

FOCUS

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Acknowledgements

The making of **Focus 1991** has been an exercise in community. This year, we solicited submissions from all of the women and men in the Atlanta University Center. We have found that the written word banishes bigotry and prejudice. We send this edition of **Focus** to every person in the AUC so that we may appreciate our likenesses and differences. For, amidst these convergences and divergences, we find our beauty.

To:

Provost Ruth Simmons,

who has taught us self-reliance. Thank you for your excellent advice.

Spelman Student Government Association,

Thank you, sisters, for believing in **Focus**. Your financial support was important, but your emotional support is priceless.

Faculty of the English Department and the English Club

for your embraces, admonishments, chastisement, and endearments. Thank you for believing in the word.

Ralph Wright

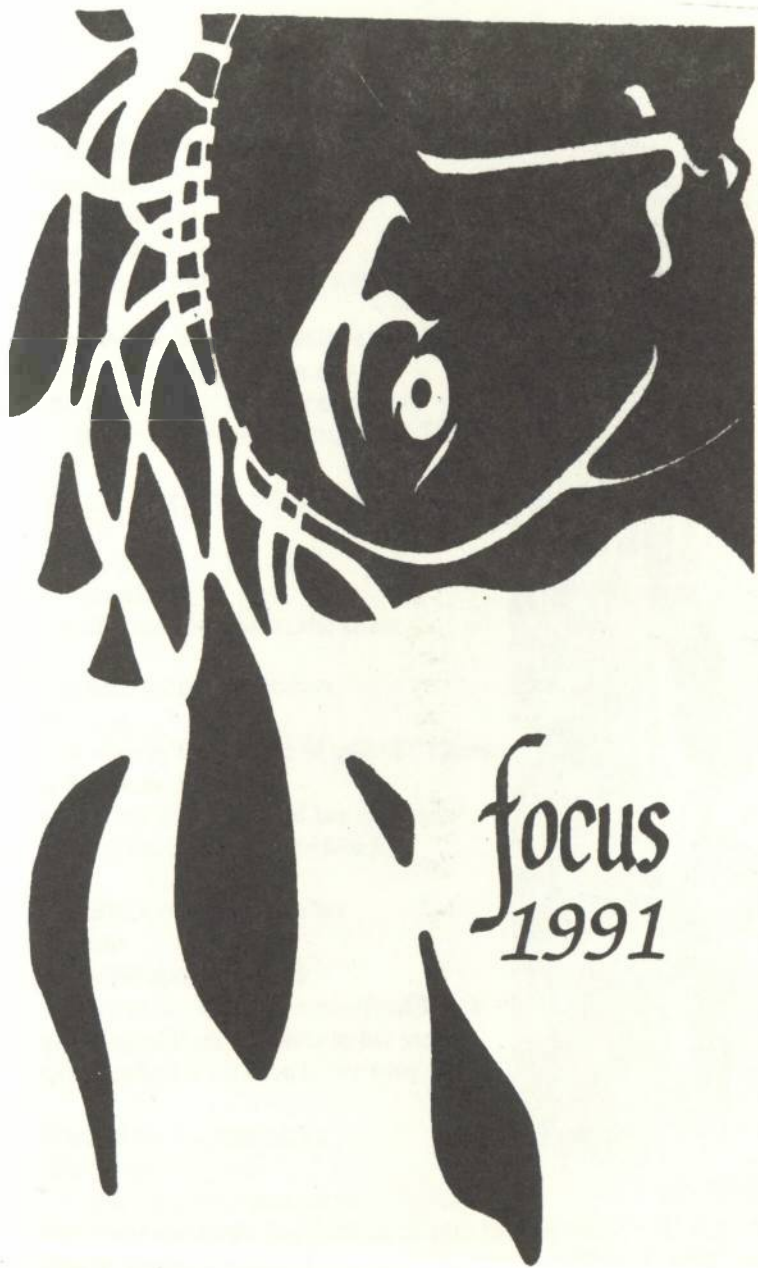
We would be lost without your continuing enthusiasm, seemingly inexhaustible energy and phenomenal creativity. We are grateful for your patience and your support.

All of the women and men who shared themselves with us,

We appreciate your passion and your dedication. Continue writing, thinking and loving.

Sister Writer Toni Morrison,

Thank you for sharing Pecola, Sula, Nel, Pilate, Milkman, Jadine, Sethe, Beloved and, of course, yourself. Your November visit left us irreversibly changed. Because of this, we dedicate **Focus 1991** to you.



focus
1991

The Spelman College Literary Magazine

This Passion Woman of Black
(Dedicated to C.M. Cherry)

She had such a passion for
Blackness
such a passion for Blackness
that she so excited me
sending me into wanton ecstasy of Black

She made me desirous to love her
for her seductive dark beauty
and the allure of her fierce intellect
for the overwhelming of her Black passion

She gave cause for my heart to fall
gladly
to the charms of her mind
for she knew
and she used well what she knew

She was not only a woman
She was
of a woman from a line of splendid Queens
A Black Woman
who knew thoroughly of her Blackness
who had such passion for Black

Her Black passion made her
Sensual
when she spoke of Black
whenever she spoke so strongly of Black
and I heard it set athunder in her voice
and watched it set afire in her eyes

She had such a passion for
Blackness
O' such a glorious passion for Blackness
She made me justly feel such an esteem toward her
for this Black Woman
this passion woman of Black



S. Terrail Singleton

My Grandmother

SHE BE

Oak Tree

dark brown bark weathered by the storm
branches curving
embracing the sky

blinking, wrinkled eyes
shoot out green leaves
even in winter

SAYING SO MUCH

Sun's daughter
Wisdom's creation
Too Limitless to
swim in

Yet She lets me
get my
baby toes
wet

Sweet powder lingers
still singing her name
leaving her near me
when she's gone

in her bosom

The ESSENCE of BEING

begins

SHE BE
so I become...

Hope over the long seas
that lead to Africa
she can feel my love

she can hear
my
...Thanks

C. Wiatta Freeman

Ashley's Dance

She dances, Ashley dances
And my eyes dance with her
Whirl Ashley
Twirl Ashley
She prances, Ashley prances
And my thoughts prance with her
She is lovely as a rose
darkened by dusk
She is a specter of brilliance
tempered by trust
Twirl Ashley
Whirl Ashley
She dances, Ashley dances
And my heart...dances with her.

She whirls across the theater stage gracefully, each spin melting smoothly into another, and I watch her. She is not the only dancer who pirouettes to the beat of the tom-toms, but God's light bathes her, nurtures her, separating her from the others. She drenches me with her loveliness and my eyes soak in her every movement...her every expression..her every smile. Who is she? I wonder. Who is she to possess such beauty?

"The woman third from the left, what is her name?"

"Ashley...she's a real comer, the future is hers if she wishes it to be."

Ashley dances, and my eyes dance with her. The other dancers feed off her magnificence. Following her as though she were Moses leading them to glory. My eyes follow her as well, basking in her beauty as she parts the ocean and walks amongst the clouds. The black silk of her dress falls loosely behind her, punctuating her every spin, accenting her every stride. A motley colored scarf adorns her head; its silk resting gently against the nape of her neck, highlighting the black-as-night blackness of her hair. The deep ebony and magenta of her gown hugs the curves of her body, as she sways to the beat of the tom-toms...She is vibrant...All of the sweet secrets of life seem to lie beneath the surface of her caramel brown skin, allowing promissory echoes of ecstasy to seep through the smile that never strays from her face. She is beauty incarnate and the sheer brilliance of her magnificence burns my eyes...Burns my soul...She dances, Ashley dances and my eyes dance with her.

Ashley prances and my mind prances with her. She is limitless. This is

evident in the mockery she makes of space and time. Space becomes nothing more than a dazzled voyeur as Ashley whirls; for she is everywhere at once, ignoring all concepts of boundaries. Leaving awe stricken gazes from whence she has come and eliciting looks of delirium from where she is to go. Her presence touches every corner of the theater, leaving only her loveliness to linger...No...Space does not hold her. Time stands still as Ashley twirls; for how long have I gazed upon her? Minutes? Hours? For a duration unknown, I have wallowed in the depths of my burning soul where the beats of tom-toms are the only measures of existence...No...Time does not hold her.

But what of me? Is she for my arms to hold? If Time and Space, the powers before which all forces must yield, cannot hold her, then what chance have my modest arms of mortal flesh I wonder if she has the same perception of love as I do. Will she have a need for the stifling earth bound love that I could offer? In my arms lie the realities of Human misery, Human joy, HUMAN LOVE...Will that be enough? My soul burns. She prances, Ashley prances and my thoughts prance with her.

Ashley dances, but the pace of her dance slows. She is spent. Exhaustion hangs softly over the smile that never strays from her face, as the tom-toms slow to a stop. It is a smile of affection that Ashley wears, yet it mocks me. The smile mocks me for it dispels my delusions, bringing my burning soul to the realization that she could never be mine. The smile tells me that Ashley has already found the arms that will hold her. She has found them among the clouds through which she has traipsed and the oceans she has divided. Ashley loves the ethereal rhythms of her dance, the driving beat of the tom-toms and it is they which will hold her. Perhaps, one day, my, or another man's earth-bound love will be enough...but not now. Human arms would only restrain her, taint her, mar her loveliness. Ashley's brilliance causes my soul to burn as well. Her place is upon the stage where she can revel in life's sweet secrets undisturbed. The smile reminds me that God's light shines upon Ashley, and because of this, she must dance beneath it.

