

ONYX

REFLECTIONS



**SPECIAL
ISSUE**

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Editor's Note:

This issue of the Onyx comes at both a beginning and an end. It is the end of four years for the Class of 1997 but the beginning of their glittering futures in new schools, jobs, cities and countries. It is also the beginning for new students to create their own legacies at Tufts. The Onyx, has often conveyed this sense of past and future as something that could not be clearly defined but rather a combination of eras, traditions and innovations. You can neither dwell solely on the past nor ignore it. You learn from it and take it with you in your future endeavors. In writing, the past is essential. So many wonderful wordsmiths came before us and left important messages about the state of the world. We echo them without even knowing it half the time. Just as they had a lot to say, there are a rainbow of powerful voices that can speak on the world as we know it today. Past and present collide and differ at the same time. This issue, appropriately titled reflections, is a collection of poems from students who span the years and famous quotes from people of color around the world. I think of the Onyx as a tree, with a defined and immovable base but from it stems many different branches that cross and tangle while maintaining their own individual directions. Life and writing are much of the same, reflections of one another. For the Class of 1997 life in the real world is just beginning. I wish them luck and success in whichever direction they go. To the younger classes who will be taking over the Onyx and all the other black student organizations, I wish them the same. Life is whatever you make it. That's something that everyone should remember. Good luck everyone and I hope that you continue to recognize and appreciate the power in a word.

Lauren Allen

change, all production and generation are effected through the word.
Leopold Senghor, Presence Africaine, 1956

Writing, like dreams, pushes you up against the evasions, self-deceptions, investments in opinions and interpretations, the clutter that blinds, that disguises that underlying, all-encompassing design within which the perceivable world- in which society would have us stay put- operates.
Toni Cade Bambara,

As I read, my ears opened up to the magic of the spoken word.
Richard Wright, 12 Million Black Voices, 1941
Text without context is pretext.
Howard Thurman, Disciplines of the Spirit, 1963

Writing really helps you heal yourself.
Alice Walker, c. 1983
A good book is a garden carried in the pocket.
Africa
Poets sign their signatures on the world.
Haki Madhubuti

You can taste a word.
Pearl Bailey, in Newsweek, 4 December 1967
I am a writer because I am not a talker.
Gwendolyn Brooks, Report From Part One, 1972

Black poetry is like a razor; it's sharp and will cut deep.
Haki Madhubuti
A poem only lives when it has a soul to reside in.
Julius Lester, introduction to Jordan, Some Changes, 1971

A poem only lives when it has a soul to reside in.
Julius Lester, introduction to Jordan, Some Changes, 1971

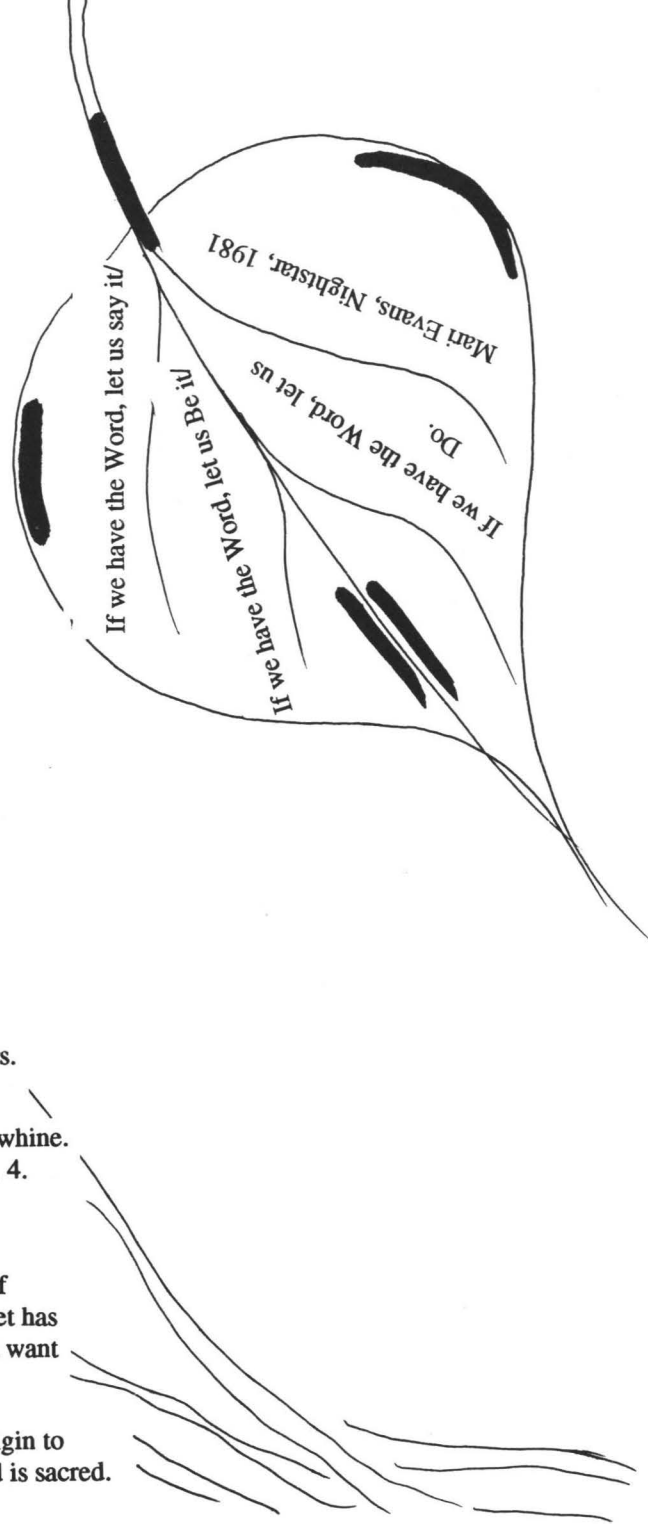
My writing was more an attempt at understanding self than self-expression.
Richard Wright, in American Mercury, July 1940

Words were living things bestriding the air and charging the room with strong colors.
Paule Marshall, Brown Girl, Brownstones, 1959

Words do wonderful things. They sound purr. They can urge, they can wheedle, whip, whine. They can sing, sass, singe. They can churn, check, channelize. They can be a hup, 2, 3, 4. They can forge a fiery army out of a hundred languid men.
Gwendolyn Brooks, afterword, Contending Forces, 1968.

[All] Black poems ain't the same, certain poets hip you to something, pulls the covers off of something or run it down to you, or ask you to just dig it - your coat being pulled, every poet has written a being poem. Just writing the way they be, they lovers be, the world be. We do not want subhumans defining what we be doing.
Ibid

A word has power in and of itself. It comes from nothing into sound and meaning; it gives origin to all things. By means of the word can a man deal with the world on equal terms. And the word is sacred.
N. Scott Momaday, The Way to Rainy Mountain, 1969



With words as our weapons, there are some few of us who will stand on the ramparts to fend off the evildoers, the slanderers, the greedy, the self-righteous! You are not alone.
Richard Wright, An Open Letter to Kwame Nkrumah, Black Power, 1954

Writing is a labor of love and also an act of defiance, a way to light a candle in a gale wind; in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
Alice Childress, A Candle in a Gale Wind, in *ibid.*

In the battle for peace the word will always be the winner.
Nikki Giovanni, An Answer to Some Questions on How I Write: In Three Parts, in *ibid.*

The whole world opened up to me when I learned to read.
Mary McLeod Bethune, Faith That Moved a Dump Heap, WHO, June 1941

The poetry of a people comes from the deep recesses of the unconscious, the irrational and the collective body of our ancestral memories.
Margaret Walker, in *Black World*, December 1971

