

Black Magnolias

Copyright © 2003 *Black Magnolias*

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.

Address all correspondence regarding editorial matters, queries, subscriptions, and advertising to *Black Magnolias*, 203 Lynn Lane, Clinton, MS 39056. psychedelicit@bellsouth.net, (601) 925-1281. All submissions should be sent via e-mail in a word attachment. All submissions should include a 50 word biographical note with mailing address, e-mail address, and phone number.

All rights reserved. Rights for individual selections revert to authors upon publications. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Publishers.

Founding Publishers

Monica Taylor-McInnis

C. Liegh McInnis

C. Liegh McInnis, **Editor**

Cover Art

C. Liegh McInnis

Black Magnolias V, 2003

© C. Liegh McInnis

Table of Contents

Prose

- “Bernard Dadie’s ‘Dry your Tears, Africa!’ as an Example of Negritude”**
by Stephanie L. Stokes 5
- “When Their Backs Were Against the Wall, They Chose to Fight:
Christian Heroism in *Jubilee*”**
by Shamir Lee 13
- “The Art and Power of Cross-Cultural Communication”**
by Ayisha Knight 22
- “Eight Ways to Identify Poetry Pimps”**
by Aqiyl Thomas 25
- “Existentialism in ‘Third Bank of the River’”**
by Vera Davis 27

Poetry

- “For Our Mothers”**
by Preselfannie Whitfield McDaniels 37
- “Indoctrination”**
by Poet (Myron Adonis Franklin) 38
- “Gypsies Fire (After Reading Paul Laurence Dunbar’s
‘The Sport of the Gods’)”**
“Millennium Hunger”
by Marcus Uganda White 40
- “Pass It On”**
“Perspectives”
“Royalty Revisited”
“Dichotomy”
by Ayisha Knight 42
- “Seasonz out of Time with the Sun and the Moon”** from *Kultural Eunuchz*
“Listen (metamorphosis)” from *Kultural Eunuchz*
“Kultural Eunuchz” from *Kultural Eunuchz*
by Asukile S. Bandele 48

Narrative

“Chapter One” from <i>Tree Shakers and Jelly Makers</i> by Chris Parker	56
“Scene One” of <i>Stolen Childhood</i> from <i>The Village Poet and Collection of Writings</i> by Leon Newton	68
Contributors’ Bios	85

Prose

Bernard Dadie's "Dry your Tears, Africa!" as an Example of Negritude
by Stephanie L Stokes

A consistent theme throughout the history and literature of Africa is its question of identity. This question of identity is directly related to the question of survival and sovereignty because the greatest struggle for the African remains that of psychological enslavement, which involves one's self-hatred and one's acceptance of slavery or second-class citizenship. As its literature explores this notion, we find that the question of identity is simultaneously an individual and collective issue because Africans traditionally have not made the same rigid distinction between the individual and the group, which is most commonly asserted in the saying, "I am We." Thus, a question of identity for the African individual is ultimately a question of identity for the collective. With Africa being the most attacked, warred upon, and tampered civilization, its eccentricity has been brainwashed, altered, twisted, and perverted to a point where Africa's greatest struggle is how to get the collective to unify against psychological warfare and enslavement. In Bernard Dadie's poem, "Dry Your Tears Africa!" this theme is noted through its message of encouraging the oppressed Africans to rise collectively from psychological white supremacy despite all the toil and hardships endured. The poem's essence lies in asserting, affirming, and preserving the value of African traditions and exalting Africa's natural beauty. Dadie's poem becomes an example of Negritude, which is "an anti-assimilationist African literary movement that promoted a return to Africa's distinctive values and culture...[The art speaks] of the beauty of Africa and its women, the protective guidance of the dead in the lives of the living, the destructive effect of European colonization on African culture, the need for cultural interdependence, and the world's need for Africa's special qualities of passion and spontaneity" (Rosenberg 340). Writers who embrace this philosophy assert that a training of the mind to accentuate these attributes gives way to Africans' psychological and cultural liberation. The African populous must have their efforts and their minds refocused to take responsibility of current circumstances in order to progress. Only through spiritual, mental, and cultural emancipation can one attempt to resolve the inferiority complex oppressing so many Africans and African descendants. Dadie' has set out to construct a type of poetry that will, in itself, inspire, if not cause, African liberation, echoing Amiri Baraka's notion in "Black Art" that the art of African people has a greater responsibility to aid in the liberation of that people.

Dadie' begins by attacking the heart of African oppression, the oppression of their spirit. In the words of Dr. J. H. Clarke, "When a people laugh at your gods they have you one way, and, when they train you to laugh at your own gods, they've got you another way" (Locke 111). Spirituality is the basis upon which many an African culture is founded. Under European influence, the concept of what was to be worshipped was altered where the African was not resembled or related, in any way, to the God they praised. This created a hierarchy in which the African assumed an inferior position. In the poem, the narrator is urging the continent/nation to reach back and embrace its original statutes. "Dry your tears, Africa! Your children come back to you out of the storm and squalls of fruitless journeys." This opening statement signifies the destructive impact of European dominance as it relates to Africanness and, at the same time,

acknowledges the great pride in its own heritage. What one praises is what one strives to become, and through realizing what one observes as the truth, no other “truth” should be considered. When the essence of the individual’s spirituality is altered, the individual’s identity is scattered. One is defined, in many respects, by what one worships because it creates a moral foundation on which to build other aspects of social, economic, and political life. The poet records, “And our senses are now opened...And to the charm of your foliage pearled by the dew.” The freedom of Africans to heed to their own true spirituality does away with their subjugation. Or to put it another way, Dadie’s rejection of European technology and capital is to be seen as a rejection of European gods, since Baraka did assert that the European had replaced God with capital as the center of man’s life. As Baraka asserts in *Bluespeople*, the African only embraced the god of his oppressor because he wanted to get the secrets of his technology. Thus, the rejection of that technology must be read as a rejection of the gods and a return to one’s native beliefs.

We must understand that religion for the African, prior to first contact with the European, was not just a part of life--it was life. Writer Mambo Ama Mazama considers spirituality as an innate Afrocentric quest. He defines Afrocentricity as the recovery of African freedom and creativity or “the measure of our lives.” He notes it as a tool to be utilized to subdue oppression (Mazama 220). It is important to observe the African as a people collectively in that respect. In the poem, the narrator approaches his audience by speaking to a mass of people. This pinpoints a unified recovery of spirituality that must take place in order for a positive impact to occur. “We have drunk...” comes from a first person plural tense. A sense of necessary inclusion between the narrator and his audience can be felt supplying strength and faith to endure, succeed, and overcome. “When we think of African selves, we cannot be satisfied with an individualistic approach, but must understand that we are part of a whole that includes diverse spiritual and physical entities. We certainly cannot think of reclaiming our lives outside of this ontological order it at the end we are to be whole again, as demanded by Afrocentricity” (Mazama 221). Africans cannot think this way because Dadie’ seems to assert that African oppression has been both systematic and designed with the group in mind. “We have drunk...” There has been a collective elixir to which the race/nation must find an antidote.

Contrary to what many have tried to assert, Black unity is not merely some reaction to American slavery and Jim Crow. Much of their ancient epics, myths, legends, and parables address the issue of the individual’s responsibility to the tribe and the inextricable connection of the two. From the traditional notion that “I am me because we are we, and we are we because I am me,” it can be derived that one’s relationship and interacting with one’s society is a religious action where one serves God well if one interacts well with one’s society. In the traditional African sense, religion is not merely about one’s individual relationship with God, but it contains, innately, how one manifests that personal relationship with God in one’s dealings with the society. Thus, in a traditional, pre-European context, it is almost impossible for indigenous, non-tarnished groups to think of man’s relationship with God on an individual level. Therefore, the need to construct and maintain unity is a political and religious action and need--for the good of the tribe and for the good of the tribe’s soul. “In the African context, people do

not conceive themselves as separated from the cosmos but as being completely integrated into a universe that is much larger than any of them and yet is centered around them” (Mazama, 228). This signifies the original African notion concerning themselves in relation to their God. These people, as human beings, along with their surroundings, are with and of nature, which is life all connected and supplied from the same source of energy, which is God. “A major articulation of African metaphysics is the energy of cosmic origin that permeates and lives within all that is—human beings, animals, plants, mineral, and objects, as well as events. This common energy shared by all confers a common essence to everything in the world, and thus ensures the fundamental unity of all that exist” (Mazama 228). And European Christianity not only separated the African from himself but also from the land. Thus, for the African to re-commune with his nation and with his people is as much a religious act as it is a political act. This is important because the religion that the African received from the European was one that taught him to separate from the tribe and to embark on one’s individualistic journey, which directly contradicted the African’s understanding of man’s relationship to God. By sending the African on this individual journey, the European was able to dissolve the African’s cohesive communal bond. Thus, Dadie’s goal is to restore this bond by having the African understand the joys and benefits of African landscape, history, and unity.

With Africans and their dispersal accepting the idea that their deities could not be true messengers of God, they have discarded them, only to embrace someone else’s God and its messenger. The African was connected to God through his relationship with the land. By turning his back on the land, particularly the African landscape, the African is turning his back on his own beauty to embrace someone else’s beauty. It is Dadie’s hopes to paint a better picture of Africa than has been painted by the European oppressor in order to cause the African to see his beauty once again by seeing the beauty of Africa’s landscape. Dadie’ writes “Over the gold of the east and the purple of the setting sun, the peaks of the proud mountains...” This quote gives reference to the African interpretation of what they observe to be precious and how these natural wonders relate to them. Dadie’ has the “children” of Africa to “return” home as a rejection of the land of the West, which is to reject the ideals of the West that are embedded in the land. “One cannot pretend to be relocated and defend African agency while at the same time continuing to embrace one of the pillars of Western Supremacy” (Nye 224). Addressing the demise of African beauty is to what the essence of Afrocentricity is fully dedicated. “Christianity is a derived way of life and belief system promulgated and manipulated by Europeans for Europeans so as to facilitate and advance their religious supremacy” (Locke 94). In the past and even arguably in the present, Christianity has been a part and parcel of the White Supremacy project. The chosen people were, of course, from some other land than Africa. Thus, Africans can have no special place in God’s plan. Yet, by showing the beauty of Africa, “Over the gold of the east/ and the purple of the setting sun,/ the peaks of the mountains/ and the grasslands drenched with light/ They return to you/...to the splendor of your beauty/ to the smell of your forests/ to the charm of your waters/ to the clearness of your skies/ to the caress of your sun/ And to the charm of your foliage pearled by the dew” Dadie is debunking the myth of Cain and the despair associated with it. He is asserting that Africa is a land of beauty, which allows him to assert that Africa’s people are beautiful, which asserts that they are of God.

By addressing the myths of Africa's ugliness, Dadie' is involved in the re-educating of African people that Negritude demands. Marcus Garvey asserted, "Education is the medium by which a people are prepared for the creation of their own particular civilization and the advancement and glory of their own race" ("Maxims of Marcus Garvey" 2002). By far, when a proper and correct history is grasped by the African, an account of heritage through ancestors, philosophy, science, medicine, etc., false ideas of stereotypical information used to oppress the African is erased. In comprehending these leading elements, it can then be utilized as a tool to eradicate forced upon faulty education and perpetuate a strong sense of identity. In the poem, Dadie' describes Africans surviving their misfortunes, giving them a sense to appreciate their strength, character, and legacy as mighty survivors, which opposes all inferior notions of the race. For instance, "Dry your tears, Africa! We have drunk from all the springs of ill fortune and of glory." However, the African has survived those "springs of ill fortune and glory" to "return" home from "the storm and squalls of fruitless journeys." Initiated by a change in the thought process, a correct outlook on identity, life, and progression is synthesized, which will alleviate the state of oppression of Blacks. So, Dadie', in the spirit of Negritude, is laying a blueprint for African independence by affirming African worth and character. By celebrating African survival, Dadie' is asserting that the African has a legacy of greatness. "For peoples of African descent, an important aspect of our struggle is the struggle to define our worldview from within the various African centered schools of thought. In this sense it should be our collective mission to keep alive the struggle of our ancestors on the continent of Africa and its Diaspora" (Christian 181). Here, an alternative perspective to heroism is asserted and validated. It is important to recognize one's genuine identity and how this identity contradicts all inferior assumptions. What Dadie' wishes to assert is that the genuine African identity is not that of an oppressed, second-class citizen. The "return" that is a repetitive, reoccurring image is used to move us from the literal/physical return of Africans back to the continent to the figurative/metaphysical manifestation and/or evolution of the African to his reinstated, non-oppressed, first-class self. To do this, Dadie' must show that exposure to the European has been a negative and not a positive. African scholars John Henry Clarke and Anthony Browder agree that "White Supremacy is inextricably interwoven with the notion and the practice of White racism...thus, White Supremacy manifest in the social, economic, political, and cultural history of European expansion and the development of the New World" (Christian 184). Dadie' asserts this by naming the African's relationship and exposure to the European a "fruitless journey." In relating the past to the present, there is a consistency in the evidence of a transformation that changed the "culturally" African people into a "culturally" European people through the impregnating of new thought processes, images, and mis-truths. Thus, the poem--an artifact of thought, an example of critical thinking--must be used to counteract that change, to free Africans from psychological enslavement. So, the poem, itself, presents the example of the African's "fruitless" relationship with the European and acts as a mantra to inspire the African to terminate this "fruitless" relationship and develop relationships with his own people.

To go further, "fruitless journeys" symbolizes the malevolent attributes Africans

gained. Under European colonization, the African was forced to strip away his own identity. In the mental realm, present educational systems affirm European superiority, founded upon a history that has been completely interpreted by Europeans and exclusively from their perception. There is nothing wrong with any people viewing history through their eyes and through their perceptions, unless they also force others to internalize their view. With Africans under this system, a transformation of consciousness in the Africans (worldwide) synthesized, more specifically, through the enslavement process. The effects are and have been detrimental to the African rediscovering his true self (through heritage). With the “emancipation” of Negroes in Europe, America, and Africa, they were able to learn to read and write, but, of course, in European school systems. The clergy taught the Negro through use of the Bible, which methodically gained the Negro’s trust and loyalty, making the displaced African subservient to European domination, which makes the relationship between the African and the European a “fruitless” relationship for the African. “It was observed that the most loyal and subordinate slaves were those who could read the bible...” (“Transcript: Words Worth Repeating” 1998). Thus, it is very significant to trace European thought manifested in Africans (and descents). The early indoctrination of the European notion chipped away at the African’s inherent “Africanness” and was strategically substituted it with “Europeanness.” The African’s mental existence was deeply affected in their cultural decision-making process. “Afrikans were acculturated with European history, culture, values and thought while simultaneously being deculturalized to their own Afrikaness, their own national identity as an Afrikan cultural group and were taught to deny their own Afrikan history, culture, etc., without even saying it.” (“Transcript: Words Worth Repeating” 1998). With the progression of this type of “mis-educated Negroes,” the system will not undergo any type of change, and even the Negroes placed in charge will continue to perpetuate the same output Whites have educated them and shaped them to produce (Fellman 28). So, Dadie’s “return” is a return to Afrocentrism, which is a healing, which is in opposition to Eurocentrism, which is debilitating to the African mind, soul, and body. The African must leave the white land and white institutions that are rooted in the central nature of whiteness, which simultaneously marginalizes blackness, and return to Africa and Afrocentrism, which is to put Blackness at the center of all institutions, which is to put themselves at the center of all institutions. To put it another way, Dadie’ is addressing W.E.B. Du Bois’ “double consciousness” by asserting that as long as Africans look at themselves through the eyes of others they will remain schizophrenic slaves. However, if Africans “return” to Negritude, return to Afrocentrism, they will return to sanity, which is the first step to returning to their rightful place as global first-class citizens.

Accordingly, in regards to African mental emancipation, Booker T. Washington and Du Bois differed on how to aid and evolve the Black race, but their differing is important in realizing and understanding Black critical thought and the manner in which this diversity symbolizes intelligence and humanity. What is significant here is that the battle is fought, whatever the methods. Washington asserts “Enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of struggle rather than of artificial forcing. It is important and right that all privileges of the law be ours, but it is vastly more important that we be prepared for the exercises of these privileges.” The being

“prepared for the exercises of these privileges” is Washington’s assertion that the Black mind is the key for Black survival. In the same manner, Du Bois contends, “Education and work are the levers to uplift a people. Work alone will not do it unless guided by intelligence. Education must not simply teach work—it must teach life” (*American Enterprise* 1998). In his poem, Dadie’ chooses to celebrate Black diversity by combining the theories. His work is both a thematic and strategic act of re-joining the two theories, which have been separated by slavery. The insights and theories of Washington and Du Bois are conceived in and by the African’s dissemination and dislocation in a foreign land. The fact that the two men were never able to work together is the prime example of the manner in which Africans have been separated from themselves. Dadie’ takes a holistic approach rather than choosing sides. By merging the two ideologies, Dadie’ is asserting that we need to re-train the Black mind to reverse the effects of white supremacy. The poem encourages its readers to be restored, encouraged, and ultimately freed (mentally)—“They return to clothe you in their dreams and their hopes.” The clothing should be seen metaphorically as the act of clothing the African with the ideology of Afrocentrism because the garment (ideologies) of Eurocentrism has failed the African.

