

Fourth Anniversary
Issue

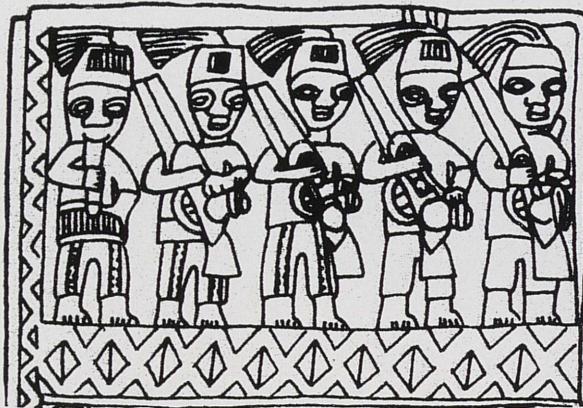
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Salute to Black
Male Writers

\$3



The young men keep coming on
The strong men keep coming on.

Sandburg

They dragged you from your homeland,
They chained you in coffles,
They huddled you spoon-fashion in filthy hatches,
They sold you to give a few gentlemen ease.
They broke you in like oxen,
They scourged you,
They branded you,
They made your women breeders,
They swelled your numbers with bastards...
They taught you the religion they disgraced.

You sang:
Keep a-inchin' along
Lak a po' inch worm...

You sang:
Bye and bye
I'm gonna lay down dis heaby load...

You sang:
Walk togedder, chillen,
Dontcha git weary...
The strong men keep a-comin' on
The strong men git stronger.

They point with pride to the roads you built for them,

They ride in comfort over the rails you laid for them.
They put hammers in your hands
And said-Drive so much before sundown.

You sang:
Ain't no hammah
In dis lan',
Strikes lak mine, bebbby,

Strong Men

Strikes lak mine.

They cooped you in their kitchens,
They penned you in their factories,
They gave you the jobs that they were too good for,
They tried to guarantee happiness to themselves
By shunting dirt and misery to you.

You sang:

Me an'muh baby gonna shine, shine
Me an'muh baby gonna shine.
The strong men keep a-comin' on
The strong men git stronger...
They bought off some of yur leaders
You stumbled, as blind men will...
They coaxed you, unwountedly soft-voiced...
You followed a way.

Then laughed as usual.

They heard the laugh and wondered;
Uncomfortable,
Unadmitting a deeper terror...

The strong men keep a-comin' on
Gittin' stronger...

What, from the slums

Where they have hemmed you,
What, from the tiny huts

They could not keep from you-What reaches them
Making them ill at ease, fearful?

Today they shout prohibition at you

"Thou shalt not this"

"Thou shalt not that"

"Reserved for whites only"

You laugh.

One thing they cannot prohibit- The strong men...coming on

The strong men gittin' stronger.
Strong men....
Stronger....

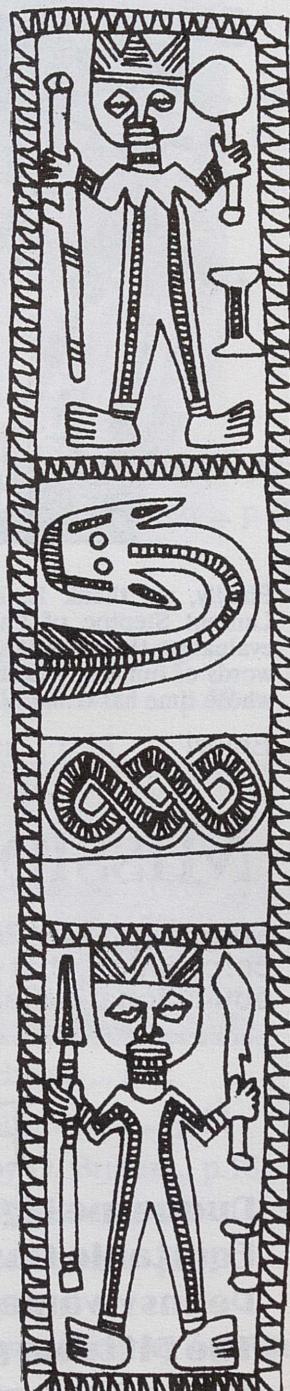
Sterling A. Brown

Yet Do I Marvel

I doubt not God is good, well-meaning, kind,
And did He stoop to quibble could tell why
The little buried mole continues blind,
Why flesh that mirrors Him must someday die,
Make plain the reason tortured Tantalus
Is baited by the fickle fruit, declare
If merely brute caprice dooms Sisyphus
To struggle up a never-ending stair.

Inscrutable His ways are, and immune
To catechism by a mind too strewn
With petty cares to slightly understand
What awful brain compels His awful hand;
Yet do I marvel at this curious thing:
To make a poet black, and bid him sing!

Countee Cullen - 1925



FOUNDER'S STATEMENT



This Spring, 1991 "Salute to Black Male Writers" issue marks the beginning of *Shooting Star Review's* fifth year. We could not have survived without the many wonderful people who volunteered over the years. The importance of volunteerism is better understood when realizing that in our first production year, we operated on just \$10,000 and have never exceeded \$40,000 in operating revenues. Hopefully, we'll be able to produce with more than good intentions in the very near future. We are grateful to the hundreds of artists who entrust *Shooting Star* with their creations each year.

Finally, we thank E. Ethelbert Miller of Washington, DC and Lamont Steptoe of Philadelphia, PA for recruiting the writers, evaluating the materials and coordinating an issue that is -- in the words of our Copy Editor Ervin Dyer -- "... a fine edition and one whose time has come."

Enjoy!

Mission Statement

Shooting Star Productions, Inc. is a non-profit corporation that exists to promote artistic and educational outlets for Black culture.

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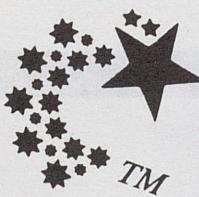
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SUBMISSION POLICY

FREE Submission Guidelines with helpful information, including upcoming themes and maximum word counts are available with a self-addressed and stamped envelope (SASE). All submissions must include a self-addressed envelope with sufficient return postage and artist's name and address on each page.

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 Strong Men, by Jay Allen

Clockwise from top: Paul L. Dunbar, James Baldwin, August Wilson



WHEN WE ARE ALONE



Photo © Denetria Craig

*I let the children
climb into my bed. They
are afraid to sleep alone.
It is dark and they cannot
see. I feel their small bodies
against mine. A small foot pushes
into the center of my chest. I tickle
it and it moves quickly away joining
a silly laugh.
Tonight is a night for stories
and tales filled with monsters
and Mickey Mouse. I tell my children
to hush and listen. I find the words
from somewhere else. I borrow this
moment from my mother and memory.
The stories begin
when we are alone and afraid
of the dark. We need the stories
to hold us. We need the words to keep us warm.*

E. Ethelbert Miller
Washington, DC

SATURDAY RENDEZVOUS

*I staged the Civil War
in the back room with
plastic men and horses
while my mother cooked in
her vinyl slippers, the ones
with the slight heels and the toes
that gave the appearance
of woven bands of fabric.
She stirred the chicken
and vegetable in the gumbo
slowly, with one hand first
on her hip and then wiping
her forehead, while her hair
lost the curls she had just made.
My father came in
from the back yard with
my uncles in a gust
of winter air and laughter,
strong men with thick hands
and plaid shirts who knew
the real meaning of cities,
who were roughly urbane,
and they sat around the table,
as my father leaned over
to the bottom cabinet,
pulled out his Old Grand Dad,
and fixed a bowl of ice,
popped open a Coca-Cola
for the Saturday evening drink.
My mother asked about*

*their wives, her sisters and aunt,
who had already called
and telephoned in my uncles' coordinates
like the intelligence network
they were, and I slinked back
to my place in the back room,
waiting, as the men did,
for the soup, trying to remember
the strategy of the first Bull Run
as I learned it in school.
The cackling played
like low saxophones in the kitchen,
as I moved to the doorway
to see the light reflecting
in their eyes, the quick "Hee, hee"
of one uncle as he smiled
through weakening teeth and
my mother's happy solemnity,
satisfied in knowing they had
been confined after a day
of driving through the city,
bragging about their cars,
making passes at women.
She served them their gumbo
while I took delight in
a treaty with childhood ensuring
that these times would never end.*

Micheal S. Weaver
Philadelphia, PA

BALDWIN REMEM- BERED



8p.m. December seventh.
Harlem, New York. LaMer,
my 2 year old and I walk
down St. Nicholas Avenue to
6030. This is the address of
Bentas Funeral Home.
“Jimmy” has finally returned
from exile. He is laid out in
the same establishment that
buried the poet Langston
and Philadelphia poet Larry

Neal who died at the age of
41. Police guards are
stationed outside. Inside are
clusters of people speaking
in hushed tones. Occa-
sionally, a flash from some
camera goes off. We enter
the chapel where Jimmy is
and find a brilliantly
polished mahogany coffin
with gold-plated handles.

