

# ShootingStar

REVIEW

*Black Literary Magazine*



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# ShootingStar

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Black Literary Magazine

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E  
V  
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W

## Romance...



...Passions to warm up winter

# To A

## *Govern Yrself Accordingly*

*i have dismissed  
the minister  
of emotional defenses,  
distributed  
confetti to all  
the guards and given  
faithful and ever vigilant  
caution  
several days off*

*the city  
of me is well ready  
to joyously receive and  
rainbow celebrate  
your unanticipated but  
nonetheless profoundly appreciated  
arrival into the intimacy  
of our space*

*know that you are warmly  
welcomed for howsoever long  
you should choose to stay*

*here, you need no keys  
no door is locked to you  
every window is open*

*feel free*



**Kalamu ya Salaam**



# LOVER OF ART



*This poem is for you...*

*This poem is of you*

*This poem is you*

*This poem is yours, is mine, is me...*

*This poem is my consciousness, crackling lightningfast  
in ecstatic orgasm*

*(This poem is quite erotic)*

*This poem is your mother and the luscious fruit of her womb*

*This poem is your father*

*This poem is your daughter*

*This poem, my child, your son*

*sung softly in your magic's own essences...*

*This poem is for the way you touch me*

*This poem is for the way we make love*

*This poem is for my reaction to your caresses*

*(This poem is serious)*

*This poem is for the wine, candlelight, and inebriating herb  
of your anonymous eyes*

*(This poem is intoxicating)*

*This poem is for the sweat of our lovemaking—*

*This poem is for your breasts*

*This poem is for your thighs*

*This poem is for your lips*

*This poem is for the roundness of your cheeks*

*This poem is for your nipples*

*This poem is for the hidden valley of your aromatic spices*

*This poem is for your overflowing juices*

*(God, this poem is physical)*

*This poem is for you watching me watching you*

*This poem is for the robe you wear—*

*the gentle heave-ho of your breath*

*This poem is for the red, red, rose wine of your beauty*

*and the salted, bitter tears*

*streaming through your life's*

*sometimes sad sonata...*

*This poem is for you—*

*for someone who touched inside, somewhere, softly*

*this feeling, that sense, those pillars of flame*

*now, beautific memory*

*in the tunnels of time...*

*This poem is for you...*

—Arturo

New Orleans, LA

# Wellspring

## I. Transparencies

Burrowing deeply into yielding flesh  
full and swollen  
lubricants of hot and cold layered air  
enthall the skin  
drenched in para-verbal urgencies  
our bodies join wet and sucking  
absorbing the must of each other's light  
we burn in the shadows of desire  
transparentized by unimpeded permission  
and explode in the enthalpeic energy of a lost star.

## II. Cataracts

My feelings are breakdancing colors  
over clear water  
caressing stones in an active stream  
I scoop up my emotions into the palms of my hands  
and see the sky reflected in them.

I scoop up my emotions into the palms of my hands  
and see your opalescent face  
clouded with the expression of the non-committal  
My feelings shift  
to see you more clearly  
and project onto the illusion of resoluteness.  
Refraction of my perceptions seem  
skyless...

The distance between stars can be measured  
more accurately than the gulf between two lovers.  
My feelings are grotesquely naive,  
performing clowns with no spectators.

These are my feelings,  
uncertain but tolerant,  
impractical but not totally disingenuous.

I scoop up my emotions with these large clumsy hands  
and see the sky's reflection leaking  
from the edges of my protruding veins.  
Your face does not change.

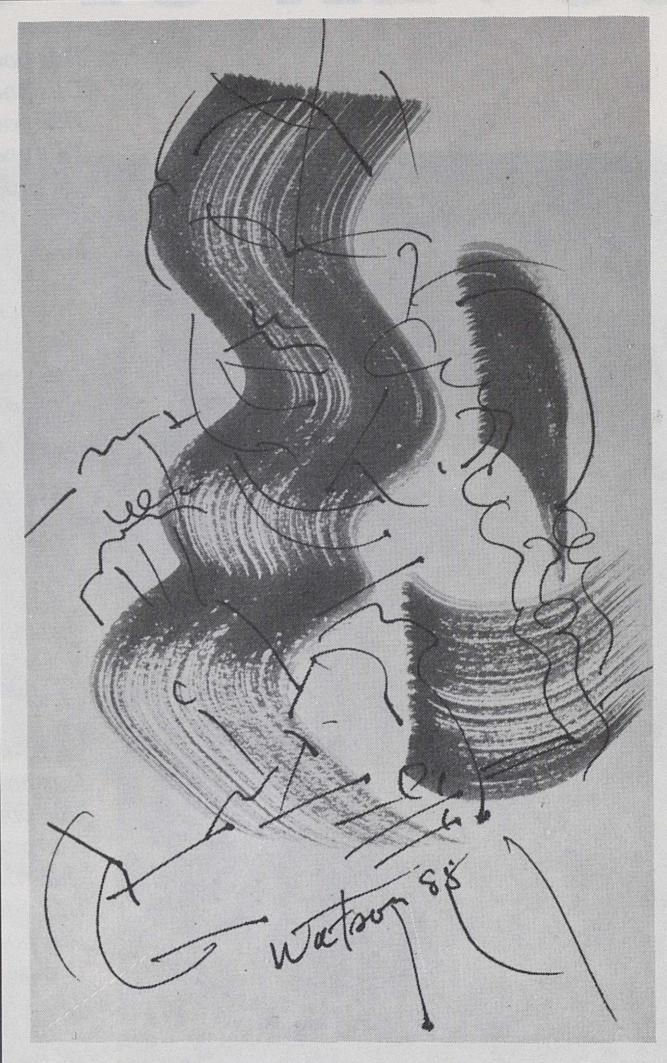
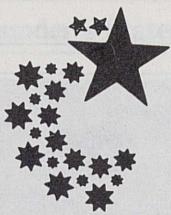


Illustration by Meredith Watson

The nimbus cracks.

I scoop up my emotions in the palms of my hands  
and see the relief of your face  
in the arid dirt  
transformed into memory or art,  
into a silence without seams,  
or whatever,  
my hands are broken bones,  
rattling shells of carnival melodies.

—Gilbert Moses  
New York, NY



# Shooting Star REVIEW

SHOOTING STAR REVIEW  
ISSN 0892-1407

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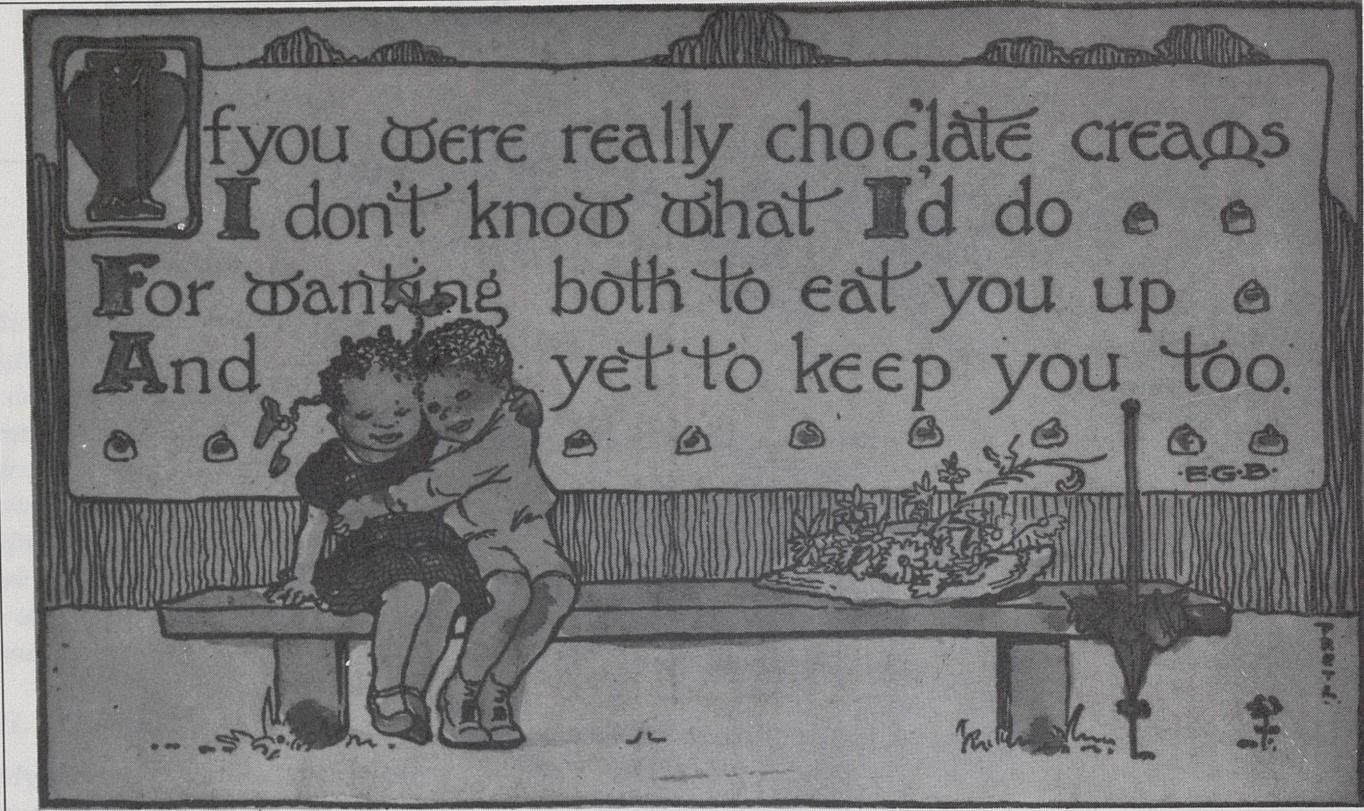
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★  
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addressed envelope.



This 1910 postcard is from *The Black Memorabilia Collection of Meredith Watson*. Ms. Watson, a Pittsburgh-based artist, says that this type of post card is "rare" because of the positive rendering of Black children. The post card is hand-colored and signed.

## Where Are You

*i seek you  
with the tender urgency  
of an ocean searching  
for sand to touch*

*my roaring waves slowly  
climb ashore and, with  
neither shame nor hesitancy,  
break softly into foamy wisps  
which insistently whisper  
your name into the warm  
ear of the wind*

*those are not stars  
lighting the night  
those are my intimate eyes*

*looking for you*  
by Kalamu ya Salaam  
New Orleans, LA



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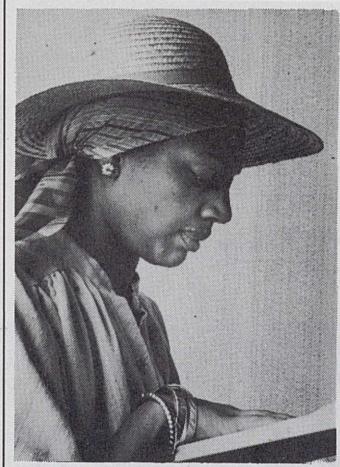


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## *Clouds and Romance*

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*Shooting Star Productions, Inc.* is a non-profit corporation that exists to promote artistic and educational outlets for expression of the African-American experience through production and distribution of publications, video and other media.

*African-American People  
are not a minority.*

**E**ach autumn, I look forward to the huge cloud masses that rise above the horizon. They cover half the sky. At dusk, they loom blue-gray. Like mountains. Casting long shadows across Pittsburgh's hills and valleys. The ridges and peaks glint like liquid gold.

The National Weather Service says that those strato cumulus clouds can occur any time, but I only notice them during the colder months. And, as those billowing masses stretch out across the horizon, I wonder . . . is this anything at all like living on the plains near Kilimanjaro? Is this what it's like to have vast expanses of blue superseded by a great, vaulting embodiment of strength, protectiveness, challenge and divine potential?

Kilimanjaro is the highest mountain in Africa and is the tallest volcanic mountain in the world. Other giants, like Aconcagua in the Andes and McKinley in Alaska were formed by impacting continents that slowly folded and crumpled the earth upwards. The tallest, Everest in the Himalayas, still grows because India's continental plate continues pushing beneath Asia.

There are two types of volcanoes. Generally, the demurer eruptions produce more lava flow, as with the Hawaiian Islands. The paroxysmal types can blow off the top of a mountain, as with Mt. St. Helens, while pushing lightning-laced clouds of steam and gases more than ten miles into the air.

Europeans first discovered Kilimanjaro in 1848. Rising majestically in northeastern Tanzania near Kenya, Kilimanjaro's multiple peaks, rims and craters are actually several mountains that have become one. Although I could find no records stating when Kilimanjaro had last been active, I've learned a few things about clouds.

Strato cumulus is Latin. The stratus part means to stretch out and extend. It's a low-altitude, horizontal-type cloud that we call "fog" when it touches the ground. The cumulus part means a heap or mass, and is a flat-bottomed cloud with fluffy, rounded tops.

Strato cumulus clouds are formed when earth-warmed air rises and begins cooling. When that air reaches the dew point, cumulus clouds form, like whipped cream piling up on glass. Cumulus clouds become stratus-like when high pressure systems from further aloft push downward. Trapped between the rising, condensing air and the high pressure system's "sinking" air, the cumulus clouds spread and take on the stratus appearance that—for a while—fills the sky with a wondrous image.

In Pittsburgh, with mere hills rippling the landscape, I have two feelings about strato cumuli. One is the awareness that when I look away—to work, shop, inspect my daughters' homework, answer the phone, read the paper—those awesome formations will either move or dissipate.

Two, that like romance, those wind-tossed creations have little substance. They are elements evoked by atmospheric conditions. Their solidity is easily altered—even disintegrated—by the slightest temperature and air flow fluctuations. But those clouds filling the horizon look good, and they make me feel good.

Like romance, strato cumuli are the fizz that sparkles relationships, and this issue of *Shooting Star Review* delivers. But the real "thing" is rock, earth, mineral and metal . . . not chilled vapor. The real "thing" is not called romance, and it's not called love.

The real, solid, push-it-and-it-don't-budge "thing" that makes relationships strong and lasting and awesome—that flows and sometimes blows but usually just sits around with its splendor taken for granted—is commitment.

Sandra Gould Ford  
Founder  
*Shooting Star Productions, Inc.*

# The Trials and Tribulations of Jennifer's Suitor

**N**ow I'm a pretty patient dude, but I got my limits. There I was, wheelin my vehicle down Missouri Avenue when I gets the bright mentalism that I should parkalate at Jennifer's and take her to this movie. So nex thing, I was standin in fronta Jennifer's house, waitin for her to come out. Wound up doin such for what musta been three hours. Well maybe I oughta say, "about three hours." I can tell time by the sun. But it was night time, so I could be a little off. See, my little surprise to Jennifer, bout us goin to eyeball this movie, had me really feelin the excitements cuz she monstrous fine, lookin like hot chocolate syrup bout the skin. Got these long mystery eyes with the whites gleamin like some polished iv'ry. I woulda gone up to the door an knocked or sumpthin but Jennifer's peoples got this dog, you unnerstan. It aint vicious or nothing. Mattera truth, the dog much friendly, which be the problem. It be jumpin all over you an executin extreme liberal with the slime-slingin. It drools real bad, you unnerstan.

So I was standin there at the fence an the dog grinnin an ass-waggin. It aint got no tail whatsoever. Way Jennifer's little brother, Jeff, run it down, the dog had used to go jump into the kitchen sink whenever there'd be some thuderatin an likewise outside. But one night it was stormin real strong an the dog got extra scared an jumped up into the wrong sink an bumped against the switch. Well it



Illustration by Shon Reed

commenced to do its sittin down an waitin out the storm. But a tail be jus the same as a sausage to a garbage disposal. So, anyhow, I wasn't mobilatin myself into that yard an get my garmentations soaked in no dog spit.