Suddenly the silence is broken as the sound of the tom-toms rise once again. One by one, the dancers depart from the stage elegantly spinning to the roar of applause. Ashley whirls across the stage gracefully, each spin melting smoothly into another, and I watch her. Twirl Ashley. Whirl Ashley. She dances, Ashley dances, and my heart...dances with her.

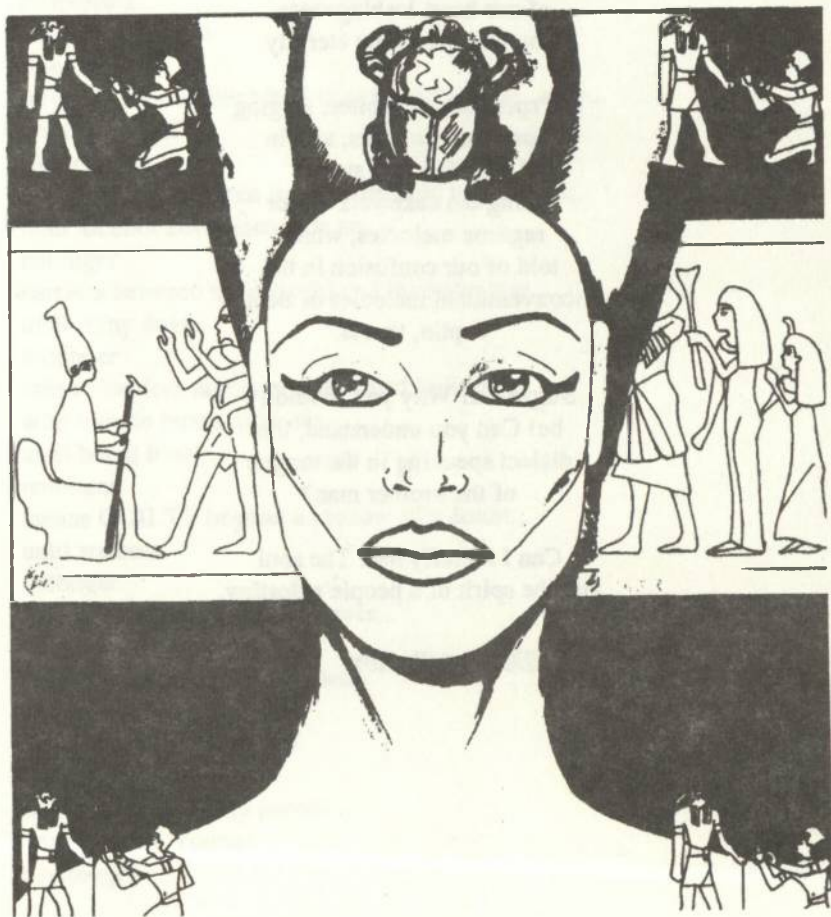
Phillip Harvey

Abstract

A woman defying definitives
sitting along the base of my mind's eye

A woman as only a woman,
against the long wall of steamed imagination,
she closes her eyes, hugging me tighter.
In her nude grace, the supple heroine
lies distant chance
to sleep in eternity.

Christopher Watkins



A People's Destiny

Sweet as a bird's song moving
endlessly with the sounds
of tomorrow.
You tuned me into my destiny.

The bard of our people, the griot
of our heart-lashing story.
You told me of my eternity.

The spirituals of Jubilee, singing
those songs of ours, told in
Uncle Remus' stories
Doing the cakewalk to our
ragtime melodies, which
told of our confusion in the
unconventional melodies of Scott--
Joplin, that is.

Surprised? Why you shouldn't
be! Can you understand, the
dialect speaking in the tongue
of the brother man?

Can I identify me? The soul
and the spirit of a people's destiny.

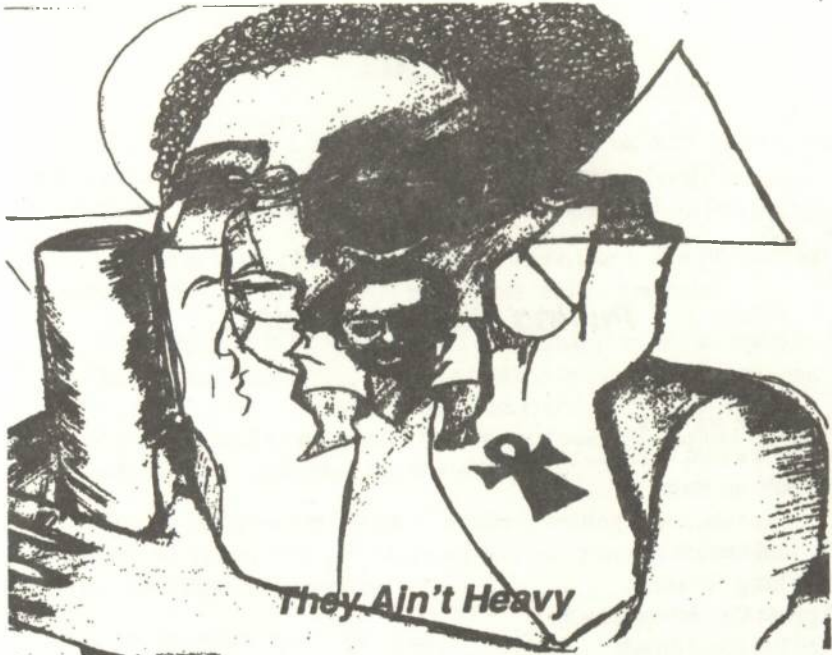
Denine Brown

Cracking Up

Cracking
Up SO FAR until
it hurts
COM
ing
down.
until BUSHism
isnolonger
RACism...
until the NONblack house
isnolonger
NONblack...
until 2-Live Crew
isnolonger
referring 2me as bitch/hoe/slut/prostitute/rape...able...
until Williams
isnolonger
announcing NO funds for race specific applicants...
until alcohol advertisements are
nolonger
barriers between the suburbs and the inner city...
until rainy days
nolonger
mean sleepless nights in abandoned buildings
with tomato boxes 4pillows...
until being black
nolonger
means GUILTY beyond a shadow of a doubt...
until success
nolonger
means blonde hair and blue eyes...
until my brothers
nolonger praise me 4my beauty,
but 4my mind...
until single parent homes
nolonger
raise over half of my people...
until Sammy Younge
isnolonger

just remembered by family and friends...
until homelessness
isnolonger
a fad...
until hunger
isnolonger
until Tom Metzger
isnolonger
being paid for the blood of my brothers and sisters...
cracking up
cracking up
crackING up
UNTIL It hurts
COMing
down!

Kalia Spears



Our Black Men
Are jobless, homeless, and hopeless
But we can pick them up
And give them our strength and love

Beautiful Black Women
Are tired and lonely
But we can pick them up
And offer them rest and companionship

Young Black Girls
Are lost and confused
But we can pick them up
And lead them in the right direction

Little Black Boys
Are dying in a world against them
But we can pick them up
And teach them how to survive

Because
They Ain't Heavy.

Arcella Keys

Pulling Our Lives Apart

**We hide our eyes
And close our ears
While we feed the lies
Yet sob our tears.**

**We turn our backs
And hang our heads
Against the vicious attacks
And the silent dreads.**

**We close our minds
And harden our hearts
We leave the past behind
As we pull our lives apart.**

Lynette Y. Ray

Eugenics

Mrs. Jonathan H. Longing quickly boarded the elevator which would carry her to the 206th floor. She moved hurriedly even though her stocking was rubbing uncomfortably against the open sore on her leg.

She got in to the plush office and slid into a chair. She punched her account number into the keyboard which was set in the armrest.

A few minutes later, a mechanical voice instructed her to report to consulting room number two. In this consulting room, she sat anxiously awaiting the doctor. In her nervousness, she could not find the tattered envelope on which she had jotted a few things down. She noisily rummaged through her purse until she found it.

There was a knock at the door. Without waiting for an answer, a tall, husky white man with sky blue eyes and hair more perfectly blond than on any Clairol box entered.

"Are you the doctor?" she asked.

"No, I'm just the technician. I am going to explain the procedure to you. Answer any questions." He took a breath and continued with the forced animation of a person who is paid to be cheerful and animated although he delivers the same message at least twenty times daily. "What we will do is take some embryonic fluid from your womb so we can get a copy of your child's DNA. Then we'll go to the lab and use the replicating machine to program in the features you want. Of course, this is an oversimplification, but you get the gist."

Yes, she got the gist. And she was pleased. She approached the situation with the smug martyrdom of a parent who is making sacrifices so that her children might have a better life than she.

She nodded, arranged her hair so that the salt and pepper roots would not spoil the dramatic appearance of her platinum fall. She carefully pulled her stocking from the oozing sore on her calf.

"What kind of radiation block are you using?"

Mrs. Longing looked up at the technician. She felt embarrassed. Like she had been caught picking her nose or scratching her behind.

"I use Enotreppoc #8," she told him.

"I suggest that you use number 9 or 10. Those low numbers are for people who sit in the chamber only about once or twice a month. I can tell you go at least once a week."

"I try to go every other Wednesday. Right after my hair appointment." She was flushed. There were some things that a woman did not like talking about with a man: her menstrual cycle, her age, and her radiation treatments. But she guessed it was okay. After all, he wasn't just any man. He was a doctor. Even though she intellectualized this, her face was still red. If there was one thing she missed about her old complexion, it would have to be that her emotions were not betrayed by capricious coloring.

