

SPEAK EASY SPEAK FREE

Edited by Antar S.K. Mberi and Cosmo Pieterse



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Speak easy, speak free

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Edited by
Antar S.K. Mberi
and
Cosmo Pieterse

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SPEAK EASY
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INTRODUCTION

IN EXAMINING the fourteen poems that have been put together in the first section of our compilation, we hope to show why, apart from the fact that they were all "Athenians" (teachers and students of Ohio University in Athens, Ohio) between September 1967 and June 1976, these eleven relatively "disparate" poets do belong in the same collection.

First, the poems have a global range—from the Alabama River of the southern United States in Margo Bohanon's opening poem, "Alabama," to Vietnam in ". . . and all call him Uncle." by Antar Mberi, closing this section. Lindiwe Mabuza's "Patchwork" deals chiefly with the killing of an Afro-American student during a demonstration at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, but it goes on to link this "incident" with the shooting and killing of white students at Kent State University near Cleveland, Ohio, and with the napalming of Vietnamese. A very important meaning of the war in Vietnam—namely the resilience of those who fight for freedom: ". . . the V(iet) C(ong) always comes back"—is found in Horace Coleman's "Night Flare Drop." Coleman's "Attica" concerns itself with the New York State prison that is known by that name and is known also for prison hardship, prison revolt and repressive gunnings down. And so the other poems in this section carry us, by description or in their title, in their subject matter or by reference, clearly or by allusion, to South America (Mexico and Ecuador), the Olduvai Gorge in East Africa where the fossils of earliest man have been unearthed, to Jamaica and Guyana, to Kenya and the Sahara Desert, to Kimberley and the diamond mines in South Africa, to Wounded Knee and its massacred people, broken treaties and promises, to the metropolitan cities with their junkies, pimps, ghettos, barrios, to Guinea and Mozambique, and the struggle to retain freedom and to gain liberty.

Already a second level of comprehensiveness and comprehension has been suggested. The poems have a massive thematic scope. The first three poems comprehend pain and suffering and the suffering of pain, despair and dreams and the dashing of hope: on one level they sound almost desolate, yearning, forlorn. The next two deal with, inter alia, certain conscious and unconscious agents and instruments of an oppressive status quo. The two that follow include in their depiction: limitless poverty and infinite groping, timeless frustrated endeavor and hope unending: ". . . an old man [tries] . . . to grasp the blackness/ of the sun," ". . . a final longing . . ." And the arc of themes runs from Schulte's "Mexican Village" to "Caught up in a villa" where Storey creates a series and a tower of rich and telling images, especially in the complex puns of the title which contain more than a passing reference to Pancho Villa, the Mexican revolutionary.

Margo Bohanon's "Apartheid" is an indictment of exploitation and of the careless luxury-lovers whose affluence and enjoyment derive from the labor and travail of others. But labor and travail can also bring birth and growth despite massacre and assassination, and it is to this that Anne Sadowski attests in "Poem about Birth." And while "Night Flare Drop" asserts the degradation and social pollution that attended the U. S. presence in Vietnam, it also reasserts the unflagging power of resistance. Liberation is hymned by Yearwood's "I am the Soil," and the struggle and readiness of a whole nation to preserve freedom (Guinea, under Sekou Toure, against a Portuguese invasion attempt in December 1970) and to attain liberation and independence and to effect change (Viet Nam, under Ho Chi Minh) are sung by the two poems that round off this section.

In the third place, it is interesting to note how every one of these poems tenses against itself and so strains out signification upon signification, significance after significance, that urge the reader to probe again and again into the poem and into life and the society out of which these poems are made. What may have appeared on one glance to be questioning anguish at the end of "Alabama," assumes a multiple force once the echoing power of the quiet rhetorical question accu-

mulates. It is a statement which is a question in form; it stands at the end of the poem, but it does not conclude the poetic statement: it rather opens up the world of this "prostitute's" life and death for us. And as we continue our investigation, the questions mount up into an indictment.

Very much the same kind of experience is created for us about half-way through "Patchwork." After terrible description-in-a-question we have an exceeding but evanescent delicateness, it is sharply destroyed and then an ambivalence develops:

Why so many
So many people in Vietnam must
Slowly broil in napalm?
Tender tendrils ruptured
That night at Orangeburg.

Next to these lines, whose repetition carries a seemingly easy sentimentality, T.S. Eliot's "I did not know death has undone so many" appears almost romantically evocative but vague. The quiet and "facile" alliteration of "*so many/So many*" continues in "*must*", is disturbed in the associations of "*Vietnam*" that are spelled out in the alliterative distension of "*Slowly broil in napalm*". Many other "devices" contribute to the power of these lines which we come to recognize as angry evocations of the realness of the atrocity of an anti-human war. The propaganda (the pro-humanity content) of this poem is as clear as Picasso's *Guernica* and the intentional or unintentional artistic touches as sure, because they come from an engaged and serious, an enraged sensibility. Not death undoing so many, but many people made to broil slowly, in napalm, in Vietnam: in napalm? and at Orangeburg . . .

The fourth quality (probably incidental and coincidental but nevertheless fairly important and interesting) that our poets share is the building, consciously or not, on tradition. I do not mean to imply "influences" in the sense of "copying." It is a richer, fuller and more complex phenomenon I have in mind. To be brief, a few examples: Yearwood's "I am the Soil" is enriched by undertones of "The Song of the Smoke" by W. E. B. DuBois; the title of Sadowski's "Poem about Birth" might suggest a comparison with "Prayer Before Birth" by Stephen

Spender; while “. . . an old man/raises his hand to grasp the blackness/of the sun” (Schulte) and “. . . the dark . . . always comes back” (Coleman) might call to mind the metaphysical poets, the surrealists, existential angst. How present such precursors or contemporaries are to the individual poet is of little moment: what is important is the context in which these reverberations make themselves felt to the reader and the new meanings that consequently accrue to the poetic experience. For example, Schulte’s old man grasping the sun’s darkness is controlled and given new direction by the physicality of “Naked children play/in the dirt of dusty streets” and again, more strongly perhaps, toward the end of the poem, by the economics, politics and actuality of, “Market merchants . . . died/over the strong smell of bananas/under the clean signs of Farmacias,” (“Mexican Village”). And, in its context, quoted fully, the Coleman clause has another dimension and additional, far deeper meanings than despair: “. . . the dark/like the VC always comes back.”

These poems, and these poets, have many other things in common. Important among their common qualities is the concreteness, the closeness to life and issues of living in today’s “third” world and the world of tomorrow. An important index of this shared relevance and its concomitant concreteness is the constant appearance of certain images and subjects in their poems: colors (dark, dusky, black, dusty, ashy, etc.) sweat, people (women, men, children), play, struggle. Nor do these images and subjects fossilize into absolute symbols and petrified emblemata. They always refer to actualities in such a manner that there is, time and again, the ambivalence and resonance of life which make us re-examine our prejudices and dogmas, and impel us to apply the literature we read to the lives we lead.

As they do not allow the symbol to ossify or to dictate meaning, so also do these poets not allow tradition and history to be dead or to deny them experiment, innovation and novelty. The naming of names that rings with a virtually epic voice and the timbre of a repetitive war-horn megaphoning is no more evident in ancient orature and oral praise naming, in chanted satirical poems than in the new signifying of

Sophia town massacres
Birmingham bombings
Bantu education
.....
.....
the puppeteers of Wall Street
discuss democracy in Vietnam
over Rock Lobster dinners
(Bohanon: "Apartheid")

or of

Harlem.
They ripped her belly wide.
Watts.
Mozambique blood flowed
.....
.....
Martin King
shot down
(Sadowski: "Poem About Birth")

or of

My name is Isis
Osiris
Tubman, Douglass, Turner,
Nkrumah, Cabral
(Yearwood: "I am the Soil")

Willy-nilly, new and old forms blend in this poetry that does not distance itself from life, or the artist from a community, intercommunicative. Nor is this poetry afraid of the seeming anachronism, the anomaly, the apparent mixed metaphor:

I am the soil
I am the sword
and the ploughshare.
(Yearwood: "I am the Soil")

An image changes its meaning even as life assumes new forms:

milk prolongs her nipples
into space
and quenches desire into new-born life
(Schulte: "The Equator at Quito")

One notes here the striking value of the unexpected (unidiomatic?) "into" . . . , as one is struck by the multivalence and immediacy of "planes" with its "burn" and "night" as well as "dark" in

Overhead frightened planes circle
shedding magnesium tears that
burn deep holes in the night
But the dark
like the VC always comes back
(Coleman: "Night Flare Drop")

"Planes" are *aircraft* as well as *layers*; "overhead" is *above the Vietnamese landscape and over its people*, as well as an indication of social hierarchy which is now "frightened" enough to "circle," in reconnaissance (and trying to contain? to establish a "rehabilitated" village?), "shedding magnesium tears"—crocodile tears—while planes and tears ("charity," "welfare") continue to "burn . . . the night," "but the dark"—the exploited, the "third world," the oppressed, the time for sleep and rejuvenation, the "chaos" feared by the categorizing and power-and-control-hungry-people in the world—"always comes back".

These are some of the expressive textures of individual poems and individual poets as they looked at our world, worked in it, and sought to catch in words and rhythms and thus delineate our globe's character, its perspectives and possible future contours.

They may not be the legislators of the soul, but they are not ineffectual angels beating their verbal wings against the harsh realities of the world; they must not be unacknowledged. Their work is relevant to a world of active struggle and meaningful change. Until humanly soluble problems disappear, the artist who proclaims (his/her) art to be for art's sake only, is guilty of a lie and of criminal dereliction of talent; but there is another similarly criminal neglect: overlooking the need for the arts and the place of art cultural sustenance in the shaping of tomorrow's fuller humanity.

The SPECTRUM that follows tries to illustrate how this compilation wants, altogether, to speak with ease and for freedom.

Cosmo Pieterse

Spectrum



MARGO BOHANON

Alabama

When you were young you probably played
all the games children play,
and got your ashy legs red,
from dusty Alabama roads.

I know you dreamed all the dreams children dream,
in a feather mattress that sank
under your frail body,

And on hot Sundays
you poured salt on snails in the front yard,
to watch them melt.

I can see you clearly now,
picking worms from under the boards
at the side of the house,
to fish with,
and finding a bird's skeleton
in the garden out back.

You probably remembered all these things,
when they hung you,
over the river,
charged with prostitution,
you and two other women.

And were you dead or alive
when your baby dropped from your body
into the Alabama River?

LINDIWE MABUZA

Patchwork *(Baton Rouge)*

Sometimes
Sometimes there is a
White rope
Around the hands of time.
The colorless hands of time,
The colorless hands of man.

Like a global lasso
Sometimes
The fibre knifes the mind
Releasing some young blood
And I unleash in my dreams
Spring gardens of my generation
Spring trees that bud and bloom
And fruit and seed.

No! No!
They didn't!
They didn't shoot to kill . . .
They only want to keep me warm
For I feel warm now
Almost sleepy warm
In the company of the Louisiana sun
That softly falls on me
That quietly falls on the mouth
Of the gun.

Somebody!
Somebody please put grandma's
Patchwork on me

Its icy here please!
The blanket I mean!

Did she say,
Did she say at Orangeburg
The steel voice of bullets
Spoke through the soft smooth
Blackness of the flesh?
The students only wanted to know
Why!
Why the skin of education
Changed colors like a chameleon
Why so many
So many people in Vietnam must
Slowly broil in napalm?
Tender tendrils ruptured
That night at Orangeburg.

People changed colors that night
In America.
Peaceful America sleep!

Its too warm here now
It must be the Louisiana sun
Almost sleepy warm
Yet the open air suffocates
Somebody!
Somebody please put grandma's
Patchwork over my head
It stinks here please
The mask I mean
Thanks.
Sleepy, sleepy warm now!

There were no rifles at
Kent State they say.
The students only wanted peace
The students only wanted to

Put out the fires that burn minds and bodies
At home, at work—abroad.
Drenched in the color of blood
Even grass refused to grow
That spring at Kent State
Even the air spun the
Wisdom of pain
That spring in America!

It is quiet now.
The dull taste for joy
Inundates my mind.
Now I am the fall in Jackson State
Shouting its suspect colors . . .
Dark and red and gold and brown . . .
Now I am the dark earth
Bearing on my back the snows of past years
Now I am the bloody waters
Moving unseen beneath the desert
Crystalizing beyond the clean concrete
Of Baton Rouge.

Now I am the little sparrow
That disappears in the clouds
The dark clouds of aching people.
I puncture the clouds.
I render them asunder
Raining colorless seeds
Even upon lovers of the eagle.

I think I will sleep now
So that the grass can grow again
Innumerable as the wool on my head
Deeper than the puncture on my body
More brilliant than the mosaic of heaven.

