

Ai

(Florence Anthony)

Poet

Pseudonym: Florence Haynes; Pelorhanke Ai Ogawa

Born: Albany, Texas; October 21, 1947

Died: Stillwater, Oklahoma; March 20, 2010

POETRY: *Cruelty*, 1973; *Killing Floor*, 1979; *Sin*, 1986; *Cruelty/Killing Floor*, 1987; *Fate: New Poems*, 1991; *Greed*, 1993; *Vice: New and Selected Poems*, 1999; *Dread*, 2003; *No Surrender*, 2010

NONFICTION: “*On Being 1/2 Japanese, 1/8 Choctaw, 1/4 Black, and 1/16 Irish*,” 1974 (*Ms. 6, June*)

Achievements

In 1975, Ai was awarded Guggenheim and Radcliffe fellowships, followed in 1976 by fellowships from the Massachusetts Arts and Humanities Foundation. *Killing Floor* was the 1978 Lamont Selection of the Academy of American Poets, and Ai subsequently received two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in 1980 and 1985. She won an Ingram Merrill Foundation grant and an Emergency Fund for Writers award from the International Association of Poets, Playwrights, Editors, Essayists, and Novelists. *Sin* was awarded the American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation, and *Vice: New and Selected Poems* (1999) won the 1999 National Book Award for Poetry.

Biography

Ai (ah-EE) had a rich multicultural heritage. Her ancestry was a mixture of Choctaw, Caucasian,

Japanese, African American, and Filipino. Although Anthony and her mother clearly looked black, she found it difficult to identify with any particular ethnic group. She was born at her grandparents' house after her mother's husband discovered his wife's affair and beat her. Ai lived in Tucson, Arizona, then moved to Las Vegas, Nevada, then spent two years in San Francisco, California, before returning to Tucson. Her family moved again when Ai was twelve, this time to Los Angeles, California, returning again to Tucson three years later, when Ai was fifteen.

Anthony attended an “integrated” Catholic school that was, in fact, largely black; there, some schoolmates taunted her for her mixed ethnicity. Her first poem, written when she was twelve, was about a Christian martyr fated to die the next day. At fourteen, intending to enter a contest for poems about a historical figure, Ai began writing poetry regularly.

History was Ai's best subject in her Tucson high school. At the University of Arizona in Tucson, she found her identity in the “aesthetic atmosphere” of intellectual life. She graduated in 1969 with a degree in Oriental studies and then earned an M.F.A. in creative writing from the University of California at Irvine in 1971.

At that time, she adopted the name “Ai,” Japanese for “love.” She held various jobs, including modeling and teaching. Her unconventional



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beginnings and rage at her ethnic homelessness are clearly reflected in her poetry—work that has been both praised and attacked.

Ai once said her family's ethnic history resembles the history of America. Rather than defining her identity through ethnicity, however, she insisted on the uniqueness of personal identity. Accordingly, one aim of her work is to destroy stereotypes. When she published her poetry collection, *Cruelty*, in 1973, she became nationally known, so striking were her grimly realistic and violent poems. Although she married Lawrence Kearney in 1976, they divorced in 1984.

Following a stint as visiting associate professor at the University of Colorado, Boulder (1996-1997), Ai held the Mitte Chair in Creative

Writing during 2002-2003 at Southwest Texas State University. She then moved to Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, where serving as a professor of English and as vice president of the Native American Faculty and Staff Association.

During her final decade she continued to write poetry and comment on her life and work in interviews and articles. Far from being a voice of black or feminist literature, Ai remained her own person, not tied to any ethnic or racial group but, rather, identifying with the most intense aspects of humanity in general. She died in 2010 from breast cancer.

Analysis: Poetry

Ai's poetry is far from gentle. It emphasizes graphic violence, rape, child molestation, and murder, and has sometimes been condemned as pornographic. When *Killing Floor* (1979) received a major award, Ai had to be taken seriously, but some still rejected her graphic depictions of sex and violence. Ai was also loudly attacked by some feminists for graphically describing rape and violence against women. Although applauded for speaking to and for minorities, she was also criticized for refusing to identify with any particular group. In response, she declared, "I was forced to be loyal to myself as a multiracial person or be immersed in the black struggle for identity with which I had little in common. Except a desire to be accepted as I was." Although she chose Japanese culture as her own, her works showed she could identify with humans in general and especially with the darker aspects of human life.

