

BLACK ARTS QUARTERLY

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“Once Upon a Spider”: Reflection, Re-Invention and Resistance in Ananse Storytelling

by: David Afriyie Donkor

Laughing his lispig laugh and unwinding. Waving his spindly limbs and reeling. Tossing about the silken mass like a malevolent cat. I... wonder aloud why I shouldn't simply crush him between the balls of my feet.

Why is the Ananse trickster figure, with his moral ambiguity, so important in West African folklore? How and why does he feature in such societies' understanding of themselves and their universe? How is this figure textually and contextually recast in the Diaspora?

I beg O Mistress Gatekeeper, Kwaku Ananse wails, you will never do me such a badness. No luck can come to a woman who kills a spider

In both West Africa and the Diaspora, story “texts” of Ananse, the spider/trickster hero of folktales, abound in the published collections of folklorists, authors of children’s literature and other writers. Among the Akan of Ghana, Anasesem (Ananse stories) denote the stories told and their often inseparable performance context. Anasesem involve the critical and evaluative juxtaposition of fantasy and the perplexing complexities of human existence. In this way Anasesem provide a delightful, yet self-reflective frame for Akan discourse on life, death and the universe.

As Ananse dazzles you with his fanciful designs and shimmering threads, please allow yourself to appreciate the simplicity of my craft. As you see, I am stringing these beads on a length of a lion's tail

In performance, Anasesem typically open with Mboguo songs. Then, a storyteller invokes the audience’s attention and subsequent participation with a “frame-setting” prelude that cues the ensuing narrative as fantasy and “playful deceit.” At the storyteller’s invocation, the participatory audience responds, recognizing the beginning of their transformation into the world of fantasy.

This was just the very opening he needed. Ananse begins to embellish the very lie he has been spinning

The audience (Anasesem participants) are aware of the fantasy world they are about to enter. They understand and expect to be “lied to,” or in storytelling parlance, “hoaxed.” Thus, they already know that the “truth” in the stories is often a “figment of imaginative delight.” Therefore, in the course of storytelling, there is frequent dialogue between storyteller and the participants who question or challenge, often in jest, the “truth” in the narration.

I am a weaver, as was my father and my father before him. I was trained at the village of master weavers, you must know of it?

The place where royal kente cloth is made from pure silk, the finest in the land

Associated with imaginative delight in Anasesem is the wily character of Ananse the stories portray. This should not be misconstrued as an Akan fascination with Ananse’s often immoral exploits. It is consistent with Akan admiration for the adroitness of a spider in “spinning an intricate web.” Akans are conscious of the difference between the artistic/symbolic value of the trickster’s “woven” capers and his notoriety for malevolent deceit, greed and selfishness. This Akan acuity for critical differentiation between art and avarice, dexterity and deviance, craft and crime, is noticeable when one moves from merely analyzing story texts to “the illuminant health of folk activity,” the social context of performance.

Even in heaven we respect the powers of mystery... but to preview your daughters' growing pains before they have even had the chance to live them out. To witness the unfolding of their futures at the hands of a man like Kwaku Ananse! It is a predicament indeed!”

The social context of Anasesem performance highlights the reflective importance of Ananse to West Africans. The proverb “exterminate Ananse and society will be

ruined” underscores the indispensability of Ananse as a medium for self-examination in Akan society. Improvising, challenging and commenting on the narrative is a license that provides both audience and performer a space for reflection. This reflective space is one in which Ananse’s capers are critically juxtaposed with the moral and existential complexities of human existence.

And so, Ananse continues, I collect threads and fragments from the most fascinating, the most colorful of stories, and work them into a fabric that is the envy of all weavers. I am a mere man, a spider at that. But it is only proper that I, owner of all the stories on earth, be allowed access to this one. It shall be my finest work

Ananse’s exploits and his relationship with Onyame (The Supreme Being), spirits, Death, animals and humans, provides a space in performance for discourse on existential realities. The trickster, Ananse, epitomizes the Akan art of telling stories. He is considered the “owner” of the stories. As folklore has it, Ananse acquired this title by merit—completing tasks Onyame, the Supreme Being, gave him. Yet Ananse is fated with the misfortune of being reduced from his morphologically and artistically human figure into that of a spider when he gets entangled in his own web of trickery. With artistic flair, an Anasesem storyteller, captures within his/her own woven story-threads

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Anansi illustration
from *The Illustrated Anansi*, by Philip Sherlock and Petrina Wright

From the EDITOR

listen

artists, teachers, intellectuals and academic scholars explain that no static category names the black experience. for example, blacks in north america have shed, adopted and readopted many racial, ethnic and cultural categories, including: nigger, negar, mulatto, octoroon, quadroom, colored, Negro, black, Black, Afro-American, African-American, bi-racial, new world african, and "back again" to african (to reconnect), diasporan (to network throughout the Atlantic and outside of the US), and pan-african (to build solidarity with Africans worldwide). given the flux of our changing necessities, multiple sources of oppression, and how we make meaning out of both, it's little wonder we turn to (or tap into) our africaness when seeking the wisdom of ages or motivational currents of change.

from the Ankh to the all-seeing eye of Heru, out of africa comes our earliest recognition of life force, energy, God and cycle. yet, while taking care to revere african traditions and fundamental concepts, we must also refrain from stunting our learning process. some artists, like painter Austino Okafor, note with dissatisfaction the mainstream preoccupation with "african masks" to the exclusion of other Nigerian arts. his point is well taken, if the challenge is difficult to meet. this issue of black arts quarterly offers familiar truths and unique gestures in the form of tributes, poetry, essays and criticism. whether dedicated to striking a balance, or describing the balancing act, each piece does something unique with the concept of **african cultural expression and performativity**.

i've experienced two waves of call and response while working on this issue. a number of contributors responded to our call for papers; you are holding a result that reflects an overwhelming interest in: the life of the black subject and the destiny of the collective body from which it came, motifs of tradition and change, movements of unification and dissension, the trail of things falling apart, pieces surviving and coming back together. the works discourse with one another. i suggest approaching our issue as a point of (re)departure into what you consider african expression, for this is neither definitive nor exclusive.

david donkor opens with an explanation of how Anansem (anasi stories) are performed. in addition to copious performance texts, the essay provides a reading of Anasi the spider as a metaphor for african culture's travels and changes: "Ananse has subversive importance, especially as reinvented in the Diaspora, in resisting oppressive structures." **staceyann chin** explores this possibility in a poem that declares the performance poet artistically free while renegotiating social identity and slam culture.

for **sandra cairo**, participation in art is participation in life. working from the premise "no art for art's sake," she explores the point where art, anthropology and politics meet. **wendy sealey** analyzes film narrative as a revolutionary act. approaching Raoul Peck's *The Man By the Shore* as a piece of third cinema, sealey explains peck's role in securing haiti's future by advocating for the rights of the innocent, particularly children who survive and testify against tonton macoute terrorism. **halifu osumare** offers a performance artist's account of ethics, race and objectification. from her vantage, "the black body" doubles as a tangible, lived reality for africans and diasporans, and a metaphor for oppressed minorities.

she demonstrates how art resists "some of the hardest times you can ever imagine." **erin chapman** focuses on the african-american family's struggle to cohere while experiencing internal rifts and external pressures. her explanation of "reverse colorism" takes on the paradoxes inherited by the Johnsons, the multi-hued, black family of George Tillman Jr's movie *Soul Food*. chapman explains the ideologies that encourage moviegoers to pity the infamous Terri, played by Vanessa Williams. "i-terations" offers excerpts from a performance piece by **anna scott** who sounds off about the scattering of africans and its consequences for the diasporan woman-child. the pieces reflect the collective labor of travel and communication and the individual struggle to speak out loud. this powerful solo inscribes the journey, and having reached us, sustains us. reading unbottles the message. "sappho comment" invites us to experience sappho's lyric poetry in english. this contribution includes a critical note by **leshawn smith** whose translation is a tribute to a legendary ancestor and the talent we continue to admire. the multi-dimensional life of Nigerian literary artist Wole Soyinka spans **renee charlow's** tribute to the highly acclaimed writer and political activist. **dasha jackson** offers literary analysis and socio-historical context for "Our Grandmothers" by Maya Angelou. jackson's close reading encourages us to love our foremothers and recall their struggles. writers who want their work accessible to an international audience must navigate the world of publishing. "technologies of african publishing" by **francis kaywia** explains specific aspects of the publishing process and institution— elements that can shape how Kenyan writers publish their work. in the spirit of continued learning, we offer you web resources for black art and culture, compiled by education director **donna thompson**. this ultimate contribution to our issue provides internet addresses for peeping out a global cornucopia of african continental and diasporan art. finally, i'm sure you join me in thanking everyone who supported the publication of our issue: elena becks, solange jacobs, harry elam, the committee on black performing arts, the department of drama, and mark grazette. please consider responding to our current call for papers and original artwork for the upcoming issue of baq: artists, art and creative processes; deadline april 12, 1999!

Jacqueline Wigfall
Philadelphia, PA

Black Arts Quarterly

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BAQ is a forum for reflective explorations of black performativity. We publish three issues per academic year through the Stanford University Committee on Black Performing Arts (CBPA). Our mission is the circulation of student work that addresses the material impact of black representation in the arts, in media and popular culture; and to showcase the original work of student poets and visual artists as well. Performance theories of black identity, identity theories of black performance, and critical commentaries on art produced by members of the African Diaspora are all encouraged. We welcome submissions of any length from new and experienced writers, but suggest you adhere to abstract and MS deadlines and consider the following:

BAQ Literary Submission Information

Unless forwarded by e-mail, all text submissions must include a hardcopy and a version in Microsoft Word 5.0 (or higher) or ClarisWorks 4.0 on an accompanying floppy Macintosh disc. Please provide a brief bio which identifies your name as well as your representative institution, degree program and area(s) of interest and specialization. Reserve copies of your work, as we do not guarantee return of submissions and discs. Tiny works (1000 words or less) are acceptable. Short reflections and brief essays range from 1300-2300 words (the equivalent of 4-5 double spaced pages in 12 point Times New Roman font). Fuller works of criticism range from 3000-5300 words. All text submissions are subject to editorial alteration.

BAQ Visual Arts Submission Information

We encourage visual submissions: photographs, scanings or high quality photocopies of original art work, as well as visual illustrations that accompany written submissions. Please enclose a bio which identifies the title and medium of your piece(s) as well as your name, representative institution, degree program and area(s) of interest and specialization. If your visual submission accompanies a literary submission, please include a caption that specifies the title, subject and source, especially the URL if you have obtained the image from a website.

“Once Upon a Spider”

(continued from page 1)

such dilemmas, conflicts and paradoxes of human existence. The story-webs of Anansesem are a system of signs that compare, combine and order reality into a decipherable entity giving substance to the “unseen” and naming the “unnamed.” Anansesem performance therefore unites thought and praxis, creative intelligence and intellectual flexibility from both storyteller and audience participants to serve as a reflective practice in existential query.

Tell the story, Kweku Ananse, but also teach the art. Animate my daughters with your magic. In each of my generations there must be at least one who masters her own voice, who learns to work the warp and the weft of her own life

Anansesem participants’ collectively formulated existential statements position the Akan in relation to their universe. It is not far-fetched to consider these “statements” a modality of existence, “one that allows a group of signs to prescribe a definite position to any subject.” In Anansesem, such statements are repeatable each time participants gather to tell stories. They are susceptible to reinscription, redefinition, and ultimate reinvention across different story “texts”/“contexts” and across different geographical and socio-cultural milieu.

About this name-changing business. Correct me if I’m wrong, but hasn’t that tale-tell spider been sporting new names? Kwaku Ananse in the Old World, Brother Nancy in the New? Yes, our daughters have changed their names. Many more will do the same... reinventing themselves in this peculiar place

The spatio-temporal dispersion of the Ananse trickster figure from Africa to the Diaspora has shown such reinvention. In the Caribbean, Joyce Jonas’ conceptualizes the trickster hero in the light of a discursive practice she terms “Anancy Talk.” Houston Baker’s preface to Jonas’ work explains “Anancy Talk” as “the Spider Spirit springing webs of signification that are anything but plain, simple, ending and empirically verifiable.” The idea of the “social drama” and “liminal” entities wedged between structures of society, functions in both Baker and Jonas’ formulation of “Anansi Talk”. In the formulation, “Ananse Talk” is further conceived as “a special branch of liminal energy” which brings to the fore the social dialectic of structure and anti-structure.

I may come to regret this. Admittedly, he is a rascal. But as for me, I would like to see the creation of such a story cloth. I would like to drape this garment about my shoulders. If he has these skills, let the spider reveal them

Jonas interprets spider-man Anancy (a Caribbean version of Anansi) as a “folk embodiment of the carnivalesque spirit that challenges imposed authority structure.” While this notion is linked with destructive degeneration it is also characteristically regenerate. Jonas describes the trickster as a baffling figure of folklore variously expressed as a “criminal cultural hero” the “very embodiment of paradox”, and a “violin of taboo.” The trickster is marginal to society, parodies and criticizes the social structure and indulges in acts of aggression, destruction and vindictiveness. Yet the asocial, independent trickster is tied to society as a source of health and creativity. The trickster creates chaos by the violation of social boundaries yet initiates a transformational process that turns contradictory elements into “a web of meaningful relationships.” Anancy’s continuous presence in the folk imagination has to do with the trickster’s “capacity to transform disruption, discontinuity, brokenness and defeat into triumphant new configurations of possibility.” Anancy is the “scapegoat of tragedy” who turns the tables on oppressive authority and emerges in “a comedy of ironic reversal.”

But you realize that I am more than a spider, much more than just a man. I am one who spins the rainbow, who rides the winds, who can even negotiate the skies on a line of my own making.... I am the world’s greatest storyteller because I am the world’s greatest watcher, the one overlooked in corners.... I am not mighty like the elephant nor splendidly named like the lion.... But though small, I have never been defeated, even by larger enemies. I was here at the beginning and will yet be at the end

In summary, Akan Anansesem is a reflective practice that combines fantastic imagination with existential query. This combination helps to understand how West Africans deal with the moral ambiguity

of Ananse. Ananse also has subversive importance, especially as reinvented in the Diaspora, in resisting oppressive structures. The perennial rebellion of Ananse and his use of comic trickery to expose the inadequacies of authority figures provide an opportunity for multi-vocal expressions from the small, the weak, and the downtrodden.