JAMES STEELE

For Mantee/ My Whole World Came Falling Down

I

Below the timberline
 dilapidated with concrete edifices
Lives shaded brown and green
 of cracked wine bottles
 become kitchenette flower beds
withering under the bleak dryness
 of an artificial sun
hot-breathed and indignant
lies the night
 spooning goodness and mercy
 all the days in the lives
 misdirected mourning-glories
 given bloom in cold of day
 howling at stars
 jealous of their altitude
trying zealously to soar as high
but getting nowhere
 fast as the horse
 jumped over the moon
 and my whole world
 came
 falling
 down

Down here
on this asphalt
grade school
play
 ground

into just another number
at just another dance
same old blues
in a different pitch
just another solo flight
check marks its initials on a brick wall
beside last year's resolution:
a scribbled—"fuck you"
etched in purple misery with a young man's old
bones

danceless in the streets
and weeping
for the laughter
of straw-hat ladies
gone fishing
honey bees
in search
for the lost apple blossom
stamen
lonesome to fruit
from translucence to oak forest

Cry and laugh
cry and laugh
fearfully
at their own shadows
images of unknown warriors
sitting on the docks
of no-vacancy
apartment buildings
and my whole world
came
falling
down
off the merry-go-round
into an empty tulip patch
with other skeletons of potter's field
the unemployed caretaker
charging ten cents

for a 'round-trip ticket
but the ride only goes one way
no deposit necessary
on this teeter-totter:
non-refundable

what goes up
must come down
crashing
into a prostituted reality
of false eyelashes
and fairy tales
told by adam smith disciples
at case-western classrooms
of would-be supermen

II

My whole world came falling down
from a hole in the gutter
wearing the rainbow
pink, green, yellow, powder
blue, orange on orange
with shoes to match
being cool in a cold
cold world of chocolate
marshmallows and licorice
stunt-men on stage
and in the movies
the man
called it a human comedy
but it's not as funny
as it used to be
even on television
just another act after
the tumbling bears juggling
the greatest story yet untold
games and trips to . . .
almost anywhere

you want to go
except in the real world
where the wind
blows gray dust
between stacked hovels chilling
and choking dandelions
straining for sunlight

growing
from cracks
in strangled sidewalks
in front of pool rooms
adjacent pork shops
amid mustiness
but beyond: ex-junkies
wearing benin masks
revelating for a real journey
through a make-believe world

QUINCY TROUPE

On Watching Pimps

They cruise by
in black cadillacs,
like hungry sharks
underwater

& like sharks,
they too look for victims:
peering out from their
cold fish eyes

their trained sleek movements
gliding through arrays
of bedazzled women

& like scales of fish,
under light, their costumes
are razor sharp piranha
teeth against the night

& they devour
the things they touch:
they leave only staring
slick white bones

HORACE COLEMAN

Attica *(the season opens)*

the population of Attica is 2,900
the prison has 2,250 citizens

"They were told to sit down
and put their hands over their heads
They were told to walk slowly toward a guard
They were taken through the double doors on B Corridor

They were placed face down stripped
They were very very quiet
I think they were rather scared
I think they knew if they did
anything the guards would take
retribution"

*A lieutenant was attacked by an inmate with a pickaxe
fellow troopers blasted the assailant with shotguns
at such close range that the officer himself was pinked*

Robert Nartowicz, a resident of Tent City,
saw "a guy trying to surrender
 He had his hands folded
as the loudspeaker in the helicopter said to
 He was walking towards the wall
 A trooper was standing on the wall
The guy kept walking toward him
The trooper shot him in the chest"

*It's a tough problem trying to see through those
gas masks a trooper said*

RAINER SCHULTE

Mexican Village

Naked children play
in the dirt of dusty streets.
The air smells of dead flesh
long forgotten behind frail houses.
Once in a while an old man
raises his hand to grasp the blackness
of the sun.
Market merchants have long died
over the strong smell of bananas
under the clean signs of Farmacias,
A fish has been thrown on the beach
and casts a lame shadow
on the black sand.

The Equator at Quito
or
The will to die

The sun rests in itself.
Mountains older than memory
dream as they wake
into blue space.

Clouds
fragments of long desires
hover like old age
over trees that never grew.

An Indian woman
old at thirty
wrapped in dirty white
rocks the stillness
as milk prolongs her nipples
into space
and quenches desire into new-born life.

Beginning and end
painted in parallel colors
frame the mountains.

A delicate hand drew
the last green line
straight across the mountain.
Beyond that line
calmness lighter than air
cushions a final longing . . .

RALPH STOREY

Caught up in the villa

Mexican bandits
caught up in the
villa off 49th,
caught up in sweat sounds
of soft-hooved ladies,
begging us to
move/and we move so
slowly but go so
fast So fast blaring
out the dark place.

Ladies returning, peering
through the wrinkles of
a wounded knee or molded
endings in a victim's
pants. Junk money, we
beat the drum and a
million come
to see us, only to
get caught.

Having bet the million/odds are
we watch them go alone
this time, pacing their sadness
to a shattered cowhide,
pacing and prancing
a heartbeat's melody
to the laughing
concrete, eating remnants
of leather forced
from their shoes
during the
run/homeward.

To laugh with you,
in you now drowning
the ether from sandstroked
lips which smile ear to ear.
Wanting to take in more,
all the rusted rumps in to
a discarded pair
of pants. Pants, pants,
between cut-up rubber hoses
and condemned signs which
beg you to leave fast so
you move out only to
see the door close
in sweat sounds
on 49th in the villa
of the
mexican bandits.

MARGO BOHANON

Apartheid

Back of the bus,
white only orange juice
at segregated lunch counters.
Relieve yourself
in grimey colored toilets.
Wet your throats
at colored water fountains.

At Kimberley mines
lungs fill with black death diamond slivers
and women mourn in dry lifeless reservations
waiting for men coming home to die,
and sweat from black diamond mine slaves

food from swollen bellied children
seals the love
of some wide eyed
Romeo and Juliet
picking a ring
in a glittering window display.

Sophia town massacres
Birmingham bombings
Bantu education
separate but equal.
Sun goes down on bantu stands
rises
on the dead dreams
of democratic souls.

In the glittering South African sun
Black slaves eat dry bread
outside steel monsters
of American enterprise.
And behind the cool tinted glass
the puppeteers of Wall Street
discuss democracy in Vietnam
over Rock Lobster dinners.

ANNE SADOWSKI

Poem about Birth

An African woman is dead.
She was going to be a mother
till the soldiers came and ripped
her belly wide with knives
and watched her baby drop
into puddles

Harlem.

They ripped her belly wide

Watts.

Mozambique blood flowed

Hough.

Young infant blood flowed

Newark.

Young infant blood flowed

into

Africa flowed

into

African

Afro American

Blood.

Knives grew from blood puddles like sails
on the ocean they rose
with the wind
the movement was freedom

Malcolm X
shot down
the movement was stronger

Martin King
shot down
the movement was faster
shot down

They built walls
around the puddles
with more knives

the movement was knives and blood
on streets
the movement was black blood on streets
the movement was on the streets.

Today a black woman walks
through the city
The streets are hot and her feet stick
to the sidewalks like shadows

The streets are hot
though the sun has set
the streets are still hot
echoing high noon
streets still hot
hotter still
and the woman walks
and her feet stick
and the shadows grow
and the woman walks
tired
and her children cling to her
like sweat.

HORACE COLEMAN

Night Flare Drop, Tan Son Nhut

It is Tet
 some Vietnamese excuse for fireworks
and the war sneaks into Saigon
while young girls from villages in the Delta
 who have learned to use make-up and read comic books
suck off fat Air Force colonels
 All is joy
Roman candles chase tracers
Little rockets bark at dancing dragons
In the foreign cemetery
 at the entrance to the base

I've turned the other cheek
One time too many.
Your swashbuckling feet have trodden
My black skin
To a dusky ash.
My billowy eyelids are bulging,
Blinded from the tears
Of all my captive years.

I am the soil,
From my womb all creation springs.
I've begotten you,
Withstood your every foetal squirm
From way back,
Deep down
that gorge:
Olduvai's spawning yawn.
I am the soil,
The life giver, the healer.
I anointed your head with oil.
I am the soil.

I am the soil.
I am the sword
And the plowshare.
I've been and still am
Bounteous Africa.
I am Guyana, Trinidad
And Barbados.
I am Harlem.
My name is Isis,
Osiris,
Tubman, Douglass, Turner,
Nkrumah, Cabral.
I will rise
As I have risen
Countless times before
Against the evil tyrant.
I am the soil.

I am the soil.
I am the high hills
Of Kenya,
And the desert lands
Of the Sahara.
I am the blue mountain peaks
Of Jamaica.

I am southern Africa
Upon whose land
the stranger squats.
The demon Apartheid is my enemy;
I am the soil.
The children of my womb shall hunger
No more.
My massive hand is rising
To rule the land,
I will let you die;
For I am the soil
From whence you came
I am the soil,
I bear fruit.

LINDIWE MABUZA

A Song

When the white man
believed he was superman
he punctured a hive
in the peace of winter's fall
as we children slept
dreaming freedom's future.
Gun in hand
he went sh . . . sh . . . shtruuuuu . . . truu . . . ru ru ru

When we heard the news
our president was putting
guns in our hands and
the country went boom . . . boom . . . boomboomboom.

'He just don't know Guinea kids!'

ANTAR SUDAN KATARA MBERI

. . . and all call him Uncle

I

When—
 a nation of
children cry for you
wailing day and night:

When—
 for you
a nation of women cry
tear their hair
and breasts
in abandoned distress:

When—
 a nation of men
hold back their cries
of grief, loss and pain
only to discover
for you
they cannot:

When—
 for you

a nation of proud
determined people
split in two
by the worst predator
purveyor of violence
history has ever known

assert at your death
a fathomless vacuum
felt more sharply
than a million tons of napalm
bombs exploded in the eye:

II

Then, all will know you
were a real man
of the people
a worker
in the labor force
of humanity

Will know you
were loved
simply for this
nothing more
or less

And, will too
call you

Uncle.

III

Flowers bloom
children say:

“There’s Uncle Ho.”

Farm lands devastated
by a century of imperialism
yield their first healthy crops
farmers sway and say:

“There’s Uncle Ho.”

Crumbled cities right themselves
people smile and live again
babies run up streets
factories smoke produce constructively
no sirens screaming warnings fear
workers wear sing and say:

“There’s Uncle Ho.”

IV

When socialism on clear
red days
takes its place
and holds full sway
the people are first
to say:

“There’s our Uncle Ho.”

Anthology



MARGO BOHANON

These Feet For Rosa Parks

Black women's feet
stand on crowded buses
behind lunch counters
and sweat in hot kitchens
on cracked black leather soles.
They try to find shoes
in stores
for submissive Ming dynasty concubines
taking hobble steps
on bound toes.

These big
hard
calloused
ugly feet
swell from working too long,
get flat from standing too much,
rough from striding pavement streets,
sore from kicking down closed doors,
and tired,
from waiting too damn long.

These feet
have walked miles north
on underground railroads,
stepped hard
in freedom marches,
walked proud
in picket lines,
soaked in hot tubs
during bus boycotts,
stomped dirt

in cotton fields,
stood firm
against fire hoses,
and run fast
from lynch mobs.

Like black tempers
these feet have swelled with the heat
and,
one day, on a crowded Montgomery bus
these tired black feet
Kicked Jim Crow
dead in the ass.

Blues Suite

Music in my mind
rhythm sounds of people
singing sad happy tunes
happy blues
sad blues
love life blues

Everyday music in my mind
people singing their blues melodies
in lilting street sounds
that come through my window
and I become part
of past and present memories
blues songs
in my dreams
see me through
night time love songs.

Black people blues
sing to me
from children's smiles below my window
from red Alabama mud
from old folks' eyes.

Sing to me
songs
of grandma's dreams
of mama's hard rough hands
of daddy's tender eyes
of my love blues in sweat and tears
Sing your songs to me
and I'll sing along with you
in my tearful
blues melody.

Dark Reflections

I keep telling you,
stop looking at your reflection in
dirty mirrors.
You cannot see your face through
the smeared fingerprints
of someone who has been there before.
If you can see yourself,
you only look
fuzzy
and vague.
Even the sun, coming up in the morning,
has trouble
casting a beautiful reflection
in muddy water.

Funeral Home

On your pale aged face
the powder lines
each tiny wrinkle
around your sternly set mouth
and your hands are limp
over the ribbon of
an egg white orchid.

Masses of yellow roses
in a blanket over your feet
that cannot warm you.

And in this showcase
of human perfection,
this dimly lit showplace
of satin
and roses,
a roach slowly crawls
along the ceiling
above your head.

Up There

Waiting,
for their moment to die,
mildewed souls
float from
small window graves
above the street.
Haunted eyes
look down
from unsealed tombs,
heads nodding
in musky dream shadows.
Death,
the seducing lover,
embracing
with one cold steel arm.
Touching,
like bricks against
a soft thigh,
drawing blood
in crusty patches.
Below this solitary love scene
dream sellers
peddle illusions
from iridescent pink cadillacs.