It was gettin late an I had to make a move. Now I didn't want to be crankin up no ruckus by hollerin for Jennifer an gettin the neighbors to be coppin the peeves an goin on. Only thing I could figure was to distract the dog good enough so I could make it through the gate an get across the front yard to the porch before the dog could get to me. Well that dog have a big fixationism for red licorice, the cherry kine; an it so were the case that I had a stick of that red licorice in my pocket. So I mobilates myself over to the fence at the wes side o' the front yard an waves the licorice in front my face. When I put it down on the groun jus outside the fence, jus far enough where aint no way the dog can get it, but close enough so it think it might. Did the dog go for that? Shit! Do a worm wiggle?

So the dog's at the fence, slobberin serious an tryin the damndes to get its tongue to that licorice. I make my move, unhatchin the gate fas as I can, manifestin some extremeable zoomies as I mobilates myself to the front porch door. Bein in such a hurry, I slips on the steps without any finesse. There I was, in a heapa sprawlies. Dog happen to glance my way jus at that time, glance back at the licorice, glance back at me

again, get big smileability, come boun-  
din after me. I'm strugglin in the desperationisms tryin to get myself up but jus aint quick enough. Dog on my ass, lickin me all over my face, an slingin slobber on my garmentations. I'm executin strugglistics bes I can. But the more I tries to precipitate some alienations, the more the damn dog heapin the affections on me.

I bout ready to give up when, fin'lly, I eyeballs this silhouette comin out onto the porch. It was Jennifer's mama. She opens the door, calls the dog off me, an lets me in. So I'm there on the porch with her an feelin mis'rable deep in the pathetics. Fin'lly I tells her bout me waitin outside for so long an the transpirations what led up to my bein in a mess. She look on me with the big sympathetics an I'm thinkin bout havin to take her fine daughter to the movie with me resembilatin sumpthin come out the swamp. An she look sorrier at me cuz Jennifer weren't home.



by Wopashitwe Mondo Eyen ye Langa

# Winter Nights

Somehow

you take the chill off,  
on those long, cold  
winter  
nights...

when i

snuggle up real tight  
and mold in just right

with feet-touching and  
toes tickling...

you take the chill off,

when i'm

icy cold and  
my touch makes you  
shiver and shake...

but when

your heat began  
to pen-e-trate...  
my body comes alive  
with your warmth

and

i'm all aglow

when you

take the chill off  
on those long, cold  
winter nights...

Cindy L. Jackson  
Newark, NJ

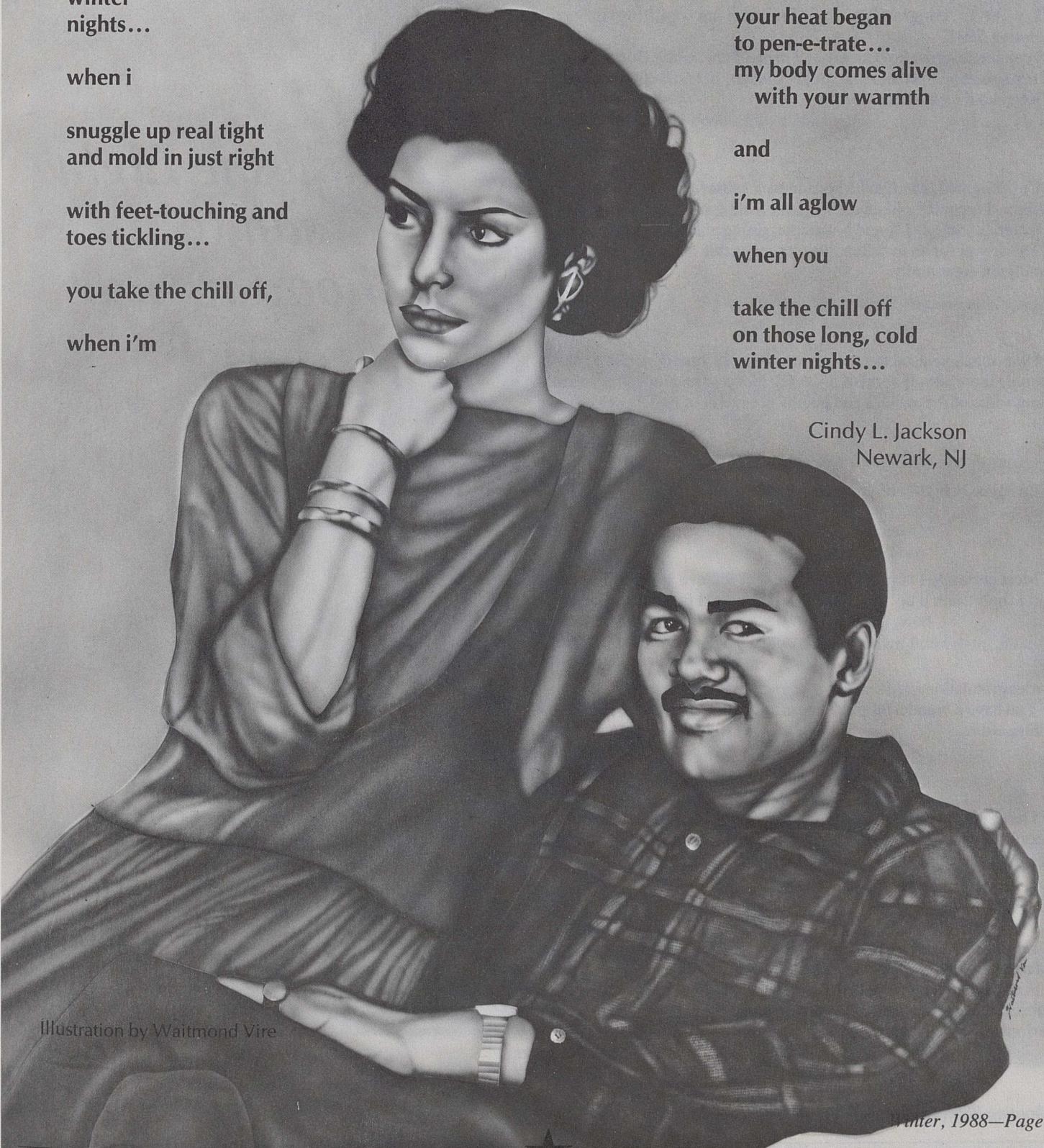


Illustration by Waitmon Vire

## Congratulations! Shooting Star Review

I want to congratulate you for such an uplifting magazine—*Shooting Star*!!

I cannot describe how *happy and proud* I am seeing God-given talents of my sisters and brothers no longer hidden, but attractively displayed.

Keep up the excellent work!!!

Carolyn B. Anderson  
Bridgeville, PA



I'm delighted, Ms. Gould-Ford to be a subscriber to: *Shooting Star Review*. I especially liked the Autumn 1988 issue, containing adult-oriented literature. I found both entertaining and informative.

Thank you for an excellent literary magazine targeted at the African-American community.

Gregory Hardin  
Chicago, IL



I was much pleased to receive your letter of June 3, 1988. I had become increasingly fond of *Shooting Star* and had looked forward to using some of the articles and poems in several of my classes.

Tony Liverpool  
New York



I will speak highly of your *Review* every chance I get.

David Dendy  
Washington, DC



Most certainly I hope the magazine will achieve a wide circulation and I shall "talk it up" to friends and interested persons out here.

Helen V. Malkerson  
Oakland, CA



Congratulations,  
You have a wonderful publication and I look forward to reading future issues.

Akbar Imhotep  
Atlanta, GA



I have just recovered Summer '88 SSR from my "Must Read Soon"(!) pile and am so excited by its contents and the catalytic effect it has, I'm enclosing my renewal + 3 gift-memberships.

Ellen Mark  
San Francisco, CA



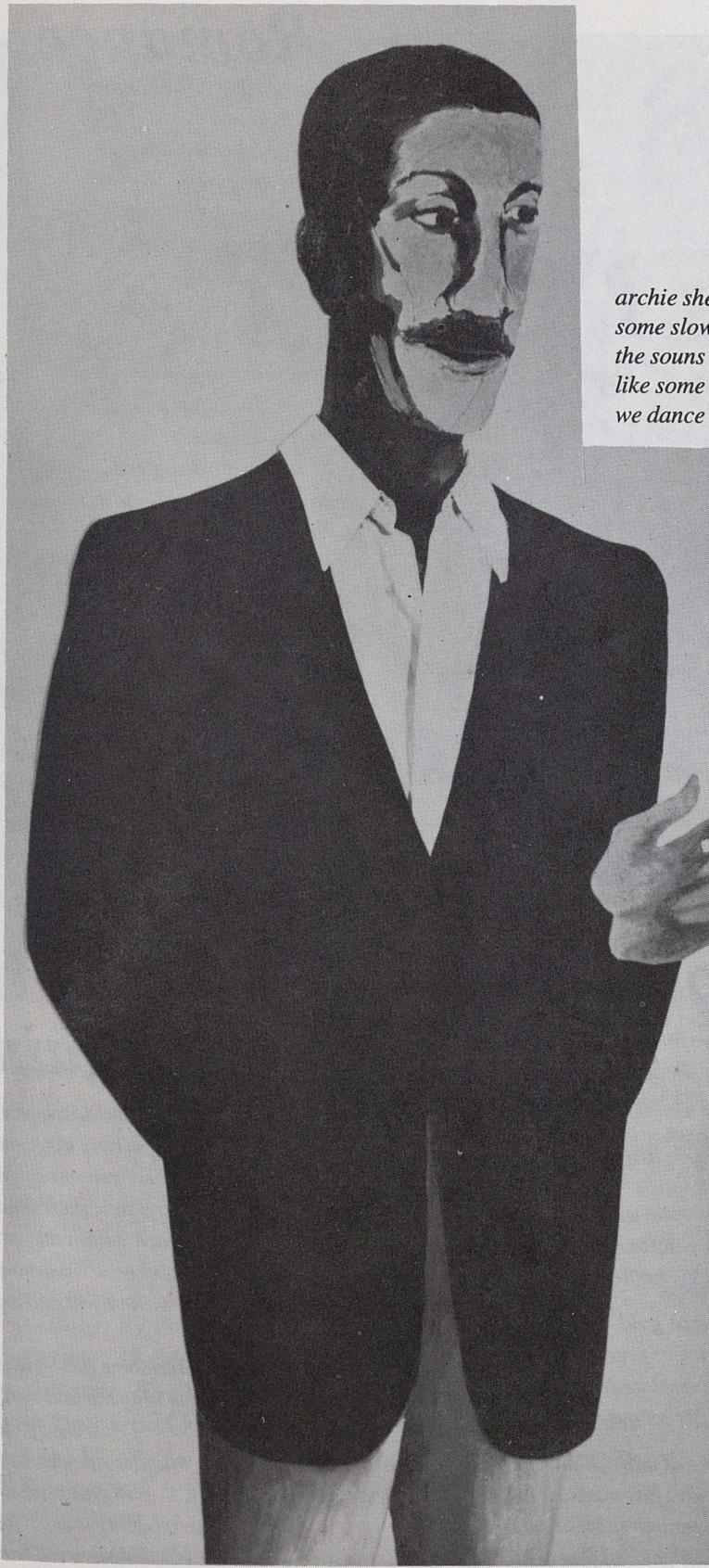
Last evening I obtained Vol. 2 Issue #1 of *Shooting Star Review* on Afrikan Literature. What an outstanding issue!

As I have told many people, this magazine (one of few I have ever subscribed to) is to become one that will be a must own if you are at all serious about Afrikan knowings.

J.E.M. Jones  
Hollis, NY

Duquesne Light  
salutes  
*Shooting Star  
Review*

 Duquesne Light Company



# We Dance

by Wopashitwe Mondo Eyen ye Langa  
Lincoln, NE

*archie shepp layin down with his sax  
some slow raunchy blues  
the souns eazin out the box  
like some snaky sneaky voodoo spirits slinkin  
we dance*

*it's pretty dark in this musk-smellin room  
the incense smoke a driftin from the stick  
undulatin wispy ghost ticklin our nostrils as it play  
we dance*

*the little green squares a light flash on the set  
in rhythm to the beat they reflect  
givin off their tiny 'luminations  
as if they was  
some weird fireflies blinkin  
we dance*

*aint jus incense that i smell that got my nose  
twitchin so  
in the midst a this hot box grind  
this close pressin soulful minuet  
aint jus sweat that's got us wet  
we dance*

*your woman mist fog up the room so good  
make me feel like shoutin an faintin an fallin to the floor  
what kinda sermon it is we preach  
in this church a sweaty steamin romance  
we dance*

*your hips held in my palms' caress  
do their own lusty dance an earthy squirm  
as we roll together hot an muggy close  
to make a sounless scream  
in a room fulla steam  
we dance.*

*the square green eyes on the face of the deck  
cooly flash to the beat they detec'  
givin off their instant 'luminations  
as if they was  
some weird fireflies blinkin  
we dance*

"Portrait of Norman Lewis"  
60" H x 40" W    Oil and Collage on canvas  
© 1986 Benny Andrews (see page 20)  
New York

# Romance



Photo ©1985 by Sandra Gould Ford

## Walking Girl

Every limb a supple curve  
stretched like a nerve  
new to love everywhere  
over you tight  
to touch and fresh  
for sight—  
now, girl gloried, spare  
what I see:  
foot after foot  
and both feet bare,  
a liquid rhythm flows  
away from me  
folded in flesh  
only your lover knows,  
not me.

Robert F. Whisler  
Glen Burnie, MD

## Moon Glow

*My love for you is like the moon,  
silent and forever;  
hanging above volatile arguments,  
temporary like the weather.  
  
Beaming down on weighty discord,  
giving it the weight of feathers;  
gliding across the sky of life—  
its my noblest endeavor.  
  
Rich as gold, icy diamond,  
rare as precious metal,  
like chocolate covered pecans,  
we're different but hanging together.*

*Because of individual differences  
our love has made us better;  
strong enough to weather storms,  
silent and forever.*

C.A. Pruitt  
Seageville, TX

We trekked into a far country

My friend and I.

Our deeper content

was never spoken,

But each knew all the other said.

He told me how calm

his soul was laid

By the lack of anvil and strife.

"The wooing kistrel," I said,

"Mutes his mating-note

To please the harmony of this  
sweet silence."

And when at the day's end  
We laid tired bodies 'gainst  
The loose warm sands,  
And the air fleeced its particles for  
a coverlet;

When star after star came out  
To guard their lovers in oblivion—  
My soul so leapt that my evening prayer  
Stole my morning song!

by Anne Spencer  
from Translation (1927)

Anne Spencer could not read or write until she was 11 years old; yet she graduated as valedictorian of her school class and eventually became a librarian.

