



ShootingStar

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Black Literary Magazine



Our Voice ... Our Song

Featured Artists in this
issue include ...
Langston Hughes
Bob Kaufman
Gloria Naylor
Charlie Patton

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W

Summer,
1990

\$2.95

Got to Take the Crescent



Twinkle in Her Eyes

"Weigh your words; think before you speak".

—Alberta Hunter
at the Cookery in New York City

*At eighty-two
there is still twinkle in her eyes.
Arms akimbo, she was a full
fledged woman
at eight,
when she left her mother in Memphis
and jumped a train to Chicago.*

*In that robust town, she was really
nothing but a child
with a hidden spirit, but*

*surrounded by nightclub owners
and
good natured prostitutes,
that spirit took form,
like budding gardenia and
the blues haven't been the same
since.*

Leigh Donaldson

Train Back to New Orleans

*I'm goin' back to New Orleans...
The jazz down there is Baaad and Mean!
It takes you by your hand and soul...
Says, "Come on in from out the cold!"*

*See, you don't have to go inside...
They play that cool black satin pride
on raunchy corners...public squares.
Yeh! Got to jump 'The Crescent' there!*

*Up here too many suits and ties'
and melodies which say 'goodbye'.
Just when your ears were set to smile,
you find that you're 'nobody's chile'.*

*I went down there one time before
when tears were puddlin' up this floor.
I went down there... One slide trombone
smiled, "Momma, let me ride you home."*

*How can a spirit stay undone
when saxophones and trumpets run
the heartaches out of town! Train tracks
keep magnetizin', "Come on back!"*

*These last few months been mopin' roun' ...
My signs of life been 'when I frown'.
But I'm rememb' ring shiny horns
which made this spirit feel reborn.*

*Yeh! Going' back to New Orleans!
The jazz embraces you... I mean
it holds you in its arms and rocks
it's down to earth into your socks!*

*Don't even have to go inside...
That breezy cool black satin pride
flows all your corners....floats the air.
Yeh! Got to jump 'The Crescent' there!*

*Jaren Johnson Hailey
The Rejuvenation of a Beat*

Publisher's Statement

This "Our Voice ... Our Song" issue has been a truly joyous task. I sincerely hope that the voices that sing of Black culture throughout this issue warm your heart and give hope of bright and informed tomorrows. The editors and artists who worked on this issue have pre-

pared quite a meal, with tastes rousing as the boogie-woogie, as sweet as a popsicle and as exotic as the Caribbean. Thank you for joining us. Enjoy!

Sandra
Sandra Gould Ford

PATRONS

International Business Machines
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Pittsburgh Foundation

Street Vendor

*See dese grade big sweet pertaters
Ri' chere by dis chicken's side?
I'm de one what bakes dese taters,
Makes dem fit to suit yo pride.*

*Dere is taters an mo taters,
But de ones I sells is fine.
Yo kin roam de ole worl' ovah,
But you won' fin' none lak mine.*

*Cause I'm de tater man!
—Ah mean! ... De sweet pertater man.*

MISSION STATEMENT

Shooting Star Productions, Inc. is a non-profit corporation that exists to promote artistic and educational outlets for the expression of Black culture through publications, video and other media.

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SUBMISSION POLICY

FREE Submission Guidelines with helpful information, including upcoming themes and maximum word counts available with SASE. **All submissions must include a self-addressed envelope with sufficient return postage.**

Shooting Star Review is completely free-lance written and open for graphics, photography, illustrations, short fiction, folktales, essays, reviews and poetry.

Written work must be neatly typed, double-spaced and legible. Send poetry and fiction in separate envelopes. Artists submitting material for publication can come from any cultural background, but all work must relate to the Black experience.

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COVER ART

"They Came on Tuesday" is a 50"x56" oil on canvas by Virginia artist Robert Dilworth. Dilworth explains:

Most of my work reflects the musical and emotional rhythm of the African-American spirit. That is, the emotional rhythm that stems from early spirituals, syncopation, musical improvisation, blues and a way of playing that reflects a way of living. The figures in the upper region suggest the "ring shout," an African tradition that used clapping, basic drum beats and, of course, shouting.

I often use trains to symbolize freedom. The train whistle's rhythm had a hypnotic power for 19th and early 20th century Blacks because (like the old spirituals), it conveyed promise and hope of brighter days ahead.

Toys are American icons that continually update society's phobias, idiosyncrasies, wishes and pleasures. I believe they reveal a social story more directly, with more power, and with a sharper edge. Like any good story, the true plot is concealed in symbols and sub-plots. The toy images act to conceal other meanings.

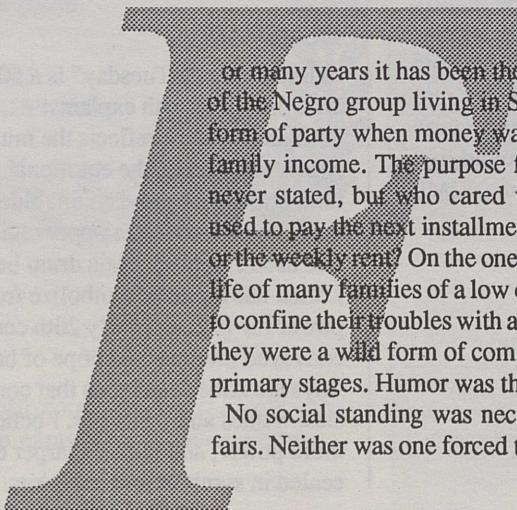
Mrs. Bailey Pays the Rent

by Ira De A Reid



*"Won't you come home,
Bill Bailey?
Won't you come home?
She mourns the whole day long.
I'll do the cooking
I'll pay the rent..."*

-Old popular song



For many years it has been the custom of certain portions of the Negro group living in Southern cities to give some form of party when money was needed to supplement the family income. The purpose for giving such a party was never stated, but who cared whether the increment was used to pay the next installment on the "Steinway" piano, or the weekly rent? On the one hand, these parties were the life of many families of a low economic status who sought to confine their troubles with a little joy. On the other hand, they were a wild form of commercialized recreation in its primary stages. Humor was the counterpart of their irony.

No social standing was necessary to promote these affairs. Neither was one forced to have a long list of friends.

All that the prospective host required to "throw" such an affair would be a good piano player and a few girls. Of course you paid an admission fee—usually 10 cents—which was for the benefit of some Ladies Auxiliary—though it may have been an auxiliary to that particular house. The music invited you, and the female of the species urged that you remain. The neighborhood girls came unescorted, but seldom left without an escort. Dancing was the diversion and there is no reason to doubt that these affairs were properly named "Shindigs."

*they were known as
"struggles,"
"break-downs," "razor
drills," "flop-wallies"
and "chitterling
parties." These they
were in fact as well as
in fancy. It was a
struggle to dance in
crowded little rooms,*

There was "Beaver Slide," that supposedly rough section of the Negro district, in the hollow between two typically Georgian Hills. Here lived a more naive group of Negroes whose sociables were certain to make the passers-by take notice. The motto for their affairs seemed to be "Whosoever will, let him come, and may the survived survive." 20 to 30 couples packed into two small rooms, "slow-dragging" to the plaintive blues of the piano player, whose music had a bass accompaniment furnished by his feet. The piano was opened top and front that the strains may be more distinct, and that the artist may have the joy of seeing as well as hearing his deft touches (often played by "ear") reflected in the mechanics of the instrument. They were a free "joy-unconfined" group. Their conventions were their own. If they wished to guffaw they did—if they wished to fight they did. But they chiefly danced—not with the aloofness of a modern gigolo but with fervor. What a picture they presented!

Women in ginghams or cheap finery, men in peg top trousers, silk shirts, "loud" arm bands, and the ever present tan shoes with the "bulldog" toe. Feet stamped merrily—songs sung cheerily—No blues writer can ever record accurately the tones and words of those songs—they are to be heard and not written—bodies sweating, struggling in their effort to get the most of the dance; a drink of "lightning" to accelerate the enthusiasm—floors creaking and sagging—everybody happy.

During the dance as well as the intermission, you bought your refreshments. This was a vital part of the evening's enjoyment. But what food you could get for a little money! Each place had its specialties—"Hoppinjohn," (rice and black-eyed peas) or Mulatto rice (rice and tomatoes), Okra gumbo, Sweet potato pone—sometimes Chicken—Chitterlings—Hog maws—or other strictly Southern dishes. You ate your fill. Dancing was resumed and continued until all were ready to leave—or it had suddenly ended in a brawl causing the "Black Maria" to take some to the station house and the police sending the remaining folk to their respective homes.

And there were those among us who had a reverential respect for such affairs. At that time there was no great popularity attached to a study of the Negro in his social environment. These were just plain folks having a good time. On the other hand, they were capable of description, and to those of us who knew, they were known as "struggles," "break-downs," "razor drills," "flop-wallies" and "chitterling parties." These they were in fact as well as in fancy. It was a struggle to dance in crowded little rooms, while one never knew if the cheaply constructed flooring would collapse amid midst of its sagging and creaking. What assurance did one have that the glistening steel of a razor or "switch-blade" would not flash before the evening's play was done? And very often chitterlings were served—yet by the time 40 sweating bodies had danced in a small parlor with one window—a summer's evening—and continued to

dance—well the party still deserved that name. But Mrs. Bailey paid her rent.

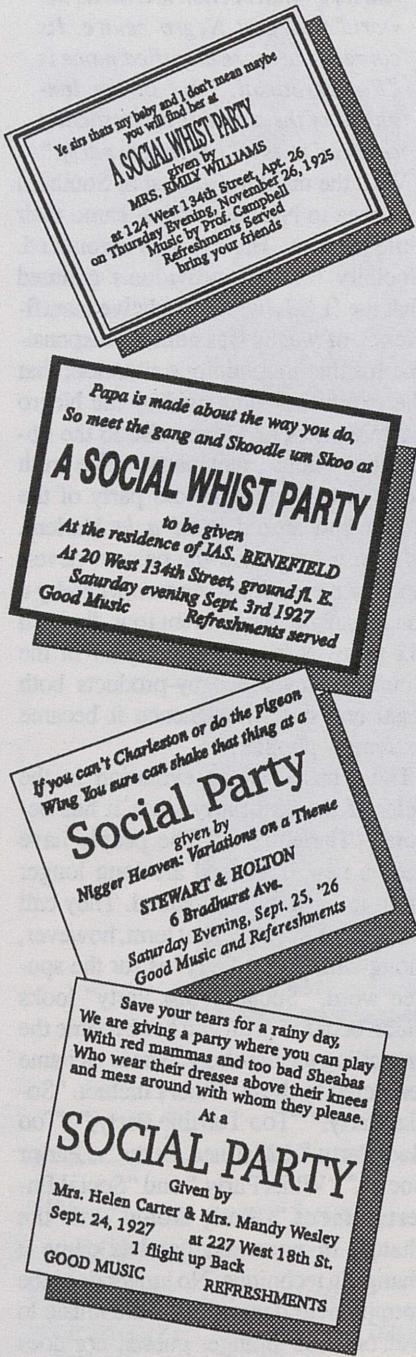
NEWS ITEM: Growing out of economic stress, this form of nocturnal diversion has taken root in Harlem—that section known as the world's largest Negro centre. Its correct and more dignified name is "Parlor Social," but in the language of the street, it is caustically referred to as a "house rent party."