Ai's poetry uses a straightforward narrative style to describe especially horrible people and events. She often assumes various voices from many times and places. Generally, though, her speakers experience the darkest parts of the human experience. Ai has changed American poetry by her forthright, often horrific

renderings of some of reality's grimmer aspects. She dealt with pain and anger so well because she felt hurt and angry. Her forthright poetry pulls no punches. Her characters are murderers, child molesters, rapists, and prostitutes. Life is not necessarily pretty, and Ai shows its ugliest parts. While readers might not like to admit that the people Ai talks about exist, her work makes them impossible to ignore.

Cruelty

Ai is more concerned with social class than with racial identity or gender in her first book, *Cruelty* (1973). The book offers dramatic monologues spoken by members of the American underclass. It powerfully indicts societies that permit poverty.

Life itself is cruel for the speakers in *Cruelty*. The speaker in "Tenant Farmer" lacks crops. The couple in "Starvation" lack food. In "Abortion," a man finds his girlfriend's aborted fetus, wrapped in wax paper and thinks: "the poor have no children, just small people/ and there is room for only one man in this house." Men and women become alienated from each other in these conditions. The speaker in "Young Farm Woman Alone" no longer wants a man. In "Recapture," a man finds and beats a fleeing woman. In "Prostitute," a woman kills her husband, then seeks revenge on exploitative men. Some characters do achieve transcendence through love. The couple in "Anniversary" has managed to stay together, providing a home for their son for many years, despite never having "anything but hard times." In "The Country Midwife: A Day," the midwife delivers a woman's child for "the third time between abortions." Crying out to the Lord, the midwife lets the woman bleed. Ending the woman's cycles of pregnancy in an act of mercy, the midwife takes up the cross of guilt and suffering.

Late in *Cruelty*, Ai explores the causes and consequences of poverty in other times and

places. In "Cuba, 1962," a farmer cuts off his dead wife's feet, allowing her blood to mix with sugarcane he intends to sell, so everyone can taste his grief. Medieval peasants are evoked by "The Corpse Hauler's Elegy," although the plague victims there could also be contemporary.

Violence increases in the book's final poems. In "The Deserter," a soldier kills the woman who gave him shelter: he wants to leave everything of himself behind. In "The Hitchhiker," a woman is raped and killed by a psychopath. In "The Child Beater," a mother assaults her seven-year-old daughter with a belt, then gets out her "dog's chain leash." Ai feels, and elicits, compassion for all of these people—including the killers.

Killing Floor

Killing Floor (1979) resembles *Cruelty*, but its poems are generally much longer and are more stylistically varied. Dialogues and even a few prose poems appear. Moreover, *Killing Floor's* characters do not exist in isolation; they exist in specific environments and historical settings. Narrators include actress Marilyn Monroe and also Ira Hayes, an American Indian World War II hero who eventually died broke and drunk. Other characters are especially horrid archetypes.

The narrator of "Jericho" is a fifteen-year-old girl in bed with an older man who feeds her candy and gets her pregnant. In "The Mortician's Twelve-Year-Old Son," a boy makes love to a corpse. "Almost Grown" concerns a boy's first visit to a prostitute. Sixteen of the twenty-four narrators are men. The poet is clearly identifying with all humanity, or at least with the darker side of all human souls. An especially disturbing poem entitled "The Kid" is spoken by a highly unusual fourteen-year-old boy who splits open his father's skull, bludgeons his mother, slaughters horses, and kills his little

sister. But his attitude gives this poem its power: “Yeah. I’m Jack, Hogarth’s son. / I’m nimble, I’m quick. // I’m fourteen. I’m a wind from nowhere. / I can break your heart.” The poem does not justify Jack, but something is obviously wrong. After killing his family, he dresses well and heads for the highway. In a terrifying twist, readers feel compelled to identify with the boy and, in some strange way, feel sorry for him. But the poem shows that even a child can be a monster. Readers can hardly excuse his acts, but they wish they could, somehow.