## Play It Again

*Sin, sex and sacrament:  
a holy three mix  
between our thighs  
and take their place  
each within this act,  
within quickened breathing,  
within you and me.*

*Like some bebop dude  
you play me and sway.*

*Drawing circles  
of ethereal substance  
with your mouth.  
Holy and perfect  
inside this passion.*

Yvette R. Murray  
Charleston, SC

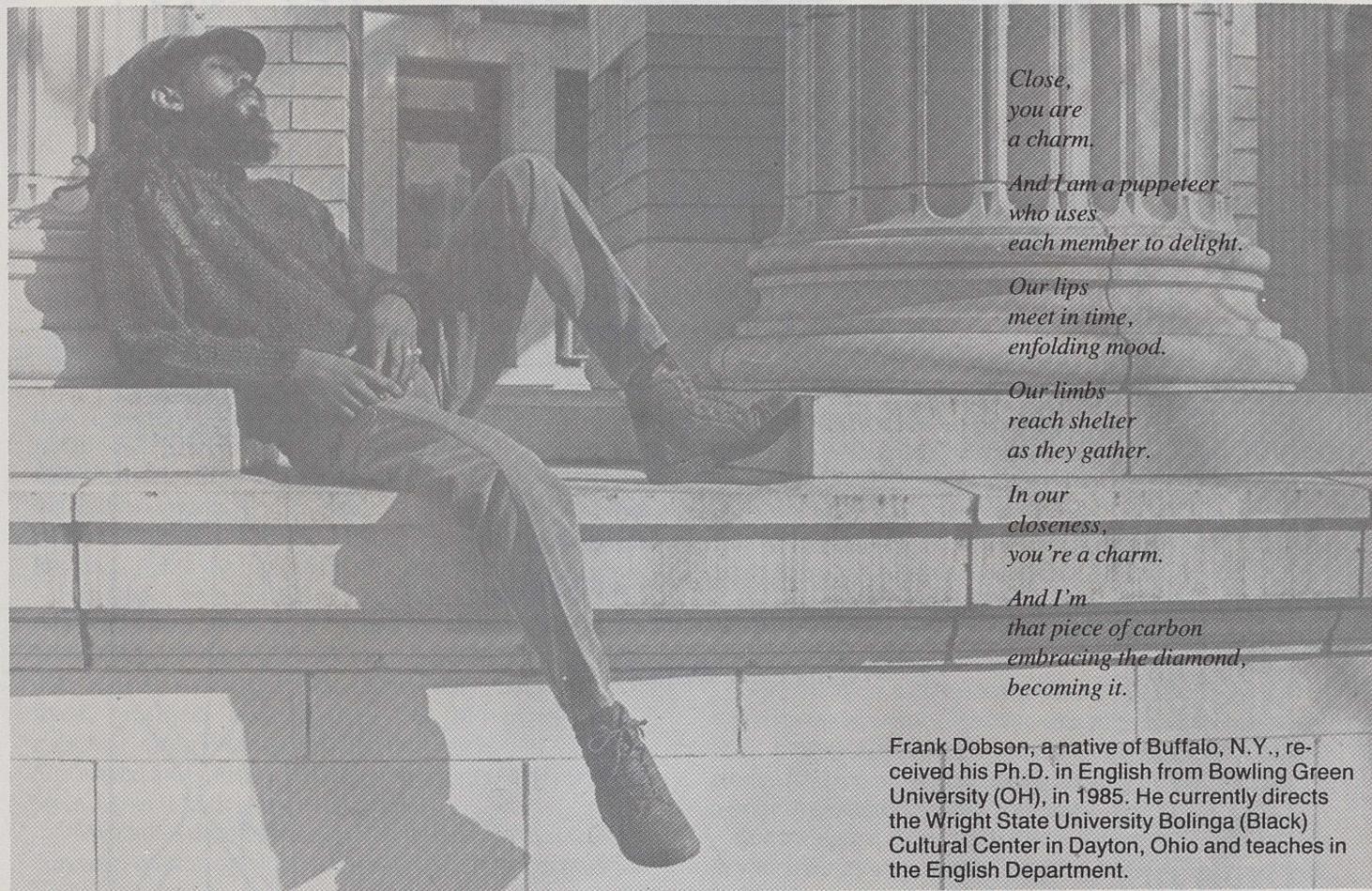


Photo ©1988 Deborah Dember

*Close,  
you are  
a charm.*

*And I am a puppeteer  
who uses  
each member to delight.*

*Our lips  
meet in time,  
enfolding mood.*

*Our limbs  
reach shelter  
as they gather.*

*In our  
closeness,  
you're a charm.*

*And I'm  
that piece of carbon  
embracing the diamond,  
becoming it.*

Frank Dobson, a native of Buffalo, N.Y., received his Ph.D. in English from Bowling Green University (OH), in 1985. He currently directs the Wright State University Bolinga (Black) Cultural Center in Dayton, Ohio and teaches in the English Department.

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## Next issue: OUR CHILDREN... WHAT'S HAPPEN- ING FOR AND ABOUT OUR FUTURES

In the Spring of 1989, *Shooting Star Review* begins its third year with stirring, insightful and deeply meaningful explorations of what childhood means for Black people in America.



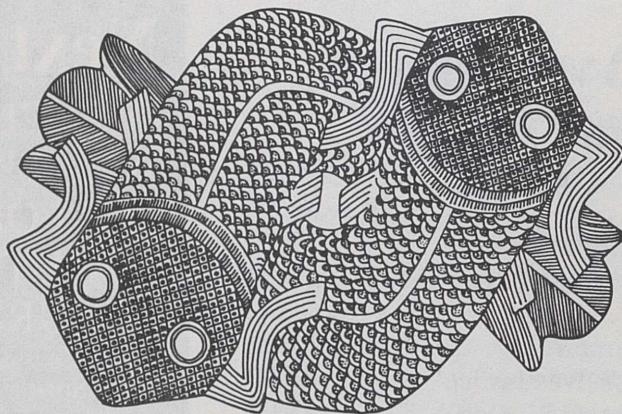
# *Love, African Style*

*from a novel in progress*  
by Kristin Hunter

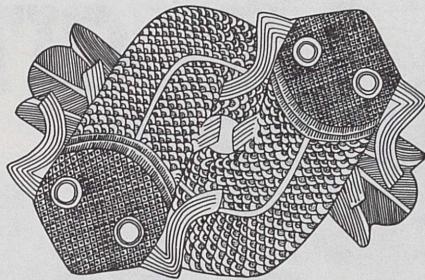
*Just when you think it's all downhill,  
Something turns up.*

*Like a breeze from the south,  
Like the wings of a dove,  
Like the corners of a mouth,  
Like the shivers of love.*

—Willy C.B. Williams, 1964



*Shooting Star Review, Winter, 1988*



**W**histling his new Bad-Feet Blues, wondering how his feet would hold up in field maneuvers, Willy Cullen Bryant Williams almost overlooked the tiny figure on the bench in front of the factory among the geraniums, pretty window-dressing for the noisy steamy horrors inside. Slim as a pencil. Dark as black coffee. Eyes big as the cups that held it. Hair in a million braids, worked in intricate designs. Oh--the little college student who'd bitten his attacker during the factory race riot.

Her name, he learned, was Ayesha. It had been something else once, something "white," but she had renamed herself in the dawn of Black Consciousness. She was a student in good standing at Shaw University, but mainly she lived, breathed, ate and slept The Movement. She'd marched, sat in, been jailed, had training in non-violence. She waved away his concern over the injury to her stomach from Asher's kick she waved away.

"My fault. I didn't do the double-up-and-roll fast enough. Anyway, no damage done. I have incredibly tough muscles. Feel."

She guided his hand to her flat, hard stomach. It was, Willy agreed, incredible. So, he thought, used to coy, skittish girls, was her lack of self-consciousness.

"You eat bullets for breakfast?"

She laughed, showing twinkling dimples and perfect teeth that lit her face like a slice of new moon. "Unh-unh. I do sit-ups before breakfast, though. Got to keep in condition for the struggle."

"At least you're fighting *our* war," Willy said with a touch of envy.

"Damn right," she said, turning left toward the cafeteria, tugging his reluctant arm. "Whassa matta, don't you grit?"

"I have to do something else first."

"What," she asked with a pert look, "could be more important than having dinner with me?"

With those eyes turned on him like floodlights, Willy did not know how to be anything but honest. "Uh—I have to do my feet. They really hurt me after a day in the factory."

To his relief she did not laugh. "I'm good at feet," she said. "I used to do my grandparents'. You know, when folks get old and can't see so good or bend so easily, somebody has to do things like that for them."

"I went to a foot doctor once," Willy remarked. "He only spent five minutes with me, and he didn't even do all

my toenails."

Her braids tossed in a storm of scorn. "So cold. So white. Paying doctors for what people ought to do for each other for free. The quicker we get away from these white notions, the faster we'll build The Nation. Tell you what." The smile lit her face again. "Have dinner with me first, then we can go to my place and I'll do your feet."

Ayesha was delighted that he too ate only fish, fowl and vegetables, though only from habit, not for her mystical and hygienic reasons. Her talk of yang and yin foods confused him, but he was glad they had a common diet; it held out a hope of many other sharings.

Her place was a curtained-off third of a room she shared with two other women students who picked in the summers. Still, it provided more privacy than his meager bunk and trunk. And the most generous hospitality ever lavished on a poor orphaned boy with sore feet.

She brought a large basin filled with warm fragrant suds in which he immersed his tortured hooves. Also a large fluffy towel on which to dry them. Soaking, he thought of the disciples and Jesus, and of this as a ceremony no less holy. When she gestured, he obediently dried the left foot and offered it for her inspection.

"Relax," she commanded, tapping his instep. "I like doing this, and I'm good at it. I doubt if I'll hurt you, but if I do, let me know."

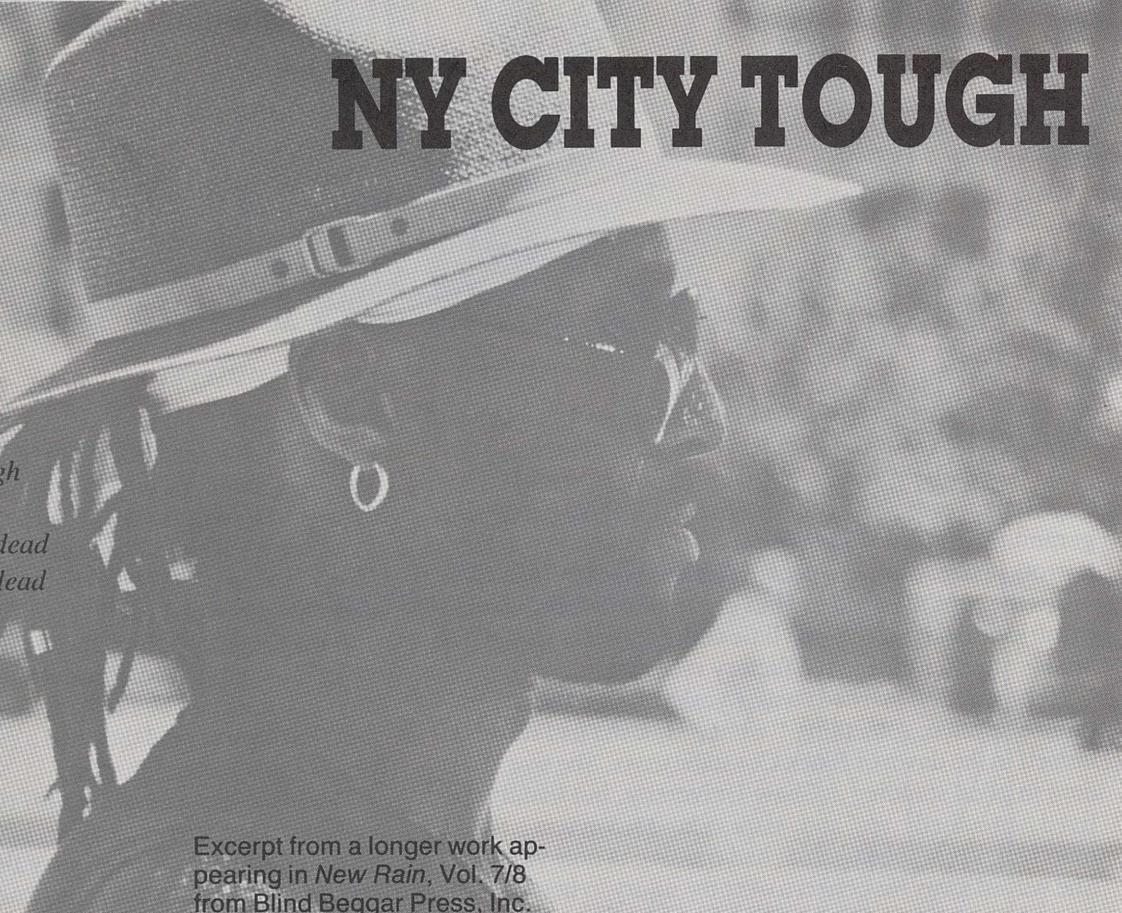
On her record changer, Nina Simone wailed that nobody loves you when you're down and out, a patent lie. Diana Ross simpered about baby love. Errol Garner manned the harpsichord and sent all the composers of the eighteenth century flying like tattered moths. The MJQ took up where he had left off, tinkling crystalline fugues while Ayesha performed delicate surgery on Willy's horny toenails.

"Dunk it and gimme the other one," she said when she had completed paring operations on the left foot. After her painless surgery was completed, she dried both his feet and commenced massaging them with her small strong hands, pressing the balls, pushing up the arches, pinching the sore gristle above his heels. Milt Buckner's magical hammers set wind chimes tinkling in his mind. "How do they feel now?" she asked.

"Wonderful, delicious," he said, adding as she pressed an especially agonizing spot, "It hurts so good."

"I know what you mean," she said. "I have a place on

# NY CITY TOUGH



you're my lover  
like no other  
come on  
suga... let me in  
I can help you  
e-a-s-e the pressure  
make you wanna start  
again  
'cause  
I am New York Cit-tee Tough  
and I love you just enough  
to cause a mugger to drop dead  
'cause I will fill him full of lead  
If he tries to take my  
sanity  
or keep me  
from your bed  
I Love US just enough  
to keep on keepin'  
New York Cit-tee TOUGH.

J.E.M. Jones  
Hollis, NY

Excerpt from a longer work appearing in *New Rain*, Vol. 7/8 from Blind Beggar Press, Inc.

Photo ©1988 S. Gould Ford

## Love African Style continued from pg. 15

my right shoulder that knots up whenever I'm tense or tired." He had kept his eyes closed, relaxing under her ministrations. Now he opened them and saw that she had changed into a short kimono, belted but not buttoned, which she was letting slip from one iridescent shoulder. Black, he remembered from his fourth-grade art lessons, contains all the other colors. On her shoulder he could see them—shimmering blue, mauve, gold, green—a coruscating rainbow.

"Here?" he asked, experimentally touching the right scapular area.

"A little higher," she instructed, and gasped with pain and pleasure when he found the exact spot. "Don't be afraid. I won't break. Bear down."

Ayesha sank onto the bed beside him as he worked his way around her butterfly shoulder blades, up and down her elegant little spine, then up again to the spasmed shoulder muscle and down her arm. She seemed lost in space as he had been, wrapped in a dreamy cloud of relaxation. But when he cupped her breasts in his hands and kissed the back of her neck she was right there, turning swiftly to meet and receive him.

For such a doll-sized girl, she was indeed strong. Her thighs gripped him like an iron vise. Her need was fierce

enough to ride him to death instead of mere exhaustion.

"Do I have any pimples?" he asked, face muffled in her pillow, what seemed like an hour later.

"I thought you'd never ask," she said with a giggle. "I love to do pimples." Meticulously she explored his back, seeking and destroying offending barnacles. "Do mine now," she said when she had finished, and offered her smooth, supple, miraculously made back for his inspection. He found mosquito bites but no other blemishes, and settled for scratching her back instead. His nails moved in steadily expanding circles as she yawned and sighed with pleasure.