Woman

Strong Black women
are tin cans
in slimy gutters
children playing
kick around
on rainy afternoons.
their hands get rough
nostrils numb
scrubbing white linoleum floors
with milky ammonia water.
Loves grow stale
with bloody aborted children
and temporary promises
lost in wine bottle forgetfulness.
Strong women
sacrifice dreams
for thin veiled future hopes,
portraits of happiness
for beautiful strong faces,
that dissolve
in cloudy acid tears.

Manchild

Women hurry by
looking the other way
Children run past him
whispering names
and laughing.
He smiles at the women
and curses the children
coughing and spitting
after his words.
Tilting a bottle

that fall five miles and shake
the yellow palm-thatched huts and
the yellowed stucco houses and the
yellow tent O Club of Ca Mau

they hunt communist water buffalo
with quad .50s and infra-red
they scream howitzers at suspicious rice
but one bullet
makes a helicopter a shotgunned duck
one rocket trips the man-blind radar
off its legs and the Americans
leave and the women sweep
after them in Ca Mau

log: 19N 72E

me,
i'm just
a lower deck crewman
on Space Ship Earth
with many captains and
no navigator and our sun
is moving and melting.
we scrape the sky and scratch
the face of God who watches us
go quickly and ungently into
that long night and wonders how
when we've used up all our supplies
we will use each other and where
with what cargo we are going
and why his watch is over
but the next helmsman
has not reported while
the air from down below
smells of old sweat
and the mutiny
I've started.

Dustoff: Med Evac

I'm meeting God in the Mekong Delta
He's waiting till I finish watering
this rice paddy here He comes now
whirring through the clouds and I'm
almost done He's blowing the dust
off I can see His plastic nose and
His long green tail I can feel His
spinning wings hovering as he tosses
me a dented halo two sizes too small

junkies is

stone zombies
stone cold
to the cold
cold to the touch
of death stoned
stone cold dead
in the market
place where them
Black Draculas
get their blood
powdered and white
and drive slim
steel stakes
through their own skin
into the hearts of
all the Harlems
and white magic
is black death

He aint risen, baby, cause he aint gone nowhere to George Jackson, missing in action

the first official version said
you were nailed in the head, George,
while trying to escape and the bullet
had tunneled through your head and escaped
through your back. It must have pleased them
to destroy a man who couldn't be beaten, starved,
or caged into cringing. They had to pulp the brain
that burned them, turned their faces red with shame
when the screws couldn't chain your soul down: Already
you had imprisoned the guards—revoked the warden's
parole—
put all their minds in multiple confinement and served
only water so strong they'd die without it but choke
if they drank it.

The second cover story was that you had been shot
in the back while trying to escape and the bullet
had splatter-painted your skull. The warden shouted,
the slave-drivers laughed. They were celebrating
over a beer when Attica started. They didn't know
you had a thousand brothers. They denied seeing
you there in the official reports. Even now, with
the ground disappearing beneath their feet, they
refuse to admit your grave is not being used as
they try to escape.

Stalemate at Attica

the white knights strain to restore
the black pawns to their natural stare—
guests of honor at the wake
besieged wives knuckle their cheeks
officials write reports praising each other

the governor tries on mourning masks
practices phrases: "morally justified" "outside forces"
he speaks gently of "restraint" and
"the highly organized revolutionary tactics of
the militants"
what else was there to do all day all night but
see and feel and think?
acting like a man is revolt
if you're a prisoner
or a nigger
or a nigger prisoner

the guards are white
the wardens white
the judges white
police white
the troopers white
the city white
the gas white
the prison dark
the mourners white
power white
the "hole" black
the jobs white
the prisoners are black brown poor white
but nowhere in this
is there prejudice
or politics
only power

that life, that love, that fine

sisters, sisters:
with your large brown eyes
seeing big,
with all your clothes' colors
brightened by your skins:

I know your thick lips
that give bigger kisses
and your long fingers
which touch more.
rounder hips bounce better.
kinky hair that is antennas
pulls in life from all directions.
it fills my hands with fullness
and nappy hair down below catches
me in it, holds me closer with you.
feet a foot long grip the earthy
real so firmly and your nostrils
opened wide by the world you
deeply breathe and widen.

we know:

when the frost burns part of the vine
the living grapes get sweeter and blacker.
those who have been pained can joy; can
deal with all things real and unreal.
your love has been our blood, wo(mb)man.
your tears always stop our sad thirst.
woman, your arms have held us all.
in a life where there is less of else
more of self grows. you are so tall.
sisters, you are so deep. which is why
we fall before you and into you.
with love, with love.

in (what few) green (barely) parks

I

in (what few) green (barely) parks
in black and poor neighborhoods
you're always seeing them

the old women with expert forks
thrusting from the pockets of men's
long brown coats with fringes

they have two sweaters too
the old women following the sun
through the morning grass that wets
their half-rolled stockings

they are hunting the yellow heads
cutting the dagger leaves of dandelions
getting their wine and table greens
at the public supermarket

the scourge of suburban lawns
feeds these old welfare ladies
these social without security women
with a shopping bag full of weeds
and a string bag of bottles

they're making it
with what nature doesn't want
and smart folks won't need
these quiet old ones
hobbling through the grass
humming half a hymn
these magic old ones who can turn
the edge of things into the center

II

they don't see too well
they keep wiping their \$2 glasses
with their other handkerchief
but even the ones who can't read
can read the land

can follow their setting faces
into lonely evenings

can follow their wrinkles
their skin maps of self/life
tattooed with poverty:

Anniston—Albany

domestic

Dalton—Dayton

high blood

Sumter—Detroit

welfare

Mississippi—Pittsburgh

sugar

their eyes shine like dying lakes
their legs are blighted roots
they have arms like dead trees
with broken branches for fingers
and joints hard with old
but the hands that held 6 babies
and a hundred irons
these trembling hands
can feed themselves
still

being black

being black
that is “naked
with a bone for luck”
being black my life is
a weapon an example
even when sheathed even
when I don’t want it to be

my love is a tool to cut
ease for you although my hands shake
and your breath the trophy I shelve
on my skin and my lap your throne

faith is our wealth our power
is our sweat and our will the
children are the crowns
their future the kingdom

but my people
my people are
the air I breathe

LINDIWE MABUZA

*Listening to Mbaqanga **

Once again your twittering notes
reach new worlds,
revive old worlds
amid the seen, perhaps unseen,
splendid savagery of the new;
breaking through flesh bone and marrow
of our now
stir/ring blood from the hot springs
of the locust-chase days.

You are the mandrake of song
the willow that breathes rocks
over swamps of our existence.
Build with your crude tools
monsoon bridges
to carry the weight on the eyes;
bridges of hands that will unmask
the plastic orgasmic veil of now.
Reveal, relieve, relive
portions of our thisness today
with us, once upon a time.

Once again upon a time
your sounds twist and
twitch our oblivion
to gyrating thoughts.
Rings that plea
then pledge worlds of rooms
to our origins,
on with your neon blades!
they scathe to suture
drums of the earless.
Blow thrills that laugh,
rain moans that scream for life
at the clever frills
of civilization.

Tears from the fountain of pain
avalanche from mountains in the manger!
Tears, centuries of tears
tears. Sweat, so young
hurt, sickled-palm sap
sapping rocks
so schooled
yet to be
in the imperfections
of a tailored land.

Run on bull-calves run,
like antelopes frolic
in our veins—
cull to preserve in us
the incense of hope—
Inject us
with the sweet sperm
of bitter works—
those untellable tales
of the raping of our fathers
forced
in the noons of our notion;

noons,
endless noons
nation after nation
as the sun stood bare
and still charts
a 'cussing glare
on the conscious
less
conscience.

Plough on Bafana†
plough on.
With your reed shares
burn this cold;
shake the earth we stand on
till tiger-flame eruptions
break the WORD
from the parched granaries of your lips
from the tatters of our souls
from the shanties of our youth
break, break, break this world.

No! They can't afford you!
No! You are rare!
Then again
you are plenty.
Yes! On a land far gone
this land poised between questions
we fill your feels.

Of today we shall wake,
of tonight we shall sleep
to wake many tomorrows
strong, renewed, strong.

*South African urban music

†Boys-musicians

Of Time

We stand sometimes
at the crossroads of time
time remote
time immediate
time to come
mediating
indecisions
which are decisions,
those inaction actions.

And in the room
people wear a sneer,
perched on dented sagging
hopes
anaesthetized before idiot boxes . . .
"We believe er . . . er . . . er . . ."
but the voice droops
oozing net-minuses
of spider-web predictions.

We stand now
in gears, not neutral,
breathing over dry petals
wasted in city air.
With soap in their eyes
the people cannot see those
oil-sleek seas embalming
the sliding ground where
america minuets
to sonic drums
on a day lost at infancy.
Yet at intervals of sounds
and dances
of today
we hear the certain
fresh rhythms of tomorrow.

Changeless Changes

Old Glory Lord
Old Glory!

We proceed from ebony death wishes
Lactified, canned, bottled, sold
To the essence pages of vogue
Issued from the off-centre
Navel of the universe:
America to America.
There Dingane's dashiki
Dazzles with the shimmering flow
Of adders puffing, molting,
Without a change in size.

I am haunted by chameleon dreams—
Black hands that fumble a squeeze
Along unequal breasts
Of a soot-covered snowman—
On a sunny day.
Dreams of want
Belied in comical commercials
By blacks
For blacks
To blacks.
Did Papa Doc die
Or did his alien widow
"Operation Exotic Dance"
Revive his white-minded ghost?
We are haunted at daytime.

I reach a cliff,
Fathomless to many minds.
Here and there I pick
From playgrounds down below
Voices with touches and questions of youth

Propelling a thousand
Never-never flights for kaffirs
In the heat of South Africa's bounty.
I wade, mount, mount, fall
Yet always rising
If only between the frilly
Fingers of fancy.

Many moons have come and gone
Yet one woman's anger
Still scars an axe story
On the jaw of her black son.
It was superbly drawn,
Then neatly filed . . .
By social workers.
The white man's burden
Is the sufferer's burden!

They call it kwashiokor
When native babies waddle a cry
From three hundred and sixty six days
Of mushroom eyes,
Questioning,
No! hardly eyes,
Hardly questions,
But catalogues of infant pregnancies
Conceived amid barbecued-martini laughter
In the catacombs of Apartheid.

"They have a sense of rhythm my dear!"
"Ooooo . . . they certainly can dance!"
Yes!
Dancing memories of parchment skin
Over reed ribs,
In their folds hiding
The malnutrition of western minds.

How the mind constipates
From patterns of blows

From visions of stumps
From patterns of visions!
It yells in silence
At the picture on the wall—
Starved ships from Africa
Wave their fill of chained cargo
Above satiated sharks
Across seas that eddy
The same . . . same . . . same message!
"Tobacco Road."

The fall of a house
Is the rise of another!
The white man's burden
Is the sufferer's burden!
To unload . . .

So like flies trapped
In a water glass
The shadows of Mississippi
Pass.
Remnants from scorched singed stumps,
They pass;
Offspring from tarred feathered bodies,
They grow;
Thumps over smiling fried chicken bones,
Over festive sandwich paper,
They march.
Against blues bellowing piercing laughter,
Bleeding in song
For center-piece black testicles
On some white mantelpiece.

In spite of forbidding hoods and sheets
And vibrant tongues that leap and dance
In cigar spits
They still pass.
They pass the mob
Singing their beginnings and nows

While again in the world-wide Delta
Again so many babies must die
For a few to grow big, straight, and strong!
I am delirious
From the pattern of visions
From movements of patterns.

The fall of a house
Is the rise of another!

And the willows whisper
A new moon's history;
The still pool floods
With secrets of ancient seeds
Of tomorrows' fruit
When the sun will dance in the valleys
Lifting its feet as on fired sands
Tapping for the suns which
WILL come.

Thoughts From The Pacific
(for Caution Semenya)

If I were a song-writer
I would compose for the world
Ear-wax-drilling lyrics—
Pound gongs,
Drum drums,
Centipede-legged sounds of pain,
Jut earsplitting wordspears to the hearts' brain
So the whole world can really hear . . .
The feels of exile.

I would write of turbulent marriages
Between ourselves
And shark-warmed seas—
How like thirsty pebbles
We wait for some lone spray

(that never falls):
We come,
Smogdusted silhouettes
Acclimatized
Gravitating
Upon the hollowed axis
Of their timed, doldrum time.

I would also write of whirlwinds
Bristle whistles of challenge—
Unleash spiral bellows
Let their splitsplash fire
Their yoke of years
On Dawn's rocks.

I would write of the circled hands of
A continent,
A face of an Africa
Spangled with glowworm eyes.
BECAUSE she will reclaim her own
From these years' tide.

