2002 in Mississippi and perhaps other parts of the world requires one to map out what Anthony Browder calls “Survival Strategies.” While in her poem “samson predicts from gaza the philadelphia fire (for ramona africa, survivor),” taken from the *In Defense of Mumia* Anthology, Lucille Clifton reminds us of the MOVE organization, when on May 13, 1985 Philadelphia’s first Black Mayor authorized the bombing of a home after complaints from the neighbors, who were also Black, about the Afrocentric back- to nature- group that was headquartered there. All of the members of the group wore dreadlocks. Eleven people including children were killed and 61 homes were destroyed. Clifton writes,

It will be your hair
ramona africa
they will come for you
they will bring fire
they will empty your eyes
of everything you love
your hair will writhe
and hiss on your shoulder
they will order you
to give it up if you do
you will bring the temple down
if you do not they will
(Medina and Anderson 95)

Wearing locks makes a profound and penetrating political statement because when wearing locks (or natural hair) there is no attempt being made to emulate white or European culture by straightening the natural crinkly, curliness of the hair. It is a defining of one’s self as UNDENIABLY AFRICAN in a culture that is dominated and controlled by Europeans and those who wish to assimilate into the thinking and behaviors of Europeans and their standards of class, status and beauty, even at the expense of lying to the self by subconsciously, through actions and attitudes, labeling anything associated with Africa (the continent and state of mind) as ugly and inferior.

Deep in the traditions carried over from Africa and from Slavery in America is a love of community a support and attachment with those surviving as you are. Even deeper is the sick twist that propels the individual to desire ease of life through the acquisition of material things or privileges received when ones behavior is in the category of what is called “acting white.” Even deeper still, is the desire to not “act” anymore but to ‘become’ white, as Pecola prayed to become in *The Bluest Eye*, as we all subconsciously want to be when we allow ourselves to be offended by “Blackness.” We become supporters and champions for “white supremacy” and the perfected model of what ‘self-hate’ is all about. When we criticize, mistreat or even fire a person from employment for wearing their hair in its natural, nappy state, we wear our “*I Am A Slave*” badge with pride. The color of your skin will not alleviate your human condition and all that we are subjected to wearing the reality of being human, even before the realization that we are racial beings, as well.

Human Beings, in general, seem to have a real problem with any person who is free enough to be who and what they are without a straightening comb, a perm, makeup and yes without a magazine or video to tell them what is or is not beautiful or acceptable. Personally, I am always rebelling against slavery, especially as it exists in America in present times. I refuse to be enslaved by another person’s fear of my being my Black African born in America self. God made me this way, and if God likes it then I love it. For if I do not love the natural state in which God has made me, I must be schizophrenic. It never ceases to amaze me how black folk get upset when challenged on issues about identity. They say, “Jolivette, I am just as black as you now...” as if *my* being black and expressing my natural self through my hairstyle and dress has anything to do with them defining and discovering who and what *they* are. If you don’t like the reflection, stop looking in the mirror and find ways to deal with the self. Let’s not be vain. Let’s check the fear factor. Who are you trying to please by looking the way you look? Is it yourself, someone else, or God?

Recently, here in Mississippi, a friend of mine was fired because he refused to cut his locks. Once he went to the EEOC, a Black woman told him that his former employer was justified in terminating him because he was violating the employee dress code because his hairstyle was “elaborate.” My question is “elaborate by whose definition?” My advice to him was to not only file a class action against his former employer but to also file a complaint against the EEOC office for having incompetent investigators who reek of what I call internalized race prejudice. His hair was undesirable to her as a Black woman as well as to his former employer so she did not want to help him with his case. Since I am a hell shaker on issues such as this one I pleaded for him to keep fighting and he did, amen.

Daily, around the world, doctors, lawyers, teachers, artists, laymen, and blacks in corporate America express themselves with their hair in locks and manage to be effective in their daily duties and obligations to self and community. To not be able to be ‘who you are’ and to grow as a human being who is able to express themselves culturally is an undeniable form of mental and cultural slavery. So, I ask once again, if you made a

decision to cut your hair, and started wearing your hair natural and eventually decided to wear dread locks, would you be fired from your job? If you say “yes,” then yes, you are officially and undeniably a slave. Peace!

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Poetry

Note: The first seven poems in this section were all composed as tribute pieces in honor of the work and life of Charlie Braxton. On May 24, 2002, these pieces were read at a special benefit for Braxton. We are publishing them here as a testament of the legacy and love for Charlie Braxton.

Rhythm of A Warrior (...Poem for Charlie Braxton)
by Marcus Uganda White

I hear rhythms,
true rhythms...
The unending windcast soul-rhythm
of a mighty nation
racing with time
out of mind
to remind
just what history has had us find.
Southern martial dances
like warrior's stampers
slowly when the evil spirit comes
snakedancing easy complications eloquently;
the so so familiar Way of a nation;
feels good each and every time we win
against oppressions and redirections
of chains and lies, fires and flame.

Scream and holler
cry, moan, dance,
call on ancestors
and underground poets...
Obatala, Oludamare;
remember rutabaga memories
and blind pharaohs you gave sight to
groooooove to the poorman's blues
and take a night dive in the muddy water
to be baptized again.

My friend,
"Take care of yourself" is what you
always told me.
You caring non-judgmental voice,
you gentleman, gentlebrother
your wise words: "Read and write on
and write on
and on and on;"
into these nights
where the whiskey stench
breaks an inch
to have me loose my noose
to hear the bluesman's moan
in the three o'clock Italiano a.m.
of my quiet solitary amens

to tell you the same,
“Take care of yourself.”

My friend,
Jam your very merry jive
forever like the warrior does
when there is nothing more
and nothing less than life
while you prance and dance
victorious chants,
barefoot and sweat-drenched
in the foreground of some sunrise,
that seems to be only rising for you.
That’s the rhythm,
that’s the true rhythm,
of a warrior.
Amen.

For Charlie

by Nayo Barbara Malcolm Watkins

arise, oh phoenix
from ashes and soot
be born again
in your new glory

arise, oh charlie b
from w/in your soul
be renewed
to live anew again

no one can take
what is yours
though they defy
and destroy
your glory
was always within

shake the soot
from your shining light
that it may glow
even more brilliantly

fight, oh warrior
for what is yours
never give up/in
you hold the sword.

here's loving ya, man

Blues-in' for our Brother (for Charlie Braxton)

by Howard Rambsy II

Ask our brother Charlie, and he'll tell you 'bout the blues
Ask our brother Charlie, he tell you bout the blues
I say, ask our good brother Charlie B, and he'll tell you 'bout the blues
He'll sing you one of those ol' songs about what it means to lose

He know that laughing-crying blues
Uh-huh, he know that sad-happy blues too,
He know that fighting-blues
know that blues that'll get you through

he's a bruised blues man
a blues man cause the way he's been bruised
like some of us, he's a bruised blues man
a blues man cause the way he done been bruised

but he ain't gon' stop now cause times is tough
he ain't stopping now just cause times got rough
he gon' keep on moving, keep on moving on
yeah, gon keep on moving, gon keep on moving on

so you ask our brother Charlie, he tell you 'bout the blues
ask our good brother Charlie, he tell you 'bout the blues-ed
ask our brother Charlie B, and he'll tell you 'bout blues-in'
He'll sing you a laughing-crying song about keeping on keeping on even when
you losin'

Two Part Coda: For Charlie Braxton and Family
by Tsehaye Hebert

The Great God of fire, Shango
takes what he will
from those he loves the most.
For those he favors, he is
the jealous one
and leaves little for you
but the gift, the glimmer
in the tragedy, in the chaos
in the ashes
a life
burnished again and again
made smooth by the knowledge,
by the removal of,
what lies around you,
making the path free again
of all that is held familiar
free to reinvent
to start anew.
Shango in his wisdom
clears the land and seeds it
for life again and again and
in its recurrent theme
demands only the constant change.