A change is imperative in order to improve a positive sense of self and restore the self-esteem of the African identity. This directly relates to the characterization of an individual as well as its society or culture as a whole. The conflict and resolution to arise from oppression develops in the mind. Often, if the culture is celebrated, a rejuvenation or remembrance of the great African tradition promotes victory through thought and, ultimately, living. Dadie’ asserts, “Your children come back to you, their hands full of playthings and their hearts full of love. They return to clothe you in their dreams and hopes.” This indicates that culture maintained throughout generations must be appreciated. Art, such as Dadie’s poem, must be used to motivate and perpetuate the ideals that will promote a constructive existence. The “dreams” and “hopes” refer to conquering social battles, set forth by Europeans, equipped by knowledge of the past and an affirmation of one’s worth and beauty. This past molds the being of which Africa is. The “children” symbolize a refined African people who are instilled with a mind of liberation. This must be practiced continuously to uproot the tyranny of whites. Thus, “Your children come back to you their hands full of playthings and their hearts full of love” describes, in a sense, a vibrant generation that has come forth full of rejuvenation and encouragement. In Earl Byrd’s article, “Black Culture Rooted in Jazz,” he notes how “our inspirations are rooted in our music. It has evolved over time during our development and evolution and is an essential ingredient to our experience.” Byrd is noting that everything that a people do is guided by their culture, which is driven by how they see themselves and react to their surroundings. The aspect of culture is no doubt most significant. If the art to which the people are exposed provides a positive image of the people, then the people will be guided by this image. Thus, Dadie’ is working to refute the lies about African people so that he can inspire them to ascend to their cultural heights. Charlie Simmons emphasizes “Believing that an understanding of one’s culture, combined with education, is the true key to freedom in America. Jazz is a big part of the cultural exponent of the African-American experience; culture is one of the building blocks of a people’s behavior. It gives a social force that shapes our lives, for it underpins

the knowledge of ourselves and our people's development" (Byrd B1). To put it plainly, jazz musicians saw themselves as more than musicians. "They saw themselves as griots, remembering and building upon the history of the culture (music as its artifact) and using that artifact to inform and guide the people in a positive light" (McInnis 2002). They were using their talents to make comment on their people's situation as well as to inspire their people to a new type of liberation--a liberation that could be heard in the music of Black men breaking the chains and confinements of white notes and scales. In the same sense, Dadie' uses his poem as an artifact that will fill the African's "hearts full of love" for themselves, which will allow them to make real their "dreams" and their "hopes."

Art, such as Dadie's poem, is seen as a primary weapon of defense from white oppression and a tool to build one's sovereignty by constructing a positive image. Joshep Okpaku states, "We are therefore, in launching our revolution, setting out to recover these values and to reshape them according to the needs of our current experience. For it is that culture has emphasized the value of man, not as an individualized and egotistical animal, but as a social and socialized being" (Okpaku 50). This, of course, is Dadie's goal, which allows him to fulfill the prime directive of Negritude. In a world where they are surrounded and often suffocated by whiteness, Blacks can only be liberated by reminding themselves who they are as an African people and allowing this notion to define their culture. It is then that they dwell in freedom. Malcolm X believed that the "African American struggle for equality would have to include individual discovery of self through the lens of culture" (Nye 30). Thus, Dadie writes of Africa's natural beauty embodying the culture of its people—"And our senses are now opened..." This rediscovery or remembrance joins the African to his origin or identity. By demolishing the false ideas held by the thriving Black mass and bombarding them with new imagery of themselves and their history, a progression in the African struggle for liberation, freedom, and sovereignty would be incalculable. Yet, it must be stated that the goal of Dadie' and Negritude is not to inspire or produce hatred of whites in Blacks. Dadie's goal is to rid the African of his self-hate, which will allow him to work on his own behalf. "It's important to the Black psychic that a child know what Africans helped to advance mankind." (Byrd, B2). Without this knowledge, African people will never believe that they have the right to be equal and to control their own lives. "Dry Your Tears, Africa!" stresses a freeing of the African psyche and perhaps a reformation in character to reveal the true human African identity, destroying all inferior ideology. The message validates how and why this outstanding character was established, which affirms the prominent African identity and paves the way for Africans to create a world for themselves. The poem achieves its prime directive of Negritude, which celebrates value in African traditions and in Africa's natural beauty. To recognize this is to perpetuate Africans' psychological and cultural liberation.

Bibliography

- Baraka, Amiri. *Bluespeople*. New York: William Morrow & Co., 1983.
- Byrd, Earl. "Black Culture Rooted in Jazz." *The Washington Afro American and the Washington Tribune*. 22 Nov. 2002, pp. B1-B2.
- Christian, Mark. "An African-Centered Perspective on White Supremacy". *Journal of Black Studies*. Vol. 33 No. 2, Nov. 2000. pp. 179-198.
- Cronon, E. David, ed. *The Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1972.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Gramercy Books, 1994.
- Fellman, David. *The Limits of Freedom*. Westport: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1959.
- Garvey, Amy Jacques, ed. *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey, Or Africa for the Africans*. New York: Centennial, 1990.
- Locke, Alain, ed. *The New Negro*. New York: Athenaeum Paperbacks, 1968.
- McInnis, C. Liegh. "Lecture: Identity as Theme and Technique in African and African Literature." *World Literature*, Jackson State University. Fall, 2002.
- Martin, Joecephus. "Personal Interview." November 6, 2002.
- Martin, Tony, ed. *Message to the People: The Course in African Philosophy*. Baltimore: The Majority Press, 1986.
- "Maxims of Marcus Garvey." *W.E.B. Du Bois Learning Center*. (Online Posting). <http://www.duboislrc.org/html/MaximsOfGarvey.html>. December 1, 2002.
- Mazama, Mambo Amo. "Afrocentricity and African Spirituality." *Journal of Black Studies*. Vol. 33 No. 2, Nov. 2000. pp. 219-234.
- Nye, Russell B. *Fettered Freedom: Civil Liberties and the Slavery Controversy 1830-1860*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972.
- Okpaku, Joseph. Ed. *New African Literature and the Arts Vol. 3*. Chicago: The Third Press, 1973.
- "Transcript: Words Worth Repeating, Du Bois and Washington Debate How to Prosper the Black Race." *American Enterprise Online*. November/December, 1998. <http://www.theamericanenterprise.org/taend98u.htm>. December 1, 2002.
- Washington, Booker T. *Up from Slavery*. New York: Dover Publications, 1995.

**When Their Backs Were Against the Wall, They Chose to Fight:
Christian Heroism in *Jubilee***
by Shamir Lee

Jubilee is a tripartite narrative that includes the period of bondage, escape, and freedom. Reading almost like a self-contained trilogy, Margaret Walker presents the movements and transition of African Americans in a manner that provides a thorough and three-dimensional understanding of the African American struggle through slavery, Reconstruction, and a foreshadowing of post-Reconstruction. With this three layered presentation, Walker shows us the three-dimensional planes of the African American: physical, spiritual, and psychological. Not only does Walker prove the human complexity of the African American, she asserts that African Americans have never been passive pawns to be manipulated by their white masters and their situation. Rather than deal with flat, one-dimensional characters that simply symbolize right or wrong, militant or accommodationist, Walker forces us to deal with the complexity of the America slave on the slave's terms and conditions of eminent and constant threat of death and not on our terms and conditions. More specifically, Walker is forcing us to turn our eyes to a universal notion and standard of goodness and justice and not the generational sliding scale of the ends justifying our singular and current means. In fact, what we get from Walker is an understanding that African Americans have resisted their oppression at every turn, but have done so with a dignity and morality that is the epitome of man's connection to his higher self. And it has been the understanding of that connection to a higher being that the Africans never lost and that has kept them alive and moving. Accordingly, Walker provides for us an understanding that one of the primary and greatest characteristics of African Americans is their will and determination to fight for freedom as that fight, itself, is a metaphor for man's ability to manifest and evolve back to God.

Jubilee chronicles the story of Vyry, a mulatto slave girl, and her struggle and survival during the antebellum period, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. The struggle for freedom, equality, and happiness is a recurring theme mentioned within *Jubilee*, which is enhance by Vyry never compromising her ethics or her values for any gains. The story starts out on a plantation where Vyry is born as a slave to her master and father John Dutton. Her father and his wife, Salina Dutton who hates Vyry for being the master's illegitimate child, treat Vyry horribly and try to break her spirit. Yet, it is Vyry's Christian fortitude that allows her to rise above the evil of her masters and achieve the place of protagonist, where the un-Christian actions of her masters relegate them to the role of antagonist. "Vyry rejects racial bitterness as she forgives Salina in spite of the terrible cruelties that she endured at the hands of her masters wife" (Magill 1211). Walker enhances our understanding of Vyry's heroic nature by paralleling her to the acts of the slaves who serve a greater literary purpose than just being backdrop. Throughout this novel, the slaves on the plantation search for peace and equality while forgiving and helping those who treat them badly. There are many slaves who are mentally strong and have the faith and strength to live through these times of injustice. By showing Vyry as the offspring of the slaves' goodness, Walker uses Vyry as a Christian symbol, showing man's ability to rise above his physical hardship because of

one's inner/spiritual strength. Walker demonstrates the central issue by contrasting the negative circumstances of Blacks with the bond that exists between them, the faith they had in God, and their endless struggle for freedom. On one hand, Walker's purpose is to show the world that Black people have the same emotions and concerns as the white man. In this notion, *Jubilee* is Christian/integrationist propaganda. However, if we look deeper, Walker's goal is to show God in the spirit integration and not necessarily the law of integration. In theory, the notion of integration goes beyond the mingling and mixing of the races. On a higher level, integration is about the wearing away of arbitrary and man-made walls and laws that separate God's children and hinder their evolution. Thus, it is important to understand that Vyry not only refuses to hate, she also attempts to bridge the races and the genders with every action. Both Vyry and the slaves become metaphors for Walker's need to articulate the social and political power of God's love, and she does this by embedding both Vyry and the slaves with epic-like heroic qualities. More specifically, rather than choose what Walker would consider the death of vengeance and retaliation, Walker has her characters choose live through choosing to love. When they were kicked down, degraded, and were not given a choice, they chose life. "*Jubilee* chronicles the triumph of a free spirit over many kinds of bondage" (Carmichael 5). And more importantly, it must be understood that Walker does not have her characters choose a blind, ignorant kind of love but a critical, calculating kind of love where one understands that the best for oneself and the best for humanity is to cultivate love in this field of hate. And this is mostly implied in Walker's juxtaposition of gender when men symbolize death and women symbolize life. Walker shows the strengths and skills of the Black women who lived during this time. It was important in their survival and livelihood that women helped and educated one another. They were not allowed to attend school, so it was the older women's responsibility to educate the younger ones. "Don't never grin in that white woman's face. She don't know what you mean. I was borned here, and I been here all my life, and you don't see me grinning bout nothing, now does you? Well they ain't nothing here to grin about, that's how come I ain't grinning" (Walker 109). The older women took pride in teaching the younger ones how to survive. The only way the younger women learned how to be wives, mothers, and servants were through the oral teachings of the older women who lived on the plantation. "Older women instructed younger ones on food preparation, needle crafts, and the medicinal value of herbs and roots" (Magill 1209). Along with teaching the practical lessons of survival, the women were passing along the lessons of nurturing the body and the soul in the manner that it was as practical as cooking and cleaning.

Black women, due to the special and specific subjugation of Black men, were forced to be mentally strong and flexible. In many ways, Walker creates a clear dichotomy of right and wrong, life and death and places it on the shoulders of male and female where Black women are the ones who take up the heroic mantel of saving the race--the human race. Older women dedicated their lives in the progression of their culture by teaching younger women the rules of their harsh reality. Their master subjected them to harsh treatment, back braking labor, and rape. The women who lived during these times of injustice and oppression established a strong bond, which helped them make it through each horrific day. As these women were forced to cook, clean, and serve their masters, they prayed for glory: a day where freedom would ring and they

would be able to live their lives in peace and harmony. Yet, it was not just praying. They lived their lives in a manner that would manifest that glory into their physical lives. Their pain and sorrow were alleviated by their tears, prayers, and cries of freedom that they shared amongst one another. They protected one another to the best of their abilities and cried out joyously when one of their fellow members were able to escape this cruel life--that escape being the ultimate affirmation that God was indeed listening. Yet another example of this connection to God was that their womanhood was shaped and marked not by the experiences living within a slave society, which sole purpose was to degrade and mock their existence, but by their belief in God and the great goodness of life. "For a slave woman, womanhood encompassed taking care of the 'plantation family' and their own household" (Magill 1210). These women cared for white children and the white mothers who sold their children and mothers. Slaves were auctioned off as if they were animals to be bought and sold and lived with the fears of one day awakening to the disappearance of a loved one. They were forced to swallow their pride and make the best of their situation. While they looked into the crystal blue eyes of their owners and begged for mercy, in return they received lashes against their naked bodies, which pierced their skin. As their cries grew louder and louder, their wounds cut deeper and deeper. Not once did they question why, but they prayed for when. When shall the day come when they would be free, free from oppression, bondage, and enslavement? As their days worsened, their bond grew stronger and stronger. Their bond was tied in prayer and confidence and was strong as steel. "No matter who owned them or where they worked, enslaved African Americans never fully accepted their situation. The spirituals and folk songs they sang revealed their longing for liberty" (Virginia 37). For in the same manner that Walker is causing us to look to the past for our strength, the slaves knew to look to their past, which allowed them to reject the false notions of their humanity that slavery attempted to offer them.

Thus, it was the sanction between man and God that made life worth living. When their backs were against the wall, they still refused to embrace the evil model of survival that their masters proposed. When their backs were against the wall, their faith in God was the only thing on which they could rely. Though beaten and humiliated, the slaves never lost their faith in God. Though their bodies were bruised and bloody, their spirits were free and holy with the intent to bring no harm amongst any man.

"I knows deep down in my heart that they is a God and He ain't gwine never forget his childrens no more'n I'm gwine forget mine whilst I'm living in this world. He's above the devil too, that's what He is. I knows I'm a child of God and I can pray. Things ain't never gwine get to bad for me to pray. And I knows too, that the Good Lawd's will is gwine be done. I has learned that much. I'm gwine leave all the evil shameless peoples in the world in the hands of the Good Lawd and I'm gwine teach my childrens to hate nobody, don't care what they does" (Walker 404).

"With acts and assertions such as these, Walker is reconstructing the American heroic image and hierarchy by putting those whose actions are closest to God at the top of the heroic hierarchy" (McInnis 2002). From Achilles to John Wayne, the white image of

heroism is one who can meet out revenge to the evil doers. However, Walker is paralleling that action to Satan and redefining the ability to love and forgive as the true heroic deed. It was the slaves' faith that allowed them to continue each day in hope of living the life God intended. Together and individually they bowed to their shattered knees and prayed for the day that the heavens would fall upon them. Their faith in God was so strong that they were able to forgive those who have enslaved them and murdered their family and friends. "Goodbye, honey, don't yall forget to pray. Pray to God to send His chilluns a Moses, pray to Jesus to have mercy on us poor suffering chilluns. Aunt Sally knows she ain't never gwine see yall no more in this here sinful world, but I'm gwine be waiting for you on the other side where there ain't gwine be no more auction block." (Walker 71). Walker is asserting that it was because of their faith that they long endured what no other man could face. Walker is clear that hatred is a virus and cancer that eats at us in the manner that it eats at both of the men in her life until it makes their love limited and almost impotent in one way or another. Vryy, on the other hand, is free because she has liberated herself from hatred, and this freedom allows her to build rather than to destroy. And Walker uses the slaves as a backdrop or an affirmation of Vryy's spiritual liberation by showing how the slaves pass on love to their children. The spirit of God moved within their souls while they chanted that old Negro spiritual that kept them focused. Tears fell from their faces and at any time and in any place smiles haunted them then faded away, but came again to brighten their day. Their hearts fluttered, while their emotions swelled; they would hide their thoughts and dare not tell. Their eyes wondered, while dreams they could hold, those hopes of life were exploding within to their souls. They prayed to Him and blessed the day when He would send Moses to save them from the damnation in which they lived. "Lawd, ah doan feel no-ways tired, oh, glory hallelujah! For I hope to shout glory when this world is on fire, oh, glory hallelujah!" (Walker 394). The slaves knew if they were not delivered while living in this world, their freedom would be in heaven with God. Even when they were beaten, cheated, and sold, their love for God was the light that guided them out of darkness. Showers of blessings fell from the sky, and the heavens did open and the angels did fly. Darkness came, but light did prevail. It was the glory of God that held still, it was the faith in His word that helped them live. The smiles of the Lord kept them motivated and gave them the courage to live in a world that views them as animals.

Yet, the strength of *Jubilee* is that even though Walker is asserting a type of Christian propaganda she never falls into the trap of blindly romanticizing the plight of the slaves. Walker captures the heartache and abuse driven by the white man against the Black race. As Black people struggled for freedom, the masters took pride in keeping them chained like animals. "God meant for you to have masters. God meant for you to be slaves. God meant for you to be humble, obedient, honest, truthful and God-fearing servants of your earthly masters" (Walker 102). Walker uses the evil deeds of the whites to reconstruct the Western terms of good and evil, protagonist and antagonist. As many critics have asserted, while Walker is writing about slavery she is also addressing her current time--the apex of the modern day Civil Rights Movement. By drawing on the past, she wants her current generation to know of its historic and heroic past so that they may be encouraged but also guided. Written and published in a time (1966) when the Civil Rights Movement and divided into two distinct paths: integration and Black

Nationalism, Walker is obviously siding with Martin L. King rather than Malcolm X. The growing number of people who embraced the Black power and Black Nationalist movements threatened to shed a negative light on many of the beliefs held by Walker. *Jubilee* was a way for Walker to reassert the value, potential, and strengths of Christian love. Walker, in working from her Old Testament history and her New Testament ideology, is asserting that man cannot meet fire with fire, for as King asserted the policy of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth would leave us all blind and toothless. With *Jubilee*, Walker is asserting that love is the only medicine for hate and that it is the strongest of us who can love those who hate us. So, the dream of one day being free was instilled in the hearts of every slave, and they were determined to leave the lands of slavery and live in happiness but on their terms of righteousness. While they kept their hopes and prayers of being free only amongst one another, the dream was very much alive. In their search for freedom, slaves were subjected to whippings, lynchings, and many other wicked forms of punishment. Through the south flowed many man-made rivers, which were the tears of black men's cries for freedom. For their masters turned their heads at the tears that dropped from their cheeks and the lashes that ripped away their flesh. They could only see their nigger skin and nappy roots, instead of the human beings they are. "White man got the eye for gold, nigger man do what he told" (Walker 74). Black people endured the scars and the whips, the chains and the shackles, the tears and the pain of slavery. Pushed down into the mud by their executors, they crawled through mud and rain in search of the freedom that belonged to them. The slave owners tried to break the spirit of running, but the Black race was like a ghost, a spirit that would never die. With every tug that their masters pulled to keep them down, their hearts opened and their souls rose up. Although they were enslaved physically, they did not let that keep them down. Spiritually, they could not be broken, which is the truest mark of a hero. They prayed to live in a world that would embrace them as human beings. Their masters could whip away at their flesh, but they were not able to erase their dreams or prayers of freedom. As the whips burned like fire and cut their bodies like a red-hot poke iron or a knife that was razor sharp and cut on both sides, they held back their hollers in pride and refused to let the pain break their spirits. For they knew that one day soon their eyes would see the glory of the coming of the Lord. The road to freedom was a long treacherous road that would test the strength and courage of many slaves. And eventually their spiritual strength was rewarded and their prayers were answered as whispers of the Underground Railroad turned into shouts and turned into freedom. "Underground railroad. Don't you know the secret road slaves use to escape up North?" (Walker 137).