The lid is in an upright position behind the casket that is emblazoned with a large gold cross and a nameplate.

The body is hidden from view by a glass gauzed over except for the face and upper chest. A blue cloth covers the hair down to the forehead. With LaMer in my arms, we gaze at Jimmy's face for a final time. Those famous eyes and mouth closed forever. This is my daughter's first experience with death. She is horrified! We move away. I murmur, "Goodbye, "Jimmy."

11:30 a.m. December eighth. Harlem, New York. St. John Divine Cathedral. This modern day Black prophet buried from an edifice named for a biblical prophet whose prophecies are yet to be fulfilled! The world has come to say goodbye to "Jimmy." Reporters and photographers crowd the steps. Mourners mount the steep steps with resolve. The weather is clear, sunny, crisp. Inside, down the long aisle, surrounded by 12- to 15-foot high candles in elaborate candelabrum, "Jimmy's" black shrouded coffin lies in state. The well known and the unknown have gathered today to say goodbye but also to celebrate the life of James Arthur Baldwin. For the next hour, a multitude of people from all walks of life move into the church unceasingly. Soon, the 5,000 programs that were printed are gone and still more people arrive. At last the service begins.

From the back of the church a procession of priests, family, fellow artists and friends begin the long walk to the front of the church to the sound of drums played by Olatungi. Among the procession: Sonia Sanchez, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, Quincey Troupe and Amiri Baraka. Later horns, voices and organ music will fill the air of this vaulted space in celebration of Jimmy's life. Baldwin, originating from humble beginnings, had shaken the world with his perception and would continue to shake it for some time to come. Odetta sings, her voice rich with joy

and sorrow. Maya Angelou remembers her and Baldwin's friendship. Toni Morrison tells of how Baldwin inspired her writing. Amiri Baraka tells of his friendship with Jimmy and calls Jimmy, "God's Black Revolutionary Mouth."

A tape is played with Baldwin singing the Lord's Prayer. Later, I was to find out that Baldwin had gone into a studio with Philadelphia musician, Bayard Lancaster in the waning days of his life in France to make the album on which the prayer appears.

It's now time to give Jimmy back to the earth. Again, the drums. Like an ocean of sound, the drums roll over the assembled thousands, flooding the church, pushing out the windows and doors, rising up to the highest vaulted pinnacle, threatening to move the stones from their very foundations. In the midst of this skin/wood thunder, the procession begins the final walk that will marry Baldwin to eternity. His 85-year-old mother, wheel-chair bound, heads up the column. What must she feel? What must she know? Her life having eclipsed a son and prophet, what words will she speak with God? The drums, awesome history of Africa fill up the church, fill up Harlem, fill up New York. This was no ordinary man. This Baldwin was a King, perhaps a new Black Saint.

Jimmy is taken out into the light of day one last time for his final ride. Thousands emerge from the cocoon of the church, spill down the steps into the streets, surround the funeral procession before it speeds off into New York traffic. Reddened eyes above returning smiles. We all head for home knowing something great and good was done here today. In your new world "Jimmy", hopefully, "the price of the ticket" won't be so high.

Lamont B. Steptoe
Philadelphia, PA

PHELA MO LONGO

(for Azanian singer/actor Fana Kenkana)

brought back
thru music, of course.
Zulu tongues and drums,
chanting harmonies...
i've heard them before:
**"IF I'M STILL
ALIVE AND HAVE EYES
WE WILL SEE THAT FREEDOM DAY...
STILL ALIVE
AND STILL HAVE EARS
WE WILL HEAR THE MUSIC PLAY..."**
i've heard you sing these same songs.
struggled with porridge
while they danced on the walls/homespace.
watched in amazement
at African Boot Dancing on California beaches.
joined/in uncharacteristic abandonment.

**"THE PEOPLE ARE WATCHING
IN OUR WORLD
THE PEOPLE ARE WAITING
IN OUR WORLD
THE PEOPLE ARE LIVING
IN OUR WORLD"**

i've heard you cry these same melodies,
when tired of the grind in "Survival".
tired...lonely...missing Lindi

and your fana kekana.

i've heard you cry-felt the shaking and twitching-
watched you fight south african police
all night.

flinch from beatings

all night.

clenching grip

all night,

sometimes.....so tight.

SO TIGHT.

others came to hear you sing and dance.
tell the story with laughter then brutal anger.
every night you survived those truest tales
to return home/space and cry
south african police in your dreams.

to shake and twitch

fists and cattle prods in your dreams.

humiliation and institutionalized brutality
in your dreams.

yet morning,

your mouth always tasted clean,

and still you'd sing:

**"PHELA PHELA PHELA MO LONGO LONGO
PHELA PHELA PHELA MO LONGO LONGO
ASI PHELA ASI PHELA MO LONGO
ASI PHELA ASI PHELA MO LONGO**

MAMA!

ASI PHELA MO LONGO

MAMA!

ASI PHELA MO LONGO"**



DUNBAR

Ah, how poets sing and die!
Make one song and Heaven takes it;
Have one heart and Beauty breaks it;
Chatterton, Shelley, Keats and I--
Ah, how poets sing and die!

Quoted lyrics from the play
"SURVIVAL" used with permission from author.

Mbali Umoja
Philadelphia, PA

The First of Several Letters Opposing a Bill before the Senate of Pennsylvania

We hold this truth to be self-evident, that God created all men equal, and (it) is one of the most prominent features in the Declaration of Independence, and in that glorious fabric of collected wisdom, our noble Constitution. This idea embraces the Indian and European, the savage and the saint, the Peruvian and the Laplander, the white man and the African, and whatever measures are adopted subversive of this inestimable privilege are in direct violation of the letter and spirit of our Constitution, and become subject to the animadversion of all, particularly those who are deeply interested in the measure.

These thoughts were suggested by the promulgation of a late bill, before the Senate of Pennsylvania, to prevent the emigration of people of color into this state. It was not passed into a law at this session and must in consequence lay over until the next, before when we sincerely hope the white men, whom we should look upon as our protectors, will have become convinced of the inhumanity and impolicy of such a measure, and forbear to deprive us of those inestimable treasures, liberty and independence.

This is almost the only state in the Union wherein the African race have justly boasted of rational liberty and the protection of the laws, and shall it now be said they have been deprived of that liberty, and publicly exposed for sale to the highest bidder? Shall colonial inhumanity, that has marked many of us with shameful stripes, become the practice of the people of Pennsylvania, while Mercy stands weeping at the miserable spectacle? People of Pennsylvania, descendants of the immortal Penn, doom us not to the unhappy fate of thousands of our country-men in the Southern states and the West Indies; despise the traffic in blood, and the blessing of the African will forever be around you.

Many of us are men of property, for the security of which we have hitherto looked to the laws of our blessed state, but should this become a law, our property is jeopardized, since the same power which can expose to sale an unfortunate fellow creature can wrest from him those estates which years of honest industry have accumulated. Where shall the people of Pennsylvania consent to oppress him?

We grant there are a number of worthless men belonging to our color, but there are laws of sufficient rigor for their punishment, if properly and duly enforced. We wish not to screen the guilty do not permit the innocent to suffer. If there are worthless men, there are also men of merit among the African race, who are useful members of society. The truth of this let their benevolent institutions and the numbers clothed and fed by them witness. Punish the guilty man of color to the utmost limit of the laws, but sell him not to slavery! If he is in danger of becoming a public charge, prevent him! If he is too indolent to labor for his own subsistence, compel him to do so; buy sell him not to slavery. By selling him you do not make him better, but commit a wrong, without benefiting the object of it or society at large. Many of our ancestors were brought here more than one hundred years ago; many of our fathers, many of ourselves, have fought and bled for the independence of our country. Do not then expose us to sale. Let not the spirit of the father behold the son robbed of that liberty which he died to establish, but let the motto of our legislators be: "The Law knows no distinction."

These are only a few desultory remarks on the subject, and I intend to succeed this effervescence of feeling by a series of essays tending to prove the impolicy and unconstitutionality of the law in question.