With the mass movement of Southern Negroes to Northern cities, came their little custom. Harlem was astounded. Socially minded individuals claimed that the H.C.L. with the relative insufficiency of wages was entirely responsible for this ignominious situation; that the exorbitant rents paid by the Negro wage earners had given rise to the obnoxious "house rent party." The truth seemed to be that the old party of the South had attired itself *a la* Harlem. Within a few years the custom developed into a business venture whereby a tenant sought to pay a rent four, five and six times as great as was paid in the South. It developed by-products both legal and otherwise, hence it became extremely popular.

There has been an evolution in the eclat of the rent party since it has become "Harlemized." The people have seen a new light, and are long longer wont to have it go unnamed. They call it a "Parlor Social." That term, however, along with "Rent Party" is for the spoken word. "Social Whist Party" looks much better in print and has become the prevailing terminology. Nor is its name restricted to these. Others include "Social Party," "Too Terrible Party," "Too Bad Party," "Matinee Party," "Parlor Social," "Whist Party," and "Social Entertainment." And, along with the change in nomenclature has come a change in technique. No longer does the entrepreneur depend upon the music to welcome his stranger guests; nor does he simply invite friends of the neighborhood. The rent party ticket now turns the trick.

There straggles along the crosstown streets of North Harlem a familiar fig-

Continued on page 8



ure. A middle-aged white man, bent from his labor as the Wayside Printer, is pushing a little cart that has all of the equipment necessary for setting up the rent party ticket. The familiar tinkle of his bell in the late afternoon brings the representative of some family to his side. While you wait, he sets up your invitation with the bally-hoo heading desired, and at a very reasonable price. The grammar and the English may be far from correct, but they meet all business requirements since they bring results. What work the Wayside Printer does not get goes to the nearest print shop; some of which specialize in these announcements.

A true specimen of the popular mind is expressed in these tickets. The heading may be an expression from a popular song, a slang phrase, a theatrical quip or

"Music Galore"; "Charge de Affairs Bessie and Estelle"; "Here You'll Hear that Sweet Story That's Never Been Told"; "Refreshments to Suit"; "Refreshments by 'The Cheater'." All of these present to the average rent-party habituee, a very definite picture of what is to be expected, as the card is given to him on the street corner, or at the subway station.

The parties outdo their publicity. There is always more than has been announced on the public invitation. Though no mention was made of an admission fee, one usually pays from 25 to 50 cents for this privilege. The refreshments are not always refreshing, but are much the same as those served in parts of the South, with gin and day-Old Scotch extra. The Father of the Piano lives up to his reputation as he

"Whosoever will, let him come, and may the survived survive."

"poetry." A miscellaneous selection gives us the following: "Come and Get It Fixed"; "Leaving Me Papa, It's Hard To Do Because Mama Done Put That Thing On You"; "If You Can't Hold Your Man, Don't Cry After He's Gone, Just Find Another"; "Clap Your Hands Here Comes Charlie and He's Bringing Your Dinah Too"; "Old Uncle Joe, the Jelly Roll King is Back in Town and is Shaking That Thing"; "Here I am Again. Who? Daddy Jelly Roll and His Jazz Hounds"; "It's Too Bad Jim, But if You Want To Find a Sweet Georgia Brown, Come to the House of Mystery"; "You Don't Get Nothing for Being an Angel Child, So you Might as Well Get Real Busy and Real Wild."

And at various parties we find special features, among them being "Music by the Late Kidd Morgan"; "Music by Kid Professor, the Father of the Piano"; "Music by Blind Johnny"; "Music by Kid Lippy"; "Skinny At the Traps";

accompanies a noisy trap drummer, or a select trio composed of fife, guitar, and saxophone.

Apart from the admission fee and the sale of food, and drinks, the general tenor of the party is about the same as one would find in a group of "intellectual liberals" having a good time. Let us look at one. We arrived a little early—about 9:30. The 10 persons present were dancing to the strains of the Cotton Club Orchestra via radio. The drayman was just bringing two dozen chairs from a nearby undertaker's establishment, who rents them for such affairs. The hostess introduced herself, asked our names, and politely informed us that the "admittance fee" was 35 cents, which we paid. We were introduced to all, the hostess no remembering a single name. Ere the formality was over, the musicians, a piano player, saxophonist, and

Continued on page 10

Prayer for Africa

With dignity

(English)

Bless, O Lord, our country,
Africa, So that she may
waken from her sleep. Fill
her horn with plenty, guide
her feet. Hear us, faithful
son. Spirit, descend, (Spirit,
Spirit,) Spirit, descend,
Spirit, descend, Spirit di-
vine.

(Swahili)

Bwana, i-ba-ri-ki Africa, I-
li-i-pa-te ku-am-ka. Ma-om-
bi ye tu ya-si-ki-lel. U-tu-ba-
ri-ki. U-je Ro-ho, (U-je, U-
je.) U-je Ro-ho. U-je Ro-ho,
U-tu-ja-ze.

Zulu

Nko-si, si -kel -el' i Africa,
Mal-u-pa-kam' u-pon do-
lway-o; Yi-va im-i-tan-da -
zo ye-tu. U-si -si-kel-el-e,
Yih-la Moya. (Yih-la
Moya,) Yih-la Moy-a. Oy-
ing ewel - e.

English Bless, O Lord, our coun - try, Af - ri - ca, So that she may wak - en
 Swahili Bwa-na, i - ba - ri - ki Af - ri - ka, I - li - i - pa - te
 Zulu Nko - si, si - kel - el' i Af - ri - ka, Mal - u - pa - kam' u - pon -

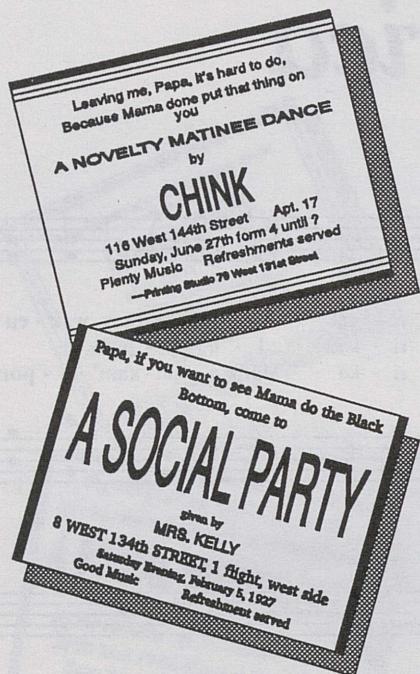
from her sleep. Fill her horn with plen - ty, guide her feet.
 ku - am - ka. Ma - om - bi ye tu ya - si - ki - lel.
 do - lway - o; Yi - va im - i - tan - da - zo ye - tu.

C7 Dm C7 F Fine

Hear us, faith - ful sons.* Spir - it, de - scend, (Spir - it, Spir - it,) U - tu - ba - ri - ki. U - je Ro - ho, (U - je, U - je,) U - si - si - kel - el - e, Yih - la Moy - a, (Yih - la Moy - a,)

E7 Bb Bb C C7 F C E C7 F D.S. without repeat

Spir - it, de - scend, Spir - it, de - scend, Spir - it di - vine. U - je Ro - ho, U - je Ro - ho, U - tu - ja - ze. Yih - la Moy - a, Oy - ing ewel - e.



drummer, had arrived and immediately the party took on life. We learned that the saxophone player had been in big time vaudeville; that he could make his instrument "cry"; that he had quit the stage to play for the parties because he wanted to stay in New York.

There were more men than women, so a poker game was started in the next room, with the woman, who did not care to dance, dealing. The music quickened the dancers. They sang "Muddy Water, round my feet—ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta." One girl remarked—"Now this party's getting right." The hostess informed us of the menu for the evening—Pig feet and Chili—Sandwiches *a la carte*, and of course if you were thirsty, there was some "good stuff" available. Immediately, there was a rush to the kitchen, where the man of the house served your order.

For the first time we noticed a man who made himself conspicuous by his watchdog attitude toward all of us. He was the "Home Defense Officer," a private detective who was there to forestall any outside interference, as well as prevent any losses on the inside on account of the activity of the "Clean-up Men." There were two clean-up men there that

night and the H.D.O. had to be particularly careful lest they walk away with two or three fur coats or some of the household furnishings. Sometimes these men would be getting the "lay" of the apartment for a subsequent visit.

There was nothing slow about this party. Perfect strangers at 9 o'clock were boon companions at 11. The bedroom had become the card room—a game of "skin" was in progress on the floor while dice were rolled on the bed. There was something "shady" about the dice game, for one of the players was always having his dice caught. The musicians were exhorting to the 15 or 20 couples that danced. Bedlam reigned. It stopped for a few minutes while one young man hit another for getting fresh with his girl while dancing. the H.D.O. soon ended the fracas.

About 2 o'clock, a woman from the apartment on the floor below rang the

and refreshments available are ruining the business. Those who continue in this venture of pleasure and business are working on a very close margin both socially and economically, when one adds the complexity illustrated by the following incident:

A 9 year old boy gazed up from the street to his home on the "top floor, front, East Side" of a tenement on West 134th Street about 11:30 on a Friday night. He waited until the music stopped and cried, "Ma! Ma! I'm sleepy. Can I come in now?" To which a male voice, the owner of which had thrust his head out of the window, replied,—"Your ma says to go to the Midnight Show, and she'll come after you. Here's four bits. She says the party's just not going good."

Originally published by National Urban League

About two o'clock, a woman from the apartment on the floor below rang the bell and vociferously demanded that this noise stop or that she would call an officer. The hostess laughed in her face and slammed the door. Some tenants are impossible!

bell and vociferously demanded that this noise stop or that she would call an officer. The hostess laughed in her face and slammed the door. Some tenants are impossible! This was sufficient, however, to call the party to a halt. The spirit—or "spirits" had been dying by degrees. Everybody was tired—some had "dates"—others were sleepy—while a few wanted to make a cabaret before "curfew hour." Mrs. Bailey calmly surveyed a disarranged apartment, and counted her proceeds.