The underground railroad is a symbol of the transition and transformation of Black people and a symbol of their spiritual affirmation. "Walker uses the underground railroad as a symbol of both secular and spiritual journey. On the one hand, the slaves are walking from slavery into freedom in the same manner that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* charts a cultural transition from a dictatorship to a democracy. Thus, a new man (citizen) must be developed to exist within this new society. In this same manner, we see the slaves transformed from enslaved beings to free beings" (McInnis 2002). Where McInnis chooses to focus more on the socio-political transformation of the slaves, I want to continue to see the underground railroad as symbolic of the Christian journey in the same manner as Dante discusses the Christian journey in his *The Divine Comedy*. As McInnis

asserts, “the hellish conditions of the journey of the slaves can and must be read as the difficult yet rewarding journey of Christians” (McInnis 2002). In the same manner that Dante’s fictional poet, whom we know to be himself, goes through the struggles of Hell and Purgatory to reach Heaven, so do the slaves endure hell and purgatory to endure freedom and, hopefully, one day sovereignty. In search of a better life for themselves and family, slaves were forced to walk through the thick and grimy swamps that covered their bodies, which would lead them to the North. The path to a life of freedom would not be easy, and many would be caught and punished for trying to escape. But the treats and realities of punishment did not stop them. “Every step Vvry and Jim took, they could feel the mud sucking their feet down and fighting them as they withdrew their feet from its elastic hold” (Walker 140). They saw running as the first step to their ultimate goal, and when they had the chance they took action. Their will to be free lead them toward the North, the same type of ascension found in *The Divine Comedy*. Their scents were tracked by dogs, and their footprints planted in the mud, but they continued to run, crawl, and swim their way to freedom. Hiding by day and running by night, many slaves made it, and many died in the struggle. For hundreds of years our people lived in captivity without the right to live and grow as people in the same way that fallen sinners are immersed in filth of unrighteousness. The way to freedom and salvation was long, but it was a necessary struggle that had to be accomplished if Walker’s hero was to achieve the same glory as Dante’s poet. Many people sacrificed their lives in hope of change. The cries, tears, and shouts of the slaves would finally be heard. And in the same manner that Dante’s poet had a Beatrice and a Virgil to lead this dual journey, so did the slaves have a Harriet Tubman and an Abraham Lincoln. “Goodbye Marster Jeff, Goodbye Mister Stephens ‘scuse this niggah for takin his leavins. ‘Spect pretty soon you’ll hear Uncle Abraham’s coming, coming. Hail! Mighty Day! Goodbye hard work wid never any pay. I’s e gwine up North where the good folks say that whit wheat bread and a dollar a day is coming, coming. Hail! Mighty Day!” (Walker 201). Finally, the slaves would see the morning sun of freedom and leave behind the legacy of slavery. The symbol of a racist past, a past of servitude, slavery, and second-class citizenship for African Americans was behind them. The ex-slaves can now reveal in the glory, bravery, and the refinement of their heritage.

And we must be clear that Walker is moreso evoking Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address” than she is evoking Lincoln. For it is the spirit of the “Gettysburg Address” and not Lincoln himself that is aligned and parallel to the spirit of the slaves.

“Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether this nation or any other so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met here on a great battlefield as the final resting place for those who gave their lives that that nation might live. It is for us the living...to be here dedicated to the great tasks remaining before us,...that these dead shall have not died in vain that this nation under God have a new birth of freedom and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth” (Lincoln 1863).

Having either heard or read of those in Biblical slavery that “God” made of one blood all races of men and in the assertion of their new land’s “Declaration of Independence” that “we hold these truths to be self-evidence that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these, are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” Blacks could not understand by what right they were held as chattels. Therefore, they are justified in undertaking the dangerous and exciting risk of “running a thousand miles” in order to obtain those rights, which were so vividly set forth in the Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address” (Lincoln 1863). It was demanded that those who knew the particulars of that thousand-mile run continue in the run of traveling a thousand more.

So, “Walker is making *Jubilee* a tripartite narrative by paralleling the Christian journey, the slave journey, and the nation’s journey up and out from slavery” (McInnis 2002). The Civil War is the transition and transformation of the nation, ending the institution of slavery. In his noblest utterance, President Lincoln declared the war a contest to ensure freedom to all people on Earth. And while we understand Lincoln’s freeing of the slaves was merely a secondary issue for him, Walker is asserting that his act is dictated more by the will of God for the fulfilling of prophecy of a people who remained steadfast and faithful. And even though the legacy of Reconstruction casts a long shadow, which the quality of life for slaves was hidden behind their dark skin, Walker addresses it as merely another phase in the transition of Blacks and the transformation of them back to their ideal (African) selves. With the abolishment of slavery, the slaves cried and prayed to God for seeing them through the horrible times to which they were subjected. For the day had come, no longer shall they live in a world that judges them because of the color of their skin and the roots of their heritage. The tears they once cried and the mud that once covered their feet as they ran for freedom was all a memory. It was a necessary memory so that they would never again loose their way. So, *Jubilee* is both record and reminder. “For the day has come and God has blessed his children with a victory.” It covers not only the African American experience, but also that of our American society as a journey to become a better nation and the proof that we have it in us to evolve to a higher state if we but turn ourselves over to a higher power. This is an important and poignant message in 1966 as the nation stood at the crossroads of change and decision. Walker does not want us to remember our historic and heroic past for the sake of remembering; she wants us to use that memory as a critical guide for our present and future. Of course, by doing this Walker is able to show slaves in a positive image, while not demeaning their white masters, which is the ultimate essence of Christian heroism. No one is caricatured or stereotyped. “Walker explores many of the issues inherent in the institution of slavery, including the myth of enlightened self-interest.” *Jubilee* praises the role of Black women as preservers and transmitters of the cultural identity of their people and the important role that Christianity plays in their struggle for freedom. Thus, the work is inherently didactic. With the many stories of the trials and tribulations to which slaves were subjected, they never accepted the belief of slavery. They knew within themselves they were righteous human beings and continued to fight for their freedom in an ethical and humanizing manner. “As Walker has pointed out, her perspective on history is not that of whites, either Northern or Southern, but that of African Americans. Because, as Walker shows, such justifications for the suppression

of African Americans did not disappear with the Emancipation Proclamation. Given the blindness of whites, Walker seems to be asking, how can blacks progress beyond nominal freedom to full equality?"(Magill 645). Walker is not just asking; she is answering. Through study of the American slave, we understand that people are the most heroic and the most free when they embrace the love of God. Additionally, slaves were heroic because they were fighters--fighters for freedom, fighters for morality, and fighters for the spiritual evolution of humanity.

Works Cited

- Carmichael, Jacqueline, M. *Trumpeting a Fiery Sound: History and Folklore in Margaret Walker's Jubilee*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998.
- Cave, Janet. *Perseverance: African Americans Voices of Triumph*. New York: Diane Publishing, 2002.
- "Declaration of Independence." *Liberty Online*. (Online Posting). <http://libertyonline.hypermall.com/declaration.html>. December 1, 2002.
- Graham, Maryemma, Ed. *Fields Watered with Blood: Critical Essays on Margaret Walker*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001.
- Holmes, Towanda. "A Review of Jubilee." *Mississippi Writers Page*. (Online Posting). September 26, 1999. <http://www.shs.starkville.k12.ms.us/mswm/MSWritersAndMusicians/writers/Walker.html>. December 1, 2002.
- Lincoln, Abraham. "The Gettysburg Address." *Liberty Online*. (Online Posting). November 19, 1863. <http://libertyonline.hypermall.com/Lincoln/gettysburg.html>. December 1, 2002.
- McInnis, C. Liegh. "Lecture: Primary Themes and Symbols in Black Literature." Composition Literature, Jackson State University, Fall 2002.
- Magill, Franklin, N. *Master Plots II: Women's Literature Series*. Englewood Cliffs: Salem Press, 1995.
- Pelichet, Danye, A. "Voices from the gap: Women Writers of Color." *Voices*.cla.umn. Edu December 9, 1999.
- Walker, Margaret. *Jubilee*. Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966.

The Art and Power of Cross-Cultural Communication by Ayisha Knight

Until last night, I was missing the key to the place I forgot existed, buried deep in historical memories laced with questions of timing. As a Black Deaf woman and artist, kaleidoscope visions of myself are reflected in each of my constructed poems, spoken through photographic images that I've filtered through my camera lens. Focusing on all aspects of my art is my passion, and I've reached the point where my photographs, American Sign Language (ASL), poetry, theater, and writing are coming together in a limitless creation. I've always been an artist, but until recently, I was terrified of being vulnerable and sharing myself and my artwork with anyone outside my immediate family. My privacy was sacred, and it took me a long time to fully understand that how I see and interact with the world, especially with my ASL interpreters, is unique.

My journey has taken me from photographing homeless people on Telegraph Avenue, because I could identify with their invisibility, to being fearless and writing about issues that most shy away from. I've been hustled, made to feel I wasn't good enough, been introduced to guardian angels who do everything in their power to make sure I succeed, and reached the point where I'm proud of my accomplishments as a visible leader.

Last year was truly remarkable. I had 10 exhibits of my photographs in a variety of venues, from Salem to Boston, for diverse audiences, many who still give me positive feedback. I was also a featured poet with BlackOut Boston, became the first Deaf poet to slam at the Nuyorican Poet's Café, and delivered two lectures showcasing my poetry and photography at the Boston Public Library. In addition, I was the sign master for a production of the Amen Corner, at the renowned Huntington Theater in Boston. Throughout this process, I've learned that the more I give of myself, in poetry, photography, and theater, the more amazing opportunities present themselves. What I also realized is that none of it would have been possible without the help of ASL interpreters.

I'd never given much thought to their roles, or the color of their skin until I began working as a sign master once more, this time a dramatization of the novel *A Lesson Before Dying* by Ernest Gaines. It was a phenomenal experience in more ways than one, but for me, the most profound was being able to work for the first time with two highly qualified Black ASL interpreters, Chris Robinson and Robin Burgess. Given the fact that I hadn't met a Black interpreter until attending classes at Howard University, I had to deal with a ton of issues that I haven't thought about consciously in several years. Light skin versus dark skin, teaching in the "country" versus "city," and language issues. As an ASL theater consultant, my job is to direct the interpreters and make the play culturally accessible to the Deaf community as well as to keep the characters the same. One of the first discussions the interpreters and I had was whether or not to have Vivian (light skin, teaches in the city) sign in American Sign Language, Signed English, or a mixture of both. Which is more appropriate? Culturally accurate? Keeping in mind that the play happened in the late 1940's in the deep south, which culture takes precedence? In Deaf

culture, it is imperative that you keep eye contact with whom you're speaking, but in that time, Blacks and Whites couldn't do that. Discussing Grant (the teacher), his frustrations about not only teaching in the south, but not feeling he is making any impact at all on his students, brought up even more thoughts about the impact that I make, teaching by example, teaching just being myself, whether that is in the confines of a four wall classroom or on a stage. I've often thought of myself as invisible, and have continuously been amazed at the impact of my work. Writing this article is no exception.

Confronting cultural and linguistic issues appeared again the first week of January when I was invited to travel and photograph in Cuba for ten days in March, to my knowledge as the first Black Deaf photographer with the Black Arts Movement. Black artists from the U.S traveled all over Cuba, visiting Havana, Guantanamo, and Santiago, meeting various Cuban artists, spiritual leaders, visiting Deaf schools on the island, and immersing ourselves in the culture. When I first said yes to this amazing opportunity, the first thing that came to mind was making this trip accessible for myself. Aware of the fact that this would be an all Black group, I approached Chris Robinson and Robin Burgess, to see if they would be interested in traveling and interpreting for me. In part it was a selfish reason, wanting to experience a trip with all Black people, but at the time I felt it was necessary. Unfortunately, neither of them could make such a commitment or had scheduling conflicts, but it turned out perfectly because a short time later, Diane McKeon agreed to join the trip as the solo interpreter. Her generosity and hard work truly were phenomenal, and for that I am truly grateful. I realize now, that she was the right person for this job. We both discussed our fears, decided to work together and keep communication a priority, something which I believe kept our friendship intact.

Communication on this trip was groundbreaking in many ways. I sign in ASL, but am also quite proficient in written Spanish. Diane knows ASL, but has a limited knowledge of Spanish, which made our conversations very interesting. There were times when the lines of communication went through many translations. Spoken Spanish, spoken English, ASL and sometimes fingerspelled Spanish (translated in my head), but by far the most compelling happened on the first night we arrived in Havana. An amazing opportunity presented itself, and from that came one of the more profound discussions on the trip. One of the women in the group and I had an incredible conversation about mixed heritage (and all other tangents leading out of it) that lasted until four in the morning. At the time, I felt comfortable with Diane interpreting for us, but later wondered what the experience was like for her, being a White woman, interpreting for a culturally sensitive issue between two Black women? Her response was surprising, and gave me a new view of interpreters and their involvement. She told me it was a privilege and an honor being there at that moment, because she would never have been able to learn as much as she did from that conversation, in all its brutal honesty. That's true. If she wasn't my interpreter, I sincerely doubt that conversation would have taken place around her, and I wonder how much cultural information we share when someone "different" is around? I believe that much of our confusion and fears can be solved with communication, but first, we need willing participants. To make an impact, we need to develop cross-cultural interpreting programs, train interpreters to be trilingual or more, and recognize the changing demographics in our Deaf society. Most importantly, we need Deaf people from other

cultures to not only share their experiences, but to teach others. By the way, does anyone know how to say Oaxaca?

Eight Ways to Identify Poetry Pimps by Aqiyl Thomas

Of course, poetry is no new thing. When in 1997, I visited Egypt and went to a lightshow at the Karnak Temple in Southern Egypt and heard poems recited from the scrolls of Akhenaton and Tutmoses III. This suggests that written and spoken poetry can be dated back far beyond 2,000 years to the assumed beginnings of civilization or concept of time. With these thoughts in mind, we have a clear understanding that none of us are really “poetry pioneers” and for any of us (living or dead) to claim that we started this poetry movement, are absurd. We’re simply doing what has always been done.

However, this new generation of poets can safely say that poetry has never before existed at such a high plateau in anyone’s human history. Today, there is a collective movement of poets who are able to share poems over the internet, on self-duplicated or mass marketed CDs, and self-published or mass marketed books to a worldwide population of over 6 billion people. Moreover, this is an international movement, with poets booking their own tours in every imaginable place where poetry exist in the world, especially in the United States, Germany, Ghana, the UK, South Africa, Japan, Holland, Switzerland, and France. A combination of the aforementioned has never been accomplished before.

Now that we understand that we are in a “poetry movement,” we must start to understand the dynamics of it and how it influences modern culture. Wherever there is opportunity, there will always be people around to pimp that opportunity. And just as poetry has been around since the beginning of time, so have pimps. Poetry Pimps only love poetry because it will bring them opportunity. Some Poetry Pimps are producers, booking agents, promoters, poets, or just playing the background. Poetry Pimps are dangerous to the movement because they will never adhere to its unwritten code of ethics. Movements of consciousness are designed to change cultural standards in a productive way so that human beings are aligned with the Universe and do not become destructive to humanity and nature. However, poetry pimps don’t care. In the process of sucking opportunity out of poetry, they will be extremely destructive by contaminating vibes, starting gossip, creating poetry hierarchies, destroying venues, having sex in the name of being a poet, and anything else they can conjure up to get respect, attention, fame, or self-worth. They are lost souls who are dwelling on this planet with the sole purpose of getting anything from it that pleases their limited five senses.

My reason for writing this article is to give the humble-hearted people, who will serve for the betterment of this movement, an additional eye for identifying such pimps. However, it must be understood that Poetry Pimps will eventually detect that we have discovered them and like viruses, they will advance into a more sophisticated stage. So, this is just my attempt to give you a mere understanding of the grain that our generation of artists is treading against. The following points are not indefinite or absolute and will just give us a paradigm for understanding our surroundings.

Poetry Pimps: The Poets Version.

1. Most poetry pimps are not writers. You won't find many with books.
2. Poetry Pimps will rarely have poems available for the public unless they can hide behind a big name.
3. Poetry Pimps usually come to poetry venues and stay for short periods of time to survey the vibe. Then they go to the next spot. If they are on the list, they will read a poem, talk to some people, and leave. You will almost never see a poetry pimp with a one man/ one women show in a theatre.
4. Poetry pimps have a difficult time remembering their poems, because their poems are not a part of who they are, not just because they have a bad memory.
5. Poetry Pimps love "short competitions" where they can display their punch lines within three minutes. Most of their poems will be designed to fit a competition format. They understand how the audience works and will construct their poetry accordingly. At the end of the day, they are the #1 poet in the country. Funny?
6. Poetry Pimps were something else yesterday, poets today, and will be something else tomorrow. They follow trends.
7. Poetry Pimps will read this and get offended. Good!! You can't escape that feeling of being naked and discovered. You will be the last person to tell anyone else to read this. People will come to you and ask you if you have read it before you ask them. Then you'll say, "Naw, I didn't read it." If they are looking you in the eyes when you say it, you will be discovered immediately.