And that, my people, is how Kwaku Ananse, the spider who is a man, the man who is a spider, came into possession of this story. There are those of you who may say he came to it by trickery. I prefer to call it the fine art of negotiation. Even I can’t help but admire a man who can think on his feet s ▲

David Afriyie Donkor is pursuing a Ph.D. in Performance Studies at Northwestern University, Evanston IL. His areas of interest are West African Theatre/Performance and Culture.

1 All quotations in italics are from Sandra Jackson Opoku’s novel, *The River Where Blood is Born*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1997).

2 Gregory Bateson has concluded that fantasy or myth may simulate a denotative narrative.

3 “Frame-setting” helps to distinguish between the two; see “Theory of Play and Fantasy” in *Ritual, Play, and Performance*. Ed. Richard Schechner and Mady Schuman. (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976), p. 73.

4 Ghanaian Dramatist, Efua Sutherland explains this in the introduction to her plays, *The Marriage of Anansewa and Eufua*. (Essex: Longman, 1975).

5 Kweisi Yankah, “The Akan Trickster Cycle: Myth or Folktale.” (Term Paper, Indiana U, 1983), p. 13.

6 Sutherland, *Ibid*.

7 The phrase is borrowed from Kweisi Yankah. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

8 My attempt to adequately express the Akan phrase “ye de toto yen wiase abrafo ho” from the introduction to E.O. Ayeh’s collection of Akan folktales, *Mmrehua*, (Ghana Publishing Corporation: Accra-Tema, 1978).

9 Michele Foucault explains this idea of the “statement” in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. (New York: Pantheon Books 1972), p.107.

10 Joyce Jonas, “Anancy in the Great House: Ways of Reading West Indian Fiction.” *Contributions to Afro-American and African Studies*. (Ser. 136, New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), p. vii.

11 *Ibid*.

12 *Ibid*. p.53

13 *Ibid*. p.50-51

14 *Ibid*. p.51

15 *Ibid*. p.51-52

Call for Papers and Original Artwork: Artists, Art and Creative Processes

Deadline: April 12, 1999

Do you or does someone you know work well with their hands or powerfully express themselves through the work that they do and the products that they design or make? What materials do they use? Why do they work on these projects at all? What messages do they share or do you find in their work? What do you like about your artist-friend’s craft? Who would you like to see more work from? Black Arts Quarterly is currently accepting original literary and visual Art, interviews, commentary, criticism, free verse, etc. We invite you to submit material about one-, two- or three- dimensional (or cyberspatial) arts and crafts...and the people who produce them. We especially encourage very creative submissions related to the following by and about African Continental and Diasporan artists:

- essays on how to develop one’s craft
- short stories
- interviews and discussions with artists
- revised, expanded, or open-ended definitions of art
- collaborative works
- shameless plugs for your (or your friends’) work
- how artistic vision changes over time
- works-in-progress • reflections or theories of creative processes
- art for print
- tributes and memorializations • art reviews
- manifestos and predictions
- invitations, solicitations, advertisements

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Please send photographs of visual submissions (and if possible a disk with your picture scanned onto it in gif or pict format) with self-addressed, stamped envelope to ensure return after review; submit literary submissions on Mac disc in Claris works or Microsoft Word: Committee on Black Performing Arts (CBPA), Harmony House, 561 Lomita Drive, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305. If you submit visual or literary text via email or in attachment file, send to Lenochka@leland.stanford.edu. We can be reached by at this email address, by phone (650) 723-4402 or by fax (650) 723-6441.

I've Decided

by: Staceyann M. Chin

I've decided
I don't want to be
a poet who just writes
for the slam anymore

I want to stop writing
poor excuses for poems
that do nothing but
stroke my ego and fool
the crowd into thinking
my bucking and screaming
was actually their orgasm

I don't want to be a poet
writing to slam anymore

I don't want
to join the staged revolution
don't want to be a part of
some spotlight-slamming solution
don't want to go to Austin or Chicago
simply because I think I have
the rapidly moving metaphors
smashing off the Nuyorican walls
or similes like a silver bullet
bee-lining for the finals on a balloon
full of nothing but hot air
making the room smell like a fart
from a bad poem that somebody
should have said excuse me for

I don't want to just slam anymore

I don't want to sit
in smoke-filled rooms
listening to women who rhyme
creating lyrics that rock
making sure they fit within
the confines of some judges ticking clock
smiling with people I've only seen
on the corner of an old Slamnation flyer
trying to get them to tell me
how to record that first CD
how to really work a crowd
how to fuck those hard to please judges
so I can give birth to a bastard TEN

I'm tired of igniting blazes on the mike
pimping poems about my lover's private life
sipping iced tea over superlatives
eating spring rolls over hyperboles
juxta-positioning myself in vegetarian cafes
between guys with funny sounding names
like Guy and Procope and Dot
hoping some of what makes them real poets
will rub off on a pretender like me

I want to be like them
when I finally grow up
because I've watched them
rewrite stolen histories
in breathtaking three minute pieces
doing only honest performances
so that everytime they go on
they kick a poem with heart
fighting the fanfare of this
slamming psuedo-revolution
changing the world

one poem at a time
Now that I've actually been a poet
been romantic and been poor
I don't want to be a slam poet anymore

Today I want to write
from a place where I change lives
and change people and places
cross over boundaries
of sexes and cultures and races
paint the skies deep red
instead of boring blue
write the true histories of me and you
crawl deep inside the lines
of every poem I write
I want to speak about the stars
as if I had become the night

Tonight I want to be
intimate with my muse
Hell- I want to bed the woman
I want to have her so close
she gets up inside me
so when I am asleep
she can rouse me
No!
I want her to arouse me
have her way with me
have her play with me
so that when I wake up
I will be inspired
to write honest poems
poems about grandmothers
and babies and truth
poems that don't care
about the meter or the rhyme
poems that really couldn't give
a flying fuck about the time
poems that will not sit
within the squares of any chart
poems that are written in blood
flowing straight from the heart

I want to write
I left my lover and
now I want her back poems
I miss Jamaica
but I'm never going back poems
I know it's not a ten
but it sends shivers down MY back poems
poems that talk about life
and love and laughter
poems that reveal the flaws
that make up strikingly real people
real poems
poems that are so honest
they slam

Born in Jamaica, Poet Staceyann M. Chin has shared her work on the performance stages of New York, where she currently resides. She has performed on "Showtime at the Apollo," produced by NBC, and is one of the finalists in the "Nuyorican Grand Slam" to be held this May. The results of this competition will decide which poets go to the Nationals in August. Chin has also done radio performances on WBAI and WHCR. Her previously featured work appears in Mosaic Magazine, Everybody Magazine, The Black Track Magazine and anthologies Voices Rising and Skyscrapers, Taxis and Tampax.

African Performing Arts Through the Lens of the Body Politic

by Sandra C. Cairo

In the field of anthropology, African art and performing art forms have usually been studied in the specialization of cultural and/or social anthropology. We need only think of our great anthropologists Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus or Zora Neal Hurston, who diligently brought our art forms to the forefront in anthropology.

Within the field of medical anthropology exists the specialization of the critical interpretive perspective, which focuses in on the concept of the body. The study of the body in turn is divided into three categories: the individual body; the social/cultural body; and the body politic. This approach has grown out of a movement and a challenge to anthropologists to be critical and not merely anecdotal. It has also grown out of a charge to anthropologists to be responsible and conscientious in their writing, to look at the larger picture and its implications, as opposed to the local one.

The body politic analysis examines the body as it is influenced and guided by larger forces (Lock and Scheper-Hughes, 1996). In return the body exerts force and influence on the larger forces, it is an active participant. This concept is very similar to the African cosmology and worldview. The individual is not placed "at the top of the food chain" or as "master of his domain". Instead, he is part of the environment and strives for harmony and balance through working with and responding to the forces in the environment (Shelton, 1968). It is my charge then to move the world of African performing art in the field of anthropology from the cultural and social realm to that of the body politic within the critical-interpretive realm.

Many works have been written about the holistic role of African performing arts within the context of African life. Pearl Primus states (1996): "Dance is not a separate art, but part of the whole complex of living" (p. 4). Nicholls extends it to art in general by suggesting: "there is no art for art's sake in Africa" (1996, p.43). Art in traditional African societies is used for healing, connecting, uplifting and understanding life. Through art the world makes sense and its purpose reaches far beyond the aesthetic (Nketia, 1982). Given its impact, it is very powerful indeed.

If art is used to maintain balance, harmony, and a sense of "what makes sense," then what happens to a people when the ability to

produce and participate in art is restricted, curbed, or even obliterated? In many so-called "Third World" countries the performing arts are the real mass media, "possibly matched only by radio in availability and popularity." (Kidd and Byram, 1978, p. 170) But even closer to home, here in the United States the arts have been and continue to be a significant part of our survival; from the secret messages in field hollers to the personal expression in Hip Hop culture. These are only some of the questions that can be addressed in the critical-interpretive realm of anthropology.

African performing arts then contains many forces indeed and within it then the potential for power. Accessing this power can lead to improved sense of self, community, and the world as a whole, something many of our African brothers and sisters around the globe are lacking. Twillie (1995) explains that due to our invisibility at the outcome of our colonial history we fail to see our potential, strengths and significance in this world. Through critically approaching the performing arts we can re-discover our tools and put them to good use. Our art was never "for art's sake" only, meaning that with participating in art and thus in life came a serious responsibility.

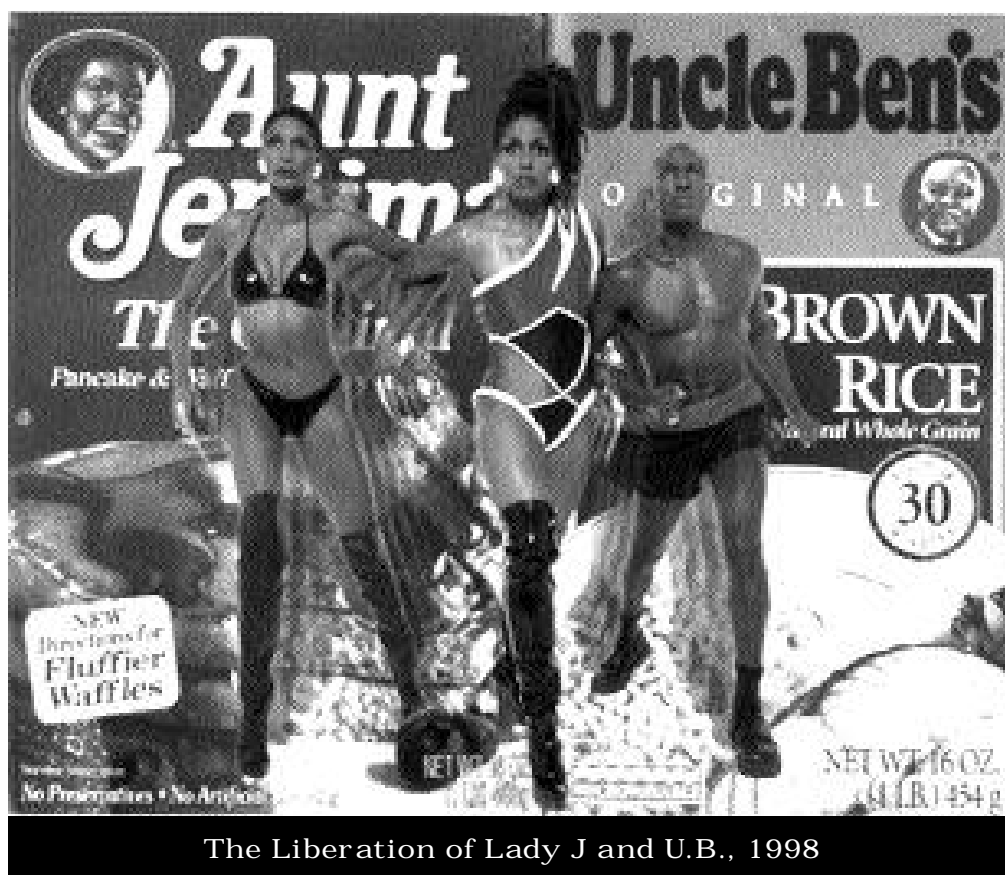
The charge stands. ▲

Sandra C. Cairo is a professional dancer and holds an M.S. degree in Clinical Psychology from Eastern Kentucky University. She is currently pursuing her Ph. D. in Medical Anthropology at the University of Kentucky. Her special interests include traditional and Western biomedical healing practices and the forces that guide or interfere with their co-existence.

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images



The Liberation of Lady J and U.B., 1998

by Reneé Cox

Exploring the relationship between Official Discourse and Popular Memory in Raoul Peck's *The Man by the Shore*

by Wendy Sealey

In 1492 Columbus' "discovery" began an economic and political hierarchy which still plagues the modern world. Out of this foundational event arose an epistemological configuration which subjugated the colonized man to his colonizer (Mudimbe). Caribbean theorist Frantz Fanon wrote extensively about the process of decolonization in *The Wretched of the Earth* where he defines decolonization as the putting into practice of the following sentence: "The last shall be the first and the first shall be the last (Fanon p. 37)." In 1804, Haitian slaves put this notion into practice by liberating themselves and declaring their independence from France. Since independence, Haitian history has been characterized by moments of social unrest and repressive violence. This history has produced a vibrant artistic culture which struggles to represent those who often cannot speak for themselves. Haitian artists, such as the filmmaker Raoul Peck, often address the systematic exclusion of the popular voice from official policies through their art. In *L'homme sur le Quai* (or *The Man by the Shore*) Peck depicts Duvalier's Haiti in the early 1960's in the spirit of the Latin American film movement known as Third Cinema.

Inspired by Fanon's work, two Latin American filmmakers, Fernando Solanas and the Spanish born Octavio Getino introduced the concept of Third Cinema in their 1969 article entitled, *Towards a Third Cinema*. They envision Third Cinema as a cinema of decolonization. According to Solanas and Getino, Third Cinema is unique in that it does not subscribe to Hollywood notions of aesthetics, production, and distribution practices (Solanas and Getino, p. 41). Since the publication of their article much has been written about the concept of Third Cinema. Two fundamental principals must be established if we are to grasp the important nature of this art form vis-a-vis Peck's work. In an article entitled, "The Third Cinema Question: Notes and Reflections," Paul Willeman suggests first that "a cinema forever in need of adaptation to the shifting dynamics at work in social struggles," and second that it "attempt to speak to a socially pertinent discourse" (Willeman 231). Peck's film falls under the cadre of Third Cinema because it reflects the ideology of those struggling for liberation. In *The Man by the Shore*, Peck critiques the repressive practices employed by François Duvalier in his mission to destroy anyone who threatened his quest for power. Through the prism of Sarah's fragmented memory, Peck tells a story of violence and female subjugation at the hands of Haiti's tonton macoute. The story unfolds as a flashback with interruptions from an omniscient narrator. Memory, then, plays an important role in Peck's overall project.