* * * * *

But the rent parties have not been so frequent of late. Harlem's new dance halls with their lavish entertainment, double orchestra, and "sixteen hours of continuous dancing," with easy chairs

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Shooting Star Review is starting a LETTERS TO THE EDITOR page. We're interested in sharing your thoughts about current events in Black culture and the arts as well as what you like, don't like and would like to see in this magazine.

Letters should be less than 200 words and may be edited by *Shooting Star*. All letters must contain the writer's name, address, phone number and signature.

Write to:

Letter to the Editor
Shooting Star Review
 7123 Race Street
 Pittsburgh, PA 15208



Whose song is it anyway?

That's 'Retha's song
Bessie's blues & Ella's lyrics-
who's messing it up...

That's the Tempts
Big Joe Turner & Eddie Jefferson's legacy-
who's ripping it off

That's Billie's pain-
who knows her blues

It's Vernelle's gentle persuasion
when house lights dim
curtains rise exposing Pain In My Heart
enlightening Good Black that don't crack

It was Beverly Young's everlasting smile
showcasing our beauty
welcoming our struggle and love
from Mississippi to Azania to Brazil and back home
promising our freedom on her journey
to the palace of our ancestors

It is Melanie's and Betty Robinson's outstretched hands
open heart and Fannie Lou Hamer styled
homemade compassion that soothes the scars
of behind closed-door abuse and natures our
traditions of our Nguzo Saba mission

That's Langston's rap
wrapped tight in the R&B origins
of Harlem's dreams and Simple's wisdom

That's California Cooper & Ernest Gaines' community
and Sterling Brown & Alice Walker's people
near Wells that erupt into social and political protest
in homes feasting on our mother's recipes
inspired by our daddy's passion for his woman and his children-
who's messing with the truth...

These are your songs
written in the blues memories
of your grandmother
under the watchful eye
of your brothers' struggle
and your sisters' determination

claim it...

These are your innovations
written in the jazz improvisations
of your African American survival-
claim it...

That's your song
That's your legacy
in your blues with outstretched hands
and open arms embracing your struggle
your determination
your Kuumba-use it
take it-
claim it as your own.

Tamaini Njia
Pittsburgh, PA

Mawgwa Ooman



Photo © Sandra Gould Ford

Ooman:	woman
Ananse:	a trickster spider. Often an intermediary between the spiritual and physical world. Common to African and Caribbean folk- lore.
Mawgwa:	ugly
Siddung:	sitting
Cut eye:	evil eye
Screw face:	sour disposition
Sinting:	something
Smaddy:	somebody
Fi-her:	her
Obeah ooman:	witch
Macca Palace:	a housing development in Jamaica
Pickney:	young child

David Holper of Northampton, MASS. has created his little story after the Jamaican voice known as "Patwah" (patois). Holper explains that since there is no written form of this language, he has used the Sistren theater collective's examples from the group's book *Lionheart Gal*.

Mawgwa. Mawgwa. I be telling you true as Ananse come creeping down out of de soursop tree and weaving sinting tale round smaddy head. She got cut eye all de time. This is what her face look like. Fi-her nose like de mishappen fruit drop in de bakin sun and siddung too long. Her hair be brown knots which no comb might straighten. Some say she had dem madder and fadder like the rest of us, but I had me doubts. I be saying she Obeah ooman. I was not by meself in dis. Women threw stones at her when she came. Ahaaa! I speak de truth. Some men from de village say that when de rock and woman come hobbling down de road together in a bad season. They choose the rock and leave the woman in de dust.

She raise herself up to be de screw face in our village.

Me I have no cause to hate this woman so plain that trees along the path bend from her when she come walking. Me I take me husband's wash to the river and find de cool place where de water moves some slow, some fast. There be sand and fish play in de light and de dark sand on de bottom. River sing a song like ooman with some sleeping baby in de tuck of her arm. Ooman be happy der. Ooman find nother body to sing with to de sound of de river.

I siddung der a bit when de sun get high up and make me tired. I take de wash and set it by me side. I lay me head down on de bank and fall asleep in de shade. Me dream me fadder still alive. Him take me to di Macca Palace to visit a friend him no see in a likkle while. He put me out on the veranda and I tease de cat. Him yell out, "Chile, you leave dat poor cat alone or I whoop you good." Dem play wid each other all afternoon. Her calling out "Ooooh" and "Ooooh" as if he fill her mouth wid honey.

Somebody come and stand over me leave a mawgwa shadow on me face. I wake up it already evening. It be her fer sure. "What you want from me?" I ask her mean.

"You husband he dead," she say and sit down next to me.

"You lie!"

"I tell you the truth he was walking in de road and de diesel truck come know him down and crush him."

I let out a sound like stone fall in deep water. I try to stop de sound but once it start, it just come out of me like someone pull string.

She take me head in her arms, rock me back and forth like pickney. We be siddung der till stars sparkle over us.

"Come now," she say and help me up. Her hands be like rough wood.

This is how we come to be wid each other. Dat was a time ago. She siddung in de corner smiling to hear this all now. Wait a moment now while I chase Ananse back up dis here tree. I put on de kettle and we all three sit in de shadow of de soursop tree and talk away de hot time.

David Holper has previously published fiction in Stories and Quarterly West. He is completing an MFA in fiction at the University of Massachusetts and is currently working with John Wideman.

Jax dialogue

*With reedwords
say honey syllables of me
Blow inflated lung gust
to the Serengetti Plains
reverberate through
the Cotton Belt
roll unlyric messages
down Sugar hill
talk about me*

*Expel
goldenbreath
to unravel plaguing myths
of LadyFire and Warrior Women
Talk, talk, and talk*

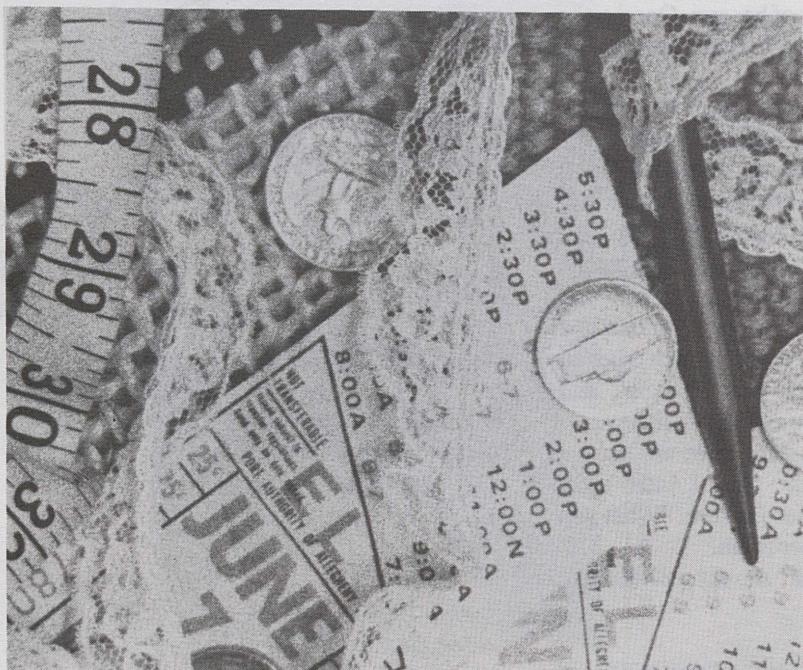
*Let leave
your lips
unwhispered grandwinds
celebrating EarthMother
SpiritSister
and Women Poet*

*Up form you—play of me
You and Me
are We making music you talk about.*

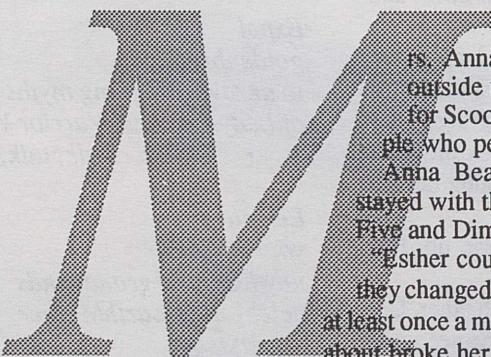
*Jaleelah Karriem
E.Orange, NJ*

Ballet on the Bus

by Sandra Gould-Ford
Pittsburgh, PA



"They say that art is there is valuable," Anna Bea told Scooter. "That the artists is great people. And I wonders. I mean," Anna Bea shrugged, "sure, the materials, some of that is precious. But, my gran'baby down in Pensacola can do better than some of that stuff."



rs. Anna Bea Hunnicut enjoyed standing outside the Gallerie Grande. While waiting for Scooter's bus, Anna Bea listened to people who peered—but never ventured—inside.

Anna Bea was the only housekeeper who stayed with the building that was once Jennings' Five and Dime.

"Esther couldn't work here no more. Not after they changed it around," Anna Bea said to Scooter at least once a month. "Progress, they call it. But just about broke her heart when they took out them old iron stairs in the back." Anna Bea smiled. "I think that's where she and Jimmy used to, well ..."

There was an old couple, once. Anna Bea thought she'd seen them shopping in the old Five and Dime years ago. The man leaned on a cane, and he'd whispered, "Look, they done tore out Jennings'."

The old woman's eyes, magnified by her thick glasses, said, "The old brick wall." She touched the big window. "It's all glass now."

"And they covered up them creaky, old, pine floors—I loved them floors—with oak," Anna Bea added. "You ever go in old Jennings'? You remember my sister, Esther? First colored woman they let work the front?"

"Do I?" The old man squeezed his wife's hand. "Made us feel so proud, didn't she, honey?"

The woman nodded and smiled.

Another time, a young, red-haired woman said to her restless child, "See, Andy." She pointed to a Venetian glass sculpture. "Look how beautiful."

Anna Bea stood taller. "Takes a special kind a cloth for them porcelains. Only a certain kind has just the right texture. And see that hand-carved wood? That silver? That glass?"

"See Andy? See how it sparkles?"

"Takes a particular ointment to make 'em shine." Anna Bea smiled. "Not many folks knows how it's done. My sister, Esther, she's ailing right now, Esther done even better than me."

Anna Bea wore those thick-soled shoes that left geometric patterns in summer-softened asphalt. Her opaque hosiery—wrinkled at the ankles—perpetuated a sense of movement when she stood still. Anna Bea's straw hat was navy with plastic daisies. Her periwinkle and fuchsia dress generated excitement—for the optically aware—against cinnamon skin and pewter hair.

When finished at the Gallerie Grande, Anna Bea often rode Scooter's bus home. She'd bring him carefully wrapped fruit, cheese, pate and dainty sandwiches after gallerie receptions.