"Like I said, try a 12 or 13. If those sores don't clear up, you should see somebody about it. Well back to the business at hand," he declared remembering all of the people in the waiting room whose yearning he didn't understand. He produced a form which looked very much like the one the waitress had used to take her order at the diner where she'd eaten lunch.

"Eyes?" he asked.

"Either hazel or green. Is there a difference in the cost?"

"No. What we do is this: We take down what you want. Then, we try to work out a package deal to fit your budget. Hair?"

"Kinda curly or wavy."

The technician produced a cardboard placard onto which locks of hair were stapled. Under each lock there was a number. "We have some samples."

She fingered the nylon facsimiles. "I think I like #243."

"Is that color okay?"

"Well," she said thoughtfully. "I like the texture of 243, but I like the color of 426."

"Fine," he said. "No problem." He handed her another piece of cardboard. "Complexion?"

She took a long time to answer. This question was the most important of all. It couldn't be too red because someone might think the child had some Indian in it. Not too yellow. Wouldn't want her kid to be mistaken for one of the ching-changs. Not too white. What a waste of money if the little rascal decided to get a tan. "Number 875."

"Lips?"

"Put down lips like mine. I kinda would like us to favor a little bit." Her conscience gnawed at her.

"Nose?" he asked while handing her a large photo album.

"Um, I've changed my mind about the lips," she said, apologetic about interrupting. "I wouldn't be able to sleep with myself at night knowing that I made my baby have big lips just because my lips are big. Can I look at that paper again?"

"Sure," he replied not quite masking his annoyance. He kept his pen poised and recorded her order.

"Nose?" He asked her again gesturing toward the photo album.

She didn't open it. "How about a nose like yours?"

"Let me take a look to be sure, but I think it's number 423." He looked and he was right. Of course he was. He'd been asked the question a million times before. "Well, Mrs. Longing, do you want to choose the sex of the child?"

"Of course not," she said. No use trying to play God. Gotta leave something up to Mother Nature."

"Of course," he answered condescendingly. "The doctor will call for you shortly so we need to hurry and work out a payment plan."

"The price for the treatment will be \$25,500." He anticipated the gasp she emitted so he continued. "It's really a good deal when you think about it. You spend what? \$50 a week on the melanin removal radiation. Then you paid about \$100 for those contacts. How much does it cost for you to keep your hair like that? Its cheaper in the end. Anyway, when you see how beautiful your children are, you'll agree that it's all worth every penny."

"What if I have twins?"

"No extra charge," he replied magnanimously.

She had known it would be expensive. In her bra was tucked a cashier's check for \$5,000. That should be enough for a down payment. She wished Medicaid would help foot the bill, but they wouldn't. Just like the government. Always trying to keep poor people from bettering themselves.

She agreed to complete payment by monthly installments over an eight

year period at 16.3 % interest and signed the papers.

Eight years was a long time. Her cousin claimed to know a man who would perform the procedure for \$9,000. The offer was tempting. She had even made the appointment to talk to him but she canceled when she saw what happened to Desma.

She had walked into the laundromat and saw Desma laying on the floor writhing in a pool of what looked like blood, but it was green. Saliva gushed from her mouth like bubble bath. Her eyes which stared heavenward, were as red as she'd hoped her baby's hair would have been.

Later on, she learned that Desma died as result of the poison some nigger claiming to be a doctor injected into her womb, promising her beautiful kids.

* * * * *

In the procedure room, she clucked her tongue as she undressed quickly and slipped on the stiff paper gown. If I'm coming off \$30,00, she thought, you would think they would have a more comfortable gown. But I guess it is worth it for a professional. Humph. If a nigger thinks he is coming anywhere near my stomach he's got another thing coming. She laid on her back and waited.

The doctor, another perfect specimen of the Aryan race, entered, wearing the white robe which gave him an air of competence. He was so perfect looking that she wondered if his mother had gone to such a place before he was born.

She focused on his white robe for comfort. Security. Suddenly, alarming questions skirted through her consciousness: Did Desma's doctor also wear a white robe? Did she feel relaxed as he killed her? The thought came quickly and left even faster. So fast that she couldn't even remember what had made her feel so frightened. He roughly prodded her abdomen and pulled out an enormous hypodermic with a disproportionately huge barrel.

"I'm going to have to get some fluid. Just relax. It's going to sting a little because I can't use anesthetic because it may have a bad reaction with some of the other chemicals."

She braced herself. The other women had warned her about the pain. They bounced their honey-colored children upon their knees and talked about the anguish just as they talked about the contractions. It was just another one of the sacrifices of motherhood. Not to mention that it was a

status symbol to have a bespoke baby. Sometimes they modestly claimed that their babies' green/blue/hazel/grey eyes were the amazing result of some recessive gene of some distant white (and usually rich) relative. But everyone knew, and everyone knew that they knew that they knew.

The needle penetrated the tight muscles which she was not able to relax upon the doctor's request. She bit down on her lip to keep from crying out. As he siphoned the fluid from her womb, she felt her teeth sink into the soft flesh.

The doctor unscrewed the barrel. "I'll be back in a minute."

The doctor never came back, but the technician did. He used a large pair of scissors to open her gown. HE took a long appraising look.

She closed her eyes.

He injected the liquid back into her body. It was as hot as lye left too long on one's scalp. She repented for all her sins as her pupils faded in to her irises.

"That's all, Mrs. Longing. Our secretary will finish filling out all of the papers."

She thanked him and left. As she rode the subway home, she felt something warm trickling down her leg. It looked like blood, but it was green.

Tayari Acia Jones

headaches

head/aches 4 unfamiliar temples

2 thnk

uncommercial thoughts

n brand name

society

an pleez no tyl/o/nol

an naw bill

i won't hv a coke o a smile

cuz ain't nuthin diffrent

bout this

world

an we ain't too

black o too strong-not yet

an i will worry

an b very un/happy

cuz this is live

(re/peat)

live.

an not mem/o/rex.

Mark Jefferson (Thandiwe Onipede)

Where the White and the Black of the City Meet

Another night of sleeping with trash cans. Another night of stench-filled slumber, inhospitable noise and cold. But somehow, in the midst of it, he was all too content to be somewhere. Not to be caught up in the dizzying crowds, looked down upon, trampled on by the soles of society, delivered a peace in and of itself, a peace that deadened the motorized tread of tires, the human and yet inhumane traffic that created and comprised his city-existence.

Although he did not consciously chose this as his habitat (was he not living an animal's life?), it was all that he knew. This was his birthplace, that which set the boundaries to his enlightenment of other places, other worlds.

Smears and scuff marks of browns and black with tinges of yellow--green arrayed his coat. Yet, it willingly warmed his body, held the memories of places visited recently and of long ago, and repelled those around him. He was not gregarious by nature anyway.

On occasion, he would remember being held, only a playful little bundle, and his quiet, sunny place of slumber. The soothing sounds and pixel glow of evening television filled his senses, soothing the immediate. The sweet tones of loving remonstrances and kind hands interrupting his furniture adventures and play contrasted greatly with the depths of deprivation to which he had sunk. This happy time was one lost to the rigors of the present. Usually an aching for nourishment denied the surfacing of these thoughts.

To the muffled light of the sun he rose. The heavy grey haze filled the sky above him, around him, the spaces inside him. He walked in the cool density of the morning, the smog melting into his eyes, as he sought scraps of sustenance.

A worn and unannounced tread moved with him as silently as his shadow. This fed the pretensions of those around him, encouraged their myopia, and tutored their indifference. For, the ease with which he could move through a crowd of hollow-sounding high heels, heavy leather soles, necks and chins was no feat but a fate. As the conscientious student longs for his teacher's glance of recognition, so did he, once, anticipate acknowledgment. He was a student of society. He too had learned to ignore, for the invisible need not entertain thoughts of being noticed. Why look in expectation when the world is so blind?

Out into the briefcases and blackening exhaust his search beckoned him. The automobiles, hard and fast, made his entire body flutter with the anxiousness of impending death, sudden impact. This scene aroused in him a desire for the sanctity of the stationary world. The high gentle tree called through the spaces between the buildings and over their roofs.

As he ventured along the busy walks, crossing streets, buffered by the layers of people that laid between him and the threatening crowds of automobiles, he made his way toward his goal. His present surroundings did not, however, escape his notice. The crumpled paper and plastic pieces of wrappers and refuse seemed to line the walking path. Where the black and the white of the city met, the asphalt and concrete, there was the indelible stain of overabundance and waste. The purpley-blue oil that lay on the murky gutter rivulets made abstract halos around deserted floating scraps, making their way to unknown, darker destinations. This was a place of discord, unnatural blending. The hues and tones, the grey sky, the black, the dim white of the concrete and the hustle of promiscuous tints and shades stiffened his senses.

Just beyond the parking lot. There it was. He finally came upon a wide open patch of green with trees, intersected by a manmade path with hard black bars encircling the space. In this patchy yellow-green-brown there was a particular tree, towering, thick and of majestic stature. The tree was one of his many voiceless friends but it could feel just the same, just as all living things can. It would comfort him with its enveloping shade and catch the refreshing wind in its boughs when the sun was high and fierce. At these times, they would carry on light conversations, cool timely breezes would be exchanged for his sighs of contentment as he lay against the strong skin of its trunk.