In foregrounding memory as an important reservoir of popular narratives, Peck demonstrates that the collective memory serves an important role in the quest for critical counter discourses. Teshome H. Gabriel, author of "Third Cinema as Guardian of Popular Memory: Towards a Third Aesthetics" theorizes about the importance of popu-

lar memory in the context of Third Cinema. In his article, Thomas suggests that the official histories often represent the "center" and that "memories" are often represented as the margin. He writes, "official history... claims a "centre" which continuously marginalizes others. Popular memory, on the other hand, considers the past as a political issue. It orders the past not only as a reference point but also as a theme of struggle. In popular memory there are no longer any "centres" or "margins." "Popular memory... is a look back to the future, necessarily dissident and partisan, wedded to constant change (Gabriel 54)." By constructing his narrative through Sarah's memory, Peck disrupts the center to which Gabriel refers. Peck disrupts the historical narrative, allowing the margins comprised of the the forgotten or the ignored under Duvalier to speak to the world at large. Peck's privileging of memory in his film embodies the notion of open-endedness and constant change that Gabriel sees as integral to the concept of Third Cinema. By critiquing many of the injustices the populace suffered under Duvalier, Peck is careful not to construct a narrative that categorically claims to speak for all, but rather, his narrative which constructs itself as a narrative among many.

After Papa Doc's election in 1957, Haiti's political structure took a dramatic turn the likes of which its country had never seen. Under Papa Doc Duvalier, Haitian's experienced the emergence of a new armed force, the Volunteers for National Security referred to as the tonton macoute. These men instilled fear in the hearts and minds of many Haitians because the tentacles of their power seemed so complete and ever reaching. François Duvalier's himself defines the tonton macoute in the following terms: "this body only has one soul: Duvalier, knows only one head, Duvalier and fights for one destiny: Duvalier's power" (translation mine)¹. This quote clearly shows Duvalier's interest in acquiring and maintaining power. To this end, he created the tonton macoute, instilling new governing codes of terror to consolidate his authority.

It is widely acknowledged amongst Haitian scholars that François Duvalier instituted repressive practices during his presidency (Hurbon, 1987; Nicholls, 1996; Laguerre, 1993). However, it is widely debated whether Duvalier's regime was authoritarian or totalitarian. In *From Dessalines to Duvalier*, David Nicholls suggests that to characterize Duvalierism is to "misconceive the situation" (Nicholls xiv). He writes, "The politics of... the Duvaliers is much closer to autocracy than it is to totalitarianism. How different from the dynamic and fanatical desire to remold the Italian nation or to purify the German Volk of non-Arian blood, or to collectivise the peasants into a total communist state!" (Nicholls xv). For Nicholl's, Duvalier did not have what Carl Freidrich refers to as a "total ideology" in *Totalitarianism*, his seminal work on the subject. However, Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot in *Haiti: State Against Nation, The Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism* develops a convincing argument which counters Nicholls' thesis.

According to Trouillot, Duvalier' introduced new means of repression during his presidency that distinguished him from his predecessors.

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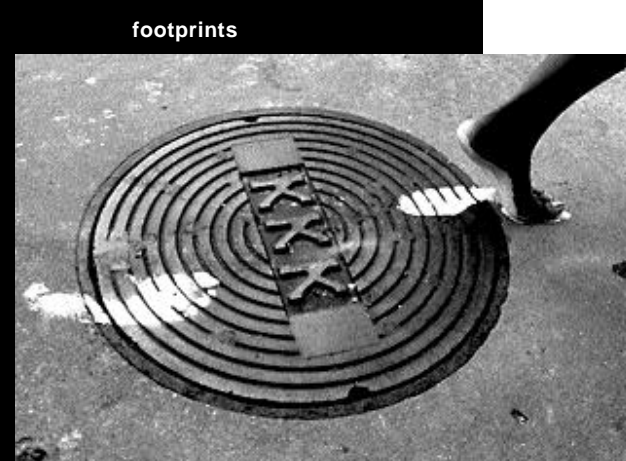
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Duvalier, through a series of institutional transformations, pitted the state against the nation, resulting in a totalitarian state. These transformations, Trouillot writes, “together with the auto-neutralization tactic, led to new forms of state intrusion into the organization of everyday life. The accumulation of such changes eventually led to a qualitative change: the remaking of the traditional authoritarian state into a totalitarian apparatus” (Trouillot 163). Duvalier’s totalitarian apparatus was contingent upon the new “activities” which changed the fabric of everyday life. In this sense, Duvalier did institute new governing codes that imposed a “totalist ideology” in keeping with Freidrich’s definition. Despite their opposing views on Duvalier’s totalitarianism both scholars agree that Duvalier’s practices with respect to women and children were unlike those of his predecessors (Nicholls xv).

In a chapter titled, “The Transition to Duvalierism,” Trouillot outlines Duvalier’s practices with respect to women and children. This analysis is important to an understanding of Peck’s film. Trouillot argues that under Duvalier women and children were no longer protected for political persecution and “Children and the elderly were no longer protected by their age. Whole families were forced to flee when it was known that one member was (or was considered to be) in conflict with the government” (Trouillot 167). This is shown in Peck’s film through Sarah, who is persecuted with her sisters and her grandmother, because of her relationships with her father and her godfather. Another important development which occurred under Duvalier was the elimination of the gender distinction which had ensured preferential treatment for women. He writes:

Under the Duvaliers, women were sometimes treated the same as men, often worse. Many were attacked because a husband or male relative was out of reach—in exile or in a foreign embassy. The Duvalierist preference for the sexual “conquest” of females associated with the political opposition, from torture-rape to acquaintance rape to marriage, infused the politicization of gender with violence. Womanhood, which had traditionally afforded partial protection from the state, now became a disadvantage (Trouillot 167).

Trouillot’ analyzes women-children like Sarah would have been protected before Duvalier came into power. However, during his reign, Sarah’s status no longer afforded her any privileges. This is evident at the end of the film when Sarah’s grandmother has “disappeared” and Sarah is almost raped because of her father and her godfather’s transgressions against the Duvalierist state. Thus, Sarah’s persecution directly relates to the political standing of two men: her father, who can best be described as un homme militaire naïf (a naive military man), and her godfather Sorel who is labeled a “subversive.” Trouillot’s analysis of women and children in the new Duvalier state helps us to better understand Sarah’s tormented childhood. Using Sarah’s memory as the official source of his dramatization of the late 1960s in Haiti, he thereby privileges subjective memory over conventional narrative forms. The tension between memory and official discourse is a theme which is established at the very beginning of the film.

The film opens with two voice overs that establish a tension

between official discourse and popular memory. The first voice-over follows:

*People of the Northwest, of Artibonite, from the Great Cave, from the Southwest, intellectuals, masters of thought, of art, professors, teachers, students, they have decided to ignore you. They have gone mad!*²

This citation suggests that Duvalier ignored the majority of Haitians and his regime systematically excluded the perspectives of all who dared to question his authority. The second voice-over is a song heard at key moments throughout the film: “three leaves, three leaves, three roots, to throw away is to forget to pick up is to remember you.”³ The line: “to throw away is to forget, to pick up is to remember” suggests the keepers of memory need to sift through the pieces of memory to speak for those who have been ignored and/or forgotten. In *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, Pierre Nora reminds us of the importance of memory with respect to official history, “it is upon the individual and upon the individual alone that the constraint of memory weighs insistently as well as imperceptibly... when memory is no longer everywhere it will not be anywhere unless one takes the responsibility to recapture it through individual means” (Nora 292). In Peck’s film, Sarah assumes this responsibility. She carefully pieces together the “leaves” of her memory. The result is an effort to recapture the voices of those who can no longer speak for themselves. The silent are signified by the reference to rasin or “roots” in the song. Sarah’s memory, then, plays an important role in the subversion of official Haitian discourse under Duvalier.

Much has been written about the dialectical relationship between official history and popular memory in critical and fictional works (Gillis, 1994; Nora, 1994; Irwin-Zrecka, 1994). Literary critic Myriam Chancy specifically addresses this question in relation to Haitian women writers in *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women*. Chancy suggests that one can use memory to preform revolutionary acts because “the movement from orality to literacy through the process of colonization resulted in a tragic falsification of memory” (Chancy 74). Therefore, collective memory has the potential to demystify the falsified past by reclaiming the history of oppressed people who have been forgotten in the context of traditional historical narratives. She writes,

... the histories of the silenced and oppressed people have already been swept away and cannot be readily reclaimed. Memory serves as a tool for reclaiming these histories, but it is not a vehicle meant for restoring fragment to, or destabilizing, History. Memoire is the thread that links generations of people whose various histories have been ignored, displaced, silenced...Rememberence is thus at the crux of the reconstructive moment, and the “text” becomes the intermediary between private and collective consciousness. It is the basis for political renaissance: memory, rebirth, as a revolutionary act (Chancy 103).

Chancy proposes that popular memory has the power to transform official versions of the past. By constructing his narrative as a flashback, Sarah’s story is told through the lens of her subjective memory,

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Exploring...The Man by the Shore

(continued from page 7)

and hence, Peck's narrative exemplifies what Chancy defines as a revolutionary act. In using the flashback interspersed with ellipses in memory as a narrative device, Peck inspires a renaissance of Haitian subjectivity. Instead of delivering the story as an official, objective version, Peck allows Sarah's subjectivity to speak for itself—enabling Sarah's memory gaps to reflect Gabriel's notion of "constant change." Peck, speaks "a socially pertinent discourse" in the spirit of Third Cinema, by constructing the narrative from Sarah's memories as a child of a Haitian Army Captain in the early 1960's.

Peck brilliantly dramatizes the tension between the army and Duvalier's Volunteers for National Security. There are several theories which attempt to explain Duvalier's creation of this private militia. According to Elizabeth Abbot, author of *Haiti: The Duvaliers and their Legacy*, Duvalier created a secret militia as a result of a failed invasion. On July 28, 1959, Duvalier faced an invasion lead by an ex-Captain, Alix "Sonson" Paquet. Abbott writes, "Duvalier emerged shaken and unscathed and obsessed by the vision of a legion of civilians armed, trained, and loyal solely to himself" (Abbott 82). Duvalier created the Volunteers for National Security to secure his presidency. However, the institution known as the tonton macoute did not develop overnight. In *The Military and Society in Haiti*, Michel Laguerre suggests that the development of the tonton macoute can be separated into three phases, the first of which precedes the invasion to which Abbott refers. According to Laguerre, in the first phase, the volunteers were called cagouleurs and their identity and activities were kept secret. The second phase in Laguerre's analysis, began after the Pasquet invasion in 1959, when Duvalier conceived of "the formation of a civilian militia to serve as an auxiliary of the army, supposedly in case of a national emergency (Laguerre 114). For Laguerre, the final phase, in which the tonton macoute gained legal recognition, "redefined the primary role of their existence from that of serving as a reserve force in case of an invasion or any other emergency to that of a permanent repressive militia" (Laguerre 115). The introduction of this institution into the fiber of Haitian life created many social conflicts, one, for example, between the army and the new Volunteers for National Security (VNS).

While the Volunteers for National Security were gaining power, the army was being stripped of its power. This resulted in a tension between the army and the VSN. Not only was the tension spurred on by the obvious shift in power from one institution to another, but it was further exacerbated by class and color divisions. According to Laguerre, "the members of the officer corps were the offspring of urban and provincial middle class families" (La Guerre 120). This agrees with Laguerre which concurs with Abbott's description of the VSN as "from the most disadvantaged classes and [those who] regarded the VSN as their sole escape from the relentless misery and hard work that inevitably awaited them" (Abbott 87). Abbott and Laguerre agree that the introduction of the tonton macoute created a tension between the army and the new militia, especially, "during the early years of the Duvalier presidency (Laguerre 117). This conflict is specifically dramatized in Peck's film since Sarah's father, a light-

skinned captain in the army, is a victim of this tension.

At the beginning of the film, Sarah's voice is somber. We see her as a young child in her grandmother's attic. We hear her voice signify her lapse into the past. She states: "It was the early 1960's. The attic was still an attic. I was eight and the world was already opening onto a disaster."⁴ Slowly we see Sarah open the blinds protecting her from the outside world and the disaster lurking outside the attic window. Once the attic's blinds are open, she can not recapture the attic's tranquility. From the balcony, Sarah sees her godfather, Sorel, being beaten and sodomized by the tonton macoute. Her father, François Jansson, a captain in the army, watches helplessly. Eventually he asks his men to stop, but they turn on him instead. Later on in the narrative, we learn that the events could not have unfolded in this particular order, but the scene establishes the importance of Sorel's beating for the rest of the narrative.

Sorel's torture scene is significant for many reasons. One could argue that this scene frames the narrative. The powerful and privileged Jansson can no longer maintain his station. When he asks his men to stop torturing Sorel, they ignore him and he appears weak. In order to maintain his authority, Jansson must participate in its brutality. He tries to stop the torture, subsequently placing him in jeopardy. His subordinates turn on him, seizing him. We later learn that he is forced to flee the country with his wife, leaving Sarah in his mother's charge. By challenging his men who were performing their duties, in a sense Sarah's father is questioning Duvalier himself. Lannec Hurbon suggests as much in *Comprendre Haiti* when he writes,

The presence of the macoutes in the state was already the mute and blind practice of repression as a method of government; it was also a means of inscribing the president as the only legitimate proprietor of the nation and Haitian space. A macoute is linked directly to the head man, therefore, to the president who maintains personal relations with him (translation mine).⁵

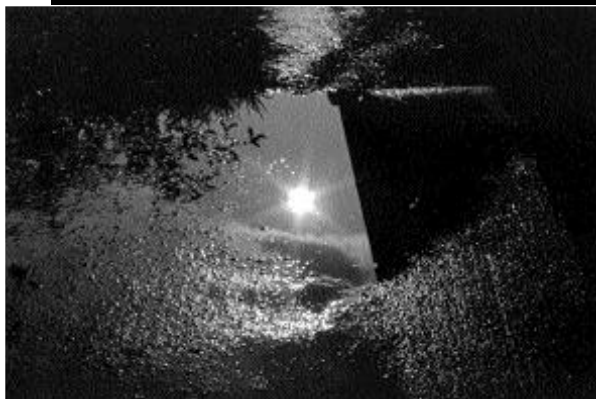
Hurbon explains that Duvalier controlled all Haitian space and the macoute to report directly to him. This insight reinforces Trouillot's notion that Duvalier had a program of total domination. Jansson's attempt to protect his daughter's godfather, he indirectly places himself under suspicion. After all, Sorel's interrogation was in keeping with the tonton macoute's procedure, therefore, to question his interrogation was perhaps, to question the regime.