They had another coupling, longer and slower, less athletic, more satisfying, after which Ayesha brought another basin and solemnly washed both their genitals.

They turned next to attending one another's hair. Oiling her scalp, brushing the intricate mandala of braids that crowned her perfectly round head, Willy wondered where in his bleak boyhood he had learned to participate so naturally in these rituals of grooming.

Ayesha answered his unspoken question. "This is very African, you know," she said as she parted his wiry hair and scratched his scalp with a fine comb. "Europeans don't touch each other. They pay doctors and barbers and even prostitutes, I guess, so all the touching stays professional,

not personal."

"The poor fools," he said, and groaned with pleasure while she warmed oil in her palms and massaged it into his scalp. "Just think of all they're missing."

"It comes naturally to us," she said. "But they're afraid touching will turn into sex, I guess. Sometimes it does. But only if you want it to. Shall I rub your back?"

"Yes. Oh, yes. If you will permit me to massage your feet first."

So he played This Little Piggy for awhile, and then his back was expertly kneaded. Happy in their well-tended bodies, they lay side by side in silence and admired their twenty perfectly pedicured toes. Later they sipped chamomile tea and listened to Odetta croon about a hound dog baying at the moon. Large posters of her and of Bobby Seale decorated Ayesha's chamber, which had a soft orange glow from the Indian-print bedspreads she had hung as dividers. The orange ambience was soothing until she asked him, "What did Hofstetter want with you, Willy?"

At her mention of the factory floor boss, orange flames licked at the edges of the posters, charring and curling them. Beneath Odessa's baritone rumble, the thunder of cannons could be heard.

"He wants me to go serve my country." An unpleasant suspicion crossed his mind. "Why? Did anybody in the shop ask you to check on me?"

It was a terrible thing to ask of this lovely wisp of a girl who had so generously given herself and who sat opposite him now so trustingly exposed, her mouth and her breasts and her Venus bush all smiling up at him. To her credit, she answered honestly. "Yes. You know somebody always has to watch out for leaks to management. This is my third summer, so the workers trust me. They know where I stand."

"This is my twelfth summer," he growled, "and still nobody seems to know where I stand. Well, I didn't tell him anything."

"I believe you, Willy." Her eyes were clear, direct, true blue-black.

But a new chill was there between them. As if they had never squeezed pimples or oiled scalps or massaged feet or engaged in all the other comforting rituals of love, African style.

"Matter of fact, the man didn't ask me anything. He just told me, enlist or be drafted. And said he can make me do it because he's on the draft board."

"Shit." Coming from her clean mouth, the word was especially filthy. "What are you going to do?"

He shrugged. He could feel his back muscles tensing, in spite of all that lovely manipulation. "What can I do? What I have to do, I guess."

She drew herself erect and suddenly seemed tall, in spite

**continued on pg. 18**

# PRIVATE THIGHS

*I admire greatly,  
those publicized panty hosed  
sweet shades of brown  
legs  
that carry wombs  
and sweet breast milk,  
below slender shoulders  
that struggle with our burdens  
of tomorrow/s in pin-stripe/with smooth  
brief cases, in business offices...  
to succeed beyond and inspire of  
day care centers/pots and pans,  
and, sometimes, sometimes  
that man,  
that sweet lovin' ol' man  
who don't seem to understand  
nothing but  
in between  
crescendo squeezes of private  
thighs,  
that still leave you  
satisfied...*

Glen Rinehart  
Oshkosh, WI



## Love, African Style continued from pg. 17

of her near-midget status. "I can't tell you what to do, Willy. But I can tell you this. Black men are rare and valuable. You, Willy, are incredibly rare and precious." She stroked his arm with a feather touch, as if it were made of porcelain. "There's a plot to destroy black males. Jails, drugs, the service... I plan to have at least six sons, myself. I know we can't afford to lose any more of you in their immoral war."

"I thought I could sit it out," he said miserably. "My birth was never recorded. I thought they'd overlook me."

"But now they've found you. So what will you do?"

He shook his head for lack of an answer.

"I could write letters to some people down in Mississippi who'd hide you. Give you a new name. Put you to work helping in the struggle, educating the people, registering voters. Dangerous work. But our work."

Willy thought that one over. He didn't know anything about the South, except that one night he'd talked to an old-time picker named Jabbo who said, "You've got it made here, bo. Flush toilets. Towels. Soap. Showers. Real food." Down South, Jabbo had told him, the hours were longer, the pay was shorter, and the growers meaner. There was no union to guarantee you fifteen-minute breaks or half-hour lunch periods. There were no cafeterias and, in some places, no bathrooms either. You brought your lunch to the fields in a pail and did your business behind a bush. And hoped the boss didn't catch you taking a dump break. So he hadn't wanted to follow the crowd to Florida at the end of the Jersey picking season.

Luckily, lying about his age, he was taken on in the frozen-food factory at the end of his first full picking season, and didn't have to test out the truth of Jabbo's remarks. Other workers tended to confirm them, saying of the South, "I ain't lost nothing down there."

On the other hand, Willy sure hadn't lost anything he needed to go looking for in Vietnam.

"I don't know," he said. Like everyone else in Willy's life, his barracks buddies came and went—some who wanted to beat the system, some who wanted to join it, some who wanted to overthrow it. Willy had only wanted it to leave him alone with his poetry. But now it had come after him.

For the struggle going on down South, he felt only a mild curiosity, stimulated mainly by his wish to know everything there was to know about Ayesha. "I don't know," he said again.

She had her back turned to him now like a frozen wall. Willy felt a sad loss. No more foot-tending, no more massages, no more baby love or breath-stopping friction. "I don't know anything about all that stuff down there."

"It's the same stuff up here," she said in a voice muffled by a pillow. "The same the whole world over. A white boy can sit on a stool all day while you work standing up. When

you ask him to share the stool, the whites get violent and all hell breaks loose. That's the way the rules are for black people all over. You'd be part of changing them."

She turned on her pillow to face him sternly. "But you would have to have commitment, Willy. You'd have to care enough to be willing to die for freedom."

Willy found it hard to explain what he felt. He had no family, no personal loyalties. He could not commit himself to people or causes in the abstract. With no kin, no blood, no connections, how could he care about a whole race of people? He tried to think of something he'd be willing to die for. Voting? No. A sickening meal of greasy meat at a dime-store counter? Hell, no.

Finally he said, "I'd die for you."

"That's not enough."

"It is for me. You could've died for me today."

"That's not the point. It isn't about you and me. You have to care about freedom more than you care about anything else in the world. More than your life."

"I could learn to care about it," he said, "if you would rub my back again."

*His birthright, life,  
He sold for a touch,  
A body rub,  
A pedicure.  
No one ever died for more.  
Life without touch  
Is not  
Worth  
Much.*

—W.C.B. Williams, 1965



Kristin Hunter is the author of eight books of fiction, four each for young people and adults. Among her novels are *God Bless the Child*, *The Landlord*, *The Laketown Rebellion*, *The Survivors*, and *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou*. She is married to John I. Lattany and is a senior lecturer in English at the University of Pennsylvania.

© 1988 Kristin Hunter

# Spring Fever

Christina Springer  
Yellow Springs, OH

*Thought has been a luxury  
I have not been able to afford.  
Lately, the frivolousness of gathering together  
the pieces of my mind  
has meant hunger and long overdue bills.*

*I am surprised now  
with the Spring's attempt  
to sabotage my routine  
of working and mothering  
working and mothering  
over and over,  
that I yield to subtle pressure,  
cool breezes brushing my neck,  
the unfolding flowers,  
much like a woman loving.*

*This immersion of self  
in the thriving beauty  
around me  
will be my downfall.*

*Perhaps it is you,  
the way you walk  
hips swinging in rhythm  
with the wind in the branches.*

*The touch of your hand  
irritatingly sensuous breezes,  
and I succumb terrified of losing  
my priorities  
or you.*

# Ritual

*After this nightly ritual is over  
where we toss and turn, searching  
for that one position comfortable for two  
in the single bed that was all we could afford,  
your breath keeps me warm  
steady gusts like the furnace we turned down  
when the night came.*

*You are gone somewhere better than here.  
I wait, taking comfort in being surrounded by you  
the shape of your leg draped over mine,  
inspires free form colorful thought.*

*I am left contemplating the humidity of July days,  
pretending to be naughty children  
we play hooky from the tediousness of working  
hiding out in the close room we call home,  
becoming like water slides at the p  
To sleep, I must open the doors of my imagination  
and I am standing in a snowfall  
the moon caressing me.*

Christina Springer  
Yellow Springs, OH

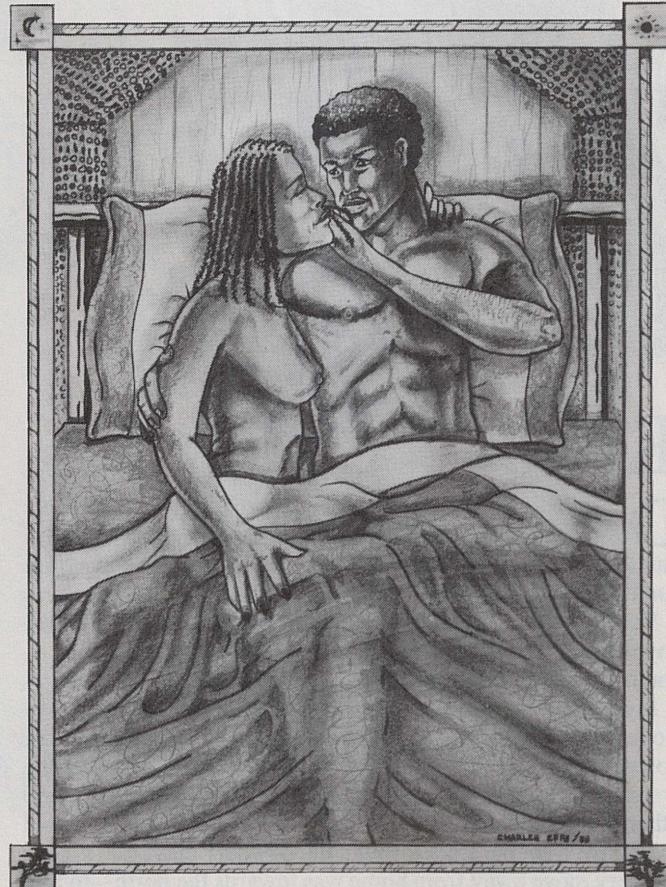


Illustration by Charles Epps

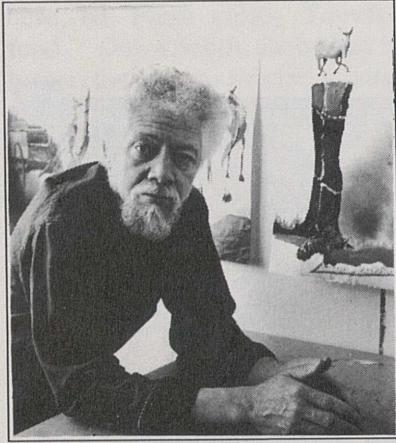
# Life Experiences

The Collages of Benny Andrews Exhibition

The Studio Museum in Harlem celebrates its 20th Anniversary with *The Collages of Benny Andrews*. The exhibition runs concurrently with **From The Studio: Artists-in-Residence, 1987-88** through February 26, 1989.

*The Collages of Benny Andrews*, guest curated by Donald Kuspit, Professor of Art History and Philosophy, State University at Stony Brook presents themes and images from Mr. Andrews' paintings dating from the 1950s through the 1970s. Andrews' urban paintings, such as *Gypsy* and *Seder*, show his fascination with the immigrants who were his earliest neighbors. *Edge of Reality* and *Artist as Artist* (self portraits), document contemporary history. Andrews' still-lifes and landscapes are represented with works such as *Interior with Objects* and *Still Life with Flowers and Two Apples*. *Executioner* and *Southern Pastures*, are more characteristic of Andrews' oeuvre.

continued on pg. 23



## Roads

Doesn't sound like much when I say that the little, red clay dirt road about a half-mile long ran right by my house and out to the big gravel dirt road to town. But nothing about my life could be complete without mentioning it.

Even today, I dream about walking along it to go someplace, anywhere. Even when my dreams get all mixed up with my past and my present, the road is very much a part of my life.

My family's two-room, wood frame house sat 100 yards down slope from the red clay road. Except when we, as children, went down into the woods to play, every place we went away from the house meant we'd go up to that little road. We walked. We had no other transportation. And, except for school, church, and cold spells, we went barefoot through the powdery clay.

Every move away from home was towards the north—follow the North Star. First to Madison, the county seat 3 miles away. Then Atlanta. Then, into the Air Force (a brief detour west) and

continued on pg. 22





## A PORTRAIT OF THE BLACK MADONNA

OIL AND COLLAGE ON CANVAS 36" H x 48" W  
©1987 BENNY ANDREWS

## Benny Andrews ROADS continued from pg. 20

on to Chicago, New York city and the world!

Sometimes with my brother Raymond and other times alone, childhood fantasies of being a cowboy, pilot, soldier of fortune, hobo, and world traveler resurface. These fantasies were fed by my reading everything I could get my hands on and seeing every moving picture I could afford. Pictures flash before me on command about those times and for, my art subject matter, I superimpose updated events over those experiences like one overlays transparent paper to do tracings. It's a bottomless well that I draw upon to fuel my creative juices. So much of my life's hopes have been lived in my imagination until it's often hard for me to fully appreciate the distance I've come from those days of poverty, blatant racist segregation and poor formal education. My recollections of my dreams and actual experiences are often interchangeable.

I do know that I knew I was going to get the hell out of my situation. I still don't know why I knew that, but I knew. It was like running an obstacle course and stepping on a lot of stink bombs along the way. Survival, both physical and mental, was like forging toward some predestined goal in the face of an onrushing and blinding rain with few let ups. Role models existed only in the world of make believe, the movies, comics and fiction stories. The real people and real world were either too limited in opportunities or just not worth wasting dreams on because what everything seemed to amount to was no where near enough to mean anything. So the only way to transcend this small and limited world was to dream and dream as big as I possibly could.

Often I had to get angry. I'd rerun the insults, the evils, the wrong doings that my family and race endured to obtain basic human needs. Other times I had to find ways to bring white people down to human scale. I'd look at these elevated individuals and strip them of their clothing, their whiteness and see them as naked human beings who had to perform the same basic functions that we do to exist; like going to the bathroom, eating, getting sick, growing old and dying. When hearing of important white people experiencing misfortunes, I was encouraged to know that no matter how white, how supposedly superior they were, they still had limitations. Those are thoughts that often occupied my mind as I walked along that little road. Thoughts of movie stars having to pee just like we did. That their clothing got dirty like ours and if they didn't brush their teeth, their breath smelled bad too.

Standing in the street outside the drugstore, handing the clerk your nickel for an ice cream cone through a little side window with a sign above it reading "Colored." The shame, the debasement, the indescribable pain of this and countless other daily experiences piled up inside you to an infinite height. Being poor,

*Unlike my life in the South, in the North my light complexion, blue eyes and freckles blurred my racial identity.*

and I mean POOR, and seeing wealth and affluence is another torture that will never leave me. To finish your main meal for the day still hungry, to be shooed away from playmates' houses at mealtimes because no one had enough to share, even crumbs, with neighbors. To go to school and never get more than a third of the way in tany of your hand-me-down, used textbooks from the white schools during the school year will always come back to plague me when I need to draw upon my education for use in my life's work. Having one teacher that had to teach all of the classes for seven grades and prepare a school lunch just doesn't sound possible. Yet Mrs. Bertha Douglass did just that at Plainview Elementary Rural School. No wonder I had so much time to dream when I was in school. It's also fortunate for me and my brothers and sisters that our mother literally held classes for the ten of us when we returned home from school.