II

As the forest is cleared
and charred
and mighty trees fall,
they give way,
they relinquish to the seedlings
that will follow
that will grow taller
and stronger and that will
soar skyward with the
indomitable message:
We are still alive!
We survive!

4 A Black Bard

by C. Liegh McInnis

Courage is d ability 2 hold fast 2 your small cup of water
even when d nferno of njustice wages against u
while d blind eyes of millions burn heavily against your chest.
Yet u stand, planted n d soil of truth
knowin' dat your 1 fruit will bare goodness against d lying weeds of whiteness.
Your voice has remained a lighthouse n d abyss of our co-optation,
callin' us 2 remember d countless treaties of our black bards
as u wrote 2 wade us thru d high tide of corruption.
As callus Caucasians dropped whiteout n d liquid of our music,
u warned us 2 b-ware of anemic accountants disguised as patrons
who give grave gifts of triflin' tokens wrapped as our seductive undoin'
from our addition 2 shiny things,
but your words corrode d fool's gold 2 show us d rust of capitalism.

Words r all we have...4 everything is birth from a word,
planted like mustard seeds jus' b-neath d fertile loam
of who we can b-cum...

& u Charlie, warrior of words
pour your words
like Eloheem pourin' himself n2 molded clay
breathin' n us a new day...
u, d word, & d discourse make a necessary trinity.

Cum let us read d divine coconuts dat cleanse us from dis concrete world.

[i] say ashe 2 d mountain dat is your work
[i] say ashe 2 d pyramid dat is your legacy
[i] say ashe 2 d bluestraveler who dwells among us
[i] say ashe 2 d crossroads dat deliver us
 where u took out a bone, strung it w/some twine
 & plucked it w/your bleeding fingers
 each stain a monument 2 survivin'...

U Mr. Braxton r.

U r
u b
u is...
& we is,
we b
we r...thru u.

Cremation Blues: A Mother-wit (For Charlie Braxton)
by Ahmos Zu-Bolton

The house I was born in
burned down.

Flickering flames welcoming daybreak
sent my great-grandmother
running for her life.

She had lived for 80 years
in that house, patched up the roof
after hurricanes rolled in off the gulf,
built new rooms when the grandchildren
were born.

Mama Easter was a mid-wife,
knew all there was to know
about birthing babies, made her home
the only colored hospital
this side of Hattiesburg.

The walls of one room
were filled with fresh herbs
hanging on nails to dry out.
Mama Easter would tour the woods
all around Pearl River County
looking for plants that could cure
and ease pain.

In-between the hanging plants
were Mama Easter's art designs, strange
& quilting, the only person I know
who would hang a square of old denim
on the wall, and tell you a story
about it, while calling it art –

that square would one day
stitch its way into a quilt

*all that art
burned, all those stories
cremated*

I arrived a month later
& found her sitting in a new rocking chair

in the front yard of Uncle Bob's house,
working on a new quilt
with a shiny new needle

She looked uncomfortable
in her brand-new cotton dress,

"I reckon I'll get use to these clothes,"
she said, scratching her back,
"and I reckon I'll get use to the feel
of store-brought needles
iffen I lives long enough

I was sweeping out the living room
when the flames rushed in on me
from the kitchen, something caught hold of me
and pushed me out the front door,
'fore I knew it
I was standing on the front porch,
iffen I had known it would burn all the way down
I would've done a better job
of sweeping,

she chuckled,
& smiled at me

my home got cremated,
but me and my funny-bone
is still here.

Complex Simple Complex (for Charlie R. Braxton)
by Jerry W. Ward

Blues poet so
Jazz dap so
Hip hop wise
Soul demands
Your bones dream
Upon the mountains of your life,
Your bones dream
To be more better than you've been
Jazz poet so
Blues black so
Ring-shout in disguise
Your eyes witness
Loud silences
Condemn you to poet
Death/red ships invade the mother/
Land/alien-hand snatched land/
Place where your double-crowned minds ascend/
Defy a future dying for an answer,
Leave fingers unenslaved/harp notes so
True/rap blues rupture /rapture news :
Gold grill gangsters be a dirty digital hoax,
Pixels pretending to promise/keep the real
From being said or seen:
Crime in a cloud of imitated/intimidated Afro-Sheen
When white worms return to vanish in terror.

Charlie, little brother, your mind
Always a light/year
Before your life,
Always a star ascending to your ancestors
From policed ashes,
Always nothing but a man,
Blues poet so
Jazz/b-sharp major/so
Rap hop hip finally
Is your wisdom/finally
Is a word so
Deep/ so complex simple/complex
Truth finds no hiding place,
No space to cry or die.

When I Grow Up, I Wanna Be Like Pablo

by Tufara Muhammad

Are we living reality or Is this an illusion?
Is America a democracy of a hypocrisy?
Is the white man my enemy or is my biggest enemy my inner me?
Do the steroids in Churches Chicken make kids aggressive?
Is Hillary Clinton a lesbian?
Is Janet Reno her lover?
Is glue really made from dead horses?
Why did Princess Di die anyway?
What do they make recycled toiled paper out of?
Why do they make miniskirts for women with oversized booties?
Are NBA players just high paid hookers?
Does the pope where clothes under them robes?
Why would you want to have triple "D" boobs when you got a triple "A" body?
Why would Tupac and Elvis play dead if they ain't?
Why do people pierce their gentiles?
Why do Christian people symbolically drink blood and get mad at Satan worshipers?
If a woman pierces her nipples can she breast feed?
Does the milk shoot out from the sides?
Is Diana Ross really a female impersonator?
Was that really Clarence's pubic hair on Anita's coke?
Do you think the White House is the only place that Monica got poked?
Why do we have to pay water bills?
Aint' water free?
Why do white folks think if you got dreads you smoke weed?
Does security follow Oprah Winfrey when she shops?
Why are they selling coffee makers in the bookstore?
Why do I make more money than my professors, and I clean pee?
Does the Queen of England kiss her own ring?
Is there life on Mars?
If it is, what they do everyday?
Why do they have you use them damn Kroger cards?
Are they watching what you eat?

Park Sunday (for Umar bin Hassan)
by Tufara Muhammad

Uncle dances the Meringue
over fields of daffodils and buttercups
drinking hot toddies for his cold
feasting on black breads and yams

His words jump through the sky
over the tops of our heads like comets
And me, he, we, be gliding over the clouds
one, two, three, four, "swivel your hips girl"

"We going to Spanish Harlem," he say
"You gonna love them Dominicans"
and me, he, we, dancing like celestial beings
over river boats riding the Mississippi

And Allah is present, I feel Him

I sing spirituals to Uncle, and kiss his palms
He rubs my hair 'til I sleep and rest in his bosom
And we, he, me are still, in his quietness
Twirling and smoothing my black ringlets over his finger

I bathe myself in the essence of him and his divinity
Inhaling him in every breath and he resonates in my nostrils
And we, he, me loving him, him loving me
His man ness consumes me, and I get lost