After the initial opening torture scene, the viewer learns that Sorel has been suspected for months and that Jansson struggled with the order to detain him. At one point in the film, he mentions to his wife that he spoke to Sorel and tried to get him to stop his anti-macoute campaign. In the end he feels helpless and he, too, succumbs to Duvalierism. In an argument with his wife he says, "I couldn't do anything for him. You wanted me to act like a macoute? I did all that I could. I really thought that I could fix it later."⁶ It is clear from this argument that he is unable to protect Sorel. Caught in the tension between the army and the macoute and in his attempt to "not act like a macoute," he lets Sorel be detained. Even though he is a captain in the army, he has no power in dealing with the VSN. Sorel's interrogation, takes place with Duvalier's approval. Jansson's attempt to stop the

About the Artist: Tahir Hemphill

Born in Queens, New York, Tahir Hemphill grew up in a house permeated by artistic stimuli and influences. The sounds of his Grandmother's off-key piano playing served as the backdrop for her spiritually inspired folk art which lined every wall of the house. Tahir, like his grandmother, is a self-taught visual artist. Having a formal training in graphic design, Tahir's world exists in the intersection of these two groups. Tahir is interested in the symbol systems that connect the fine art and commercial art worlds and how he can use these same communication techniques in fine art to influence the masses in a way that not only calls attention to problems, but also heals. The first marks were made for survival by a chosen holy person—Shaman, High Priestess, Obeah Man, Magician. Only (s)he was allowed to touch the ground to design because the act was sacred and no one understood the language of symbols except for the artist-priests. The royalty sought the counsel of the artists because they understand our direct relationship with the divinity of communication through symbols and images. In doing so, the artists/priests make good between the royalty and the Creator. Today the same relationship exists; fine artists and designers are the modern day scribes. The commercial world seeks our counsel in order to create a combination of words and images that will transform the ideas and influence the movement of the masses. Our ideas, movements, speech and Visual Alchemy fuels this machine.

Visit Tahir's website @ <http://pratt.edu/~themphil/index.html> to see the preceding images and other examples of his art/spirit fusion.



reflection



interrogation questions his allegiance to Duvalier. After his attempt to stop Janvier's men from sodomizing Sorel with a stick, he is left with no choice but to leave Haiti. On this matter, Hurbon writes, "[To place oneself outside of Duvalierism is to expose oneself to death to the life and death of the tonton macoute) at least to flee the country. In all cases, the one who thinks of his independence in the face of the regime is already driven by the desire to leave."⁷ Jansson's attempt to stop the interrogation places Sarah and the rest of his family in jeopardy. He is left no choice but self-exile without young Sarah.

Sorel's initial torture scene is also important in that it establishes the next in command, Monsieur Janvier. Through his character we come to understand how the VSN operates. Janvier's VSN status is signified by his clothing, his words and his actions. First, unlike the captain, he does not wear the khaki uniform of the army, preferring instead to wear a jacket and slacks. In keeping with Abbott's description of the macoutes as "virtually all back" (Abbott 87), he is darker than the light skinned Army captain. In a scene which chronologically precedes Sorel's beating, Janvier lets Jansson know that he has been watching Sorel for a long time, suggesting that he has been operating independently. When the captain asserts his authority in the matter, stating, "I am still in charge here," Janvier responds by suggesting that Jansson "tempts the devil." This scene between these two is key in establishing the tension between the army and the VSN. Janvier commands his subordinates to detain Sarah's father. It follows then that after Sorel's beating, and her father's flight into exile, Sarah's life is overshadowed by Janvier's menacing presence. Eventually, Sarah's grandmother is called in for questioning under the guise of "complaints" against her. Michel Laguerre writes about the weight of this kind of evidence under Duvalier.

Under Duvalier, gossip was a legitimate reason to detain and imprison. Laguerre defines zin, the Creole name for this kind of gossip, as an oral message from an unknown source that may alter when passed from one individual to another (Laguerre 139). It was common practice that someone would be called in for questioning on the basis of zin, even when the accusations were unverified. He writes, "During the Duvalier years, countless numbers of people ended up in jail on the basis of zin" (Laguerre 143). In his film, Peck demonstrates the insidious nature of gossip and the extent to which VSN uses its power to intimidate those they dislike. Remember that Janvier persecutes Madame Desrouilleres because of her son-in-law, Jansson. Eventually, Sarah's grandmother is detained and never heard from again. Peck dramatizes the terror of those whose loved ones are detained and the injustices suffered by those who, as Hurbon points out, were perceived as anti-Duvalier. In keeping with Trouillot's analysis, Mme Desrouilliere's story is an example of how women and the elderly lost their privileged status under Duvalier.

Peck's film is important because it speaks from the margins, in keeping with Gabriel's theories of Third Cinema. He speaks from the margins through Sarah's memory, and he also privileges the margins through the character of Sorel. After being beaten senseless, Sorel is homeless and eats only because of Sarah's grandmother and others' generosity. Relegated to the margins because he lives on the street, he is no longer seen as a threat since he is considerably less articulate and walks with a limp. Despite his physical deformities and his outbursts while relating to other Haitians in town, he delivers lucid messages at times. At one point he states, "Who invented the macoute? God says it's not him, the Devil says its not him Duvalier says. Haiti, f-ck you!"⁸ With these words, we are privy to Sorel's thoughts on the Duvalier state as he suggests it aggressively disregards the lives of its citizens. Sorel is the true L'homme sur le Quai, the consummate outsider. In this sense, his role is best executed when he saves Sarah and her friend from Monsieur Janvier.

At the film's conclusion, Sarah' and her friend's body, become the ultimate site of constestation. The struggle for power and for liberation takes place around the body of a young girl. She is the "last" person to whom Fanon refers because she has been marginalized, is related to her father and her god father, is the owner of youth and gender that no longer provides refuge in this violent world. Françoise Lionnet is a French feminist who provides an interesting analysis regarding the need for control of one's body in the face of repressive environments like Duvalier's Haiti. According to Lionnet, in "Geographies of Pain: Captive Bodies and Violent Acts in the Fiction of Myriam Warner-

Vieyra, Gayl Jones, and Bessie Head," the "struggle for control of their own bodies determines the ultimate act of resistance and survival performed by [the heroines of these novels]."⁹ Sarah's character has a lot in common with the protagonists in these novels in that she witnesses a lot of violence in her short life. At the end of the film, Sarah and her friend are by the shore when they are attacked by Janvier who attempts to rape them. Due to the haunting image of her godfather's torture, her parents departure and her grandmother's disappearance, Sarah carries her father's gun with her to the beach. Armed also with the knowledge that anything can happen in her homeland, she is ready to be violent if attacked. This is the culminating scene in which Peck demonstrates what Trouillot refers to as the "politicization of gender with violence" (Trouillot 167), and along the same lines, the extent to which notions such as the innocence of youth and the sanctity of femininity were destroyed by Duvalier. When a shot rings out, Sarah thinks she kills Janvier—undoubtedly a definitive moment in her life. Lionnet directly addresses this point when she writes, "the women's subjection to forms of social control that further marginalize these women does not, however, succeed in annihilating their need for... personal agency, even if this only manifests itself in dramatically violent acts."¹⁰ In light of this citation, it seems Sarah carries the weapon, waiting for the moment when she will have to assert her agency in this violent world. Peck demonstrates that even though Sarah is completely marginalized, she still has a means of resistance. Sarah does fire and Janvier is shot, but it is Sorel, her godfather who delivers the fatal shot. Peck constructs his narrative for the following reason: he provides Sarah with a means of resistance—her father's gun which has the potential to ultimately kill an attacker. Peck, however, is uncomfortable with the complete disarmament of Sarah's innocence, and instead allows her godfather, Sorel, the man by the shore, to take the blood on his hands.

In conclusion, Peck critiques the Duvalier state by dramatizing what Trouillot calls the "loss of innocence." Peck demonstrates how the macoute would use all means to intimidate and terrorize members of Haitian society including women, children, and the elderly. Peck uses the concept of memory to demonstrate that the keepers of the past have an important role in their nations future: they must dare to look backwards in order to guarantee that the sins of the past are not repeated. Peck's project reflects Gabriel's notion of the importance of memory with respect to Third Cinema. "Third Cinema," he writes, "serves not only to rescue memories, but rather, and more significantly to give history a push and popular memory a future" (Gabriel 64). The future will only be secured if protagonists like young Sarah, who represent the marginalized in Duvalier's Haiti, have an opportunity to tell their story in films such as Peck's *The Man by the Shore*. ▲

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The Black Body: *Surviving Under Siege*

by Halifu Osumare

The black body has been under siege ever since the trans-Atlantic slave trade began. After all, bodies which are classified, ordered, valorized and devalued, yet used as property, are detached from their personhoods and become objects. Difference is socio-politically created based on arbitrary markers of skin color, facial phenotypes, hair texture, and size of female buttocks. Objectifying the black body has preoccupied Europeans from the 15th century until today, producing horrific social phenomena and insidious institutions: the “Hottentot Venus” of early 19th century European medical science,¹ social Darwinism and the Great Chain of Beings, the U.S. institution of slavery by “God-fearing” Christians, Jim Crow laws and “scientific” racism through the use of craniometry in turn-of-the-century America, and most recently the glass ceiling of today’s corporate America, when Texaco corporate executives used 19th century “coon” jokes about blacks and watermelons to degrade African Americans. Black bodies have been objectified from the multiplicity of African ethnicities from the Wolof to the Amhara, from the Kung to the Susu. Black bodies have been exteriorized and extricated from the deep philosophical soul force which dwells within the cultures producing those bodies. Black bodies have been under siege and still are.

David Golberg parallels the familiar concept of the body as a “bounded system, whose parts and functions are related in a complex structure,” to that of a metaphor for “the body politic, to symbolize society.”² Racist discourse, growing out of the inchoate objectification of the body, serves as the indispensable foundation for the economic and social institutions of exclusion. Goldberg explains that, “. . . human bodies, because they are different, are forced to work, disenfranchised, and restricted in their right of social entry and mobility. . . . [The] classification of physical difference determines order; hierarchy is established on a basis of purity.”³ Yet racial purity in America does not exist. This is one of the themes of Ishmael Reed’s new anthology *MultiAmerica* (1997), which challenges the notion of racial purity among whites. Though long suspected, The recent scientific proof of Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings bi-racial offsprings is an illuminatingly poignant case in point. If there is an Indian and a European (rapist) in every black person’s closet, then there are surely Africans in the back upper shelf of Euro-Americans’ cupboard. Yet if (purity of) race is an erroneous concept to begin with, then what are we talking about? Are we talking about power—the power to name, classify, and have the world believe in a dubious (unifying) myth?

For whatever it’s worth this myth has created unique cultures of the “New World” that we call the African diaspora. The people of this diaspora not only have the common experience of the spurious objectification of the black body, but also have unique, often unconscious, syntheses of those original discrete African cultures. And most blacks implicitly know that those “syntheses” we call black culture are boundless, not limited, circumscribed or parochial (even if particularized by region of the diaspora). The acts of expression of those syntheses like Aretha’s holler in “Respect”, George Clinton and the Parliament Funkadelics’ postmodern techno-funk performances, The catharsis of carnival in Trinidad and Tobago, August Wilson’s decade by decade black explorations in theater, or choreographer Jawole Willa Jo Zollar’s dance-theater piece, “Praise House,” tell us that the experience of so-called “blackness” is infinite. This black infinity is not even confined to the so-called black body. Michael Eric Dyson puts it this way: “Fiction and jazz, for instance, urge us to savor the outer limits of our imagination as the sacred space of cultural identity. When advocates of particular versions of Afrocentrism and black nationalism claim a common uniqueness for black life, they deny the repertoire of difference that characterizes African cultures.”⁴

Given this socially-constructed difference of race and our common experience of being the literal human bodies on which much of the New World economies were built, the black body has become, for us, a sense of internalized identity—a belonging, and on historic occasion some semblance of unity. For black women, this belongingness has been especially important because we have had to be the nurturers of

the black family, holding it together, cherishing it, loving it, as fragile as it often is. This is a historic truth and a contemporary reality for still too many black families. Bell hooks suggests in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* that her concept of “loving blackness as political resistance” in a white supremacist society was unthinkable to most students in her Princeton University class on black women writers. She painfully reveals that “they wanted to talk about black

self-hatred, to hear one another confess (especially students of color) in eloquent narratives about the myriad ways they had tried to attain whiteness, if only symbolically.”⁵ The sense of belonging to the internalized identity called “blackness”, in other words, is becoming insignificant to many middle-class college educated black youth, while identification with white privilege is becoming near devotional. This is happening in the same contemporary era when President Clinton deemed it necessary to have a national commission on race, and a black man in Jasper, Texas was dragged to death behind a pick-up truck by three white supremacists. The black body is still under siege, literally and symbolically—the two levels which must work hand in hand to keep white supremacy in place and the black body, as “the other,” objectified.

As an antidote to this continuing insidious system, bell hooks offers “black love” as a saving grace. She dedicates *Black Looks*

to all of us who love blackness,
who dare to create in our daily lives
spaces of reconciliation and forgiveness
where we let go of past hurt, fear, shame
and hold each other close.
It is only in the act and practice
of loving blackness
that we are able to reach out
and embrace the world
without destructive bitterness
and ongoing collective rage.
Holding each other close across differences,
beyond conflict, through change,
is an act of resistance.

In a fast-moving, materialist, MTV sound-bites, and cyberspace computer bytes oriented world, love, itself, is a revolutionary concept. Love of the most reviled human representation—the black body demonized first by the nomenclature of “darkness” and “black” in the English language—is probably the most resistive act that one (any human) can have. This fact is a sad commentary in the age of Oprah Winfrey, Michael Jordan, Colin Powell, and Toni Morrison, but it is still absolutely true. The racist discourse of the last five hundred years, beginning with the “Age of Discovery” is still alive and well, and the black body is still at the center of this discourse.