But certain things have seemed to me to be here as I heard the tongues of those who had speech and listened to the lips of the books.
Zora Neale Hurston, Dust Tracks on a Road, 1942

you can psychoanalyze yourself, get rid of paid for it.
Essence, May 1989

Writing is one of the few professions in which hostilities and frustrations in public, and get Octavia Butler, in *Birth of a Writer*,

The word is at its most expressive in poetry.
Keorapetse Kgositsile, in *Black Poetry Writing*, 1971

Poetry is religion brought down to earth and it is of the essence of the Negro soul.
Albert Barnes, Negro Art in America, in Locke, ed. *The New Negro*, 1925

Poetry is a friend to whom you can say too much.
Gwendolyn Brooks

Be careful, think about the effect of what you say. Your words should be constructive, bring people together, not pull them apart.
Miriam Makeba, *My Story*, 1987

IN MY UNIVERSE

THERE IS A UNIVERSE WITHIN ME
AND I HOLD THE KEY
TO UNLOCK ANY AND ALL OF ITS MYSTERIES.
MY THOUGHTS ARE THE ESSENCE OF SACRED SCRIPTURES
PASSED DOWN INFINITE LIFETIMES
ENCODED IN ANCESTRAL LIFELINES.
I SING THE SAME SONG AS THE ALGAE AND AMOEBA
BECAUSE AT ONE TIME I WAS AS THEY WERE
AND IN THE NEXT TIME THEY SHALL BE AS I AM.
WITHIN MY UNIVERSE ARE PLANETS AND MOONS
WHICH ORBIT STAR LIKE SUNS
NUMEROUS LIKE THE ATOMS WITHIN TONS.
ON THESE PLANETS ARE CIVILIZATIONS THAT LIVE AND DIE,
LAUGH AND CRY,
SING THEIR SONGS THAT MEANDER LIKE STREAMS
AND WHEN I REST ON MY SEVENTH DAY
THEIR SOOTHING SONGS ENTER MY DREAMS.
THE GALAXIES THAT RESIDE WITHIN ME
ARE THE SAME GALAXIES THAT ARE IN THE NIGHT SKY.
AND AS THESE GALAXIES ARE FULL OF LIFE
SO ARE MINE
WITH COUNTLESS LIFEFORMS
ON COUNTLESS PLANETS
ORBITING COUNTLESS STARS
WONDERING THE SAME QUESTIONS THAT I DO...
IN MY UNIVERSE.

GEORGE OFORI-ATTA

The Greatest Creation?

In the beginning - silence

-An abyss of ebony

-An eternity of liquid crystal.

He was lonely.

He frowned.

And from His tears a drop of awesome iridescence

fell and brightened

the abyss.

He saw how good it was.

His tears ceased.

The emptiness was overcome
as earth formed - orchids grew.

The emptiness was overcome

as winds blew - eagle soared.

The emptiness was overcome

as liquid crystal flowed as oceans - manta rays streaked.

He saw how good it was.

He was pleased.



The Deity's hand
tugged away the sun,
allowing rainbows of citrus
to drip onto the blanket of the sky.

-Sunset

slowly,

slowly,

gone.

He saw how good this was.

He smiled.

Night

and the watchful lunar eye

and her face of stars

peaked out of the sleeping Virgin forest.

The Deity saw His moon

and observed

that this too was good.

He laughed!



In His Greatest Glory,

He looked into the crystal ocean
and created His tangible reflection.

-Us.

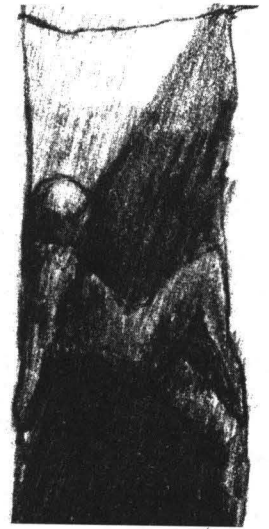
But you, Adam

and I, Eve,

our fingers entwined with the Kiss of our palms,

take it All for granted.

Tiphonie Gundel



The Moon at the Fortified Pass

The infamous nemesis,
the rival of the sun
came to compete tonight.
Jettisoned from its
immediate past
mountain of a companion.
Raised and enveloped
in purple cloud and haze.
Accompanied by harsh
well traveled winds
beating against aged walls.
The blue waters of the bay
stretching endlessly
toward the night horizon,
stretching endlessly
away from the confined
dream filled lodgings.
The blue waters of the bay
stretching endlessly
toward the night horizon
surround the soldiers
looking toward the border
with wistful eyes
and thinking of home.
And some toss and turn
with visions of home
stifling their sleep.
And some know
they are to stay
and they sleep
to the sound of drops.

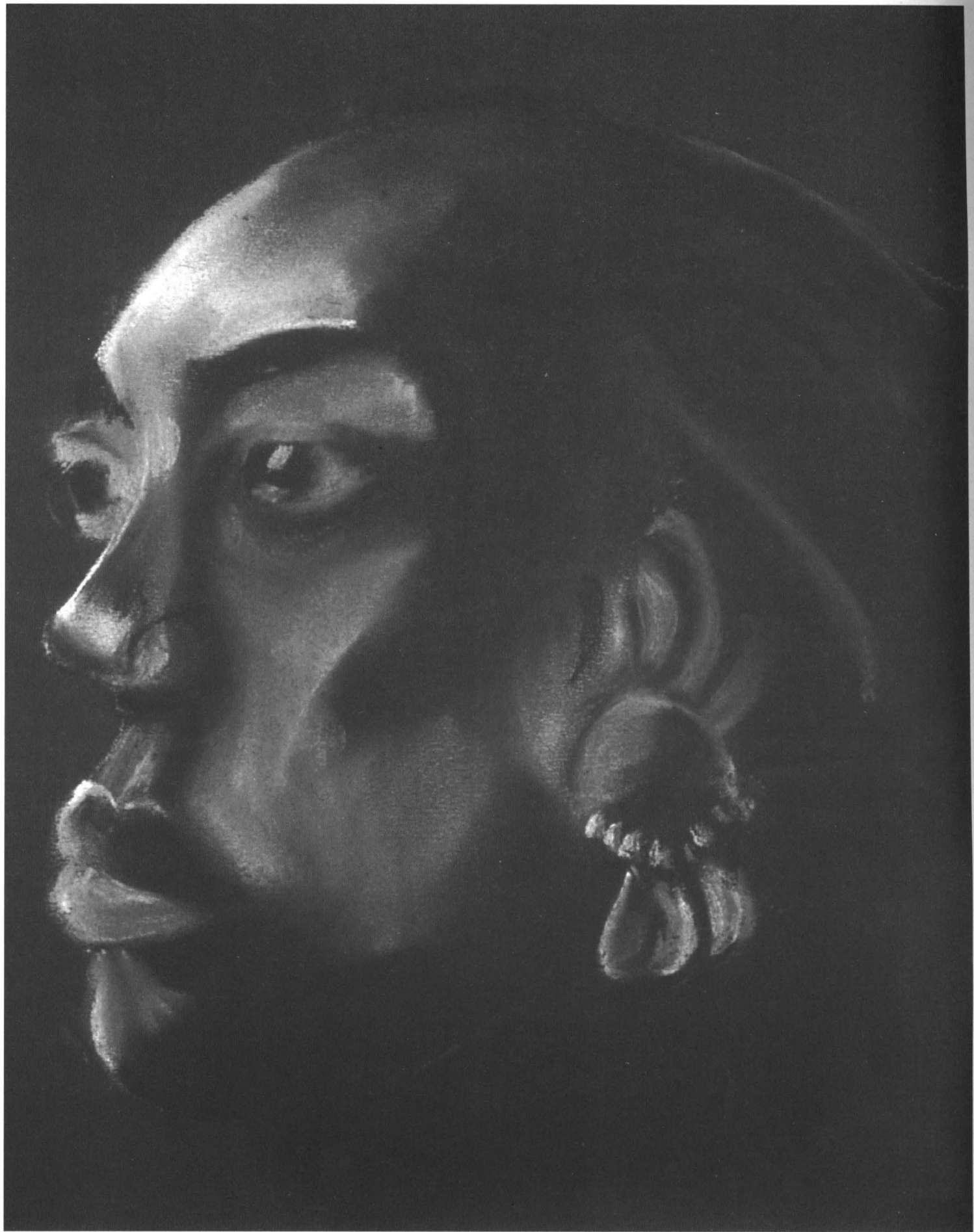
Shamik L. Mitchell

VERSUS THE ELEMENTS

Beneath the selfish shade
Of the suffering tree
She sat
Holding, in brown arms, the beloved skeleton
Which sucked desperately at her withered breast.
As she watched
The cruel sky above,
A fly settled nearby,
Eager to share the nourishment
But in vain for the fountain was dry.
Clouds accumulated above;
Taunting and sneering.
Her pleas went by unnoticed
For to them it was only a game.
Their playmate, wind, joined in too,
Sadistically blowing
Pregnant clouds out of her sight
In a long-lived gale,
A gale which perhaps possessed more life
Than the innocent gamblers below
Who were left holding helplessly
The frayed strings of the grinning puppet.