In these first two collections, death, violence, and sex are prominent. Children appear often but are never happy. Both books emphasize misery, but readers identify with these characters. Ai’s poetry draws readers inside especially dark minds. Readers do not sympathize with these grim characters but do learn how these people feel. This is Ai’s greatest strength.

Sin

In *Sin* (1986), Ai’s focus becomes more overtly political and religious. “Two Brothers” features John and Robert Kennedy and emphasizes death and immortality as the Kennedys posthumously discuss their deaths. The poem ends by suggesting that death is not final and that God may be responsible for everything: humans seem only secondary. “The Prisoner,” spoken by an anonymous, regularly tortured inmate, describes a jailer who calls himself “Our Father.” “The Good Shepherd: Atlanta, 1981,” a dramatic monologue by a mass murderer, was inspired by the case of Wayne Williams, a black man accused of murdering black children. The killer graphically describes disposing of a child’s body and then goes home, makes hot cocoa, washes blood stains from his bathroom, then finishes his drink. Once again, readers are given access to this man’s thoughts. Pleased by his actions, he considers himself “a good shepherd”—a god feels no guilt. *Sin* is full of such ideas, but

this poem is unusually powerful. Readers don’t sympathize with the murderer, but they understand his perspective.

In “The Testimony of J. Robert Oppenheimer: A Fiction,” the liberal Oppenheimer describes helping develop the atomic bomb. He recounts his early passion for science as well as his later work supervising construction of the bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He announces that when “we accept the worst in ourselves,” we are “set free,” as if trying to absolve himself of guilt. But he concludes that we destroy ourselves “atom by atom,” leading to our ironic “transcendent annihilation.”

In “The Priest’s Confession,” an admittedly sinful priest battles his own temptations, fearing God’s wrath. Sexually attracted to a young girl, he contemplates suicide. Images of the girl and her developing body haunt him. He eventually gives in to temptation, but he still wants God’s love. Confessing to a sadistic encounter with the girl, he is haunted both by her laughter and by her screams. But he still implores the Lord’s help.

Fate

In this collection (1991), Ai’s dark emphasis continues, as in “Eve’s Story,” a poem told from the viewpoint of a sixteen-year-old girl who leaves home after her father strangles a deformed kitten. She winds up in an evangelist’s tent. He quickly seduces her. She becomes his servant and procuress. After being edged out of his inner circle by more photogenic women, she films him engaging in a lurid sex act and exposes his hypocrisy. Although his followers desert him, the speaker stays with him. Ai here satirizes both the preacher and the system that produced him. Unlike most of Ai’s narrators, this victimized girl inspires real compassion and pity. Who is to blame? The preacher? His religion? God?

Greed

Greed (1993) explores late twentieth-century American identities. In dramatic monologues spoken by famous or obscure Americans, Ai exposes amorality in the institutions of society, business, and private life. For most of the speakers, America has not kept its promises. Truth and justice are illusions in a society made more vicious, because of greed, than the Darwinian struggle for survival among animals. Money, power, drugs, sex—these are the gods Americans worship.

To the African American speakers throughout the collection, slavery is still alive in the “big house” of white America and violence is the inevitable result. In “Riot Act, April 29, 1992,” a black man threatens to “set your world on fire.” In “Self Defense,” Marion Barry, mayor of Washington, D.C., trapped using drugs by the FBI, warns: “The good ole days of slaves out pickin’ cotton / ain’t coming back no more.” In “Endangered Species,” a black university professor is stopped by police while driving through his own neighborhood. In “Hoover, Edgar J.,” Ai indicts the long-time FBI director for abusing power. Government deceptions are implicated in poems concerning the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. In “Oswald Incognito and Astral Travels,” Lee Harvey Oswald finds himself “trapped / in the palace of lies, / where I’m clothed in illusion / and fed confusion with a spoon.” Other poems explore domestic violence and the sexual abuse of children. In “Finished,” a woman kills her husband after repeated episodes of physical abuse. In “Respect, 1967,” a man expresses rage “against the paycheck that must be saved for diapers / and milk.” The priest in “Life Story” sexually abuses young boys. He was once abused by his uncle, also a priest. In “The Ice Cream Man,” the speaker molests a little girl inside his truck. He tells of his own abuse by his stepfather and his mother. Ai offers little hope for the promise of

America in *Greed*. She closes the book with the title poem, about the savings and loan scandal of the 1980s. The responsible working man in “Family Portrait, 1960” has little chance to succeed. Even so, he takes care of his sick wife, cooks dinner, oversees his young daughters’ baths, then dozes—“chaos kept at bay” for one more day.