I remember throwing rocks at birds and trees while walking home with classmates and trying to make out with the girls along the way by—seemingly innocent—running off into the bushes and playing hide and seek while getting incomplete little thrills. As we grew older, reaching ages that made us capable of reproducing ourselves, these teasing pleasures became career-ending clinchers when we succeeded in causing pregnancies. I remember those hot nights when we chased each other into the dark, beckoning bushes and produced the babies that grandmothers inherited for the rest of their lives.

I speak of anger. But, for us, anger was a luxury we could only express amongst ourselves. Too many times this expression led to horrible fights and death. The survivors supplied the chain gang with its laborers, plodding the roadside from sun up to sundown doing backbreaking labor like mummified maggots. The anger we experienced from whites was mostly verbal, like calling us "boy" or "girl," regardless of the individual's age. The highest term of respect was to call old, good (in the eyes of the whites) people "Uncle" or "Aunt." Meanwhile, we had to address all of them, except the young children, as "Mister" or "Missis" or "Miss."

Racism didn't contain itself in a neat line between whites and blacks; other factors dragged it across any such imaged lines. Being poor, coming from the country and being very light or very dark complexioned exposed one to additional discrimination and debasement. Only in dreaming could I filter out the impurities of reality. I could enter into the world of make believe that the movies and fiction stories projected. I could be *me*. That's why I liked and identified with the individuality of the cowboy, the hobo and, later, the artist. Through hell and high water they were satisfied with being themselves.

It'll always be a mystery and, I suppose, a miracle that anyone can keep so many emotions pent up for so long. I wonder how people who experienced what I did, and often worse, didn't just physically blow up one day. Actually, some did. They'd just quit, go crazy, kill someone or just collapse like shattered glass. Yet, a mind is a funny thing. Mine keeps on record, for instant recall,

*In public, they professed to be fair and unbiased in carrying out their professional responsibilities. In private, many of them were as racist...as any I'd experienced in my childhood.*

*...the only way to transcend this small and limited world was to dream and dream as big as I possibly could.*

the extremes. Along with the hunger, the shame, the environment of futility, there were sunny days, spring fruit, many games, and real life characters who made our lives livable.

Long after I left home, after those problems of blatant segregation and racism, poverty, being from the country, and poorly formally educated, the importance of being me never lessened. I continued to find special roads to walk and be alone within myself.

As much as I liked attending Fort Valley State College in Georgia, it still was segregated and never compared to any other well known institution. The black college students in Atlanta looked down on state college students as "hicks." I dreamt of being able to attend a major educational institution. One that could be used to measure others by. At Chicago Art Institute, for the first time in my life, I not only attended classes with whites, but I could go into the main libraries and museums like my white counterparts. I remember being invited to the homes of my white classmates to meet their parents, to have dinner! Here I was twenty-four years old and had never sat in a living room with white people before. When they asked me about myself, where I'd come from and about my family I found myself struggling for responses that I thought they would understand. Race was on my mind in everything I did, said or saw. I was totally immersed in race-related references, and I saw everything in the context of race.

Unlike my life in the South, in the North my light complexion, blue eyes and freckles blurred my racial identity. Again, I was challenged to be myself and not succumb to any drastic changes to satisfy some immediate social conventions. The roads I found in Chicago were Madison Street and Cottage Grove, the homes of the winos and the black community, respectively. I'd get myself away from the ideal world of the Art Institute and spend long hours in bars, restaurants and up and down Madison Street. I could strip away the veneer and be amongst the socially naked. I'd go over to Cottage Grove on Chicago's south side for another need, to find and be amongst the people I'd left in my home down South.

In New York City, I found roads to travel, only they became cities and countries. In 1962 I went to Mexico, Europe and the different regions of America and Canada, always getting away from where I am in order to get an understanding of where I was from.

In the 1960s, when the whole force of the black awareness movement hit America, I fell into it like a hand fitting into a glove. Though I never enjoyed picketing or being vocal in public forums about obvious racism in cultural institutions, I never had second thoughts about my responsibility to protest. In the process of protesting and meeting with representatives of the museums and art media, I gained another valuable experience.

Experiencing first hand titled individuals such as museum directors and curators and art critics and cultural news reporters

who lived one life publicly and another one in private. In public, they professed to be fair and unbiased in carrying out of their professional responsibilities. In private, many of them were as racist, and in some instances more so, as any I'd experienced in my childhood. What amazed me, and added to my education, was their ability to practice this insidious racism so effectively and with such diligence. Also, I learned that the quality of art that I'd aspired to attain in my own work often counted for little or nothing in their overall estimations of me and other artists. They had many other interests that were much more important in their evaluations than whether an art work was of quality or not. These "other interests" include sustaining the status quo and giving credit to only a token number of multi-cultural (minority) artists. Art selections are also affected by gallery dealers and museum personal interests. Museum directors, curators and art critics are guilty, too, of chasing the latest "styles" in art while neglecting the quality of art that they define as "dated." These and other hard realities of life and the arts keep me from ever feeling that I could let my guard down regarding my individualism.

I work hard getting exhibited, collected and published and I do receive a certain amount of satisfaction from achieving these goals. Nevertheless, I never lose sight of the temporary nature of success in any areas.



#### LIFE EXPERIENCES continued from pg. 20

Benny Andrews was born in Madison, Georgia in 1930. He moved to New York City in 1958, after receiving a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Mr. Andrews' works have been exhibited in The Museum of Modern Art, The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, The Art Institute of Chicago, The High Museum of Art, The Studio Museum in Harlem, and The Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo. He has also received awards from the John Hay Whitney Fellowship, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the MacDowell Colony.

The Studio Museum in Harlem is at 144 West 125th St., New York, NY 10027, (212) 864-4500.



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# Confession

*Yr heavings lift the sun  
As silently as breath escapes from yr lips  
Are welcome in the veins of my arms*

*You pour like honey into me  
And i'm a vessel for god's gift:  
A canvass spread on the landscapes  
Of Mississippi and Pittsburgh*

*Tuning my soprano saxophone  
Kissing the brownness in yr eyes  
Waiting cleanly for the cloudburst  
Of yr fluid finger paints*

*Baby, i become  
willingly brown red yellow white purple  
a lotus flower an olive branch a thorn  
All the things you taught me  
All the rays of Agostinho Neto  
Ida Wells Barnett Steven Biko Archie Shepp and Big  
Maybelle*

*W/you thru/you because of you  
Flowering out of you into me  
This revolutionary blackness  
On yr face in yr walk the trim of yr thighs  
Hold up my sky  
As I sing in my tenor voice  
The notes you paint on the canvass  
of my future*

*The moan that rises in us  
In the socialist breathing together  
is the fireflames of change  
As we fly on the anchors of jazz and blues  
Towards happiness*

*What i really want to confess  
Is that when you kiss me  
I can hear sun shine.*

Rob Penny  
Pittsburgh, PA

Rob Penny's play *Good Black Don't Crack*  
is now at the New Federal Theatre  
in New York City

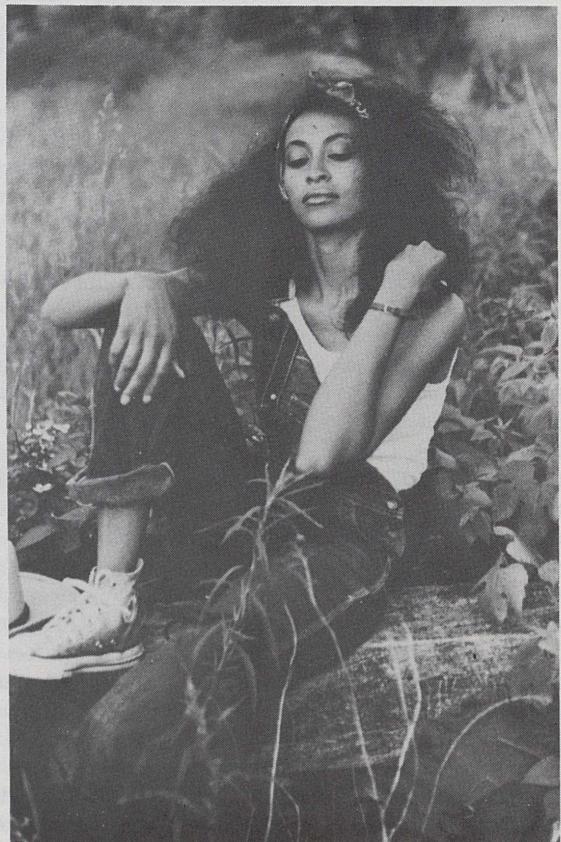
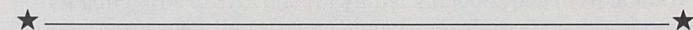
# Love Song

*If you really want me, really,  
you will be kind with me and fair.  
You will take only what I can give  
and remembering my needs  
love me long into my helpless nights.  
You will allow my kisses and slight fussing  
in the difficulty of a new day's opening*

*and I'll make french toast for you  
with lots of syrup  
and read the last few lines from night's  
closing poetry;  
and not forgetting soap for the shower  
or love poems on bathroom mirrors.*

*And maybe we'll mention our caring/and maybe not.  
What's morning without indecision.  
What's day break without orange juice and fresh  
possibility?  
What is poetry without your smile?*

Maisha Baton  
Albuquerque, NM



## Banana Yellow (Deletrice)

Kissed by chicks so fine and mellow,  
I once had a girl called Banana Yellow,  
Now she's gone and I'm to blame,  
Never had I met one with such a name, Deletrice!

I'd met her in a Midnight Bar,  
Where she invited me to ride in her car,  
But I had other things to do  
And said, "I'll be in touch with you."

Thirty days later I got in touch,  
N'er before had I loved so much,  
This Woman Deletrice set me aflame.  
Was sheer ecstasy, when she called my name,  
O Ahmed!

Two years later I went to jail,  
Had over two hundred thousand dollars bail  
They gave me a truck load of time,  
But Banana Yellow (Deletrice) stayed on my mind.

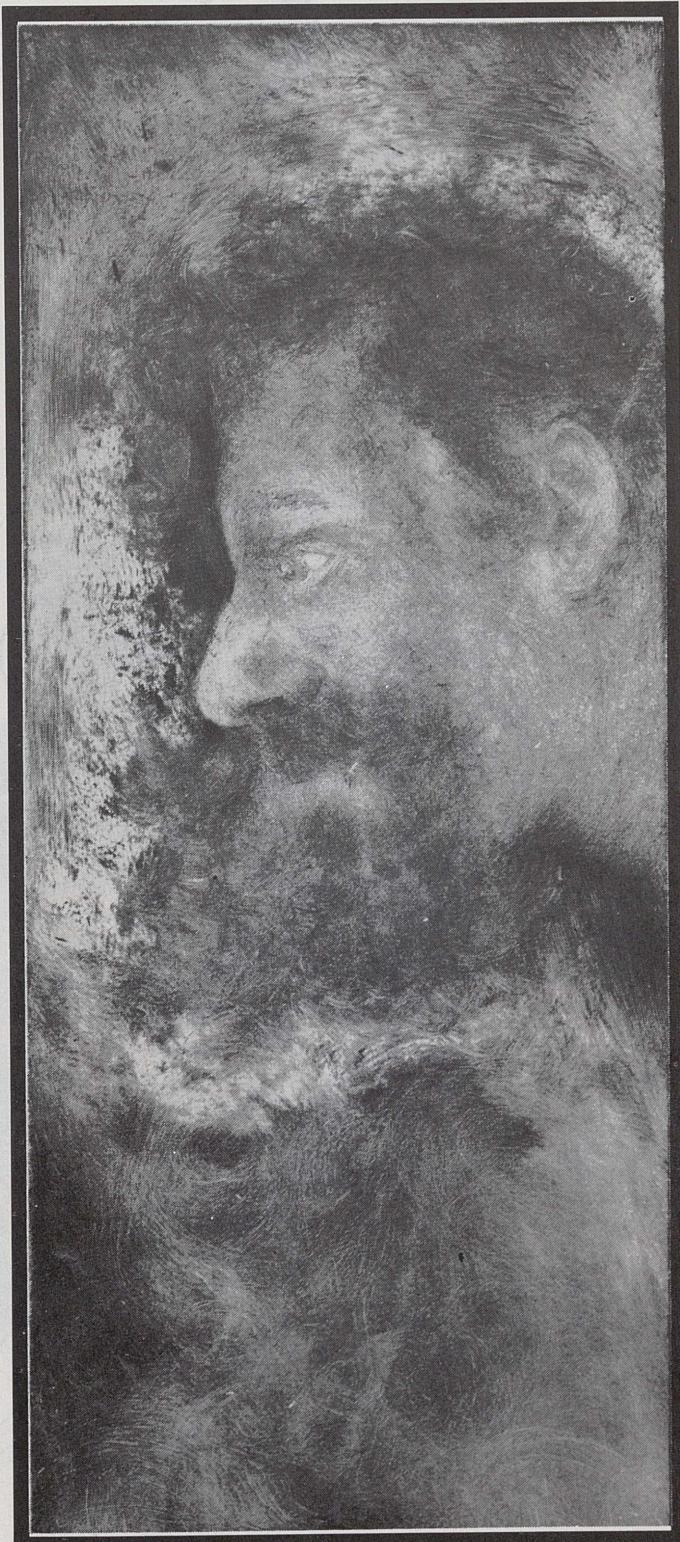
For six long years and seven months,  
I dreamed of Deletrice, and married her once,  
But finally the day of parting had come;  
When I said good-by, our love is done.

It hurt, deep in the core of my heart  
That I and Deletrice had to part.  
For the sake of keeping our love complete,  
I learned to take Bitter with Sweet.

Goodbye it must be, I had no choice,  
To end this Love, that once made me rejoice,  
But the pride of Manhood, made me act;  
I Loved you deeply Deletrice, and that's a fact!

Kissed by chicks so fine and mellow,  
I once had a girl I called Banana Yellow,  
Now she's gone and I'm the Blame.  
My Banana Yellow, I'll always remember your  
name,  
Deletrice...

