

Hazel Simmons-McDonald



Silk Cotton Tree

Some say
They hold secrets of centuries
Within their gnarled trunks

They are the silent see-ers
Of ancestors, backs bent
In blazing sun
Seeding earth to birth young trees
The backbone of a nation.

And when, in the noonday heat
Some girl, shunning the overseer's
Pulsing whip would hide
In foliage at their feet

Their branches bent
To mark the place where she,
Holding within her breast the memory
Of one who gave himself to shield her
From the hurt of that same whip,
Fell to the whim of the master's will

She gave birth to one stillborn
And buried it there in the dark earth
Between the roots.

And the ghosts of all those loves
Whose hearts were given, taken, broken
In that place
Sigh the wind's silken breath
Through the leaves of this stand
Of silk cotton trees.