Natsai Mandisodza





Lost and Found

I was wondering
if you could help me find something.
I'm looking for a woman.
Hold on, let me show you a picture.
She is around five feet and maybe three -
no four - inches tall.
Her smile is wide and her spirit is free.
Have you seen her?
I have been looking for her everywhere but
cannot find a single thread of her existence.
Have you seen her?
Brown eyes with tiny specs of invincibility
that change color under the light.
I'm getting worried.
I haven't heard from her in a while and
she was last seen compromising,
pleasing
pleading
tearing
shouting
calling
confused.
She was last seen giving in and giving up,
sighing
losing
accepting
weak.
And when I heard that I knew that
something was wrong.
So have you seen her?
Take a good look at me.
We kind of look alike,
about the same height and weight.
There's a woman missing-

a strong woman that is not afraid to be alone
to speak her mind
to argue a point until her tongue aches
to give everyone a run for their money.
I am afraid she's in some dark place,
abducted by a gang of insecurities,
bound by bullshit and gagged with silence.
Look for her.
She might be lost somewhere inside,
wandering alone along our brutal boulevards,
preyed on by pimps who want to sell
her self-esteem.
Look for her and if you see her,
if you see anyone like her,
tell her that we'll be waiting for her safe return
in order to be whole again.

Lauren Allen

Soul Trudging

Alone.
In a world that is not mine
Exit signs lead to rotaries
lead to one ways with no U turns
I trudge upon my lonely path
Never looking forward
Never turning back.
Almost afraid to assess my progress
I know where I am going
NOWHERE.

Circles don't have directions or destinations
Just endless amounts of road to be travelled.
Speed Up
Meet your destiny
Face the challenge and conquer
Slow down
Your finite fate has infinite time
Nothing to do
As it awaits you.

No wise ones to preach to me
This passage has no rites
My ancestors lay silent in their ethereal places
Their knowledge has seeped out of my veins
Their words are lost to me.
I am utterly alone
Soul trudging, grooving circles around my heart
Weary footprints, forever preserved
My two feet, constant reminders that I am alone
In this world I stake no claim
I am alone
Feet weary, soul bowed.
I am alone
No rest, my roads too long and I am alone.
The pain dulls
The sorrow recedes
still
I am alone.

Sacha Thompson

Domestic Criticism

I wake up to find the dawning.

It is a new day filled with sunlight and unsaught dreams.

Dream of Being Happy. Dream of Being Free to do what I want to. When I rise, I see the glamour within my reach. An abundance of books to write, pictures to autograph. People will cry as I approach. Long to touch a hair on my head. Faint at the thought of my picture that looks right at them.

I was supposed to be star. Shine with the brightest. Feel the cold clay ooze through the space between my fingers. As I regress to mud pies and oatmeal mountains. Take aim and etch the only word I know better than anyone. What a future I would have. How many more futures would I help to mold and form. To play with the mud pies again.

I take control and my work becomes a masterpiece. It is filled with strength and roars of a lioness stepping up and summoning HER kingdom to her wake. Dismissal of the lion so brisk and unsuspecting. He is without strength and crawls away with his tail dragging as to suggest that he will use his trail to find a path to normality again. Dream of Power. Dream of Ha Ha. Dreams of Look at what she's done now!

I go on trampling as though through the jungle. Stomping on Fruits that stifle sounds coming from a cave deep within me. Plants that relieve my aches and wounds. Those to adore and respect my venture as a creature of the world. Stars that would shine far beyond the galaxy that I could reach. My mouth becomes larger. I take a bite of a tremendous sandwich. Larger than one I need to feed me. Dream of Greed. Dream of More and More. Dream of Disgust.

When I realize the extent of it all, the clay has dried. My hands are still in the vat of dirt. It pains me to realize this and I don't believe it. I pull hard wishing to disconnect myself from my fingers that have now begun to bleed. The blood running rampid into the clay and hopefully loosening its grasp of me. The pain does not surpass the longing I have to free myself of the 100 pound burden. Etched in stone.

Suddenly I am alone. Those who wished for me to be close to them are no more. My hairs are not as fresh smelling. My pictures not as desirable. My masterpiece has now mastered me. I release the steering wheel hoping that the car can not go without my eyes to direct. And yet the car still travels.

I scream as loud as I can. Dream of Being Happy. Dream of Being Free to do what I want to. Dream of Being Me.

I wake up to find the dawning.

It is a new day filled with sunlight and unsaught dreams.

Wendy Abraham

I am not afraid

I am not afraid
of the prickly
of brown colors crushed
and soft,
or the silent bitter leaf
the shock
doesn't really cling to me anymore.

I don't care
if there aren't flowers
laughing with me like a greeting card
at each step
and turn of my path,
cause I don't want it that way
convincing
does not always help.

I am not afraid
like I've been sometimes
that the only thing
good is
precious and vulnerable.
stories that
are heavy with weeds and
slow with age
soothe the child's
bleeding tongue
like a chewing stick.

I wonder when I look at the tree
in the back yard
still and patient against the wind, what
it was before.
a woman rooted in time
frozen in one spot forever?
or a fallen star trying
to make it's way back
to its collection of bright lovers
once more?

maybe it is in me and
my consent
to live,
that stands willing where I am
within the unknown
irregardless of the weather
and
I am not afraid,
even if
I die?

By Ekene Nwokoye



"WHO I AM (POEM FOR MOMMY)"

for years
i was proud
of being
true
ghanaian
surrounded by
purple
flying
free
from slavery
colonialism
proud
that I knew
my roots and
not lost
like the millions
infinite
african-americans
whose family
origins
umbilical cords
slowly unraveled
untied and cut
from their mother
land
used for
lynchings in
AMERIKKKA.

in my soul,
i reigned
like my mother
queen
nefertiti
queen mother
nana
floating
freedom
from the
systematic rapes
of black women
by white slave owners
and black men alike
my family
was not
enslaved
so I thought

my mother's skin
sweet caramel
is celebrated
in ghana
a preferred color
mommy
you are a stranger
immersed in the tide
of ebony
dark cocoa beans

mother
you were proud
to possess
a whiter complexion
proud
while others
sit in the dark
unable to fly
unilluminated
eaten away
by self-contempt
feelings of
incertitude
because their hair
like wool
is not
straight enough
because their noses
are flat stubs

i thought i could
fly
it is only in
AMERIKKKA
that my brothers
and sisters
defeat me
with colorism
in AFRICA
I assumed
sovereignty
was not based on
shades of skin
maybe not.

mommy
when i
when ghana
looks at you
you are forever
an embodiment
of a consciousness
that whiter
is better
that midnight
tar skin
is shame.
a symbol of
truth
that a white man
during africa's colonization
raped
a black woman

he was my great-grandfather
maybe I didn't fly.

by Nana Osafo



Target Practice

Words shot with a fury often miss their target.
This gun of mine, so deceptively petite,
Packs a punch that I cannot handle.
Bullets of blame fly without direction,
Ricocheting off the eardrum to shatter the heart.
That was not what I intended.
His heart got hit with a stray. It shouldn't have been there anyway.
It had no place wandering innocently through a neighborhood of complaints.