Claud Gray  
Lewisburg, PA

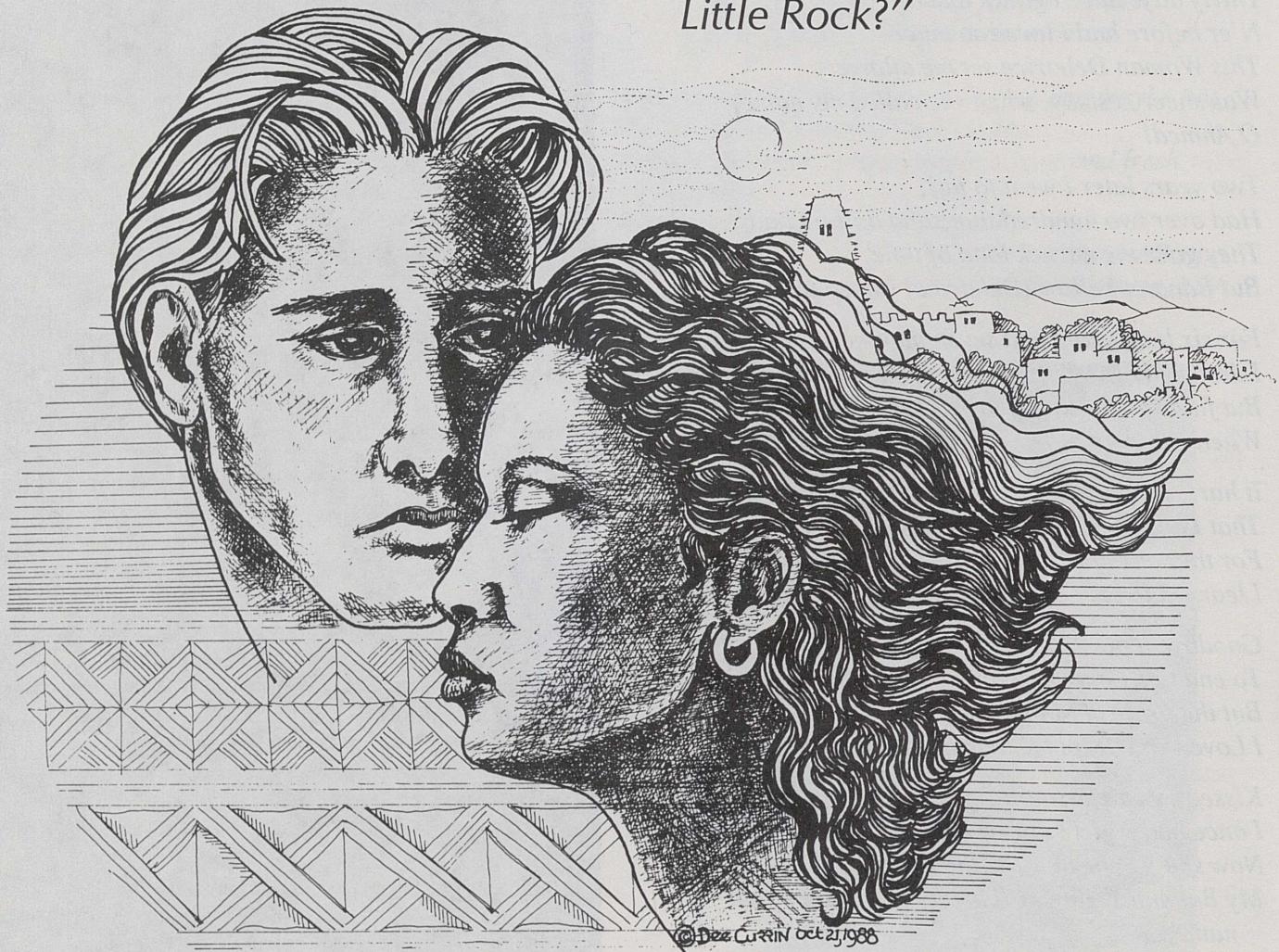


Cyrano deNoir  
by Jay Moon  
Minneapolis, MN

# Commitment S

by Tony Zurlo

*"And now that I've got you, I don't know what to do with you. Can't you lie out in the sun and get a deep tan or something before you come to Little Rock?"*



©Dee Currin Oct 25, 1988

Illustration ©1988 Dee Currin



**V**isions of Karen working at Ahmadu Bello hospital, soft brown complexion, her long sensuous legs outlined by her white nurses uniform—I could feel again her trembling body as Hausa rioters pelted her house with rocks thinking that she was an Ibo, not an American black. I've wondered if it was the same fear she'd felt back in Little Rock when she and eight friends were integrating Central High... Could a white teacher from Ft. Worth find happiness with a black nurse from Little Rock on the African savanna?

I slip on my jogging shoes and shorts and start out just as the sun is setting on the savanna. As I pass by the school compound some of my students, out tending their dorm gardens, run along side of me for a couple of minutes teasing me about the extra weight I'd put on over the past few months. After a year and a half, I'm still conscious of my color, a pale, fading white.

Soon, I'm alone, and I try to set a rhythm between my strides and breathing, but instead I'm thinking about Vietnam, some far-away, exotic land of yellow people—not black or white—and my brother, Jack, who has been over there for six months leading a platoon of boy-men of various colors, and I imagine I hear a rustling in the bush off to the side and I almost jump for cover—

How to get the thinking to go away, just for a few minutes? I look to the right half-expecting to see Karen jogging along side. I begin a cadence, counting each time my left foot hits the pavement: one, two; left...left...left... I ought to be preparing lessons for my classes, but what's the point? All anyone wants to talk about is the fighting, the riots and killings. But I don't care anymore, almost.

Has the Peace Corp been worth it? Karen is getting a lifetime worth of experience. No more attacks on her house. I don't get to see her as much now that she's been transferred to the hospital. She has a car available to drive into town, but she sometimes imagines she sees the rioters again, except they've all turned a pale, faded white. Do I dare ask her to drive in?

About all I've accomplished is dodging the draft. That's something, I guess, but what ever happened to involvement? commitment? Well, if I'd stayed in Ft. Worth—maybe the civil rights movement, the anti-poverty campaign, voter registration, VISTA. The goddamn list is endless. Maybe joining the Peace Corps was just a cover up for not getting personally involved at home... Got to stop thinking. Got to count. ONE, Inhale; TWO, Exhale; In-hale, Ex-hale. Slow, deep breaths, get the pattern, the rhythm. One, Karen. Two, Karen.

Almost past the empty savanna area with short bushy trees, like mesquite trees back in Texas, the land stretching out with slight undulations and prehistoric-looking rock formations and patined in soft hues of gray, tan, and green. Ah, the next curve and mile two. Time? 8:20. Not very good.

Pick up the pace. Go ahead, press it a little. One, two...Left...Left...

But the second mile is the more interesting part of the run, the part where I always slow down to check out the architecture. Some of the compounds are built from cement blocks with small rectangular window holes, one per side, and drainage vents cut out from the roof area about every ten feet, and then the whole building painted white. Some of these stretch for twenty or thirty yards along the road and have telephone and electrical wires crisscrossing from the streets into the middle of the compounds.

Now the rectangular houses built with blocks of dried mud, the walls cracked with uneven lines and chips, the wooden frames set into the mud, but no windows—just shutters to close out the rain and wind, and in the distance the minarets of the mosque, from where the familiar high-pitched cry of the muezzin will soon call the Moslems to evening prayer. Karen and I used to walk out to the main street on Fridays and watch the stream of bicycles and people on their way to Mosque.

Next, my favorite part of the run, along the road busy with children playing or helping their mothers with chores: carrying water from the wells, pounding guinea corn, or returning from the market with calabashes balanced on their heads. Most of the children wave, and I recognize most of their faces by now, even know some of their names. I try to place these smiles and bright eyes back in Ft. Worth, but I had always avoided the black sections of towns, and I can't recall if little black girls in the states dress this way or not.

I call out to one small girl wearing a blue and yellow and brown cloth, with triangular designs, wrapped around her hips and a green and yellow checkered blouse. Her hair is covered with a black, yellow, and red striped scarf tied in the back.

"A'isha! Sannu." She waves back and smiles shyly, her shiny dark eyes looking up at me. Like most young girls in the North, she wears lots of costume jewelry. They look very much like miniature adults. I see Karen in every face and want to sweep them up into my arms.

The boys, though, look very bland in their wrinkled, white, loose-fitting pullovers opened at the neck, and white shorts. Several of the boys run along side and raise their fists in greeting.

"Sannu Baba. Sannu Mohamed. Sannu Suleman."

"Sannu Bature," they all chime together in response.

"Ina gajiya?" I ask.

"Ina iyali?"

"Lafiya lau," they answer.

"To, madalla." Once again I'm struck by the musical sounds of the language, the special attention to tones in language that I'd become aware of listening to and trying to speak Hausa.

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COMMITMENTS continued from pg. 27

The boys trail off as always, and will wait for me to make the turn at the city wall and come back by. So I go on, slowing down frequently to greet a friend or anyone else who speaks. Not a bad place to live? If you're a Batuuree—a European. A very dangerous place if you're an Ibo or look like one.

Finally, I reach the edge of the old city with its aged mud wall, in some places still eight to ten feet high; and I start back for the last two and one-half miles. Most of the time I'd run just two miles, one to the beginning of the white-washed compounds and the return to

my house. But this time I'm determined to turn off the thinking for a few minutes, even if I have to run to the end of the savanna, far into the darkness.

Two small girls wave as I run by, and I pass men on bicycles and several Hausa peddlers on their way home from the market, and I pick up speed as I approach the stretch of savanna again, the last mile, and my strides and breathing are in perfect unison, and for the last mile I'm hardly aware of the familiar landmarks or the handful of students who yell to me as I sprint the final 200 yards to my house. And in my head a

chorus chanting with each stride: "Kar-en, Kar-en."

Back at the house, I find a letter from home, so I drink some juice and sit down on the couch to read it. The nightmares again? No, this time they're real. Jack had just arrived at the veteran's hospital in Dallas paralyzed from the waist down. He'd been hit during an ambush while on patrol. The news, as bad as it sounds, though, is somewhat of a relief, having anticipated even worse for months, considering his aggressive nature. In the same letter—more disaster: Louis had died mysteriously in



## *Songs they could sing for Roland*

*how long will I tremble at your touch  
these short forevers in love's monsoon  
when we woo small catastrophes  
and mingle vulnerabilities, matching  
types of blood. will this one sustain  
what foreign bodies contained in spiral  
and jab of wind whose lashing tears  
drain sight of any clarity you. you. you.*

*in each flesh song, reminders. celebrations  
of defying sorrow's monologue. confirmations  
of accepting bond, by motion's lust for motion  
by storm's mandatory respite. when  
when it slows, when the fury of search,  
secure or shred, slows to damp breath  
of breeze, will clear eye of fresh air sparkle,  
suntoothed and handwashed, will the juiced land  
grow food for lesser seasons.*

Akua Lezli Hope  
New York

## *The Politics of Sex*

*She makes love the way a nominee  
shakes hands.*

*With that sweet sluice,  
that slice of cherry pie, she bears  
like a mandate—wears as smiles  
are worn in cheering crowds—she  
crowds the opposition out: routs  
rivals, then retires to statesmanship.  
Recall is tried; impeach that cleft  
of peach! the people cry. The people  
cry; she dries their tears, and feeds  
them policy. They see she will not  
budge: she budgets self to serve  
the state. They wait till she retires,  
or tires; select her queen-elect.*

John Ditsky  
Windsor, Ontario Canada



# The Ballad of the Honey-Flowers

(The following is an excerpt from a letter by an Afro-American soldier who was killed in action in Viet Nam.)

While dancing on a puppet's string  
the violins all honey-colored, honey-hurry  
soon begin to sing  
of riddles of new Blue-grass fiddles.  
The green scissors foxtails offair weather  
well, will wither  
with willow whips that snap into,  
as brittle broken promises, sheared a little  
as love sharpened to cruel, fine points of view,  
the sweet honey-blood which leaves  
love's sad wedding ringed  
in bands of sticks and silver leaves.  
The naked willow whistles in glitter lure  
grieves, will leave, the willows will  
its will will shed sad, lost tender tears  
when loves bright purpose has turned to bad.  
Their honey-love, the mad insanity achieves  
a numerous sort of message  
of the honey-sage, a sweet painful thing,  
the April sting.  
That's love as seen for the first time.  
Experience, the honey heart-ache,  
goes beating the early Spring.  
That's how love starts  
as humming birds and honey bees.

The crying of sad tomorrow, someone will  
weep  
alone among the leaves.  
So honey-hanged the willow trees to  
gladness.  
Forget the shower of their lonely sorrow.  
Of honey love at play, that's neither here  
nor there to say.  
Sweet heart's ease; the honey bees flower  
blossom ecstasy  
each start to petal part with honey-love,  
the sweet-ache ringing.  
The honey heart beat.  
Somewhere between the middlin' gold,  
the honey-road to April's moments.  
The honey-run racing wildly in the melting  
sun.  
Love skipping as an orchestra of insects  
untuned.  
Some where doesn't ring as true. Its honey  
dew.  
The scent of love that clings to you.  
Its loving you. Its honey-breath.  
Its true! Its true!  
Of you! Of you! The honey-flower.

They play a thousand strings strung  
as sung by a chorus of enchanted  
Grasshoppers,  
each one giddy on the nectar of love's  
honeyed sweetness.  
Give honey! Give honey! Or I'll kill you!  
Spring's promise in the music,  
her honey-flower promise,  
seen pure as Pierian crystal-glazed still  
clearer.  
The happy honey marriage ring, the  
special view.  
They play before the wedding of the band  
of  
honey-bandits, the ladrones.  
You and me in April, may be very well.  
I, a black honey soldier of Viet Nam's  
leave for me  
to look at the amber hours of the honey-  
suckle roses,  
to hear the ballad of the honey-flowers.

Raymond W. Burke  
W. Sacramento, CA

## Commitments

India, and his body was being shipped back to Fort Worth for burial, the services to be held in a couple of weeks. What else could happen? Tears are burning my eyes. Who's next? Karen? I call her at the hospital and ask her if she'll come over.

"God, I'm glad you're here. I'm not sure I can take any more without going crazy." I tell her about Jack, that at best he probably wouldn't walk again. "And Louis is dead." I have to take deep breaths to calm down. "And Christopher and other Ibos—dead or being driven from their homes... I just can't handle it. I guess I'm afraid. At least you're working at the hospital now, so I don't have to worry about you, too."

She watches me, waiting, and I can tell she has something she wants to talk

about, too. But she's patient, patient to a fault sometimes.

"Mom kind of wants me to be there, Karen. So, I'm thinking that maybe I need to go home." How can I leave without her?

Karen stays seated, but turns toward the living room window and the darkening sky. The early stars are twinkling, suggesting a clear night with a full moon. On nights like this we often sit on the steps and gaze out at the savanna, and tonight it's so bright that we can almost identify movements on the horizon. Once we had even proven that a person can actually read by the moonlight.

But tonight we stay inside without any lights on. I'm on the couch looking over at her, and suddenly I realize that I've been in love with her right from the start, and that only the question of race

is keeping us apart. But not finding the words or courage to tell her in person, I can only watch her outline against the gray light as she gets up and walks over to the window.

"There's a strange beauty to nights like this, isn't there?" she says. "Is it like this in Ft. Worth?" It's a familiar but soothing conversation. Just hearing her voice in person calms me.

"Yes, a lot like this."

"We've got too many hills in Little Rock. Any news from home?" She waits for a response.

"Karen..." I walk over to her. "Just listen for a minute, okay?"

"I'm listening." She keeps looking out at the night.

"You know, I can't imagine making it this long without you," I say, looking out the window also. "And now Jack

*continued on pg. 30*

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Illustration ©1988 by Dee Currin

★  
and Louis.’’ Then I put my hand on her shoulder, and she reaches up and touches my hand, and a warm rush spreads through my body.

‘‘Paul . . . ’’

‘‘Damnit, Karen. I’ve used race as an excuse for too long.’’ I turn to face her, my body casting a shadow across her face, but her clear eyes are bright in the moonlight. The room, our shadows, the setting, a geometric design in black and white, a plain and simple scene out of an earlier era of romantic movie sets: silhouettes of arms reaching—hands to cheeks—faces in profile closing on each other in slow motion.

Neither of us say much, our intentions being clear from glances and touches. We embrace, and I hold on tightly, as if becoming one might change the course of events, or at least make the two of us immune from events and from the pain and sadness of our friends’ deaths, immune to the turmoil and hopelessness—as if for one night, we can squeeze the whole world out of our minds.