Existentialism in “The Third Bank of the River”
by Vera Davis

Although it may seem unlikely, Latin American writers have been having some of the most profound discussions about existentialism. In fact, on the literary discourse around existentialism, there can be a very definitive line drawn, and most Latin American writers will fall on either side of the concept--pro or con, affirming or refuting. Now to be more specific, those contemporary Latin American writers who are asserting existentialism are not promoting it as a way of life, but merely acknowledging the reality of an existential existence or universe and are hoping to provide a blueprint as to how one can survive the existential existence. For instance, writers such as Gabriela Mistral and Pablo Neruda are often using their work to refute existentialism by proving that we do live in an ordered and logical world that can be better understood if we look to nature, human relationships, and our higher powers. On the other side of this coin, writers, such as Jorge Luis Borges and Silvina Ocampo, choose to show the illogical and often meaningless universe where the individual is left to fend for himself. Then there is someone like Octavio Paz who seems to straddle the fence of existentialism, which allows his work to create an ongoing tension or analytical engagement of the concept, where the work is not necessarily pro or con but an investigation of the concept as he does in his poem, “Two Bodies.” This type of analytical engagement of existentialism can also be seen in the work of Joao Guimaraes Rosa, especially in his short story, “The Third Bank of the River.” Existentialism is defined as “a theoretical movement stressing individual existence and holding that man is totally free and responsible for his acts” (Webster 215). It is the understanding that life “is irrational and without meaning” (Rosenberg 876). This understanding of the universe is explored in Rosa’s “The Third Bank of the River.” The short story shows the personal compromises with which we must struggle to achieve sovereignty within our relationships in life and solitude of human existence. In existentialism it is the duty of the individual to create order out of confusion and save himself. Along with showing the plight of an individual in the existential existence, Rosa shows a family’s struggle with their perceived unreasonable behavior of the father and with the community’s perception of the father and of them. At the core of this story, which is also a primary question of existentialism, is the question of reality, which is symbolized by the mystery of just what is the third bank of the river and why does the father choose to create it. Ultimately, the story highlights the struggle of the son, the narrator, trying to accept his father’s departure and his struggle to come to terms with what he sees as the proper reaction to his father’s departure.

Existentialism is the school of thought that emphasizes the mere existence of the human being, the lack of meaning and purpose in life, and the solitude of human existence. Tanweer Akram implies that, “the human being has no essence, no essential self and is no more than what he is. He is only the sum of life that he has created and achieved for himself”(Akram 1). The territory of existentialism has been mapped out chiefly by philosophers and by the writer of novels, short stories, and plays because these are the areas where self-reflection and the questions of meaning are most evident. The writer has always been concerned with the existence of the total person, and Rosa’s preoccupation with the total person and man’s relationship with the world is significant in

“The Third Bank of the River” as he creates two characters fighting for some sense of self while immersed in the predefined expectations and definitions of their society. Rosa wants us to see the anxiety and tension of embracing existentialism, but he also wants us the reader to engage in his own critical thinking process. He never promotes or affirms either character to be right or wrong, just or unjust. That is for the reader to decide. So, the work, itself, becomes an example of existentialism or, in the least, an existential exercise in critical thinking and social criticism.

A story with such open-endedness, in which characters have no names and nothing is explained (editorialized) by an all-knowing narrator, is naturally one that provokes a great range of interpretations. The story’s lack of precise declaration is complicated by its title, which calls for the reader to identify a third bank. The bank, both literally and figuratively, is a man-made bank, one that the father makes to construct or re-construct his own reality. Thus, the construction of the third bank is to be read as an act of existentialism by the father who embraces the notion that he is totally free to create who he is and his actions give meaning to his life and the world in which he lives (Rosenberg 876). The story begins with the description of the boat, which is either a vessel of escape or a vessel of exploration, that father has made for himself. This boat is a crucial element in the story because the reality of the “Third Bank of the River” could hinge on exactly what this boat is. There is a proposed likeness between the boat and a coffin that is “just large enough for one person. Mother was terribly upset by the idea of father buying the boat,” which could hint at suicide or just death if the boat is to be read as a coffin. So, the father’s boat or his exploration can be seen as one individual’s death to society as a way to become divorced from the society that controls him. The father is ceasing to exist in that world to create his own world.

There is strangeness in the making of this boat, and this strangeness has both a literal and a figurative translation. On the one hand, this project comes from a man who has never been able to build (figuratively) anything in his life. Father has the boat handmade from very fine wood, and it is built to last twenty or thirty years. For a man who seemingly never called the shots in his own house, father’s purchase would have come as a surprise because the canoe was expensive and he continued with the project even after mother voiced opinions. And on the other hand, father is a man who has been completely controlled by the voice of his wife and her ability to embarrass him or make him feel guilty for having any thoughts other than submitting to the will of the house (read society). Thus, this act of building something specifically for him shows existentialist behavior because the use of guilt invoked in the purchase of an expensive item is ignored to save himself from a bleak and obviously oppressive existence. In very real terms, the individual often has to overcome the feelings or forces of guilt and embarrassment, which are forces the society uses to control the individual. Thus, by overcoming these forces, the individual is able to leave what he perceives as an irrational and illogical world and create his own world, which is what the father does.

The father is taking a journey of self-discovery, which necessitates cutting off the family ties that had held him down in the past. Not only did he have an overbearing wife, but also the responsibilities of caring for three children where an overwhelming burden

when he has no voice in the nature of the care. For a weak man, such as father, it would have been easy to lose oneself in the shuffle of this society. The separation of the journey symbolizes the individual's need to divorce oneself from the society to create one's own world. That is why he can leave his world with "no joy or other emotion" and with one simple goodbye. Rosa wants us to understand that the father is not emotionally tied to his society because it is illogical and meaningless to him. And the father's perception is affirmed, if not justified, by the manner in which the society, represented by his wife, tries to retrieve him like a run-away slave. There is a sense of disbelief and bitterness at the rashness of father. Fear, another force that society uses to control the individual, is then used to try and rationalize an irrational situation. Mother vehemently states "If you go away, stay away. Don't ever come back!" The mother's words are not words of concern or compassion but of hatred and anger. She does not give him any reasons to stay other than evoking the notion that you will be sorry that you left. The goal of her statement is to imply that you will regret your decision, but we (the society) will not take you back if you make this decision. Her words are threats, not words of love or compassion. Thus, Rosa seems to be evoking the notion that society is not based on man's fellowship with man, but on a set of terms based on fear and a perverted form of interdependence. And at a closer examination, we must ask what is driving the anger of the mother? Is it that she, herself, is driven by the societal forces of fear, embarrassment, and guilt in not being able to live up to the expectation of society by not keeping her family together. "Mother was ashamed." Her anger and wrath aimed at her husband is really the example of her submitting to the pressures of society. This sets the stage for the emotions the family has when they see that father never is coming back and that they will have to live without him. For the family, it is only after the father leaves that they realize how much they do need him, which gives them the same sense of loneliness that he has had for his entire life. According to Frank O'Connor, this state of loneliness and feeling of separation is how we normally feel, asserting "there is in the short story, at its most characteristic, something we do not find in the novel--an intense awareness of human loneliness." So, Rosa uses the genre, the short story, as a trope of existentialism to better articulate the solitude in human existence that existentialism proclaims as the normal manner of existence.

However, Rosa does not merely present the loneliness, but also the manner in which we all make decisions to give our lives meaning. All the characters are changed after the father leaves for his new existence--a protagonist turning his back on what he perceives as illogical an irrational life. Rosa shows us a domino effect of change caused by the father's, the individual's, choice. "My sister and her husband moved far away. My brother went to live in a city. Times changed, with their usual imperceptible rapidity. Mother finally moved too." Father had two choices, staying with his family or leaving. By the end of the story, he has accomplished a place somewhere between loneliness and togetherness. Yet more importantly, father's actions affirm Rosa's notion that although we live in a universe that cares nothing for us, we can take control of our lives and give it meaning, even if that meaning is constantly shifting and often temporary. In the case of the family, which should be read as society, the father forced them to come to grips with the arbitrary nature of their lives, his singular action constantly affecting the way in which they perceived and lived their lives. However, there is no happily ever after. Had

Rosa done that he would have betrayed the essence of existentialism. The father and the son are left in the constant and continuous discourse of finding the meaning of life. Rosa leaves it up to the reader to determine the meaning of the father's leaving and why he never really left the proximity of the family's house. In fact, the father's semi-presence is as much of a factor as is his leaving. The family does not appear to be strikingly well off, as we are told that the mother sent for her brother to help with money matters after the father leaves. However, she allows the boy to take food from the family every night and leave it for father. Her sense of compassion should be read as her trying to lure the father back by seducing him with the pleasures and privileges of being in the society. She had always led the family, but that leadership has always been supported by the arbitrary values of the society. Now she had to provide a sense of strength to her children for them to deal with father leaving, and she unable to do so. The father's act of leaving was in a way like Jesus' submission to death and resurrection. Once conquering death, it was a force that could no longer be used to control the Christians. In the same manner, that father is asserting that the forces and values of the society are no longer capable of enslaving him. Yet, while the family changes, it does not completely dissolve, which is another example of existentialism. The family is merely an arbitrary concept or institution, which, as any arbitrary concept, can be changed or modified to perpetuate human existence--survival. So while the father's acts do not destroy the thing that he finds irrational or illogical--his actions do force the family members to evaluate their lives, which is really their first attempt to give their lives meaning--the family (society) finds a way to move on and exist.

Interestingly, the father is not around to see the transformation. Father is nowhere to be seen when they come, another allusion that Rosa creates to raise the question if the third bank is death. As time passes, it can become implied that father has died, in one form or another. The son claims the father never stepped on solid grass, never built a fire on land, and never lit a match. These are all very basic actions for someone who is alive. By adding this to the story, Rosa shows that father has been away too long to be alive to the family. "Rosa is asserting that all human concepts of 'life' and 'relationship' are arbitrary in the same manner that Tom Hank's character creates a friend of a soccer ball in the movie, *Cast Away*" (McInnis 2002). To his family, for all purposes, father was dead as a person, but yet his life, his exit, and his memory had a definite affect on how they defined themselves and life. As to the wedding of the daughter, we are told that there are no festivities. This is mentioned in passing right before the narrator mentions that they remember father's suffering when they eat a nice meal. The father's suffering is now seen as a trope for the suffering by his family and community. Let us be clear that they are not suffering from the loss of the father, but the actions of the father causes them to realize how un-lived and arbitrary their lives are. Their suffering comes from the notion that the father has destroyed their facade, which, although different from the father, is suffering nonetheless. The father obviously was of the mind that he was suffering from them, hence the reason he turned his back on a confused, uncertain existence. Jack Douglas claims, "Man's existence is fundamentally problematic, both for man and anyone who would understand his existence. Man is varied, changeable, uncertain, conflictful, and partially free to choose what he will do and what he will become, because he must do so to exist in a world that is varied, changeable, uncertain,

and conflictful” (Douglas 14).

To achieve the evoking of “anxiety and anguish” created by existentialism, Rosa creates a series of conflicts between memory and realization that creates mourning. For example, the son, our narrator, is clearly trapped in mourning or memory for the rest of his life. He lives solely for keeping his father alive, which is to keep alive the illusion of a happy life, causing further damage to himself. While on the other side of the fence, the rest of the family is able to finally separate themselves from father and proceed with their lives, which in one sense also makes them heroic existential characters. Life as they knew it has been shattered, but they all commit actions that give the meanings that they want. The children marry, leave the town, and begin families (worlds) of their own. Mother also leaves and goes to live with her daughter because of her failing health. Because we are never given father’s perspective, we do not know whether he mourns the separation from his family; however, judging that this decision was his alone we can assume he does not. We are given, by Rosa, the son as an example of the unhealthy position of extreme mourning and the father as the unconcerned representative of just having a memory. Thus, the son suffers most because he is the only character who cannot make a decision. He is the only character who cannot do as existentialism demands...take control of his life.

We are then moved from it being all about father to being all about the son, our narrator, now living alone in the house by the river. The river plays an important part in the story, assuming that his death was undoubtedly tied to the river and its banks. The son states that times had changed, meaning that everyone else had moved on and put father’s memory behind them, but he cannot. He justifies his holding on to his father’s memory by saying that his father needed him, when it is he who needs the father or the memory of the father. Here, again, is the irrational fear and guilt that society puts on us. Existentially, the father is seen as a free man and is juxtaposed to the son who is tied and bound by fear and guilt--afraid of being alone and guilty of not being able to keep his world from dissolving. The son’s being or state of mind evokes the notion of an irrational and illogical existence as he rambles in dialogue with himself, trying to tell himself he is not crazy. It is at this moment, at this crossroad, that we have father’s first contact since leaving his family. The son is now a grown man, and the father has been at large all these years. And now the son is at large too--not by choice but by inaction. We are made to understand that life has passed the son as he has been held by his own fear and guilt, unable to act. Yet, he, like his father before him, inherits the old urge and yearning. He would replace his father on the boat if he could. The son’s existence has become illogical and oppressive, which he created from his obsession for his father.

The son is meant to be seen as the very opposite of the father. Where the father is a heroic existential figure, the son is to be seen as a tragic existential figure. When the old man, or his ghost, appears around a bend in the river, raising his arm in greeting, as he calls him from the other side, he is so afraid that his hair stands on end and he runs for his life. But later, he regrets having missed the boat, instead of rocking it, and asks to be sent down the river in it when he dies. The son somehow feels that the father had waited for him all those years to take over the job of staying in the boat in the middle of the

river, and when given the chance he fled and apparently fails in the opportunity to take control of his life. Yet, it is also apparent that when the offer is made, the ordeal, with whatever the outcome, is over because the father is never seen again. It would seem that the son removed himself from his world of confusion, loneliness, and self destruction by finally confronting the thing that had controlled him all those years. He made the decision to save himself. Rosa here is being completely critical/analytical in asserting that existentialism does not demand that one make a proper choice, but that one make a choice. Notions such as proper or right and wrong, in the existential understanding, are completely subjective and never objective or universal. So, Rosa seems to be asserting that what was really controlling the son was that unlike his father, the son is looking for a universal right and wrong. However, when he flees the boat or the opportunity to stay on the boat forever like his father did, he becomes an existential hero in that he makes the best choice for him, even if the choice is from fear.

Additional opposing aspects become very important at the end of the story. First is the question of whether or not the narrator's obligation is to his father or to his own sanity, which Rosa set up both as very uncertain and almost impossible conflicts to resolve. It is in this way that the reader is better able to explore the crossing, the journey from one position to its opposite, no longer that of the father, but the son. The son denies that his father was insane while the family ponders insanity as a probable cause of the father's exit. By obsessing over the question of his father's sanity, the son becomes quite irrational and illogical. He has made himself ready to take his father's place in the boat which in the end he cannot do. The son is then left to accept the truth that he is the one insane. Rosa leaves us asking just what sanity is. Is it defining one's own existence like the father has done, or is it being at the mercy of other's existence, (living in society)? Rosa raises this question of insanity as a manner to raise the question of reality, which is an essential and primary question of existentialism. Also, there is the conflict of freedom versus bondage. This is highlighted in how the son describes his father in terms which downgrades him as a slave to the river and as a slave to the life he has chosen. Not only that, but the failure or unwillingness of father to come to land has made him a slave in the sense that he becomes completely controlled by his desire to escape. So, the question that is being raised is whether or not the father has become a slave to the thing that was supposed to liberate him, in the same manner that many become slaves to religious or other organizations that are supposed to liberate them. All of this is Rosa's manner of having us more critically analyze the concepts and institutions that we create.

However, it is clear that Rosa proclaims the father as the hero by making us aware of the freedom of the father and the virtual bondage of the family because the father is proactive and the family is merely reactive. The family cannot enjoy a nice meal or the marriage of the first child, let alone escape thinking about the father. This is really true of the son who never marries because he says that "father needed me," but really it was he who needed his father. The father has become free, but it is a compromised freedom as all freedom usually is. While he has no earthly ties exemplified in the fact that he never steps back onto solid ground after he leaves, he has a deeper tie to himself (to his new convictions) and to the river. Ironically, he must fulfill his new responsibility that he obtained while leaving his old responsibilities behind. The study of existentialism says

that this freedom that the father has is as contrived and arbitrary as what he has left, which asserts that man merely exchanges one arbitrary concept for another to gain some temporary meaning of life. The human being has liberty, with which comes great responsibility. Thrown into the world, the human being is condemned to be free, which means he is condemned to be responsible for his life. No longer responsible for anything earthly, father becomes even more responsible for himself, this is freedom in the truest sense.

It would be said by some existentialists that father was a hero in saving himself from his previous life. There are three stages in this type of heroism: separation, initiation, and return. Certainly father created his own separation, which was initiated by life on the river or death. Rosa keeps us guessing about the return. The reader is left to make sense of whether or not the surrendering of the boat to the son was a way of returning for the father. In any case, father ends his journey in the son's failure to take over the reality of the boat because father's ultimate journey is the destruction of one world for the creation of another. However, even though the son cannot take over for the father, his father has taught him a very valuable lesson; one must determine his own existence for they can never lead the life of another. The father's behavior not only physically separates the family from each other, but it also creates a tension and a separation of the family from the life that they had once known, marking new differences between physical and spiritual death, sanity and insanity, existence and nonexistence, loneliness and togetherness, reality and fiction, and finally between the death of a loved one and the emotions of the survivor. Existentialism stresses that these are the actions that the world throws at humans--the world in which pain, frustration, sickness, contempt and death dominate, and humans are at liberty to combat. At the core of the work, Rosa's psychological insight asserts that man's prime directive is to decipher the mystery of life and the meaning of human existence. His characters are remembered according to their ability to engage and understand the mystery of life. This is why Rosa leaves us with the son and not the rest of the family. Although the other family members make conscious decisions to move on with their lives, they never engage in the process of trying to understand the meaning of the father's action and how those actions affect the meaning of their lives. The son does, which leaves the door open for how tragic or how heroic the reader views him. Which is, again, an existential process by the reader.

It is probably possible to interpret this story as a basic man versus society or man versus man, or merely as a problem of family communication, or even as a religious tale, but that would reduce it to an essay or parable, and not the analytical masterpiece that it is. Rosa uses existentialism as a way to open up a new awareness of problems of the human personality experienced by simple everyday people. Rosa stated in an interview that, "the third bank of the river is the land every soul craves for. There the drowned come out to shore, the tired rest, the wounded are healed, the lost are found, and the living reconciled with the dead" (Yates 31). In rejecting the objective view of what life is and should be, the father in "The Third Bank of the River," has rebelled against the limitations that society has placed on him. The father has created a new existence for himself, one in which he is completely in control of his nature and destiny, the very concept of existentialism. The urge comes on him in a sudden frenzy and nothing could

hold him back, not fear, embarrassment, or guilt that society uses to control the individual. Perhaps it is easier to be forever severed from those you love than to be forever joined to them in bondage. And more specifically, Rosa is asserting that not to make the any decision as to how one lives one's life is the ultimate tragedy.