Words shot with a fury often miss their target,
And the shooters are left standing in pools of their own doing,
Cradling the spirits they've destroyed,
Riddled with guilt at the hands of their own bad aim.
My trigger finger shakes when it sees opportunity
And like the predator that has spotted an easy target,
Curls back before my victim sees it coming,
And leaves nothing behind but a degraded, conquered heart.

Words shot with a fury often miss their target,
And I hurt the ones I love with a dangerous tongue.
I never have the chance to tell them thank you.
I never have the chance to tell them I appreciate them.
And what's the use in apologizing?
No words can wash away the stain on my hands,
Erase the prints on the gun,
Or remove such a scar.

Lauren Allen

A Gift

Friendship is easy when you're young
You play, you jump, you skip, you run
But everything's complicated as the years go on
A whole new age begins to dawn
Your feelings go up, your feelings go down
Your entire life is spinning around

People talk, rumors spread
You need to grow close but drift apart instead
You need to work if you want to hold on
But it's hard not to give up and your friendship is pawned
All for a laugh that wouldn't last
That turns into tears, dark shadows are cast

You're pulled from the left,
You're pulled from the right
You really have to hang on tight
So hold my heart and hold my arm
Together we can resist all harm
Stick together through thick and thin
And through the fog our friendship wins.

-Zandra Buckley '00



photo by
Amit Desai

Lauren Allen

Daily Grind

I am aching to let this out.
Have to release my distress.
Have to weed through hip high anger
and pray my soul can heal the rest.

You see, my mind's been spinning,
turning me sideways, heart upside down,
fueling tears that keep on coming -
that heavy aching on my crown.

I am a victim of attitude.
Frustrated by a state of affairs.
Wrapped tight in a cycle of pettiness.
Convicted guilty of putting on airs.

See I was easing down the street
just as carefree as I could be.
Spotted my acquaintance up the block
who was not speaking to me.
And do you know what I did
as my anger was steadily rising?
I hit back twice as deadly -
turned my head and cut my eyes and
we kept on walking.
I was wrong.

Sisters standing tall with heads held high
and noses in the air -
shock me with snippity sighs
and the cutting stares of those deep onyx eyes.

Men and women with all their hesaidshesaid
rumors and revenge,
grin while planning the tactics
for humiliating ex-best friends.
She flirted with him with the bounce of her hip
and he played her out with his sarcastic lip.
So full of
distress, distrust, dissapointment and doubt,
after while no one knows what they're fighting
about.

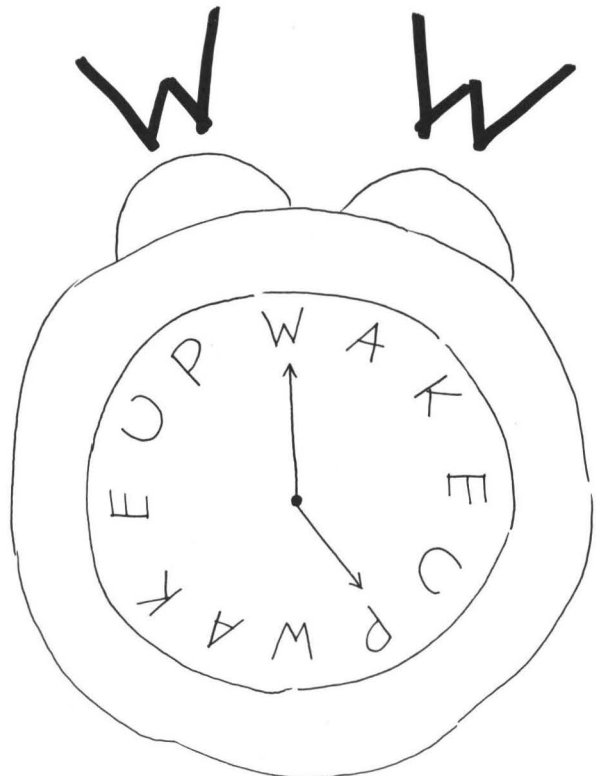
She takes things the wrong way,
he forgot to say "hi,"
she's in a bad mood
and his words made me cry.
My heart's on my sleeve,
I'm aching inside
and I silently grieve
for all my wounded pride.

Who's calling whom out
at tonight's dinner table?
With lives this dramatic,
there's no need for cable.
There are rumors on the wind
and secrets lurking behind our ears.
Such cynical behavior's made us
wise beyond our years.
Or are we immature ?

Whether I remain silent
or voice all my gripes
my life will be tainted
with some form of trife
lest I decide to stop it -
lest I decide to drop it-
and make myself free.

I am a victim of attitude.
Frustrated by a state of affairs.
Wrapped tight in a cycle of pettiness.
Convicted guilty of putting on airs.

But I am changing rearranging scolding molding myself
into someone else who refuses to entertain such drama.
I'm a new woman.
New soul, new view
and I advise you to do the same.
Get out of this game.
Life is hard enough without all these trifles...



12B HARMONY LANE

"I do not understand.
Please, tell me you too are in darkness."
She pauses to enjoy
Her lover's fingers melting in the
Warm, deep chocolate of her bare shoulders.
"Will you ever answer me?"

How the frustration and anger stain her cheeks!
She wants to run through the front door,
Out onto the sidewalk,
Out into the street,
Vomiting her grievances
In gushes of agony
But she won't for she can not -
And to think that not long ago,
She had cried incessantly
When Mother forbade her to ride
The toy car indoors.

"Can I ride in your car, Miss?"
Reality rudely interrupts.
She replies with a thoughtless swap
Of the left hand
But Junior ducks,
Allowing residual frustration
To lose itself in the nothingness.

Now, where was she?
Ah, yes...
"God damn it! Why won't you answer me?
You're enveloped in this darkness too,
Aren't you Helen?"

Natsai Mandisodza

Shamik L. Mitchell

Our Cause

Impetuous sleepwalkers
colored by childish regret
colored by fear of reproof
woefully mope towards awaiting hands of reprimand.
These colors,
colors of defeat,
stare into undeviating,
vacant eyes reflecting
luminous ambiguous histories subjugated by the truth.
By the true Blue awakening.
Blue, the color of recognition.
all else
the colors of defeat
amassing emotional distress
amassing false hope.

Adorned in self-defeat
they hold firmly
to the addiction
drinking from the bitter cup
and its choking oil,
not heeding confessions of future victories,
at celebrated costs.
Certain redemption awaiting...

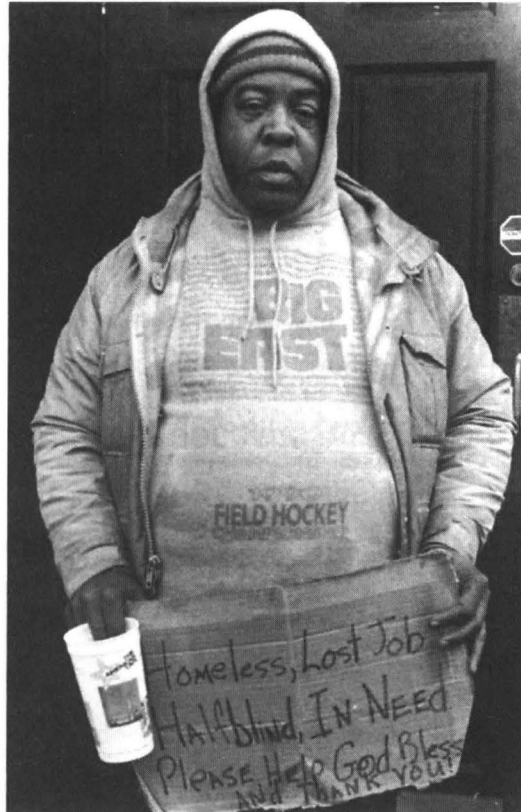
Blue,
Peerless,
retains authority
standing securely in a job well begun
but not finished.
The conquered must learn...
What profit is it to gain the world and lose your soul?
They must learn
it is better to die of thirst
than to drink from the bitter cup.