Then the turkey flew up into the Magnolia tree
And me, he, we, laugh at the nappy headed boys with the cane fishing poles

pussy dick politics (3rd chakra and falling)
by Jolivette Anderson

no pussy, dick and politics
should stop the revolution
whether wet or dry, sober or high
the quality of life for all should be rising

in a past life
my neck stretched
after roped burned
and stool was kicked
from underneath
feet

i didn't touch, sniff or think about no white pussy
some crackers was just having a bad existence
and took the shit out on me

in a past life
i lived to lie
tried to figure out the crime
of lies
as constantly women lied to themselves
and men lied to everyone else
it was accepted, tolerated, celebrated and procreated
always to be castrated when it met truth
in that dark fruitful womb
of eternity when god looked in the mirror
and saw himself and herself

i didn't speak ill of the living nor the dead
and this was before jesus so
how did i know this was a good thing to do
i mean, before jesus, who would i have been praying to, right?

in a past life
i counted cowrie shells
waited for acceptance of
my wings
given to me for fulfillment of a mission but
i am back here
for reasons unknown

maybe

for having been a believer
instead of a knower, sower, and reaper

so now i
i dissect words, each syllable
a hand full of seeds
to feed innocent birds

(the innocence of turds that just want to be free
shit preceded by pretty adjectives is still shit to me)

as if they do not know how
to feed or free themselves
thats what wings are for
to move swift and silent in the
pursuit of necessities
for survival or
for spiritual ascension

all food feeds something
and in the great transformation
it frees something
so...in a past life

i chant/ ed
screamed, i did
yes, screamed the squawk of
strangled birds
left to
perform acts of
suicide and genocide
with wing suited
to fulfill missions
to self

in a past life...yes i
murdered me with silence
in this life
i can't shut the fuck up
in this life
i kill bitch ass policies
with my words spoken
chokin
crackers, niggers, wetbacks, and spics

i kill patriarchy that doesn't know the power of its dick

i kill feminism that pushes pussy to my lips
and i gather soldiers from behind bars
by beggin them in full genuflect
to read, write, think and speak

in a past life
i knew i would be doomed
to repeat this
this life thing

until i learn to kill or overcome the energy
that made me fail me

silent when i should speak
a poem
is a policy is a piece of the puzzle peace

with bullet and tongue, ballot and gun
pussy, dick and politics threaten to stop the revolution of self
turning into self

can never let that happen.

A Nigger Poem

by Jolivette Anderson

would some body
kill, kill this
nigger
make this nigger suffer and die
cause this nigger make me
see me
make me - see me
in the light of darkness
and i don't want to be\
don't want to be a
nigger
so please
take a rope to the throat
take a knife to slice some
nigger
get the gun, pull the trigger
cause i hate me some
nigger, nigger
always wearing shiny shit (just a symbol)
always talking loud (a symbol, a symbol)
take 'em to the museum, they touch shit
show 'em a new world
they
niggerize it
WOULD SOMEBODY PLEASE
find a cure for this dis - ease get
niggers
away from me
self hate
got me hating
niggers when being
nigger
is how i survived
being black
with a colonized mind

The KEYnote Address
by Terrance Youngblood

O say can you see
the great Sun rise. . . .
Illuminating light pristine
upon a plain of dirt cultivated from
Seeds of
Dried blood, sweat, and tears.
O say can you see
Sacrifices e'erlasting
Ne'erending
E'erflowing from the blood of
Our countrymen—
Our whiteman Our blackman
Our indianman Our americanman
Our everyman.

Whose broad stripes of patriotism and bigotry hath
consumed this nation? (We'll never know), yet
We fight on for the better. . . (and for the worse). . .
The wars. Numerous. No end.
Yet always remembered.
Our Rebels. . . our damn Yankees. . .
Our Allies. . . our Vietnam Vets. . . .
Whether alive or dead,
hath earned sacred stripes— Glorious stripes
of red, white, and blue (or black)
(How often we forget them black stripes!)
And yet I can look to the flag and realize that
Our perilous fight will never end. Never.

And the rockets red glare gleaming martyrs' blood. . .
(Ask not what you can do. . . let freedom ring!)
The ends of great men. Great American Men.
The bombs of separation and hate hath
destroyed many (even ourselves),
Yet we stand as one.
One nation. One country. Under God. One.

But the next seeds from this tilled land called
America—will they blossom?
Doth this banner wave forevermore?
Maybe—through the rose of gray, but
Will I see it through the red?
Maybe.

As oft as the great Sun rises,
The torch will forever burn.

As oft as the great Sun rises
This plain of dirt will forever be
Deemed as the land of the
Free (and the enslaved) and
The home of the brave
(and the dastardly).

Untitled #1

by Terrance Youngblood

dead Carcasses are abundant around you
in every stage of life.
yet you are still alive
you still view the spoiled blood scars and flesh—
an act of God simply an act of God
now the eyes of the hunter themselves
on you

don't run, get your slingshot, take good aim
fight until the good fight has flown from your vessel
when it isn't enough
stand still. . . peace—and be absolutely still,
sense the fires of Hades rage around you.
watch darkness eradicated like rotting flesh
among lost cadavers. . .
smooth skin now scaly skin warped by a time persevering. . .
flaming eyes now blackened balls of old blood
stabbed by a truth beyond Oedipus's wrath.

watch the color of light.
from death. . . to blood. . . . to purity.

it is the sun. it is the sun. it is the great Sun.
the sun is the sun is RISING.
the sun is RISING NOW!!
smile.

victory is imminent.

Untitled #3

by Terrance Youngblood

A living shadow makes its
silhouette upon the pavement. . . .
In school, academics concrete
transform this malleable mind. . . .
Music of Sinatra and of Motown
Fuels this mercurial soul to
an overwhelming octave of harmonious pleasure.
Love—tender love—for that special lady consumes
This being and blossoms as a
Spring rose fresh from God's garden—
but sadly,
The rose withers alone. . . .
And the invisible shadow sulks back
within the midst of a society definite.

Tranquil by the richness
of ancient wine—gray wine.
Sad. . . Alone. . . by sipping on Nat's
mona lisa in melancholic silence.

For sometimes,
my heart (Runneth over) can not
comprehend the hearts of others. My extreme passion—my overzealousness
separates the shadow from
Society.

Oh! How I've longed to prosper
Within another time!
To be with the great Yankee dynasties of
the Sultan and Gehrig and The Yankee Clipper (Where have you gone?)
To be with the Rat Pack and
the Temptations
To be anywhere else but in the
present.
For the shadow cannot live there.

What a beautiful gray rose it is.
Nostalgia.
It deems me as a fading figure in
the definite realm, but
My passion to fight for success,
For victory—
For glory—

My passion, here, keep me alive.
It keeps me living just one day longer.

ICEBERG SLIM

by Chris Hayden

. . . And the sky was a fine bright bitch
And the night had gone sucker
And gifted her
With a shimmering bracelet
Of a million white diamond stars . . .

. . . The moon lurked
Like a fat yellow eye
Spyin' a mark . . .

. . . I could hear
Big Joe croonin'
Backed up by The Hawk . . .

I was the King of Chicago
They called me Iceberg Slim

I was the King of Chicago
They called me Iceberg Slim

I'm going down slow now
I'll never see Chicago Again

ICEBERG

Say my name

Freezeframe

Cool Criminal
Cash n Cocaine

Hypnotizin' notoriety

razor-sharp-greased-pig-slick
Clean-as-a-broke-dick-dawg
vision n image

Feel me
Struttin silky smooth

Cold Indestructible

SUCKER

You done went for the okey doke fell for a motherfuckin con

It be on the wire all over town

Iceberg doin a meltdown

From his handmade shirts to his silk sox
Behold a human paradox

The Man Who Lived Life As A Lie
And discovered the stompdwn Holyghost Gospel Truth

That no cat be a mohair island
Nor can he cut it on bread from hustlin alone

That the dirt he do in the streets
This minnit lives on and on

That the shit he drowns in is
Always his own

Sure as Cain the Great Granddaddy and Patron Saint of all Pimps
Bones be turned to dust and gone forever

A con man's biggest victim
Is always his own sorry ass
Motherfuckin self

Say my name!