"Your little one still got that cough?" she'd asked last winter. "Umph! I've got something for that." In a small jelly jar wrapped in waxed paper and secured with a thick rubber band, Anna Bea brought a salve—sublime chartreuse—that smelled of sage, savory and thyme.

She'd say, "Did you see that new soap opera on Channel 5? Comes on at 10 o'clock. Oh, mercy. Do you think them folks really live like that? I guess they couldn't make those shows if some of it wasn't true. But it's a wonder, ain't it?" Her face glowed, a rose blush tinged with gold. "And how about The Prize of the Century? That young couple from Minneapolis almost won the million dollars. A young black couple. Oh, it was exciting."

Anna Bea picked up on a look in Scooter's eye one night, the line of his lips and a heaviness in the way his hands steered. "Why do you men think just bringing home the bacon is how a woman's supposed to know you care? Hah! You got to tell her, son. You be driving this bus late sometimes. You know she miss you. She be working in one of them offices. Some of those men's got no morals. They don't respect a woman's marriage. And she knows all kinds of women be climbing on this bus smiling at a handsome man like you. You got to tell her, with words and with the little things that you does." Anna Bea was quiet for a while. "Buy her some flowers tonight from the store out on Hermitage." She smiled, then, and barely taking a breath, asked, "By the way, did you see the article in the Post about the man who went in for a hernia operation and the doctors gave him a sex change?"

Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays Anna Bea would clean the Gallerie Grande's collections. Her soft cloth followed the curves in the crystal, ivory, bone china, porcelains and marble. Her feather duster flounced the teak and mahogany, the steel and bronze, the silver and gold. "They say that art in there is valuable," Anna Bea told Scooter. "That the artists is great

people. And I wonders. I mean," Anna Bea shrugged, "sure, the materials, some of that is precious. But, my gran'baby down in Pensacola can do better than some of that stuff."

Every spring, when they rode out past Glenn Heights and the buds were just swelling on the trees, Anna Bea said, "You know the reason I likes this bus, sugar lamb? I likes riding through Meridian Park. Meridian's where me and my Jesse went on our first picnic. Blacks wasn't supposed to be in the park, but we found a place right down there, yeah, you see them trees? That's the place. And it looks out over the river. And at night, with them few lights," she paused, "cause it wasn't all built up like it is now, and the stars and the moon and the smell of the grass, even the dirt ... oh," Anna Bea took a quick, deep breath. She laughed, "it was lovely." Then she'd frown and say, "Sure wish I could get Esther out here to see how things is changing."

She'd knit receiving blankets and crochet crib spreads. "Even my babies' babies is near grown," Anna Bea said. "Spread out across this continent. So I makes these little things for the church sales." Rainbows flowed from her fingertips ... pinks and purple, pastel blues, duckling and daffodil yellows, browns that sang of corn pudding, and apple betty and warm wheat bread.

The last few months, just before they got to Meridian Park, Anna Bea had taken to bringing out a little radio with earphones. She'd gaze toward the thick evergreens and the navy sky and city lights reflected in the river, and she'd say, "You young folk don't really appreciate this here music, do you Scooter? Humphf," she'd adjust the tuning, "maybe it's cause you Northern peoples ain't raised up proper in the church." With the little radio in her palm and the earphones circling her head, Anna Bea hummed softly, and sometimes she'd say, "Gospel lifts the soul, sugar dumpling. They say that stuff I be polishing at the Gallerie is supposed to do the same thing, but this here music takes my heart right up to heaven."

"And that opera. Humphf. Sometimes the Gallerie's manager talks about going to those things, and how great the singers' voices are. Coloratura. Mezzo. All that stuff. And they say our folks holler too much when we sing. But what about them? I'm surprised the stage don't cave in under all them big women in them heavy costumes parading around, wailing at the top of their lungs." Anna Bea laughed, and then she was silent.

"How's Esther?" Scooter asked.

For a long time, the ride up to Glenn Heights was lonely for Scooter, even at rush hour. Sometimes, during the drive out through Meridian Park, he'd see the ballet of Anna Bea's fingers working that yarn amongst the crush of business commuters. And months after Anna Bea left to help her older sister, even above the bus' rumble and the traffic's din and the chatter of his riders ... months after Anna Bea had gone, Scooter heard her aria every time he passed Gallerie Grande.



King of the Delta Blues

The Life and Music of

Charlie Patton

by Stephen Calt and Gayle Wardow



Photo ©Manchester Craftsman's Guild

Review by John Pyros

...there was a class, being deemed only "niggers," who were given the artistic luxury "to let the good times roll."

What's most surprising about Stephen Calt and Gayle Wardow's biography of the legendary Mississippi Delta Blues musician Charlie Patton (1891-1934) is not its correct and scholarly brilliance but that it was written at all.

In spite of the fact that considerable artistry emanates from the poor, the illiterate, the uneducated, 95 percent of that artistry is, at best ignored, and at worst, castigated. Such, happily is not the case with the Calt-Wardlow biography of Charlie Patton, one of America's seminal blues musicians.

Though more an inferred aspect, *Delta Blues* confirms that no society, no gathering, no group is ever devoid of art and culture. One of the paths that culture takes will seek the ethereal and the sublime, another will seek the earthly. Such was the case with early 20th-century Blacks who stayed in Louisiana, Mississippi and Arkansas. While most Black music was funneled into spirituals, there was a class, being deemed only "niggers," who were given the artistic luxury "to let the good times roll." And though their art was (and is) still considered "...the skid row of their profession...," with geniuses like Charlie Patton, roll they did. How else to explain the rise of Charlie Patton, virtually the inventive Bach of Black America blues, except that in every time and every clime and every condition, there are some beings who are born musicians. Some find expression in Mozartian

quartets, while others, like Patton, articulate through broken-down guitar picking and howling poetry.

Taking Charlie Patton as an example, par excellence, *The King of the Delta Blues* confirms the generally speculated, nay, fantasized beliefs held both by its foes and friends regarding the rough and raucous and rowdy and withal, not irreligious lives of those Black troubadours, goliards, meistersinger-poets. Although grievously alienated and consistently deprived, Patton found the opportunity to do his thing, and he did it. Albeit in rural, ramshackle barrelhouses, shanty gaming rooms and barnyard brothels instead of elegant ballrooms, Patton fulfilled his musical birthright. And then, given the secondary opportunity for the wine-women-song rewards of these labors, Patton emphatically embraced these "occupational hazards", too.

Calt and Wardlow's scholarly work, replete with documentation, clearly sustains their thesis not only that Patton was a superb musician but — as with so many other more appreciated, orthodox and therefore socially acceptable geniuses — Patton's "...musical imagination proved to be too large for the Delta, a confined area of both space and thought." Finding himself confined by oppressive forces who preferred that he address himself solely to the wanton, Patton, with as much truth and as much beauty as is given to speak, spoke.

When Patton died of a heart failure, in 1934 at the reputed age of 43, one of his colleagues said, "It went out over the country like wildfire... and when I heard of it, I woulda rather heard anything than heard that."

John Pyros
Tarpon Springs, FL

King of the Delta Blues: the Life and Music of Charlie Patton published in 1988 by Rock Chapel Press, 37 E. Clinton Street, Newton, NJ 07860



Janet Jackson Photo courtesy A&M Records

She of the Dancing Feet Sings

*And what would I do in heaven, pray,
Me with my dancing feet,
And limbs like apple boughs that sway
When the gusty rain winds beat?*

*And how would I thrive in a perfect place
Where dancing would be sin,
With not a man to love my face,
Nor an arm to hold me in?*

*The seraphs and the cherubim
Would be too proud to bend
To sing the faery tuns that brim
My heart from end to end.*

*The wistful angels down in hell
Will smile to see my face,
And understand, because they fell
From that all-perfect place.*

Countee Cullen
On These I Stand



Our Voice, Our Song

Rhythm and Blues

by Dr. Maghan Keita

When the Ojays do "Ship Ahoy," its historicity is rooted in the framework of what it means to be a poet, and poetry as a performance art, and the performance as a historical device.

Rhythm and Blues. We are, possibly, more Western than we believe. Especially when it comes to the scholarly assessment of our culture. As children of the age and this geopolitical space, we like the neatness of modern social scientific categorization, even when it comes to categorizing ourselves. Rhythm and Blues.

Rhythm and Blues. When Sterling Brown speaks of the "blues as folk poetry," we take him and the terms "folk" and "poetry" too literally. The literalness of his statement makes it easy for us: the form has been compartmentalized; boxed and bounded. Encased by some impermeable barrier that refuses to allow it to spill over into any other segment of our lives. We view it and say, "It's only art;" we hear it and say, "It's only music." Rhythm and Blues.

The conventional ease with which we compartmentalize the Blues defines the form as personal, individualistic, ahistoric. The popular perception is the peculiar lament intimate to and epitomized by stereotypic black life: "I'd rather drink muddy water/ and sleep in a hollow log" ... 'cuz "ain't nobody's business if I do." Songs of lost home,

lost love, lost esteem, lost life. Supposedly.

Baraka (as Leroi Jones) asserted in *Blues People* that art, specifically music and in particular the Blues, from his vantage, was political economic in nature. That is, from my vantage, representative of culture in its broadest interpretation; touching on every aspect of our life as we know it; illustrating, as well as coloring it. As important as the poetics of the art form is the tangible way in which it informs us about our history and the ways in which we order that life.

How does it do that? Simply put, poetry has always been historic in form; and if we hold Sterling Brown to his word, then this folk poetry that we call the Blues is also historic. It tells us, in so many words and *rhythms*, how our life is ordered. It aids in our socialization. Field hollers; work songs; proverbs and protests only skim the surface of this deep, dark well, but they provide plenty of material.

Rhythm and Blues. Yes, we do order our lives, in part, by these rhythms. We've heard those rhythms in Africa and the Americas and they've called us to work, to pray and to play. They have been part of our socialization; they

caused us to respond to the work at hand as a unit. When a man sang,

*Ain't no hammah
In dis lan',
Strikes lak mine, bebby,
Strikes like mine,*

his rhythm caused individual hammers to rise and strike in one chord. His song concentrated the strength of an entire workgang. It channeled the energies into a single force. It infused and directed a power more than comparable to the ordeal. We only need look around us at the very foundations of this country to see what song has done. And it has socialized us as workers—contrary to conventional wisdom, and no mean task in itself. Rhythm and Blues.