IT'S ANOTHER DAY

YOU CALL THEM HOMELESS
LETS CALL THEM JOBLESS...
NOW WE GOT A PROBLEM
SOCIAL PUZZLE PIECES
AND NO ONE WILL SOLVE THEM
THERE'S MONEY FOR WAR
MONEY FOR MORE
MORE MONEY IS PRINTED EVERYDAY
THAN WE REALLY NEED
BUT WE SEE
HANDS AND A CUP BEGGIN FOR GREEN PAPER
HANDS AND A CUP THEN NEWSPAPER
BLANKETS MUCH LATER
IN THE NIGHT
COLD AND FREEZE
IN THE NIGHT
THE CHILLY NEXT THE WARM BREEZE
IN THE NIGHT
OR ANY NIGHT TIME SEASON
IF YOU LOOK CLOSELY YOU WILL BE SEEIN'
BON FIRES IN CANS
LOOK AT THE EMBERS
AND REMEMBER
WHAT!?!
WHEN AND HOW
THEY LOST IT ALL
HOW CAN YOU RELATE WHEN THERE'S NO FAMILY TO CALL
NOT EVEN A PENNY—NO JOB
NOW LET ME—HOLLER FOR A DOLLAR?
GREEN PAPER WITH A FACE?
ARE YOU ROCKIN' OLD SHOES WITH NO SHOE LACE
A SOCIAL DISGRACE
THE SOCIAL DISGRACE IS SWEEPIN ASIDE
THE FACT THAT THERE ARE NO JOBS TO FIND.

YOU CALL THEM HOMELESS
LETS CALL THEM JOBLESS
I'M SICK OF THE PUBLIC BEING ILLITERATE
LOOSE CHANGE CAN'T CHANGE SHIT
LOOSE CHANGE AND PAPER WON'T MAKE A DIFFERENCE
WHEN YA LIVIN' HAND TA MOUTH
GOOD RIDDENCE
IS THE LIFE ON THE STREET WORTH IT
WHEN NO ONE REALLY CARES
WHEN EVERYONE STARES
SOMETIMES I'M TIRED
OF SAYIN' WHAT I SAY
DOES ANYONE HEAR ME
DON'T SAY THAT THIS IS A GOOD POEM OR LYRIC
IF YOU DON'T REALLY HEAR IT.
DON'T SAY "HEY, YOU CAN REALLY RHYME"
AND DON'T GIVE THE JOBLESS ONE SINGLE DIME.
CHANGE THEIR LIFE BY FINDING THEM A JOB
CUZ ONE APPLICATION IS THE ONLY THING MAKIN'
YOUR HOME SWEET HOME AND YOUR PICKET FENCE
SO LETS MAKE SOME REAL CHANGE
AND NOT A FEW DOLLARS AND CENTS.



Stefan McLetchie

Reality?

Black duderags, pink curlers, outside house shoes, worn out robes
Cussing, Hoeing
No pride, No self esteem
Bitches with Attitude
Babies having babies
Cops and robbers - everyone wants to be the robber
Shots and screams violent dreams.
Boys will be Boyz...

In Da Hood,
success is unknown
fear is power
There are no hopes, just Hoop Dreams
No strivers for success - They're just striving to survive
Menaces to a society that does not want or care for them
Where are the idols?
Who are the Joe Clarks?

They say that there are many roads to choose from...
Only one is accessible to those Strapped and trapped.
Or so it seems.
If the other road exists, how come we can't see the light?

Kahlillah Dotson

Mamma's Song

Our grandmothers songs make the past
"Comrade, my fist is high"
I am tired

I've seen blood drip thickly down our faces
"Fight for everything that we own"
Fight for things unreceived
But never fall

"March on your weary feet"
Hearts being uplifted with thoughts of freedom
Cry for all our children dead
BOMBED, KILLED, PUMPED WITH LEAD

"Weep for your name that is unknown"
Bred and killed on evil soil
The rose drinks our blood

We live beneath the deep waters
GUNEA, GUNEA calls to me
Claim your thunder and defeat



Hope

What is left when hope is gone,
but the silent still of winter storms,
and empty noise all around
Extremely loud, but not making a sound.

I asked, what is left when hope is gone,
but dry tears and timeless song,
that plays to every hollow ear
for the lonely conscience to grab and hear.

Tell me, what is left when hope is gone,
just invisible words, all day long
to blind eyes that will never see
the life and the story of nature's tree.

What is left when hope is gone, y'all?
My guess, nothing at all.

Cory J. Person



I, Human

I, Human, step out of the blinding night
of whiteness
into the conflicting colors of a
remembered day.

I see the forgotten innocence,
(the so needed innocence)
of the child who shall lead us.

- We forget to know
that hate is learned.

I watch you, your eyes so telling.
You watch me, my stride so newly proud.
You mistake my welcoming smile
for Black Pomposity.

I mistake your out-stretched hand
for the falseness of White Superiority.

- We forget to know
that mistakes are human.

I lie, a heap of ashes
in an urn
a heap of bones
six feet down.

Blow!

The ashes are scattered, together,
out of life.

brown, black, yellow, red, white...
a rainbow whole and complete
only when it is too late

We forgot to know
that love is innate.