We stand in each others’ arms for a long time, watching faint shadows in the night edge closer and then farther away; listening to dogs bark and the talking drums from the nearby village and the chatter and laughter from the compound

behind the house, watching a land glowing beneath the starry sky, eventually not a blade of grass moving, just absolute stillness from the view at the window.

The moon progresses westward, and we stand in starlight, no longer identifiable silhouettes, but one darkened shadow rising and moving to an inaudible melody into the bedroom. In the darkness we undress each other, slowly kissing and exploring. Then with the night sounds blending into a harmonious background, we raise the white mosquito netting from the bed and lie down together on the cool sheets, our bodies burning and hands clinging to each other. We make love, slowly at first, conscious of the drumming outside growing louder and faster and of the orange tinge to the sky from small fires started by night people seeking light and warmth. Soon, however, our passions become one force, no longer two independent desires, and our desire seems insatiable.

Afterward, we lie together for nearly an hour in silence, drifting in that timeless zone beyond worries, my face glowing from within. We hold hands and listen again to the night, the owls, insects, and other animals sounds we can’t identify. The drumming has stopped, and the fires have grown dim, and we drift into a peaceful sleep.

I wait in the kitchen the next morning, after my most restful night since arriving in Nigeria. Nothing has changed, I tell myself, but quickly realize that's wrong, more of a knee-jerk reaction to believe that because of race Karen and I could never be romantically involved with each other. But why couldn't we? Am I that much a victim—a product—of white prejudice? "Bull shit!" I glance self-consciously into the living room, afraid she might have heard me. If I love her... but is it really love? How could I know?

The coffee is perking, so I turn the gas flame down and pour myself a cup, black, something to jar me back to earth, to help me see this whole situation clearly in the morning light.

"Coffee hot?"

Turning, I know immediately by the rush that I don't need the morning sunrise or afternoon sunset to help me; I know I'm hopelessly in love with the sleepy-eyed woman leaning against the door, a short-sleeve football jersey hanging down past her hips, covering but clinging to the curves of her body. I want her again, immediately, but the intensity of my passion surprises and embarrasses me. She might have a totally different feeling about last night. "Let me get you a cup of coffee," I offer.

Her smile creeps up the left side of her face, the way it does when she's got the devil in her mind, and she says, "I'd like mine in bed, white boy."

I bring both cups into the bedroom, and we sit up together sipping coffee, enjoying the cool morning. The sky is already a bright blue, and I know dozens of couples have parted after their morning coffee and gone off to work, and in the still air laughter drifts over from the highway.

She waits. I kiss her, but that isn't the devil in her mind I'd expected, so I lean back and say, "Karen, you want to know what I think?"

"I do, Paul, very much."

"Please, don't say 'I do,' yet. Karen, I love you. There. You know how that'll play in Ft. Worth."

"About the same as it'll play in Little Rock. So where do we go from here?"

I run my fingers through her hair. "I've got to go back. Mom'll need help with Jack, and I've got to go to Louis's funeral. I just have to be back there."

"Do you think the Peace Corps would give you extra time off and let you make it up?"

"I don't know. And I don't really care. I need to be with mom, at least until Jack gets out of the hospital. So I don't think there's much point in planning to come back here. I'll just have to terminate early for personal reasons. But Karen, we've got to talk about us."

Am I being realistic? A black woman who will be spending the next five or six years of her life becoming a doctor—would she even consider marrying me? Would it be impossible to make it as a couple back in the states? Other interracial couples do it. "Karen, shouldn't we consider our future? Together?"

"I think we should, Paul. And we should see each other as soon as I get back to the states."

"I could drive up to Little Rock. It's only a seven hour drive, at best."

She places her hands on my cheeks and looks directly into my eyes. "It was the nicest, most precious time I've ever spent with a man, Paul. But to tell you the truth, I don't know what to do

about us. I have very positive feelings about us. But I also have a family to consider, just like you do. I mean, how they feel is important to me."

I turn away. Again, the racial issue. "Karen, if we drop it, just say 'Thanks, it's been nice, have a good life.' I think we'd be making a big mistake. Our families should not dictate the rules for our future happiness."

"If you really want to know the truth, Paul Harris, I've been chasing you for two years. And now that I've got you, I don't know what to do with you. Can't you lie out in the sun and get a deep tan or something before you come to Little Rock?"

"We could paint me brown, or you white, I guess. When do we meet? Where? Do we tell our families ahead of time?" I am full of unanswered questions.

Karen reaches over and holds my hands. "I need some time to think. I'm not avoiding the issue, believe me."

"I understand. Listen, I'm not saying we should rush into something so serious, with all the problems we'll have as a mixed couple, but damnit, we've got to look at this first of all like two people in love. Any two people, without regards to race."

Karen bounces out of bed and begins dressing. Looking at me, she gives me a variation of that left-faced grin and says, "Oh, I know. You'd like to live together first. Right? Men!"

"Maybe. I don't know. That might be something to consider, though. Lots of people do that today, you know. We could go back to L.A. Out there they don't seem to care all that much about what color a person is. I could teach at the high school, and you could get a job at the hospital."

"You in Watts? We'll have to talk about that. Okay, Paul. I told you I need to think about this." She turns to me and winks. "Listen, I've got to go now."

"Love 'em and leave 'em. What am I, a one-night stand? I'm not that kind of man."

She picks up a pillow and throws it at me, and I return it. She grabs me and we wrestle to the bed and she starts hitting me with a pillow. "I'm not going to stay here and take that kind of abuse. Of course you're a one-night stand. A one-night, white-knight stand," she says. I throw my hands up in surrender, put on some jeans, and go to the kitchen for another cup of coffee.

"When are you leaving, Paul?"

"Probably in three or four days. I'll make arrangements today."

She walks over and kisses me. "Okay. I'm going home so I can think all of this over. Give me until tomorrow night, and I'll have some ideas. I'll call you. I won't have all the answers, but there'll be possibilities."



Tony Zurlo is an assistant professor of English at Wright State University—Lake Campus where he teaches courses in non-Western and American literature (including African and Asian lit), creative writing, African history and culture, and Japanese history and culture.

He has published poetry and short fiction in *Coe Review*, *The Colorado-North Review*, *Dan River Anthology*, *Flights*, *Kerouac Connection*, *Network Africa*, and *Okike*.

Zurlo spent the month of December, 1986, as a fellow at the Yaddo Writer's Colony, where he completed *Journals*. He's now working on his third novel, with a tentative title of *Charlie's Voice*.

# Meltdown, By Candlelight

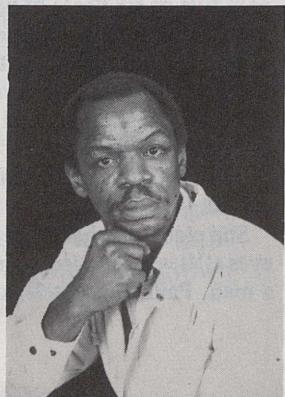
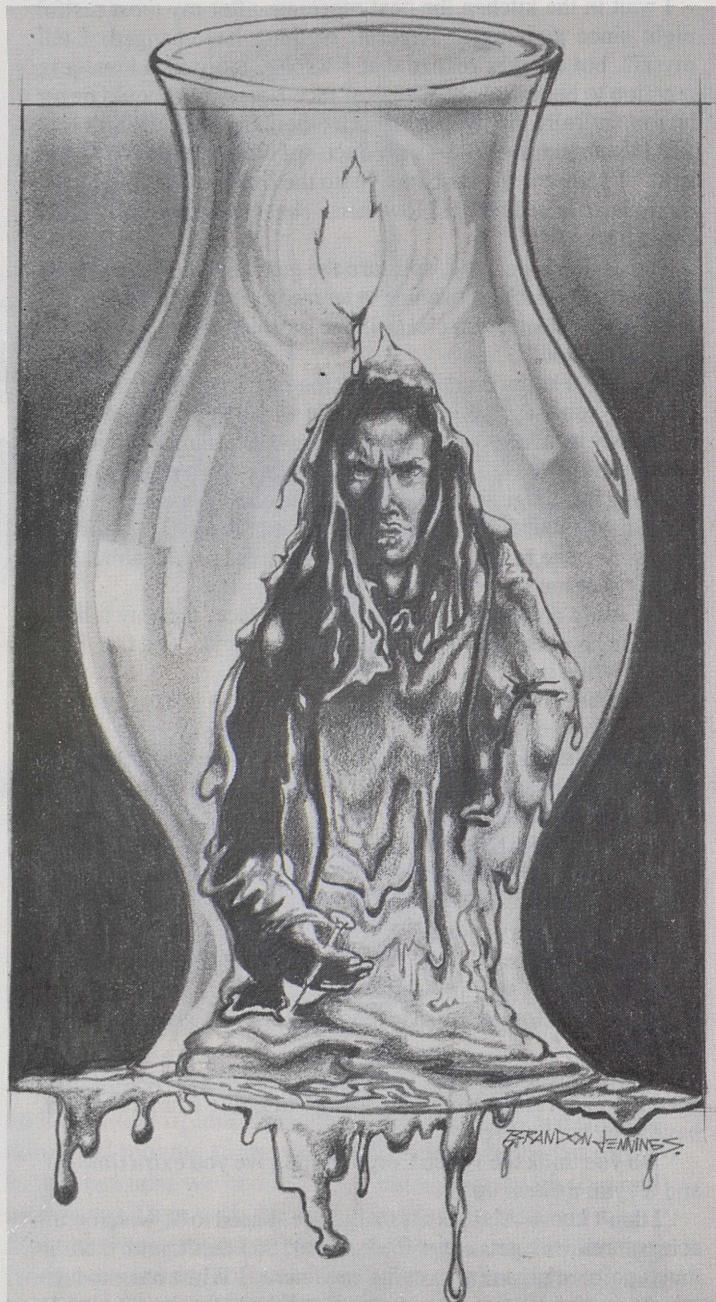
*Her  
Affair,  
With the junkie  
Was strictly platonic,  
At least that's the  
Way she 'splained  
It to him.*

*Now he can't find her,  
To tell her 'bout the  
AIDS that's consumin'  
Him from the inside  
Out. And 'friends' be  
Makin' jokes 'bout  
Your dark comin' to  
Light. But ain't nothin'  
Funny or romantic...  
'Bout a candle meltin'  
In the moonlight and  
You know the sun ain't  
Comin' up...*

Charles Cannon  
Spartanburg, SC

Charles Cannon was born in 1944 in Durham, N.C., and attended public schools in Detroit, Chicago, Asheville, N.C. and Greensboro, N.C.

He attended Warren Wilson College, in Swannanoa, N.C. and started writing poetry in 1970. Cannon won the T. Henry Wilson poetry award at Warren Wilson College in 1970 and again in 1971. He also won first place in the poetry division of The Queens College (Charlotte, N.C.) Literary Contest in 1970 and had a small volume of poetry, titled St. Nigger, published by Broadsides Press (Detroit, Mich.) in 1971.



# QUIZ

*Following are romantic excerpts from five novels and two plays. Can you match the text to the title?*

*Answers to the Quiz are on page 36.*

1. . . . the soft mound of her belly whispered to him, and his mind reached down and kneaded it ever so gently until it was supple and waiting. And then the tip of his tongue played round and round the small cavern in the center of her stomach, while the hands tried to memorize every curve and texture of the inner thighs and lightly pressed outward to widen the legs so they could move through them and get lost in the eternity of softness on her behind. And she would wait and wait, getting fuller and fuller until finally pleading with him to do something—anything—to stop the expansion before she burst open her skin and lay in a million pieces among the roots of the trees and the leaves of the tiny basil.

- a) *The Women of Brewster Place* by Gloria Naylor
- b) *Sounder* by William Armstrong
- c) *The Harder They Come* by Michael Thelwell

2. When he was gone I shut the window and said, "Oh, God! Not the garbageman! Please!"

I always woke up when the garbagemen came after that. Well, really you couldn't help it. But I didn't allow myself to look out there. Can you imagin . . . fallin in love when your eyes meet across a crowded garage can?! I didn't want no poor garbageman! No Lord!

One morning tho, they made so much noise I looked out the kitchen window again. He was just astandin there banging that can down on the ground! When he saw me he smiled. I opened the window some more, leaned out and said, "What's wrong with you? Makin all that noise! It's six-thirty in the mornin!"

He smiled on. "Girl! What's your day off? I want to see the rest of you hangin on the other side of that window!"

- a) *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*
- b) *Sent for you Yesterday* by John Wideman
- c) *Some Soul to Keep* by J. California Cooper

3. Asagai: Yes! . . . (Smiling and lifting his arms playfully.) Three hundred years later the African Prince rose up out of the seas and swept the maiden back across the middle passage over which her ancestors had come—

Beneatha: (Unable to play.) Nigeria?

Asagai: Nigeria. Home. (Coming to her with genuine romantic flippancy.) I will show you our mountains and our stars; and give you cool drinks from gourds and teach you the old songs and the ways of our people—and, in time, we will pretend that—(Very softly.)—you have only been away for a day—

- a) *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry
- b) *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* by August Wilson
- c) *Dream Girls*

4. One day I thought it would help the women's classes if I took her—just because she happened to be an instructor, to the Museum of Natural History. I wanted to show her some Museum displays having to do with the tree of evolution, that would help her in her lectures . . . When I mentioned my idea to Sister Betty X, I made it very clear that it was just to help her lectures to be sisters. I had even convinced myself that this was the only reason.

- a) *Learning Tree* by Gordon Parks
- b) *Brown Girl* by Paule Marshall
- c) *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

5. She led him to the top of the stairs where light came straight from the sky because the second-story windows of that house had been placed in the pitched ceiling and not the walls. There were two rooms and she took him into one of them, hoping he wouldn't mind the fact that she was not prepared; that though she could remember desire, she had forgotten how it worked; the clutch and helplessness that resided in the hands; how blindness was altered so that what leapt to the eye were places to lie down, and all else—door knobs, straps, hooks, the sadness that crouched in corners, and the passing of time—was interference.

- a) *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker
- b) *Beloved* by Toni Morrison
- c) *Native Son* by Richard Wright

6. She didn't even feel the house shake when the train rumbled past her bedroom window.

And Spooky took his time with her. He licked her skin in slow motion, the way a kitten licks milk from a bowl. He swirled his tongue around in her ears at 33 rpm's, until Mildred felt like she would boil over. She had never, ever, experienced this kind of passion before. And when the room grew completely black and his warm pressure amplified inside her, she screamed out his name three octaves higher than her normal voice.

- a) *Chaneysville Incident* by David Bradley
- b) *Mama* by Terry McMillan
- c) *Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison

7. (He says): That explains the whole thing—no wonder; you missed the most important part of being somebody.

Lutiebelle: I have? What part is that?

(He says): Love—being appreciated, and sought out, and looked after; being fought to the bitter end over even.

Lutiebelle: Oh, I have missed that, Reb'n . . . , I really have. Take mens—all my life they never looked at me the way other girls get looked at!

(He says): That's not so. The very first time I saw you—right there in the junior choir—I give you that look!