The power of the hammer and the blows of its wielder also speak of other historical tensions. The singers are not only a nation of builders, their hammers can also be turned to destruction. That potential is illustrated when "rhythm and blues" becomes the genre and the hammerers are forced to "breakin' up big rocks on the chain gaing/ breakin' rocks and servin' ...time." Though the

compartmentalization is hardly ahistorical:

*Way down, way down dat lonesome road,
De workhouse is down dat long ole
lonesome road.*

Or as Ma Rainey sang in two separate verse:

*Mah friend committed suicide,
whilst I se away at sea.
They wanted to lock me up fo'
murder in the first degree.*

*When I went down to de station,
bad luck waitin' there too.
When dey needs mo' money,
dey take out a warrant fo' you.*

The hammer slingers must be exploited and controlled. The art form provides a historical lesson.

If the music speaks of exploitation and control, it also calls for resistance. In the spiritual, the rhythmic and historical antecedent of the blues, and in its successor, the gospels, resistance is a critical theme. Witness their use in the '50s and '60s: "We shall overcome" ... "gonna keep on walkin', an' keep on talkin'" ... and in any case, "We shall not be moved...." The voices and the lyrics were lifted in defiance; the words and the rhythms were to steel those who were unsteady and to strengthen those who were weary. But for analysis and precedent go back to the late '30s and listen to Leadbelly sing:

*The home of the brave,
the land of the free,
Ain't gon' be abused
by no bourgeoisie.
I got the bourgeois blues.
I got the bourgeois blues.*

The music as history is here. That which is labeled "rhythm and blues" is contextualized by the music as a historical vehicle. So when the Impressions sing, "We're Movin' On Up," it is in keeping with a tradition of protest and defiance. When the O'Jays do "Ship Ahoy," its historicity is rooted in the framework of what it means to be a poet, and poetry as a performance art, and the performance as a historical device. A song to be sung. A song that has reason and purpose; that redeems itself and its culture. The song is history. Rhythm and Blues.

The art form as history and a vehicle for the dissemination of history is not relegated to the past. Al Jarreau's "We Got By" and "Sweet Potato Pie" (1976) are two of the most recent pieces that reflect similar musical attitudes. Yet, so few songs can be identified lately that characterize the forces that unit,

socialize and empower. The fact that so few are being created that are analytically and historically instructive gives real urgency to the need to understand and protect the blues and its rhythms:

*Them that's got, shall get
Them that's not, shall lose...
God bless the child
Who's got his own.*

Rhythm and Blues.

Dr. Maghan Keita is a Professor of History at Villanova University

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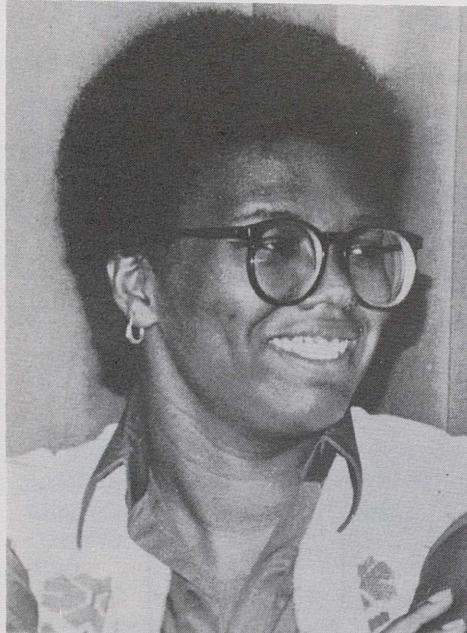
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An Interview with

Gloria Naylor

by Mickey Pearlman, Ph.D.



I asked her, perhaps naively, whether a writer without the big agent or the powerful publisher had any chance of having her book chosen by the Book-of-the-Month Club.

Gloria Naylor, who always has "to have a little bit of sky," lives in a sunny cooperative apartment in upper Manhattan where the living room windows face the Hudson River. She works at an oak rolltop desk (the one that most writers lust after), but only a foot or two away is the inevitable computer and the boxes of continuous white paper are piled up nearby. The plumbers were there on the day I arrived (is it comforting to know that pipes break even at Gloria Naylor's?) but we settled in to talk despite the bangs and the clanking.

Naylor is a woman with a formidable intellect and a deeply ingrained sense of personhood, and she had recently returned from a fellowship at Cornell; now she had the space and the time to relax after the considerable accomplishment of *The Women of Brewster Place*, *Linden Hills* and *Mama Day*. We talked initially about a writer's use of memory and about identity, and Naylor said, "when I think about the process itself, within the artist, what you are doing is trying to somehow give cohesion to the chaos that is all of you. You are taking the memory of your personal self, your historical self, your familial self, because your writing filters through all of those things.

"For most females" your "identity comes through connecting yourself to nurturing of some sort, to your body, and ... when you write, the writing flows through that identity. That goes back to the 19th century. What has changed somewhat is the way women see them-

selves in relationship to the female *as body*, the female *as nurturer*, the female *as mother of the family*." Now, "you get literature that will sometimes rail against that," and that tries "to broaden the horizons of what [being a female] means. As long as we have woman defined [in the usual ways] in our society, as long as that must be my identity," she said, "I can either accept it or somehow define myself against it, because ... my art will indeed come through what it means to be a woman. And, what it means to be a woman, unfortunately, is a political definition, and it ties me to my body, and to what society has told me is my fate, whether I choose to see it this way or not." A writer, she continued, uses what "has been your living reality, consciously or unconsciously, and you articulate through that reality." Naylor said, philosophically, that she doesn't "think this is a bad thing because male writers ... had a certain identity that they had to live with, and they articulate through" that identity. The point is "that we get marvelous perspectives of the world, and now, at least, [we are] getting somewhat of a forum for the women's view." What is important is that "we used to look at women's writings, or at any writing that had not been involved in the traditional — i.e. white upper-middle class male canon" — and we would look for the influence of ideas like memory or identity. But these influences "exist in everyone — they exist in James and in Faulkner and in Hawthorne and in Irving and in Mailer." It is



only "when the politics of, 'is this included in the canon, is this American literature, is this literature — period?' "that we "begin to say, 'well, how are women doing it?'" My argument," Naylor said, "is that all artists do 'it'— 'it' being articulating through our concepts of self." The concept of self "depends on where you are placed within a society because of gender, because of race, because of class, and I think that's fine because great literature comes out of that."

That concept of self is closely related to women's perception of space, and we talked about the ways in which the physical and psychological spaces in *The Women of Brewster Place*, for instance, seemed to grow smaller and more confining as the novel progressed. In each case, it seems to me, the seven women on Brewster Place move from larger, more viable spaces to more limited ones. (The novel ends when the Black women on Brewster Place revolt against their environment and, with the help of their neighbors, tear down the walls of the dead-end street on which they are trapped.)

But Naylor said that closed spaces emanate from "a whole web of circumstances." A woman's sense of space grows out of "the society in which you are born, and the way in which you are socialized to move through that society (and that movement, or lack of it) determines who you are, how you see the big YOU when you look into a mirror." That is why space was used "intentionally in *Linden Hills*. It was to be a metaphor for that middle-class woman's married existence as she was shoved into that basement." Naylor said she "saw women having been shoved historically," and that this woman does "uncover our history and she does it the way that women have made history and that is in a confined place ... she is able to break out and to claim herself (after her husband locks her in the basement for giving birth to a light-skinned child). Not the way I, Gloria Naylor the feminist, would have liked her to claim herself. But she did at least say, 'yes, this is me, I can affirm myself, and I can celebrate me,' if you call that a celebration."

Celebration, she said, "is not quite the right word but yes, she claimed herself and the repercussions were whatever they were."

Space and memory also play a part in *Mama Day*, a novel about Miranda (Mama) Day, a descendant of Sapphira Wade, a slave, who is the matriarch of Willow Springs, a small sea island off the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia that is "history concretized. My parents are from the South, from rural Mississippi, but what impressed me when I went down to Charleston [to do research was that] you walk around a city that has been contained architecturally and therefore you get a time warp. I grew up around Southerners and I know how provincial they are (and there's that old joke that Southerners are still living through the Civil War)" but they "do indeed hold onto tradition and all of that came together for me. I said, 'my God, I'm walking on history. I'm talking to history, there is no separation in their minds often between 100 years ago and yesterday.'" Willow Springs "was a living thing in their minds and Mama Day was just sort of the most recent reincarnation in a sense." Mama Day is an enchantress, but she is very much an earth mother figure to her niece, Cocoa, a New Yorker, and this novel is one more in a long list of books about mother-daughter combinations. I asked Naylor why this issue persistently reoccurs. Naylor said that in "finding out what it means to be a woman you either accept or reject [what the mother represents]." A mother's "influence is so strong, sometimes acknowledged, sometimes unacknowledged, [that the mother-daughter conflict is] going to show up in books written by women. I don't see how it cannot. I used to teach women 15 to 20 years my junior, and the [issue is] still there. These women are going to go on and do things I never dreamed were possible for a female to do, and they are still struggling with what it means ... to be a woman."

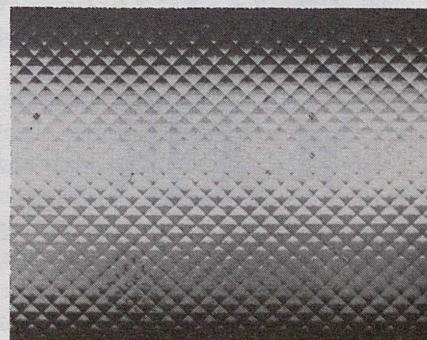
That gender-linked identity struggle is part of a larger struggle, which is often linked to race. In Naylor's case, her identity as a Black woman "came at

The Jazz

(for Faruq Z. Bey)

*The touch is soft
And meaningful
And fast
Like jazz
Uptown
In sweat
In tears
In hard driving notes
That break our opportunities.
High
High
The jazz
The jazz
Can you dig what's happening
here?
The blowing future barking
Us back to the dog houses
Of our present lamp,
And the jazz
The jazz
It beats and polishes
Everything
Every goddamn thing.
Let it talk soft
And slow.
Let us say no words-
Just listen to the jazz-
To the jazz.*