Works Cited

- Akram, Tanweer. "Essay on Existentialism." (Online Posting). January 18, 1991. <http://www.columbia.edu/~ta63/exist.htm>. December 5, 2002.
- Douglas, Jack D. and John M. Johnson. *Existential Sociology*. Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 1977.
- Guralnik, David, B., ed. *Webster's New World Dictionary*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984.
- Harss, Luis & Dohmann, Barbara. *Into the Mainstream: Conversations with Latin-American Writers*. New York: Harper & Row, 1967.
- McInnis, C. Liegh. "Lecture: Existentialism and Latin America." World Literature, Jackson State University, Fall 2002.
- May, Charles E. *The New Short Story Theories*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994.
- Romano, James V. "Structure and Mysticism in 'The Third Bank of the River.'" *Luso-Brazilian Review*. Vol. 20, 1983. Pg. 99.
- Rosa, Joa Guimaraes. *The Third Bank of the River and Other Stories*. New York: Knopf, 1968
- Rosenberg, Donna. *World Literature: An Anthology of Great Short Stories, Drama, and Poetry*. Lincolnwood: NTC Publishing Group, 1992.
- Salmonson, Jessica Amanda. "Some Ghostly Tales from South America: A Lackadasial Overview of Magic Realists' Short Story Art." *VioletBook.com*. (Online Posting). <http://www.violetbooks.com/magic-realist.html>. December 5, 2002.
- Tarves, Shaun M. "Becoming the Third Bank: An Exploration of Crossing and Ambiguity in João Guimarães Rosa's 'The Third Bank of the River.'" *Fresh Writing*. (Online Posting). Spring 2002. <http://www.nd.edu/~frswrite/mcpartlin02/tarves.shtml>. December 5, 2002.
- Vessels, Gary M. "The Search for Motives: Carnivalized Heroes and Paternal Abandonment in Some Recent Brazilian Fiction." *Luso-Brazilian Review*. Vol. 31, 1994. Pg. 59.

Poetry

For Our Mothers

Preselfannie Whitfield McDaniels

Mothers...
We are their...
Extensions
Dimensions
Reflections
Recollections
Spirits
Souls
Reasons
Rights
Regrets
Wrongs
Possessions
Releases
Loves
Lives
Longings
Crossroads...
Their Children

Indoctrination

by Poet

jesus, jesus
say niggah
you hear me talkin to u
wanna ask u somtin'

whucho daddy name?
 god!
whucho moma name?
 mary!
whucho step daddy name?
 joseph!
den who you is?
 god!

niggah u aint makin no since
is u crazy

now rumor is
u in the same blood line as
david and solomon
how so if mary's yo mammy
and joseph's yo step pappy

joseph related to them mutha fuckas
and you ain't no kin to um
now is u?
cause jewish folk blood line
travel through the mother
and yo bastard ass ain't got
no joseph in u
remember yo daddy ran out on u
so let's dispel the myth
u is black

but um still stuck

niggah you listen to me

now let's talk about this gang of yorz
u was the big dope man on the street
besides the government, right? right?
jesus, niggah I know u hear me
yeah yal was dope boys

peddling that shit to the po
making all da doe
cause they couldn't afford the
government shit

so judas got green and set u up
and they executed yo ass
now u had some strong shit
niggah still high off it
despite the fact the government
step on it a couple times

my question is
where u get that shit from
cause niggahs still think
yo ass is alive, dawg
and they killing and dying
all over yo ass

now niggah,
dat's some pimp shit
dat's the level um trying to get on
so won't u tell yo boy
who yo supplier is

oh and one mo thang, dawg
whucho real name is anyway?

Gypsies Fire (After reading “The Sport of the Gods” by Paul Laurence Dunbar)
by Marcus Uganda White

I can't settle for the madness in my life,
even though I'm addicted to it like some drug.

I hope to find the day when I want nothing
and everything is just a small portion of a struggle.

Once I could see myself singing like a slave
moaning and crying like the world don't love me at all,
and the man was gone come in the night
to steal me away to the edge of the river someday

when alls I was trying to do
was to stand
on my own two feets...

Don't make me no never-mind to tell the story
afta all that hard living been done.
Just be ware that my journey won't be
no cry-in-the-night-run-for-my-life nobility.

I'd rather die in the day, giving my life back to Heaven...
or to whomever sowed this sail.

I can't settle for the madness in my life,
taking it in like bad air and bullshit rhetoric
from frosted ambivalence and quaint histories
twisted in hypocritical injustices, they smile.

To think it be all over now is a self-gratifying touch
and a lonely realization...

I am the orphaned son of the world.
Running with the wolves
and dancing near the gypsies fire,
where violins charm my harmed heart.

Tomorrow's a day gold and free
with floral scents and time strung along,
like the fancy of Dunbar's gardens.

Millennium Hunger

by Marcus Uganda White

human hunger horrifies soon as born-
appetites demonize their own fulfillment
and the fanciful are left to settle down
no more closer to rageless fields.

warfare is an antidote to simple boredom
and peace is a now a luxury
waging very moments aside like a child
deemed too unknowledgeable to lend a voice.

catastrophes are anticipated vividly
from paranoia and fear as substitutes to happiness
and American dreams,
and others;

“antiquated” prayers are more useful now
in the precious mornings hoped to last and surpass sullenly,
as coasting fishermen's boats in the eve.

crying would heal something,
however,
a resolution to nothing
when men and weapons compromise the ways of our world
that shrinks so minutely
when anger leaves words wavering alongside prideful expectations
and holds on in desperation,
unfortunately.

babies who share their candy are the greatest peacemakers.
music brings the greatest comfort, as well as our lovers.
optimism is of the greatest possession
and retribution must be divine;
as all these
have become not enough
day to day.

Pass It On

by Ayisha Knight

Shhh. Don't tell anyone.
It will be our little secret.
In the basement,
clean laundry mixed with
dirty deeds
allow a secret to be kept.
By the time I rejoin
the party that never missed me,
I have buried the memory
beneath lost time
and the lie that says
I have the right to
remain silent,
but not before
I remember
the smell of semen and tide.
Alone I
Remember and
Anger metastasizes into fists
Pulverizing internal organs until suicide permeates
Every thought.
Memories stain my consciousness
with false testimony
given by lying tongues
pre-treated with
fear and guilt
until I, brainwashed
start spinning through
endless cycles of self-hatred
soaked with shame.
I was so confused,
I couldn't even remember my name,
so I wore the label of victim
forgetting I was neither
until ten years later,
when wisdom cloaked
in poetry
unraveled lies with its
spoken truth
and healed this
wrinkle in time.
Ladies, gather round,
listen to the whispers

then pass it on.
Tell everyone,
they have the right to
speak the word
because elevation begins with
revelation and dirty laundry
mixed with dirty deeds
have spelled trouble for too long.

Perspectives

by Ayisha Knight

With your thermonuclear touch
polar archives dislodge and melt
until I'm flooded with
multicellular ghosts
aching to solidify antimatter into
a sheer vertical mountain of accessibility.
I felt safe until your hurricane tongue
dripping with metaphysical philosophy
took my breath away.
You guided me into other realms,
and clear-cut theories about spiritual characteristics
and tangible emotions became cloudy
because poetic translations
narrated by an aphasiacs dream
make me follow epileptic
streams of consciousness
illuminated by alpha waves.
You looked beyond the
self destructive chain,
saw who I was before scientific dissertations
and expensive words punctuated with PhD's
took control of my speech,
taught me that gut feelings are more than
proof of indigestion, especially when
you taught me I could translate
Quantum physics into poetry.

Royalty Revisited
by Ayisha Knight

King Tut starved himself when
I told him he was too old to
suckle my regal breasts
and the sphinx remained
riddled with silence when he
couldn't figure out how
locks pinned beneath
gemmed tiaras don't
define me as a queen.
See, the jewel cup between my thighs
has been pouring silk threads for centuries
decorating my remarkable divinity.
The enigma of my power left
ancient gods breathless
rendering them frozen in worthless statues.
Millennia can't count
how many mortals
have kissed the ground I walk on
just to taste a grain of diluted heaven.
I stay adorned with pride and inspiration
draped in scriptures and
baptized with the words of
Nikki Giovanni and Alice Walker.
While history books thought they could pacify me with
paragraphs on Martin, Malcolm and Nelson,
my mother and I used the Earth's axis to excavate core
minerals and write the life stories of
Coretta, Betty and Winnie.
Glancing at the star maps tattooed on my collarbone,
I took Zeus off my mountainous shoulders,
and let him rest in the grand canyon of
my cleavage until he fell asleep,
passed the time by making
thunderbolt rattles out of Nefertiti's bones,
used my wisdom teeth fillings to
paint stars in the Delta Quadrant,
and my unedited poetry became gospel.
I was sculpted from the Navajo's blessing
to walk in beauty and here
I stand at the crossroads
of those who walked before
and now with me.
I remember when Harriet Tubman used to wade in the Nile

and Angela Davis' fro was just a nap of Sojourner's truth.
Each woman is my stepping stone
but together, they make up the mosaic
lining my Atlantic ocean pool,
weathering monsoon tidal waves
in a testimony to women's strength.
My flawless skin baked brown by
a cowering sun
requires no masking foundation, makeup or diluted perfume
cuz I've got Ida B Wells speeches hanging onto my ears.
Orion's stars illuminating my hips,
and Saturn's rings around my toes.
Intoxicated by my ability to fill
black holes with misbegotten history,
I fed King Tut and told the Sphinx
He could now share my story.

Dichotomy

by Ayisha Knight

Sidewalk sphinxes
decipher spray painted cartouches
hushed by a Thorazine haze,
shape shift grammar into
schizophrenic delusions
often perceived as
incohesive drunken banter
so skeletons dressed
in human shadows
with kleptomaniac kerosene tongues
assume they're just
speaking in riddles.
With pristine perseverance
disinfected copper colored soldiers
protecting their status quo
coax their metal camels
to travel through the
vast desert of deserted values,
drinking from discarded
liters of literacy
and feasting on
centuries of conversations
until the geniuses
draped in disheveled robes
rest on concrete pillows
and realize that
oracles become so clear
when you stop and
pay attention.

Seasonz out of Time with the Sun and the Moon from *Kultural Eunuchz*
by Asukile S. Bandele

what present or future rage or panic
pain or static could
be worst than yerterday'z?
(we survived that, did'nt we?)
sunny Mayz of by-gone dayz
electrify the rain from those Aprilz we shared
even multiple winter held fringe benefitz

the chillz of winter'z hawk
waz nothing compared to these barz
returning from marz
you see
prisonz are extraterrestrial, outside our
sacred atmosphere
but still I rebel in cellz az you experience
hell: a Fe separated from Male
I await mail you await male
we relish the spellz worked on one another
we must be Magicianz or at least Supreme Loverz

with long-distance intercourse enter
forced circumstancez
I use my hane or set appointmentz
for wet-dreamz
and the receptionist haz me on hold
you do what you must
it'z all in the scheme

we're on the same Team
of thiz I am sure
even our dreamz connect
haven't we been here before?

some say that the mind iz time
and space
place my time in your space
and some facez appear
spacez of fear disappear
in time'z mind

to request you wait for
me iz just a romantic line
and I've never been to rome

and neither have you
in the Seasonz we endure ain't nothing
pure except our Love
and we are quite practical
4-iver never comez
thiz iz just a Season'z sabbatical of the moon and the sun

Listen (metamorphosis) from *Kultural Eunuchz*
by Asukile S. Bandele

urban-ghetto landscapez scraped me early in my youth
mama kissin' those woundz with
Supreme Lovin'
but there I waz again
off and runnin'
duckin' crooked copz
sworn ta put a stop
ta young hard rockz like me
sportin' our capz cocked
deep ta da right creep thru da night
stomachz uptight seein' with no sight
blind in other wordz
lifestyle absurd
"gd 'til da world blow-up"
waz our plighted word
fightin' in herdz and never landin'
a solid punch
systematically subjugate in
chi-town segregated
never knew other racez 'til a visit
to da Audey Home
butt naked and de-throned
from our project zone
and st.charles could not sanctify
or provide the fear of god
timez of livin' hard left too
many battle scarz
not all time visible
we lived no principles
simple ghetto motto:
"get dat money nigga"
so the counselorz figured
we'd never stand and deliver
blew the brothaz up with potatoes
and liver
shiverin' in summer sweatin' in winter
a lifetime furlough from realness
iz what we knew
returned to da street burnin'
envious heat
every brotha we meet automatically
suspect
before automatic gatz

and technology of death
our pathz were chosen to keep us frozen
stuck on stupid, man
we'd bumrush cupid
no love we exhibited that shit waz prohibited
only visitz off da block
were excursionz to da loop
pickin' pocketz for loot
feathered handz to salute
trippin' over vital pointz
we landed in da jointz
"BOTTOM OF DA WORLD , MA"
az if by appointment
learnin' disappointment when girlz
broke bad
never knowin' what we had
we were on a madd dash
cash ruled da subject we knew no
economicz trapped by reaganomicz
shit became hectic
life so frantic narcoticz became medicine
treez our herbal remedy
clearly defined insanity
vanity fair in fox brothaz suitz
tailormade for our pursuit
of the amerikan nightmare
shootin' dice in stairwayz burnin'
out dayz
dazed in thiz maze to old folk amazement
blood on da pavement from
brothaz I ran with
young sistaz havin' shortiez
and the parentz never planned
the seed waz conceive to
Roger Troutman'z
"I wanna be your man"
but kid what'd no man
he a dysfunctional boy
his father he never knew
so 'ol girl waz his toy
how are you to be responsible
when your ability to respond
had never been cultivated?
educative measurez designed to bury our greatest Treasurez
and an entire childhood spent desparately tryin' to recover it
discover thiz

enta da Phoenix
precious Black jewelz we found in da dismal cryptz
osiris-jesus mix
provin' wrong thiz whole establishment
locked in thiz cell
with nothin' but bookz to read
breakin' down every word of the chairman'z creed
my soul began to bleed
from the bible to the qur'aan
history and arcaeology
my self starte rising like Kilimanjaro
over afrikan plainz
the frame in my mind I shattered
theb constructed one anew
learnin' who'z whe in regardz to who am I
questioning why so many had to die
so I write and I read
I write and I read
I write and I read
I write and I bleed
wordz
being emitted from thiz punctured soul
each vibration awakening you to let your story be told
don't let your blackened bluez cause you to miscontrue your affinity to the
red black and green
or deferred dreamz drownin' in spoiled amerikan cream
niggativity holdin' us down like gravity
it takez the divine in you to restore your sanity
peace to larry chief malik and all the voicez that I speak
slain soldierz, warriorz that never were in all these urban streetz

Kultural Eunuchz from *Kultural Eunuchz*
by Asukile S. Bandele

we were not birthed into all of thiz to be the world'z peerless cultural
eunuchz
revolving with low resolution and resolving to conquer bootiez and adore
phalluses in resplendently-darkened vibrating templez that we have anointed
CLUBZ and TITTY BARZ
beaten and scarred
callous on our collective soul
from our vocation of mental masturbation
ejaculating highly organic extensionz of self down into the drainz of
infertility
frivolous attemptz at balancing broken crownz on hollowed headz
echoing long forgotten memoriez of glorious yesterdayz
existing in a present presenting sacrificial offeringz of Self to the
neon-god of 2K Babylon
secular piety in a divided society
there iz a Grand Nebuchadnezzar
He-brewing youthful elixirz in reverse
seizing identities, blessed with the curse
hi-technology hocus pocus gold into base metal
philosopherz being stoned
washed genez are easily transmuted
relinquishing their treasured genius for small change and everything
changez
yet nothing changez
the hippest trip in amerika being Soul Train
soulz trained and transfixed
crucial fixturez provoke spiritz to constrict conflict and boogie down to
it
noxious elementz fouling up the firmament
beckoning me to strange heavenz
iz it exotic by virtue of being non-recognizable
holy rolled vesselz got us tight locked and shackled
searching for keyz to be free while incarcerating our will to be
wayward poetz hippin' and hoppin' down cotton trailz
travail upon travail the pungent smell of decomposing mindz
ghostly shellz of their former selvez
hell iz not fiction since we articulate with sacred diction
spit-kickaz knitpickin' all the nookz and crannies
pot-holed lawnz I pawned my last sanity
rhythm and bluez confused the soundz we use
believing I can fly
but settling to feel on your booty
pusherz in educatorz clothing giving overdosez of "I once ruled the world"

curriculum to children heedless of their delirium
MIRACLE BASTARD BABIEZ suffering
and today caricaturez of men with precious metal'd teeth emitting rusted
wordz
bling bling like the cling clang of incarcerated brain
producing only the hollowed sound of tear-stained tierz
malted beerz up-graded and priced high with fancy foreign namez like
MOET DOM P. and CRISTAL'
pistols blazing like the 'ol west that created thiz mess
in the 21st century pandering revolutionaries doing impressioanz of the
'60'z and '70'z
(and hollywood'z missin' 'em)
time-locked and shell-shocked
gotta cop the latest reeboks!
kultural eunuchz can not get it up for liberation
liberation iz intimidating to some
and she don't want no minute man
and you barren sarahz laugh and giggle too much to understand the Sun in
Man
label me a loose brother for being intellectually promiscuous
but never can you call me kultural eunuch
though at timez camouflage become necessary
sabotaging Nebuchadnezzar'z harem with the seed of thought
POTENT! SEE! MEN!
bursting through the prophylacticz of mind control tacticz
and they are all virgin mindz
having never been touched by Master Mind
just carefully planted abiding in Time
now the harvest has come and karma'z divine

Narrative

“Chapter One” from *Tree Shakers and Jelly Makers*
by Chris Parker

Synopsis: Representative Louis Lavell Thurman is a man of esteem and influence but also a man with secrets. Eighteen years earlier he fathered a son out of wedlock who has become the number one football recruit in the State of MS. To make matters worse he is being heavily recruited to the state’s flagship university by parties who will do or say anything to retain his services. When the threatened exposure leads to his State congressional seat being challenged by his own son-in-law Representative Thurman must move fast to save his family and reputation.

