

AUNT CHLOE

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"...we do language."

"Writing is really a way of thinking—not just feeling but thinking about things that are disparate, unresolved, mysterious, problematic or just sweet."

"I am interested in the complexity, the vulnerability of an idea. It is not 'this is what I believe,' because that would not be a book, just a tract. A book is 'this may be what I believe, but suppose I am wrong...what could it be?' Or, 'I don't know what it is, but I am interested in finding out what it might mean to me, as well as to other people.'"

"What I really love is the process of invention. To have characters move from the curl all the way to a full-fledged person, that's interesting."

"I think about us, Black women, a lot. How many of us are battered and how many are champions. I note the strides that have replaced the tiptoe; I watch the new configurations we have given to personal relationships, wonder what shapes are forged and what merely bent. I think about the sisters no longer with us, who, in rage or contentment, left us to finish what should never have begun: a gender/racial war in which everybody would lose, if we lost, and in which everybody would win, if we won. I think about the Black women who never landed who are still swimming open-eyed in the sea. I think about those of us who did land and see how their struggles for survival became our maneuvers for power."

"I tell my students, 'When you get these jobs that you have been so brilliantly trained for, just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else. This is not just a grab-bag candy game.'"

"You wanna fly, you got to give up the shit that weighs you down."

"I try to give some credibility to all sorts of voices, each of which is profoundly different. Because what strikes me about African American culture *is* its variety. In so much of contemporary music everybody sounds alike. . . . There is no black woman popular singer, jazz singer, blues singer who sounds like any other. Billie Holliday does not sound like Aretha, doesn't sound like Nina, doesn't sound like Sarah, doesn't sound like any of them. They are all powerfully different. And they will tell you that they couldn't possibly have made it as singers if they sounded like somebody else. If someone comes along sounding like Ella Fitzgerald, they will say, Oh we have one of those . . . It's interesting to me how those women have this very distinct, unmistakable image. I would like to write like that, I would

like to write novels that were unmistakably mine, but nevertheless fit first into African American traditions and second of all, this whole thing called literature.”

“We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives.”

“If each hour of every day brings fresh reasons to weep, the same hour is full of cause for congratulations: Our scholarship illuminates our past, our political astuteness brightens our future, and the ties that bind us to other women are in constant repair in order to build strength in this present, now.”

“What’s the world for you if you can’t make it up the way you want it?”