Now, as the autumn months had announced themselves with the biting frost of the morning and chilling winds of the day and night, the tree stood as a cold, silent acquaintance. Unable to give shelter, incapable of interceding and abating the oppressive and relentless winds that prick the skin and pinch the ears, the tree stood like a huge hand shooing him off to this fate.

As he turned to leave his sad sanctuary, he immediately found himself facing a navy blue carriage with big spoked wheels bringing him to a sudden halt. Two adults, a man and a woman, were in charge of it and its screaming contents, authoritative, Aryan forms. They jerked back the carriage in horror and surprise at the ragged figure before them. His veil of invisibility snatched away, his life was acknowledged, his existence

realized.

“Ugh! Can’t they prevent creatures like that from entering the park?” she said. Disgust was wrought upon the sturdy feminine face.

With this exclamation the trio curved around his contaminated space, walked away at first loudly, quickly, then resumed their strolling pace.

He watched the backs of their heads as they left him. He was still in the same position as he was a minute ago--his weight in transition from his toes to his heels in order to avoid walking into the carriage.

The couple had spoken of him as though he were not even there. Their sight had merely grazed him but they only needed a short look to know what he was. They didn’t (or couldn’t) even look him in the eye.

As he left he turned once more to see his friend, the tree. His branches were filled with the fading life of autumn--purple, green, yellow, red, brown, orange. The area around the trunk was similarly arranged by Nature’s hand from her thoughtful palette. He put the black bars and the enclosure behind him. He looked around him as he walked, reorienting himself to the world of quickness and mobility. He saw metallic blue cars, bullet-like silver cars, heavy pink cars, bright red jelly bean cars, black pointed cars and junky primer-cars. Their great speed made him anxious. Between the blur, of their swiftness and sucking sound, through the whizzing of color, he saw... food-- an unwrapped, untouched sandwich. Simply dropped by some crossing pedestrian, the nourishment laid in the middle of the street, where the double yellow lines formed a rounded elongated shape. Hunger pangs permeated every cell of his body, from his toe nails to the tip of his hairy head. He must try. He must eat.

He bounded out into the street. Each foot landed separately, nervously. The cars were not coming as thick and frequent as before. The three lanes must be crossed. He could feel each hesitating, careful footstep. He could hear every pound of heart as it moved into his face. Cars passed inches before and behind him. People continued to ramble along the sidewalks.

He was now in the second lane. The cars came thicker, in bigger bunches. Somewhere, somewhere close by, someone honked at him. The sound went directly into his chest and grazed his lungs. He began to pant heavily. No turning back. One more lane. Saving his life, not getting the food, became his sole objective.

He felt an eternity had passed since he’d last moved and the cars were mostly in the first and third lanes. He had to cross the last lane. His

shoulders felt tight and his head was numb. One leap and he would be out. He would be out. He couldn't see anything anymore, he could only hear the sucking of the cars. In a whirl of anxious energy he leaped out into the third lane.

The immediate impact of a metal bumper threw him out of traffic where the white and the black of the city met. His perception faded in and out. His nose was wet with warm blood that he could taste as it trickled into his open mouth. He was on his side and could still feel the sucking cars as they passed. His eyes were half open making the cars blur even more.

"Mommy, look at that! Can we help him?"

"Frances!! Get up off the ground! Don't touch it, it's dead."

"Shouldn't we bury him, so he can go to heaven?"

"Cats don't have a heaven, they just die. Come along now; we're late!"
And the mother and child left.

Nicole Pitts

On rainy days when the sun doesn't shine,
I relax and contemplate
the secrets of life
Freeing my mind
and emancipating my creativity

I imagine
A time before time
Intellectualize
A place that is nameless
I examine
the untraceable roots of existence
which entrap me within an Alpha confused with an Omega
presses me through a melting pot of ambiguity into a pregnant...

VOID
WHICH
whispers "the seeds of the divine spark
lie dormant,
in the consciousness of all."

Yet the endless souls of man
that forever
scour the Universe
hoping
to Capture
TRUTH
do so vainly
For it lies too well-hidden
within themselves.
Yet men's perspective has been retarded by their self-indulgence.
Hence, they refuse to explore the wilderness of self,
fleeing change
and embracing stagnation.

I wonder
if I will find the answers
On a rainy day when the sun doesn't shine.

Robert A. Boyd, Jr.

I/luv/u's
(For KRM B/cuz I un/derstand)

I/luv/u's R

so

so

much

when u don't mean it.

U don't

stutter

stammer

OR

feel scared

B/cuz

i/luv/u/2

iz

ir/relevant

Tayari Acia Jones

Pro-Choice

Together yet alone, here we are
Waiting.
A chill lingers through the silence.
Tension replacing her tears.
I wonder what will be her decision,
after all it's not up to me.
Why must time move so slow?
Especially now.

Death.
Death?
How will it feel? No one will tell me.
I guess I just have to
Wait.

She's not being fair.
I know. I know. Life isn't fair.
Life isn't fair even before it begins.
Well don't mind me: I'm only an issue.
There's a choice to be made and a life to be lived
But by who?
Who are YOU anyway?
God?
Well, why don't you decide
You already know everything
I'll just stay here and
Wait.

Kim Foster

The Soldier

One night I dreamed that I met a young soldier
With sad and haunting eyes
As though waiting
His stare was cold and numb
For something- soon to come

I stood before this man and looked into his face
Into those lonely eyes
And asked his name
But not a word he said
Just bowed his heavy hand

I spoke again and asked him of his trouble
Searching for a clue
As to the horrors
Which had made his face so cold
This man so young-but old

He said to me: If you could see what I've seen
You'd better understand
My misery
Which falls on me like rain
The agony- the pain

And looking up he said: If you knew what I know
You'd better understand
And weep for me
And pray for me to die

Then in the distance I heard a trumpet call
He turned away from me in answer
And he slowly walked away

And after he had gone my mind searched for an answer
For this sad young man
And his tragedy
And I wondered why
He had wanted so to die

Then suddenly the earth it shook
And fire rent the sky
And through the thunderous din

I heard men and women and children cry
Then just as suddenly I could hear my pounding heart
And all was silent- still
But on the air
The putrid smell of death
Like Satan's evil breath
I looked up- and through the acrid smoke
I saw a field aflame
And broken bodies
And what horrors filled my head
The dying- and the dead

And walking toward me I saw the young soldier
He did not seem to see
Me standing there
Then he turned to me and sighed
And then he started to cry

Forever I have been all races and all nations
My sword forever drawn
Against my brother
And in the bloody hands
The tragedy on man

So many years of war-hundreds- Thousands
On ancient battle field
And on the sea
When will it ever ever end

My friend I am compelled- condemned to walk the earth
For all eternity, or so it seems
For I live though I should die
O pray for me to die

I am human envy
Your stubbornness- your pride
An humankind shall suffer
So long as I'm alive
And then I realized who this man was I had met
And then I understood his misery
For he held humankind at bay
And I began- to pray

Gregory Strauther

Wars

In Grenada,
a U.S. invasion killed
thousands of women and men
who had been kissed by the sun.
Charred bodies could be smelled
throughout the night
and Mothers mourned the loss of their sons.

Then, it was Panama
where the bomb was dropped
on those blessed by the sun.
Dark faces in dark places
splattered against red weeping shadows.

Now, Saudi Arabia
will witness black blood
clog their sewers.
Mothers, Fathers, Daughters, Sons,
Husbands and Wives will wither
away in warfare.

Children of the Sun
dispersed all over the world
and placed before each other
on the battleground;
We must come together
and walk off-
Long live the
Children of the Sun
all over the world!

Tomika DePriest

Mall

I

When I hear them say
"troops"
are being sent
here or there to do
this or that
I can't help but cry
cause
"troops" means you.
Here or there
is irrelevant
but
I have lead in my chest
and
cotton in my head
cause
this or that means kill or be killed
or both
and
it breaks my heart every time.

II

And the reason I am sitting here
writing poems
instead of dragging you home is that your mailing address is
New York
and I have no idea where you really are.
I only know what that it is not at school and that's where you
really need to be.

III

When I got your letter yesterday,
I was so
happy
to know that you were alive
one month ago when you mailed it,
but will you still be alive
one month from now
when my reply gets to
where ever the hell you are?

Tayari Acia Jones

Spiritual Searchin'

I need some good , rich
Black church folk
steeped in faith and love
from years of knowing
what it is to be praying on your knees
while the tears travel down
deep wrinkles and roughed smooth skin
so taught and painted
by the sun and sorrow.

How can I speak of their worlds
when I have only
heard tell of them.
I need to see them
be with them
if it's only for a day I will be thankful.

Spirit's not here
I want to go where it is
push my hands deep into its
soft warm brown earth
I want to get the fertile spirit
under my fingernails
gritty and dark
and feel the worms' routes
as I push deeper down.

This is what I yearn for
in this little sheltered room of a college
that spends so much time...
looking at other worlds
that it is removed from living one.

Carrie Smith-Dahl

It is at those times, when one feels close to death,...
that all seems magnified.

Am "I",...or am "I" not the physical manifestation of a
long past idea, which is overdue and overdone?
Is there talent wasted, or just regurgitated thoughts,
that shall not spew forth unto the world, with the
silencing of my lips.

What is man?...but a being trapped upon the physical plane, mentally
masturbating on his own achievements and so-
called liberation of self.

Haven't "I"?...merely played the role of an overstuffed
parasite,

Fixed inside the anal cavity of the world.