See redyellowblackwhite asses humpin horny johns lined up for miles
desperate to fuck dirty cash passin from sweaty hand to hand junkies pukin
needles stickin slack veins in the night be they precious in His sight Pimp
kings and hoass queens Hallelujah! I'm a dopefiend justice corrupt and
denied purity defiled souls damned and burinin' in everlastin' South Side
Hell
Do even Jesus love the little children of the underworld?

See graveyard Insanity Jail

How and why did I do them things
Maybe the answer is in the
The story bout the Brother with the wings

I was a restin and dressin man
Now I'm lyin' round dyin

I was a restin' and dressin' man
Now I'm lyin' round dyin'

I done a shitload o' wrong

I think about it

All the time

I

I is for Eye is for Ice is for

IRONY

PIMP

I ate that shit up like a big plate of hamhocks and greens
I knew no shame

But what kind o' name
Be dat fo a nigga
Or anybody else
With the least amount of
Respect
For his or herself

Dig a vision n image

Of a gentleman of leisure
Apparelled in a roostertailed ostrich plumed
Three piece cranberry colored accoutrement
With a belt in the back

Out rageous spo-de-o-dee

Comporting himself about town inthe finest livery
Chrome plaited pimped out luxury automobiles
HotRocks of Ages sparklin on his pinky fingers
Livin large widdout benefit or support of visible means

SUCKER

You swallowed that bullshit
Quick as a jailhouse sissy frenchin a big black DICK

Just like a trick

I called myself a bidnessman
I dealt in pussy dollars
A trader in come fuck me bonds

Call a spade a spade
PUNK
Wuz whut I wuz

Yet fools still got the gall to cop my name
Try and ape my game

Mothasses gettin' burnt
In criminal flames

Scarface and Little Caesar path to success

Nigga mess
Ain't you never seen what happens to the mothafuckas at the end of them
flicks?

Nothin but motherfuckin' tricks

I was King of Chicago
City of Big Pimpin'

The name of the game was
Cop and Blow

Everybody was fuckin' n suckin' or tryin' to

Specially them bluenosed Gold Coast reformers jiveass cocksuckers always
brayin' that they tryin' to clean it up they was makin' the midnight creep for
bootleg meat
Chicago a whole town full of Back Door Men

Sick fucks and hypocrites paychecks in one hand hard throbbin' cocks in the
other the Polacks from the Stockyards and West Side Micks Hunkies and Dagoes
from Cicero

Christian Muslim Atheist and Jew

All United in their desire
To do some midnight integratin'
To screw them some of that
Stank Black ass Nasty Pussy

How dare a square look down his nose at a ho'
Spending' the rent and gasmoney for strange pussy
Back up in the alley
I hope they all turn out syphilitic wrecks

Skittish as a prissy New England spinster around sex
Shackled and bound for life to frigid bitches too tired too bored too sick
too nauseated by they funky unwashed armpits & asses to fuck em

Sick fucks
Hungerin' and Thirstin' after Naked Lunch
Diggit! I was the sickest fuck of the bunch
Sittin on top of the shitpile
Stirrin' it up

But say hey
Anybody wanna get they dick sucked in Chicago
Ain't got nobody love 'em enough to suck it
Gotta pay

Ain't that the American Way?

I fit into the plan
Tight as one of
My spotless pearl grey
Capone style Stetson hats
Sat on top of my conked noggin'

Oh, but like a leaf
I was bound to fall
See
I was biggest trick of em all

And the sun was big fat and round
As my high yella bottom woman's ass
Shinin' good as gold
On all the pimps and hustlers and hos
The children of Chicago

Chicago my mama and mentor

Every brick and cobblestone
Of her was a bill
Tryin' to jump
Into my pockets

I was Iceberg Slim
By golly
My makeup was right my wavy marcelled hair was right
I was right from the top of my peerless crown of do to the needle sharp tips
of my highgloss polished handstitched patent leather shoes

So right and
and still o' so flatass wrong

Livin' some Hollywood gangster dream
Like I was John Garfield
'Stead of Blackass
Bobby Beck

I can't feel myself no more
I hear Lady Day

Body and Soul
Flying away
Like a pile of blow
In the wind

I is for Ice is for Irony

Wastin' my life
Coulda been another Richard Wright
Gwendolyn Brooks
Stead of a crook
A character in one of their books
Coulda made more of myself writing about it all
That's the killer

Mama
Chicago

All is gone
and lost

How did I dood it

I don't know really

That science
Is like a faded photograph
Locked up in a safe
And I had the combination
on a piece of paper
But I hadda swallow it before I could look
(The cops was comin')
Swallowed it and shit it out
A life time ago

Why did I do it

Sweet Jones said I had the hate to pimp

To do it I had to HATE
hate hate hate
HATE to pimp
Hate hate hate hate
HATE to pimp
hAtE hate hate hate
HATE to pimp
I HaTeD tO pImP

But that ain't why

It just seemed like a good idea
at the time

Not now
Lyn' in this stinking dark room
On a pissy mattress crawlin' with vermin
Waitin' for the man

Like a dead Jap
Photo I seen in Life Magazine
Sprawled on a cot on Iwo Jima
With a rifle in his mouth
His big toe on the trigger
Brains Blowed out

Kamikaze seppuku
Got me trippin in pimp haiku

Heroin drips Perfume on
From syringe tip A silky neck

The sound of water The smell of death

Tongue laps
A whores cunt
The taste of honey

Blood on Feel me holler
A dead pimps lips Only love
The color of money Is for the DOLLAR

Before I go
One last thing

Gotta tell you the one
About the brother with the wings

Brother died and went to Heaven
Went before St. Peter who said, "Okay Shine. You made it fair and square,
though for the life of me I don't see how, much as God was stickin it to
your black ass all the time. Here's ya wings."
Brother got 'em, put 'em on, flapped 'em a couple of times and took off.
What a sight! He looped de looped around the Throne of Grace. He buzzed
the Heavenly Chorus. He dive bombed the Pearly Gates.
Ultimately he lost control and, like a Black Icarus, he crashed.
"Thass just like I always said, niggas just ain't ready," St. Pete said to
him as he stripped the bedraggled spook of his wings.
"That's okay," the Brother shrugged. "I was a flyin' sonofabitch while I
had them things."

Now maybe you understand
If so then maybe you can explain it
To me

I used to ride round

the South side

In sky blue

Cadillacs

I was a restin' and dressin' man

I used to ride

round

The Southside

In sky blue

Cadillacs

I was the King of Chicago

Well them days are gone now

I was a flyin' sonofabitch while I had 'em

They
Ain't
Never
Comin'
Back

Untitled #16

by Naykishia D. Darby

A single leaf floats aimlessly in the wind,
one careless shot takes away a lifetime of misery.
As the seasons change like clockwork,
human nature is inevitably erupted.
Days going into night can't give enough notice
to the patterns being given.
Life is on a climatic spiral downhill,
while that single leaf is still floating
aimlessly in the wind.

1909

by Julius E. Thompson

Then black men
Are standing
In the fields;
Then black men
Are crying still
On the spot
Where they were killed;
But you say that
it was so long ago,
In Mississippi,
In the year of our Lord,
Only in 1909?
Can then black men
Stand for ninety-three years?;
Can ten black men
Cry for nine decades?;
Can ten black men
remember the night
That they were killed?:

To Mother, On Mother's Day
by Julius E. Thompson

.1

I count
The faces
Of the past;
I count
The faces
Of the present;
(How can
I count
The faces
Of the future?)