Birds and Man

Thus spoke the senator from Arizona:
Gentlemen! the coin-grafted bird is extinct
Our national eagle has been overkilled
Those poisoned plants were meant for rodents
Aah . . . ! Ours is a dark history!
First the buffalo!
Then the frontier! The rivers! The forests!
Now, our national symbol . . . gone . . . all gone!
And I keep thinking
Next, it will be us!
 And at the back was heard
 A choir of Americans chant
 "Bury my heart at Wounded Knee"
 My heart at Wounded Knee

At Wounded Knee
Wounded Knee
Wounded Knee!

Thus spoke an old Zulu in the pages of history:
Iqola, the bird of marvels lives
Iqola, the bird-eating bird lives
He lives in the rising sun
He lives in the setting sun
In the air we breathe
In the fields we plough.
In the sweat of the handicapped
And his hand searched the pockets of poverty!

Many heard him speak.

Though they did not know his language
In the four corners of the world,
Many understood.

Also in the book they read:

"The flying bird of steel is dewinged

And now adorns the countryside

Leaving triumphant ugliness in Angola

Vietnam

Where legs of the wounded dangle

From backs of flying trucks

Where shelled pullets emerge

Flipping newfound wings

Flashing bullets of change

Clanging chants of freedom.

Thus spoke the new age:

Like shadows at sunrise

We lingered in your footsteps.

When the sun moved west

We marvelled at our own shadows growing.

Now our direction is pointed.

America is burning!
Stores homes are burning she says!
Landlords shake insurance claims,
Black people just taking food
Clothes and anything brand new!
 Heh?
 What you say?
 Makes no sense?
 Its another world?

I wonder if she's tired already!
I hope she's not!
I hope she's . . .
 Yes Ma'am!

There Is No Light

My father wears a light on his head
He says it is dark underground
His brother only laughs
And says there is so much light
At night at the power house
He wishes it could turn into food.

My mother is at Madam's
Preparing dinner on a gas stove.

I know I'll be punished at school
I can't finish my homework
We just ran out of paraffin*
There are no pennies for candles
I see I have to unfold my mat.

We ran out of paraffin
And there is no money for candles . . .

Maybe . . . Maybe . . . I'll just . . .

*Paraffin is kerosene

Summer 1970
(a thought to Barbara Masekela)

I heard this morning
dawn's trumpet stampede
deluge the air with spears
of Hughie's 'lovely lonely' blues.
We grew without comprehension
at the quicksands of America's time
groping for solutions
to the teary smiles
on Africa's face.

I read this morning
poems written with the color
of South Africa's bloodshot sky.
How they leapt with the wind
on the narrow prisons of pine!

We move to rooms
drenched in whey
calabashed at our fathers' fathers' birth—
along the place of dance.
Now we dance on other fields
menstruating seeds from a book
that smolders on grounds
the same that followed
with the flood
of early summer promises.

We are the transplant from the womb
whose contractions
cure the wrinkles
of the stock exchange.
Noon
we move like gold fish
in murky waters
of a glass jar—

On the faces
you cannot catch the rats
that meander
inside bewildered ends;
we mark-time
between choiceless-choices
in this marble maze of human progress.

These are "they"
citizens on the run.
Today they know what I know:

How the echoing
so—
lo
falls
on
nerves pulled
like autumn
strings across
an empty gourd.

Embracing Exile

Yes
We drift
Country to country: drift . . . ?

I move
Yes I move on
Upon, depending on
Ideal tides
But even in the fashioning current

As it furnishes
I gather moisture
To carry me ashore

Sometimes too much
And then I weaken
From the weight
Also
Of blood and water-home, home screaming blood

Sometimes too little
As when it takes slow years
To rock
Again
Together in long warm embrasures of the sunlit, running
sands

THERE
You can see
The piecing of wounds better
Than
You can pierce

A fish
High on its sunlit crest
Of awesome beauty.

ANTAR SUDAN KATARA MBERI

Quickview

She climbs the stairs
at the base of the hill
quickly
clad in brown
head to toe
bundles under each arm
groceries for someone
she is so beautiful

her pitch-black face
aglow
she is fully lit
where the sun weaves
its haphazard way
between trees and buildings
to find and touch her
her door opens and
she is gone
leaving an unintended memory
of raw beauty
indelibly inked and
etched upon the fabric-flesh
of my mind and heart.

Quickview #2

There's a farmer tilling
turning up fresh soil
in fields where earth is
dark beneath his tractor-plow
there are new buds bursting
from seeds of long ago
their brandnew tiny faces
pushing up through this land
are dark like mine.

New quotas / or Booker T. and Garvey would have loved South Africa

each year
new quotas
of heartbreak
children shut out
of schools, towns
life

is a plague
fed with spoons
of apartheid

“separate as the five
fingers of the hand”

they come at six
in the morning
just to be coldly
told:

“no room, go home”

they come with expectations
bright as neat uniforms
to again be told
coldly:

“no room, go home”

they come every day
for weeks on end
determined to learn
but—

“no room, go home”

each year

life
towns, schools of
children shut out
heartbreak of
quotas new

each year

where may they cast
their buckets down
when the well they stand at
is shallow/hard as ground?

Juanito's Blues

downstairs
lives a small
spanish boy
who sez,

he wants to be
a cop
when he grows up

jus so he can kill
all the friggin spics

cause they don't—
he's been told—
never go to work,
love to play
dominoes,
drink mucho beer
eating baccalau
and cuchifritos
all day
in the sun

but really because
his white teacher
told him before
the entire class:

latinos contributed
absolutely nothing
to civilized humanity
except rameras, putas,
and sugar cane.

so, tonight
i am going down to tell

my little brother
who hates his mirror,

about Cuba and Castro
Chile and Allende

then ask he pose
his teacher two questions:

how does she explain
Hitler and Nixon
to her little girl and boy;
what she plans to do
about the proposed teacher
layoffs?

*Percussion Bittersweet **

if you go where cities quake
in fear of their own shadows

if you go where buildings hide
behind a broken skyline

you will find a band of wo/men
in love

the daily rounds of suffering
is the vintaged wine they drink

these people collect the spilled
blood/

wine

of our people

wine

of our pain

wine

of our percussive persistence

these people refine the wine

of our mind
the mind/

for our strength
the strength
of
our
struggle

they have grown
in the streets of our desires

they have grown
in the rivers of our universe

i have seen their fish/

these wo/men

i have seen these wo/men
feeding multitudes/

feeding them

their love—

two bushels of unending bread

their knowledge—

one lonely fish abstracted from mud

rivers of the universe

i have seen their fish

in the moons granary
they have sown the suns seed
for the harvest

the moons granary/

the source

the suns seed/

the strength

the source/

this devotion

the strength/

this devotion

this devotion/
the daily round of suffering
this devotion/
the vintaged wine
the vintaged wine/
grown in the streets of our desire
the streets of our desire/
rivers of the universe

*A Max Roach title tune

Legacy for a Beboppin Gentle Giant: DuBois

Olympic torch
within your eyes, heart
a torch firm based
cast years before
in the smelts of Africa
before your heraldic cry

red, black, multifired flame
you took yours
from American coals
coals mined by black hands
coals draped with black flesh
from the invisible ovening vats
of American racism and crass
class oppression;
you siphoned off a black bread of flame
flame draped with black hands
flame shaped with black flesh
flame burning eternally
its first oil black blood
seeping down in the bituminous lamp
of the soilvat.

Olympic torch
within your eyes, heart
within your high held hand
a torch cast years before
in African smelteries
now your heraldic cry

black runner
lungs breathy as the universe
black runner
veins strong in iron-wrought limbs
black runner
daring an obstacle course, a gauntlet
defying history and the present
black runner
your course is history
your torch is defiance
your defiance is the future
made manifest in present
black runner
outdashing, outdistancing the chasm
of capitalism of imperialism of racism
of national oppression of blind hate for humankind

black runner
firm back, firm will
run into exile with treachery
we know America
sought to spike you illegally
you knew it
were too fast afoot
for you had seen the tape
standing red
and black
against a golden dawn
you were the dusk of that dawn

America still remains
an obstacle course of intrigue

standing before us
worming away at history
obstructing the future vision

Black runner
lungs breathy
of our history
optimistic
olympic torch
within your eyes, heart
your high held heraldic hand
we see your limbs
lightskinned and pressed
against our darkness
we call your red— vision
blooded choice:
clarity

No "house nigger" you.

Your trophy is not
senility
unrecuperated exile;
your trophy is
our love
the black toiling tortoise
who learned his task
discovered the ego-lipped
hare had eaten his own speed
then chose to rest;
and knew his path

Black
Runners
We Are
Black Toilers
Tortoises
Sometimes Slow, But Consistent

I am one, there are others
my mother and father for instance,
who know loneliness
long distance
running; who know it well

Who know well
second-rate sprinters
who have eaten their speed
for breakfast
a short buck or two
cents

Today
we, like you
see red tape
black draped
for us
standing beside brown drapes
yellow, tan and white drapes

Today
we are running
lungs breathy
limbs smelted in
soil/flesh/vats
of Africa-American women
olympic torches
olympic bearers
high in eyes, hearts, hands
heads tossed back fearlessly

Today
we together burst across all obstacles
courses set before us
ours is a zigzag or beeline
up steep slopes, goat paths of Agony Hill
to the future

our youthful lungs
already know of pain of fire of hurt of hate
of desert dryness of distance covered of distance to go
our second wind at hand
our stamina time
and you WEB
who showed us our
sweetswingin sweatsteppin paths
are the multifired flame example
draped in black hands
shaped in black flesh

burning eternally
in our bituminous black blood—
lamps of love, persistence, and longevity

we are the torch/
bearers of your legacy
an olympic flame of fame

Because of you WEB
to all we can say
do say
send us your runners
runners of/to the new world
and let us breast the nearing tape
on the horizon together
or not at all

for we are the torchbearers
bearing todays race,
tomorrows victory
among the flames
of our sacrifice and love.

Winnie *

blind
black
leader of leaders
worker

your gentle face
a clearview mirror
hides nothing of your humanity

blind
black
worker
father

I sit here trying
to sculpt an image of you
with my pen
but find my creation un
satisfactory

I ask: how
to ink your story of inspiration
your mass song bassooning through
red baiting waters
you wounded:

where they robbed you of your sight
but could never in an epoch
touch your voluminous vision

blind
black
Communist
brother

who will paint your surging picture?
who will stroke the fine lines
eight years of prison left
entrenched in your fiercesoul brow?

suffering
you have seen so much
through eyes hidden
in the turrets of your mind
in the high places of your heart

blind
black man
Communist leader
comrade worker

who will capture this love
that lies residual
alluvial
rich and fertile
between your vast banks
of human understanding?

what honer of stone
will step forward
and hew you into immortality
mortal though you be?

what historian, regardless
of color; of strong convictions
will tell your untold story
will mingle your minerals within us?

bold
blind man
beautiful black
soulful man

I have sat before your wisdom
a new shoot in the noonday sun

felt your rays uplifting
my searching petals.

I have found a painter
to capture the serenity
of your years
in the struggle

But I

I will need a special pen
a pen with the surging waters of the world
for blood coursing through your veins
a pen with the trunks of all trees
symmetried into one
with roots on every continent
for a fountain
and the crystals of the sun's vision
to serve as ballpoint
calligraphy you
pulse of our consciousness

to roll out the dark lines
blood lines of your soft features
your Southern heritage: black
and warm
them with unselfish life
sheened in class struggle

for my eyes

I will need the sweat of workers
and the multitudes of tears gathered
through the years harvested
on our march through history
our march to change history

you: blind
you: black
you: Communist
you: my man
you: Winnie

the heritage
we shall never renounce!

*Henry Winston, National Chairman of the C.P.U.S.A.

On The Inside Strong

leaves have fallen
from young treetops
standing tall
pale and cold

leaves lay coupled
beneath my window
autumn's memoirs
red and gold

snowflakes come softly
small, thin, drifting
sifting through barren trees

mixed with rain
so bleak,
 wet,
 cold,

lonesome's feeling is winter's cane

but, though the ground
will soon be coated
deep inside me

summer rages
fancy free

cause

though years may go
in trouble's churn

the greatest thing
i've ever learned
is to love
 peace

and thus be sure
of peace's return.

COSMO PIETERSE

Song (Prelude)

Tall trees:
Pine and poplar: oak

And a man shall weep

 Vine and maple; rose
 Bright leaves

And a woman keep
All his troubled heart
Till she lull its sorrow and he fall asleep

 Deep roots

Then his tears will flow

 Green shoots

Till they flood the seas
And his blood's disease
 Shall erupt to peace
Bright and tall as trees

Mild shore

And the mountains stand
Over all the land

Wide plain

And the rest will grow
While the wind shall sing

White rain

And it shall be spring, and it shall be spring
Deeply: darkening . . .