M.Liebler
St.Clair Shores, MI



Continued on page 22

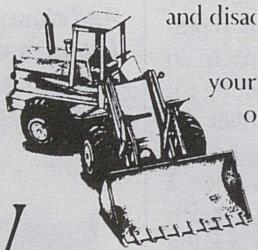
Brooklyn College [of The City University of New York] which was the place that formed me. I was 25 years old when I began college. I had gone off, hit the road...lived down South for a while, been a sort of street preacher...and at 25 I wanted structure because I had had the freedom and I realized that I had no marketable skills." Brooklyn College "made me conscious of what it meant to be me—and me in all of my richness and specificity" because it was where "I first ran into feminists. I had never thought about who I was—I had other identities: I was Roosevelt and Alberta's daughter, and then I was a Christian, and then I was a switchboard operator, but I never knew, really and truly, what it meant to be a Black woman. I did know what it meant to be Black." By the time she "reached Yale [for the M.A. she] was 31 years old ... had already written one novel and I went for security because I

thought, 'well, I cannot make a living out of being a writer.' I think that was a very wise thing to think, because the odds were definitely against me! So I said, fine, since I love books, I'll go and get my master's in Afro-American Studies because I wanted now to really deepen my knowledge about what had been awakened in me at Brooklyn. I'll do that," she thought, "and then I'll go on and get my doctorate in American Studies. I'll get one of those high class union cards, which is tenure, and I won't have to worry. What I was not prepared for, was that the side of me that had started to grow while I was working on *Brewster Place*, the need to write, would really be that strong and there was a clash...I did not think I could do both (graduate work and writing) with the same amount of energy. I found it difficult to always be thinking about how you take apart [a novel] and then

having to shut all that out to just let the process evolve. Just the logistics of it! The work involved was tremendous. I'm one of those type A personalities who like to do things well, and to do things well I read about 1500 pages a week for those seminars. So it was the clash between what I wanted to do with my [literary] output, and what they required of me to be an academic. And that's why I left after I got the master's. I was ready to leave after the first semester and come back to New York, and go back to the switchboard, because I had written *Brewster Place* while I was working on the switchboard and it paid well, the hours were flexible, and I had started *Linden Hills* the summer before I went up to New Haven. But I was able to work out a deal (after my first year] with the department, where if I just did the course work, did the papers, my thesis could be *Linden Hills*, and that



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freed me up. After that I decided to leave academia alone and to just try my wings as a writer." She supported herself through "teaching and fellowships."

Naylor said that at 39, she now understands many of the ways in which she

I said, 'my God, I'm walking on history. I'm talking to history, there is no separation in their minds often between one hundred years ago and yesterday.'

was formed by her childhood and "why my parents did what they did. They were trying to protect us from pain and they took us up to Queens...to put us into a good school system. They never talked much about the racial problems that were going on in America, and I grew up in the '60s, mind you. I would hear it at school and see it on television, but we never got that sort of talk in our home: you should have pride in yourself because you're you, and [you must] never let anyone put limits on you. You were taught to treat people as people, and that sort of thing, which is all right, all very nice and good and well, but you grow up terribly innocent and eventually you are going to get hurt. So it is a matter of trying to ward off the moment when that would happen." Naylor spoke of her "niece and nephew..who do understand the political ramifications of what it means to be who they are in America, so they are getting their pain and the disappointments and the frustration early. They are talked to about why certain things happen, why people say certain things to them." I asked Naylor if she thought racial consciousness and pride brought with it an unhealthy separation of the races, but she said "they have to go to school with children of other cultures, their stepmother is a woman of Italian-American [ancestry], the doctor who saved my nephews life

and has been his only surgeon since he was 20 months old is a Jewish man, so they have all their ambivalences" but "ultimately what we learn in this society is that there must be co-existence, there has to be." Now, she said, all people "face other cultures" on television and in magazines. "What they do when they filter that information is something else again, but they are aware of what this country is."

Gloria Naylor is now one of the six members of a committee that chooses the books offered by the Book-of-the-Month Club. That job requires her to have a sense of what literature has been and what it is now. I asked her, perhaps naively, whether a writer without the big agent or the powerful publisher had any chance of having her book chosen by the Book-of-the-Month Club. She

Within the artist, what you are doing is trying to somehow give cohesion to the chaos that is all of you. You are taking the memory of your personal self, your historical self, your familial self, because your writing filters through all of those things.

seemed to genuinely believe that "it depends totally on the composition of the jury" and the choices depend on "the individuals and the chemistry of that particular panel." Naylor expects them to be "open and fair people who take their commitment seriously, and to look for...the best books that we have read." The problem here is "what is best to begin with." I was particularly interested in whether a woman without a powerful agent or a contract from a New York publisher had any chance of being noticed. "Will you be disregarded matter of factly? Not today...maybe once when they had all men on those panels, it's possible that it could have happened. Now, even some men who sit on these panels are sensitive enough to know that they may NOT know. Often a woman's voice will have *more* input because they want to do what's right and they are aware of their ignorance. But

the bottom line is, good literature is good literature. I think that the people who make up these panels now are sensitive to gender, to race, to class, and to region. Region, believe it or not, is extremely important. I have heard that one time there was an Eastern 'mafia' and if you were not an Eastern writer, forget it. Now they will bring in panelists from the West or from the South to sit on these juries." I asked if her unknown writers had much chance of having manuscripts accepted by important publishers and she said that "publishers are out there looking for good writing...the whole thing is what constitutes good."

Her most profound advice to writers is to "totally forget [about prizes] and to write their hearts out." They should write "with as much integrity as they can—to the story they want to tell, to the

characters who entrust them with those stories. Try to use the language as beautifully as they can. When that's done, (and here Naylor reminded me that "God said, after the seventh day, 'It is good.'"), the writers will then be able to say, "it is good [and] that is enough!" Naylor said that after she completed *The Women of Brewster Place*, she said to herself, "I did this!" She thought that "nothing would ever replace this feeling, and nothing has."

There is much to be learned from Gloria Naylor. She is an extraordinarily talented writer, a woman of conscience and vigor, who understands the writer's commitment to their work and to his or herself. "If I could have created myself," she explained, "what would I come here as? I would come here just the way I came by happenstance; I truly

Continued on page 31

LIKE 'EM FAT

Magazines
Like to show
Female bodies
That curve and flow
Bodies that gamble
And you can bet
They'll help to sell
A cigarette
Bodies that ride
In sleek machines
And helps to sell
Designer jeans
The most beautiful
bodies
You ever saw
Bodies that help
Sell alcohol
Slender legs
In slinky dress
Always revealing
Less and less ...
The message being
That all of this
Is the image
Of glamorous
A beauty statement
Finality
Increasing sexist
Mentality
'Cause underneath
Are all the lies...
Just prostitution
In disguise
And it's best
That pimps don't
know
A way to make
The profits grow
Some like 'em thin
Sleek as a cat...
And there's nothing
Wrong with that
But I for one
Would tip my hat
To a lady

That's big and fat
I like to enter
Into the zone
Of excess meat
Stuck to the bone
I like to roll
Romp and mesh
On top of mounds
And mounds of flesh
Slippery suction
As I pounce
On more bounce
To the ounce
They can squash me
Like a gnat
But that's okay
I like 'em fat
There goes another
T.V. ad
Perpetuating
The same old fad
This time they got
Some brand-new
bait
To help a woman
Who's overweight
Diet pills
To help you make
Your body curvy
As a snake...
Pills that help
Work up a sweat...
Help you move
Fast as a jet
All to aid you
In the fight
To control
Your appetite
They leave no time
For hesitation
Half-naked girls
On every station
Skinny women

Flaunting their
stuff...
Knowing men
Can't get enough...
Of lean cuisine
Tall and sleek
Nature pleasing
Body freaks
And it's best
That pimps don't
know
A way to make
Their profits grow
Some like 'em thin
Sleek as a cat...
And there's nothing
Wrong with that
But I, for one
Would tip my hat
To a lady
That's big and fat
I like to enter
Into the zone
Of excess meat
Stuck to the bone
I like to roll,
Romp and mesh
On top of mounds
And mounds of flesh
Slippery suction
As I pounce
On more bounce
To the ounce
They can squash me
Like a gnat
But that's okay
I like 'em fat

Excerpted from
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Lyric Collection,
Vol. I

Jazz, What It Be Like

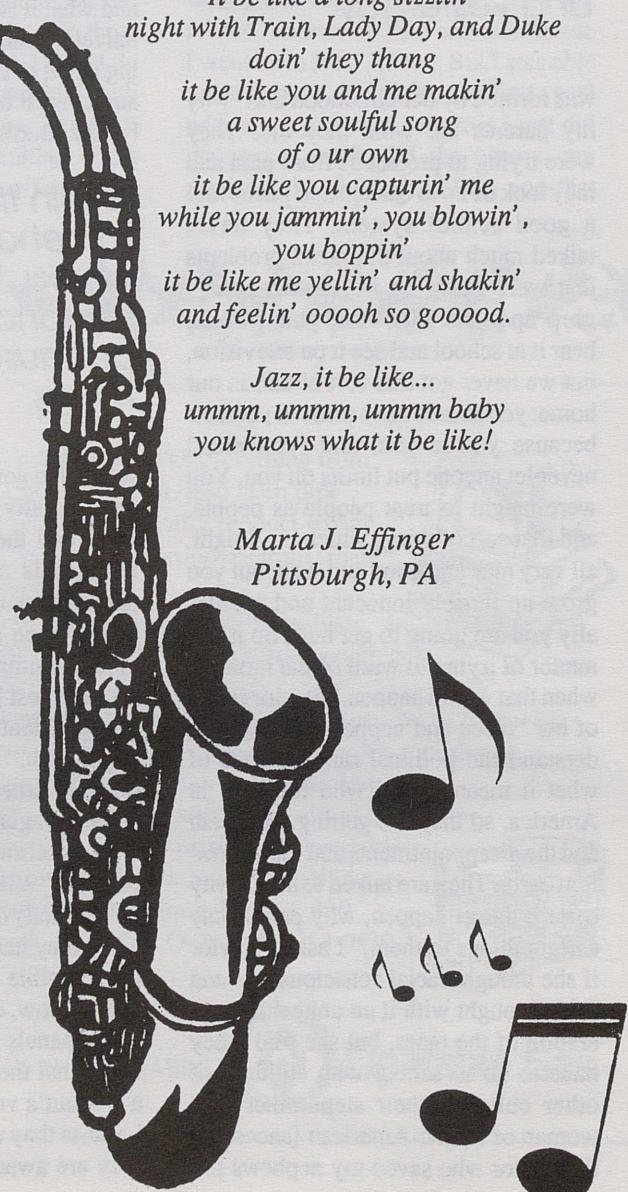
Jazz, what it be like?
It be like fingers movin' down my spine
inch by inch
that hummin' sound gonna' ring
in my ear baby
gonna' ring in my ear.

Jazz, what it be like?
It be like the fusion of those
chocolate, honey, and coffee brown
brothers jammin' in my head
lips be a blowin', blowin'
that they blows my mind.

Jazz, what it be like?
It be like a long sizzlin'
night with Train, Lady Day, and Duke
doin' they thang
it be like you and me makin'
a sweet soulful song
of our own
it be like you capturin' me
while you jammin', you blowin',
you boppin'
it be like me yellin' and shakin'
and feelin' oooh so gooood.