.2

Memories
Carry me
Back;
Memories
Carry me
Forward;
Memories
On you,
On me,
And the family.

.3

Lord,
Bless the child
Who lives
To serve
Another day.
Lord,
Bless the mothers
Who have
Given their all
For so may!

.4

Dreams now,
And it is night:

& the day has
Gone to tell
The story.

To the Brother Who Was Wounded by Sadness (For Malachi D. Crawford)
by Julius E. Thompson

A black man
Stands on
The cliff
Of the mountain
Looking down
Down into
His fate
But he does
Not remember
Yesterday
And when
Is tomorrow?
He cannot
Escape the past
And the present
Doesn't know him.
He made the major
Decision that
No one could
Love him, except
On his own
Personal terms:
And the main
Moment for
That miracle
Has not yet
Reached him
In his
Hiding place.
And so
He lives
From day
To day
On borrowed
Time: some-
Where between
The Living
And the dead,
And yet,
Poor son,
He does not
Even know it.

Reflections on My Mother at the Age of 91
by Julius E. Thompson

Mother,
When you were born,
What was life like
In Mississippi
For black people?
Did we have to hid
In the woods
When white people
Came around;
Or dance and pray
& perhaps act crazy
As if we were
From Mars?
Mother dear,
What was life like
In Mississippi
In 1906?

Was It a Lifetime away?

Faith

by Julius E. Thompson

Faith sits at the door
Looking at me,
What can I say?
What excuse can I give her
This time for the many
Mistakes that I've made
In this life-time?
Should I sing a song,
Or just cry--and pray
That Faith will forgive
Me one more time

Sankofa

by Charlie R. Braxton

O' Sankofa, high over the heavens you soar, my soul will soon follow you
Cassandra Wilson

we are both
embattled & bloody
like the sea that carried
our bruised & beloved
brothers & sisters-
ancestors
raped & battered
fore parents
beaten & bludgeoned
black & blue
attracting a trail of famished
sharks-
sea monsters who eagerly devour
the beauty of our sunburnt flesh
see devils growing fat off the
seed we sow in toil and turmoil
but like shine
our souls
still swim on
on through
the reign of the lash
laced with crimson skin
on
through yarugu's noose
naked with sadistic homoerotic
bloodlust
on
through brutal torture
& molestation of a generation
still scraping off the dried white sea/man
from the painful middle passage
on
through the degradation of
chattel slavery
on
past the uneven weight of
the sharecropper's scale
on
past the long hot summer of 64
on

past the freedom rides
boycotts & sit-ins
on
past the miles we marched in Mississippi & Louisiana
the beatings we took in Georgia & Alabama
pausing only to honor
the lives we've lost along the way
remembering that we swim them
as they have swam for us
to be
born again & again & again

Narrative

“Chapter One” from *The After*
by Savannah King

The eyes of the sky awake from a dark and stormy nightmare, which drenches the grounds of the earth with its tears. A small blue bird sings a melancholy tune as her small eyes evince big and sorrowful; she peers through the window of the novel Palace. Noble and proud with a touch of pleasing personal, this neo-castle is Nile’s own Camelot. He loves stories of castles, princes, and knights, a fantasy given partial birth for this impish little boy living in a fortress. But today, stark realities will cause the mutation of him into a full blown cherub. Upstairs lies Niles upon plush, ocean blue carpet. The walls of the room are dainty and colorful. The room has a spirit all its own that consumes the attention of all who enter. There is a binary union between the room and Niles, like a gold cloud that envelopes all visitors. Today, sorrow fills the air; the colors on the walls appear dark and gloomy, grieving for the delicate soul who lies upon the carpeted floor in a pool of blood. His body is numb and weightless though ravaged throughout in pain. He feels wet and loathsome all over. The gashes in his skin sear with suffering as blood and white fluid trickle down from his head, mixing with the blood that sluggishly dribbles from his legs and thighs. He reeks of urine. In the pit of his essence, Niles feels an emptiness like a part of him is missing. He takes his little blood soaked hand and touches what is left of his skull; Filled with striking agony, Niles thinks to himself, “Why daddy? Why? All I did was pee on myself. I can’t help it. I am sorry”

As this thought mutates into emotion, little Niles explodes into tears of pain, that streak like scoring rain while sadness and confusion churn in him like a ball of the last fire. “It must be my fault?” Niles whispers with his final units of air leave him. “What did I do to make him come....to make him change.” The hand is the same, but the possessor is the question. Niles didn’t know who it was that hurt him. “Was it daddy or was it Rahazjeal?” He turns on his side and curls into a ball. All he can do is suffer. No one is there to comfort him. His only comforts are his small arms he uses to embrace himself. Tears race out of his water puddles for eyes, down his face and into his ear; his entire body grieves, shaking violently like a kitten lost in frigid woods. A weightless dizziness overtakes Niles. He is lifted and becomes light as a feather. “What is this strangeness?” Suddenly, like a bead of light appearing before a black board, he sees four spirits. The reach out to him with a single hand, and his pain flees his body, like being sucked away. Niles becomes silent. Like glowing Samaritans they tend to him with a soothing touch that ejaculates love like a liquid to be poured into all wounds for permanent healing. Their smiles light up the darkness like flickering candles, and they spoke with voices that caressed his soul like warm coco on a winter’s night.

“Great things await you little one. You have pleased Him greatly.” One spirit seems to float a bit higher than the others were. He speaks sternly but grandly, “Come now let us complete our journey.” Four other spirits come. They are dark angles who are the givers of various tortures. They peer at Niles amidst the darkness and announce with but eagerness and curiosity, “Let us see if we may find reason why he should not enter.” The dark angles search of fiber of Nile’s soul to find any residue of the Earth’s soiled way, but it is of no use. Niles is free of blemish like freshly wash linen. His innocence

remains untouched by burning hands. After a full examination, the dark angles proclaim, "We find nothing in him of use. We shall take leave from you, for there are many more with great findings that are pleasing unto us."

Niles sees other spirits who wander about in torments and confusion because they forsook God in their mortal bodies and discarded the love of God in his presence while they were alive. The sight of those rueful spirits in misery causes Niles to become relieved that he was taught about the Messiah and accepted the Way in his heart. Nile's third eye was opened to the importance and immense magnitude of the power and love of the Alpha. At once the four dark angles take flight from Niles, leaving him with his personal angel and the three spirits who take Niles onto a weightless, free-falling ride into a sacrosanct presence that is as calm and as peaceful as a motionless ocean. He feels agape as he never has before. It is a feather with fingers that gently cuddles him like a mother's touch with a newborn. He raises his little head, and his eyes are opened into a glorious light, and there at a distance before him is a Superior One whose shape defies any form of solid, gas, or liquid, yet binds them all into a higher form of physics. The Omniscient One is horrifying, yet possesses a beauty that simultaneously transcends physical nature's components, while bespeaking of all its potential. He sits upon a great, hallowed throne and shines like Edison's wildest dream, a star in the East that leads Niles to Him.

This Magnificent One sits upon this throne surrounded by seemingly holy beings unlike any creatures Niles had ever beheld. The repeat continually, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord Ruler of Sabbath, heavens and earth are full of Your glory." He is the One of Old, The Ancient One from on high. Niles is awe stricken. The presence of Love engulfs Niles, reaching from the center of the One who sits on the Throne. The Omnipotent Being has a calmingly beautiful appearance that shines an exuberating tenderness. Niles is now where he has always wanted to be. The reality of seeing the face of the Majestic One is something that fails to register as true to Nile's carnal mind. For the gold of this love seems to be centered with a wrath that cannot be conceived to dwell within the heart of love. Simultaneously, Niles is terrified and comforted. Intuitively, he knows that this Great Lofty Ruler cherishes him. This unyielding love uplifts him from his small body. He is in spirit. There are many different men, identified as messengers and watchers. They all stand in white robes with white wool for hair at enormous heights with light glistening around their beings; Men of this nature have never been seen by Nile's eyes. And in his ears, Niles hears the ringing of triumphant beauty and singing, in tongues of another realm. The spirits make their way up front to the presence of the Most Holy of Holiness; they present Niles to the Father.