Vice

Subtitled “New and Selected Poems,” *Vice* (1999) won the National Book Award for poetry. In the collection’s 18 new poems, Ai’s obsession with the dark side of human nature continues. For instance, “Sleeping Beauty: A Fiction” is dedicated to a real comatose patient raped by a medical aide. The speaker calls her abuser “furtive,” violent, and eager to hide external evidence of his abuse. She worries that any baby that might result from the rape will have no real parents. But she says, “My eyes were open, / while you violated me” and “I could see / beyond the veil of your deceit.” Later she ironically recalls Sleeping Beauty. She realizes that own her story will have no happy ending.

Other Literary Forms

Although best known for her poetry, Ai did write occasional nonfiction prose and participated in a number of interviews.

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—*Marc Goldstein; James Green; John Jacob; Holly L. Norton; Robert C. Evans*

Maya Angelou

(Marguerite Johnson)

Memoirist and Poet

Born: St. Louis, Missouri; April 4, 1928

Died: Winston-Salem, NC; May 28, 2014

SHORT FICTION: “Steady Going Up,” 1972; “The Reunion,” 1983. drama: *Cabaret for Freedom*, pr. 1960 (with Godfrey Cambridge; musical); *The Least of These*, pr. 1966; *Encounters*, pr. 1973; *Ajax*, pr. 1974 (adaptation of Sophocles’ play); *And Still I Rise*, pr. 1976; *King*, pr. 1990 (musical; lyrics with Alistair Beaton, book by Lonne Elder III, music by Richard Blackford).

SCREENPLAY: *Georgia, Georgia*, 1972; *All Day Long*, 1974.

TELEPLAYS: *Black, Blues, Black*, 1968 (ten episodes); *The Inheritors*, 1976; *The Legacy*, 1976; *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 1979 (with Leonora Thuna and Ralph B. Woolsey); *Sister, Sister*, 1982; *Brewster Place*, 1990.

POETRY: *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water ‘fore I Diiie*, 1971; *Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well*, 1975; *And Still I Rise*, 1978; *Shaker, Why Don’t You Sing?*, 1983; *Poems: Maya Angelou*, 1986; *Now Sheba Sings the Song*, 1987 (Tom Feelings, illustrator); *I Shall Not Be Moved: Poems*, 1990; *On the Pulse of Morning*, 1993; *The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou*, 1994; *Phenomenal Woman: Four Poems Celebrating Women*, 1994; *A Brave and Startling Truth*, 1995; *Mother: A Cradle to Hold Me*, 2006; *Celebrations of Peace and Prayer*, 2006; *His Day is Done: A Nelson Mandela Tribute*, 2014; *Complete Poetry*, 2015.

NONFICTION: *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 1970 (autobiography); *Gather Together in My Name*, 1974 (autobiography); *Singin’ and Swingin’ and Gettin’ Merry Like Christmas*, 1976 (autobiography); *The Heart of a Woman*, 1981 (autobiography); *All God’s Children Need Traveling Shoes*, 1986 (autobiography); *Wouldn’t Take Nothing for My Journey Now*, 1993 (autobiographical essays); *Even the Stars Look Lonesome*, 1997; *A Song Flung Up to Heaven*, 2002 (autobiographical essays); *The Collected Autobiographies of Maya Angelou*, 2004 (autobiography); *Hallelujah! The Welcome Table: A Lifetime of Memories with Recipes*, 2004 (memoir and cookbook); *Great Food, All Day Long: Cook Splendidly, Eat Smart*, 2010 (cookbook); *Mom & Me & Mom*, 2013 (autobiography).

CHILDREN’S/YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE: *Mrs. Flowers: A Moment of Friendship*, 1986 (illustrated by Etienne Delessert); *Life Doesn’t Frighten Me*, 1993 (poetry; illustrated by Jean-Michel Basquiat); *Soul Looks Back in Wonder*, 1993; *My Painted House, My Friendly Chicken, and Me*, 1994; *Kofi and His Magic*, 1996; *Izak of Lapland*, 2004; *Mikale of Hawaii*, 2004; *Renie Marie of France*, 2004; *Angelina of Italy*, 2004.