For the present, I leave the public to the consideration of the above observations, in which I hope they will see so much truth that they will never consent to sell to slavery.

James Forten

A MAN OF COLOR

1813

Excerpts From An Interview With Sam Allen

by Lamont Steptoe

Samuel W. Allen studied at Fisk University, the Sorbonne and Harvard Law School. *Elfenbeinzzaehne* (Ivory Tusks), Allen's first book of poetry, was published in 1956. He edited *Pan-Africanism Reconsidered, Ivory Tusks and Other Poems, Poems From Africa and Presence Africaine*. Allen was Poet-in-Residence and later Avalon Professor of Humanities at Tuskegee Institute.

Steptoe: Your early mentors, Richard Wright, James Weldon Johnson and Langston Hughes, have all passed on. How's time altered or underscored your relationship toward them?

Allen: Let me say that James Weldon Johnson was my teacher. I was in his creative writer's workshop when I was at Fisk. Richard Wright and Langston Hughes were not mentors except in the sense that I admired their work tremendously and was influenced by it, but they were not the personal mentors in the sense that James Weldon Johnson was. I am totally absorbed in their work. I think they're tremendously significant. As time goes on I think I like their work even more. Richard Wright and Langston Hughes, I think of their work and how crucial they are to the Black Experience. And James Weldon Johnson, of course, is a great forerunner. What would we do without *Creation*, without *God's Trombone*, those *Seven Magnificent Sermons*?

Steptoe: Without the Negro National Anthem.

Allen: Right! Without the Negro National Anthem. James Weldon Johnson played this role. Although he, there are chinks in everyone's armor, he also wrote some of the Coon Songs and some have disparaged his career to some extent because of that.

Steptoe: What about anger and time? As a Black man living in the West, the White West I might add, what has time done to your anger?

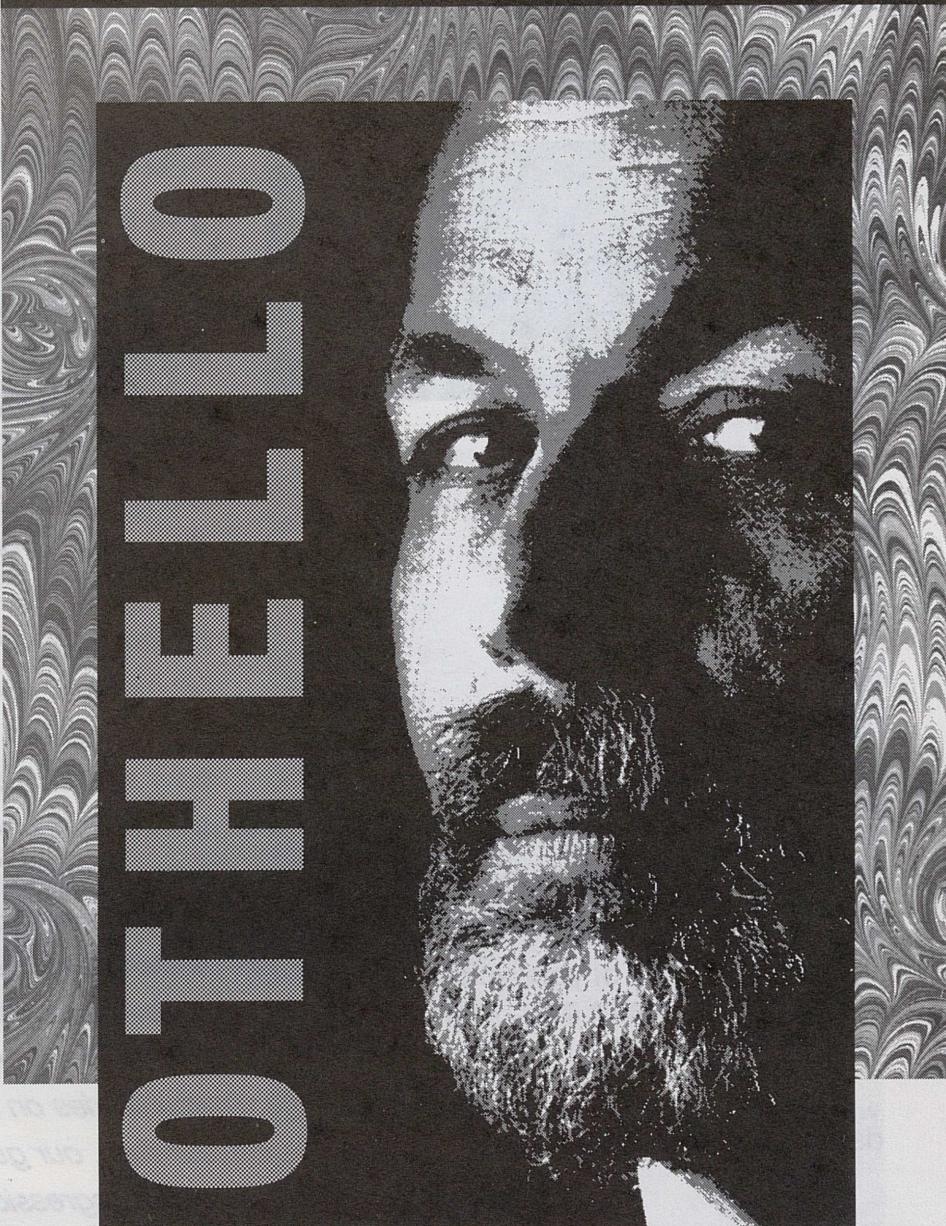
Allen: Well, one learns to channel wrath and resentment because of the historic treatment of Black people in this country. It remains there, but time in a sense doesn't heal all, but it exchanges the intensity of our feelings with angers with other emotions and you learn how to deal with it constructively so that you can build a program. You can do something creative. You can use it to martial

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your forces to do something that is worthwhile. I feel writers particularly have had to deal with their resentment with the way they have been treated in this country and to transcend that, otherwise it becomes destructive, one cannot do creative things.

Steptoe: *What was the origin of your consciousness as a Black man in America? How old were you when you realized your color would be held against you the rest of your life?*

Allen: Well those are pretty absolute terms in which to put it, but I think for all of us it tends to be true and I think that the significance of race in this country is evident in most work of most Black writers. Race consciousness comes when you're just a child, but the full realization comes in the teens. And then growing up in the Black Church, in a way the whole church experience is a cry for liberation couched in biblical terms. So, that sharpened and deepened it for me growing up as a minister's son in the AME Church and I remember when we'd all go over to Sunday School and I would stay to hear the sermon since I was the minister's boy and the burden, the substance in much of the sermons of course related to the Black Experience. It's there in the music. It's there in the ritual.



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NORTH AMERICA, 1919: SACRIFICE

*The rope knotted
to a limb of the oak.*

*The knife so sharp
it slices the air.*

The fire commenced.

The nigger is on his knees.

Death is Life!

We are fully human here.

No more no less than human.

*We have taken long draughts
from a chalice of blood and fire.*

*A cruel and jealous god
owns our faith, our glazed eyes,
owns our sweating souls.*

*And the blood of the sacrifice
will be fed to the earth
and the flesh of this battered beast
who carries on his flayed back
our pain, our guilt, our blood lust,
the transgressions of our weakness
will be fed to the fire
and the smoke of our humility
will rise up to the nostrils of god
and he will forgive us
for we will be clean.
Amen.*

Eugene Howard
Philadelphia, PA

FOOTNOTE TO A MARRIAGE

Intimate shadows populate
my dark nostalgia:
a touch as beautiful
as the hiss of tires
 splashing in midnight rain.
I am so
 calm
 here (blissful)
without the razor of your voice
filling my world with pain.
I age
 gracefully: becoming a gaunt hermit
 among my books and poems in hazy
days
 of russet
 leaves
and pilgrim memories
silvered like comets
streaking the black void
of my beard.
Lush like silence
flowing through
canyons of my solitude. Placid
like the lyrics of my tears.

Askia M. Tovre'

KOULÉ

*Lé yo pa wé yo di fé nwa.
Lé yo en déy yo mété nwa.
A la koule pase mizé.
Gen yon mou ki mete nwa li ka pab fé vi debodé.
Rele li jig li mete nwa tou?*

Yo fé nou konpran-n nwa se koulé lan mó.