The Spirit's voices flows like a pure river, "This one, Most Glorious Adonay, has always followed my lead. He, even though a child, wanted to know me, to know you, so he searched for me and found the Son. Now he stands before you. I, your Holy Spirit, testify unto thee for the soul of Niles" The Great One looks upon Niles. Fear drapes Niles like an iron shawl. His body could not bear the piercing glance of The Omnipotent One, his eyes cutting through him like stainless steel to fragile flesh. The stare of His eyes push Niles to the ground. His smile beams a brilliant blaze of radiance that fills the space.

He lifts Niles up and brings him unto him. As he parts his lips, his voice roars like mighty tumultuous thunder, as powerful as any great storm of raging oceans and seas of water thumbing toward their destiny. "I am pleased with thee my child. The love that I have for you is an endless abyss. I have loved you before the foundations of the world were prepared. I have set aside a time and place for you all to stand before Me and now here you stand my child. Be happy my son for you shall be taken to a place of rest where you may partake of the fruit of your labor until the Day of Reckoning."

The Omnipotent One gives him over to an angel that he may take Niles to the first born of the dead and see the Light, who has suffered for all mankind that whosoever believed shall have everlasting life. The mighty angel, his golden limbs cradling Niles with great affection, takes Niles in flight. They travel up to many heavens until they reach the City of Christ. This city stands upon a golden sea of glass with glistening trees, smelling of ripe apple cinnamon, standing upon crystal waters. For the debts of the oceans, Joy reaches his firm hands and grips Niles tightly. The hold squeezes a burst of laughter from Niles like toothpaste exploding from the tube. His insides fill him with delight like the cream of loaded pastry. Niles' ebullience amuses the angel, causing laughter to spill out the sides of his mouth. Upon arrival to the inner courts, there are holy soldiers. Their battle scars are covered by shimmering shields. They all greet Niles by his name. Niles' face revels his curiosity. Looking up at the Angel holding him, he asks, "How do they know my name?" The angel eagerly replies, "We know all the children of The Omnipotent One, even before they know themselves." This response finds harmony and balance with Niles, and he gleefully greets everyone.

They enter a grand court with seven sides, filled with bodies dancing whose feet never touch the ground. They are covered with a golden dust with a bright glitter that cascades down their heads and off into the air or nowhere in particular. As the angel brings Niles to the center of the court, there is another silver hallowed throne. A voice shouts, "The King of Kings and Lord of Lords, glory, glory, unto thee. To he that sitteth upon the throne be the highest glory and all majesty. For he bore the sins of mankind upon the cross and unto thee be all glory and majesty." The Omnipotent One's true, one and only King. Niles' immediately recognizes the Most Holy One upon the throne. This shining being speaks, his voice evaporating deep inside Niles. "Niles, welcome in unto thine rest." He holds out his hands, which bear the wounds of salvation. "Niles runs towards him shouting, "Jesus! I know who you are! You are Jesus!" The two embrace. Once in His arms, Niles' skin is gently pricked with an arrayment of power and completeness that feel like a summer rain washing the dirt of the world from his being.. After the two-embrace, Niles looks upon the face of Jesus and his little face glistens with spoonfuls of dancing crystals.

Downstairs in a cozy, cheerfully colored cherry finished kitchen sits Terrence with a shot glass drinking at the eating peninsula. The strong scent of scotch hangs about his mouth like flies buzzing around garbage. The kitchen's artificial light dances upon his face, creating a frame for the portrait of evil. His eyes are grimly red with a dazed

wicked expression that is at war with his handsome countenance. With silky dark-brown skin, soft eminently shaped coquetry lips, he looks like an alluring cafe' singer whose words can seduce the chastity from the purest virgin. His hair is neatly cut, always shines, and is lightly scented of sweet amberwood. The artistic quality of the crown of hair upon his head is picturesque of the talents that his personal stylist possessed who kept his hair neatly outlined with T-liners on the sides. Terrence is an aesthetic creation. His voice caresses the soul like delicate sequential kisses tiptoeing down the back of one's neck, tickling the spine, driving you into a frenzy. His hands are large, perfectly manicured and masculine smooth. Yet, he is as dangerous and pleasing as natural gas. He is a man who had walked with demons his entire life. As a child they came to him, suggesting he do harm to others, and often times he did harm to himself. Once in particular when he was eight years old, Terrence was outside playing, floating upon the airs. Rahazjeal seizes the opportunity to deceive the young child whose mind is impressionable carbon. Rahazjeal's voice blazes like a smoldering fire, flickering at just the proper time to entice the mind to deeper evils.

"Hello young son of the dust, or more fittingly clay prince of the earth. How art thou in these colorful days of autumn?"

Recognizing the voice of his invisible acquaintance, Terrence responds in his youthful exuberance, "Hey Rye! Did you color these trees?"

Playing along with the child's ease, "No, not I but others like myself who render the drudgery of the creator. Have you practiced any of the secrets that I have revealed to you my son?"

"Well, kind of sort of."

"Today we shall practice the art of summoning fire in which the passage of entrance shall be cast."

"I don't really want to play today."

"It will be fun little one. It will give you more secrets so that you will know more than those who try to keep you from having fun."

Rahazjeal seduces the heart of the child so that the urge to start a fire comes upon him; the impulse is so strong that Terrence begins to tremble, and his big deep brown eyes grow small, like two small slits that curl at the end. He begins preparing an area in the backyard, clearing all unnecessary distractions such as sticks and any trash that he could find. He goes into his parents' shed and gets the lawnmower that is empty of gasoline. He looks around the shed aimlessly and spots a dusty red iron can of gasoline. Calmly, Terrence fills the lawnmower with fuel and carelessly spills some on his pants and shirt. He then puts the gas can back in its usual place and takes the lawnmower out of the shed and proceeds to cut the entire yard. After finishing up with the yard, Terrence happily skips into the kitchen and gets a cup of fruit punch. His redolence of gasoline catches the attention of his father who is watching him from behind his newspaper. Paul Whitman smells that his son is up to no good; however, he does not stop him. He just lowers his papers and asks, "Gonna start a fire son?" Terrence smiles sinisterly at his father as he gulps down the sweet punch and walks back outside. Paul yells to his wife, "Cleo, come in here honey and see our boy at work." "What's my baby doing now?" Cleo asks in her proud paternally way as she enters the kitchen. Paul puts down his newspaper and walks over to his wife, grabbing her lovingly around the waist and leads

her over to the kitchen window where they are in perfect view of Terrence. Cleo smiles as her husband kisses her on the neck adoringly; she anticipates one of her son's cute little tricks.

Rahazjeal lets Terrence know that he is very pleased with the work Terrence has done. "Well done my child. Now in the area where you are standing I want you to relax. Close your eyes and meditate, allowing yourself to fall deep into the plushy darkness." Terrence obeys as he breathes slowly, feeling eased and relaxed all over in his small body. While Terrence drifts, his mind begins to visualize a place that is dark and murky. Slightly afraid, Terrence wants to leave this place, but his curiosity causes him to continue on in his mental voyage. Rahazjeal appears before him in the visualization and asks, "Do you know where you are my son?"

"Yes, I am at the door of my soul."