GORGING myself on remnants of stale thought-matter.

DOING NOTHING

But DROWNING the divinity within me in the excretion of my
own piety and selfishness.

What gained?

What shared?

What for?

Have I succeeded in failing, or have I merely fulfilled
my destiny,...established my Karma?

I REFUSE to digress into self-pity.

But I must face the eminence of our creator with my eyes
open, yet with my head bowed.

Robert A. Boyd, Jr.

This Wasn't Meant 2 Rhyme

A cool breeze entertains
as the rhythm of the clock, ticks...tocks
off the sounds in my mind R U so inclined
to view the deceased
if the dead rest in peace
then why is it so hard to find
a witness to a murder
which was kinda sorta
more than an average
murder on the arc
sittin' on a slab
was the main corpse, stuffed
and handily packed with crack
stiff to the rhythm of nature's drum.
thum thudda thum
went his heart as the bass dropped
was it a corrupt cop
or maybe just another dead basehead
flickin' off the world for a moment in the tum tudda thum
as his bass drum
kicked for the last time
tick. there it goes again
stop the watch he said
panic attack not the mac
but a martyr or dumb or smarter than most
just a toast to the new year filled with fear
as a tear drop quenches the thirst
of a dessert as a mother gives birth-
the human race or is it aerial space
that hastens the flow of dead waste-
Maybe they'll find J.D.
Mr. Doe U know
who he was why he fought for life as a rock star
rock jock rot in hell oh well,
just another day on the streets
of a lot of people's nightmares
rather than conscious minds...
This wasn't meant to rhyme.

Manuel K. Morris

Calm Rain

looking out on the rain
where it has bathed tree trunks
and painted sidewalks
feeling the sponginess of the earth
as it bounces up through my toes
wetness on my lips
and in my hair
softening everything
gentling existence
drip drip drip drip
even metal sounds natural
the sky is pink
from the city's lights
and the rain connects
the ground to the sky
with me in between
forgetting that my feet aren't roots
and my hair isn't branches
that I am not flowing
from one to the other
through both
I'm here forgetting myself
and remembering the multivers
as it calmly rains
looking at other worlds
that it is removed from the living one.

So I continue to look
for folk who've never been lost
soul searchin' and spiritualizin'
I'm skimming across
the water's surface
like a boat bug peering through her legs
Looking at rivers of miracles
I know are somewhere beyond
... for now, resting on the tension
that just walking creates
Until I can begin to swim.

Carrie Smith-Dahl

Nuts

I love her, I really do, but she intentionally does things to hurt me. She uses me for my money, and she is also a flirt. She is my wife, My wife. And even though I love her truly, I have the feeling that she hates me. This puzzles me greatly.

I am aware of the fact that the wife by all means should stay at home and enjoy the life given to her, provided by the husband. However, one should not take the enjoyment too far.

My wife is prone to spending my money carelessly. Just the other day, she bought herself a new pair of shoes. She justified the worthless spending of my hard-earned money by saying that she only had one pair of shoes that were over two years old, and that she thought it was about time that she had a different pair to wear. Then she started to become outspoken towards me. She said, "I don't have any paraphernalia since you gave all of my shoes, and the best of my dinky, conservative wardrobe to the needy," Is she delirious? Those families have nothing! She should be thankful for what she possesses and be content to give to anyone of need, anything of hers, anytime at any expense. She even complained about me not asking her first before I took from her closet. I cannot believe that one; I am the man of this household. Whatever I choose to do is automatically permissible.

Yesterday, she and I went to the market. I saw her smile at the clerk. I saw the loving way their hands brushed each other when he handed my wife the change. They were lovers. I knew that she was going to deny her infidelity, but I wanted to see to it that she confessed her sin.

On the way home we were silent. The unceasing silence molested my inner peace, for I had the feeling that she was thinking about me and how she believed that she was tricking me to think that she was faithful. Although she was actually sitting there looking straight ahead in the passenger's seat, her body seemed to be laughing at me. I had to get it out of her.

When we arrived inside my house, I, struggling to maintain patience, stopped her immediately in the hallway. I calmly asked her to admit that she was an adulteress. She would not. I could not restrain myself any longer. She was lying to me! I grabbed her by the arm with a firm grip, and I said in a low, angry voice, "Now! Tell me now! Stop this lying to me!" But all she could say was that I was hurting her. I started to raise my

voice slightly, and she became hysterical. She began to make wild gesticulations, and she spat at me. It was then that I finally realized that she had the devil in her; I shook her a little bit. She became more hysterical: He was coming out of her. I hit her, and he screamed. He must leave her helpless body and soul. I love my wife! Why couldn't he leave her alone? He made her body shiver, and I knew that this meant that he was laughing at me. I beat him and beat him until he was gone, her body quiet.

Today she had me arrested. My own wife had me arrested. I was charged for wife abuse. Why? While the cops handcuffed me, I looked at my wife, and I cried shamefully, and I pleaded. She began to cry: she knew that she was wrong; however, she made no effort to stop the policeman. I don't understand. Why does she hate me? Why is she treating me this way? I love her.

Raye John Belcher

Artificial Moans

We loved each other.

The nights we shared.

But,

The coffee went cold.

I never did like cold coffee.

(Did you?)

You didn't like my eggs.

I read that in the

GOSSIP TIMES

Everyone knows about my eggs

And

No, you didn't make me feel

THAT good ---

I moan for the fun of it.

Stephanie Gayle

Without Me

I.

memories

the water ain't runnin' right
in the kitchen
the water
be comin' out but
in spurts

remind me of our love
... and my
memories

that emerge in spurts
so cruelly

maybe

i be rememberin'
s.l.o.w. l. y 'cause
the LOAD of Misery
2HEAVY
right now
a S...L...O...W DEATH...

II.

i lay in bed
Be Mornin
Be Night
Be Winter
Be Spring

Sweatin' in passionate dreams
of U

i can't tell if they really happened like this
or does it just
feel better to
remember them this way

III.

i can't remember the wedding
not even the dress
not even the honeymoon

but i remember
the way your eye twittered
when you said "it's over"
and the way your voice droned...on
like an old tape player

IV.

i lost it...
i know
...i'm sorry

RAGE!

i BEAT your hard chest
BROKE all our dishes
KNIFED your clothing
SCREAMED

...and you stared hopelessly
(but you told me in the room
where we first made love)

i know i closed the chapter then
'cause you always been so
calm and peaceloving
(but we are in the place
where i first felt safe)

i should have been calm
said OK
licked my lips stoically
maybe even smiled
said something poetic like

"To be or not to be ain't no longer the question?"
or pleasant like

"Yes, darling! I think that's best!"

BUT who can be a lady
when 10 years of your life is
FLUSHED
and your heart is
SHATTERED
all over the bedroom floor
(in a room where vulnerability
was once a choice)

V.
THE NOTE

IT'S NOTE THAT i
CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT U
IT'S THAT
i CAN'T LIVE
WITHOUT me

THE END

When i did it Last Night
Billie H. was on
"GOD BLESS THE CHILD"
(our favorite,...'member?)
whisky was right
the room was dark to
fit the mood
but candles were lit
(wanted to see what i was doin'
don't know why just wanted to)

It was romantic
a sweet close
you would have liked it

only thing i regret
was dripping blood on my
beautifully milky white wedding dress...

EPILOGUE

they talked about suicide
my spirit giggled in my sleep

it just isn't that morbid

U left me with no one

U

carved out my heart
i was just completing
the slaughter

LOVE

ALWAYS

without me

C. Wiatta Freeman

The Minuscule Wink

There is a distant sparkle
that I've yet to imagine.
Nestled in the black heavens
it sends my eyes a whispered glimmer.
Am I not to imagine you and me,
the dark sand,
our salty skin,
a bare freedom,
the crystal transformation
burning our lungs that is a star?
Running naked under night's first kiss
it's hard to imagine
that the distant sparkle
wasn't made for us.

Christopher Watkins



The Warmth of Winter

He watered my garden
my dark petals...
peeled
under a Blazing Sun

though...
12 below
outside my crystal window

C. Wiatta Freeman

Balladists

It's about 9:30 and two friends are alone in the bedroom of the cool, upstairs apartment. There is darkness split only by the potent moonbeam forging through the uncurtained window. This moonbeam acts like a movie projector, casting silhouettes of the two friends on the naked wall behind them. Their shadows are dancing and only briefly does the wall evidence any distance between them. Their drag seems tedious, slowed perhaps by sizeable chicken dinner they recently devoured, the aroma of which still lingers in the air. Just above the boombox playing Ballads by the John Coltrane Quartet, the laughter of neighborhood high school kids can be heard outside right below the window. The kids are oblivious to the ceremony taking place above them.

But the two friends are very aware. Somehow, without speaking, they proceed with their ritual, which finds them kneeling toward one another on the mattress, escaping the moonbeam. A new dance has begun which moves them over each other's body with the intensity and friction of a match being struck on the pavement, yielding a contained but potentially all-consuming flame. With the consent of touch, they liberate each other from the fetters of clothing. They seek shelter from the flannel quilt at the foot of the bed. Protected from the elements, their dance continues, with greater fervor.

No words have yet been spoken, but both seem to know the steps to this dance. In concert with the music, their hips gently grind to the bass laid down by Jim Garrison. Their feet keep rhythm with Elvin Jones on the drums, and their fingers gracefully caress and tease each other like McCoy Tyner's do on the piano. Meanwhile, their tongues wrestle with all the dexterity and ardor of an angry John Coltrane on tenor saxophone. Their two bodies have become a quartet, playing the accompaniment to their climb toward ecstasy and their subsequent plunge into consummation. This song is recapitulated time and again until the friends finally realize that the tape has stopped; the music they've heard is their own.