Louis Lavell Thurman exited the elevator onto the tenth floor of the King Edward building. Commonly referred to as Power Alley, the entire floor was inhabited by the most professionally and politically powerful attorneys in the State of Mississippi. Each shared the common genealogy of having matriculated at the same institution - Ole Miss, the incubator and gateway of power in the state of Mississippi. As an insidious cultural reminder to outsiders of the State’s undying and unwavering support to the institutions of the Confederacy, the Rebel flag, affectionately referred to as Ole Dixie, stood planted on an eight feet staff directly in front of the doorway. On each side, on preceding shorter staffs, hung the State of Mississippi and United States flag respectively. The message couldn't have been clearer. In Mississippi, the State Constitution was the Law of the Land with the understanding that only those powers or rights not explicitly provided for under that noble charter could revert back to the Federal government.

Attired in his favorite double-breasted blue blazer with gray slacks, white button-down shirt and gold tie, Lavell Thurman could easily have passed for an executive of a major Wall Street firm. However this was Capitol Street in Jackson, Mississippi and not Wall Street in New York City. Here, he stood out as a black face among a sea of whites - a fly in a bowl of buttermilk. The very fact that he proceeded unescorted spoke to the influence he commanded. He smiled to himself and shook his head in sincere amusement. Not the least bit offended by the unspoken challenge signaled by the Rebel flag, his disposition could be better characterized as glee. He as much as anyone was a benefactor of the flag and the old way of life in Mississippi. As a black politician, it provided him with a ready and reliable issue whenever he lacked for one, which because of Jim Crow theology synonymous with the State's heritage and espoused within the various halls of government, he seldom had to search far.

Instinctively, he turned left and headed for the eight feet African mahogany doors behind which lay his destination. Per usual, he slowed to admire the emblazoned gold plaque mounted to the left of the entrance. Printed in large two-inch letters were Bertram, Wallace and Associates. Underneath, in smaller caption, were names of what he estimated to be ten to fifteen others whom he surmised were partners and junior partners in the firm. Half way down the list, his cell phone rung, interrupting his perusal of names. He reached inside of his right breast pocket, pulled it out and popped it open. The caller ID
read

(601) 956-7701, his office number. He hesitated momentarily thinking he hadn't left there over an hour ago. It mildly surprised him that anyone on his staff would be trying to contact him already. Never the less, he placed the small device to his face and answered, "Representative Thurman, may I help you please."

"Representative Thurman. I'm sorry to interrupt but Dr. Sullivan's office called. He would like for you to contact him as soon as possible."

He instantly recognized the voice as Wilma Satern, his secretary. She maintained his personal calendar and was fully aware of the importance of his present meeting. It was very much unlike her to call with small matters. She knew to let them wait until he returned.

"Did he say what he wanted?" he asked quickly, slightly miffed.

"No he didn't thank you. I didn't speak with him. I talked to his nurse," replied Wilma picking up on the saltiness in his voice and returning it tick for tat.

Representative Thurman smiled to himself. One day he would have to remind her who was boss and who was employee. But that would have to wait. He had other fish to fry just now and no extra cooking oil to waste on Wilma. He thought for a second on how best to dispose of the current issue. Dr. Sullivan was a close friend and was forever in panic mode even when things could wait. For him a blood pressure reading of 121 over 81 was enough to ask you to come right over. "Well o.k.," he said careful to sound polite. "Call him back and tell him I'll get over there when I can. And Wilma, do tell him not to have a heart attack before I get there."

"I'll be sure to boss," replied Wilma sarcastically before hanging up.

Representative Thurman placed the phone back inside of his coat and resumed his journey. Entering, he held the knob as the door closed softly behind him. Seated at the receptionist desk in the exterior office was a young rotund black female, Samantha Bailey, office assistant, but more importantly a constituent of his district. Recently back from lunch, she had failed to notice he had entered the room. Half turned towards the wall, pen in hand and leaning over as if shielding something from view she intently scribbled entries into her personal checkbook. Quietly, he approached to the very edge of her desk before softly clearing his throat. Surprised, she popped up in her chair to see him literally standing above her.

"Oh" she exclaimed loudly before she realized who he was. Embarrassed, she regained her composure and asked cheerfully as she could manage, "Representative Thurman how are you today?"

"I'm sorry," he responded disingenuously with a most devious grin, "I didn't mean to frighten you."

“Sure you didn’t. I’m sure you always walk into folk offices and sneak up on them,” she commented laughing.

Unable to contain himself he broke into full laughter with her and responded “I said I was sorry. I just couldn’t resist the notion of sneaking up on a fine young sister. You know at my age that’s the only way I can get close to one.”

Samantha and the Representative laughed at his joke. Both knew he’d been overly generous in his assessment of her figure. It wasn’t the first time he’d complimented her as such. She knew it to mean he needed information. In as professional voice as she could manage she queried, “And how might you be doing today?”

The Representative looked innocently around the room before replying, “I’m doing fine Sam. How about you?”

Pointing to her checkbook she answered, “ask me tomorrow after I get paid.”

Again the two of them laughed. Sam took time to place her checkbook back into her purse. Sitting upright, she turned slightly and retrieved the appointment ledger from her desk.

“I see you’re down for one-fifteen with Bert and Jeremy. I can let them know you’re here if you like?”

Representative Thurman stepped closer so as not to be heard from anyone who may have been listening. Speaking softly he asked, “Sam, I’m supposed to meet some more gentlemen here. Have they arrived yet?”

“They made it about half hour ago. They came in with Jeremy and went straight to the back,” she replied in like manner, looking both ways to ensure they were not being watched.

“How many?”

“Three not including Jeremy,” she whispered quickly.

Using his right index finger the Representative rubbed it lightly across his opposite hand.

“All white” Samantha replied immediately. “Two I didn’t recognize. The other I’ve seen on T.V.” Sam placed her right hand slightly above her head and then moved the both of them out past her side to indicate his height and size. Judging by her description Representative Thurman concluded the last man was big and husky, probably around six feet and very large.

“Thanks,” he replied. “You don’t know how much help you’ve been.”

Nodding his appreciation, he saluted her with a tip of his hand. Samantha smiled with vested satisfaction. At another place and time he would assuredly reward her appropriately. From time to time he had sought and she had provided intimate office information which he had used to further his agenda. On one occasion it had resulted in his having paid her as much as five hundred dollars. Based on the recently reviewed figures in her checkbook she could use cash.

He started for the interior office stopped and asked, "Sam, could you loan me four sheets of that typing paper."

Effortlessly she pulled five sheets off the top and handed them to him. After receiving the paper he again nodded his gratitude before stepping past her into the interior office.

Upon entering the interior office he was immediately greeted by another young African-American female whom he guessed to be a junior member of the firm. In her early thirties she stood close to five feet six inches tall and sported short-cropped hair falling slightly below her ears. Accenting her appearance was the traditional dark two-piece suit reserved for female attorneys. Her petite frame curved graciously beneath her skirt and further accentuated her womanhood. Not bad he thought. The sight of her quickened his attention as he attempted to pull in his stomach and stand erect to his full height of six feet two inches. She in turn saw his approving appraisal of her body. It wasn't much different from that seen on the faces of her white counterparts when she ventured into the lounge on breaks or to deliver documents to adjoining offices. She had become used to it and although she would have denied it publicly very much enjoyed it. She considered it an appropriate return on her investment of having spent every free minute away from the office working out at the gym or sitting in the beauty shop.

Feigning ignorance to the searching in his eyes, she extended her hand and smiled. "Representative Thurman how are you? They are waiting for you in Bert's office," she said hurriedly bringing his attention back to the matter at hand. He accepted her hand and held it briefly while using his thumb to rub across the back of hers. It was a little trick he'd picked up years back from a Deacon friend of his. It had been described to him as a way of speaking without opening your mouth and a way of inviting without explicitly extending invitation.

It was now one-forty five, thirty minutes late of the agreed upon meeting time. He had intentionally come late. He viewed arriving past time as a statement of perceived power that he hoped would set the tone for their discussions. It was as simple less powerful people wait on more power ones. The person who controlled the time controlled the power. As he followed her down the hall past the smaller offices he thought to himself let them wait. He had been waiting on them for months and felt obliged to make them wait on him for a few minutes. Quietly he inhaled deeply and familiarized himself with all of the issues to be discussed.

The assistant slowed as she approached the last office. Stepping to the side she

knocked and paused before peering in.

“Bert, Representative Thurman is here.”

“Please show him in,” responded a familiar voice from inside the office.

She held the door open as he thanked her and stepped past. Representative Thurman entered to see four white males all seated around a small rectangular conference table.

Benjamin Bertram, fondly known as Bert, stood and ushered him fully into the room. He and Jeremy Wallace were both founder and senior partners in the firm. Each in their last sixties, they were and had been Democratic Party stalwarts and financial benefactors for eons. Along the way they had managed to use their political connections to accumulate sizable portfolios. No deals, Democratic or Republican were done without them being compensated. In cases where they were not at the table, family members or close friends were there to receive a piece of the pie.

“L.T., it’s good to see you,” greeted Bertram heartily. “I’d like to introduce you to John Wilson, Senior Vice President and Al Connel, Director of Human Resource for Signal Automotive. And of course you know Jeremy.”

Each man stood and received his hand as he went around the table. He had been through the formalities with Bertram and Wallace numerous times before and used this as an opportunity to size up the agents for Signal. The Vice President had the look of being from Mississippi. It was confirmed by firm handshake and broad smile behind which the Representative assuredly knew laid contempt. The ability to mask contempt with respect was a common characteristic of the supposed southern gentleman. Connel, the younger of the two, he appraised to be just the opposite. His deep red coloration exposed his angst for having to endure such a meeting. He wore the look of a northeastern numbers cruncher, probably from Boston or New York City, who had landed in Mississippi as a result of having been relocated by the company. Without doubt he would be the one to take the hard line. However he had even less doubt his opinions would go unheeded.

Taking his seat he waited respectfully for either of the hosts to get things started.

“Can I get anyone anything before we start?” asked Jeremy Wallace pleasantly. The offer again brought to mind the façade of the southern gentleman.

The Representative knew that proper etiquette required he take something. Faking humility he responded, “It was a long walk up those stairs, I’ll take a bourbon and coke if it doesn’t trouble you.”

“I think we can handle that. I have some private stock I’ve been saving for an occasion just like this,” he commented self assuredly.

Benjamin Bertram looked at his watch. They were running late and he had other commitments for the day. "O.K., you all know why we're here."

His statement hung in the air as he examined each face to ensure everyone understood Court was in order. Satisfied he continued, "The Governor has asked that we sit down with you to try and head off a potentially ugly situation. He doesn't want your differences to spill over into his reelection campaign. The truth of the matter is we have a major on-year election less than three months away and the last thing the party or any of us need is having to answer to matters of race."

"I agree," replied Jeremy Wallace. "It's just no good for anyone," he said directing his comment towards Representative Thurman with the slightest of edge.

"I'm sure everyone will agree," responded Bertram. He too detected Wallace's edge towards the Representative and sought to head off any early confrontations. "I've been knowing L.T. for many years and I'm confident we can get this thing resolved and still be able to enjoy that bourbon and coke afterwards."

Bertram had first come to know the Representative over thirty-five years earlier during the Civil Rights movement of the mid-sixties. A college student, Thurman organized and successfully demonstrated against a well-known lending institution. Family owned and operated, the institution had for its existence exercised predatory lending practices towards poor black sharecroppers and landowners. It resulted in the sharecroppers never turning a profit and in landowners losing their property. Using his newly held position at the NAACP, Thurman was able to stir enough a controversy to draw outside assistance. Media and financial resources from outside of the state converged with a passion. The amount of attention was a boon and eventually led to a Justice Department investigation that ultimately bankrupted the company. From that point any black having a grievance against a white institution or farmer sought out none other than Louis Lavell Thurman. Lavell Thurman used the resulting notoriety to seek and successful land public office.

Representative Thurman smiled broadly at each man comments. Although both men were leading the negotiations, he was sure the real dealmaker had yet to surface. Around the table were he and four others. However Sam had given him a heads up that three persons had entered with Jeremy. One whose face she had seen on television. No doubt the person was closely connected to the Governor. Although Sam had provided no description, his bet was it was the Joe Don Henry, the Governor's Chief of Staff. He was known to proxy for the Governor and weigh in on his behalf when the stakes were high. Regardless, the presence of this unknown person and his desire not to be seen buoyed the Representative. His first hand interest in observing the discussions up close meant decisions could be made without having to consult outside sources. It most definitely upped the ante as to what the Representative felt he could walk away with.

Speaking for the first time on the issue at hand, Representative Thurman commented, "Thanks for the vote of confidence Bert. I really appreciate you and Jeremy

putting this meeting together. It's important to the outcome that the persons doing the listening have reputations of being fair and objective."

All most on cue Bertram and Wallace casually nodded their acknowledgement of the compliment. Both understood perfectly that it was totally disingenuous. Based on their previous dealings, if the Representative did not get all of what he wanted, it was possible if not probable the meeting would end in threats of boycotts and allegations of racism against them. In their estimation, Lavell Thurman was there looking for loot, either for himself or friends, and he would do or say whatever was necessary to be satisfied.

Turning to the Vice President of Signal, Bertram stated, "I think a good way to go is for each to hear the other. I've found most times folk disagree it's because no ones listening. If it's agreed upon I suggest Signal make their case and then L.T. you can speak afterwards."

Receiving his cue, the Vice President perked up and reached into his briefcase for a stack of papers. He passed them to his associate then waited patiently for him to issue a copy to each person at the table. As if announcing his candidacy for public office, he stated eloquently, "Gentlemen I too would like to thank you all for hosting this meeting. I believe our case is contained within the documents I just passed around. Nothing can speak better to our positive effects of this State and Representative Thurman's district in particular than the numbers on those papers."

"One look and we're sure you'll agree," chimed in the Connel having rehearsed his interruption. "When we came here unemployment in this State had risen to an unbearable 6.9 percent. In Representative Thurman's district it was even higher. We came here saying we would put anyone willing to work back to work and we've done nothing less than that," he concluded smugly looking at the Representative.

Seeing it was his time again, the Vice President echoed his sentiments. "Putting people to work has been a priority. But it's more than just that. We've expanded the tax base of the entire State with the greatest gain being seen in the Representative's district. The expansion in the tax base means more dollars for schools, law enforcement and public works."

Bertram and Wallace appeared attentive as each man spoke. Wilson and Connel spoke passionately about what Signal's presence meant to the state and the subsequent improvements that had transpired as a result of its relocation. Representative Thurman waited patiently and marveled at the lack of political understanding each man demonstrated. They really believed what they were saying and actually thought it would have an impact on the outcome. Neither had yet to conceptualize that the conclusion would not be based on anything said or done. What could and couldn't be offered had already been settled upon in earlier meetings during which neither party was present. They were merely props or extras in a game of political cunning. Their contributions were significant only to the extent of deciding how what already had been agreed upon

would be disposed of. The picnic basket had already been filled. And now it was to be divided based on the presentation of the opposing parties.

Ten minutes into his presentation the Vice President paused. Introspective, he appeared to be weighing his next sentence. "No disrespect intended," he said after considering the impact of what he was about to say. "But that Representative Thurman would have a problem with these numbers seems specious. It would lead one to think he's not here to represent the interest of the people in his district."

Everyone looked to the Representative for a reply. Still smiling, he responded, "I thank you gentlemen for all Signal has done for this State and my District. I'm sorry that anyone would think my motives to be anything but sincere."

The Vice President attempted to continue but was cut off by the Representative raising his hand.

"Please allow me to finish," retorted the Representative while reaching into his breast pocket for the blank paper he had gotten from Sam. As had the Signal employees, he passed them around for each person to get one. He purposely delayed, giving each man an opportunity to examine his evidence. He noticed them looking down at the paper and then around the table at each other in obvious bewilderment.

Continuing he began to lay out his case. "Two and a half years ago Signal relocated their operations to this State and my District," he stated as a matter of fact. "In order for the venture to move forward it required Signal receive most favored tax credits and land grants. Under the guise of providing new jobs and establishing a more credible tax base, I against the wishes of many voters in my district legislatively supported you."

Turning in his chair and directing his comments to Bertram and Wallace he continued. "At the time I was assured by my white Democratic constituents and lobbyists for this very company, that African-Americans would be employed at all levels of the corporation and that African-American business owners in my district would receive contracts to supply goods and services. After intense deliberations I felt compelled to vote in support of legislation granting all requests."

Bertram and Wallace afforded the Representative the same appearance as they had Wilson and Connel. Contrary to them the Representative understood how the game was played. He knew in truth Wallace had little affinity for himself and would use his power to leverage Signal's position.

Careful not to appear disparate, but not desiring the hear a long drawn out

rebuttal, Wallace anxiously cut in. "L.T. we are quite aware of the relevant history and process by which Signal came to this State," he said with vain politeness. "However these gentlemen are offering evidence that they have delivered," he concluded holding up the Signal documents as evidence.

Representative Thurman had not come expecting things to be easy. He knew he had no friend in Bertram and was not at all surprised by his assessment. Not to be deterred he replied, "I appreciate their evidence Jeremy, I really do. I agree they've done a masterful job of characterizing their position. However I have my own evidence. I refer you to the exhibit 'A'. On one side of those sheets of paper that I provided are names of African-Americans in managerial positions. On the other are the black businesses that have long term contracts with Signal. Need I say more."

Representative Thurman's point could not have been made any clearer. For all the numbers Signal had provided he had rebutted with one swift move. Feeling comfortable with his position he sat silently and waited for their response.

Bertram knew they were at the point of disposing of the situation. Sensing each had no further arguments he asked, "L.T., what would you like to see happen? Obviously these gentlemen have limitations."

"I understand. What I'd like to see happen is for me to submit to these gentlemen a list of qualified individuals and businesses capable of working with Signal. They should feel free to verify their references. After which I should hope Signal would take the affirmative action to hire and contract with some of them."