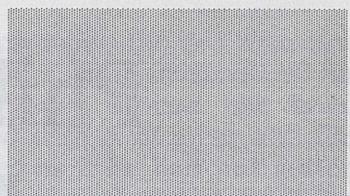
*Tout nwa annon konpran-n nou sóti nan men-m kontinan
tan kou nwa Afrik*

nwa Amerik

nwa Azi

nwa Erop

nwa Oseyani.



COLOR

*When it's dark they say it's black.
When they mourn they wear black.
What a miserable color.
Can someone wearing black mess up your life?
Why do judges wear black?
They make us comprehend black is the color for death.
Let's understand we come from the same continent
like black Africa
the black Americas
black Asia
black Europe
black Oceana.*



Jean Ronald Taifer
Translation by Zoe Anglesey
New York, NY

YOGA IS NOT A WAY OF LIFE
IT'S A WAY OF LIVING

Philadelphia Bar-B-Que

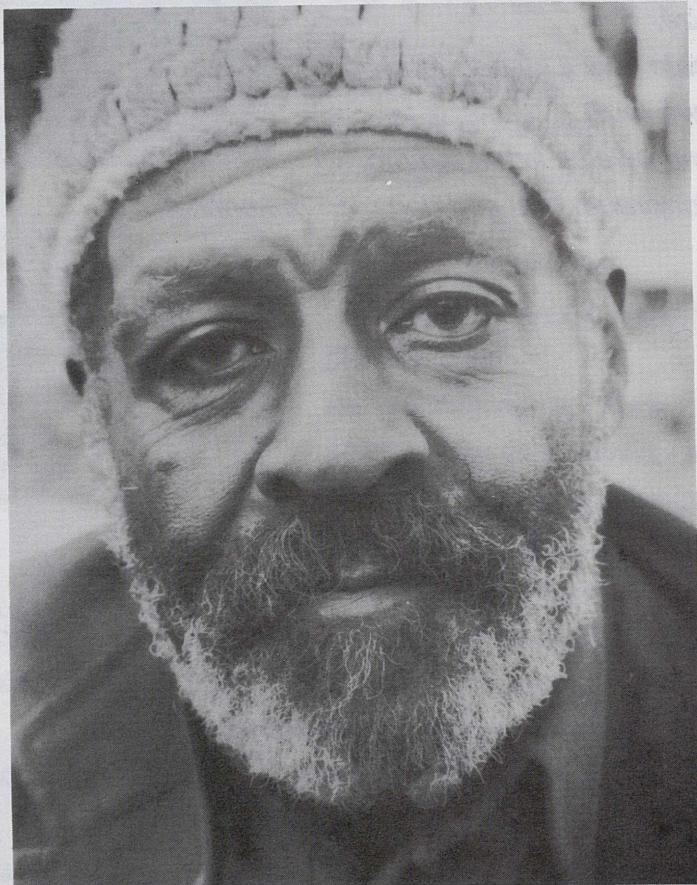


Photo © Manchester Craftsmen's Guild

Walter Mosley

New York, NY

"This 9-1-1?" The old man asked.

"Police emergencies. Yes sir, what's the problem?"

"Death," he said. He

raised a half-pint bottle from the table to his mouth. "There's somebody dead nex do'."

"Have you seen a body sir?"

"Ain't seen it, no."

"Did you hear shots or a struggle, a fight?"

"No, I ain't heard nuthin from over there in couple a days."

"This is an emergency number, sir. We can't issue a call unless there is a real emergency."

"What you call a dead man? An he done kilt him too, you can bet on that."

"Who are you talking about, sir?"

"The man! The man that kilt the other one. The one I been smellin fo' the las day an a half." The old man knocked back a deep draught. "It took me a while but I fin'ly figgered out what it was. I ain't smelt nuthin like that in seventy years. An it still makes me sick."

"I'm sorry, sir, but you'll have to call it in to your regular precinct," the voice said.

"Where do you live?"

"You cain't hep me?"

"I'll give you the number of the number of the police station where you live if you'll give me your address."

"Ain't you the police?"

"Yessir, but we only handle those emergencies where life or property are in immediate danger."

"Oh." The old man pulled his large earlobe and stared out the window. West Philadelphia was just turning light in the overcast morning. "I guess a dead man don't count in that. Danger past for a dead man I guess..."

"Sir? Could you give me your address?"

"Yeah. I'm over on Suttah, tween Gregory an eighteenth."

"That's the West Philly station," the voice said and gave the old man a number.

"Hold on, hold on! I ain't got no pencil right here..."

"I'm sorry, sir, but I'll have to ask you to call information. This is an emergency line and we can't tie it up that long."

"Jus hold yo pants an I get my pencil."

"Sorry. Just ask for the West Philadelphia Police Department," the voice said and then hung up.

* * *

It was late afternoon when the old man saw a police car roll to a stop in front of his building. The policemen looked like boys. The tall one walked with a swagger and the shorter one squinted as if he had just gotten out of bed. The old man asked himself, "Can they let boys that young be cops?"

"Mr. Fornay? I'm officer Monroe and this is my partner, Officer Kincaid," the squint-eyed policeman said from the hallway. "You called the station about a foul odor you were experiencing?"

"I called about the smella death comin in my windah. Yeah, I guess you could call it a foul odor."

The officers had to cover their noses and rub their eyes when they entered the room.

"Shit!" The tall one said. "Smells more like a dead horse than a man. Whew!" He waved his cap in front of his face.

"Uh-uh, son, you got it wrong. That's manflesh." The old man's nose curled up in a snarl. "Burnt manflesh. Or maybe a woman. That boy nex do' love t'beat up women."

Officer Monroe went to the window and stuck his head out. "Yeah, it's coming from out here alright. Why don't you just close the window, Mr. Fornay? Keep the smell out." He pushed the window closed.

"I guess I could jus stick my head in the toilet, that keep me from smellin it too."

"No reason to get angry, sir. I just meant that..."

"It gets a hundred degrees in this place when they got the heat on. I ain't got no thermometer but you can believe it. An when you ask em to turn it down they tells ya that they's a hundred other fam'lies need that heat. An when you turn the handle on the radiator it fill up wit liquid an it gets colder that shit in here. An when you ask em ta fix it you know what they say?"

"I'm sorry about that, Mr. Fornay, but we don't handle that kind of problem..."

"I know that. I ain't askin neither, I got my own lil answer: I jus leave my windah cracked an that keep it jus right. They wanna waste that Arab oil it's okay wit me. That's why them Arabs is so rich anyway."

Well like I said, sir, that's not a problem that we can handle."

"What about that smell?"

The tall man touched his partner's shoulder and motioned his head toward the door. He was smiling and sure and full of himself.

"We'll put in a complaint for you, Mr. Fornay. And if the smell doesn't go away in a few days the sanitation department will get to them." Officer Monroe squinted at him. He took out a black leather notepad and a pen.

"Sanitation? They the ones gonna arrest that crazy man? You the police. That man been yellin an screamin an beatin on folks in that house for two years, just you ask anyone round here. I seen him throw girls naked out the house at two in the mo'nin, even later. An now he got the smella death up here an you gonna call the gobbage man?"

Officer Kincaid, still waving the cap, said, "Listen, old timer, we're the police and we have a lot of experience in these things. All the time we find old people, like you, who have expired in their houses with no one around. Believe me, we know the smell of

death. What you got from the house next door is your tar or your rubber or just a bad roast..."

"You don't know what you talkin' bout, boy," Mr. Fornay snorted. "Thats a dead man I'm smellin."

"Uh, well, maybe we can check it out, Artie," Monroe said. "I mean Mr. Fornay seems to know what he's talking about."

"Yeah, sure."

From the window the old man watched them go down to their car. They drove off without even looking at the house next door.

"Damn cops. Ain't worf nuthin."

In an hour the room was boiling hot and the old man opened his window, just a crack. The smell was still there, the smell of human flesh on fire.

Mr. Fornay remembered when he was a young man in uniform and looking for a good time; only there was a war and killing all down the trenches.

They wouldn't let his company carry guns so instead they carried dead and dying boys back and forth and to the grave. Most died

of influenza while they waited in the mud and blood and shit. But some were gassed, some shot and some burned so bad that the first time he smelled it he fell on his face in the mud and his own vomit.

He would stand guard over twenty bodies or more armed with a stick to fight off snapping dogs who smelled meat. And those boys laid there so quiet and still with the guns rolling down at the line; the smell of death and burnt flesh was all they had left to say.

Mr. Fornay raised another bottle to his lips, drank and gagged.