"Not quite, you are in the realm of the darkness in regards to your nature. The doorway that only I can enter. Your goodness has not been given over to me as of yet, and I cannot travel there since He safely guards it. I want you to visualize a spherical force field."

"You mean the circle?"

"Yes."

A circle and an interwoven network appears in Terrence's vision.

"Very good my child; now, do you remember the gates of the elements?"

Now, quivering but maintaining his focus, Terrence's replies, "Yes."

To ensure that they are on the same page, Rahazjeal asks, "The seals of the opening and closing of the elemental gates?"

"Yes."

With a momentary lapse of emotional explosion, Rahazjeal emits, "Excellent!" Gathering his composure, he continues, "Now with this knowledge I want you to clearly focus! Let nothing distract you! I want you to cast the pathway of entrance around the area that you stand." Terrence's mother feels uneasy as she sees her son in a trance like state; a small circular fire begins to burn the grass around her son. Cleo is not amazed because this is not something out of the ordinary for her son, but she feels a heavy evil presence that weighs on her soul. "Paul, something's not right."

Attempting to calm his wife, Paul responds, "I know, but he has to learn that he can't trust him."

"Trust who!" demands Cleo, her voice almost shrieking, "Who!" Cleo looks more closely at the shape that is burned into the area around Terrence and sees what looks like a conventional figure. At the sight of this she knows to whom her husband is referring.

Terror strikes Cleo like a hammer in the center of her back. She tries to run out to her son, but Paul holds her tightly and will not release her. Cleo desperately screams, her cries piercing the cracks in the wall, "Please let me go! No! This is not right!"

"Cleo, calm down. He has to learn that he cannot trust him."

Cleo and Paul fiercely struggle in the kitchen; outside Rahazjeal continues with the child. "The doorway is opening. Now, I want you to raise the fire. Raise it high! Raise it so that it covers you!" Terrence does as he is told and raises the fire. The fire's

fingers catches the fumes of the gasoline in Terrence's clothes and he is engrossed in flames. The bright glare of the raging fire grabs the attention of Paul and Cleo. The struggle comes to an abrupt halt. Like human lightning, Cleo dashes to the aide of her child. The fire slashes through Terrence like sharp daggers. The pain thrusts him from his meditative state, and the fire around him relinquishes instantly. Greatly angered Rahazjeal shouts, "Let nothing distract you! Continue on!" Still ablaze, Terrence collapses heavily to the ground. Cleo screams hysterically with a river of tears in her eyes while the smell of burning flesh fills the air. Cleo takes off her shirt and uses it to extinguish the fire. She then picks Terrence up and runs into the house. Entering the kitchen, Cleo sees Paul grinning like an animated fool. Cleo is disgusted with him, but her concern for her child so intense that nothing else matter. Cleo places Terrence on the floral cloth that covers the kitchen table and snatches the phone off its wall receiver.

Paul seizes her and says, "He's going to be all right. I did it also when I was a boy. Just wait. Please honey wait!" Cleo looks at the insane but sure look in her husband's eyes. She always knew Terrence had power, but to what magnitude she was never sure, and she did not want to find out this way. Her confusion makes her immobile. She cries and struggles to get away from her husband. Slowly, Terrence regains consciousness, whimpering in great distress, "Mamma it hurts! It hurts!" Cleo summons all of her strength and throws Paul against the refrigerator. She picks up the phone with shaking hands and dials 911. Paul grabs her and declares, "He's going to be fine. I did it when I was a boy. Just wait. Please honey wait!" Terrence begins pulling the burnt skin off himself erratically; he pauses, stands upon the table and spreads his arms like a bird gliding in flight. He becomes bright as the sun, filling the entire kitchen with a blinding light. Cleo stops crying. The dazzling bright light causes her to shield her face and fall to the floor. Paul withstands the light; he looks at his son and yells with great pride and joy, "That's my boy! Look at him honey! I told you he was going to be all right!" Terrence is this ray of light for about 120 seconds, and then he is as before--only he has new skin. Cleo quickly jumps up and picks her son up off the kitchen table and hugs him tightly; she is filled with inconceivable rapture.

Terrence possesses a power not of this world, but of the spiritual realm. He uses this ability to heal, transport objects and people, and to often bring back the dead provided it is in the will of the Infinite One. The demon, Rahazjeal, knows of his gift; moreover, he seeks to use Terrence's endowment to empower himself, thus enabling the destruction of the Whitman family. The battle for souls is waged one soldier at a time. Terrence has a younger brother, James, who possesses the same gift, but he is on a different spiritual level. James spends his time searching the Holy Writs and talking to the Infinite One daily. This holy habit so filled James that he has become repulsed with evil practices. Terrence lacks the understanding of James and is blinded by material gain through the usage of the scriptures. His lack of knowledge and greed is the door Rahazjeal uses to come unto him, imploring him to search for the pleasures of the flesh. His seed, Niles, also has this ability, but he takes after the ways of his Uncle James. As the child begins to mature, Rahazjeal hates him; he tries to conceive his hate for the child

in the heart of Terrence so that he will kill his own son and brother. Terrence's love for the two is at constant battle with Rahazjeal's evil desire.

To be protected from evil, there is a certain level of closeness man must achieve with the Infinite One. The Whitman family has this level of closeness but the foundation on which it stands is cracked. Rahazjeal is an expelled angel loosed on earth. Rahazjeal has destroyed many of the Whitman's by ways of murder, suicide, or by simply getting them to reject the Infinite One and ignore the powers they possess. In the mind of Terrence there is a conversation going on. Across from him a chair is at the peninsula with a half-drunken glass of Scotch. Terrence always pulls up a chair and pours a drink for his guest. At that moment his guest is seated within him. The guest is a life long airy acquaintance of the family--its evil conscious. Terrence's head is spinning; he tries to drink his unwanted guest out of his mind, but he's not budging. Rahazjeal has sealed his entry. This lifelong transition is finally complete. Marked by the murder of his son. The guest, Rahazjeal, has thus completed his quest.

Outside of the Whitman's home the weather is cool and the scent of spring is battling with fall. The streets and grass are damp. The sun paints the grayed sky. The colors of reddish yellow and orange fall in the mass of the blue sky and dance the tango, leaving a trail of the immense power and creativity of the Infinite One. Joan pulls up in her 2001 S-Type Silver four door Jaguar; she has just come home from teaching at the university. She is a strikingly, mesmerizing young crème mocha colored woman; Tall, skinny, the runway models type although nicely proportioned in hips and thighs with a firm supple plum for a rear end. She has on her typical spring wear, which is a black/white animal print silk skirt with the handkerchief hem with a paisley border, accented with a white silk halter-top. Her ample breast fill the halter-top. On her feet she wears Python lead slides with a 4-inch stiletto lacquer heel. Her waist-long shinny black hair bounces as she walks. The closer she gets to the door, the more she begins the chilled breeze that is emanating from her deep inside her home.

Like a clear, cloud, something is emanating from her home. As she passes the elegant front porch that embraces the main floor, Mrs. Whitman can not shake the feeling that something is terribly wrong. She opens her front door and walks into the central living room which flows from the foyer passing a nearby game room leading to an inviting pub with a marble wet bar. Her eyes dart across the empty spaces in search of Terrence. As her eyes move slowly along the walls and floors, Joan sees Terrence in the kitchen with two half-empty bottles of his sin juice. She notices the chair for his guest along with the half empty glass of Scotch. Joan knows Rahazjeal is there. She searches Terrence's worn face, trying to see if Rahazjeal has embedded himself within Terrence. The fear of not knowing takes her body and shakes her violently. Trying to compose herself, she does not want to let on that she knows that the other force is in the room. Moreover, she does not want her fear to give Rahazjeal the power.