MISCELLANEOUS: *Letter to My Daughter*, 2008 (memoir, poetry, prose); *Rainbow in the Cloud: The Wisdom and Spirit of Maya Angelou*, 2014 (poetry and prose).

Achievements

Maya Angelou's work has garnered many prestigious awards. For her writing of the revue *Cabaret for Freedom*, which she and Godfrey Cambridge produced, directed, and performed in 1960 for the purpose of raising money for Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), she was named northern coordinator for the SCLC in 1959. She later worked with civil rights leader Malcolm X. Other honors include a nomination for a National Book Award (1970) for *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*; a Yale University fellowship (1970); a Pulitzer Prize nomination (1972, for *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Diie*); Antoinette Perry ("Tony") Award nominations (1973 and 1977); a Rockefeller Foundation scholarship in Italy (1975); honorary degrees from Smith College (1975), Mills College (1975), Lawrence University (1976), and Wake Forest University (1977); the Woman of the Year in Communications award, and a listing as one of the one hundred most influential women, both bestowed by *Ladies' Home Journal* (1976); a Golden Eagle Award for documentary (1977); a Matrix Award from Women in Communications (1983); the North Carolina Award in Literature (1987); Distinguished Woman of North Carolina (1992); the Woman of the Year award from *Essence* magazine (1992); the Horatio Alger Award (1992); the Spingarn Medal (1993); a Grammy Award for Best Spoken Word or Non-Traditional Album (1994); the National Medal of Arts (2000); the prestigious Order of Kilimanjaro Award from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (2001); the Presidential Medal of Freedom (2011).

Angelou was appointed Reynolds Professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, in 1981. She



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composed and read a poem in honor of the inauguration of President Bill Clinton at the inaugural ceremonies in January, 1993; only one poet before her, Robert Frost, had been invited to read at an inauguration ceremony. In all, she has received more than thirty honorary degrees.

While many honorary titles have been assigned to Angelou, one is especially significant to her: the modern female African American Proust. Angelou is known for addressing the world through the medium of her own life. The first volume of her autobiography made her the first African American woman to appear on nonfiction best-seller lists; six volumes followed the first.

Biography

Born Marguerite Johnson, rechristened Maya, and taking the professional name Angelou (an adaptation of the name of her first husband, Tosh Angelos), Maya Angelou studied music and dance with Martha Graham, Pearl Primus, and Ann Halprin. Her early career was as an

actress and singer, to which she quickly added the roles of civil rights worker (as the northern coordinator for the SCLC, 1959-1960), editor (as associate editor for the *Arab Observer*, 1961-1962), educator (beginning with the School of Music and Drama at the University of Ghana's Institute of African Studies, 1963-1966), and finally writer—first as a reporter for the *Ghanaian Times* (1963-1965). During the late 1960s and 1970s she taught at many colleges and universities in California and Kansas. After joining the faculty at Wake Forest University in 1981, she became a sought-after speaker and was for many years regarded as America's unofficial poet laureate, although she never received that honor.

She has told much of her own life's story in her seven-volume autobiography. Undoubtedly, Angelou's legacy will be her writings: Although the best-selling *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* was censored, her excellent work as an author in all genres has kept her story before the world. Angelou's early years have been burned into the minds of numerous readers. A particularly striking image from *Caged Bird* centers on three-year-old Marguerite and four-year-old Bailey Johnson aboard a train, alone, traveling from California to their grandmother's home in Stamps, Arkansas, after the breakup of their parents' marriage. The two children wore their names and their destination attached to their clothes. This locomotive quest for family is both a factual part of and an apt metaphor for the life of the world-famous poet. Her first feeling of being truly at home, she has said, came in Africa, after she accompanied her second husband to Egypt and then traveled to Ghana.

A second image from Angelou's childhood involves the seven-year-old's rape by her mother's boyfriend. When no legal punishment followed, the rapist was murdered, possibly by the victim's uncles. Guilt following this incident drove Angelou inward, and she began reading the great works of literature. Reading her way

through the Stamps library, she fell in love with William Shakespeare and Paul Laurence Dunbar, among others. The child of a fractured nuclear family came to see herself as a child of the fractured human family.