WE MUST ALL RISK A LITTLE

In grey, on the dewy grass
beside decapitated corpses
heads pierced by bullets
scattered brain matter spell:
"We must all risk a little" *

* Words of a priest, murdered

in San Salvador; Nov. 1989.

Dennis Brutus, Pittsburgh

11/25/89

Faith

to Bernadine

*Water, earth, electrical fire,
gusts of air and windy breath.
All the lives I touch in all the ways I touch
them
leave their mark in me.
All that filters through my senses
through these brown eyes and this brown
skin
over the drift of these brown years
leaves its mark on me.
When I am close enough
to brush the air that touches you,
currents pass between and through us
and leave their mark in me.
There are times when my past splashes
forward
over and under the fraying woofs of life
to settle in a puddle around the muddy cuffs
of death.
Indelible marks are alive in me.
I am like you locked in the right
angles of the USA,
boxed into the abrupt corners of
the urban grid,
and when the names of the
streets are changed overnight
I sometimes lose my way.
But a round black space I have
never seen
lives in me and knows my name.
It hums in my brain, pulses in
my heart,
rides the circle of my breath.
It calls and I respond: Yes.
At the farthest borders of my
life: Yes.
And always: Yes*

Eugene Howard
Philadelphia, PA

BLOODSPORT FLAMINGO: A FESTIVAL OF DEATH!

*(with gunshot castinets)
In the manner of Pablo Neruda
Fratricide preludes
Black genocide: the blood flows;
rituals of young, male death-throes.
C.I.A. imports a drug war; U.S.A.
conspires, pimping Latin imports.
Machine guns announce drug posses,
in streets raped by dying macho. Anglo
greed scores a needed coup: billions;
a market Japanese won't seize!
Holocaust blooms in the Harlems,
resurrecting Nazi dreams.*

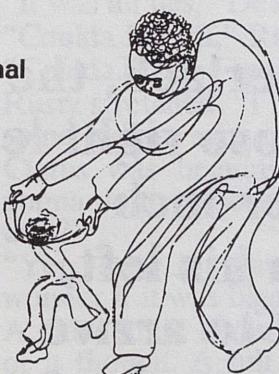
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The Man in the Moon



Photo © Andre Mosley

Percival Everett
Notre Dame, IN

Old Deke Gerlach, the foreman whose right leg was a quarter-inch shorter than his left, was the first to arrive. Rusty Cusswell, the fat

cook, was close behind. The two men rubbed their jaws and the backs of their necks and stood stupidly silent for many minutes while they observed the moon.

"I guess," said Deke, "since I was the first on the scene, it's mine."

They laughed.

Rusty chewed his lip. "You know, I always thought it was bigger."

The moon was as large as two good-sized barns and it was hard for them to see all of it, the top curving into the darkness of the pre-dawn sky.

"You see it come down?" Deke asked.

"Naw, but it shook me out of my bed roll when it landed," Rusty said.

Deke ran his tongue against his cheek. "Guess we can put to rest all those stories about men landed on this son of a bitch."

"A thing like this is bound to attract others," Rusty said.

"I'd say so."

Cletus Boatwright came riding up, but his roan mare whined, then nayed and refused to come any nearer than 30 yards. Cletus slid off of his nervous ride, tied her to some brush and walked toward Rusty and Deke.

"Jesus H. Christ on TV," Cletus said. "That ain't?"

"Sure as hell seems to be," Deke said.

"Deke done already claimed it," Rusty said. They laughed.

"Boy, oh, boy." Cletus said and he whistled. He walked away from the other men, but kept his distance from the moon.

Deke looked at the empty sky. "Bound to be missed. Now, we can't go riding into town talking about this here. They'd call us lunatics?"

Cletus smiled at the joke and rejoined the other men, "Why do you reckon my horse wouldn't come any closer?"

Rusty played with the button that barely held his shirt closed over his belly. "Maybe the beast senses something."

"Don't call her no beast," Cletus said.

Rusty wasn't listening though. His eyes were again on the moon. "Maybe we're frying our innards from radiation or some crap like that."

Deke spat between his feet. "If we are, we are, don't make a dog hair's bit of difference now."

"Yeah," Cletus said, looking around. "All the animals seem to be staying clear."

Rusty knelt and studied how the ground had accepted the weight. "I wonder if it landed on anything important or anybody. Ain't always the same thing."

Cletus was moving again. "Let's saunter around this thing and see what is to see."

"What if it starts to roll?" Rusty asked.

"A thrown rock comes to rest, but a resting rock does not spontaneously move. That's the second law of thermodynamics," Cletus said.

"What say?" Rusty looked at the man.

"I don't know why I said that," Cletus said. Then he stepped close to the moon and touched it. "It's cool."

Deke and Rusty stepped forward and rested palms against it too. Cletus scraped off a hand full of its surface and let it sift through his fingers.

"What's it feel like?" Deke asked.

Cletus shrugged.

"I guess it ain't cheese," the cook said. He looked at the sky. "Sun'll be up soon. What do you reckon'll happen then? What do you think it'll mean for this feller here?"

"Don't suppose it's ever seen the sun," Cletus said.

"Sure it has." Deke bit off a chew of tobacco and put the plug back in his pocket. "You seen it out in the daytime. What about eclipses?"

"Nights ain't gonna be the same. Just sitting out here and never movin'." Cletus shook his head. "Long way to bring a gal."

"I always thought it was bigger," Rusty said again.

"I don't see no flag," Cletus said.

"It was all lies," Deke said.

"Coulda fell off," Rusty said.

"Coulda." Deke spat.

Rusty stretched. "I heard a story once where some Indians sang it down."

Cletus was beginning to fidget. "What's it gonna do to the ocean and seas and such like that?"

"Yep, sang it right down out of the sky. I wonder if it was bigger then."

A slow smile came to Cletus's face. "Think of it though. A full one anytime you like. If you know where to go. How much should we charge young lovers for a gaze." →

"I'm worried," Deke said. "You know, what you said about the oceans."

"I wonder if the Indians sang it down this time too."

"Shut up," Deke said to Rusty.

"If they could sing down, maybe we could sing it back up. Eh?"

They laughed.

"What'll we sing?" Cletus asked.

"What about 'Rally Round the Flag'?"

Deke sighed and watched while Cletus and Rusty sucked in breath to sing. And though there was no flag, he sang too.

We'll rally round the flag, boys

Rally once again,

Shouting the battle cry of freedom

We'll rally from the hillsides,

Gather from the plains,

Shouting the battle cry of freedom

"This ain't working," Cletus said and waved the singing off. "Not one little bit."

"Course it ain't," Deke said.

"You hear that?" Rusty had his eyes closed to listen.

"In the light of a new day, they could see a crack forming in the body before them."

Cletus frowned at Deke. "What the hell are you saying?"

"Beats me."

"But looky there," Rusty said.

Cletus swallowed. "It's breaking open."

The men ran away, looking over their shoulders while in a dead sprint. Rusty caught his foot in a gopher hole and fell but did not take his eyes off the moon.

"Far enough," Deke said, resting hands on knees and panting.

Rusty, up again and beside his friends, swayed. "What the hell is that?"

There it was. Big enough to fill two good-sized barns. The colors of it were primary and bright and pure. It had a head and stood two-legged and two arms hung heavy with hands twice the size of his face.

"It looks like a cartoon," Cletus said. "Like something out of the funny papers."

"Look at how big it is." Rusty tried to stand taller.

"Is it real?" Deke said.

"We're seeing it," Rusty said. "Therefore it must be real in some sense. Listen to me."

"Oh hell, it sees us," Cletus said.

Deke spat out his chew. "You don't reckon that's..."

"The man in the moon," Rusty said. "A celestial myth come to give testimony to his real existence. The things coming out of our mouths," shaking his head.

"It's trying to say something," Deke said.

"Jesus H. Christmas," Cletus said.

The cartoon lips parted. "D-d-d-double h-h-armonic s-s-s-super l-locrian."

"What was that?" Rusty said. "Was it English? Does the man in the moon speak English?"

S-s-symmetrical m-m-m-mixolydian p-pentatonic m-min-n-nor m-m-mixolydian mi-mixolydian."

"I think it's it mixed up about something," Cletus said.

"Probably about where the hell he is?" Deke said.

"He's a big son of a bitch," Rusty said. "Talk to it, Deke. You're the foreman."

"Yeah, besides, you claimed it," Cletus said. "Like the settlers claimed the Indian lands."

They laughed.

"Mixolydian."

"Hey, did you hear that?" Rusty said.