ANNE SADOWSKI

Miss America

She walks she talks
laughs smiles at calloused fingers
like mine.

Her hands
hands that would go well with coffee
pasteurized white
have never grappled with America
or even touched it.
But mine have.
These hands and millions more have fed America
been bitten chewed
then tossed aside like old calendars.

These hands
hands that scar themselves for a living

will never be an asset in love
or make the movies.
They only come quietly out of their pockets.
But they have made America.
Made her gluttonous for more.
They've made Miss America
who she is
Queen of the untouched
Mistress of greed.

They've made the gloves she wears
The soap she washes off her history with
Her history
Covers our hands like dirt
Clings to our fingers like sweat
Won't wash off
Refuses to wear gloves

Oh Miss America, what will you ever do
when these hands come out of their pockets?
What will you do
when these hands
join hands?

Crucified

Not like Jesus pinned
to his cross like a monarch
moth.
Nothing so extravagant
as that.
No parade or mobs
No thunder—
Storms or words from heaven
No hallelujah chorus
No churches built
No missions started
No disciples or bibles or mourners.
No mother.

This was simple
like morning
an every day affair.
A boy convicted
sentenced to rats
broken glass
nailed to dirt
and tenement walls
a boy called nigger
playing in an alley slips
falls maybe
cuts his head maybe
loses an eye
lives to be ninety
and blind

I know you've seen him.
Standing on the corner clutching a cup begging
Singing
"Praise the Lord
Oh me, oh mighty
Praise the
 mighty
 mighty
 all-mighty
 Lord."

To Whom it may Concern

Part of the world is dying.
Everywhere leaves fall off trees
like blood from a wound.

I am here by the river
I've come to watch the earth explode
like a sky on Independence Day.
But I can't celebrate like everyone else
as reporters take pictures

my eyes focus on something else.
Somewhere
someone is bleeding
Something inside me leaps
I let it go.

The trees are lucky.
Only the scientists know they are dying.
The rest of us become part of the season
falling out of high places
in one way or another we identify
like mirrors do.

I've seen poems thrown out windows
like rice on a parade
celebrating a hero or the time
of day
celebrating themselves
like these leaves falling
into the river extending
for miles.

I'd like to toss my self out a window
and watch it scatter like stars
around the moon.

Sometimes I feel as old as the moon
When I'm alone
and the moon is alone
I want to touch her face with both my hands
and comfort her
maybe draw her down from the sky
and turn her face around.

The trees know they are beautiful.
The scientists know the trees
are dying and the river knows
the time of year.
I only know that I can fall out a window

only in dreams
and that the moon will never fall.
She must be the only exception.

Clouds fall when it rains
buildings fall
with age
children fall
sooner or later
scientists and empires fall
and tears fall from mothers
when their sons fall
from too few tears
men fall in factories
every day
thousands fall into graves.

Now even the leaves fall.
It's that time of year
part of the world dies
here by the river
I watch the reflection
it's almost inviting
like Independence Day.
Something inside me leaps
I catch it
here it is
throw it out a window if you like
carry it on
I'm all yours.

Disorientation

Distance strengthens
my intentions.
From the hills of Ohio
I long for places
in Paris and Budapest
In Buenos Aires
I write poems about Ohio.
Friends
long dead
Walk with me to whiskerias
along the calle Santa Fe.
I drink to their health
and through the whiskey's
yellow color
emerges a blue begonia
wilted under my window.

Poetry

I woke up without laws.
My pen outlined the thirst
of my tongue.
I caught the light
between my fingers
and carried it into the sun.
I enlarged kaleidoscopic cancer
and shredded its skull.
I kept writing
without a pen in my hand.

JAMES STEELE

ecology

how do i speak
to sunrays faltering
in billowing flames

what do i say to the sea
her waves stunned
as they fall
upon dead birds
laying silent on cluttered beaches

can i hum lullabies to children's
swollen bellies
their red noses
dripping with starvation

will i chorus humbled tomorrow
when it creaks through broken doors
feet sore and stinging
from the hot pavement
of heroin tracks

when jobless dawn
turns a bleak stare
of indifference
to the moon
budding for fullness

what will i sing to her
loved one
fluttering glitter
who arrays my loins
with pregnant immensity

when hunger dwindles
that bulging mountain
down to desolation

what rhymes will i chirp
into her capacious ears
whetting for satisfaction
to soothe gnawing pains
eating 'way the future
like termites do
an old wooden floor

how can my strained arms
bear the solitude
of stingy factories
put to pasture

how can i echo
to maimed humanity
bursting
below cylinders
falling rapidly
as do snow-flakes
upon brains spewing
from the hollow sockets
of tear-stained pupils

how can i speak her name
to the dozing embers of nights
endless with screams
and depleted lunchbuckets
empty beds
rusted machines
barren tables
and work benches
orphaned seconds of unwound time

life

to struggle against a falling mountain of opposition
to hold up against burgundy-breathed despair
and the gleaming eyes of rampaging computers
set loose by profiteers with balding brains
to fight and resist continuity of the present
to fight and resist discontinuity
impeding the sun rising from rainy days
constipating earth from quaking disease and deceit
against ambiguous forces of the mystical shell

graeco-roman wrestlers carrying two bricks
for castrating the wind
that blows out of the nostrils of change
to struggle even after air thickens with hollering
from the phobic closets burning in reichstag fires

after steel doors slam
smashing the sculptor's hand in ovens
masquerading showers to wash innocence away
after treachery and neglect
after worn-out hearts weather away
too tired and disappointed with the minimum wages of life

to struggle against the whole world falling
down on an ant hill
and survive . . . and survive . . . and triumph

bon voyage

why not someday
take a voyage to the center of the earth
where the working people live
and sea what you can see—

down tunnels
damp and
where
odious rats smile at screams of raw children
gnashing teeth against the tiny heads
battered upon plymouth rock

thanksgiving
on gravelled playgrounds
turkeys simmering
on pages of old magazines
piping hot potatoes
rotting
in broken jaws of distraught irish peasants
pumpkins in pies
hunger in lives
black is red
and red is black
and indigo is a spectrum
colored
want

flannel-quilted pilgrims
bring tidings of great joy:
an empty book of capricious holidays
cornucopia of insensitive indifference
brims of silver chalices
tilted against puckered lips
of dilettantish social workers
overflowing with ignorance

someday take a voyage
To the middle of time
and tale what you can tell—

of dust storms whirling with grotesque laughter
across starving barrios
blowing chills up
half-naked panchos of resilient barrionados

and compassionate mamasitas
pensive
make tamales
with no ingredients
on discontented christmases
little muchachos sleep restlessly
beneath breathless radiators
hoping the omen of death
finds no chimneys on their heartless buildings
would that santa and the landlord
burn quickly in this firelessplace

take a voyage
down the tongue of inner city's blues
sometime
and here
what you can hear—

of screaming desperation
spawning melotone choirs
epics of great tunas
leaping with furious contortions
of stamina
to freedom
from grey nebulous churning currents
that would gladly drown the nimble cynic

but this torrential tyranny
becomes a sauna of determination
for muscles replenished by reddened sweat
dripping from aching centuries of toil

lazarus
the straw man
sleeping rainbow
gigantic colossus
awakens from castigated drudgery
quaking pale dungeons into pastel rubble
sickle (cell)

hammers
labor day into yearly harvests
this time immemorial voyages of october
this time a good traveller
this time autumn quests triumph:

evermore the spring of life

some day

some day it would be nice
to play an instrument through
the green carnival of forest
music and brush notes of love
across the soft feathery
tops of trees sending out
rhythm breezes to count each
tree root one by one

my name is a name

my name is a name
an image implying
human
being
dynamic and alive

gliding in and
out of where
life and death
the buried spirits
and the future
perfect tense
conjugate
on the rhythmic wind

my name is being
the meeting place

in the trunk of trees
where air intercourses
the flesh of earth
unifying old skulls
of the fathers with
tomorrow's babies' first tear

being is my name
. . . a juncture where
vectors of all things
gather briefly
unto each other
to see if good and
beauty will manifest
in the space of time
. . . then they adjourn

i am the continuum
where name and
being congregate
on the sunrise
beneath full moons
in springtime

i am a chance to gain
another chance
the pregnant mother
cradling the sunset
of a new-born year
a sphinx harmonizing
with riffs of the wind
blowing through green trees

folk poet

folk poet folk poet folk poet
folk poet folk poet
folk poet

exploding lore
like combustions of
sun bursts
before denying eyes
who refuse to hear
radiating messages
singeing blind ears
with electrifying mud

tom cat jitterbugging
over chords like
gossip across backyard
clotheslines telegraphing
blues legacy
from down home

city-sleeking hands
of a country-fried cousin
jammin' lightning bolts
in reclamation of ancient
drums and sending
them fireworking
splendorous rainbows
electrocuting
society page consciousness
with rude revelations

against over-worked spines
pumping shrills up
and down negated brains
chilling "fronts" to the bone
embarrassment suddenly gives
way to big feet patting
out the bunioned beat
of a denied heritage

spontaneously like
spring erupting
out of the doldrums

of dead winter
sparkling eyes witness
moaning sounds

episodes
of the painful journey
sad souls recall sorrow
agony, burnt cork
songs of wickedness

against the treacherous agents
traitors against humanity
assembling the master blueprint:
a debauched legend
coated with loathing
facsimiles blushing like
sewage ditches with the lusty
mustiness of manure oozing
its perverted history
into the fresh air

exposed now
now exposed in the catfish night
by the strummer of poems
the surgeon
with sterilized guitar
cuts incisions
into etherized eyeballs
that could not listen

but the drumming strumming
and the moaning groaning and
the groaning moaning and the
clanging and the twanging
and the pick- pick-picking
dynamites anesthetized minds
with parabled
images of healthy hearts
undergoing surgery

in an eagle's nest
at the city dump

wildcats walking in the dark

. . . this is a story about a wildcat, whose cousin is the Pink Panther; and his parents are Lionel Lion and Pauline Puma, respectively; his uncle is Larry Leopard, and his nephew is Culligan Cougar. wildcat is distantly related to Artimus Aardvark and Benjamin Bear. By the way, wildcat's aunt is Tiny Tina Tiger (it should be just Tina Tiger, because she's been getting bigger lately).

wildcats walking in the dark
carousing on every streetcorner
hollowed eyes lingering
at the prospect of vacant lots
that once bulged with machines

but now in blue fog
of empty summer
nothing grows there
only weeds
on the oil-stained concrete
not even a rat
to munch on
porkchop bones
discarded with a burp
from brown lunch bags

lounging on parking meters
patent-leather paws
patting against crumbling curbs
tigers and lionesses
blighted by idleness
not a cameo role
to be had at metro-goldwin-mayer
nor even a jungle run

of monsoon charity
from kingfish kerner*

nickleless and funky
silk manes and panamas
tilted twixt hungry ear lobes
thirsting for sounds of axes
hammers
soddering, wiring
the speeding sonatas of belts
conveying gold
frankincense and myrrh
or even textbooks

but nothing moves
but the noise of streetlamps,
parking meters, curbs,
beergardens
and broken wine bottles
moaning
the misery
of used cars:
"cadillacs for sale"

*the late Otto Kerner, head of Kerner Report Commission

the other side of town saturday night

"i loves you porgy" rasps
beneath scratching fingers
of half-powered victrolas

sweet peter jesus
bedecked in double-knit
needling snares
for bergamoted virgins

the hounds yalp at vagrants
whispering on the corner

sneaking plans to espionage
another screaming eagle
"lord, o'lord" recites the sister
to blister
sword-like tomorrow sabbath
as she hot combs ultra sheen
through her pomaded curls

ole man river belches on the porch
grime gripped hands choking a brew
pops hops for his head
aching with clanging reminisces
of fomentous forty hours
not ours
not even his

no individualism in this family living
common blood with every block
in the low rent district

RALPH STOREY

The Death of a Symbol

What words can *you*
say to me? As if
my ears are so distant, that your
breath could not touch
or disfigure /my face

has turned. Not in or under
the direction of your ways.

When I had ventured
away from home/and met
you in the streets of rain;

Were there really soft, beautiful
words to caress or embrace?

Lust . . . seemed to be company
in the cold deserted
houses in which I died; that was my death
now I live I live or did
you know?

I love you? is that the thing I told you
or did you listen correctly to
the disgusted songs in my mind
and heart? that were never performed.

The sheer dislike
for your symbols that made me sit alone

my eyes rolling around in my head
staring at the sun, It's blackspots.
There were times we walked. I like motion and anything
at that time when I was alone to walk with.

I forget things easily now I remember,
and my face has turned
and my face has turned
and my face has turned and I am sliding
dark slopes easily
through my home, (content) at my turned face.
happiness at my place

None of your fingers
can grasp or look
again in emotion or
affection.
I have survived your death
in my
life.