Representative Thurman surveyed faces and realized the smile had left those of Wilson and Connel. To further make his point, he said, "Additionally I would like for us to meet again in ninety days. At that time Mr. Wilson and Mr. Connel should bring back those pieces of paper with the names of black managers and black businesses. If not," he said hesitating for effect, "I will have no choice but to consider further action."

Everyone knew exactly what was meant by "further action." Representative Thurman was essentially threatening a boycott of Signal goods. This would require the Governor's intervention and result in heightened scrutiny for everyone publicly associated with the company. Bertram and Wallace nodded their agreement and looked to Signal's employees for approval. Not yet ready to yield Connel appealed. "Signal is in the business of doing business. We're not in the business of being directed who to hire or contract with. If we allow ourselves to be shaken down by every Tom, Dick and Harry we'll be out of business by Christmas."

Bertram had grown tired of the meeting and was looking for a quick end. Connel

was absolutely correct in his assessment of the Representative's request and was only looking out for the welfare of his employer. However that was the cost of doing business in Mississippi and if he didn't want to pay then Signal could do it elsewhere.

"Sir I'm not sure if you're familiar with how us Southern folk do business," he said indignantly. "But I'll have you know that this is my office and I'm responsible to ensuring everyone who enters is treated with the utmost respect. Anyone doing otherwise will not be asked to leave--they will leave."

Connel was completely unnerved by Bertram's comments. He weakly apologized and sunk low in his seat. Bertram accepted his apology, changing his demeanor as he did so. Like a father having just whipped his eldest son he added with authority, "in Mississippi business is institutional and not personal. I would advise you to remember that and refrain from making similar such disparaging comments in the future."

Bertram looked to Wallace and continued. "Based on what's been said, I agree you both have strong positions. However this is an election year and L.T. while being a shoe in could use some cover. I say you boys go back to your board and strongly suggest they spend the next couple of months working with that list L.T. said he would provide. However I trust you gentlemen are honest and see no need for us to waste your valuable time with another meeting."

Both men appeared dissatisfied with the verdict and with their looks appealed to Wallace. Not as supportive as Bert he never the less nodded his agreement with the verdict.

"Good. If that's all I say we dismiss and enjoy the bourbon and coke," continued Bertram.

"Agreed" answered Representative Thurman glad to be finished.

"Jeremy has another meeting in here so let's retire to the lounge. It should be set up and waiting."

Wallace stood and watched as each man filed out. Confident he was alone, he locked the door through which each had recently departed before proceeding to the far end of the elongated room where he opened a second door. It served as an alternate entrance leading to a smaller more private office. It was connected via closed circuit to the larger office thus allowing its inhabitants to view the activities. Inside sat Joe Don Henry, the Governor's Chief of Staff and an African-American male associate. They had seen and heard every word of the preceding discussions.

Wallace took a seat around the table directly opposite Henry. Within seconds the black female attorney who had escorted the Representative in joined them.

“Well - what do you think?” she asked to no one in particular.

“Ellen, I can’t say I’m surprised. I just felt like he needed to see for himself.” answered Joe Don Henry referring to his associate. “You know if we do this it’s not going to be easy, but then again any thing worth doing is never easy.”

“He knows,” she answered on his behalf. “We’ve talked this through and as I’ve told you he’s our man.”

Joe Don Henry changed glances from the black male to the more attractive black female. “Ellen,” he said enjoying calling her by her first name, “I believe everything you’ve told me and agree his prospects are indeed impressive. However before I sign on with any posse I like to hear from the Sheriff that his heart’s in the chase. Experience has taught me that it’s easier to lead a charge when you know what’s at stake.”

Everyone looked back to the black male for his answer. Unshaken, he returned their stare. “I’ve given this some thought and know what I’m doing. I’m in,” he said definitively.

“Good,” replied Joe Don Henry smugly. “Because after everything’s said and done there’s likely to be hurt feelings and bridges to mend. Now do you have the paperwork we requested?”

“I have it right here Joe Don,” answered Ellen quickly, wanting to appear on the ball. “I picked it up last night after dinner to make sure it was completed correctly.”

Joe Don Henry reached across the table and retrieved the package. He examined the first page and placed it in his brief case, satisfied it had been completed correctly. “Well that’s all for now. Do know there’s no turning back from here.”

Almost introspectively without saying a word the young black male nodded his handsome head yes.

“Good,” replied Joe Don Henry, his face appearing as sober as a bereaved father. However inside he was purely ecstatic. He had been cajoling the Governor for months to make this move. A tall thickly built curmudgeon of a man, he served as special advisor to the Governor, having earned his reputation as a no holds barred political operative. More than once he had run scorched earth campaigns that had resulted in the personal as well as professional demise of his candidate’s opponent. More factual, he was a man who could jump into a pool full of sharks and come out unscathed. The sharks afforded him what

was considered professional courtesy. Sliding his chair back, he rose from the table. As he did so he reached for the cellular telephone on his belt and headed for the distant corner. He inputted the numbers to the Governor's direct line and counted the rings until the answering machine picked up. The electronic voice wasted little time, "at the beep please leave a message."

Speaking in his operative voice he replied happily, "This is mission control. We have lifted off."

“Scene One” of *Stolen Childhood*
from *The Village Poet and Collection of Writings*
by Leon Newton

History and Play Synopsis

Stolen Childhood is a drama concerning dueling in the 1800s. In sum, the play is a social protest about the method of resolving conflicts between men and the impact it had on others. In the 1800’s, many duels were fought over abstract concepts like honor. Considering such an abstract, you could fight over anything that offended your honor.

The play centers around a young lady named Zina who seeks to revenge her father’s death. Zina plots to destroy Mr. Church, who shot her father in a duel. In her efforts to make Mr. Church suffer, Zina causes others to suffer. The turning point in the play is when Zina realizes her revenge is responsible for the death of Paul, the one she really loves. Newton is working in the tradition of Alexander Pushkin and Alexandre Dumas where the writer of African descent uses white characters as Trojan Horses to illuminate both universal and specifically cultural issues.

“Scene One”

Setting: Living Room

At Rise: Zina is sitting on the sofa crying with her head down. Directly across from her is her father’s favorite chair. Zina suddenly stops crying and stares at the chair for a few moments. She rises and slowly walks over to the chair.

Zina: (Monologue) Father, I am here. Please speak to me. I really miss you. I told Aunt Gin that I talk to you all the time, but she just stares at me strangely and retorts, “Stop such fool talk, girl. Your father is dead.” Then she walks away shaking her head.

Aunt Gin: (Pensively) Zina, I am home. Zina, did I hear you talking to someone?

Zina: Oh, just father!

Aunt Gin: Who?

Zina: I said father.

Aunt Gin: Zina, you have got to stop this foolishness.

Zina: But Aunt Gin.

Aunt Gin: No, I mean now. I cannot take this any longer. Your father has been dead

- for some time now. You still claim to be speaking to him.
- Zina: You don't understand.
- Aunt Gin: I told Reverend Job about you. He said just pray to God and everything will be alright.
- Zina: (Mockingly) Just pray to God and everything will be all right.
- Aunt Gin: Zina, you should be ashamed of yourself. Mocking a man of the cloth.
- Zina: It seems like when all the men of the cloth encounter problems they cannot understand or give good advice, they always say, "Just pray to God and everything will be all right."
- Aunt Gin: My child, all men of the cloth are men first, not gods of perfection. They must have faith in the power of prayer. Zina, life is fair and God is love.
- Zina: (Shouting) Don't tell me about the fairness of life! Father is dead and that's not fair.
- Aunt Gin: I am sorry you feel that way, my child, but life is fair in spite of your sorrow.
- Zina: (Hysterically) Life is not fair! It is not fair! No, it could not have been for father. I know Father's dead, but I speak my thoughts out loud while most people keep them to themselves. He lives in my memory. I am not mad, Aunt Gin, so don't worry.
- Aunt Gin: (Reaches to Gina to comfort her) Now stop crying, my child. Everything's going to be all right.
- Zina: (Looks up at Aunt Gin) Aunt Gin, why did Father have to fight a duel?
- Aunt Gin: I assume your father had his reasons.
- Zina: I hate Mr. Church. He is responsible for Father's death. He will pay just as I am--with grief.
- Aunt Gin: Grief is always felt when someone we love is no longer with us, Zina, but we must go on living. I also loved and miss your father, but he is dead now and we both have to go on with our own lives.
- Zina: Aunt, Gin, there is nothing you can say to change the way I feel.
- Aunt Gin: Well, then I really don't know what more I can say.

Zina: Nothing. My grief and desire for revenge on Mr. Church is far too great.

Aunt Gin: These feeling are leading you to an inner death. You are too pretty a young lady for such bad thoughts. Let your inner beauty shine through. Don't hide is behind all those bad thoughts.

Zina: My inner beauty?

Aunt Gin: Yes, a beauty that transcends the outer, but only by possessing good thoughts about people and life.

Zina: (Pauses) Aunt Gin, I just cannot help the way I feel. Once a person believes a certain way, it is very difficult to change.

Aunt Gin: Please stop all this talk about hating folks. I don't like it at all.

Zina: Aunt Gin, I just cannot help the way I feel. Once a person believes a certain way, it is very difficult to change.

Aunt Gin: True, but if it will hurt someone, why shouldn't we try? We must all try in our own little way to help each other.

Zina: Why can't you understand? I don't want your help.

Aunt Gin: Zina, please.

Zina: No. Just leave me alone, or is that impossible?

Aunt Gin: Say to me what you will, but I will tell you what is right and good whenever you lose sight of them. Nothing short of my death will prevent me.

Zina: (Puts her hands over her ears) Go! I don't want to hear anymore!

Aunt Gin: Child, do not enslave yourself to vengeance. Forgiveness is the greatest emancipator. I beg of you to liberate yourself from your hatred so that your flowers will bloom to the heavens and not be strangled by will the weeds of your evil deeds.

(There's a knock at the door.)

Aunt Gin: (Answers the door) Hello. May I help you?

Mr. Church: I would like to see Zina.

Aunt Gin: Wait and I will call her. (Calls for Zina)

Zina: Yes, Aunt Gin, who is it?

Aunt Gin: Mr. Church is here to see you.

Zina: Please let him in. (Aunt Gin then exits.)

Mr. Church: (Enters and sits down in a chair across from Zina) I think you know why I am here.

Zina: (Quickly) No. Why?

Mr. Church: It's about my two sons, Bolk, and Quentin. They are going to have a duel over you. One of them is going to be killed.

Zina: What do I care?

Mr. Church: Zina, I came here to ask you to stop it.

Zina: Really, now, how can I stop it? You are their father, not me. If You can't control your sons, how can it?

Mr. Church: It's all your fault! Leading them on. How could you do this to them?

Zina: How could I do what?

Mr. Church: Don't play games with me, Zina. You know very well what I am talking about. You are cruel.

Zina: If your fool sons want to fight over me, it is their problem, not mine. As far as leading them on, I am a woman.

Mr. Church: So, I can see.

Zina: Besides, I don't know where your sons got the crazy notion that I cam in love with them. Paul is my only love.

Mr. Church: I thought this too. Some people are not secure with one lover.

Zina: What are you trying to say Mr. Church?

Mr. Church: You know very well what I am saying. This duel is being fought over you, and you alone led them on.

Zina: (Smiling.) Quentin is nothing more than a friend. Bolk is crazy because he sincerely believes he is the only sane person living.

- Mr. Church: (Angrily.) I won't stand here and allow you to talk bad about Bolk.
- Zina: That is your problem, Mr. Church. You always protect Bolk's character. Everybody in town knows Bolk is sick in the head.
- Mr. Church: (Defensively.) Now is it true that Bolk hasn't been feeling well?
- Zina: Bolk asked me to marry him. I told him I would have to think about it. He immediately jumped to the conclusion that Quentin was my reason. He left storming mad, shouting that Quentin would interfere in his plans for the last time.
- Mr. Church: I know you, Zina. You led Bolk into believing that.
- Zina: (In a confessing and submissive tone) So I did. What of it? Even if I did. I am not the one pulling the strings here. Not me...Mr. Church. I am not the blame here.
- Mr. Church: Witch! How could you?
- Zina: I've been called worse. Bolk hates Quentin. Bolk has always possessed a strange, mad meanness. A house divided...a civil war...I wonder what past deeds or planted seeds lay at the root of Bolk's madness...at the Churches foundation.
- Mr. Church: And knowing you, Zina, that was all you needed to know. The devil plotting begins to take course. I have always known you hated the Churches, but never did I imagine it was this deep.
- Zina: I can assure you, Mr. Church, my hatred is much deeper. I've been still Mr. Church. And we know about still waters...You should teach your son's to never wade into unknown waters. Or, maybe you should be a better navigator.
- Mr. Church: Zina, please hate me if you must, but spare my sons. My sons are all I have. They are my joy and sometimes my sorrow. I realize Bolk is a little sick.
- Zina: Bolk, a little sick! (Laughs devilishly) Ha. The only help you can expect from me is to watch you suffer. I have dedicated my life to this end. I am a raped servant who happily watches his master's house burn.
- Mr. Church: You are just as sick as Bolk.
- Zina: (Viciously) A sickness begotten by a sickness.

Mr. Church. Bolk has always been a hot head in trouble. My three sons are really good boys. Frank is the wisest and Quentin the strongest and Bolk is weak minded. My three sons are good boys. They wouldn't harm anyone. They do mean well, but boys will be boys.

Zina: Good boys Mr. Church? Evil roots can only bear spoiled fruit. And Bolk is the most rotten of the barrel. He has been involved in three strange incidents. Because of your position in this town, no one dares question Bolk about them. The town folk accept any of his explanations. Well, Mr. Church, I don't. I know the tree from which he falls.

Mr. Church: What strange incidents are you talking about?

Zina: Come now! Like the girl who refused to go out with Bolk on a date. She and her boyfriend were found tied together in a barn and the barn was set on fire. Bolk was seen running from there minutes after it caught fire. Bolk had a fight with Jeff Hooks. He was found Sunday morning hanging from the ceiling. Remember when Mr. Jones beat Bolk in the buggy races? His three horses were found butchered. The old man hasn't been the same since. Or the time...

Mr. Church: (Interrupts) Please say no more. I know Bolk has been a little sick. He doesn't mean to harm anyone or thing. The town folk claimed they were all accidents.

Zina: (Angrily) The hell with Bolk and the town folk! You are just as sick as your son. You should have had him put away years ago. But you cling to him like men always cling to old traditions.

Mr. Church: (Shaking his head) My Bolk put away! No, no, never! He's all right, just a little sick.

Zina: You're wasting your time. Church, your time has come, like an old day passing in the night to a new one...your time has come and I plan to rip the seeds of your legacy from the grown and leave them there like a fallen dynasty.

Mr. Church: I am not here, Zina, to amuse you or entertain you. I am here, Zina, for the sole purpose of pleading for my sons' lives.

Zina: (Her eyes suddenly expanding and glowing as struck by a new revelation) You're not here for your sons. You are here for your power. This is truly power—power to control the fate of others. Especially when it's a life and death game. I feel like a goddess and you are a king begging for the lives of your subjects.

Mr. Church: Why toy with human life? I must compliment that imagination of yours, but this is a serious matter.

Zina: Yes, I know. So was my father. You took his life and discarded him like chattel. My father Church!--a man reduced to a thing. A thing upon which you built your reputation. A thing to be put in a box and buried like egg shells for the breakfast of your life.

Mr. Church: In dueling, you either kill or be killed. I had no choice. I have always valued human life, but do what you do when someone else does not? Killing is a social and ungodly evil.

Zina: Social and ungodly evils? It's amazing how men like you, Church, learn to live with and even justify social and ungodly evils, especially if those social and ungodly evils produce the fruits that you desire. Just as you make your choice, I must make mine.

Mr. Church: Why must we play with the lives of others? They are not as replaceable as we think.

Zina: You are such a hypocrite. Which lives Church? Who are you to pick and choose which lives are significant? What manner of man stands in his pure whiteness and decides which lives are too black to continue? Your words mean nothing to me. Over the years, my heart has hardened to words that appeal to reason and humility for reason and humility are just words...empty words used like perfume to justify and cover a man's filthy thirst for power. Life is cruel and I feel I must be even crueler.

Mr. Church: Such a young woman to harbor so much hate.

Zina: Young as this countryside that harbors the seeds of vile vassalage--seeds that germinate and flower into forests of fiery enmity. You cannot hate this fruit Church...this fruit from the tree that you planted. You brought on the circumstances, not I. For my father meant everything to me, and you snatched him from the Continent of my soul. I really can't understand why your sons want to fight a duel over me anyway. Maybe my hatred tastes like sweet guilt, but it is not of my doing. I'm just the fruit hanging here.

Mr. Church: Zina, stop your lying! We both are aware of why you are doing this.

Zina: No, why?

Mr. Church: You are going through my sons to get at me.

- Zina: (Bursting into tears) Murderer. You killed my father! Yes, you! Your vicious deeds have colonized my heart forever. I am a slave to this pain that I feel, and you will feel the uprising of my wrath.
- Mr. Church: But Zina, your father challenged me to a duel. I caught him cheating at poker. I didn't want to fight him in a duel. I knew one of us would surely be killed.
- Zina: (Cries Out) Why couldn't it have been you?
- Mr. Church: It was his idea to fight. In fact, your Aunt Gin will tell you I tried to talk him out of it. He called me a damn coward who was pleading for his life. I didn't want to kill him. He was determined to kill me. I had no choice but to shoot back. I am sorry things happened the way they did.
- Zina: (Tears in her eyes) Too late for any of that. I don't want to hear your history. I plan to write my own history that is rooted on your evil and your death.
- Mr. Church: Child, you must try to understand my position at the time of the duel. I hate killing because when you have to take another man's life, you also have to take your own in the process. I have some friends in Congress who are working to outlaw dueling. This business of dueling is evil, especially when good men lose their lives. Nothing but evil doing. Child, I still suffer in a way you wouldn't understand.
- Zina: (Interrupting) Suffering! What do you know? You suffer? Please don't make me laugh. (Wiping her tears) Do you know what it is like to grow up without your mother and father? I'll tell you. Hell! My mother died in childbirth. It was my passage through the middle of her that killed her. Father brought me up, and he made me a very happy child. He was my whole world. He was a calabash that sheltered me from the teeth of my foreignness from being motherless. Then you, like a nocturnal invader, snatched him from me, leaving me, once again, without a tribe. After the death of father, Aunt Gin took care of me. It wasn't the same. The other children would no longer play with me. I hated them and they hated me. It wasn't the same. (Tears flowing) When you took Father's life, you also took mine. You took two lives; now you must pay with two lives. If I cannot rebuild my hut, I will destroy yours.
- Mr. Church: No. Please take mine.
- Zina: (Shouting with all the air and energy in her body) How dare you stand there and ask me for pity! No! I want you to suffer. I want you to experience emptiness. To see and feel what it's like when someone takes a loved one away. No! You are the one who must live to suffer. I lay awake nights plotting how you would suffer. I even thought of killing

myself, but I said no—you must suffer, and suffer you must. Dying would be an escape from suffering. Hell you must feel.