"That was pretty damn good," Cletus said. "Didn't stutter at all that time."

"Should we try singing again?" Rusty licked his lips. "I mean it was just a thought."

A NEW SONG

(for Michael S. Harper)

*He hoes the sunbright squash
reflected in his prayer-clear eyes
against warming torches of wind,
becomes the light of jazz
that is forever
sound resolving
itself for the ears.*

*The wind brings offerings of prayer:
essential calm whiteness
masking his small-town-blues;
his father's mending
songs of a certain harvest
still echo a sweet music
to nurture his hunger:
a new song is breaking blues
sung supremely against heat.*

Lenard D. Moore

Raleigh, NC

Etheridge Knight



Etheridge Knight, an outstanding poet, a recipient of Guggenheim Foundation and National Endowment for the Arts fellowships, died March 10, 1991 of lung cancer. He was 59 years old.

Knight was born in Corinth, MS and grew up in Paducah, KY. He quit school, joined the army and, while recovering from injuries, became addicted to heroin. After leaving the army, Knight supported his addiction with petty crime. In 1960, he was convicted of armed robbery and served eight years in a state prison. One result of his imprisonment was Knight's first book of poems, *Poems from Prison*, published in 1968. In 1973, he published *Bellysong and Other Poems*. In 1980, he published *Born of a Woman*. In 1986, he won the American Book Award for *The Essential Etheridge Knight*.

Knight also received the Shelley Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America. He is survived by his mother, who lives in Indianapolis, three sisters, one brother, two sons and a daughter.

THE ROLL CALL

*Any half decent rapper
Can conjure the dead,
Can reach into graves
& accuse God
Of Indian giving.
The trick is ancestral,
No more magic than memory's
Hidden strings & chains.
Trust me,
We've barely forgotten a name.
Say them. Raise your hands.
Holler at me!*

Thomas Sayers Ellis

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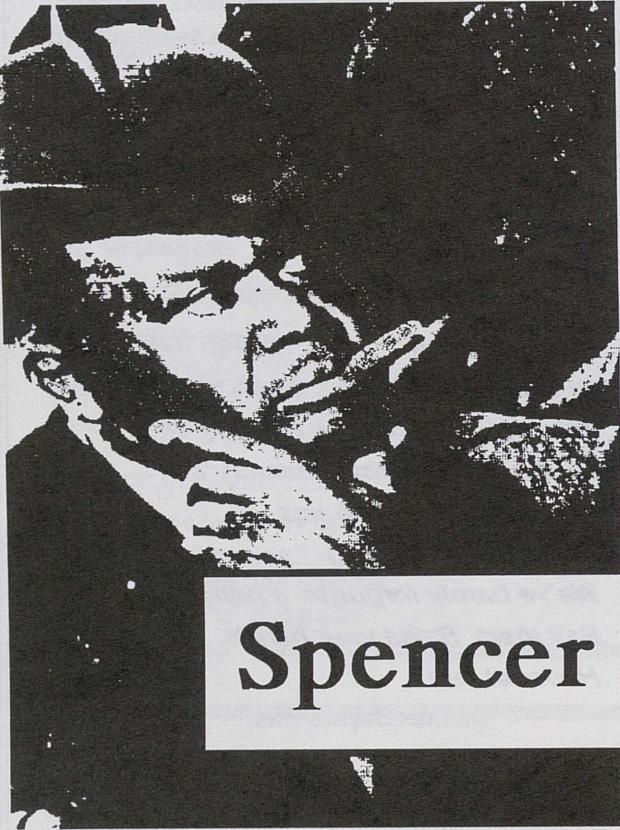
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later achieved fame as Andy on the popular TV show "Amos 'n' Andy," demonstrated a keen sensibility toward black folk idioms. By 1928, he had negotiated this skill into a position

with Paramount Studios; and

before he left a year later, he had worked as dialogue coach, actor, continuity writer, and "script doctor," in collaboration with the white, Southern local-color writer Octavus Roy Cohen, on several all-black cast comedy shorts.

It's not exactly clear what caused Spencer Williams (1893-1969) to use Afro-American folk religious traditions to structure his film aesthetic. What is clear, however, is that early in his career, the Louisiana native, who

Like other black film pioneers, Williams honed his skills working on "race" movies and conventional Saturday afternoon staples - Westerns, melodramas, and musical variety shows. Before the release of *Blood of Jesus* (1941), he had drifted from studio to studio -- the major studios and independent companies -- producing for the black market. At the first opportunity to exercise the control of an auteur, Williams demonstrated an intimate familiarity with the folk cultural elements that he wove into his best films. In *The Blood of Jesus* these elements combined in ways that parallel the traditional Afro-American folk drama found in black churches across the United States. This tradition, though largely undocumented, runs deep and richly employs symbols and imagery that have historically distinguished Afro-American folk religious expression.

Using a soundtrack of traditional songs, crosscuts of pulpits and imposing church exteriors, and voice-over narration, Williams cements the relationship between traditional forms of Afro-American ritual expression through the medium of film. The all-black audiences for whom these films were made doubtless found these elements familiar, as they did another element, that of the processional.

The processional is a powerful and recurring performance element in the folk drama and in the regular church service. In *Heaven Bound*, a traditional folk drama performed annually in Atlanta, Georgia, for more than half a century, the procession of a celestial choir into the main playing area signals the beginning of the dramatic action and immediately distinguishes the saved from the damned. This tradition, however, does not function solely in a sacred or spiritual context. It carries over into broader social and political contexts as a characteristic feature of black demonstrations and protests. The civil rights marches led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in the 1960s demonstrate the continuity and function of the tradition in its fusion of sacred and secular elements. In *The Blood of Jesus*, Williams uses both spiritual and social images, through opening visual sequences, songs from the Spiritual corpus, and a narrated prologue to evoke a mythical past and link it with a historical and immediate present.

Williams adheres to themes that also govern folk drama: unadorned variations of good vs. evil. There is no artifice here; neither irony nor moral ambiguity comes into play to obscure the path of the righteous. The city, defined by nightclubs and juke joints, symbolizes corruption and damnation. But these environments are also devices the filmmaker uses to showcase black talent and to create transitions and a change of pace.

In *The Blood of Jesus*, for instance, the action further establishes dual planes for the heroine, Martha. Within the larger narrative structure of the folk drama she is the lost prodigal; within the city sequences she is the "fallen woman" popular in numerous Hollywood movies in the 1930s. Her struggles against worldliness culminate at the cross-

roads, a powerful symbol in Afro-American folk culture. It was at the crossroads that blues musician Robert Johnson is said to have sold his soul to the devil; and it is at the crossroads that Martha's soul is in jeopardy. Williams presents the juncture of two roads, one bound for heaven, the other for hell. In one of the most powerful and surreal moments in the history of black filmmaking, an exhausted Martha collapses at the base of the cross; "The blood of the lamb" literally drips into her face.

Williams was never able to duplicate that moment or the sense of moral clarity that he achieved in *The Blood of Jesus*. He comes closest in *Go Down Death*, a visual retelling of a James Weldon Johnson poem. Using borrowed footage, he attempts to recapture the surrealistic style of the earlier film through concrete visual expressions of death and hell. The effort, however, is heavy handed and the quality of the additional footage is low. Though both films use religious themes for their development, it is interesting that in *Go Down Death* folk elements are minimized in favor of a more urban, middle-class tradition. The songs, for example, rather than derive from the Spiritual tradition, are usually texts found in standard Methodist hymnals. And the villain, Him, is as much a victim of the class to which he belongs and from which he cannot escape. These differences between two films that use the same dramatic formulas suggest that Williams was attempting to widen his audience by making an appeal based as much on social as moral issues.

Historically, the label "black film" has been used to identify a wide range of productions, primarily defined by an emphasis on cast and theme. A number of these films have countered the distorted and pejorative portrayals conventionalized by Hollywood by emphasizing "racial uplift" themes and the desire to present more "realistic" images of black life. But in the process of combating negative stereotypes, self-conscious impulses have undermined the creative representation of distinct aspects of black culture, which in themselves include elements of social and political consciousness. A "black film", like black music, black sermons, and raps, can, however, be identified as in *The Blood of Jesus* in relation to dynamic and distinct cultural processes. Traditional forms, images, symbols, and performances styles can inform the structure, content, and texture of the works of a new generation of filmmakers seeding a cinematic expression of an Afro-American worldview.

Adrienne Lanier Seward received a BA degree from Spelman College, and MA from the University of California/Berkeley, and a Ph.D. in Folklore from Indiana University/Bloomington. She is producing a video documentary on women ministers and their influence on Black Church culture.