This is exactly what Toni Morrison grappled with in *Beloved* (1987) and what Ntozake Shange revealed ten years earlier in *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf* (1977). Morrison openly discussed *Beloved* as a revision of the real life story of Margaret Garner, long before Oprah Winfrey’s feature film made the historical account popular. Garner, as a runaway Kentucky slave woman killed her three-year old daughter with a butcher’s knife rather than have her child returned to slavery upon their being caught



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TAHIR HEMPHIL

and surrounded by slave catchers. Morrison explained that,

*"It occurred to me that the questions about community and individuality were certainly inherent in that incident as I imagined it. When you are the community, when you are your children, when that is your individuality, there is no division...Margaret Garner didn't do what Medea did and kill her children because of some guy. It was, for me, this classic example of a person determined to be responsible."*⁶

And now *Beloved*, the ghost of the dead slave child in the novel, not only haunts Sethe and Denver in Morrison's story, but she haunts all of us today as a Pulitzer Prize-winning literary reminder of the need for the promotion of integrity over degradation, of black love over black bondage.

Shange's contemporary Lady in Brown seems to speak to *Beloved*, the slave child of the past when she says in *For Colored Girls*...

I can't hear anythin
but maddening screams
& the soft strains of death
& you promised me
you promised me . . .
somebody/anybody
sing a black girl's song
bring her out
to know herself
to know you
but sing her rhythms
carin/struggle/hard times
sing her song of life
she's been dead so long
closed in silence so long
she doesn't know the sound of her own voice
her infinite beauty

This is what bell hooks means by "loving blackness." It is a necessary act of resistance, "refusing to be humbled," to borrow a term from Alice Walker, "in a contest you did not design."

We want "her infinite beauty" to be known. We also want "his" infinite beauty to be known. That's why The Million Woman March had to take place in Philadelphia on October 25, 1997 in true African call-and-response to the Million Man March a year earlier in Washington DC. The women journeyed and gathered just as the men had in 1996. Seas of black bodies, touching, mingling, testifying to the need for black love, the sisterly kind and the brotherly kind. The black voice—the articulation of the soul contained within the black body—has always been the conscience of America. It has been heard throughout this country's history in the personhoods of Wheatly, Douglass, Wells, Washington, Du Bois, Marshall, King Jr., and Malcom. The cry of the integrity of the human spirit as it comes through the objectified black body has continually given America a wake-up call. Yet hooks tells us today that the young ones are falling to the glitter of the gold, the carrot that has always remained out of reach to the black masses. In this era of mirages, we must be especially diligent to keep the cry of the human spirit alive, the dance of the human soul in motion, if nothing else but for the youth who must know this alternative to self-hatred and self-destruction.

But "otherness" is not only created along racial lines in America. The AIDS epidemic has brought home to us the lack of compassion that can be engendered among so-called rational people of all ethnicities. The African American population has been devastated by this insidious disease of the immune system. Blacks with HIV or AIDS are, therefore, dou-

bly stigmatized, often by other African Americans. Issues of homophobia, ignorance of how the disease spreads, and classism, have all coagulated into an often vitriolic response to seriously-ill people. Internationally-acclaimed choreographer Bill T. Jones's experience of being black with HIV in his 1994 monumental dance work *Still/Here* is a brave testament. It proclaims how courageous people with terminal illnesses can leave the superficiality of our socially-constructed world of appearances and ask, as Jones does, "the profoundest question: literally what is life and death." What does it look like, what does it feel like, taste like, smell like?"

Still/Here is an evening-length dance piece performed by the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company. It grew out of a survival workshop conducted by Jones with black and white people of all ages and with various terminal illnesses. The PBS television documentary, "Bill T. Jones, *Still Here* with Bill Moyers," chronicles the process of creating the dance work out of the movement explorations of non-dancers in the survival workshop to his professional dance company. Moyers interviews Jones about his essential creative process. Jones necessarily draws from his own life, and during the interview exposes a major turning point in his meeting of Arnie Zane, whom he describes as a "Jewish intellectual homosexual." Jones explains in a characteristic movement/spoken text exploration, "We fought like hell. Can you image how a white man and a black man could live together and not fight like hell in this country?" He goes on in a kind of disembodied elucidation: "The man and his partner fight like hell, and love each other?"

Jones continues telling his life story to Moyers. After he confessed that Arnie Zane had died in the mid-80s of AIDS, he follows with, "One day the man tells a reporter on the wrong day that he, himself, is HIV positive. He then becomes no longer Bill, but he is an HIV, black male, homosexual." He confronts the concept of depersonalized objectification and the role of the media in this process. Jones proceeds, again as if he is outside of his own black body: "He thinks of

the moment when Arnie stopped breathing, and how he was sure he felt a breeze go by his head." In the end it was life passing and love shared that truly counted between the two men. The world of socially-constructed difference based on race, and the real difference of the white and black experiences of America gave way to the ultimate reality of life: love and death in Jones's own life. This is what Jones asked each participant of the survival workshop to do in confronting his/her own life and death struggle. This is what life asks of America as a country, where all the races of humankind are battling it out in a nation founded upon the contradictory principles of individual freedom and hierarchical racism. This is what life asks each of us in its demand for human empathy, compassion, and ultimate transcendence: "What is real, what is most important?"

I had a personal experience of this kind of profound human empathy in performing my black theater production "Middle Passage: The Beat of the African American Journey" in Kalaupapa, on the beautiful peninsula of the Hawaiian island of Moloka'i. Kalaupapa was the former 19th century leper colony, where thousands of Hansen's-disease (formerly called leprosy) patients were dumped over board to try to survive in a remote and then uninhabited area of Hawaii. Today, the remaining patients' disease is in remission since the discovery of the antidote in the 1940s. They and many of their caretakers have created an insular, caring community built around this special history. Our audience consisted of nurses, Catholic nuns and former patients

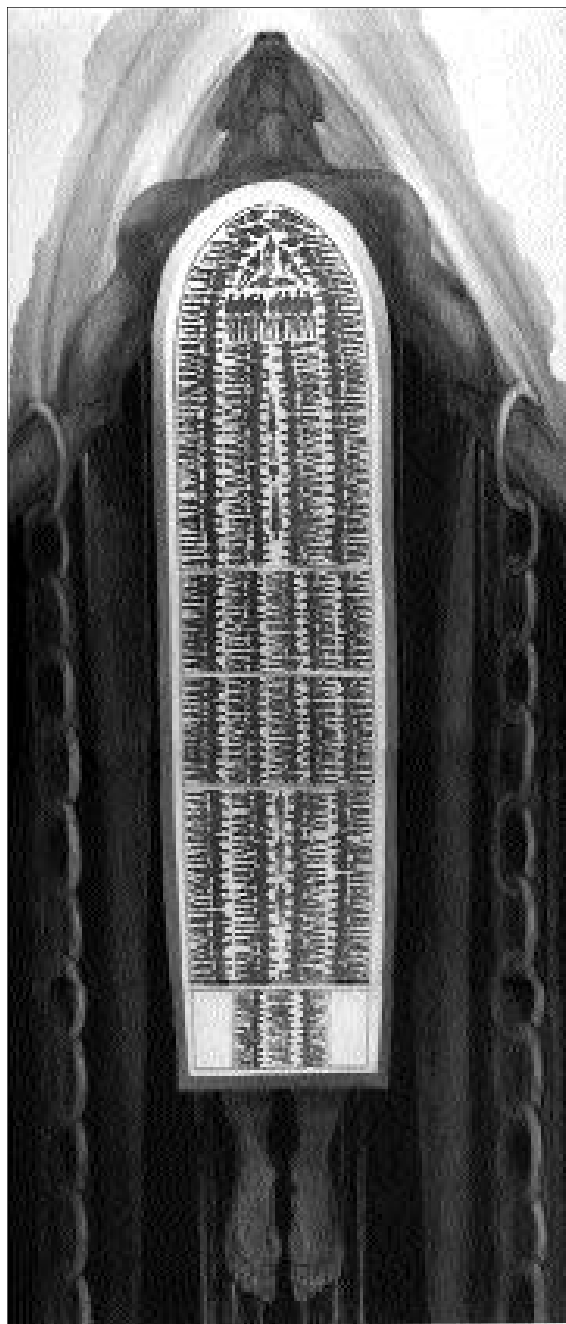


illustration from *The Middle Passage* TOM FEELINGS

(continued next page)

The Black Body:

(continued from page 9)

who have been left with several physical deformities. “Middle Passage” transports the audience from the glories of ancient African civilizations through slavery and southern sharecropping, as well as the African American cultural contributions to the cakewalk, Big Band, bebop, and rhythm and blues eras. The totality of this cultural and historical trajectory was indeed an eye-opening experience for them.

The scripted ending lines of “Middle Passage” are: “And our people have had to use this celebration to get through some of the hardest times you can ever imagine.” At the moment I delivered my memorized lines, I realized that these Hansen-disease victims knew their own kind of social pain, having been ostracized from the rest of Hawaiian society for a near century. In recognition of this fact, I ad-libbed some added sentiments to reaffirm the need for every kind of “minority” to uphold their humanity and to resist succumbing to the majority view of possessing less than full human dignity. As I finished and looked out into the audience, I saw a teary-eyed group of people coming to their feet. They wholeheartedly identified with the pain of the black experience through their own unique experience of otherness. They too had been objectified out of their humanity, and had had to struggle to maintain a sense of self-worth. It was then that I realized that the black body has become symbolic of many who are marginalized. Racism is not classism, is not sexism, is not homophobia, but each of us must fight every attempt at wresting the humanity from the least of us. For none of us are free until all of us are free.▲

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1 Sander L. Gilman writes about the pathological fascination of 19th century European medical doctors with African women's buttocks and vaginas as a way of explaining racial difference and black inferiority. The African type most described was from the Southern African region and was dubbed the “Hottentot Venus”. See Sander L. Gilman, *Differences & Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985). Also see Gilman's *Sexuality: An Illustrated History: Representation of the Sexual in Medicine and Culture from the Middle Ages to the Age of AIDS* (New York: Wiley Pub., 1989).

2 David Goldberg, “The Social Formation of Racist Discourse,” David Goldberg, ed., *Anatomy of Racism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 306.

3 *Ibid.*, 306.

4 Michael Eric Dyson, *Between God and Gansta Rap: Bearing Witness to Black Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 124.

5 bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 10.

6 Toni Morrison quoted in Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 219.

7 This phrase is the title of Alice Walker's dedication as editor of *I Love Myself When I am Laughing...: A Zora Neale Hurston Reader* (Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1979). The full title of the dedication reads: “On Refusing to Be Humbled by Second Place in a Contest You Did Not Design: A Tradition by Now.”

Reverse Colorism and the Politics of Black Class and Gender Representation in Soul Food

by Erin Chapman

In the fall of 1997 it seemed that the whole campus—or at least the 8% black portion thereof— was going to see *Soul Food*. Everybody went: the Resident Assistants in Ujamaa escorted groups of freshman, the Black Student Union organized a carpool, upperclassmen took their girlfriends, women went in groups of friends, and all my friends somehow managed to go without me. They all returned to campus making glowing remarks about positive representation and how much they missed their mother's, grandmother's or aunt's cooking. Stanford dining services just couldn't compare. When I finally saw the movie with my family during the summer of 1998, I at first agreed with this dominant assessment. *Soul Food* is indeed a positive step away from the “gangsta-ism” rampant in the black movies produced a few years earlier, and it replaces the cool, oversexed niggas Hollywood popularized with Eddie Murphy in the 1980s¹ with family-oriented, well-meaning black men. As Chris Farley put it in *Time*, the film was “a welcome little victory for cinematic wholesomeness” (85).

However, as I watched the film again, it dawned on me that *Soul Food* has earned the coveted adjective “positive” and is praised as “down home” (Farley 86) because it replaces negative white stereotypes of black people with negative black stereotypes of black women, the black middle class and light-skinned black people. Although *Soul Food* was well-received as a positive film about black culture and family life, its portrayal of the black middle class through the character Teri (Vanessa Williams) is sexist, pejorative and divisive. The film draws on the black female stereotype of Sapphire and the marking of light skin as treacherous; and the black middle class as treasonous in order to make Teri the symbol for everything wrong in the black community.

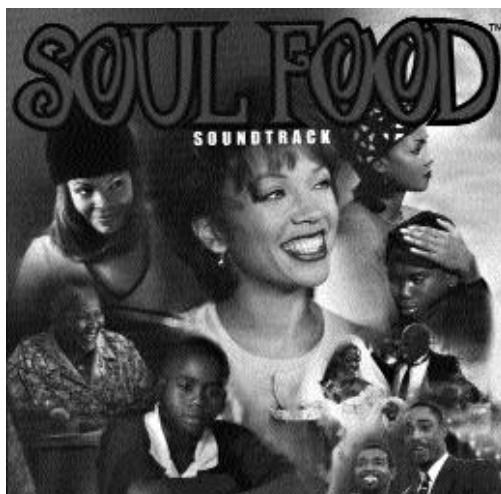
The first time I watched *Soul Food* with my family, my father commented at the conclusion, “That Maxine (Vivica Fox) stole the

show, boy. She's the best of the three of them.” Director George Tillman, Jr. caught him — hook, line and sinker. Ostensibly a film about black family life, *Soul Food* presents the fate of a family of three sisters when their mother, the bedrock of the family, dies of diabetes complications. This film is not about sisterhood, but about family life. I draw this distinction because, unlike something like *Waiting to Exhale*, *Soul Food* does not celebrate or even fully represent relationships between black women.² Rather, the film focuses on relationships between men and women, using the relationships between the three Joseph sisters and their cousin Faith to forward the plot and make points about the state of the black family. Furthermore, the characters of *Soul Food* are not individuals but recognizable types from the black community. In this way, the Joseph family and its men form a microcosm of the black community. Within this microcosm, the back-biting and competition between Teri and Maxine represents war for validation of a certain type of black womanhood.

As Tillman intended, my father was seduced by the deployment of the stereotype of the light-skinned, middle-class woman which encourages the viewer to prefer Maxine over Teri. My father is a

black middle-class corporate lawyer, and he has a light-skinned, hazel-eyed, sandy-haired daughter. Therefore, he should not be susceptible to the class and skin-color symbols Tillman uses. However, there is another element of Teri's character that repelled him. Besides being a light-skinned traitor and too stiffly middle-class to participate fully or sympathize wholly with the other members of the black family, Teri is a Sapphire, otherwise known in the late sixties and early seventies as a “castrating bitch”, or more recently as the black feminist.