- a) *Purlie Victorious*
- b) *Porgy and Bess*
- c) *Your Arms Too Short to Box With God*

# November Kiss

*He wants one more kiss  
under brisk November mornings,  
desires one more fresh water memory between layers of reggae rhythms  
& the mellow madness of one too many Tequila Sunrise & Yellowbird Quenchers.*

*He ask that I be all his.*

*I ask that Fannie Lou Hamer, Ida Barnett & Malcolm  
be Generals in our liberation.*

*I poured my soul into his arms & the beat of my heart  
accepted the rhythm of his stride-strong as the stubborn hope of  
Nelson Mandela.*

*He ask that I be all his.*

*His song is the chorus of my life  
His statue, the height of my harmolodics  
His face, the mirror of my strength  
&  
Our ancestors' blessings are the rewards of our love.*

*I placed his name at the tip of my sensibilities  
His love spilled into the recesses of my spirit  
like the notes of Trane gushing into the veins of Jazz's measures.*

*He still ask that I be all his.*

*Unless he's going to allow my blood to flow through his veins  
my soul to peer through his eyes & my ankles to know the touch  
his feet make upon the earth, then*

*He may know that  
since that first November kiss &  
since our ancestors witnessed the birth of Creation.  
I have been his.*

by Valerie Lawrence  
Pittsburgh, PA

## THANK YOU

This issue completes *Shooting Star Review*'s second year. At this time, several individuals who generously and selflessly volunteered their time and considerable talent, must be thanked. Although they are no longer able to continue on a volunteer basis, we feel it's important to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of

- Jeffrey Allen—Graphic Design
- Robert Brevard—Graphic Design
- Toni McKain—Fiction Editor.

# Homemade Love

By J. California Cooper

Book reviewed by Rob Penny

You can purchase the book at your local bookstore, but you can not buy "homemade love" at Bloomingdale's, Sears or McDonald's, because, as Cooper says in her Author's Notes, "it is love that is not bought, not wrapped in fancy packaging with glib lines that often lie."

Cooper is absolutely correct in her definition. And the thirteen stories that comprise this collection are in no way padded with "glib lines that lie," or slow the movement, revelation, or entertainment in any of the stories.

Reading through the book, I immediately discover that Cooper's language and characters are folk, country and alive, human being, living within and out of the African American cultural traditions. The form and essence of her stories are shaped by the oral forms of story-telling, tall-tales, call and response, and fables. Each story is profoundly filled with aphorisms on life, love, choices, and human relationships. Really what brings her stories and characters home is the presence of the "mother voice" that punctuates the intelligence of the characters (here I am referring to those marvelous females who strut and switch and move their neck like a chicken while expressing truth).

The magical black voice of Cooper's characters, beginning with the very first lines of each and every story, actually draws you right into the character's world.

"Swimming to the Top of the Rain," a poetic line in itself, is the first story in the book. The story begins:

Mothers are something ain't they? They mostly the one person you can count on! All your life... if they live. Most mothers be your friend and love you no matter what you do! I bet mine was that way. You ain't never known nobody didn't have one, so they must be something.

This is the same mother-like voice I hear in the music of John Lee Hooker, Billie Holiday, Thomas Dorsey, early Issac

Hayes and Smokey Robinson. I read this voice in the writings of Langston Hughes, Alice Walker, Zora Neal Hurston, Ernest Gaines, and the folk and blues poetry of Sterling A. Brown.

But Cooper's story paintings reveal much more of the creative meadows in black folk culture than most writers I have read. Her stories show that women are the true cultural bearers of wisdom, corrective values, and common sense—which reaches illumination and the stature of psychologists and philosophers. Reading her stories, you realize, finally, at last, an for true, even as we travel into the 21st Century, that women are the latter two personae rolled into one in the Afro-American Nation. Cooper's women are intelligent and earthy.

"Don't nobody who love you want to see you, or even hear of you, being in nobody's else's arms making love."

"If you ever find a old whore who's happy, you done found a needle in the hay."

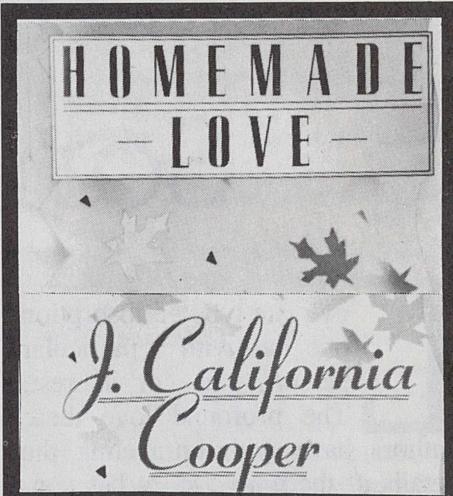
"Don't nothing but a fool give... hard-earned money away."

"Love sure must be something if it makes you change your whole mind about life."

All of the above appears in just one story. But don't run out and purchase the book yet, there's more.

In another story, Cooper says, "It's a old saying, if a thing starts out too good it's going to end up bad... and if it start out bad, it's going to end up good. Well, old sayings been around long enough to get old, so it must be some truth to em."

Let me assure you right now that these are not preachy or patronizing stories. They are uplifting, humorous, poignant, diversified, educational, and entertaining. Cooper's writing has vitality. It makes way for change. The Black Aesthetic shown here has beauty, worth, dignity and integri-



Book reviewed by Rob Penny

ty. I realize, reading these stories, that I have been invited into the worlds of people who have sung me into their song; a community of human beings, who are willing to be up front and to share with me their personal and collective parts without any pretense.

Cooper's book is a testament to black people and black folklore's dynamism, i.e., that the essence of the African in America can be a liberating force, and that black women writers are not abstracts or things, but are, and have always been, leaders in the black struggle and the black arts.

Above all, Cooper, for me is an African-American artist who uses her creativity within a cultural context. This method ensures that her creations are not generic or designer-packaged. They are ethno-universal characters.

So, remember, I've had me some homemade love. And if you want some, well, read this book, and see how good it is for you.

Joan "California" Cooper, born in Berkeley, California in the 1930's. Currently resides in Oakland, CA. Her writing style has been compared to that of Tennessee Williams (hence the name "California"), Langston Hughes, Zora Neal Hurston and Alice Walker. A "closet writer" since childhood, discovered and first produced in the 1970's by Nora Vaughan of the Berkeley Black Repertory Theatre. She has written 17 plus plays. Her dramas have appeared on stage, public television, radio and college campuses. In 1984, Alice Walker, Wild Trees Press, published Cooper's *A Piece of Mine*, a collection of short stories. Cooper was named Playwright of the Year in 1978 for her play "Strangers."

# The Journey of the Songhai People

**L**ove is a type of absorption one has with a particular person, place or interest. The profound love these authors have with unraveling the details of the untold story has contributed immensely to reconstructive history. They have courted the memories of elders, reminised with oral historians, and romanced the collections of many research facilities.

The result is this piercing commentary illuminating much of what was thought to be irretrievable information about an African people. Central to an understanding of this reading is a knowledge of the role of PAFO (Pan African Federation Organization). This role is twofold: First, to teach black history and secondly, to provide a map for substantially more ethnic cohesion. "To save us from historical oblivion is the reason for PAFO's existence."

Among the foci is the impact of subliminal seduction, the sociological systems under which blacks function. Divided into twenty three compelling and thought-provoking, action activating sessions, the book puts forth a directive that each of us needs to read, internalize and act upon. For example, the African system of kinship considers the group first and the individual second. Such hierarchical construction fosters a deep level of ethnicity and responds to the question, "Where should loyalties lie?" There lies within the pages that address the purpose and goals, a critical

plan for parenting. Interspersed through-out the text are excellent bibliographical references.

Strengthening suggestions for tightening might include identifying and replacing generalities and specifics, such as "some psychologists and sociologists say" and "the geologists tell us..." The book becomes less convincing when reading segments like the author's comparison of a black to a white counterpart seemingly to validate or emphasize positivism as with Arthur Schomburg, the Black Sherlock Holmes of Black History (pg. 25). Black accomplishment should be significant and meritorious enough not to be compared to a majority population figure as if the sleuthness of Holmes were of greater superiority.

A glossary would have been an added convenience for the novice but the many truisms such as "the mind will provide whatever it concentrates on" (pg. 98) will be duly retained.

Did you ever wonder what Blacks were doing in 1066 while your history or English teacher was vividly explaining the significance of the Norman Conquest? Read page 68. This and other personal reminders within the text provide the kindling which allows one to digest the text or alleviate the recurring anxiety or excitement that prevails throughout. It becomes extremely easy to articulate an "amen" or a "so true" to the passages that are reminiscent of not so

distant experiences. The authors description of the texture of hair and recalling Alice Walker's Founders' Day speech on hair at Spelman are illustrative. *Journey of the Songhai People* is one of the best \$13.95 investments you will ever make.

Reviewed by Irene Owens,  
Rutgers University

Robinson, Calvin and Rednan Battle and Edward Robinson, Jr. *The Journey of the Songhai People*. Philadelphia: Farmer Press, 1987.

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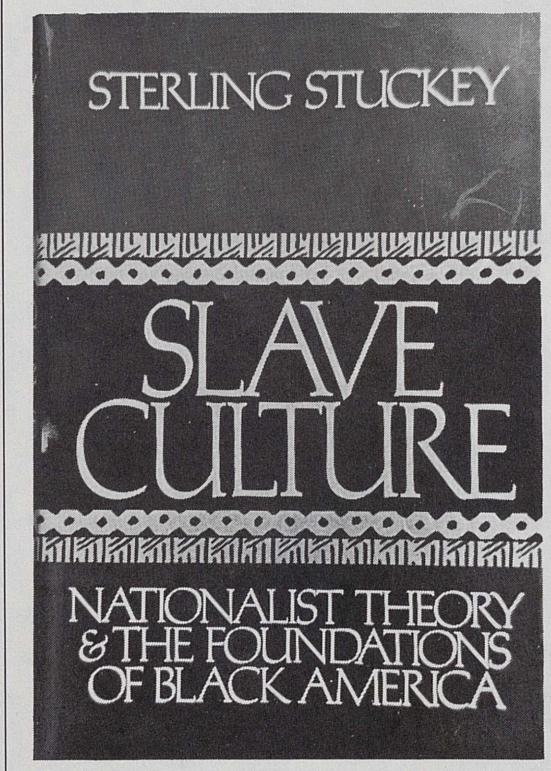


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#### QUIZ ANSWERS: (from page 33)

1. a. The Women of Brewster Place
2. c. Some Soul to Keep
3. a. A Raisin in the Sun
4. c. The Autobiography of Malcolm X
5. b. Beloved
6. b. MAMA
7. a. Purlie Victorious

# SLAVE CULTURE



Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America

Sterling Stuckey  
New York: Oxford 1987  
358 pages

Review by Michael Trotman  
New York City

**B**lack nationalism in the United States has always been an exercise in identity. Contradictions and ambiguity in the definitions tend to reflect our struggle for belonging and a struggle beneath that not to define ourselves solely in terms of our oppression.

Memory is short and not very deep. Thus the most recent spasm of black nationalism in the 1960s obscured the century of nationalist theory and practice that preceded such ephemera as Afro hairstyles, power salutes and sloganizing.

Sterling Stuckey, a professor of history at Northwestern University, has written a very discriminating evaluation of black nationalism. He starts where black nationalism itself starts: in slavery. He is not the first to look at the world the slaves made, but he has written from a position of profound identification with slave culture. Identification and vastly subtle understanding. Because there is a point at which slave culture can be understood only as a limb of several African cultures suddenly fused into one. Reaching this point at the very beginning, Stuckey evaluates like an anthropologist. The varieties of Africanness—the submerged Yoruba, Akan, Bakongo nationalisms—come to life in their distinctness. And the Africans' adaptations to slavery reveal an inherent, organic nationalism whose wholeness has gone uncredited and forgotten by those nationalists and historians who are loose with the past.

Stuckey argues that "slave culture flowed from an essentially autonomous value system." The values were African, several and particular to those regions of Africa from which the Africans were drawn. The boldness of his thesis—that African-Americans maintained specifically African cultural patterns even decades after the slave trade stopped—makes the book exciting.

Stuckey provides a broad and penetrating background on our African origins, our religious and communal practices (our spirituals, for instance, have their founding context in African rites of propitiating our ancestors by ceremonial song and dance). He then follows our course in America through the clamor for emancipation—and the first public articulations of an African-American nationalist consciousness. The body of the book evaluates the theories and careers of our most clear-thinking nationalists, some of them ex-slaves themselves: David Walker, Henry Highland Garnet, Martin Delany, Alexander Crummell, Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. DuBois and Paul Robeson.

It is amazing to watch Stuckey carefully discern the threads of culture and continuity as he traces African influences upon the late thinkers. By the late 19th century, African-Americans enjoyed some of the same class mobility as other Americans. Our earlier conditions of togetherness had changed and the "circle of culture," as Stuckey calls our early ring shouts and African-patterned ceremonial rites, suffered deformations where it was not cleanly broken.

DuBois and Robeson seem typical of the challenge for black nationalism in the modern period. Slave culture was essentially African. Freedman's culture was American and could easily induce neurosis in the African-American if he strove to define himself in terms of a culture that maligned his blackness at every turn.

Maintaining the circle of culture called for an individual discovery and identification with African values—with the root and precursors of self. But the individual discoveries had significance only when turned to the profit of all African-Americans. Just like the Africanness of our "slave culture," the meaning of individual acts existed only in the context of the group.

And in fact, as Stuckey demonstrates most vividly with Robeson, the "discovery" of Africa by modern-day African-Americans draws the slaves' "circle of culture" fully around, from the 18th century to the 20th, and from ancient South Carolina and our semi-conscious articulations of our Africanness to modern Africa and fully conscious articulations like Robeson's.

Stuckey writes: "The day was not too distant when the most incandescent dreams of nationalists, from (David) Walker to Robeson would achieve, however uncertain the workings of the human will, the tangibility of freedom."

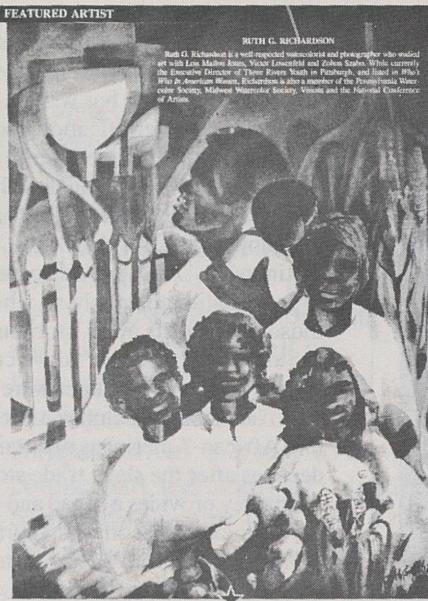


"Black Woman in White Face,"  
Spring '87, Hal Washington

"Black Family,"  
Winter '87, Ruth Richardson

# We Are Honored

On September 24, 1988, *Shooting Star Review* received awards for "Best Photography" and "Best Illustration" in 1987 from the Pittsburgh Black Media Federation.



We are pleased to have received this recognition. Even more important, we are grateful that Hal Washington and Ruth Richardson shared their talent with *Shooting Star Review* and with our readers.

We also deeply appreciate the support from the patrons, funders, advertisers and readers who have made it possible for *Shooting Star Review* to present African-American artistry to a larger audience.

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Paula Giddings

History

Ivan Van Sertima

Poetry

Sam Allen

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## *A Memory: Sana'a\**

A tiny cock of thatch  
threw a shadow across  
the sered veldt

bearing umbels of pale cardinal  
flowers

springing from the dried earth

like the ribs of an umbrella

And

Aromatic cumin  
punctured the air  
leaking from the soil

Strong and bold

Like the nights  
when moonbeams laced  
our path westward to the bend  
in Wadi-Dahr

I remember how we triumphed dawn  
and rose

Forgetting

the imprint  
of two bodies so closely knit

Jerome E. Thornton  
Albany, NY

\*Sana'a is the capital of North Yemen Arab Republic, where I taught African-American literature for one year.



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