Sky House
for Crazy Horse, Chaka & Geronimo

In a time
without time, above
an enclosure of
immense space,
craftsman baked in
sunsets created wind,
forged rain in
homespun blankets
within the only house/
a sky/sky house
the only
shelter.

With baskets &
sundials, brown bowls
in splendor stitch/up the
beaded chest/a loincloth
spread evenly round jujube
tree envelops the
eagle overhead, beak
moving to the chant.
The peaks become strong
noses, the mountain itself
puzzling the
horizon.

(Eagle devouring snake,
rattle-pipe striking
sun-rays)

Under the only house
a sky/sky house
the only
shelter.

Can I say
to you its
just a smile away,
a mere shout of feeling
rubbing thunderbird charm
kissed warm by desire.
Can we forge
blood through shadows
of a cyclical feather
that spans
forever, that melts
continents to a
decade and then to
a life.

That echoes
of a shoestep,
can crack softleather
souls naturally, even
in the laughter
of the concrete.

Going back on
the ass of a
steel
antelope I tell
you to cry
vengefully at
the obscure
markings of gloomy
visitors who
claim to feel
for the warrior.

Going back I
hope to
take you
with me, above
an enclosure of

immense space, mingling
with the
craftsman, them
breathing fire, teaching
you rain
within the only house/
a sky/sky house
the only
shelter.

Ode: Infinity
(Dedicated to John Coltrane)

Tracks reached
a vanishing point in
the distance of his day.
While the rapid
hovers above Lakeview cemetery
as I ride;

as I must pay this
fare for this Trane
or either I sit here
with *Them* e-motionless

circular yet long an infinite search/
while I rise to my stop
(a recurring jazz) to myself:
an above thing. Over to the
playground he talked to
children and the old man
who sat there in his movement

He felt supreme listening to the recurring
sweetness of the moving Trane
though he did not know John.

Where were you taking us Trane to leave?
to him I ask What

were you looking for/ Trane to leave

I've Heard Them Talk: for my main man

There are those
who talk of labor,
who worship a theoretician
& apply him to our lives.

They, who have never
seen sweat roll down their
father's hands: who
speak highly in green
buildings and never
mention hunger or how to
get rid of it.

Some of us tell them
"Journey back once again"
Look, just once more now!
(You see small men digging/ their
lives away shoveling graves
daily/no matter where.

And you see him walking or leading you to his bus stop.
Or you see him driving back in a car and a world
filled with fatigue.

Maybe even checked him out, long-faced,
sitting silent on
beer-crates, having a gutter dream
cascade against the old battered walls
of a junky corner store.

And on any given day/you find him alone.
And on every desolate corner/you hear him crying.

Every friday sun brings about his
temporary dance of wine/a frozen nose/
a bitch the next mourning.

A day asleep on a street where sun & time have died.
A death/the next wish he could make.)

Then they approach him with daggers/he hasn't been able to
change
He smiles/their arms filled with books/He smiles & speaks,
yet
realizes you'll wave everything above him/He wheels away
out of sight/
looks back to a day that he never had/ As you run forth to
liberate
him/he reaches out his hand, and looks away.
That man may come again to ask you for a dime
will you give it to him or run down a theory?

Portraits of 2 lonely women

Lil

The ceiling
vibrates in
blue shades, low
for comfort and
aged secrets.
Sipping ease
with lone screams
from a rape down
the street are the
tools of
love.
Wind echoing
disbelief
in laughter or
anything that
moves. Wind pushing
joe down the
street by the building
nodding his
head.
A broken toothed
smile breaks the

sweat as she
falls
to the
floor.

II

Jennifer Van Jones

Sachet and cold lace
are the artifacts of
her style, searching a winding
staircase of dreams, which
have all been filled.
Tipping her glass to
the curves of
the bubbling wine, the
face melts the glass/smile
which took years to
become. Her man stabs
daggers in motel
walls, coming to you
through the nerve capsule
of a vomiting throat.
Woman, going way
down to bowels
of sweaty pity and isolated
ward walls, you
only hope to
help her
pass the
time.

Home/grown

As a
child crawls
to discover the

movement of
his journey, he
is easily swept
into a love
of
silence.

(A king/child learning
to value a tool which
he is destined to use)

When he
grows old enough
to peel the
broken paint off
the cupboard door,
he will put
his tool to
use; stealing the
last can of
beans, eating them
slowly.

QUINCY TROUPE

McCoy Tyner At Slugs *(For Steve Cannon)*

Thursday night at Slug's
Lower East Side launching pad
for intergalactic space music
people sounds fire-water
drifting through ice-cubes
tinkling glasses conversations
as in a complex
beautifully painted weave

Smokin high on the riff
on the downbeat

trippin in tempo

out of tempo

ghostman dealin hot

over night piano keys
hot-steppin toe-tappin
as a thief
in the dark bending bars
step/runnin cold tunes
the ivory publisher of black riffs
doin the do
up from the blues/church music
bad-steppin
house-rockin
feet-stompin
cold-cattin
mean-boppin
hard honkin
blues/dues

good news

boilin through
the language of black music

piano spirit

bass thunder shifting sand-
box steps of lightning

McCoy Tyner
quiet genius of piano
playing contagious as a beautiful
drink of woman

Sonny Fortune

bend blastin blended chords
echoin the Trane
bass man groovin heavy
drum man up & under
rollin thunder
all around

Elvin's thang
but doin his own thang too

Me & Steve Cannon
sho nuff laid low
in the high cut
groovin
at the bar listenin

too voices blending
with ice-cubes/sounds
singin in the
throbbin heart
burnin in the smokin air
the fastest man alive
doin the righteous do
cookin the beautiful news

at Slug's Lower East Side
launching pad
intergalactic space music

Trilogy Of The Night
(For Carl & Elizabeth Kimbro)

1.

In the night,
buildings belching
light & smoke
streets plummeting
breakneck
into fireballs
of electrical colors,
carrying people
cars & animals
as molten lava

from spitting
volcanos

In the night,
oceans of feelings
touch each other
beneath sheets
of various meanings,
virginal beginnings
seed the world
with their
diffuse characters

In the night,
fear paints corners,
rats slither out
too feed
upon human flesh,
piles of garbage
reflect stench/decay
sweating boulevards
of urban cities

In the night,
executives seek regulated
passion in transient
bedrooms purchased
with plastic credit cards
while symphonies twist
whistling through branches
of Central Park
kissing lovers sweating
rhythms in the dark

& in the night,
true poems come swiftly
carried upon blinding
flights of dream/music,
cocaine firing

the mad imagination:
yellow clouds & stars
dripping tears
of molasses blood

& sometimes,
in the night,
we see the sun
shining from faces
of passing people:
& if we're lucky,
or seeking it,

we touch/find
the sweet brimming

lips of felt love

2.

In the room,
the t.v. flashing
image madness,
lights penetrating
the muted mirror,
speak of their
surreal distance,
books on the floor
piled in geometrical
stacks, records
of histrionic terrors,
loves, faiths,
sometimes achieved,
& three cats
on the floor,
curled in peace-
ful sleep,
as is a woman
in the bedroom,

warm & deep
within the sweet
embrace of a
beautiful love

3.

In the head,
the heart seeks
the essence
of poetry, seeks
too unravel
the mad mystery
of the search
for ourselves,
seeks the sacred
drama of ritual,
of release,
seeks evolving
heights of
recognition

In the night,
the spun sun spirit
sleeps in the smile
of a dazzling moon,
deep in the heart
of the head
poetry seeks
beautiful songs
of mystery

in the night
in the deep heart
head of the night

our search
is for love, finally,

it is for love

Franklin Avenue Blues People

Cosmic song birds,
fabric of rainbows,
stylin through space

hully gully grind dance
in lovestroked days
nights they come on moonbeams
with gin-scarred faces,

guitar blues strings
moanin about dues places,

in death stroked spaces,
in blues scarred lives,
& wine scarred rainbows

singing bloody knives

Thoughts

Autumn
autumn fall
fall thru light years
flesh mind

past rocks
past boulders
into sea

sea fall
sea fall
falling thru

weightlessness
thru sounds over tears

wiped from stones
with flicks of
 mascaraed eyelashes

your sounds autumn
so beautiful into winter
your sounds fall
 falling

to fertile soil
to black soil

We Climb Upwards

we climb upwards
our hands gripping
the music/the stagnant
blues/ait that is the ritual
that is the stem from the seed
grown deep within rhythms
of an african past
we climb upwards towards the vision
the inscrutable face of the mask

& we dance outside of time
for a dime in a trance on a needle point
we dance the ritual of the dead
on the southside of chicago
beneath the red cold glare of harlem

& we groove within the limits
of our undisciplined bodies
we tune our rhythms
into the ritual
of silent drums

but we can dance
the dance of freedom

we can tune our trance
to the beat of those drums
& bring the flames of justice
burning from the men that hung
for the cause
that was greater than this life

we have invented the music of the dance
we have beat the ritual of those rhythms

River-Rhythm Town

River-rhythm town
under sun/moon laughter,
blues town filled with
blues people
doin blues/dues thangs

Cycles of shining laughter,
listenin to dues sounds everyday
of Chuck Berry, Miles Davis,
Little Richard, The Dells,
Thelonious Monk
& John Coltrane

Walkin the hip walk,
wearin the hip new thangs,
laid off clean as a broke
dick dog in the cut,
chasin hot girls down
rhythm & blues,
doin the belly grinds
at smoky blue-red
lighted funky parties

music risin hot
through cold funk
of wall to wall
partyin black shadows

weavin spinnin dancin
drinkin in the foxy beauty
of sensuous bad ladies
yea!
rubbin thrills
against the pain
of imprisoned skin
screaming for release
from overworn tightfittin fabrics

& eye remember smiles
dazzling as daybreak,
& soft as mother's
warm embracing eyes

eye remember love
in the grass sweating
like rivers
from our flesh

eye remember thrills
eye remember smiles
eye remember love

in the grass sweating
like rivers
from our flesh

eye remember sadness

eye remember St. Louis,
river-rhythm town under
sun/moon laughter,
river-blues town filled
with blues people
doin blues/dues thangs

& eye remember death
shattering as daybreak

GLADSTONE YEARWOOD

if u are a poet

thousands
upon thousands of innocent lives
betrayed
by a purloined confidence . . .
civilizations
reduced to waxen
dolls
and costumed masks
in the name of Progress . . .

souls
laid bare
robbed of their organic exuberance
anesthetized
by blood stained treaties . . .
wombs
poisoned by toxic venom
from musket powder
in the name of the holy word . . .

weary nights of warbled voices
crying out to jordan.
shackled feet,
chained necks
cross the triangle's shark-filled depths . . .
men,
sold as chattel
on the auction block
in the name of capital . . .

men,
herded like beasts

into horror chambers
slaughtered
in a grinding sweatshop
called attica . . .
in the name of rockefeller
sleeping panthers
destroyed
amid their naive restful sleep
when white cloaked justice
in hangman's vestments
hovered above
the silent lull of the night,
noose drawn,
crosses burning . . .

thousands
upon thousands of innocent lives
betrayed
by a purloined confidence.

if u are a poet,
with your feet among the people
u know much about oppression
and these things:
u know how it is
to speak the word
and be condemned for it.

in your dreams
u see tortured blood bodies
hanging high from poplar trees;
what strange fruit of the earth?

tomorrow,
men will ask
to hear the truth
about these circumstances,
"is this the long delayed coming of the christ?"
they'll say.

if u are a poet
with your feet among the people,
u will tell them
the truth of your visions;
u will tell them 'bout slaveships
& faraway lands.
u will also tell them
'bout sojourner
& nat turner;
the nature of their resistance,
stubborn,
strong,
unbending as the willow tree.

when u poet your words
must become the fire,
your poem a branding iron
with the indelible imprint
of the people's struggle
to love,
to have,
to share,
to fear no longer
the merciless fangs of the imperial tyrant.

when u poet your words
must glow
radiant
as in the rare thoughts
of the spectrum;
for the poet seeks his existence
down arduous roads
among unsculptured ideas
& faces.

Sweet Louise
(for my grandmother)

Imagine time's tendersweet passions;
The golden ears of corn,
which survived the drowning of the years;

Imagine the throbbing pulsebeat,
Time's own fertile baptism.

Imagine that colossus of inequity;
Its resonant heaving;
Its cowardly belching,
Spewing Africa's stolen labors
From its bloody entrails
Into that triangular graveyard's watery labyrinth.

Imagine the palm wine drinkers;
Their vociferous shouts of *KAISO*,

KAISO

In the embrace of calypso tents.

Imagine time's tendersweet passions;
The sheathing ears of corn,
which survived the drowning of the years
despite the stricken tide.

Look at the washerwoman's
time-stained fingers
rubbing the soiled bed sheets
clean!
Listen to her song,
Sweet Louise.

Oh child of the horizon,
catapulted to a distant orphanage

far from your grandfather's land
. . . a land you never knew;

Who will till the fields
and toil tomorrow in the rain?