Teri Joseph, the yellow-skinned, blue-eyed, red-haired character Tillman created to represent the upwardly-mobile, black middle-class woman, is stiff in her movements, clipped, proper in her speech, and always conservatively dressed. She is a successful corporate lawyer, the financial backer of the Joseph family for everything from weddings to property taxes on the family house. Her husband is also a lawyer, and



Soul Food cd cover TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX FILMCORP.

Reverse Colorism

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along the lines of unacknowledged homosexual desire and bourgeois hegemony. He argues that Irene and Brian are both homosexuals who repress their true selves in order to live within the proscriptions of black American middle class acceptability. While I am not convinced by Blackmore's assertion of the Redfields' homosexuality, I do find his analysis of their passionless marriage and bourgeois hegemony useful.

Blackmore draws out Larsen's implication that "middle-class marriages... are oriented toward the procurement of social advantage; love and sexual intimacy are secondary concerns" (478). Though Teri does not have Irene's lack of emotional investment in her husband, she is preoccupied, as Irene is, with social and economic status. Just as Irene subtly hinted at the dissolution of their marriage when Brian ardently expresses his desire to move to Brazil, and therefore turn his back on the pursuit of the American dream, so does Teri admonish Miles, saying "Any lawyer worth their salt wants to make partner" and scathingly dismisses his musical pursuits as "music crap" which prevents him from achieving his full economic potential. Teri refuses to attend Miles performances. The viewer suspects her of absencing herself as an underhanded form of protest, a signal that she will never support her husband's move away from the corporate ladder. It is Teri's strict adherence to and belief in the inviolability of what her cousin Faith calls "the straight job thing" which most obviously marks her as soulless and non-supportive of black culture throughout the course of the film. In the end, she is punished for this soullessness through the loss of her husband to the sexy, uninhibited and expressive dancer, Faith.

Soullessness is a problem attributed to the black middle class as a whole. Amiri Baraka's most famous work, the play *Dutchman*, asserts that soulfulness, or unrestricted sexuality, passion and self-expression, are "the pure heart, the pumping black heart" (96-97) of the race. The stiff, buttoned-up, educated and ambitious black middle-class, represented by Clay, has learned to hide its soul in order to succeed in white society. Throughout the play, Clay's carriage, education and demeanor earn him ceaseless, scathing barbs from Lula, the white female character. She tells him he is "an escaped nigger" who has "crawled through the wire and made tracks to [her] side" (93). Mocking his affiliation with American bourgeois values, she asks him "What right do you have to be wearing a three-button suit? Your grandfather was a slave, he didn't go to Harvard" (86). She finally calls him a "middle class black bastard" and demands that he "forget [his] social-working mother for a few seconds" and "knock stomachs" (94) with her — that is, express his repressed sexual nature. These vulgar taunts are insulting and sound racist from a white woman. However, they are reminiscent of E. Franklin Frazier's conclusion that the "black bourgeoisie" is a pitiful imitation of white middle-class society, searching for but never achieving the American dream, living in a "make-believe" world (Frazier 188-191). Frazier's critique, coupled with Lula's vulgarity and Clay's eruption into violent outrage, links the denouncement of the black middle class in *Dutchman* to the scathing critiques of the black middle class which emerged during the Black Power movement. Thus, though Lula's insults are extremely pejorative and can be read as racist, they are more readily perceived as a "true" critique of the black middle class according to the Black Power values which *Dutchman* represents and Baraka championed.

With this historical and sociological background, then, it becomes apparent that Teri's lack of soul (her habitual stoicism, stiff composure and coolness) is not merely an individual trait, but a mark of her class status and the aspirations which isolate her from the other characters. She is portrayed as out of touch with black heritage, unable to join fully in black family fun, and non-supportive of black cultural expression through her denunciation of Miles' musical career and Faith's goal to become a dancer. As the rest of the family dissolves into joyous chaos after Maxine announces that "it's time" for her to have her baby, Teri remains seated and pragmatically demands the name of her sister's doctor. As she becomes increasingly frustrated that no one answers, it is obvious that her concern with this minor logistic is preventing her from joining in the family camaraderie surrounding her sister's labor. Again employing logic rather than consulting her emotions and familial loyalties, Teri insists on selling her mother's house in order to pay the hospital bills and taxes, regardless of the house's profound sentimental value for the family. This is an example of "selling out" the cultural and historical interests of the black family or the black community, in

order to gain financial advantage—an act of treason of which middle-class leaders have been accused by various people within the community.

With a particularly venomous argument in Mama Jo's hospital room, Teri breaks the time-honored tradition of Sunday dinner, claiming that proper decorum demands that the family not come together in happiness while Mama Jo lies comatose in a hospital bed. Maxine, on the other hand, argues for the continuation of family tradition, and her argument calls to mind the black tradition of emotionally expressive celebration in the face of tragedy and pain. Teri's logical mind, conservatism and soullessness, the viewer comes to understand, have guaranteed her success in the corporate world, but these traits create a nearly irreconcilable chasm between herself and her dearest family members, including her husband, and cause them and herself great emotional distress. Representing the inability of the black middle class to fully sympathize with the majority of the black community, Teri is the Joseph family's main problem.

The unifying theme of *Soul Food* is stated by its favored character, Maxine, when she counsels Bird on her marital relationship outside a restaurant bathroom. Maxine, the fulfilled wife and mother, wisely advises Bird, "A man has to be a man, and if he feels you take that away from him, he has nothing." Recalling the family crisis of their childhood in which their father's gambling nearly caused the loss of the family house, Maxine continues saying of Big Mama, "She didn't trip. She just did what she had to do and left him with his dignity. Men need that."

Representing the figure Wahneema Lubiano calls "the black lady, the one whose disproportionate overachievement stands for black cultural strangeness and who ensures the underachievement of 'the black male' in lower classes" (Lubiano 335), which others have called

Sapphire, Teri threatens black manhood and thereby the dominant political and cultural thrust of the black community through her unabashed success and corporate aspirations. Employing this figure in Teri, *Soul Food* comes directly out of the tradition of emphasizing black manhood over black womanhood and regarding black female achievement as dangerous to black family stability and the well-being of black heterosexual relationships.

Throughout the film, we see that the sisters' marriages succeed or fail based on their willingness and ability to let their men "be men"—to make important decisions without interference, be the principal providers, and exercise their preferences and will. Bird temporarily loses Lem because, doubting his ability to do so for himself, she uses her unsavory connection with Semiwell to get him a job. Maxine is blissfully happy in her marriage, and, as a full-time homemaker, wife and mother, she takes no role in family support. Her husband, Kenny, makes a major decision to buy a full-scale computer "for the baby" without consulting her, and she treats this as a delightful surprise. On the other hand, Teri loses her husband because she did not "take care of him." She insists that he inform her when he withdraws money from their savings; she belittles his musical interests; she refuses to support his decision to give his full time to his music career, clearly stating her preference that he continue to climb the corporate ladder on which their marriage is based.

Commenting on the Clarence Thomas confirmation proceedings, Nellie McKay observes, "Anita Hill committed treason against the race" by moving against "the understood inviolability of race loyalty" when she exposed Thomas' sexual misconduct. This loyalty espouses that the oppression black men have suffered and continue to suffer at the hands of the white world entitles them to the unequivocal support of black women, even to the point of women's self-denial. Interestingly, there are no circumstances that require that sacrifice of black men. (McKay 282) In *Soul Food*, Tillman has reinscribed this long-held demand of black women. He shows the viewer that black women are the ones who must change and adjust to their men's needs if black heterosexual relationships are to survive and if the black community is to thrive. After Maxine's wise speech advising Bird to "let a man be a man," Bird replies, "I just wish I could be like you, and so does Teri. That's why she acts the way she does." Teri shows the truth of Bird's statement when, in her final scene with Miles, she laments, "I don't know what happened. It seems that everything I love, I lose." What happened is that Teri, as a feminist career woman with clearly defined and unswervable goals and proscriptions, was unable to embody Maxine's ideal of womanhood. She refused to limit her goals, abilities, beliefs in any way for her man, and lost him as the result. By punishing Teri in this way,

Wole' Soyinka: Playwright and Political Activist

by: Renee Charlow

Abstract

Wole Soyinka's work is frequently described as demanding, yet rewarding reading. Thematically, his work focuses on the portrayal of good versus evil, and progress versus tradition. His writings are highly acclaimed and widely praised, yet they are not usually performed outside his native Africa. This research will explore the work of Wole Soyinka and his controversial, and insightful writing.¹

Biographical Information

Akinwande Oluwole' Soyinka was born on July 13, 1934, in Ake', Abeokuta in what was then the Western region of Nigeria. He was the second offspring of Christian converts Samuel Ayodele, a missionary school headmaster, and Grace Anile Soyinka, a political activist and teacher. Grace was the great-granddaughter of Revered J.J. Ransome Kuti, a Yoruba politician who in 1905 delivered a sermon at St. Paul's Cathedral. Her uncle, I.O. Ransome Kuti, principal of the Abeokuta Grammar School, was a political figure who served on the commission which advised the British government concerning secondary education affairs. Grace's family played a pioneering role in the spread of Christianity through Western Nigeria by composing music which combined the Yoruba and European culture. Her family fondly referred to her a "Wild Christian" because of her powerful unwavering faith in God.

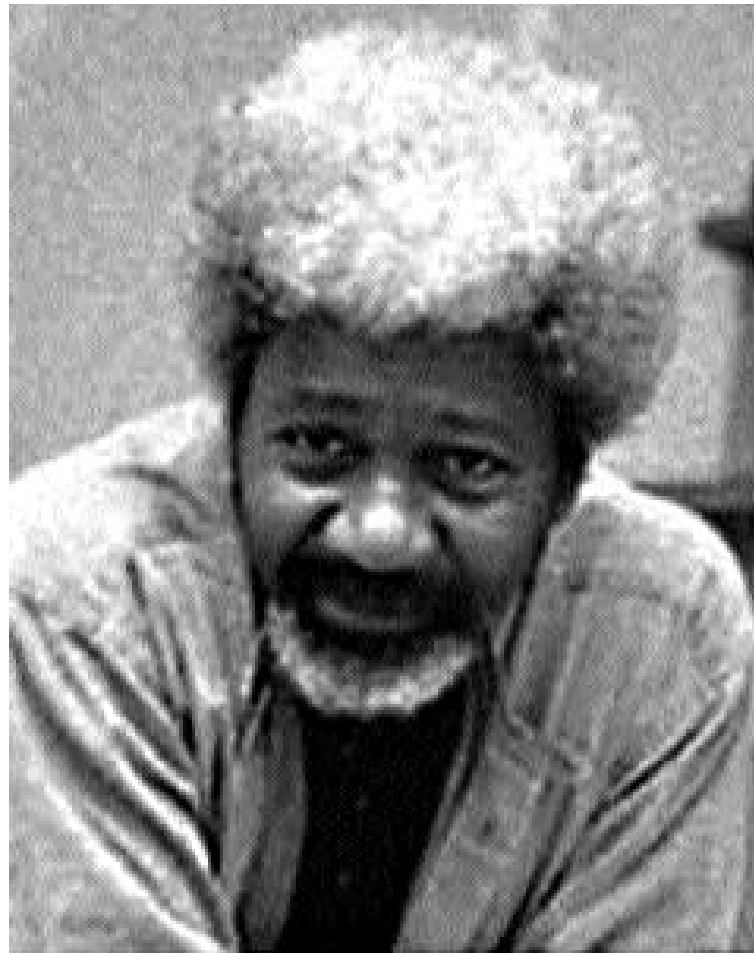
On the other hand, Wole's father Samuel was a precise, scholarly man who early on engaged his son in work play and thought provoking arguments. Soyinka recalls that he, "seemed to be on a first name basis with God." (1) Samuel's father introduced Wole' to tribal folklore and tradition, as well as the holy temple (pantheon) that housed the souls of Yoruba gods. It was his grandfather who would administer the scarification ritual of manhood on twelve year old Wole against the wishes of his parents. The ritual involved incisions around the ankles that were intended to provide strength as well as protection from poison during conflicts with larger opponents. Soyinka was also consecrated to the god Ogun, an explorer and hunter in Yoruban folklore. The Ogun figure appears regularly in Soyinka's work. (2)

Soyinka's home, the village of Ake', consisted mainly of people from the Yoruban tribe and was presided over by the ogboni (tribal elders). Wole recalls Christian influences such as the parsonage, with its canon calling on his educated parents on Sunday afternoon, employing them to spread the message of Christianity to all who would listen. Soyinka was aware of the conflicting cultures that existed in his surroundings, images that simultaneously intrigued and fascinated, yet confused him. Later, he became more aware of the vast distinction between traditional African culture and contemporary Western influence. The coexistence of these two cultures impressed themselves upon the sensitivity of a young Wole', who understood the many contradictions between Yoruba and Christianity. His natural intuitive nature would prompt him to further explore these differences and express them artistically in his later years.

Education

Wole' Soyinka's formal education began in 1938 at St. Peter's Primary School, the Christian missionary school led by his father. In 1944, he spent a year at the more Yoruban oriented Abeokuta Grammar School under the unchallenged authority of his great-uncle Ransome. The naturally inquisitive youth excelled in both schools and at twelve enrolled at the elite Government College in Ibadan. It was here that Soyinka wrote sketches for his house drama group and composed poetry which he recited at art festivals. In 1950, after receiving his School

Certificate, he went to work as a clerk in Lagos. During his tenure in Lagos, his short stories were read on the national broadcasting service and served as a pacesetter for Nigerian radio drama. He prepared to enter the recently established University College, Ibadan and in October of 1952 began his undergraduate studies following coursework in English, Greek, and History. He continued his creative writing and edited *The Eagle*, a student publication. After passing the intermediate Arts Examination, he entered the University of Leeds, where he majored in English.