LOYALTY

Essex Hemphill

For my so-called sins against nature and the race, I gain the burdensome knowledge of carnal secrets. It rivals rituals of sacrifice and worship, and conjures the same glassy-eyed results -- with less bloodshed. A knowledge disquieting and liberating inhabits my soul. It often comforts me, or at times, is miserably intoxicating with requisite hangovers and regrets. At other moments it is sacred communion, causing me to moan and tremble and cuss as the Holy Ghost fucks me. It is a knowledge of fire and beauty that I will carry beyond the grave. When I sit in God's final judgment, I will wager this knowledge against my entrance into the Holy Kingdom. There was no other way for me to know the beauty of Earth except through the sexual love of men, men who were often more terrified than I, even as they posed before me, behind flimsy constructions of manhood, mocking me with muscles, erections, and wives.

I discovered any man can be seduced -- even if the price is humiliation or death for the seducer. Late nights and desperate hours teach us to approach loneliness unarmed, or we risk provoking it to torture us with endless living sorrows we believe only the dead can endure.

But who are these dead, able to withstand the constant attack of merciless loneliness with its intense weapons, its clever trickery and deceit? Many of them are men like me, born of common stock, ordinary dreamers. Men who vaguely answer to "American," or exhibit visible apprehension when American is defined and celebrated to their exclusion. Men who more often than not are simply ignored.

We constitute the invisible brothers in our communities, those of us who live "in the life"; the choir boys harboring secrets, the uncle living in an impeccable flat with a

roommate who sleeps down the hall when family visits; men of power and humble peasantry, reduced to silence and invisibility for the safety they procure from these constructions. Men emasculated in the complicity of not speaking out, rendered mute by the middle-class aspirations of a people trying hard to forget the shame and cruelties of slavery and ghettos. Through denials and abbreviated histories riddled with omissions, the middle-class sets about whitewashing and fixing up the race to impress each other and the racists who don't give a damn.

I speak for thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of men who live and die in the shadows of secrets, unable to speak of the love that helps them endure and contribute to the race. Their ordinary kisses, stolen or shared behind facades of heroic achievement, their kisses of sweet spit and loyalty are scrubbed away by the propaganda makers of the race, the "Talented Tenth" who would just as soon have us believe black people can fly, rather than reveal that black men have been longing to kiss one another, and have done so, for centuries.

The black homosexual is hard pressed to gain audience among his heterosexual brothers; even if he is more talented, he is inhibited by his silence or his admissions. This is what the race has depended on in being able to erase homosexuality from our recorded history. The "chosen" history. But these sacred constructions of silence are futile exercises in denial. We will not go away with our issues of sexuality. We are coming home.

It is not enough to tell us that one was a brilliant poet, scientist, educator, or rebel. Who did he love? It makes a difference. I can't become a whole man simply on what is fed to me: watered down versions of black life in America. I need the ass-splitting truth to be told, so I will have something pure to emulate, a reason to remain loyal.



Dreams

W.E.B Du Bois

Night fell. The red waters of the swamp grew sinister and sullen. The tall pines lost their slimness and stood in wide blurred blotches all across the way, and a great shadowy bird arose, wheeled and melted, murmuring, into the black-green sky.

The boy wearily dropped his heavy bundle and stood still, listening as the voice of crickets split the shadows and made the



Photo © by Putri



★

←
**silence audible. A tear
wandered down his
brown cheek. They were
at supper now, he
whispered - the father
and old mother, away;
they would never be as
near as once they had
been, for he had
stepped into the world.
And the cat and Old
Billy - ah, but the world
was a lonely thing, so
wide and tall and
empty! And so bare, so
bitter bare! Somehow
he had fared forth to
beckoning hands and
luring, and to the eager
hum of human voices,
as of some great,
swelling music.**

Yet now he was alone; the empty night
was closing all about him here in a strange
land, and he was afraid. The bundle with his
earthly treasure had hung heavy and heavier
on his shoulder; his little horde of money was
tightly wadded in his sock, and the school lay
hidden somewhere far away in the shadows.

He wondered how far it was; he and
hearkened, starting at his own heartbeats
and fearing more and more the long dark
fingers of the night.

Then of a sudden up from the darkness
came music. It was human music, but of a
wildness and a weirdness that startled the
boy as it fluttered and danced across the dull
red waters of the swamp. He hesitated, then,
impelled by some strange power, left the
highway and slipped into the forest of the
swamp, shrinking, yet following the song
hungrily and half forgetting his fear. A
harsher, shriller note struck in as of many
and ruder voices; but above it flew the first
sweet music, birdlike, abandoned, and the
boy crept closer. The cabin crouched ragged
and black at the edge of black waters. An old
chimney leaned drunkenly against it, raging
with fire and smoke, while through the
chinks winked red gleams of warmth and
wild cheer. With a revel of shouting and
noise, the music suddenly ceased. Hoarse
staccato cries and peals of laughter shook
the old hut, and as the boy stood there
peering through the black trees, abruptly the
door flew open and a flood of light illuminated
the wood.

Amid this mighty halo, as on clouds of flame
a girl was dancing. She was black, and lithe,
and tall, and willowy. Her garments twined
and flew around the delicate molding of her
dark, young, half-naked limbs. A heavy mass
of hair clung motionless to her wide fore-
head. Her arms twirled and flickered, and
body and soul seemed quivering and whirring
in the poetry of her motion.

As she danced she sang. He heard her voice
as before, fluttering like a bird's in the full
sweetness of her utter music. It was no tune
nor melody, it was just formless, boundless
music. The boy forgot himself and all the
world besides. All his darkness was sudden
light; dazzled he crept forward, bewildered,
fascinated until with one last wild whirl the
elf-girl paused. The crimson light fell full
upon the warm and velvet bronze of her
face-her midnight eyes were aglow, her full
purple lips apart, her half-hid bosom panting
and all the music dead. Involuntarily the boy
gave a gasping cry and awoke to swamp and

night and fire, while a white face, drawn, red-eyed, peered outward from some hidden throng within the cabin.

"Who's that?" a harsh voice cried.

"Where?" "Who is it?" and pale crowding faces blurred the light.

The boy wheeled blindly and fled in terror, stumbling through the swamp, hearing strange sounds and feeling stealthy creeping hands and arms and whispering voices. On he toiled in mad haste, struggling toward the road and losing it, until finally beneath the shadows of a mighty oak he sank exhausted. There he lay a while trembling, and at last drifted into dreamless sleep.

It was morning when he awoke and threw a startled glance upward to the twisted branches of the oak that bent above, sifting down sunshine on his brown face and close-curled hair. Slowly he remembered the loneliness, the fear and wild running through the dark. He laughed in the bold courage of day and stretched himself.

Then suddenly he bethought him again of that vision of the night—the waving arms and flying limbs of the girl, and her great black eyes looking into the night and calling him. He could hear her now, and hear that wondrous savage music. Had it been real? Had he dreamed? Or had it been some

witch-vision of the night, come to tempt and lure him to his undoing? Where was that black and flaming cabin? Where was the girl—the soul that had called him? She must have been real; she had to live and dance and sing; he must again look into the mystery of her great eyes. And he sat up in sudden determination, and lo! gazed straight into the very eyes of his dreaming.

She sat not four feet from him, leaning against the great tree, her eyes now languorously abstracted, now alert and quizzical with mischief. She seemed but half-clothed, and her warm, dark flesh peeped furtively through the rent gown; her thick, crisp hair was frowsy and rumpled, and the long curves of her bare young arms gleamed in the morning sunshine, glowing with vigor and life. A little mocking smile came and sat upon her lips.

"What you run for?" she asked, with dancing mischief in her eyes.

"Because—" he hesitated, and his cheeks grew hot.

"I knows," she said, with impish glee, laughing low music.

"Why?" he challenged sturdily.

"You was afeared."

He bridled. "Well, I reckoned you'd be afeared if you was caught out in the black all alone."

"Pooh!" she scoffed and hugged her knees. "Pooh! I se stayed out all alone heaps o' nights."

He looked at her with a curious awe.

"I don't believe you," he asserted; but she tossed her head and her eyes grew scornful.

"Who's afeared of the dark? I love night." Her eyes grew soft. He watched her silently, till, waking from her daydream, she abruptly asked,

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←
“Where you from?”
“Georgia.”

“Where’s that?”

He looked at her in surprise, but she seemed matter-of-fact.