They lie in contemplation, noticing the blinking red dots on the digital clock which now reads 12:13. There is a different aroma in the air now, sweeter than the one of baked chicken. Which reminds them, they're suddenly hungry again. A combination of fatigue and satisfaction leaves them consigned to wait until morning to seek more nourishment, and possibly to compose another Ballad...

Koboi Simpson

Listen up!

Courage is the word for the day
and I am going to say this:

Tawanna Brawley was raped
and left to die
with racial slurs
scrawled all over her body
and feces caked about.

The man who did it
One among many
a white boy
who soon killed himself
perhaps laden with guilt.

He didn't have the courage
to face his popper due
Despite the fact that the system
tried to erase all clues.
Justice fell flat on its face--
a history of this against the black race.

Courage is the word for the day
and I am going to say this:

Sabrina Collins was terrorized
KKK style
Racial slurs staring
every place she looked,
but never expected:
in the closet
on the mirror
and even a note on the bed.

At Emory University
the culprit was said to lurk
periodically striking
until Sabrina screamed
out:
"Somebody help!"

But the white-robed terrorist
didn't have the courage
to reveal himself
and justice lied behind the white mask.
Courage is the word for the day
and I am going to say this:
Eleanor Bumpers was shot
and killed in cold blood
at the hands of a pig
who pulled the trig.
But, in the New York system
they never called her a victim--
Justice lied behind the white mask.

Will the Black woman
ever be protected by the white mask?
One needs not ask;
Courage is the word for the day--
WE will have to protect OURSELVES.

Tomika DePriest

Revolution

To all the Daddies who ran out to Fight the Revolution.
Who didn't realize that the revolution was born, grew, developed, and
LIVES in their homes.

Now where are the protests.....GONE
Where are the Civil Rights Bills.....VETOED
Where are the Children.....LOST!!!!

Where are your Sons?
LOST in trying to be a MAN

Where are you Daughters?
PREGNANT or lost looking for a MAN

Where is the Next Generation?
Searching for tomorrow!!!!!!
While today passes them by...

Where are you Daddy?
Wondering what happened!!!!!!

A Generation lost because Daddy and Mommy were out
fighting for the revolution!!!!!!!!!!

REVOLUTION????????? FOR WHAT!!!!!!!!!!

D O N T F O R G E T

A Revolution Lives and Dies in the Street.
But LIVES forever in your home.
DADDY COME HOME

Denise D. Daniels

On Violence to End Apartheid

There are only so many words that can be
spoken, so many spirituals sung.

There are only so many prayers that can be
left unanswered, so many bodies left
to rot in the road.

Until the people will tire of waiting for
murderers. liars, racist thieves to
relinquish power to its rightful owners.

With time they will grow older, blacker, angrier,

Then they will take to arms and ironically enough
black and white that could not mingle in life
shall do so in the blood of death.

Deidre Stephens

Stripped

long ago i had knowledge
long ago i sat up on thrones, in libraries, classrooms, temples,

as a sheep has his hair sheared, i as a proud African
i was stripped of something that was most sacred
knowledge of self
knowledge
beat down like a wild dog i was stripped
the mother, the queen, the scholar, stripped, stripped,
stripped
i watched as a non-colored beast raped, help me!
tortured, help me!
murdered, help me!
my woman, my queen, my mother, my daughter, my sister, my,
my, my
help me !!!!!!!
help me! as she cried
i stood still for i was stripped mentally of my manhood
i stood still for i was afraid

called me out of my original name
chaka, obabdele, aswad, ajamu, abdallah, khatib, etc.
now i have names such as toby, joe, trevor, dick, billy, biff,
etc.
names foreign to me
foreign to me

abused by his words daily
you beast
you black dog
you nigger
you bitch
you coon
you, you, you
stripped of all decency
we were stripped

lash, lash, lash,
i felt all over my back as the blood came out of scars
castrated i was, when accused of looking upon their woman
maimed i was, as i tried to free my physical, mental and
spiritual self

i pray, i pray, i pray
to who i say
for i was stripped of all knowledge of a god
Allah, God, Buddha, Jehovah, Jah, Yahway
who is who
for i once you were all one, now there are so many
tripped of all knowledge of a god and instilled the idea of a
blond
blue-eyed man who reminds me of the postman
for he was god as i was told
oh god,

oh god,

oh god,

i'm right (white)

i'm right (white)

oh god

oh god

on a throne, in the classroom, in the libraries, in the temples i
used to be

i was stripped

i was stripped

i was stripped

i was strippededdddd

Khatib Muhammed

If I Could Write a Write a Revolution With Love

the sound would be black like me
covering and encompassing all that pulsates

the force would come strong like my hand
crushing everything that would resist my love

the fury behind the force would be
brown, bronze, toffee, and butterscotch
like me

dependency would cease, for
we would be a self-sufficient people

Appreciating each other, appreciating ourselves

the world would move to a new pace
a pace with definite rhythm and spirit

there cannot be a black movement without rhythm
we are always in motion causing
that
rhythm.

We are born to set
and keep the pace

for the rhythm is so strong that it will encompass
all that have the power to feel

Adrienne Maynard

disciple

I worshipped you
everyday for years.
I wanted to know your habits,
your idiosyncracies;
You were my religion

we were divided
for I envisioned you
as a god-
when you were only a man.
you were on a pedestal
and I just a devoted
member of your congregation

you baptized me
with your indifference-
that cool, harsh holy water
that made me want you.
I imagined you were my confessional,
my shelter in the storm-
until, I actually tasted the sweet wine
of your communion.

now my faith is broken
like the ritual bread you fed me.
stale shards of wafer
that got caught in my throat.

now our love is a crucifix
piercing our flesh
until we bleed-
angry words
and bitter kisses.

Erinn R. Gordon

Reflections...

I thought of what I could say to you
I thought perhaps I could cry until
I simply fell apart
Would that appease you?
Maybe I could come and yell
and scream
and call you a dumb ass
Perhaps I could just be silent
Would you understand?
Could you understand
what my silence would mean?
I question myself, but
you don't question me...or yourself
It is easier to put me into a category--

OREO

Good.

White on the inside and black on the outside.

Real good.

So, I think like you and leave the niggas behind

Isn't that what I am supposed to do?

Stay away from those low class niggas, especially the
dark ones

My grandmother comes from Barbados

She came to this land of "plenty" at age 16

Her skin "light, bright and damn near white"

We never talk about the rape

Got her a job

tending to the Todd's

They send her Christmas cards to this very day of her 94th
year

Yeah, maid

worked in the house, scrubbed it clean

Left her six children, one of those is my

FATHER

Nigger, Negro, Colored, Afro-American, African-American...
togetherness?

I have to sit here and
intellectualize with you because
my mother works her ass off everyday
everyday

And you want to know why
I won't lay with you
cause

it will be so good
and I look so good
just for a minute

Nice try

Sometimes it works, too many times
but I know too much now.

I often speak of a we--a community, a weness
that perhaps only means black

But my teacher told me that Zora Neale Hurston wasn't
"completely confrontational of the issues concerning
African-Americans"

Am I again denied access?

Who are you?

What do you want from me?

No. Don't bother ask cause you'll just take it
and won't even say thank you

I am the Slave Girl and
I'm not going to say anymore
not to you white massa
not to you pure white woman
not to you honorable black man
and sometimes sister...

I am the Slave Girl
That's it
I have said enough
for now.

Jeanine Smartt

When I see you
my viscera move, distorting my calm facade.
Young,
Black,
beautiful.
An incarnation of the infinite, fostering
the growth of yet another incarnation inside of you.

Others pass by you uncaringly.
To them, it seems, you are invisible.
Your child, you, and I are part of the Nightpeople,
the Afrikan and poor people who inhabit these towers
of capitalism cleaning and protecting the interests and
possessions of the Daypeople.
Again I look at you...

Why must yet another Afrikan child
inherit a Black world of powerlessness
and dependence? You don't know it,
young sister, but an individualistic, materialistic,
postmodern, sexist, racist NIGGER MASS PRODUCTION MACHINE
even now works to diminish and negate your unborn.

Perhaps, I then think, I am being too negative,
too presupposing. My mind then fills with thoughts
of possibility.

Perhaps this Black child's life
can be different. An Afrikan order:
Power
Beauty
Understanding
will again become as endemic in his life
as they were many centuries ago.
Order requires work
sacrifice, and vision.
Those things, I resolve, will be my gifts
to you, unborn Afrikan.

Somewhere, deep inside, I smile



Chinua Tyehimba

True Friends

just when you think
you've found a true friend
there's another knife added
to the collection in your back.

Danielle Jenkins

To Eat, or Not to Eat

Fridays are dedicated to planning out in detail the events of the evening and saturday. Attention to detail, especially for people like me, is a must in times like these. I live for organization and structure. I'll admit it, my clothes are arranged by textures and then by patterns. I just feel that organization and planning ahead makes life so much easier. Even though weekends serve as a release from all the pressures I have during the week, structured scheduling of my activities helps me to be as efficient and as happy as possible.