Jazz, it be like...
ummm, ummm, ummm baby
you know what it be like!

Marta J. Effinger
Pittsburgh, PA



Bob Kaufman

Dialogues of an American Caliban

by Rane Arroyo

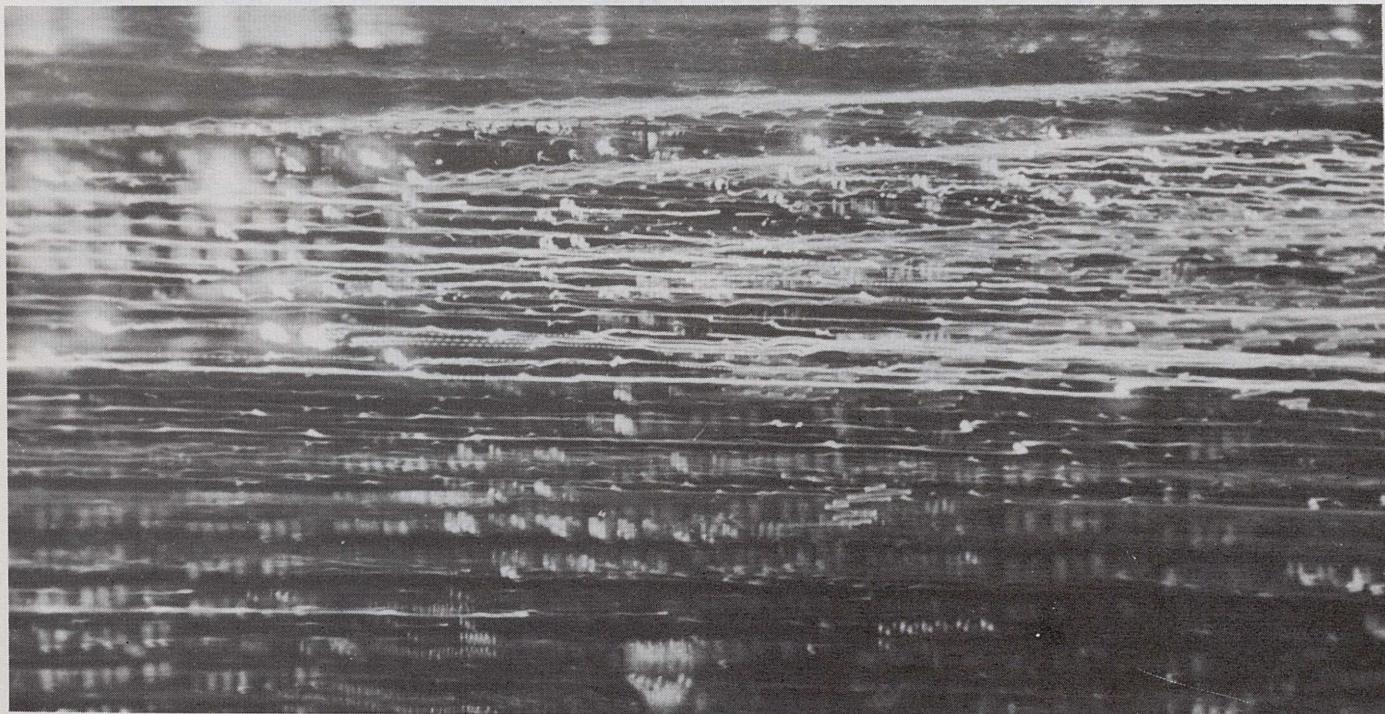


Photo ©Derriek Robinson

... music forms contain improvisational potentials that can liberate the spontaneous self

The Beat poet Bob Kaufman is unique among his contemporaries; he is a Black poet for whom jazz and jazz improvisations were always part of his culture, not merely appropriated as in the examples of his more famous Beat "brothers:" Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Kaufman's sensibility has been from the very first centered on language and rhythm, providing a segue for him upon which to focus on the ideological hierarchies "behind" language. I chose to

approach Kaufman's writings through a dialogic approach because of the importance of linguistics and voices in Kaufman's poet-narrator in his first book *Solitudes Crowded with Loneliness*.

Critic Aldon Lynn Nielson emphasizes language's role in creating distances between the accepted culture and the (by inference) unaccepted culture:

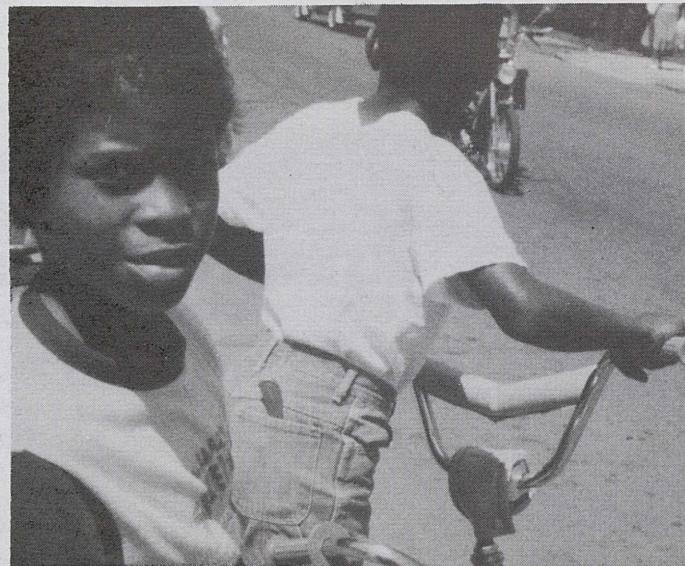
There must be something said about the other which somehow differentiates him from yourself if you are to enslave,

Continued on page 28

A Melody

Just Right For Me

Michael L. Adams
Philadelphia, PA



*she told them that when
she was a little girl, her
family was very poor, but
they made songs to sing.
Those songs made them
happier as they sang
them. The songs also
filled up that space in
their hearts.*

Kevin Jackson rested on his step on 59th Street, trying to catch the movement of a shadow from the oak in front of his house. In his fifth-grade science class, he learned to follow the movement of the sun by watching the shadow from an object. It was a warm cloudless day that had everyone complaining about the heat. He liked warm sunny days because he could do so many more things outdoors such as riding his 10-speed bike or playing ball. It also seemed as if everything moved slower. He enjoyed that because he liked to daydream, and you can't rush a daydream. If you do, it vanishes. So, he was happy, but he just continued to feel lonely. He had tried everything; playing baseball, basketball, riding his 10-speed and now, watching the tree's shadow.

Nothing worked, his mind kept returning to his lonely feeling. He wished he could make something that he could carry with him to make him happier when he felt like this.

"Hey Kevin," a voice shouted, interrupting his thoughts. "What you doing just sitting on the step?"

Kevin never turned his head from the tree's shadow. He knew it was Billy Rhodes, his best friend from up the street. He didn't feel like talking or playing, but Billy was his friend and just maybe he could help him make something.

Billy ran up to him dressed in a sweatshirt, cut off shorts and sneakers. "I thought you'd be over the playground. You know, some of the other guys want to play 58th Street a basketball game."

"I know," Kevin said, "but I don't want to play. You can, but I just want to make something."

"What?" Billy asked.

"I don't know," Billy said. "I was hoping you could help."

Billy was 11, one year older than Kevin, and most of the guys looked up to him as did Kevin. Billy thought, then he said, "I know, let's buy some clay and try to make a neighborhood like ours out of clay."

Kevin agreed, but together they only counted 32 cents, not nearly enough. "Well," Kevin mumbled, "we have to make something we don't have to buy. We don't have the money to get anything."

Suddenly, Billy grabbed Kevin's arm, pulling him up from the step. "Grandma Mary can help us, she's always making something," Billy exclaimed. Down the street they ran.

The next to the last house on 59th Street was the home of Grandma Mary. She had been living on 59th Street for as long as anyone could remember. And always willing to be what she called neighborly. She also just loved children, frequently telling them stories and having them do errands for her. Always appearing cheerful and happy, she was everyone's favorite person.

When Grandma Mary saw the two boys running down the street, from her porch, a warm feeling came to her heart. "Hi Kevin! Hi Billy! Looking for chores to do?"

"No Grandma Mary," they said in unison.

"Oh? You come to keep your Grandma company. That's nice boys. Sometimes, I wish you were mine. Have a seat!"

Billy and Kevin sat down happily. Grandma Mary was different from the other older people on the street. She was a grandma, young at heart. You could see it in her unwrinkled soft brown skin and light brown eyes. She was big, but no one ever spoke of her as being fat. A person with as much love as she, had to have room to hold it. Smiling, she asked, "Why aren't you boys playing like you usually do?"

"We want to make something," Kevin and Billy said.

"Well, what do you like to make?"

"We don't know," they both said.

"Kevin is lonely," Billy said.

Grandma Mary began to tell them how people just get lonely naturally. She said that there was a space inside each person's heart that needed to be filled by each person making something for himself. Some people knit things, others draw pictures, still others build things with different materials. BUT the boys explained that they wanted to make something without spend-

ing money. They had too little. She smiled and started humming a tune. When she finished, she told them that when she was a little girl, her family was very poor, but they made songs to sing. Those songs made them happier as they sang them. The songs also filled up that space in their hearts.

"But Grandma, we don't know how to make a song and besides, we don't have instruments," the boys said.

"You have your voices and words. That's all you need."

"We don't know any words," Billy said.

Grandma told them, all they needed was a melody, then the words could come, too. She hummed, then said, "all you need is a melody to make you not feel lonely." Next, she asked them, "What rhymes with lonely?"

"Me," Kevin answered.

She laughed, saying, "Not if you have a melody." She asked Billy what it was that made him feel alive. He told her, because he could touch, taste and see things. Then she said, "That's it. That's the song."

"What?" they both replied.

"How can you be lonely if you touch, taste and see?"

"I get it," Kevin said. "If you touch, taste and see, you have a melody, so how can you be lonely."

Grandma helped them put it in song form, so that it sang like this:

How can I be lonely
If I can touch, taste and see
Oh how can I be lonely
If I find a melody
A melody, a melody
One just right for me.

First they sang, then they whistled until they both felt good.

"Thank you, Grandma," they said, finally bolting off the porch in a hurry. It echoed in Grandma Mary's ears. And their fullness brought tears of joy to her eyes.

"Don't lose it!" she called after them.

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or, after emancipation, if his condition
is to be kept different from your own.

Bob Kaufman is hyperaware that he is an "other" in mainstream America. In his poem, "To My Son, Parker, Asleep in the Next Room," Kaufman states clearly and forcefully that he, himself, is "secure in this avowed truth, that no man is our master,/nor can any ever be, at any time in time to come."