Tiphonie Gundel

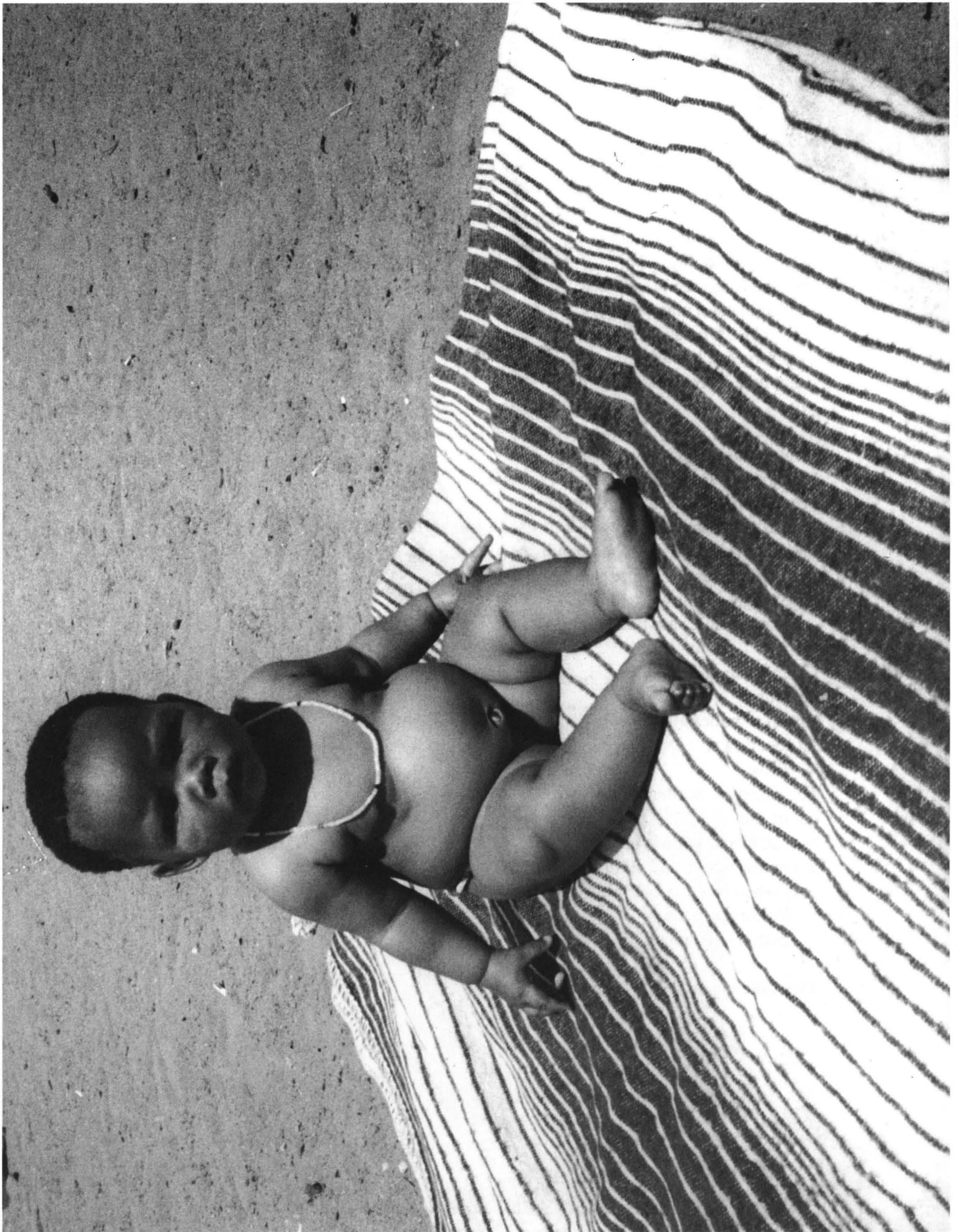


photo by Amit Desai

Untitled

I will not kneel down and surrender my crown.

With the permission of the lord
I began my journey through time.
My family erected
pyramids of stone, caves of gold
and life seemed sublime.

I will not kneel down and surrender my crown.

I filled the earth with nurturing goods.
The milk of my breast, the land of natural foods.

I will not kneel down and surrender my crown.

I carried my children through 400 years of slavery.
I kissed their wounds and
reinforced them with bravery.
The cruelty unbearable,
the lessons learned immeasurable.

I will not kneel down and surrender my crown.

I told Martin what to say and gave Malcolm his thoughts.
I gave my children strength, solidarity and they fought.
I asked them to hold on
and I would save them a place.
The freedom, the happiness, the smiles on a child's face
See where I was is where they longed to be and
the strength and courage I have is what made me free.
Their hardship and pain I yearn to soothe.
But what I had to learn took time and had to be approved.
And now in approval, I long to share.
The words that ultimately got me there.
Aside from signs through people and thoughts.
My children persistently fester and rot.
I pray that they hear before they lose faith and
in abomination they drown:

I will not kneel down and surrender my crown.

Wendy Abraham

"Lady"
For Billie Holiday

Midnight suns, noontday tears
I close my eyes, I drink my fears

History is not all past
Roots remain a silent ghost

Dreams are but a mystery
Nightmares, a twisted story

Life creates an inner glory
With silver crowns and golden hearts

I haven't a past, nor a start

Strings are taped at rigid ends
They fall apart in a circular motion

I breath a death filled untold notion
For all things here, all things gone

I embrace my mouth and sing my song

BACKLIN

Harlem

In the early 1920's I sat out on my stoop
to watch over the children I had made,
and inhaled with pride at the scent of pomade and talent.

They were rich in all their ebony and honey colored skin tones.
They glided down gilded streets,
the pavement pulsing and bulging with blackness
underneath their feet.

At that time it seemed as though anything was possible.
Hundreds would flock to this spot for a glimpse of the outside,
their mouths gaping wide at the beauty of it all.
Azure mist would crawl across the sky
and leave behind a shadowy curtain over the city.
Pretty the way lamplights became spotlights on Lenox Avenue.

This was a place where realities
were molded from dusty Southern dreams.
Where the city was about to rip at the seams
'cause it could no longer contain all the people that came.

This was the capital of Black America
and the place that I called home.
The place where jazz beats melted into heartbeats
and talent was as monumental as stone.

Where I raised Duke Ellington on Arabesque Cookies
And made W.E.B. DuBois plump with pride.
Where I spoon fed Ella Fitzgerald her voice,
And gave Marcus Garvey the strength to survive.

This was my home.
This was Harlem - for a time - in the dawn of the day.
Until jazz left my nest and emigrated to Broadway.

And slowly all my children left this place and
found acceptance in other lands.
But they can never forget the hands that fed them
or the place that bred them.
This our home.
This is Harlem.

Lauren Allen



I SET THE EARTH GODDESS FREE

SEXY IS A WORD I DON'T USE OFTEN,
BUT THIS EARTH COLORED GODDESS
WAS THE WORD.
HER EYES WERE LIKE GEMS,
SHE WAS AS RARE AS BLUE DIAMONDS,
SO HER PRESENCE IN MY WORLD WAS PRICELESS.

WHEN I CLOSE MY EYES AND WRITE THIS,
I SEE HER FORM
SWEEP AND SWAY
LIKE PALM TREE BRANCHES ON A WINDY DAY.
WHenever I SEE THE EARTH GODDESS
I DON'T EVEN BLINK,
I WON'T EVEN BLINK,
I WILL NOT MISS ONE SECOND
ONE MOMENT, ONE INSTANCE
OF HER POWERFUL AURA.

SO SILENTLY SHE MOVES
FROM NIGHT TO DAY,
DAY TO NIGHT,
AS THE EARTH
SPINS
ROUND, ROUND, ROUND
AS THE SUN SETS
DOWN, DOWN, DOWN.
SHE WEARS THE GOWN INSTEAD OF THE DRESS
THAT HAS ALL THE STARS AND ALL THE PLANETS
YOU COULD EVER HOPE TO SEE
LACED IN THE FINEST EMBROIDERY.
ON THIS NIGHT HER SOUL WAS SET FREE
BY MY SALTWATER TEARS FROM THE SEA.
AND LATER THAT NIGHT I LOOKED UP TO SEE
THE EARTH GODDESS LOOKING DOWN TO ME.

GEORGE OFORI-ATTA

Well, does she fit the description?

Full, alluring lips
Telling the explicit exploits of
Sexy, smooth Hershey skin
Banging body
Properly pronouncing every curve and muscle.
Chiseled to most men's satisfaction.

She must run track with those legs?

Store bought eyes
shielding her soul but fondling my imagination.

What's behind that stained glass?

What does she want to hide?

Nothing her tightly woven hair doesn't suggest.
Nothing her proportions don't already tell.

Black Woman.

Undeniably, and unmistakably *fine*

Seductive wittiness

Machismo taming,

ATTITUDE.

Making my mission to please you
tease me with your sensuality and sensitivity.

Self-reliant, arrogant

Loving, and compassionate

Certainly not flawless, but perfect.

You've got my attention.

And you can have my affection...if you want it?