Parties. Movies. Pretentious wine and cheese sets. The whole shabanggg. Decisions. I tell you. My need to be filled in on every detail before I can make a decision tires me out after a while. I'm almost ecstatic, actually, when the decisions of what to do and where to go are already decided. It takes the pressure off of me in having to take control.

Like this past friday. Someone else suggested an activity to me and it had all seemed to fall right into place. I had just gotten out of my 2:50pm class, gathered up my books, papers, pens, tests and Twinkie wrappers and was heading over to the bookstore when I heard someone call me from three bushes, and an empty Sprite can away.

It was Chase. Casually slinking his way through the crowd in his favorite baggy red sweater, loose jeans and suede shoes without socks, I have to admit: he's cute. He kisses me in his familiar on-the-forehead way and asks me if I want to go out to dinner. My choice. My pleasure. We really hadn't been spending much time together at all. With final exams coming up, his new job and my internship, the idle time we used to have was gone. Evenings spent with each other, like this one was going to be, were especially appreciated when we spent them alone.

The last time he took me out to dinner, we had a really nice time. We went to Chez Noir. The entire restaurant was dimly lit with candlelight and had unnecessarily high ceilings. I guess that was done for a dramatic effect. There was a low murmur of conversation punctuated by the occasional clinking of wine glasses. The melon-colored linen tablecloths with carefully sculptured napkins and chilled vases of sparkling spring water with slices of lime on the tables was just... so me. I loved it. Everything was just so. A personal servant would have topped my meal off, but the waiter, I conceded would have to do.

So, I was looking forward to going out to dinner with Chase. We always have such nice times and he always takes me to such expensive places to eat. I just love it. So, the plan seemed simple enough. No loopholes, no hidden traps. We would go to a restaurant of my choice, and my pleasure and simply enjoy each other's company and well-fed dispositions. Chase told me he'd pick me up at such and such a time and that we'd be on our way. He kissed me again and then disappeared into the crowd.

Friday was over. Friday classes were over and I chose to skip dinner at the cafeteria. I took my mid-early-late-afternoon-pre-late nap and my refresher shower. I decided to wear my new satin Donna Karans with that tangerine-colored linen suit, decidedly placed three-fourths back in my closet to let me know that it hadn't been worn in at least a month. Oh! And I had forgotten about those Calvin Klein stockings that go great with this outfit. They were my last pair. Damn. I'm definitely going to have to get some more. And the big gold-brushed drop earrings that Jason had given me last Fall--no, that wasn't a good idea. Chase would have a fit. Let's go with the safer pair from Macy's that one of my girlfriends had given me. Her taste is almost as good as mine. Looking into the mirror, about to brush my eyebrows, the phone rang.

It was Chase telling me he'd be by at 8:30 to get me. I told him that I wanted to go to The Lutece. He said sure. He also wanted to know if I minded if his roommate and his roommate's girlfriend came along. Straining an "of course not," and hanging up the phone, I tried to be graceful, but, shit. This was supposed to be OUR evening: I didn't want to have to share the attention. I went back to brushing my eyebrows and praising myself for being the bigger person and acting like I didn't mind another couple joining us this evening. I was proud of myself. I'm flexible.

Stepping back from the mirror and approving myself one last time--I'm glad I bought that bronze lipstick---I wondered how the roommate's girlfriend was going to look. I hope not better than me. She probably had big feet.

I left my dorm room and went down to the lobby to wait for Chase and the cronies. It was 8:30 and they weren't there. I hated waiting. 8:31. I'm hungry. Human traffic poured in and out of the dorm as friends and couples met for evening plans. 8:32. 8:33. Damn. What a hideous dress that girl has on over there. The only place that girl should be heading is towards the top of someone's wedding cake. 8:34. Chase pulled up and

honked outside. I went out to the car, opened the door and paused before getting in to signal that I expected an explanation for his tardiness. Chase smiled his shy grin and motioned to his roommate and the roommate's girlfriend with a nod of his head to indicate them as the reason. I forgave Chase and playfully rubbed the back of his neck with my left palm as I got in. Hmm. That deep orange nailpolish really did go well with my skin color.

We headed towards The Lutece. We drove around for awhile, looking for a place to park. What? No valet service? Friday nights must have been a popular night to dine here because it took us thirty minutes to find a space. I guess with all the excitement of the evening and my increasing hunger, I rushed out of the car and caught my left leg on the side of the car door. I ran my stockings. But only a little bit. It didn't matter. I was above getting upset. You couldn't see it anyway. We made our way inside.

The Lutece was a quaint little restaurant with lots of plants. I loved plants, but they always seemed more appropriate in the waiting area: I'm always afraid of those little mealy bugs dropping off into my food when they're close to the dinner tables. Everyone in there had soft-accents and there were no menus: the waiters had to tell you what there was to choose. Perfect. My kind of place.

As the four of us stood, waiting to be seated, I finally noticed the roommate's girlfriend. I surprised myself at how long it had taken me to notice her. She was a tall girl. And she had her hair in a stupid pony-tail at the back of her head. She hadn't used gel or anything to slick it back. Her hair looked really, really dry. Three months' worth of her perm had grown out and that nasty armpit-hair texture sprouted up in its place. Some of her hair fit into her hair clip, but most of it didn't. The part that did was filled with split ends of your worst nightmare and exploded from the barrette like a sandy brown firecracker. She probably hadn't been to the salon in years. Good God. She had some kind of sky-blue-toilet-paper color shirt on with the pants and earrings to match. And she did have big feet, poor thing. I hated everything about her. With my luck, though, she probably spoke fluent French. If she did, I'd give her that much.

Some vanilla-pale white woman with a Laura Ashley floral maternity-looking dress came to seat us. I thought she blended rather well with the plants in the place. She asked whether we preferred smoking or non-smoking. I decided that the latter was healthier and took it upon myself to say so. The vanilla lady went off and came back to say that only smoking

was immediately available and that the wait for non-smoking would be at least an hour. I was mad at myself for not making reservations. But I was getting hungrier by the second so eating in the smoking section suddenly didn't seem so bad. After all, the indirect consequences of smoking on non-smokers was still questionable.

We were seated. The waiter came soon after bearing dry-ass breadsticks and chilled glasses of water with twists of lime. He introduced himself.

"Good evening. I am Antoine and I'll be you're waiter this evening." I was immediately disappointed. "Antoine" didn't sound exotic at all. He looked more like a "Fred." Well, he did have an accent. Hmph.

The waiter skipped off. In the meantime I knawed on one of the dry crusts of bread hoping to dull my appetite. It was 9:15pm and I was just realizing that the only thing I had eaten today was my morning Slim-fast shake. Slightly irritable and feeling impatient, I decided to judge someone. Chase was my honey so he was disqualified. Aside from the roommate's girlfriend's hair, she wasn't much to look at. I couldn't really make fun of her personality because it ran neck and neck with that of a stale Ritz cracker. She was no fun. Ahha! The roommate. I turned to size him up.

I noticed that he was looking around kind of funny and trying to give his girlfriend one of those I'm-trying-to-get-your-attention-damnlt-but-you're-not-looking looks. I translated this into, "Uh-oh. He doesn't have enough money." But when he opened his mouth to say something it was,

"Hmm. Uh, the waiter sure is taking a long time." I was right. He didn't have enough money. Visions of eating my Chicken topped with a lemon-wine sauce and Almond wedges while worrying about roommate's painful confession about coming up short when the bill came made me squirm and even more irritable at the fact that he hadn't planned ahead. He should have brought his Mastercard, or, at the very least, his bank card. Perhaps reading my mind, unwilling to confess such a deep and dark secret and sensing that the time of confession was near as our waiter bounced from table to table, roommate again commented nervously,

"Boy. Service sure is slow."

I couldn't stand it any longer. Realizing that this scenario was not to be a memorable one for the roommate, and my not being in the mood to be as forgiving and as graceful as I had been at the beginning of the evening, I

was dying a slow death. The impending doom was terrible as Antoine left the kitchen with a flourish and headed our direction. That was it. Sipping on my glass of tap water, and shuddering at the fact that it was tap water and not spring water, (How dare they place a twist of lime in tap water!) I scooted my chair back indignantly and quietly declared, "Let's go. The wait is driving me crazy. I'm starving."

And so we left, with me proud of my encore performance and ashamed at roommate's cowardice. Not one to make a big deal out of things, I calmly led the way out and to the car. Quite miffed by this point, I scraped my leg on the car door again, as if to remind myself that I had a run in, these, my last pair of stockings. It was getting bigger. And I was getting angrier. By this point, I was famished and feeling a bit faint. If it got much worse I would feign a faint. We drove around aimlessly.

"Where to?" Chase asked, as if dinner was still my choice and for me. I suggested a host of other places---all of which seemed to be outside of roommate's budget. Little Italy used too much garlic. The Golden Buddha made him break out in a rash---he was allergic to MSG. The smell of curry powder in Indian food upset his nostrils: nothing, in otherwords, was cheap enough for him. Trying to be as accommodating as possible, I decided to defer to the miser. I really tried hard not to sulk. We drove all around the city. By now it was 10:55pm and most decent places had begun closing their kitchens.

We briefly stopped at some nasty hole in the ground. It smelled greasy. I had just washed my hair and the thought of it smelling like rancid hamburger meat made me cringe. I remember my beautician telling me that wet and freshly-washed hair is always so porous and open to strong smells. I hate people who smell like food. We moved on.

Resigned to starvation, I find myself in the midst of self-pity when we pull up into a shack of a place surrounded by, what seems to be brush, undergrowth, dead birds and empty toilets.