Who will husk the budding ears of corn
when crop season comes again?

Oh handsome peasant woman,
who gathered flying fish and dolphin
from the craw of fishermen's nets
as they emerged
from Neptune's tempestuous bowels,

Who will sing songs to the sea?

Oh tender sweet woman;
Seed of earth's pubescent bosom,
who conjured kernel images of youth;

Oh silent laborer,
mother time,
pent with strife,
bursting with motion;

Who will dance a bamboula
beneath the moonlight

Tonight?

A drizzle falls;
Tiny dew drops
on chalice ears of corn.

Fireflies alight
much to our delight
fluorescent in night.

We loved to make rhymes
and dance circles in the backyard;

The two of us,

Do you remember
our walking in the rain?

Your baby brown eyes,
fires of crimson red
glowing
stars of infinite brilliance
strewn in a sea of endless bloom;
quick rapid heartbeats
pounding drum messages
emblazon your heart
in my soul
forever;
Remind me
of the cypress tree
I once read about

tall
and beautiful
and black.

Come winter again;
another bedazzling orbit of the sun;
another meteor hurtling planets across the heavens

another rainbow;

Crop season again,
time to harvest the fields,
pluck the sheathing ears of corn,
enamoured in sunlight;
time to release life's golden honeyed flow.

Will there be time,

old salt of the sea,
to tell those legends
once again;

TO MY CHILDREN?

Will there be time,

Sweet Louise,
to sing those crusty ballads
once more?

To window sit;
reminisce:
hop-scotch and fairy tales;
the young man's stiffly starched collar
after the ball;

Will there be time,

old salt of the sea,
to spin those feisty tales
of ancient seaports
and ruddy cheeked black skinned mariners?

Will there be time,
old salt of the sea?

. . . all these years,
I have kept our secrets
all twenty three of them;
yet tonight in the darkness
only a woman sang
bathing her naked moonlit body
in the wide open mouth of the bay.

AFTERWORD

THE ATHENS of this anthology is situated approximately seventy-five miles south-east of the Ohio state capital—Columbus. With its campus it sits down in the valley of the Hocking River (a tributary of the Ohio), and with its residences it undulates over the hills of the area.

Most people who don't live here, who are from out of state, passing through, or are transient student residents call it a small "college" town which thrives only (they think) during the fall, the winter and the spring, and wilts at the beginning of each June!

Yet it is precisely at this time that another and no less real Athens—having shed its September to June epidermis of noise, low beer, bustling bars and out-of-door crowds, book-worms and sonic-booming stereos—emerges as if from long hibernation.

The summer months belong to the permanent townspeople, predominantly Euro-American; with approximately one hundred Afro-American families in the county, ten families or so in the city; and a group called the Colored, which is a mixture of Afro-American, Native American Indian and Euro-American stock, residing in the eastern part of Athens County. (They consider themselves distinct from Afro-Americans as a nationality.)

Southeastern Ohio, of which Athens is part, is a hilly area of often magnificent beauty. Trees of variegated hue array the hillsides, valleys and plains, resembling a rainbow, splash the countryside. Her rivers run clear to rusty polluted red.

And one cannot miss the dipping and bobbing heads of her metal soilpeckers, that peck and peck at the earth, seeking her black oil and natural gases.

Her history is: boom towns and ghosts towns; iron and coal mining gave birth and death to many. Her population is

relatively consistent owing to a balanced ebb and flow of migratory patterns. Around Athens a number of small coal mines are in operation. And behind the beauty of the hills lie the harsh horrors of strip mining. Holes gape from the mountainsides like the toothless interior of old Appalachian men's mouths. Huge tracts of terrain shine like the bald scarred heads of old wizened wheezing men, or sunken-in like the skull of an automobile victim. Sulphur in the water turns once-beautiful scenery into puspools of contamination. Here exploitative man has been seeking and scratching out materials to feed a system that in turn leaves him in the same condition as the land; wasted and discarded, eking out a meager, below-subsistence, life.

Back to Athens city: like a swimmer who has held breath almost to bursting point, the town begins to gasp and then breathe slowly, savoring each inhalation of days, days devoid of the generally antagonistic or invisible man approach and attitudes of the majority of students; of the indifferent, aloof and disdainful air of some faculty and administration. At this time one can begin to get a picture of some areas of the indigenous mentality. At times it reflects a backward, hostile and overtly racist attitude toward people of color, particularly Afro-American, African and other foreign students and faculty. It shows a hostile face to the growing body of longhaired Euro-Americans, quite a few of whom are attempting to "escape". But in doing so, many escape routes serve to reinforce and develop anti-work and anti-people attitudes and lifestyles. Some "escape" back into the world they are supposedly seeking to escape, with a liberal veneer as justification.

The majority of indigenous Athenians (those who have developed roots) are poor hard working people, most of whom lack the elemental right to send their children to Ohio University, the "institution for higher learning" (founded in Athens in 1804) which just so happens to be their employer as well. And the mentality of the administrators here is often no different toward these workers than that of the coal mining bosses. However, a better rapport is being developed between the student population, segments of it, that is, and the town population, to the extent that students begin to fight on a

number of fundamental issues, similar to those that the townspeople struggle on continually—The Right To Earn, Learn, and Live. Happily!

And our present anthology? Its birth? What prompted this collection is indirectly correlated to the last statement.

Athens, once a major stop on the Underground Railroad line for runaway slaves, still has a profound history of struggle, which unfolds daily. Not long ago there was a Student Workers' Union striking for better work conditions, the right of students to unionize, an end to discrimination based on race or sex, etc.; on occasion this strike enjoyed ninety percent of the non-academic workers' support. There has been and continues to be a United Farm Workers support movement on the campus. There is movement to win students and others to the moving of history, for socialism. There is a continuous struggle in process around the fight against racism; in solidarity with African Liberation, with Chile, with Afro-America too. These movements are turning out a number of fine working class fighters, as well as fighters in the national liberation movements here and abroad. There are struggles here around the question of equal and quality education, against male supremacism, for full equality, and for the development of democratic and forward-looking youth.

I think the anthology reflects all this well.

Yet each artist speaks with his/her own voice and outlook. The poets as individuals differ at points but they sing in unity at others.

Most of the artists represented here are tied into one or more active struggles. Those who have left Athens continue the struggle at varying levels where they are. They are giving birth to new forms of struggle, just as they gave birth to many of the strategies here. And though little of the poetry speaks directly about Athens and its multi-sided environment and life, all of the poems reflect the many psychological and active forces at work in Athens.

The range of the artists' views is suggested by the metaphor of our title, encompassing a spectrum that includes the outlook of political and artistic commitment as well as one of "non-partisanship."

Some of the poems seem to be relaxed lyrics that sing freely, and they apparently speak with ease. But they are controlled by a deep tension in their matter. Others are overtly, urgently concerned with political and social issues: they are poems whose art does not flinch from being patent "propaganda" for freedom and the end of exploitation of humanity and the rest of nature by a few. Most of our poems (and poets), in keeping with the title of the compilation, find it necessary to speak free AND easy.

Such is the case of Margo Bohanon, who opens the second part of the anthology with her powerful and beautiful "These Feet For Rosa Parks":

Black women's feet
stand on crowded busses
behind lunch counters
and sweat in hot kitchens.

Ms. Bohanon immediately confronts us with the pathos and ethos of oppressed humanity, exemplified in the deplorable and oppressive conditions of Afro-American women. Their history of denigration surfaces before us as testament and punctuation, making these lines more explosive, more vitriolic. So when the last stanza calmly informs us that:

Like black tempers
these feet have swelled with the heat
and,
one day, on a crowded Montgomery bus,
these tired black feet
Kicked Jim Crow
dead in the ass.

we are not at all surprised. In fact, we catch the jubilatory fire that ignites the last two lines, we too rejoice. The act is heroic. The Civil Rights Movement is personified in "these feet", in Rosa Parks, thus elevating this human spark plug, this old black mama-of-pearl to her proper status—national and international heroine. Mama Parks measures up to and continues the tradition of freedom fighters: of Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Francis E.W. Harper, our mothers, of all women in history who took/take up cudgels against exploitation. She joins the armada and array of international heroes and heroines who struck for human dignity and elevation.

But there is tragedy to be drunk too. Ms. Bohanon moves into the unheroic, agonized world of those Afro-American women who fall as but one segment, the most exploited, of the many victims of capitalist dehumanization. She is a black woman contemplating in "Alabama" the life of a pregnant Afro-American mother:

When you were young you probably played
all the games children play,
and got your ashy legs red,
from dusty Alabama roads.
I know you dreamed all the dreams children dream . . .

and the double-lynching of this mother:

You probably remembered all these things,
when they hung you
over the river . . .

And were you dead or alive
when your baby dropped from your body
into the Alabama River?

The poem is a biting condemnation of the socio-political fabric of "American Democracy", of the special racist features of U.S. capitalism. You leave this poem instinctually knowing the lynchers will go unpunished, if not applauded, in the general society. There is no crime in murdering Afro-Americans. The more the merrier. These are the same responses that evoke the recognition that:

At Kimberly mines
lungs fill with black diamond slivers
and women mourn in dry lifeless reservations
waiting for men coming home to die . . .

and to make it easy to direct the anger and indignation this poem *ought* to arouse, Ms. Bohanon calmly focuses on who the real perpetrators, would-be-perpetuators and beneficiaries of this exploitation are:

. . . steel monsters
of American enterprise . . .
. . . the puppeteers of Wall Street
discuss democracy in Viet Nam . . .

It is precisely this recurrent sonor that resounds consistently throughout the anthology. Ms. Bohanon has defined and de-

picted the results of a rapacious U.S. imperialist foreign policy. Ms. Sadowski characterizes the domestic policy of the "steel monsters of American enterprise" when she eloquently condemns these

. . . hands
pasteurized white
have never grappled with America
or even touched it.

She beautifully sings the fact

But mine have.

And one feels that this is a plural "mine", a multi-national and multi-racial "mine" that is so familiar and in touch with America.

They've made the gloves she wears
the soap she washes off her history with . . .

But this is not enough Ms. Sadowski drives homes, as she delineates the inter-relationship between this bourgeois "Miss America" and the damage done to her Miss America:

Her history
Covers our hands like dirt
Clings to our fingers like sweat
Won't wash off
Refuses to wear gloves

And finally, Ms. Sadowski puts the ultimate question before the bourgeoisified "Miss America," her nemesis. It is a question, a threat, a promise and a premonition. It is a happening:

Oh Miss America, what will you ever do
when these hands come out of their pockets?
What will you do
when these hands
join hands?

Like Ms. Sadowski, James Steele sees the necessity of posing questions derives from and reflective of the working and struggling masses, women and men. The questions of our fathers, our mothers, our families. These are both personal and collective questions: Questions growing out of the ever occurring fight for the economic and social and spiritual wellbeing of the

working masses where they live lives of poverty in countries whose affluence is daily flaunted in their faces:

how do i speak . . .

can i hum lullabies to children's
swollen bellies . . .

how can i speak her name
to the dozing embers of nights
endless with screams
and depleted lunchbuckets
empty beds
rusted machines
barren tables . . .

(James Steele: "ecology")

Horace Coleman, who has seen U.S. imperialism first hand, in action in Viet Nam, attests to its inability to stop the ever forward march of humankind, despite its pervasive machinery of destruction and repression. In "Night Flare Drop, Tan Son Nhut," he says:

It is Tet . . .
Overhead frightened planes circle
shedding magnesium tears that
burn deep holes in the night
But the dark
like the VC always comes back.

Coleman looking at Nelson Rockefeller's Attica atrocity, strikes the strident chord denoting repression, this time, however, much closer home, virtually in our living rooms:

Robert Nartowicz, a resident of Tent City,
saw "a guy trying to surrender
He had his hands folded
as the loudspeaker in the helicopter said to
He was walking towards the wall
A trooper was standing on the wall
The guy kept walking toward him
The trooper shot him in the chest"

It's a tough problem trying to see through these gas masks a trooper said

And in another poem it is the (unvanquishability of) Afro-American freedom fighter, George Jackson, himself a prison guard murder victim:

Even now with
the ground disappearing beneath their feet, they
refuse to admit your grave is not being used as
they try to escape.

And just as we must reckon with these “backyard/front door” scenarios of injustice, we must also come to terms with injustice and exploitation—its dehumanizing and alienating efforts and effects. Such does Lindiwe Mabuza, South African exile, probe when she reveals the exiled Black South African womens’ perception of exilement:

We grew without comprehension
at the quicksands of America’s time
groping for solutions
to the teary smiles
on Africa’s face. . . .

We are the transplant from the womb
whose contractions
cure the wrinkles
of the stock exchange.