By age thirteen Angelou had grown closer to her mother; at sixteen she became a mother herself. To earn a living for herself and her son Guy, she became a waitress, a singer, and a dancer. These and other occupations were followed by acting, directing, producing, and the hosting of television specials. She loved to dance, but when her knees began to suffer in her early twenties, she devoted her attention to her other love: writing. She began supporting herself through her writing in 1968. Her family came to include "sister friends" and "brother friends," as her troubled brother Bailey became lost in the worlds of substance abuse and prison. She married, but she has refused to attach a number to her marriages, as that might, she says, suggest frivolity, and she insists that she was never frivolous about marriage. To "brother friend" James Baldwin she gives much credit for her becoming an autobiographer. She assisted "brother friends" Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X in their work and pursued her own work to better the entire human family.

The hope that she found so significant in the 1960s is reflected in the poem she composed for Bill Clinton's presidential inauguration. The dream of King is evident in the words written and delivered by Angelou "on the pulse of [that] morning."

Analysis: Short Fiction

Maya Angelou has produced only a few short stories, but those stories, like her multiple volumes of autobiography, deal directly and poignantly with issues of African American life in America. Since her early years, Angelou has been a political activist and educator, and she is

knowledgeable and articulate about civil rights and related issues. Her fiction, like her poetry and her nonfiction, reflects social issues and conditions in the second half of the twentieth century, when racial barriers were falling but the problems behind them continued. In this sense, Angelou must be considered a social realist, for her stories demonstrate the difficulties of growing up an African American woman in an America still riven by racism and sexism. Dozens of anthologies and other collections of contemporary literature have excerpted pieces from one or another of Angelou's autobiographies because they raise so many important issues about modern America—about identity, education, gender, and race. Her short stories are only marginally more fictional and raise many of the same issues.

“Steady Going Up”

“Steady Going Up” was first published in the collection *Ten Times Black* in 1972 and has since been reprinted several times, including in Gloria Naylor's *Children of the Night: The Best Short Stories by Black Writers, 1967 to the Present* (1995). The story is a little bit dated but raises several important questions nonetheless. As the story opens, a young black man, Robert, is traveling by bus from his home in Memphis to Cincinnati. He has never before been out of Tennessee, but this is hardly a pleasure trip, for he is rushing to pick up his younger sister at the nursing school where she has suddenly become ill (possibly from kidney trouble). Robert has raised Baby Sister since their parents died within six months of each other: “He was three years older than she when, at fifteen, he took over as head of the family.” Getting a job as a mechanic at a local garage, he has been able to support Baby Sister, see her through high school, and send her to nursing school. He has had to put his own life on hold (he plans to marry Barbara Kendrick when Baby Sister is

finished with school), and now her illness may further complicate his life. The bus ride is full of understandable anxiety for Robert.

When the bus makes its last stop before Cincinnati, Robert gets off to relieve himself but is cornered in the “colored” bathroom by two white men, who have also been traveling on the bus. An older black woman, who was sitting across the aisle from Robert during the trip, has already warned him about the two men, who have been drinking and staring at him. Now they confront him, accusing him of going north to find white women. Robert cannot “stand the intention of meanness” in the two men, and he decides to act so that he will not miss the bus: “He wasn't going to get left with these two crazy men.” When one tries to force him to drink the bourbon that has made them both drunk, Robert kicks him in the groin and then hits the other man over the head with the bottle. Robert manages to get back on the bus, hiding the blood on his hands and shirt, and the bus pulls away with the two men still sprawled in the bathroom. There is no resolution to the story except this escape. Robert has left “those crazy men”—at least for now—but the reader wonders what will happen to him. He may be free of them for the moment, but the hatred and violence they represent will continue to follow him. The story ends with a neutral description of the continuing bus trip: “Then he felt the big motor turn and the lights darkened and that old big baby pulled away from the sidewalk and on its way to Cincinnati.” Robert's problems—as for so many African Americans at this time—still lie before him.

“The Reunion”

“The Reunion” has been anthologized several times, the first time in the Amina and Amiri Baraka collection *Confirmation: An Anthology of African American Women*. The story is short (only five pages) but is a much more positive short