“It’s away over yonder,” he answered.

“Behind where the sun comes up?”

“Oh, no!”

“Then it ain’t so far,” she declared. “I knows where the sun rises, and I know where it sets.” She looked up at its gleaming splendor glinting through the leaves and, noting its height, announced abruptly, “I’s hungry.”

“So ‘m I,” answered the boy, fumbling at his bundle; and then, timidly: “Will you eat with me?”

“Yes,” she said, and watched him with eager eyes.

Untying the strips of cloth, he opened his box and disclosed chicken and biscuits, ham and corn bread. She clapped her hands in glee.

“Is there any water near?” he asked.

Without a word she bounded up and flitted off like a brown bird, gleaming dull-golden in the sun, glancing in and out among the trees, till she paused above a tiny black pool and then came tripping and swaying back with hands held cup-wise and dripping with cool water.

“Drink,” she cried. Obediently he bent over the little hands that seemed so soft and thin. He took a deep draught; and then to drain the last drop, his hands touched hers and the shock of flesh first meeting flesh startled them both, while the water rained through. A moment their eyes looked deep into each other’s-a timid, startled gleam in hers, a wonder in his. Then she said dreamily: “We’s known us all our lives, and-before, ain’t we?”

He hesitated. “Ye-es-I reckon,” he slowly returned. And then, brightening, he asked gaily, “And we’ll be friends always, won’t we?”

“Yes,” she said at last, slowly and solemnly, and another brief moment they stood still.

Then the mischief danced in her eyes and a song bubbled on her lips. She hopped to the tree.

“Come-eat!” she cried. And they nestled together amid the big black roots of the oak, laughing and talking while they ate.

“What’s over there?” he asked, pointing northward.

“Cresswell’s big house.”

“And yonder to the west?”

“The school.”

He started joyfully. “The school! What school?”

“Old Miss’ school.”

“Miss Smith’s school?”

“Yes.” The tone was disdainful.

“Why, that’s where I’m going. I was afeared it was a long way off; I must have passed it in the night.”

“I hate it!” cried the girl, her lips tense.

“But I’ll be so near,” he explained. “And why do you hate it?”

“Yes-you’ll be near,” she admitted, “that’ll be nice, but-” she glanced westward and the fierce look faded. Soft joy crept to her face again and she sat once more dreaming.

“Yon way’s nicest,” she said.

“Why, what’s there?”

“The swamp,” she said mysteriously.

“And what’s beyond the swamp?”

She crouched beside him and whispered in eager, tense tones: “Dreams!”

He looked at her puzzled. “Dreams?” vaguely-“dreams? Why, dreams ain’t-nothing.”

“Oh, yes they is!” she insisted, her eyes flaming in misty radiance as she sat staring beyond the shadows of the swamp. “Yes they is! There ain’t nothing but dreams-that is, nothing much.”

“And over yonder behind the swamps is great fields full of dreams, piled high and burning; and right amongst them the sun, when he’s tired o’night, whispers and drops red things, ‘cept when devils make’em black.”

The boy stared at her; he knew not whether to jeer or wonder.

“How you know?” he asked at last, skeptically.

“Promise you won’t tell?”

“Yes,” he answered.

She cuddled into a little heap, nursing her

knees, and answered slowly.

"I goes there sometimes. I creeps in 'mongst the dreams; they hangs there like big flowers, dripping dew and sugar and blood-red, red blood. And there's little fairies there that hop about and sing, and devils-great ugly devils that grabs at you and roasts and eats you if they gits you; but they don't git me. Some devils is big and white, like ha'nts; some is long and shiny, like creepy, slippery snakes; and some is little and broad and black, and they yells—"

The boy was listening in incredulous curiosity, half minded to laugh, half minded to edge away from the black-red radiance of yonder dusky swamp. He glanced furtively backward, and his heart gave a great bound. "Some is little and broad and black, and they yells—" chanted the girl. And as she chanted, deep harsh tones came booming through the

forest: "Zo-ra! Zo-ra! O-o-oh, Zora!"

He saw far behind him, toward the shadows of the swamp, an old woman-short, broad, black and wrinkled, with fangs and pendulous lips and red, wicked eyes. His heart bounded in sudden fear; he wheeled toward the girl and caught only the uncertain flash of her garments—the wood was silent, and he was alone.

He arose, startled, quickly gathered his bundle, and looked around him. The sun was strong and high, the morning fresh and vigorous. Stamping one foot angrily, he strode jauntily out of the wood toward the big road.

But ever and anon he glanced curiously back. Had he seen a haunt? Or was the elf-girl real? And then he thought of her words: "We've known us all our lives."



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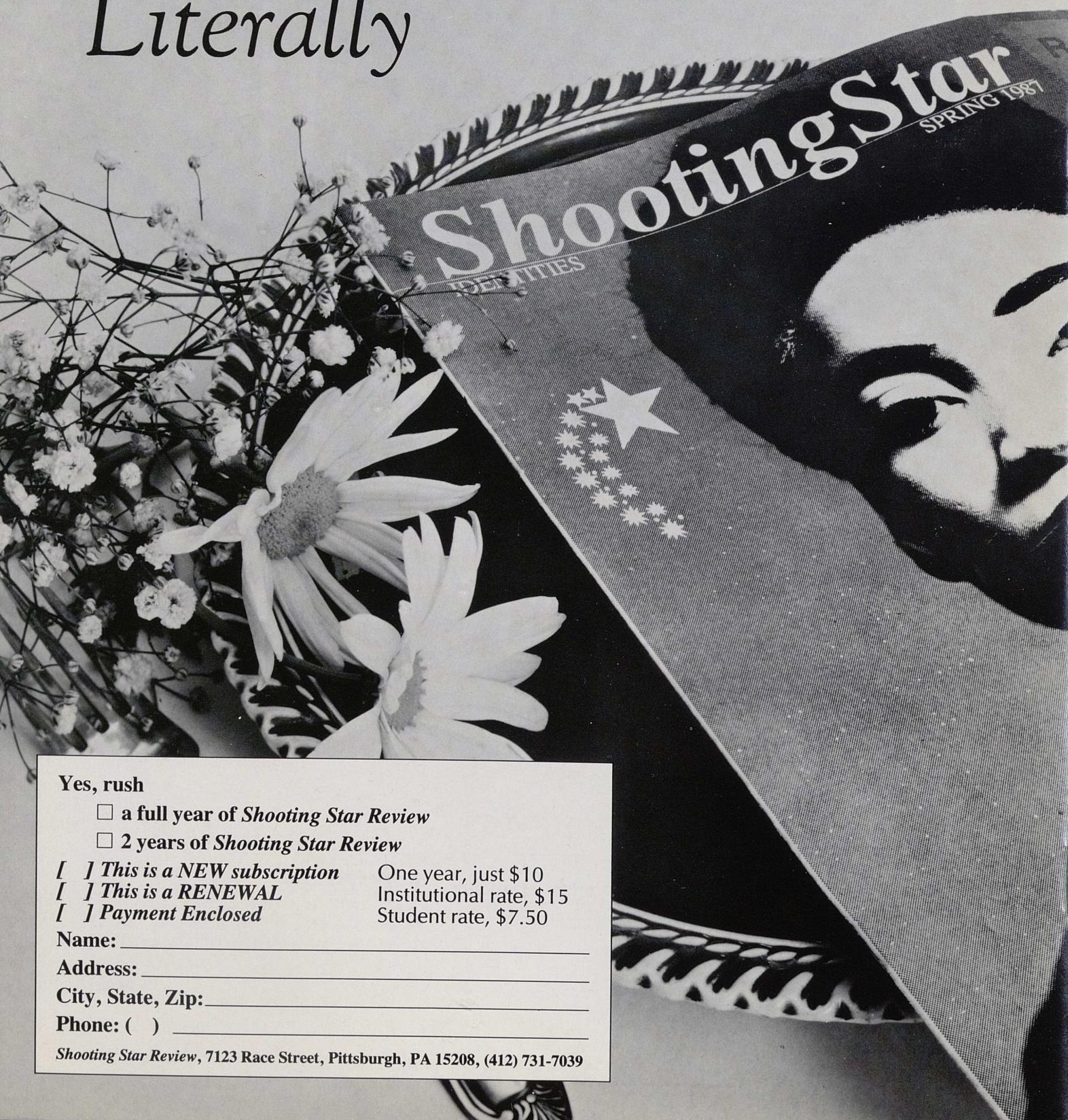
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