They had to be kidding.

Reluctantly I climbed out of the car, this time tearing the pants leg to my suit rather than the damn stockings, and followed Chase and those other two into this, this, this PLACE. It was as dark inside as it was outside in the parking lot. The place was crowded with boots and war memorabilia hanging from the ceiling. I could have sworn that a sign on the door said

that anything you could get away with in here---was yours. This was unreal. As we seated ourselves and squinted to see in the darkness, someone from the table next to us got up and came over bringing us warm glasses of water with the purpose of taking our order. He had literally been eating at the table next to us when we came in. I started wondering if I was expected to take the next table's order. I had just had it. "Yeah," I mumbled after everyone else had zealously ordered, "I'll have the grilled cheese." Hmph. A far cry from gourmet.

I glanced across the table at the roommate and his girlfriend. They seemed to be conferring on something. Money, no doubt. I didn't dare look anywhere else around the restaurant, I was disgusted by what I had already seen. So, completely unhappy with the way my night had ended up and too weak to even bitch about it, I slumped forward in my chair placing my elbows on the splintered table in a daze, carefully avoiding, of course, a hardened clump of jelly, (the cleaners could only get it out of a linen-blend of which mine, of course, was not) and reach for my water.

I start to sip and, oh. Oh no. Oh God. Tell me no. No, THERE'S A LONG BLONDE HAIR IN MY WATER! Needless to say, I lost it. What kind of shit was this? I jumped up from the table screaming and ranting and raving at no one in particular. "I got all dressed up this evening, missed the cafeteria food, wore one of my favorite outfits and then tore the damn thing, waited on your late asses, watched some dumb weddingcake dress girl and then," viciously pointing at the roommate's girlfriend, "was subjected to this mute firecracker-head all night with her nasty little evening ensemble!" I whirled around to focus on the roommate himself. "And you, you, broke-ain't-got-no-money-cheap-ass, HERE, here, take this!" I cruelly crumpled up a five dollar bill and hurled it towards his face. "I was supposed to have a nice time, this was supposed to be MY evening---and what do I get? A damn cheese sandwich and a glass of hair! Ripped my last pair of stockings, scuffed up my shoes, I smell like grease and rancid hamburgers, GOD DAMNIT!" Running towards the door and screaming back over my right shoulder, "CHASE, HOW DARE YOU TAKE ME TO THIS HELL-HOLE! JUST WHO IN THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?" And with that, I slammed the door behind me, being careful not to ruin my manicure.

Keisha M. McClellan

Returning Regret to its Rightful Owner

Excuse me, you left something:

I cannot accept the regret
That knowing you has brought me.

It belongs to you, and I think
You wear it better than I
Will ever be able to.

Our hearts are not in harmony
And neither were our intentions.

...Maybe next time we'll both
Make better decisions.

Sharon McClamney

Three A.M.

I lie alone, awake, atop the sheets.
The lonely, chilly silence is deafening
It seems as if the black room is swallowing me,
Like I'm being drawn into the dark throat of a monster.

Your smile splits the darkness, your laughter shatters the silence.
I sense you nearing, the room begins to get brighter.
Your long awaited arrival heats the air in an instant,
Saving me from the cold hearted, murderous solitude.

We're at each other so quickly, it's as if we're bitter enemies.
But there is definitely no malice intended.
Adrenaline pumps as we begin our ascent into the heavens, and
Before we know it, we're dancing among the moon and stars.
But I feel a draft - did I leave that window open?
No, it's only the chill of reality, letting me know that
I lie alone, atop the sheets.

Elliot Winston Robinson

The Kite

Pulling and climbing with the wind.

I have no freedom.

I swing, twirl and dance about.

I'm tugged back into reality.

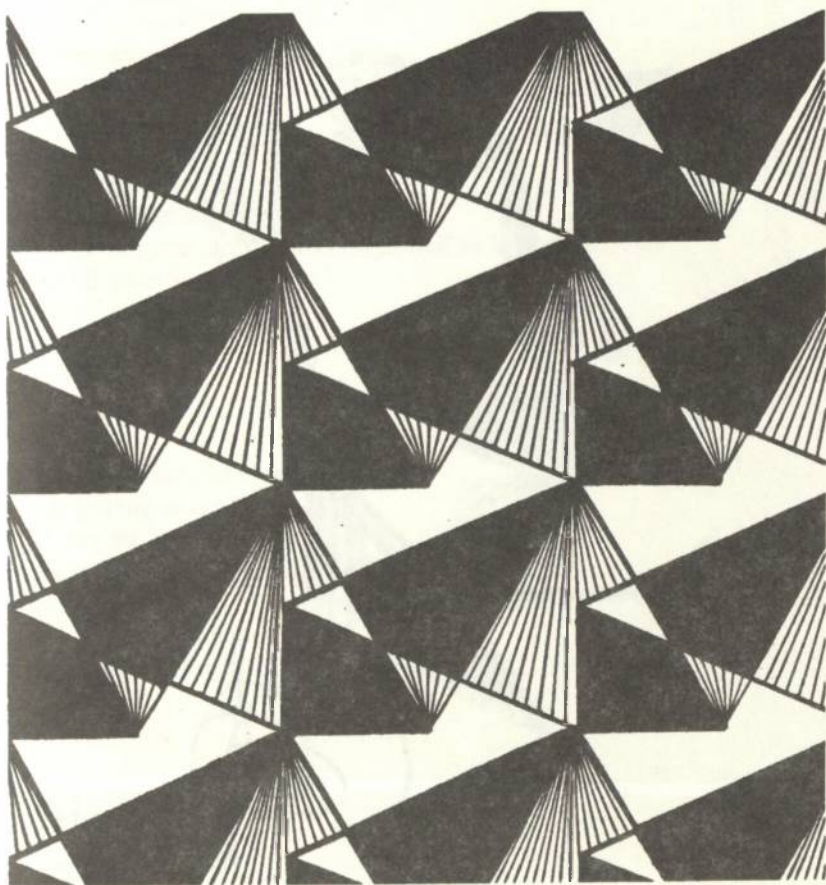
Slowly I'm reeled out of my dream

Controlled by a single string.

I resist but only crash

The string is my destruction.

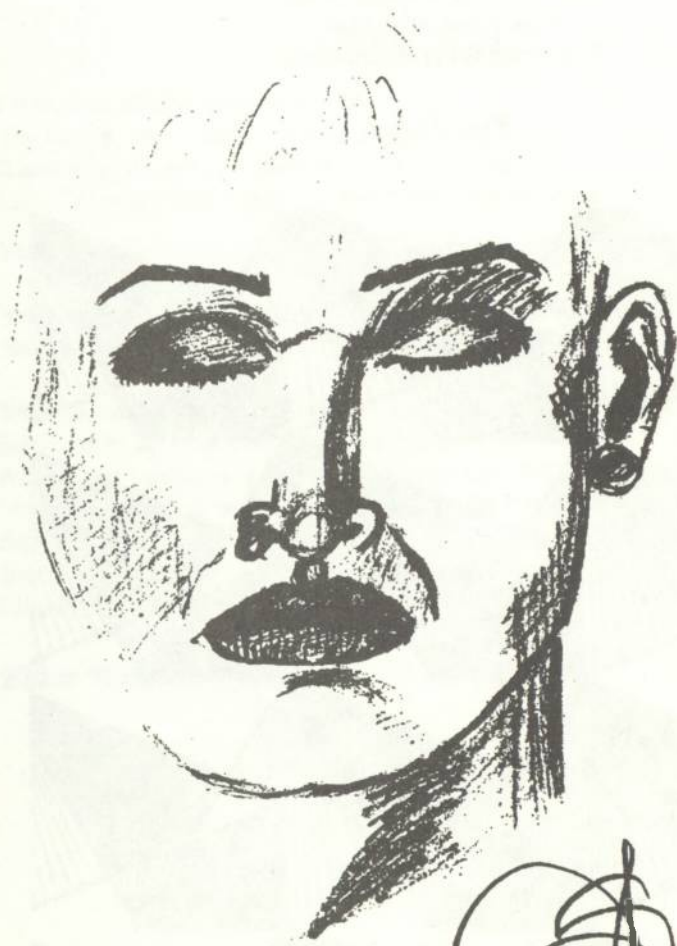
Kim Foster



Haiku

in my loneliness
i feel like a ball with no
child, moon with no stars

Mark Jefferson (Thandiwe Onipede)



[Signature]
04/19/90

Up in the Attic

up in the attic
baby sleeps

we keep her on the table
so the mice won't scare her.
she doesn't wear diapers
they get dirty anyway
so she lies on newspaper
that we get from the neighbors.

up in the attic
big brother reads.

he's nineteen and still CAN'T
get through the Cat in the Hat.
he wants to graduate
so he studies a lot.
between Playboy and Penthouse
he really gets an education.
i tell him that you can't have children and be in high
school all your life.

up in the attic

mom cleans.

she hates roaches and rodents
always getting to the food
before we do. she's always
crying 'cause baby's loosing
weight, we figure that if she goes to the hospital
she can eat and get better,
welfare will pay for that.
up in the attic
sister's pregnant

this will be her
fourth child
she had the first when

she was fourteen. she loves
playing with them so
she keeps having them so
she keeps having them,
and mama don't mind 'cause
they get sent to grandma's
place.

up in the attic
i feel alone

Karimu M. Smith

Contributors

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