Shamik L. Mitchell



To You

Damn, how you made my jones come down,
all that sweet lovin'-but I knew
From that first sight you were to be with me.
Your fine features, lips, eyes, those Nubian
cheekbones, giving you all the sexuality
and power of the queen you are.
So delicate, like that soft breeze streaming
through hazy days, or perhaps a rain drops'
gentle caress to an arid plain. You know I
dig you in the worst way. So beautiful is
my love, so dear like the angel, who comes
down every Tuesday night, Thursday afternoon,
and Sunday morning, and seems to bless
the Siamese lovin' that we exchange.
Yeah, that's right, you caught my eye.
That walk; oooh, girl, don't hurt nobody.
How can I not love you, sweet sunshine
of my every morning. Sweet whisper
is the thought of you, which allows me rest each night.
Caught in your rapture, is that what Anita
Was blowing out those speakers?
Thinking of you is my hobby, my everlasting
desire quenched by the pleasant sip that I partake
of your love. Ain't nobody around, when we makin'
our sound, can't nobody hear our true intimacies, dig.
That's what its about, my mental, emotional, and
Definitely my physical are all yours.
Baby, you sure you ain't St. Nick,
'cause every day is Christmas,
when I receive your gifts of love,
compassion, and T.L.C..
Beautiful black woman, hold me in your arms,
and if I am to pass away, let it be then,
within the warmth of your deep bosom, the place
where my dreams become reality. Because
even in my gentle sleep, my thoughts will be of you,
and me, us, together. Damn, girl, I love you.
To you I raise this diction, to you I give my love,
to you, my heart, to you, my soul, to you, all that
makes me a black man, you know what I mean.
To you, to you

By Cory J. Person

Lust in Baggy Jeans

By Lauren Allen

For a long time we were The Real World's Tom and Jerry.
Neither of us admitting to being the cat,
Always assuming the innocence of the mouse,
Chasing each other through the mazes of a glass house,
But let's face it - I know it was you with your eye on *my* tail.

We spied each other through veils of denial.
You eyed me as if I was on trial and
You were digging into me for the truth.
But could we handle the truth?

We spoke in words with double meanings by the load,
Complicated riddles that no one else could decode.
And endless round of "Mother May I",
Always taking one step forward and three steps back,
Playing so many games we could hardly keep track.

I don't know if it was my infatuation
Or all that built up anticipation,
But when I finally did kiss your lips,
It was the most amazing thing I'd ever felt,
Gentle enough to send me swooning, hot enough to make me melt.

On the other side of the door, the world did not exist
The way I'd known it before.
We were not two of anything anymore, only two.
And you seemed so perfect- Could this really be a mortal's kiss?
Only dreams should taste like this.

I was rejuvenated and elated by the weight of it,
Not to be measured in pounds or karats,
A brand new kind of heavy.

Lust in baggy jeans and packaged in smooth dark skin.
You have to be the sweetest sin.
How could I have been expected to resist you?
Your skill is to tempt - the way you implement words into my ear
And unclothe my fears, leaving me raw and unveiled to you.
Now this is something I swore I'd never do.

Such a blessing, I felt like confessing
Everything I'd ever done to you in hopes you'd take me anyway.
You made my day, my year, in only those few minutes.

In it to win it, swimming in the aura you radiate.
Hoping to be your mate.
You are the Alexander The Great of love and romance.
Just give me one chance to love you.
I'll just die if I don't try.

Lust in baggy jeans and packaged in smooth dark skin.
You have to be the sweetest sin.
How could I have been expected to resist you?
Your skill is to tempt the way you implement words into my ear
And unclothe my fears leaving me raw and unveiled to you.
Now this is something I swore I'd never do.

Beautiful Lady

Sitting next to him
angled,
so that I can see him
fully,
drink him in
soak him, into my being

He speaks
and I listen
more comforted
by his presence beside me
than the words spoken to me

I stare at his eyes
his hands
the steel of his jaw line
the slope of his shoulder
the place where my head rests

He looks elsewhere
engrossed,
in the telling of his tale
Periodically, he checks to see that I
follow the meandering fable

Inwardly, I wonder
Can he sense my thoughts
How can he be my world at times
And at times, my vexation
The cause of my worry
And the easing of my burden
A yin to a yang
My black and my white
My dark and my light
A wonderful blessing
Cleverly disguised

He has stopped speaking
For several moments now
He waits in silence
I look up,
Smiling shyly
Once again I've been caught
Inattentive,
Captive of my thoughts

He sighs,
deeply
The warm breath
clouding upon release
Does he know how much he means to
me?
Looking into my eyes
I feel as if he pierces my soul
Why must he push me so far
and yet come so close?

Shaking his head
slightly,
He pulls me close
His lips
finding my forehead
Plant a kiss
Rich in sentiment

Taking my hand,
He rises
Lifting me with him
Drawing me to him
He speaks
"Beautiful Lady,
May I walk you home?"

His eyes mirror mine
I feel as if he has always been there
always
the integral part of my soul,
of my being,
of me,

The question hangs
in the air between us
And I sigh contentedly
Knowing that I need
not consent.

Sacha Thompson

Lora-Lynn Byfield

Blue Black Nights

the kind so dark
it seems you've stepped into eternity
and grabbed a corner of the universe.

Nights with stars that twinkle
like raindrops against rosepetals.

Those nights, we chewed wintergreen Certs
with our mouths open, just wide enough,
to see the fireworks they produced.

Then,
our teeth looked liked ivory tusks laid on black velvet
-smooth and just as elegant.

The trash cans,
that just this morning squealed
protesting their relocation,
stand poised
amidst a sea of black
that washes away the sins and sorrows of the city.

And even the beady eyed bus driver
looked good
leaning against the darkness.

The flicker of Bic lighters-
the only illumination required-
on Blue Black Nights



photo by Trevor Brown

I presume

First time I saw you
I catalogued your features.
I made an imprint of the shape of your face...,
I wrapped it in pink tissue.
And saved it in a cigar box.
I put your precious face next to my boutonniere from the prom.
Next to my parents wedding picture
And a few Happy Meal Toys.
Who knew that keepsakes could come to life.

Last night I took it out that box,
When you weren't looking.
I took out that precious porcelain mask and...,
It fit you perfectly.
The lifeless spaces where
Your eyes should have been
Where all at once filled with
Your chestnut glaze.

Forgive me if I stare,
But I thought I'd grown too old to believe
In the Brother's Grimm.
But as you stand here, perhaps I'll take to
Restless December 24th's once again,
Straining to hear the pitter pat of cloven hoofs on my roof.

I dare not sleep.
For if I do,
I know you will disappear
And I'll be left standing here
In footed PJ's
holding onto a pottery mask.

Eric Walker

But One

His mouth curves forming
each of the three
syllables in my name.

Warm feelings flushes my body,
speeds, zigzags and crashes
bumper cars.

The glorious red, vibrant pink, and sweet yellow
of the bumper cars

blur

creating sentences

my mind reels

replays

fast forwards,

rewinds.

His moving lips catch me.

Moving curving, burgundy

splotched lips

utter words, sentences conversations

my mind has forgotten

but those

burgundy lips remain

floating

in my head.

It took but one.

by Natalie Smith

“Untitled”

Woman, with your kinky hair
You have a certain beauty flare

Your nose is wide and very thick
Your chocolate skin is deep and rich

Flowers sprout among your breast
You are a queen, you carry wealth

Your hips are wide, your face is round
Your feet are made to romo the ground

Your eyes are big, and very brown
Your ears can hear most any sound

Your back is arched in perfectness
Your bottom is the loveliest

You have all power to please
Ease, Tease and Appease

You bear the kings of Pyramids
Africa is where you live

BACKLIN

Untitled

Chocolate
Listen,
I can't stop thinking about you
yes! you
sensual-sexual
deep-dark chocolate...
Everything feels so right
because everything is so right
when I am with you.
What i miss the most
is ribbon created
by your arms
as you hold me.
i miss the arms that
keep away the loneliness.
i never want to let go.
But time always goes fast
when i am with you...

i miss your kisses
with your tongue waving back and forth
into my mouth.
i also miss your fingers
as they rub the arch of my back.
you relax me—
your smile how can i forget it
your smile
makes me smile.
Temperature rises
when i am with you.

Sensual-sexual
deep-dark chocolate
love that's what we have for each other
i know
because our eyes water when we say bye
so sensual-sexual
deep dark
chocolate
this love poem is for you.

Scheherazade Tillet

There

There
at the source
where your heart beat is strongest
There is where my head rests.
Where the pounding of your heart
fills my brain.
Evicting the worries and the burdens.
I am filled
with the essence of you.