Dialogist Mikhail M. Bakhtin suggests that any dominant language "weaves in and out of judgments and accents, merges with some, recoils from others." Kaufman focuses on issues of loneliness and silence; he took a 12-year vow of silence after the assassination of President Kennedy. Kaufman has seen

the white Beat poets receive honors and awards, while his work has been overwhelmed by the notoriety of his jail sentences. Yet, despite these factors, Kaufman continues thinking of himself as a poet, a wordworker. His poems clearly express a love of language, yet language and society both appear to be his oppressors, not an unusual dilemma for artists.

To mainstream readers and listeners, Kaufman's poems are stereotyped as irreverent, irrelevant and irregular. The term "irrelevant" itself assumes a privileged vantage point. The label of "irrelevant" has been applied to his work by canonical writers such as Robert Penn Warren, and the value-laden term "irregular" is applied by mainstream crit-

ics who do not understand that Kaufman's poems are often written to be read to jazz music. As Bakhtin said, those critics fail to understand communication as a "maximum of mutual understanding." When the poems are fixed upon a page, they lose the added meanings given them by musical accompaniment.

Kaufman is very much aware of William Shakespeare's presentation of—and implied linguistic authority over *The Tempest's* characterization—Caliban. Kaufman writes,

calling us dirty names. With all those syllables, we couldn't write a cheerful death notice.

The act of naming, or calling, is integral to the perception of the object being named or evoked. Kaufman knows that Caliban is central to the master's discourse; the slave must not possess a "real" language, and he must also be "impure"; that is, he must come from a lineage that is somehow connected to the Judeo-Christian concept of sin (even to the devil himself) or of shame (*Ham* of Chapter 9, *Genesis*). Possessing "syllables" is not the same as controlling them; in fact, the reverse may be true.

There is a controlled rage hidden within many of Kaufman's word choices, word clusters and tropes in *Solitudes Crowded with Loneliness*. The title itself "implodes" with the significance of Bakhtin's unified model of contradictory language which should be self-evident whether one chooses to call it a paradox, a trope or a "heteroglossia" moment. Most of Kaufman's poems make references to jazz and the blues, and how these music forms contain improvisational potentials that can liberate the spontaneous self. In "Walking Parker Home," Kaufman says:

Smothered rage covering pyramids of notices spontaneously exploding

Cool revelations / shrill hopes / beauty speared into greedy ears

Poem

Little brown boy,
Slim, dark, big-eyed,
Crooning love songs to your banjo
Down at the Lafayette—
Gee, boy, I love the way you hold your head,
High sort of and a bit to one side,
Like a prince, a jazz prince. And I love
Your eyes flashing, and your hands,
And your patent-leathered feet,
And your shoulders jerking the jig-wa,
And I love your teeth flashing,
And the way your hair shines in the spotlight
Like it was the real stuff.
Gee, brown boy, I loves you all over.
I'm glad I'm a jig. I'm glad I can
Understand your dancin' and your
Singing', and feel all the happiness
And joy and don't care in you.
Gee, boy, when you sing, I can close my ears
And hear tom toms just as plain.
Listen to me, will you, what do I know
About tom toms? But I like the word, sort of,
Don't you? It belongs to us.
Gee, boy, I love the way you hold your head,
And the way you sing, and dance,
And everything.
Say, I think you're wonderful. You're
All right with me,
You are.

Helene Johnson
Caroling Dusk



The spectators attend the spectacle in the hope that something perceivable will be actualized. What is heard turns out to be beyond what can be expressed through common language, a prime example of the dialogic moment.

Sound plays a very important role in Kaufman's poems; these are not sounds actualized or perceived as words. Kaufman calls his writing the "singing the nail-in-the-foot song," which coincides with Bakhtin's view of "language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion." Pain has its own vocabulary.

When Kaufman does refer to Christian imagery, he always tempers the reference with his own particularized political vantage point, "Singing Jacob's song, with Caribbe emphasis." Although Kaufman's father was a German Orthodox Jew, his mother was a Black woman from Martinique. Kaufman refers to "Caribbe" perceptions, but he is more focused on his political position as an "other" in America.

In "Dear John," he reveals his growing disappointment in the America he lives in,

It has been a lifetime, it seems.
I am no longer what I once was,
So I can't speak with my old eloquence.

I have become less and darker
Than a shadow.

Kaufman confesses that rather than gaining wisdom by his experiences, he is losing the little "eloquence" that was ever his. Note how Kaufman's "darker / Than a shadow" brings the image of Caliban to mind.

Kaufman "curses" American society in "Second April" in a very indirect and, ultimately, subversive manner. He takes the master's "language" and through the sheer strength of his voice forces as assumed and agreed grammatical rules to collapse. The poem begins with a quote from *Romans*: "Be ye not conformed to this world: but be ye trans-

To Midnight Nan at Leroy's

*Strut and wiggle,
Shameless gal.
Wouldn't no good fellow
Be your pal.*

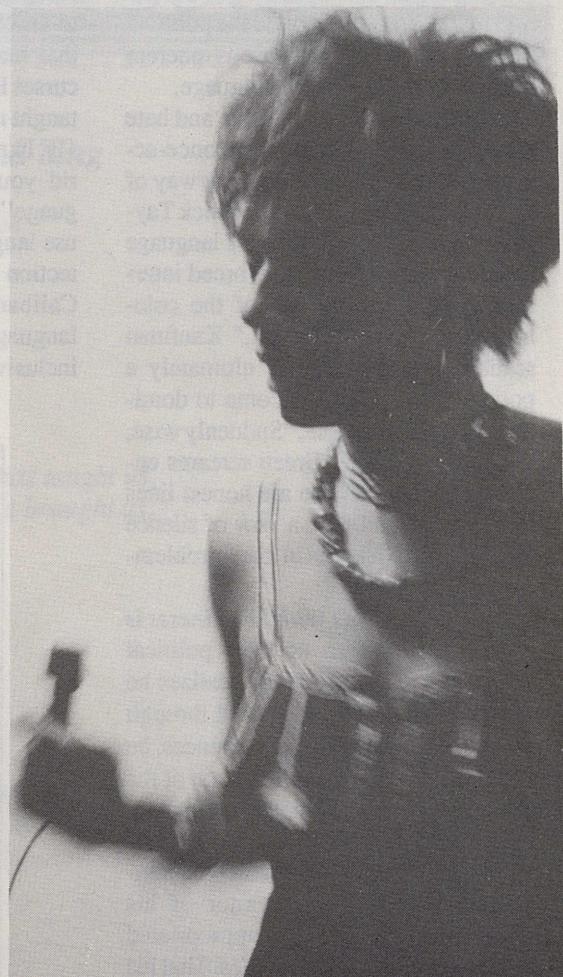
*Hear dat music....
Jungle night.
Hear dat music....
And the moon was white.*

*Sing your Blues song,
Pretty baby.
You want lovin'
And you don't mean maybe.*

*Jungle lover....
Night black boy....
Two against the moon
And the moon was joy.*

*Strut and wiggle,
Shameless Nan.
Wouldn't no good fellow
Be your man.*

*Langston Hughes
The Weary Blues*



formed by the renewing of the mind." Kaufman, like Caliban, is tired of fetching the fuel, a tireless and thankless job whether performed on a symbolic or on an experiential level.

In these opening lines from "Second April," Kaufman attacks grammar, which itself is nothing more than a societal agreement of how to order the world—

O man in inner basement core of me,
maroon obliteration smelling futures of
green anticipated comings, pasts denied,
now time to thwart time, time to
freeze illusionary motion of far imag-

ined walls, stopped bleeding moondial
clocks, booming out dead hours—
gone...gone...gone...on to second April,
ash-smeared crowns, perfect conically
balanced, pyramid-peaked heads, shud-
dering, beamed on lead-held cylinders—
on granite-flowered windows, on
frigid triumphs, unmolded of shapes,
assumed aspects, transparent lizards,
shattered glaciers, infant mountains,
formed once, all time given to dis-
appearance, speculation, investigation of
holes, rocks, caught freaks

Continued on page 30

What sense are we as readers to make of this? Kaufman liberates his voice by using the comma, weaker than the period mark. He gives form to the political contradictions and the tensions inherent in the American English language.

Kaufman focuses on his love and hate relationship to a language that once-acquired becomes part of his very way of perceiving reality. As critic Patrick Taylor emphasizes, "[t]he gift of language is but the beginning of the forced internalization of the culture of the colonizer." In "African Dream," Kaufman realizes that language is ultimately a political entity that has come to dominate him; he confesses, "Suddenly wise, I fight the dream: / Green screams enfold my night." These are honest lines from a man who took a vow of silence for 12 years; silence is in itself problematic.

Solitude Crowded With Loneliness is a book that reaches no clear political resolution. While Kaufman realizes he is a class victim, as evidenced through his drug addiction and jail sentences, he is also addicted to the articulation of the self he sees existing in bars, poetry readings, lovers' beds and in "inner basements" of all kinds. Kaufman sees himself as both an appropriator of his master's tongue and as an appropriated speaker for his master's values. That his poems were ever gathered into books are in themselves acts of assimilation; Kaufman is part of the dialogic system of mutual exchanges that are not necessarily equal.

Kaufman is a victim of the social constructs that inevitably follow the domination of one language and culture over another language and culture. Kaufman refuses to "speak" and continues to take drugs; he fails artistically, by mainstream standards, but, as Bakhtin says, it is his individual failures that provide him with his "dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words."

Kaufman enters his masters' language from the viewpoint of the oppressed; he cannot be placed outside of the ideolog-

ical hierarchy of the concept of language. When Caliban cries out in great pain and fear in *The Tempest*, he dares to articulate the frustration and despair that many people fear today. Caliban curses Prospero with these words, "You taught me language; and my profit on it / Is, I know how to curse; the red plague rid you, / For learning me your language!" Kaufman, too, has "learned" to use language as a means of attack, protection and comfort. As an American Caliban, Kaufman's poems help our language intensify and evolve toward inclusivity of the "other."

would. Because I celebrate myself. I see so many strengths in being a Black woman, so many strengths in being from a working-class family with a rural Southern background, *so many negatives, too*, for all of those things! But it gives me ME." She said, with passion in her voice, that when she writes she "wants to be good," and there is no doubt at all that she is.

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Lift Every Voice and Sing

by James Weldon Johnson

*Lift every voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the listening skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us.
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us,
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun
Let us march on till victory is won.*

*Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chastening rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears have been watered,
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.*

*God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who has by Thy might
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray
Lest our feet stray from the places, Our God, where we met Thee
Lest our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand,
True to our GOD,
True to our native land.*

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