Soyinka

[HTTP://GLOBETROTTER.BERKELEY.EDU/ELBERG/SOYINKA/](http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/elberg/soyinka/)

His studies at the University of Leeds exposed him to Western thinkers and writers. The curriculum included a course on world drama taught by Shakespearian critic George Wilson Knight. The two men developed a mutually rewarding intellectual relationship, as Knight subsequently introduced Soyinka to the writing of German philosopher Nietzsche. Knight admits, "I admired and liked Soyinka greatly and his work at Leeds, but his later work in both essays and drama I found rather difficult.... [H]is mature writing is far more difficult than were his admirable lucid essays at Leeds." (3) Wole also absorbed the work of master dramatists including Brecht, O'Neill, and Strindberg. In his autobiography, Soyinka says he "admired Brecht's complete freedom with the medium of the theater, but was less interested in his purpose or intentions." (4) In 1957, Soyinka

graduated with honors, receiving a Bachelor of Arts in English from Leeds University. He work on his Masters of Arts, but his real interest was in writing. He began drafting two important plays, *The Swamp Dwellers* (1963), a story about the moral realignment necessary to make the land resourceful and the community whole in rural Nigeria, and *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963), a comedy in which a village chief and a school teacher compete with each other for the hand of the most beautiful girl in the village. *The Lion and the Jewel* was read by Anne Piper of the Royal Court Theater in Sloane Square, London. As a result, Wole' was invited to become to reader with the Royal Court Theater. During his tenure with the distinguished company, he completed and acted in *The Swamp Dwellers* and worked on another production, *The Invention* (1963). The latter mentioned work is a comedic satire depicting the sudden loss of pigment by South Africa's black population. The play characterized governmental chaos, due to an inability to distinguish blacks from whites. *The Swamp Dwellers* and *The Lion and the Jewel* were presented in

Nigeria as Soyinka completed work in England. His connection with the Royal Court afforded him the chance to study the work of several traditional as well as avant-garde European playwrights among them Samuel Beckett, Bertold Brecht, Harold Pinter, Herik Ibsen and Anton Checkov. Soyinka remained in the United Kingdom until 1960, when he returned to Nigeria.

The Return Home

In early 1960, Nigeria was in the infancy of its new independence. Soyinka returned to Nigeria and commenced a two year Rockefeller research studentship through which he undertook a conscious firsthand

study of Nigerian culture. He immersed himself in Nigerian dramatic, cultural, and political life. He conducted intense research into Yoruba folklore and drama by traveling the country and participating in the festivals of the gods and community rituals. He noticed, however, that there was no Nigerian drama written in English. The typical Nigerian theater-goer's concept of English language drama was J.E. Henshaw's *This is Our Chance*. This dramatic work was successful mainly because of its subject matter. The play's language imitated Elizabethan accents, and was unlike the English regularly heard in the streets of Nigerian villages and cities. Consequently, Soyinka played an integral role in the Nigerian English Language theater by writing plays dealing with the everyday life and struggle of the native residents and by expressing his work in a familiar language. Wole' established "The Masks" the first Nigerian English language theater company. He admits "My whole sense of theater is to write always with a specific company in mind, and in a sense I write with that (my original) company in mind." (5) With several friends who moonlighted as amateur actors, he formed "The 1960 Masks" and presented his work *A Dance of the Forests* (1963). The October 10 opening of the production coincided with events celebrating Nigeria's independence, and deliberately challenged the perceived governmental expectations about the future of the country. The play served to remind Nigeria that the end of colonial rule did not mean an end of the country's problems. It portrays a bickering group of mortals who summon up the egungun (spirits of the dead revered by the Yoruba people) for a festival. They presumed the egungun to be noble and wise, but discover that their ancestors are petty and spiteful, much like living people. John Povey of *Tri-Quarterly* writes, "the whole concept ridicules the African viewpoint that glorifies the past at the expense of the present. The sentimentalized glamour of the present is exposed so that the same absurdities would not be reenacted in the future. This constituted a bold assertion to an audience awaiting an easy appeal to racial heroics." (6) This drama, which would establish a sometimes ambivalent relationship between Soyinka and the Nigerian public, received mixed reviews. While *A Dance of the Forests* was considered by some critics rather complex, confusing and shocking, others saw Soyinka as an ambitious, independent thinker, and a skilled dramatist. The play was given special notice by the Swedish Academy's Nobel Prize Committee.

Soyinka's ultimate aim was to form the first English language professional troupes in Nigeria— and his work with "The 1960 Masks" proved excellent insight into the business of maintaining a community-based theater company. However, many of his actors were civil servants, employed in high profile government positions, while Soyinka's writings became increasingly critical of the Nigerian government and the political situation. Soyinka was constantly reminded by his actors that their livelihoods would be jeopardized if they portrayed scenes that were perceived to be critical of the government. By 1962, Soyinka formed "The Orison Theater Company" whose members were full time theater professionals, and willingly took risks involved with presenting the pointed satires. In conjunction with the Orison Theater Company, Soyinka presented his works *Before the Blackout* (1964) and *The New Republican* (1964).

The Development of Global and Political Perspectives

By 1962, Wole' was contributing regularly to Nigerian political controversy through his writing. He manipulated the available news media by complaining about press censorship. His authorial play guaranteed adequate space for the presentation of his views, which he hoped would make an impact on his fellow Nigerians. Wole' began to experience what the literary world had to offer, by attending conferences in Italy and the United States. He secured a position as an English lecturer with the University College, Ife, and defended his position as literary critic in talks and essays. This appointment was short lived after the development of a political crisis in the Western Region. Violence returned to the streets of Western Nigeria with the murder of several outspoken community leaders, and the increasing activity of radical party arsonists. The university's vice-chancellor issued a statement, demanding consummate support of and allegiance to governmental policies from all members of the university community. Oyin Ogbuna recalls how "on hearing the credo (orders) Wole' immediately borrowed a piece of paper from the man sitting next to him in the auditorium and there and then resigned his appointment." (7)

In this politically charged atmosphere, Soyinka produced his first

major work of the mid 1960's, *Kongi's Harvest* (1965), a story characterizing the abuse of power and the tyrants' ability to corrupt an entire population of people. A multi-talented yet ingenious Soyinka premiered this work on the floor of the conference hall of the Federal Palace Hotel in Lagos, without the benefit of a stage. However, expert lighting and appropriate use of music and movement made the production one of his most memorable offerings. The following month, he traveled to London to read *Idanre* (1965) a poem that gives an account of Ogun's (god of metals, transition, exploration and road travel) annual Earth journey, during which he becomes all things to all people.

While *Idanre* was presented as a part of the Commonwealth Arts Festival, Wole' used his public appearances to advise the public of the premiere of *The Road*, which was being concurrently presented at the Theater Royal, Stratford East. He also participated in the recording of *The Detainee* a sharp political piece he wrote for the BBC. *The Road*, a metaphysically-based work, suggests that the egungun masquerade (masquerade of the dead or of ancestral spirits) in modern Nigeria can reveal meaning for those at the bottom of the social class stratus and those who feel they have personally outgrown the ritualistic ceremony. *The Detainee* was broadcast to a large part of the African continent, but it was never published. In addition to these new plays, 1965 saw Soyinka receive an appointment as a senior lecturer at the University of Lagos, and publish his first novel, *The Interpreters*. In this novel, he expands on themes presented in his previous dramas, and subsequently presents a view of Nigerian life immediately after independence.

The Interpreters is loosely structured around casual conversations between five young Nigerian intellectuals. They each had been educated abroad and had returned to Nigeria with hopes of shaping its destiny. While some critics compared Soyinka's writing style to that of James Joyce and William Faulkner, others, were irritated by the "formless" structure of the novel. Critic Neil McEwan pointed out "Although *The Interpreters* does not have a rigidly structured plot, there is unity in the warmth and sharpness of its comic vision. There are moments which sadden or anger, but they also do not diminish the fun." (8)

Incarceration and Exile

Shortly after his return to Nigeria from London, the election to name a new chief was held in the Western region. Chief S.L. Akintola was declared the winner, but most Nigerians believed the results were rigged in favor of an individual who could be manipulated by the government. Soyinka, along with other rival factions, allegedly pulled a coup d'etat, by storming into the radio station, holding the announcer at gunpoint, and replacing the pre-recorded acceptance speech of Akintola with a speech urging the newly elected chief and "his crew of renegades to quit the country." (9) The government considered the broadcast an act of tyranny, and Soyinka was taken into custody. It was never adequately proven that Soyinka was involved in this incident, and after three months of incarceration and a farce-like trial, he was acquitted. A triumphant crowd carried Soyinka out of the courtroom on their shoulders, but he remained an extremely undesirable person in the eyes of the authorities.

By 1967, Nigeria was in a civil war. Soyinka opposed the conflict, especially the Nigerian government's brutal policies toward the Ibo people, who were making attempts to form their own country, Biafra. His contributions to the Nigerian press had a dramatic result— he pleaded with his readers, requesting they seek the appropriate peace initiatives as a means of quelling the increasing violence in the North. His call for a cease-fire in the war against Biafra was accompanied by a sweeping indictment of "patriots and the sordid racketeers," an obvious reference to the government. (10) Soyinka traveled to Biafra to establish a peace commission composed of leading intellectuals from both groups. Upon his return to Nigeria, he was accused of helping the Biafrans purchase jet fighters. Again, Soyinka was detained and incarcerated without formal charges.

For 27 months, Soyinka was imprisoned, primarily in solitary confinement in Kaduna prison. During his incarceration, he was denied reading and writing materials, but ingeniously manufactured his own ink and kept a secret diary, written on toilet tissue, cigarette packages, and in between the lines of the few books he manages to secretly obtain. The atrocious conditions produced one of his most highly acclaimed writings— *The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole' Soyinka* (1972), appropriately titled because of rampant rumors of his death. Charles Lawson called this work "not so much the story of Wole' Soyinka's



Wole' Soyinka

(continued from page 13)

own temporary death during the Nigerian Civil War, but a personified account of Nigeria's fall for sanity, documented by one of the country's leading intellectuals." (11)

Soyinka was released from prison in 1969, and accepted a position as Head of the Theater Department at the University of Ibadan. However, the political climate of the university made it difficult for him to continue his politically themed work. Evidently, an inflammatory letter Soyinka sent to the University of Ibadan during his incarceration had been copied and given to high ranking university officials. In the latter, he referred to specific members of the academic staff as "government stooges, who merely function as arms of a corrupted state." (12) Finally, for many reasons, including personal safety, Soyinka left for Europe in self-imposed exile.

The "brief exile" lasted for nearly five years, and took him to Ghana, Connecticut and Cambridge University. In 1970, he was invited to rehearse and perform a play at the Eugene O'Neill Center, Waterford, Connecticut. He took an incomplete script of *Madmen and*

Specialists (1970) which he completed and presented at the O'Neill Center and in local black communities. He was accompanied by several close professional actor friends, with whom he had maintained contact through the years. *Madmen and Specialists*, set in an unspecified time and place, tells the story of a doctor who is a trained torture specialist. The doctor returns home after the war and uses his new skills on his father. The major theme of the play is the loss of faith and ritual and the total erosion of the family unit.

In 1973, Wole' landed a position as a visiting professor of English at the University of Sheffield. During his tenure at Sheffield, he completed work on his second novel, *Season of Anomy* (1973), a grim tale of mutilations and nightmarish visions in prisons, funeral homes and dark forests. He also completed his play *The Bacchae* of Euripides (1973) his adaptation of the classical drama, commissioned and produced by London's National Theater. In late 1973, he received an overseas fellowship from Churchill College, Cambridge. While at Cambridge, he wrote his most powerful work to date, *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), which is based on a historical event that occurred 10 years earlier. In 1974, Soyinka left Europe for Accra, Ghana, to become editor of Africa's leading intellectual magazine, *Transition*. He renamed the publication *Ch'Indaba*, and began to support socialist revolutionary movements in Africa. After a change of power in 1975, Soyinka returned to Nigeria.

Recent Achievements

In 1977, Soyinka adapted Bertold Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* as *Opera Wonyosi* (1981) and in 1981, completed his autobiography *Ake': The Years of Childhood* (1981). His 1983 dramatic satire, *Requiem for a Futurologist* (1983) portrays a minister's understudy, who aims to destroy his master by predicting his death and printing his masters obituary. His next work, *A Play of Giants* (1984) was an attack on the brutal regimes of modern African political leaders, and their presence at a conference at the United Nations. In the play *Isara: A Voyage Around "Essay"* (1989), Soyinka tells the story of his father, providing sketches of characters and interesting events over a fifteen year period.

Soyinka received international recognition when he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986. The nominating committee singled out *Death and the King's Horseman*, and *A Dance of the Forests* as his most outstanding works. Upon learning of the nomination, Wole' remarked, "I think the prize is a recognition of the whole African literary tradition on which my work is based, by the outside world and by the African world as well." (13) Later that year, he was named commander for the Federal Republic of Nigeria. His most recent works *Before the Deluge* (1991), *A Scrooge of Hyacinths* (1991), and *From Zia with Love* (1992) continue to bring social and political issues to the forefront.

Conclusion

Many find Soyinka's writing hard to read and comprehend. His works contain frequent episodes of coinciding dancing, singing and speaking, which non-Africans find challenging to perform. His work, however, has challenged the West to broaden its acceptance of African

standards of art and literature. Simultaneously, his personal and political life has challenged Africa to embrace the views of the traditional African tribes and refuse to bow down to unfair practices and treatment.▲

Renee Charlow graduated from the University of South Florida, Tampa in May 1998 with a Bachelor's Degree in Theater. This is her second Bachelor's Degree. She is an actor, director, playwright, storyteller, and consultant, and has performed in numerous productions in and around the Tampa Bay area. She wrote, produced, and performed an original one woman show "Standin' on the Shoulders of my Ancestors," at the University of South Florida in April of 1998. Renee also wrote, directed and performed her one act play "The Pyramid Scheme," in November, 1998. Currently Renee teaches drama, art, and performs storytelling. She plans to attend a graduate program in Theater in the fall, and eventually start a theater troupe.

Editor's Note: To reflect the variances with which Soyinka's first name is represented in publications, both Wole and Wole' appear throughout the essay .

Endnotes

- 1) James Gibbs, *Wole Soyinka*, (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1986) p. 10.
- 2) Eldred Jones, *The Writing of Wole' Soyinka*, (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc., 1973) p.p. 19-20.
- 3) Derek Wright, *Wole Soyinka Revisited*, (New York, NY: Twayne Publishers, 1993) p. 30.
- 4) *Black Literature Criticism*, 1989 ed., vol. 3, "Wole' Soyinka."
- 5) Gibbs, p.40.
- 6) Gibbs, p. 50.
- 7) *Black Literature Criticism*, 1989 ed., vol. 3, "Wole' Soyinka."
- 8) *Black Writers*, 1990 ed., vol. 2, "Wole' Soyinka."
- 9) Wright, pp. 78-79.
- 10) Jones, pp. 120-121.
- 11) *Contemporary Literature Criticism*, 1990 ed., vol 30, "Wole' Soyinka" by Corrine Gale
- 12) Jones, pp. 150-151.
- 13) *The Schomburg Center Guide to Black Literature* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1994). pp. 427-428.