Ms. Mabuza doesn’t leave the reasons why to be guessed at. She tells you with candor, it is imperialist and colonialist capital accumulation that is at the base of the “South African dilemma,” the suffering and extermination of the Black populace of her country. One hears the colonial “legacy” of slavery in the image: “We are the transplant from the womb.” And we see the connection between the special oppression of Afro-Americans and Black South Africans “whose contractions” of giving birth, provide the cheap labor of super exploitation, for the bosses of capital (“cure the wrinkles/of the stock exchange.”) in South Africa and the United States.

She reaffirms our belief that the revolutionary poet cannot escape or ignore these facts. It is the realization, grappling and exposure of these underpinnings that aids in definition:

Noon
we move like gold fish
in murky waters
of a glass jar—

The “gold” is not mere attractive outer coloring. Its message and meaning is deeper, more mundane. It is the essence of their oppression—South African gold mining. All kinds of

inferences are suggested here; the "move" suggest money (also the *m* of "murky"). The "murky waters" become symbolical of the superstructure of South African fascism and its mud (also of the United States?); and the "glass jar" is as real and definitive as is Robben Island, which holds so many freedom fighters as Nelson Mandela, as real as

. . . the echoing
so-
lo
falls
on
nerves pulled
like autumn
strings across
an empty gourd.

Lindiwe allows no resting in the desolation of exile, she is not mining for pity. Exile is no impotent state of grieving and languishment. For her, and for all the South African Blacks I have met, they are but extensions of the indigenous freedom fighter:

Yes
We drift
Country to country: drift . . . ?

But even in the fashioning current . . .

I gather moisture
to carry me ashore . . .

The poetic articulation of a people's deepest aspirations and emotions is a vital supplement to the day to day rigors and frustrations of work, our political struggles; to the education of our sentiments and intellect. The impassioned cry for lifting the smog and filth of (U.S. and South African) imperialism; the combing of the subsoil of every nation, nationality, and people—the workers—for nutritive poetic sustenance, is not confined to any one grouping. Every day many young Euro-American women, such as Anne Sadowski, are questioning their roles/position in U.S. society/history. Annie looks at her mother and sisters among all peoples. She identifies her heritage with that of the wage-toilers, the women proletariat. Such is the grass/roots of her poetry. She does not get lost in

the foliage of feminism, she goes straight to the class question, the class roots of women's exploitation. She is critical of a system in which women continue to be used as class/sex symbols; that denigrates working women. She critiques the images offered women such as the sterility and irrelevancy of "Miss America," which she identifies as partly a bourgeois device pitting women against themselves:

She walks she talks
laughs smiles at calloused fingers
like mine.

Her hands
hands that would go well with coffee
pasteurized white
have never grappled with America
or even touched it.
But mine have . . .

It is "America". the working mass of mothers, that Annie champions and identifies with:

These hands and millions more have fed America
been bitten chewed
then tossed aside like old calendars . . .

The imagery is rich and fresh. It is the working woman "America" that keeps the United States alive, that is deprived and alienated from her own worth and beauty, that cannot find her "reflection in the muddy waters" of the very same (cultural) institutions she has assisted in creating:

These hands
hands that scar themselves for a living
will never be an asset in love
or make the movies

. . . they have made America . . .
They've made Miss America
who she is
Queen of the untouched
Mistress of greed.

These are but a few examples (final examples reflected on) of the fine quality and content of the anthology. The artists are serious, striving to bring their art ever closer to life and the real needs of the people.

I feel that we have been fortunate to be able to bring together these voices speaking out in Athens, Ohio, speaking out concerning the world, speaking out to our world.

We hope that the worlds that open here have brought you closer to the times and the poets, and will compel you to come back to these poems again and again for further probings.

Antar Sudan Katara Mberi

INTRODUCING THE POETS

MARGO BOHANON introduces herself: "I was born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1949. I received my B.A., in Creative Writing and English, from Ohio University in 1971, and my M.A., in Creative Writing and Third World Literature, from Ohio University in 1972. At the present time I am teaching Creative Writing and Afro-American Literature at Kent State University." Her work has appeared in the following publications: *Confrontation*; *Afro-American Affairs*; *Concerning Poetry*; *Sphere*; and *Intro III*.

HORACE COLEMAN (also known as Chaka Aku Shango) at present teaches literature (including Afro-American literature) as well as creative writing at Ohio University. Previously he taught at Bowling Green University.

A sometime soldier in Viet Nam, Coleman is also a part-time broadcaster, and has read his poems widely. His work has been published or accepted by *Confrontation*; *Yardbird*; *Negro American Literary Forum*; *Shenandoah*; and *Kansas Quarterly*—among many others. In addition some of his work has been published by BroadSides; his poems and stories have also appeared in an anthology published by the English Department of Ohio University, *From Athens Out*.

He has said of himself: "born in 1943 and 1967 in Dayton, Ohio, and Sai Gon during Tet; no longer detribalized. Within the past two years have finally begun to become a human-poet-being and learned that the individual voice must be raised before there is unison and you make your own luck and fate. So I make poems." (*Confrontation*, Vol. I. No. 3.)

LINDIWE MABUZA (to quote *Confrontation* I/3 again) is an "Exiled South African native, born Newcastle, Natal. Taught Third World Literature and History, in the center for Afro-American Studies, Ohio Univ. (1969-1976). Also taught for a year at University of Minnesota. Received M.A. in "United States Studies" at University of Minnesota in 1968. Did also gruel for a literature M.A. at Stanford before Shockley. Got B.A. from Lesotho before Independence. Now reading for South African independence."

She has read her work widely, especially in Ohio, and also for radio and television.

Her work has appeared in *Confrontation*; *Mundus Artium*; *Afro-American Affairs*. A collection of some of her work is being considered by a London publisher.

The word passes to ANTAR SUDAN KATARA MBERI, one of the editors:

"I came to Athens as a trackster in 1967, citified, ambivalent toward nature, in love with stone structures, and thoroughly unpolitical in any organized sense, yet quite aware of the stench of racism. In my first year I was politicized along with the masses of Blacks in Athens.

"It was thus that I re-found the poetic voice, a voice somnabulant since the seventh grade; I am deeply indebted to a woman in this regard as well. Over the next six years, I was to meet and learn from, with, the other artists presented, most in the course of that struggle, a few outside of it.

"I seek a fusion of city/country images, sights, sounds, and flavors in my work, for it represents the coming fusion (removal of the multi-contradictions) between city and countryside—under a different social system. Socialism."

His work has been published, inter alia, in *Obsidian; Essence; Proud Black Images; Photo Newsletter*: James Van DerZee Institute; *The Daily World*; and *The Young Worker* among many other magazines and newspapers. His poetry is to be found in an anthology edited by Walter Lowenfels, *For Neruda, For Chile* and West End Press has just published a modest volume of his work, *Bandages and Bullets: In Praise of the African Revolution*.

He has read/worked his works widely throughout the Midwest and other sections of the country like New York, Philly, Atlanta; on T.V. and radio, at mass rallies-for-the-movement in cities and universities, junior high schools. He is presently in Harlem doing community work, and you should see his smile.

The other editor: COSMO PIETERSE, "born in 1930 in Windhoek, Namibia, of South African parents, where I spent my first five years.

"Further education in the Union (now Republic) of South Africa: formally ending up at Univ. of Capetown (M.A. in English and Nederlands en Afrikaans; B. Education). Taught in a Cape Town school for 11 years (1953-1963); during which time banned under the Riotous Assemblies Act from attending political meetings.

"Self-exiled, left South Africa with an exit visa (one-way passport) for England and taught in London school for 4 years. Then freelanced as broadcaster, lecturer, actor.

"Teaching literature (especially by African writers) at Ohio University. since September, 1971.

"Have edited 3 volumes of plays by African writers; co-edited one other anthology of (radio) plays; co-edited a volume of critical talks on African literature; co-edited volume of interviews with African writers.

"Poems in Anthologies: *From Athens Out; Poets For The People; South African Voices; Apartheid*; as well as magazines: *Groote Schuur; Drum; Labour Monthly; African Arts; Afro-American Affairs; Lotus*.

"Enjoys poetry readings and have had published two volumes of own writings: *Echo and Choruses* (poems); *Present Lives Future Becoming* (verse, dramatic sketches, prose)."

Here is ANNE SADOWSKI:

"I was born in Bayonne, New Jersey in 1953 and have lived in N.J. since then excepting college. I started writing in my early teens and am currently a Creative Writing major at Ohio University. [She has since graduated.]

"I want my poetry to be an expression of my self and of my country's people, what our needs and hopes are. I believe in a progressive art, one that speaks for the people whose sweat, blood, and tears have built America and an art that will help give America back to those people."

Anne Sadowski's poetry has been published in several magazines and newspapers, among them *West End*; *The World Magazine*; and *The Young Worker*.

RAINER SCHULTE was the Editor-in-Chief of *Mundus Artium*, a journal of international literature and the arts, published by the International Poetry Forum and issued from Ohio University, where he was a professor of Comparative Literature. One of his main fields of literary interest is translation. He is presently in Texas.

European born, Schulte is widely travelled (as a matter of fact, he really resides in the world and "only visited" Athens), "commuting" on a fairly regular basis across the United States, to South America and Europe.

He has co-edited at least two volumes of "genre-literature": short stories, in the "modern idiom", from three continents, and a "Third World" poetry anthology (with Quincy Troupe). At present he is engaged also in compiling an anthology of world literature—chiefly modern and contemporary.

JAMES G. STEELE is an Ohioan by birth, of proletarian family stock, a graduate of Ohio University where he also taught social science (history, sociology) for four years in the Center for Afro-American Studies, from 1970 to 1973. He left Athens for Cleveland to work as a full-time organizer of the Young Workers' Liberation League (YWLL), in the State of Ohio.

Steele ran for the United States Senate in 1974 and now lives and works in New York, as the National Chairman of the YWLL.

His work has been published in *Afro-American Affairs*.

RALPH STOREY's poetry has been published in *Confrontation* amongst other places, his hitherto unpublished plays have been performed in Athens, Ohio, and in Cleveland.

Storey hails from Cleveland and was a student at Ohio University where he received an M.A. in 1972/3, majoring in Third World Literature. Storey is also a quite talented singer and painter.

QUINCY TROUPE was born in New York on July 23, 1943 and grew up in St. Louis, Missouri. He attended Grambling College (Louisiana) and Los Angeles City College (California). As one of the original members of the Watts Writers' Workshop, he edited an anthology of their work: *Watts Poets and Writers* (1968). At one time editor of *Shrewd* magazine, he was also the founding editor of *Confrontation*, a journal of Third World Literature, published by the Center for Afro-American Studies, Ohio University.

Troupe has read his work in many places, on radio, for television; and he has been widely published, in magazines and anthologies, including appearances in *The New Black Poetry*; *Essence*; *Mundus Artium*; *Umbra*; *Confrontation*; *Okike* (of which he is a contributing editor); *We Speak As Liberators*; and *New Black Voices*.

Writer-in-Residence at Ohio University's Black Studies Institute from 1970 to 1973; Troupe is at present a teacher of literature in New York.

He is co-editor with Rainer Schulte of a compilation of world literature.

Quincy has published a volume of poetry, *Embryo*, and is shortly to have another, called *Ash Doors and Juju Guitars* appear. A third collection,

Black Ice, has been the chief source of the poems in our present anthology.

Troupe has travelled in Africa, Europe, and widely in the United States and in the West Indies.

GLADSTONE YEARWOOD was born in the Caribbean Islands—Barbados—and spent five years of his life in New York where he attended college at New York University.

He founded and edited a magazine, *Caribeat*, devoted to giving cultural and political expression to West Indians in the United States context and the general American situation, both as a specific group and as part of the struggle against racism.

Yearwood came to Ohio University in 1974 to do a master's course in T.V. and Film, and is keenly interested in dramatic and theatrical styles, forms, expressions, contexts and content in West Indian, Afro-American and African life and literature. He has served as editor of *Afro-American Affairs* and is presently pursuing his doctoral degree in Athens, Ohio. This is the first anthologization of Yearwood's work.

These are the poets. The introduction was long.

Their poems wait: to please, to prod: to re-create. To reintegrate artist and community, art as an expression of life: verse as an uncovering, a discovery, recovery: poetry as wry, quiet, angry, passionate, vociferous, but vitally relevant and as life-asserting, life-enhancing. Whether they speak of ease or for freedom.

Speak easy, speak free /
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Photo by Ilip

COSMO PIETERSE

ANTAR SUDAN KATARA MBERI

These poems are the expressive textures of the individual poets as they looked at our world, worked in it, and sought to catch in words and rhythms and thus delineate in our globe's character, its perspectives and possible future contours.

Cosmo Peterse, Editor

Some of the poems seem to be relaxed lyrics that sing freely, and they apparently speak with ease. But they are controlled by a deep tension in their matter. Others are overtly, urgently concerned with political and social issues: they are poems whose art does not flinch from being patent "propaganda" for freedom.

Antar Sudan Katara Mberi, Editor

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