There
where loving arms tenderly surround me
there is where my soul rests.
Your gentle caresses ease the day
from between my shoulder blades.
My world shrinks
becoming a table for two.

There
in your hands
there is where my heart rests
a quivering bird
seeking shelter from a storm.
Your love surrounds me
chasing the chills from my spine

Here
beside me
here is where you belong
In my world
My constant reminder
of the beautiful things in life.

Sacha Thompson

Turnstiles

I've got a turnstile in my bedroom.
"Single file..., One at a time please!"
Say my blue clad workers.

I've got a turnstile in my bedroom.
Because of all the traffic and volume.
It is protection against the darkness and the gloom.
In case a false love attempts to bloom.
Or a warm touch makes me swoon.
My conductor will croon,
"Move along..., Keep moving please."

I've got a turnstile in my bedroom.
Run your card.
Or drop a token.
Barely a word need be spoken.
The ticket taker makes small talk while jokin'
But he's here to insure my heart don't get broken.

I've got a turnstile in my bedroom.
You could be a home wrecker.
That's why I've got a metal detector.
My blue clad minions will act as protectors.

Eric Walker

From Morning To Eternity

When the moonlight creeps through the window,
I want you to be my dawn,
Alerting me to the sun's yawning.
Dependable as dew and equally as bright as
A thousand water jewels on emerald leaves.
I would sell my soul just to have you in my universe,
Your smile putting the North Star to shame,
Causing clouds to cover the moon
As they fight for a glimpse of you.
More rare than comets,
Comes this once in a lifetime meeting -
Sending my heart plummeting into the pit of my stomach,
Charging my veins with the electricity in your kiss.
Every part of you fits my soul like a jigsaw puzzle.
Your swerving, ridged and unpredictable edges
Become smooth when placed next to mine.
Synchronized heartbeats that follow the rhythms of Congo drums
That only we can hear.
How dear you are to me.
How beautiful you've become to me.
And as every moon looms,
You continue to be my dawn,
Each day shining brighter still
And filling my earth with rainbow hues -
Always changing, always beautiful.

Lauren Allen

Shhh. Listen and I'll tell you what I see
Inside the Temple of My Familiar.
It will leave you Waiting, not to Exhale,
But to experience joy and pain and
Ecstasy! When you're through with me you'll know
Exactly How Stella Got Her Groove Back.
Oh yes, you'll laugh, cry too - probably sing
The blues. But know, that Your Blues Ain't Like Mine.
Sometimes my blues ain't even blue, they are
The Color Purple. Beautiful ain't it.

-Lora-Lynn Byfield

Words like

snow flitting out the sides of a snowblower.

The spicy brown liquid,

apple cider,

crashing against the sides of

the gently rounded

curved

berry green bowl

clenched in the

wide palm

and piano players fingers

tapping

a concerto on the

shimmering

green berry surface.

By Natalie Smith

Words

Frozen in time
My words trap images like fireflies in a mustard jar.
Brash.
Long strokes!
Then short.
Landscapes turn a blank 8x11 page into a priceless canvas.
Passionate!
Irreverent!
Painting and covered in color I admire my work.
Sweeping swirling landscapes...
They develop from the white void.
Like a Polaroid the purples and greens form first.
Faint..., so faint at first.
Then slowly the almost unrecognizable thing
Is finally revealed.
Like the secret of life.

Eric Walker



How I Wrote This Poem

It's 4:47 am. It's too late to go back to sleep and too early to get up and get dressed. I am in a room and I am insanely bored. I pull a chair up to the desk in the middle of the room. The room is empty except for me, the desk, a chair, a few shelves with books on it, and two doors on opposite sides of the room.

An idea is injected into my head. I get up and go hunt for my poetic weapons. I get my box of No.2's. They have letters on them. I select the ones with creativity, imagination and coherence written on them. Oh, no! My creativity is dull, dull as a room full of paralyzed mimes. I sharpen it with my creativity enhancer and blow off the excess shavings, to reassure myself that none can blow into my eyes, blinding me, which often causes tangents that often deal with feelings and emotions that have nothing to do with the poem at all.

I then pick a few pieces of perforated paper, the kind with the lines that get me thinking in a parallel motion.

I stop.

I need a good title: SOMETHING

~~to~~ *CATCH THE READERS eye*

Messages travel to my brain to look for a good title. AH HA!

Here come a few words:

I jot them down quickly so I won't forget;
i'm not an elephant; i can forget.

I think about what I want to avoid in my poetry.
I know not to exaggerate
because that would make my poem
a hundred times worse.
In this day and age
it's not wise to use clichés or trite expressions
because they wear their welcome thin.
What a close shave!
I just avoided a colloquialism.

Words start trickling down to my hand from my brain
like a river trickling down through the valleys of a mountain
in the springtime.
The wheels start turning and the gears start clicking.
The pencil runs all over the paper
making L e t t e r s
and words. I add a period.
Sentences start forming at
the speed of light
which is approximately
300 million meters per second.

I once went to the redundant poetry
school of poetical redundancy. They told
me to avoid being redundant. I
have not yet been redundant. By the time I'm over with this poem I
will have not been redundant. But i must stay focused in
order to avoid being redundant.

sometimes when i'm Writing
i get Bored and start Daydreaming
i Dream about my favorite places
i'm Thinking now about a trip to
poetryland u s a
in october suddenly
i Hear: "Stop! Pull Over!"
i Look into my rear view mirror and

see the poetry police.

"Put your pencils down and your hands in the air!"

"What seems to be the problem, mr officer" I say

"I'm with the Department of English,

I noticed that you weren't using

proper capitalization and punctuation."

I show him my newly renewed poetic license

and keep on writing.

Ooops. I mispeled a few wurds.

I get Mr Eraser.

He's the sheriff in Poetryland.

He runs all over the mistakes

until they are gone and out of sight.

They won't be interrupting us anymore.

I blow off the excess debris, to reassure myself

that none can blow into my eyes,

blinding me, which often causes tangents

that often deal with feelings and

emotions that have nothing to do

with the poem at all.

I rewrite those words that I misspelled and

continue writing the poem. I can't write

anything else but I'm not done. I'm stuck.

I suddenly feel something in my pocket.

It's a cube that says 'PROPERTY OF WRITER'

This must be what they call writer's block.

I throw the writer's block in the trash.

Then I do what i always do

when i've been sidetracked

and take a shower. I use my motivation soap

and my perseverance shampoo. They get rinsed off by

the flowing water

which helps my thoughts flow properly.

As always, I use my inspiration towel to dry off.

I'm now ready to continue writing.

I brush my hair with my memory brush

to help me remember until

i get back and continue writing.

i'm not an elephant; i can forget.

Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, something dashes, from one door to another, which makes two books fall. I block out the distraction and finish the poem.

I first show the poem to the experts in Poetryland.

Metonymy says:

"You write a good verse."

The hyperbole ask:

"Can you mention us in your poem?"

"Sure! ", I say, "I don't see why not."

The hyperbole reply:

"Thanks a million!"

The Litotes declare:

"You're not a bad writer"

I reread my first draft.

I see now that there are parts which

I like less than others.

I fix some of them, not knowing how or not wanting to fix the others

I show it to a friend of mine.

He says it's "good".

He says my name should be between
Tennyson and Thomas.

I say no it doesn't it belongs between
Tennyson and Whitman.

He says it's good but he wouldn't go that far.

Satisfied with the final product,

I just sign my name

william ronald tutt jr

ONYX STAFF

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Collection of quotes - excerpts from *My Soul Looks Back 'Less I Forget*

Ed. By Dorothy Winbush-Riley, NY, NY, Harper Collins c. 1993

This is an excellent book that everyone should read.

The Onyx would like to thank everyone for their contributions, their assistance and most especially, their understanding.

ONYX REFLECTIONS SNOITCELFER XYNO