She opens her mouth, pushing with her sloping lips, allowing her flowingly husky

voice to slip from her soul and embrace Terrence. “Hey sweetie.” The gentle press of her full lips against his follow her greeting. Joan frowns as she tastes the bitter alcohol on her husband’s mouth. She continues in a more intense tone, “I won’t ask how you’re doing because I can taste and smell what is evident.”

Terrence slurs “Professor Whitman, I would like to hear your disquisition on the following: how many principalities are there and by what means are they acquired?”

Playing along with his hidden game, Joan replies, “It depends. Are you speaking in terms of the physical or the spiritual?”

“I am speaking in reference to the rulers of the airs.”

From the growl in his voice and the snarl on his face, Joan realizes that Rahazjeal is within the mind and body of Terrence, alerting her of a devastating catastrophe that has or is about to happen. Joan calmly but carefully looks deep into the eyes of her husband, showing no sign of fear and answers, “The rulers of the airs are evil spirits, but I know that you are familiar with the hierarchy of demons, including the subordinate spirits. How the spiritual world determines what is the exact number of the ruling forces or how elemental numbers are acquired only you have the knowledge to answer your own question.” Checking his facial response, she continues, “Tell me Terrence, what is your interpretation of good?” The baneful lips of Terrence spread proudly, painting the portrait of an arrogantly drunken fool. “My ability to magnify. To will the powers within myself, for I am lofty and superior to all that is human.”

Playing the role of adversary, Joan questions, “Not virtue, love, faithfulness, or long-suffering?”

“Those are words of infirmity, and vulnerability. They spring forth from the fountain of moral weakness.”

“Terrence, where is Niles?”

“I beat his ass and sent him to bed. Damn bastard pissing all over the goddamn sheets; I got him good.”

Infuriated and frightened, Joan glances down at Terrence’s shoes and sees nothing out of the ordinary. A door upstairs slams loudly. With a cat-like limber motion Joan quickly darts up the stairs, expecting calamity. Fearfully, her steps counted by her throbbing heart, she approaches her son’s bedroom door; the icy mist returns as she reaches for the shinny, golden doorknob; frantically, with sweaty palms, she turns the doorknob and walks into the room.

“Oh my Godddd! Terrence, you fucking bastard! What have you done!” Joan sees her son’s mutilated body in the midst of the carpeted floor. Little Niles has a deep hole in the right side of his head. Gobs of blood are everywhere. Trembling, Joan’s sanity is on the runway to flight. Joan grabs and cradles her blood-soaked son and races out of his room and down the stairs. Niles’ body, limp and cold, dangles as his mother runs, holding him tightly.

“Where the hell you think your going? Put his ass down and fix me something to eat dammit!”

“Fuck you!” Joan screams, her voice pushing upward crashing against the seals of heaven. “You’ve killed my son! You’ve killed him!”

Joan tries to rush past Terrence, but he grabs a handful of her hair and slings her hard to the floor, causing her to drop little Niles.

“When I tell you to do something bitch, you better do it!” Terrence’s voice

bounces off Joan's face like a summer wind. The scent of his breath matches his befuddled tone. With great ire and ferocity Joan lets out a loud cry while she fiercely struggles to break free from the powerful arms of her husband that swallowed her thin, agile and flowing body. It is of no use. Terrence is 6'4, 250 pounds all evil. All Joan has is the paternal desire for her son that is planted like a seed in the pits of her heart. She manages to land the tip of her elbow into the right eye of Terrence, but this only angers him. Terrence feels the flow of blood running wildly from his eye and declares, "Your ass is mine!" He slams Joan onto the hardwood floor of the kitchen and proceeds to strike her multiple times in the face with his huge well-rounded and rugged fists that are covered with diamond clustered rings. The powerful blows splatter blood from Joan's small, thin, pretty face. The horrible sound that swishes from every massive blow inspires Terrence to continue. Joan can taste blood as it slides down her nasal passage, accompanied with hard lumps, which are some of her teeth. Along with the punches to her face and head, Joan feels a powerful, raging fire in her ribs as Terrence kicks her repeatedly.

In front of the Whitman's home Ms. Mattie, an elderly woman in Joan's church, pulls in front of the house. She knocks on the door but no one answered. As she as done so many times before, she turns the doorknob and walks into the home. "Hello, Rev. Whitman?" The sound of the chaos in the kitchen catches the attention of Ms. Mattie; with a hint of fear and wonder, Mattie slowly walks down the corridor towards the kitchen. "Lord Jesus!" Mattie summons quietly to herself trying carefully not to be noticed. Getting to the scene, she is frozen with fear and shock of seeing Reverend Whitman attacking his wife like a wild animal. This Man of God whom she holds in the highest esteem is the very same man whose touch took away the rheumatoid arthritis that had crooked her hands and fingers to the point of excruciating pain. How could this be? This maniac ravaging his wife is the very same man who, upon instinct, came over to her home when no one was there while Ms. Mattie was in a coma from her sugar diabetes. Rev. Whitman is the man who brought her back. He held her in his arms and told her that everything was going to be okay. The kiss from his lips corrected the crook in Sister Mae's mouth after she had suffered a severe brain stroke. Sister Mae stood proudly and strutted across her bedroom floor when seconds before the kiss of Reverend Whitman she was bedridden. The elderly old woman holds her chest as she begins to slip in and out of consciousness. Yet, before succumbing to her fear, she manages to move abruptly back up the corridor towards the front door. The warmth of the evening air kisses her face as she hurries to her car. Mattie drops down like a heavy sack of potatoes in the front seat of her car; she reaches for the ignition, but to her dismay she has dropped her car keys--probably somewhere in the Whitman's home. By no means is she going back in the Whitman's home to look for her car keys, so hastily she gets out of her car and manages to get only a few steps across the front lawn of the Whitman's home. She slips and falls in the wet grass, face first into an ant pile. This fall is serious for dear old Mattie. She ca not move, but she can feel pain streaking up her sides and back, deep into her fragile joints. The tenants, red ants, greet Mattie with angry stings for she is the giant disturbing their red kingdom.

In a wild quivering scream, Terrence demands, “TELL ME HOW MUCH YOU LOVE THIS! ANSWER ME!” The deafening silence coming from Joan causes Terrence to become alarmed and slightly frightened. He stops kicking his wife and turns her over. The vision of his wife’s distorted body expels a weight from his body.

“Joan! Joan! Baby I’ sorry. God, what have I done? Joan, please, please, God no!” Terrence whimpers like a lost puppy. In a state of bewilderment, he glances over at his son whose lifeless and limp body has sunken into the floor. Terrence, as if the poet in his brain has made the familiar unfamiliar, runs over to him and picks up his son’s body, which bounces in his arms like a Raggedy Andy doll. Rampageous tears rapidly fall from the eyes of Terrence as he holds Nile’s cold little bloody hand.

“Niles! Son! Please say something! Terrence yells hysterically. He sits weeping with his eyes closed, tears escaping from his soul like runaway slaves; he holds his son in his arms and rocks back and forth. He tries to find a pulse; he panicked because there was no pulse to be found. It is possible for Terrence to heal his son with his mind, but Rahazjeal’s presence blocks that possibility. He holds his son tightly and tries to channel any shred of life. He tries and tries but nothing happens; Rahazjeal’s presence robs Terrence of his ability to connect with his son. Deep in the mind of Terrence, Rahazjeal shouts, “Let the bastard die you murderer.” Pain shoots from one temple to the other, and Terrence shouts back, “No! I couldn’t have done it! You made me do it! I love my son! God, I love my son!” Terrence cries and holds his son tightly against himself.

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