Mr. Church: Please take my life if you must. Not theirs. They are not responsible. Have you gone mad, Zina?

Zina: How can the rapist inquire of the victim's state? Bitter perhaps. Mad I am not. Justice may be blind, but she never forgets.

Mr. Church: Why my sons?

Zina: Because your life isn't worth much. Besides they benefit most from you deeds. All that you have done, you have done for legacy. They are the heirs the benefactors of your legacy. It is evil that you have planted, and it shall be evil that they will reap.

Mr. Church: (Shoves money into her hand) Here, take this money.

Zina: (Pushing his hands away) Blood money. No, keep your money. I don't want it. This is one time all the money in your bank won't save your sons from their fate. I cannot be bought and sold on the auction block of your conscience. (Picks up a handful of coins and throws them against the wall and scream.) No! All of the ships of evil that you have sent to sail the world are now coming how to you. I am the captain now, and I will drive them into the deepest parts of your heart to destroy all that you have.

Mr. Church: You are an evil woman.

Zina: (Her face covered in tears, she points for him to leave.) Get out!

Mr. Church: Revenge is what you want. I know I haven't always done the things that are right. It is I who must suffer, not my sons.

Zina: Suffer you must, but they are a fruit that must also perish.

Mr. Church: (Falls to his knees) I beg of you to please stop the duel. Please, Zina. Please. Please.

Zina: (Mockingly) Now what do you know? The man can beg? (Shouts) Beg, Beg, you dog. Beg!

Mr. Church: (His tears drying, his anger pushes him to his feet) No, I am a man. I have offered you large sums of money. You have refused. Now what must I do, Zina. I will not beg anymore. (Reaches in his coat, pulls out a pistol, and points it at her head) I came here to kill you. First, I would try to reason, but if all else failed, I would end both of our lives. I love my three

sons and I myself would kill you before I stood by and watched you harm them.

Zina: (Her face flushed with frenzied insanity, she shouts gloriously) Shoot then, you fool, shoot! What are you waiting for? Shoot!

(Aunt Gin comes running into the room)

Aunt Gin: No, don't. Please don't.

Mr. Church: (Soaked in his own sweat, he slowly removes the pistol from her head) I have become infected with your madness. No, I am tired of all this killing. Doesn't make sense. All this killing and hatred. (Turns and leaves)

Zina runs to the door and shouts

Zina: Father was right. You are a coward! The whole lot of you. Nothing but a coward! (She slams the door)

Aunt Gin: What was that all about?

Zina: (Drying her last tears and looking blankly into space) Nothing.

Aunt Gin: A man points a pistol at your head and you say it's nothing.

Zina: This life is nothing.

Aunt Gin: Child, listen to yourself. He was going to pull the trigger if I hadn't walked in. (Sits beside Zina on the couch).

Zina: Then why didn't he? I hate his life and all it offers.

Aunt Gin: Child, listen to yourself. Your anger is eating you like a cancer. You have a whole life ahead of you. Zina, don't destroy yourself by hating. Your face is becoming vexed with lines of hate etched and growing. Smile for me, child, and don't let that hatred colonize face. You're going to burn in your own fire.

Zina: (Looking at but past Aunt Gin) I know this is going to be hard for you to understand, but I can't live without hate. This is all I have ever known. I have known so little love in my life. Hate has become the fuel in my belly that provides the energy for my existence. What is love, Aunt Gin? I can't stop what has been building up in me for years. I am sorry, Aunt Gin. This is just the way I have felt for some time now. There is nothing you or anybody can say or do to change my mind. This is my shining

hour, and I must shine. Let me glow Aunt Gin. Allow all that is inside me to shine like a new sun on all those who have added coal to this fire.

Aunt Gin: By revenge and hate?

Zina: (Speaking in a lowered but clear tone) Yes.

Aunt Gin: What has happened to the upbringing you father and I tried to instill?

(Zina walks to the center of the stage.)

Zina: Nothing. The memories are as fresh as ever. They pierce my soul daily, demanding that I do something about the man who has turned my father into nothing more than a memory. Love and Hate are but mere sides on a coin. Fate, flipping the coin of its mere will and fancy, brought me this far and I must perform. Is life not a stage? I shall perform well, Aunt Gin. Yes, I shall star in this play called. I shall not let anyone take my part away or steal the show, and the show must go on. The only way to beat Fate, Aunt Gin, is to perform one's part...and to perform it well...to become a self-determined being...to snatch away Fate's coin from its grips...My upbringing is just a memory, and I need to make new memories to live at peace with the old memories.

Aunt Gin: I don't like to hear you talk like that. It frightens me. Reminds me of something evil. Yes, evil, child.

Zina: You have taught me what love is. I have chosen to learn how to hate. I shall always remember the good of you and Father. It is my life and I must lead it as I think best.

Aunt Gin: Are you happy knowing you are destroying yourself and others?

Zina: Any life that is built on evil is evil. To destroy this life is to destroy evil. Am I happy with destruction? No, but Mr. Church must suffer. It's part of life's plan for him to suffer. Why shouldn't he? This is happiness in its lowest form. Revenge equals justice. Happiness is what one considers good and enjoyable. There would be no other experience more pleasurable than for me to watch Church suffer as I have.

Aunt Gin: I lay awake at night listening to you cry yourself to sleep. For years I listened to your plea for revenge. All alone, you were growing with hatred.

Zina: Yes, sweet hatred. My hatred is but the child born of his conception. Every night I killed Mr. Church in my dreams. He died a cruel death in each dream. During the day, I played death games with his life.

- Aunt Gin: There were other children to play with. You didn't have to play alone.
- Zina: (Answering quickly) I wanted to play alone. I hated the other children and they hated me.
- Aunt Gin: But why?
- Zina: Because they had their parents and I didn't. Mr. Church is to blame. Yes, he killed my father. I hate him! I hate him!
- Aunt Gin: (Reaches for her hand) Now, child, tomorrow we will go and talk to the Reverent. He shall help you.
- Zina: (Shouts) No! No! I don't want to see the Reverend. I have nothing to say to him.
- Aunt Gin: But child, you are destroying yourself. I don't like to hear you talk like this. Hating and revenge is the devil's doing. Not meant for good folks. Zina, my child, will you please come?
- Zina: No, Aunt Gin, I can't.
- Aunt Gin: You have completely given yourself over to your hatred of him.
- Zina: Yes, more than I love life. You can't or will not understand that the only thing that has kept me alive all these years is my hatred for this man. I must revenge Fathers death at all cost.
- Aunt Gin: Even at the risk of your life?
- Zina: If there's a purpose for living, then there must be a purpose for dying. I have found mine.
- Aunt Gin: Your father was wrong. Mr. Church pleaded with your father not to duel.. Mr. Church offered to make a public fool of himself to avoid dueling. Your father always cheated at poker. I used to tell him that one day he'd get caught. He would just laugh and walk away. Your father believed dueling was the only way to settle things between honorable and respectable men. I tried to get him to reconsider. It was in vain. He said when a man makes up his mind to do something, he must do it. That is what makes the total man honorable—to be able to make decisions and stick by them to the end. Real guts it took and guts are what men are made of. You see, Zina, your father was aware of the consequences. Mr. Church has been more than helpful. He loaned me money to start the dress shop. We might be worse off if it hadn't been for Mr. Church.

Zina: He owed us.

Aunt Gin: You're wrong child. The world owes us no living. We have to get out there and work like everyone else.

Zina: Well, then, whatever Mr. Church did was because of his guilt.

Aunt Gin: You mean his conscience?

Zina: Yes. Whether my father was right or wrong doesn't concern me because he was my father. My score is with Mr. Church. My father was a good man. I don't want to listen to you anymore. Just go and leave me alone.

Aunt Gin: I pity you, child. You are right. There's no sense in discussing this matter with you. Your mind is made up and it is evil. If I or your father mean anything to you, the duel will not go on. Child, this is an evil thing you're doing and no good will ever come of it.

Zina: (Shouts) Just go and leave me alone. (Aunt Gin leaves) I must be left alone to commune with the soothing warmth of my anger. (There's a knock at the door. Zina goes to see who it is. It is Paul, her lover.)

Paul: (Rushes to her and kisses her) Zina my love, what's wrong? Why aren't you smiling? (Walks over to the couch and sits down.) Come now. Smile for me. Okay? (Zina smiles) Tell me what's wrong.

Zina: Nothing.

Paul: Good. How have you been?

Zina: Fine.

Paul: I heard Bolk and Quentin are going to fight a duel. There was much talk at the town meeting. I arrived late and didn't find out why they're fighting a duel in which one of them must die.

Zina: (Almost sarcastically) Ha!

Paul: Why are you laughing? Did I say something funny?

Zina: Oh, no, I was just thinking.

Paul: Yeah? Of What?

Zina: Oh, nothing you would be interested in.

Paul: Zina, you've been acting odd, almost crazy lately. What's bothering you?

Zina: If the insane doesn't know that he is crazy, then who are you to question my sanity?

Paul: Do you know something about the duel?

Zina: No. Now what gave you that idea?

Paul: That look in your face. I notice you always have it when you are trying to hide something from me.

Zina: Who, me? Hide something from you? Never, Never. You are my only love. (Kisses him) No, see, I told you. You are my life and I am your life.

Paul: Yes, but sometimes I wonder. Bolk doesn't like me very much.

Zina: Why?

Paul: I don't know. He gives me strange looks. Cold and full of hate. I can't understand why. I've never done anything to him. He really resents me, and I know not the roots of his resentment. And that is the most troubling thing, not knowing the roots of it all. If a man knows the roots of his troubles, like any good gardener, he can weed them out. But if not, the mysterious vines of evil will strangle him every time.

Zina: Perhaps you are imagining things.

Paul: No. Bolk has the kind of eyes that say death. I mean the kind that once you've seen them, you never forget. Bolk is a strange fellow, you know.

Zina: He does have Haunting eyes.

Paul: That's it! Haunting eyes. I don't trust Bolk, and his eyes are full of deceit.

Zina: Please, Paul, no more talk about Bolk or dueling.

(She puts her arms around him and kisses him. Bolk enters without knocking. He is shocked at what he sees--Zina embracing Paul.)

Bolk: (Angrily) What is the meaning of this, Zina?

Zina: (Surprised to see Bolk) Well, well, Bolk.

Bolk: (Interrupting) I am waiting, Zina.

Paul: You don't owe Bolk an explanation.

Bolk: I am warning you, Paul. Stay out of this. (Yells) Zina, I demand an explanation!

Paul: Must I repeat myself, Bolk?

Zina: (Frightened) Bolk, I tried to keep Paul from kissing me, but he insisted.

Bolk: Paul, you are on my dark side. I don't have to tell you what that means.

Paul: (Shocked at what Zina said about him) I don't care what you feel or think, Bolk. Zina, why are you lying?

Bolk: Don't call her a liar!

Zina: What do you want me to say Paul?

Paul: Just the truth.

Bolk: I think you better leave.

Paul: No, not until I say what's on my mind.

Bolk: Say it and get out before I throw you out. (Bolk reaches for Paul and smacks his hand)

Paul: Don't you ever touch me again. Zina, at Oxford University we had names for women who roamed the streets of London looking for lovers.

Bolk: You call her that and I will kill you now.

Zina: No, Bolk!!! Let him say it and go.

Paul: I loved you Zina. This is how it must end. I really cared, Zina. Now, you seem like a madwoman...a possessed madwoman. I hate what you have allowed yourself to become....You are a lying cheating witch.

(Bolk pulls a white handkerchief from his pocket and smacks Paul's face with it.)

Paul: (Barely acknowledging the slap of the handkerchief) I accept your challenge of a duel.

- Bolk: (Smiling wildly) A duel it is. You, sir, set the time and place.
- Paul: Consider it done.
- Bolk: I suggest that you go so you will have ample time to get your business in order. I don't miss!
- Paul: Bolk, we miss the opportunity to be human every time we duel; however, my honor is at stake. Zina, there is more confusion in my head than words my mouth can hold. I can't believe all this is happening.
- Bolk: The more reason for me to aim my pistol between your eyes--for the sake of reality.
- Paul: If I thought you were capable of sanity and compassion, I would ask not to duel and just leave.
- Bolk: That's up to you, but I shoot to kill!
- Paul: Not one of your bullets can do to me what Zina has done to the both of us. (Turning to Zina). How can such a warm body encase such a cold heart?
- Zina: (Her voice soaked with sadness) Paul, forgive me. Won't ask you to understand because I don't really understand my actions myself at times.
- Paul: How dare you ask for forgiveness. But, I pray for our sanity.
- Bolk: (Interrupts) You shut up. Zina, don't you give him any explanation.
- Paul: I have nothing else to discuss with either of you. All our words, like our lives, just evaporate under the heat of Zina's hate.
- Bolk: (Laughs) Well said. Then the duel is on.
- Paul: My regrets, but yes.
- Bolk: Paul, I have always been envious of your gusto for life. Until now. To duel with me is certain death. You must want to die.
- Paul: I do not enjoy dueling, Bolk. Every raised pistol is evidence of our fallen humanity. (Exits)
- Aunt Gin: (Entering angrily) I heard that Bolk was here so I rushed over. Bolk, you are not welcome here. Get out of my house and don't ever come again. Zina, why is he here? (Zina's head lowers) You hear me? (Still no answer from Zina).

Bolk: I'm going. (Exits.)

Aunt Gin: (Taking a moment to compose herself) Zina, what's wrong dear? You can tell your Aunt Gin what's bothering you.

Zina: I love Paul very much and when Bolk entered, I was frightened and told him that Paul forced me to kiss him.

Aunt Gin: But why?

Zina: I was frightened of Bolk. It was if he had me spellbound.

Aunt Gin: No, Zina, your hatred has you spellbound. You have made a deal with the devil, and this revenge, like malicious moths, is wearing away at the fabric of your life, taking all who love you with them.

Zina: (Her eyes glossed over with no emotion on her face.) I am ashamed and I will always regret what I did to Paul. The duel between the Churches must go on as long as Mr. Church is alive.

Aunt Gin: Zina, you have become the thing that you profess to hate. Search for the God in you and there lies the answer.

CURTAIN

Contributors

Asukile S. Bandele is a poet and writer from Chicago, Illinois. He grew up in the Ida B. Wells housing project where he began to fashion his unique voice--a voice from the "street" that has analyzed and put into perspective the conditions that created poverty and despair in "3rd world america." He began writing and compiling poetry for his book, *Kultural Eunuchz*, while in an Indiana Correctional Facility. He can be reached at ghoztwrita9@hotmail.com. All poems included in *Black Magnolias* are from the book *Kultural Eunuchz* (She Prophecy Publishing, 72 pgs) in stores March 2003.

Vera Davis is a junior Health Care Administration major at Jackson State University.

Poet is the author of *Philosophy of Existing Time*. A graduate of Jackson State University, he was instrumental in reestablishing the Pierian Literary Society. He currently resides in Nashville, Tennessee where he sponsors weekly poetry readings and workshops.

Ayisha Knight is a nationally recognized multicultural Deaf poet, photographer, and theater artist whose work has been seen in *Konch Magazine*, *Chickenbones*, *BlackBook News*, *The Communicator*, and *Regenerations*. As a member of BlackOut Boston, she has performed at the Strand Theater, Nuyorican Poets Cafe', Lizard Lounge, and the Piano Factory. Her first CD is expected to be released this spring, and her photography can be found at www.aboutayisha.com.

Shamir Lee is a sophomore Psychology major at Jackson State University.

Preselfannie Whitfield McDaniels is Instructor of English at Jackson State University and a Ph.D. candidate at Louisiana State University, where her dissertation title is "Mothering Modes: Analyzing Mothering Roles in Novels by Twentieth Century United States Women Writers." She has one published poem, "Our Children," and numerous voice publications for educational video tapes and audio tapes. The subjects of her professional presentations include the works of Gloria Naylor, Julie Dash, and Paule Marshall.

C. Liegh McInnis is the author of seven books, including *The Lyrics of Prince* and *Da Black Book of Linguistic Liberation*, a book reviewer for *MultiCultural Review*, an editor for *Diaspora*, and the coordinator of the Psychedelic Literature Black Writers Conference and the P. L. Africentrism Conference. He can be contacted through Psychedelic Literature, 203 Lynn Lane, Clinton, MS 39056, (601) 925-1981.

Leon Newton is a political scientist and literary artist. His research interests are international politics and conflict resolution in the Balkans. He is the founder of the Newton Institute for International Affairs and Humanitarian Policy, a non-governmental think tank. He is also a member of the Dramatist Guild of America and the Authors League of America. He can be reached at LeonNewt@aol.com.

Chris Parker is a native born Mississippian, having graduated from the University of Mississippi, Louisiana State University, and Emory University. He currently works with the Centers for Disease Control and lives in Atlanta, Georgia.

Stephanie Leah Stokes is a junior Biology major and English minor at Jackson State University.

Aqiyl Thomas is a poet and essayist, has been published in various journals, and spends time traveling the country reading poetry and conducting workshops.

Marcus Uganda White, who is fast becoming one of the most important contemporary folklorist from Mississippi, is one of the founding members of “Southern Vibes (later renamed Mississippi Vibes),” which is a popular open mic venue in Jackson, Mississippi. His poetry has been published in *American Poetry Annual* (1995) and in *Treasured Poems of America* (1996). He is currently serving in the U.S. Navy, stationed in Naples, Italy.