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- Gates, Henry, Jr., *Wole Soyinka, a Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources*. Los Angeles, CA: Greenwood Press, 1986.
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Sappho Translation and Comment

by Leshawn T. Smith

Comment

The object of art is to crystallize emotion into thought, and then fix it into form. Lyric poetry combines words, music, and dance to produce an art form that exudes the richness and beauty of African culture. Some of Sappho's extraordinary works have survived solely through partial discoveries of papyrus scraps in Egypt. Her poetry often deals with emotions associated with "delirious passion for real life" (Longinus).¹

In the following poem, Sappho examines the definition of beauty as it relates to the individual. As I translated the poem, I felt connection to this woman who shares my African descent and my desire to culminate a deeper understanding of the world and my role within it.

Translation

31

Some say an army of horsemen, some say an army of foot soldiers, and others say a fleet of ships upon the ebony earth to be the most beautiful. but i say whatever someone loves is most beautiful.

It is very easy to make this idea intelligible to everyone, for she surpasses the beauty of human beings; Helen, leaving all of best nature behind her man, went to Troy remembering neither her child nor her beloved parents, but leading herself to Troy...

I would wish to see the beloved footstep and shining twinkle in the face of my beloved rather than the armor of the Lydians and the fighting footsoldiers in their armor.

Leshawn T. Smith is an Undergraduate Major of Classics and Pre-Med at Baylor University.



Close Reading of Maya Angelou's "Our Grandmothers"

by Dasha M. Jackson

The last poem in Maya Angelou's volume *Phenomenal Woman: Four Poems Celebrating Women* is "Our Grandmothers." This poem pays homage to our foremothers by telling the story of a timeless, Black ancestral mother. It begins with a mother escaping from slavery with her children. The atmosphere of the poem resembles that of Frances Harper's "The Slave Mother" and "Bury Me in a Free Land." In the first stanza the mother hears the "loud longing of hounds and the ransack of hunters." Similarly, in "Bury Me in a Free Land," Harper speaks of "the bay of bloodhounds seizing their human prey." As the family continues in their escape, one child asks the mother, "Momma, is Master going to sell you from us tomorrow?" The mother's reply is yes unless the children kept walking and unless "the keeper of [their] lives," which is God, releases the mother "from all commandments." In other words, the mother felt that unless God permits her to kill, steal, lie, and do whatever else was necessary, her children would never make it to freedom. If the mother is sold, her children's lives "never [hers] to live, will be executed upon the killing floor of innocents." The mother must confront the reality that slavery snatches away her claim to her children and even to herself. This predicament of the slave is eloquently portrayed in "The Slaver Mother" in which Harper writes: "[The child] is not hers, although she bore for him a mother's pains; He is not hers, although her blood is coursing through his veins!" Both poems illustrate how slavery renders slaves powerless. But the speaker in "Our Grandmothers" resists complete enslavement and declares "you have tried to destroy me and though I perish daily, I shall not be moved."

The "you" represents the institution of slavery, oppression and the oppressors who embody both forces. The next stanza describes the oppression and depression the speaker has had to endure.

Her universe, often summarized into one black body falling finally from the tree to her feet, made her cry each time in a new voice. All my past hastens to defeat, and strangers claim the glory of my love, iniquity has bound me to his bed.

This stanza deals with the lynchings and rapes that Blacks faced throughout slavery and Reconstruction. The constant hangings of Blacks crowd the speaker's present existence; assault and sexual bondage fill her past. Without control over her body, she is coerced to sin sexually. Yet she, not the perpetrator, must bear brunt of the degradation. She is called, "nigger, nigger bitch, heifer, mammy, property, creature, ape, baboon, whore, hot tail, thing, it," yet declares,

"my description cannot fit your tongue, for I have a certain way of being in this and [the] world." This speaker, like the ones in the other poems must confront stereotypes. Her situation is particularly unjust because she has done nothing to warrant the labels that have been heaped upon her. She is the victim, and yet she is blamed. Her method of confronting the stereotypes assigned to her is to refute them with her own self-definition. Like the speaker in "Phenomenal Woman," she recognizes in herself a definition that those around her cannot even articulate. In addition, she says she has "a certain way of being in this world." The implication of her assertion is that she has an invincible method of surviving, and no word or deed will annihilate her.

In the midst of her persecution, "no angel stretched protecting wings above the heads of her children.... [Her children] sprouted like young weeds, but she could not shield their growth from the grinding blades of ignorance, nor shape them into symbolic topiaries." The speaker feels as though God has deserted her children, and she cannot groom, mold or protect them from society. The best that she can do for them is send "them away, underground, overland, in coaches and shoeless. When you learn, teach. When you get, give." The speaker's solution is sending her children alone through the underground railroad to freedom. Seemingly without God's protection, and without being able to guide them herself, she can only admonish them to help others once they have obtained freedom.

In the next stanza, the speaker is "midocean, seeking dry land. She searched God's face." She offers her services and faith on God's altar but "no sign welcomed Black Grandmother. Enter here." Distraught the speaker cries:

No one, no, nor no one million ones dare deny me God. I go forth alone, and stand as ten thousand. The Divine upon my right impels me to pull forever at the latch on Freedom's gate. The Holy Spirit upon my left leads my feet without ceasing into the camp of the righteous and into the tents of the free.

These stanzas are crucial to the poem, for they underscore the speaker's counsel to her children to help others. Without freed slaves helping the enslaved escape to freedom, the underground railroad would have fallen apart. Similarly, if Blacks today do not reach back and help less fortunate Blacks, Black society will eventually crumple. This section of the poem also emphasizes the necessity of God's help in communal success and survival. Initially the Grandmother does not sense God's presence with her or her children. And while she could face all types of debasement at the hands of Whites, she knew she could not persevere if she were somehow denied access to God. She knows that although she may feel and appear alone, she has the heavenly host on her side. She finally breaks through a feeling of separation from God and recognizes that God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are with her. It is important to note that God is not only with her, He is also guiding and encouraging her in her quest for total freedom.

Throughout the next two stanzas she is like the speaker in "Still I Rise." She is both herself and many others at the same time. The Grandmother embodies Chakka Chan's song, "I'm Every Woman." She is all the Black women in the Black Diaspora. "She is Sheba and Sojourner, Harriet and Zora, Mary Bethune and Angela, Annie to Zenobia." She is a woman in an abortion clinic, in the welfare line, ordained in the pulpit, waiting in the operating room, singing in the choir loft, drifting on lonely street corners, learning in the classroom, loving the children to understanding. She represents women and their multiple social roles.

In the last stanza the Grandmother speaks to those she loves and those who love her as well as her "foes and detractors." She tells them, "However I am perceived and deceived, however my ignorance and conceits, lay aside your fears that I will be undone, for I shall not be moved." This message, which repeats throughout *Phenomenal Woman*, reminds us that the previous poetic figures, like the Grandmother, are loved by some and hated by others. Stereotypes and expectations affect how they are perceived and evaluated. At the same time, they have centered themselves with something positive within. This something is the gifts that their ancestors gave them through the Black Diaspora. Part of that gift is a belief in God and love of the church as exemplified in "Weekend Glory" and "Our Grandmothers." The other part is a hope and dream of a wondrously clear future, like the vision preached by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King. In Angelou's poems, however, the Black woman's dream is not the American dream or the Great White Hope, but Blacks' ancestral dream and hope. And while spirituality and hopes may become jaded and faded, the essentials persist. The characters in the four poems had these gifts and were able to confront and overcome external adversities and maintain peace inside. These women remind the present Black Diaspora that the gifts are still available, ever-present and transformative.

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1 Editor's Note: This paper is abridged from a close examination of the poems in Maya Angelou's collection, *Phenomenal Woman: Four Poems Celebrating Women*. In its entirety, the essay "illustrates Angelou's successful attempt to describe the lives and attitudes of society, women, Blacks, and Black women as they relate to each other and as they form and/or interact within the Black Diaspora."

Once again I think that it will be important for the book industry to improve in the individual countries before they embark on continent wide missions. If publishers in Kenya decided to publish in Swahili they would need to combine the resources that are unique to Kenya. They would need to share editors for the language, market research and other factors. This isolation from countries that do not speak Swahili might reduce market value but it will also help to make the target audience of any publisher an exclusive domain. The success of such venture could lead to future translations of any quality work created. The success of the Zimbabwe International Book fair shows that Africa is taking her publishing industry more seriously than ever. Book fairs are like marketplaces that publishers can allow potential buyers to look at samples of their products. It is at places like this that the newest trends can be shared, new authors discovered and new markets created. It is therefore a sad commentary on the publishing industry in Kenya when none the publishers showed up to a fair in their own country. The publishers in Kenya chose to boycott the Pan African Children's Book Fair (PACBF) that took place in Nairobi, because of the newly imposed charges (Mwita). Book fairs admission fees are used to cover administrative costs. Mistakes like this could prove costly to a struggling industry chances to promote her image. Publishers in Kenya will need to find ways to be prepared when determining what fairs to go to and how best to present their goods.

“Africans writing for African audiences will stop the dependency on Europe and North America as a source for African books.”

Conclusions

Publishing in Africa has a huge potential for growth. The growth will have to come from within and not without. The publishers in Africa will need to work together to create a market for their products. The future looks bright because more governments are beginning to understand the importance of an educated population. In his address to the Arusha II conference President Mkapa cites the importance of developing African authors and readers. He goes on further to state the importance of an indigenous industry that promotes the local culture. African writers will also have to 'learn' how to write for African audiences rather than looking to write for western audiences. To me it seems that ABC is geared toward perpetuating this kind of scenario. Africans writing for African audiences will stop the dependency on Europe and North America as a source for African books. The present low levels of literacy will have to be improved to develop a market for African books. Working in conjunction with policy makers it is important for a language to be set as a standard in order to develop others. It will be hard to pick a local language because this would only lead to accusations of tribalism in Africa. What should be done is finding ways to improve the low reading levels of English, French and Portuguese in Africa. This can be done in addition to teaching the local languages. The increased numbers of bilinguals will help to develop interest in other cultures while enhancing the individual languages. Developing this will be hard because at the moment many African countries have a severe lack of textbooks and supplementary books for casual reading after class (Davies 74). This is especially so in the rural areas. That is why projects like the MCDLC in Mathira will need to be improved and supported. Off course there are many who feel that the African culture does not enjoy reading. I think it is a case of lack of books and leisure time that cause the seeming lack of interest. The Mathira project demonstrates that if these books are provided many people will find the time to read outside of class. At the moment the publishing industry does not play a huge role in shaping the future of Africa but it will have to convince their local governments of the strategic role the industry should play in their respective countries. Walter Bgoya feels that if development of National Book Policy, language policy implementation and financing of the industry are given more attention, then there is a possibility to create a thriving industry in Africa (Bgoya 31).▲

Francis Kayiwa, of the school of Information and Library Studies at SUNY-Buffalo, will complete one graduate degree in December of 1999 with plans to pursue a doctoral degree in Information Transfer in order to find ways that Information Management can be improved in the less developed regions of the world. Kayiwa's bachelor's degree in History includes a focus on Latin American Democracies. Born and raised in Kenya, Kayiwa approached research on the publishing industry as an opportunity "to understand how the publishing industry works in Kenya and how it can be improved. It is important that the problems that Kenya is undergoing are understood to save the industry from continued demise."

Appendix

ABC Members: Academy Science Publishers, Kenya; Afram Publications, Ghana; Africa Christian Press; Africa Community Publishing & Development Trust, Zimbabwe; Baobab Books, Zimbabwe; Bookcraft Ltd, Nigeria; Buchu Books, South Africa; Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa; (CODESRIA), Senegal; Dar es Salaam University Press, Tanzania; East African Educational Publishers Ltd, Kenya; Editions de l'Océan Indien, Mauritius; Environmental Development Action in the Third World (ENDA), Senegal; Foundation for Education with Production, Botswana; Fountain Publishers, Uganda; Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd, Nigeria; Freedom Publications, Ghana; Ghana Publishing Corporation, Ghana; Ghana and African Council for Communication Education, Kenya; Ghana Universities Press, Ghana; Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) plc, Nigeria; Ibadan University Press, Nigeria; Institute of Southern African Studies, Lesotho; Malthouse Press Ltd, Nigeria; Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, Tanzania; Multimedia Zambia, Zambia; Nairobi University Press, Kenya; New Horn Press Ltd, Nigeria; New Namibia Books (Pty) Ltd, Namibia; Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, Nigeria; Obafemi Awolowo University Press, Nigeria; Sankofa Educational Publishers, Ghana; Sankore Publishers, Nigeria; Saros International Publishers, Nigeria; Skotaville Publishers, South Africa; Southern Africa Printing and Publishing House/SAPES Trust, Zimbabwe; Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC), Zimbabwe; Spectrum Books Ltd, Nigeria; Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology, Tanzania; Tanzania Publishing House, Tanzania; University of Lagos Press, Nigeria; University of Nigeria Press, Nigeria; University of Maiduguri Press, Nigeria; University of Port Harcourt Press, Nigeria; University of Zimbabwe Publications, Zimbabwe; University Press plc, Nigeria; Woeli Publishing Services, Ghana; Zimbabwe Book Publishers Association, Zimbabwe; Zimbabwe Publishing House, Zimbabwe; Zimbabwe Women Writers, Zimbabwe.

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never again rape, or
point a smoking gun at
anyone else's broken black body, never again
have another chance to
make the change we all were
waiting for.

you never will
touch a woman in kindness
touch a brotha in kindness
use your gleaming fame for something
beyond black hate, waste and loss.
no more chances for that, now
you ain't nothing

**but another lifeless black figure
stretched out in a string of black rope
forming a knotted black noose
with which we might
hang ourselves.**

oh god.

you
you belonged
to me, my generation of wandering lost
children, looking to you for
noble words you could not say, sweet
truth you could not tell.
your life was an unspent coin in our pockets.

our inheritance.
you are a symbol, silent,
sullen
as blame, written
across our faces in blood.
and you
should not have died, did not deserve
the life you chose.

but
you ain't no hero. no
martyr.

what you are,
finally
is a reason to

imagine
shape
believe our dreams

make our lives mean more than
all the spirits we have
lost

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