

the first person narrative by Varguitas himself in the odd-numbered episodes while the scriptwriter's radio serials are realised in the third person narrative voice in the even-numbered episodes. Vera's narrative is conceptualised in the same manner: Zhizha tells of her pain and hurt and the story of her maternal family in the odd-numbered episodes while the even-numbered ones are devoted to her father and his own family. Towards the end of that novel there is a merging of both stories as father, mother and daughter come together in a fatal union.

This novel is full of promise, the promise of breaking a silence that it never truly fulfils. All we are given are the poetics of pain and yet more pain but no personal histories are delineated to give flesh and humanity to these pains. What went wrong? Why did Muroyiwa's calabash heart finally crack? The war had not come to an end so he wouldn't know whether his brother Tachiveyi who disappeared to join the war and who he was certain was still alive was never going to come back. After all it was this certainty and waiting for his brother that gave meaning to his own existence. Or did Muroyiwa finally discover what happened to the butterflies that

he sought in the mountains during a war? Did he get tired of watching the perfect symmetry of mats that his wife Runyararo wove?

And how well has this novel fulfilled its maxim: 'A word does not rot unless it is carried in the mouth for too long, under the tongue?' In this tale of despair and hope, a tale that aspires to be reconstructed by the power and efficacy of the word alone, the novel never truly meets its own structure as the final realisation of the story shows us. The word has become almost rotten so that in its suspended release what finally comes out is fragmentary. But again this is to be expected if only because of how grandmother sums up the sorrows that women endure: only the departed can speak our sorrow and survive. Only they can walk on a path covered with such thorns, such unwelcoming soil. Even more fundamentally, this is a novel that is realised after all through rememory, and through metaphors and images. One can only walk with Zhizha in piecing these images together. So how does one recover the missing chapter 24? (But are they really chapters or just numbered episodes?) Or is this the publisher's error?

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## Antiphonal Anthologies Aderemi Raji-Oyelade

Henry Louis Gates Jr., Nellie Y. McKay Eds., **THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE**, W.W. Norton & Co. New York and London, 1997, xxv 2665 pp.

Patricia Liggins Hill Ed., **CALL AND RESPONSE: THE RIVERSIDE ANTHOLOGY OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERARY TRADITION**, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York, 1998, xxxviii 2039 pp.

*We have attempted to reconstruct the African American literary heritage, at the turn of the century, without pretending to completeness.*

- Henry Louis Gates Jr and Neille Y. McKay. 1997

SEVERAL anthologies have appeared after the publication of V.F. Calverton's *An Anthology of American Negro Literature* (1929) to define and exemplify the canon of African American literature. But none can be said to be as extensively inclusive, patently canonical and compellingly discursive as *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* (1997) and *Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology of the African American Literary Tradition* (1998). Perhaps these two separate anthologies are au-

thoritatively significant because they are *fin-de-siecle* collections of the most representative of African American literary tradition spanning over two hundred and fifty years. More importantly, they transcend the ordinary generic boundary of the anthology as a calculated story of inclusions, revisions and rehabilitations: *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* (here shortened as NA) and *The Riverside Anthology...* (or RA) have generated a new structural sophistication in the navigation and the reception of the expansive history and con-

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siousness of African American literature.

The NA, compiled by two general editors - Henry Louis Gates and Nellie McKay - and nine period editors including Houston Baker Jr., Barbara Christian, Deborah McDowell and Richard Yarborough, projects a conventional survey of texts generally considered 'indispensable' in the broad curriculum of African American literature. Signifying on the black vernacular tradition, the anthology locates the originary oral base of African American letters, as the editors note, 'in the traditional antiphonal "call/response" structures peculiar to African and African American expressive cultural forms' (xxxviii). In a less conventional vein, the RA is announced as a ground-breaking textbook that joins students in centuries of conversations' (xxxiii); put together by seven

mons of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. Each of the other sections representing each period in the history of African American literature, has a comprehensive introductory essay, author headnotes as well as footnotes on parts of texts which demand clearer or contextual explication. Represented in this anthology are the works of over one hundred and twenty writers, fifty-two of them female, ranging from Lucy Terry's 'Bars Fight' (1746) to such recent works as Essex Hemphill's 'Conditions' (1986) and Terry McMillan's 'Quilting on the Rebound' (1991). The NA also contains thirteen complete works (eleven of which are considered as major) including Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845), Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923), Gwendolyn Brooks's *Maud Martha* (1953) and Adrienne Kennedy's *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White* (1976).

Apart from these major works and others, there are inclusions of lesser known but significant writers like Eric Walrond, a contemporary and compatriot of Claude McKay, the West Indian/Harlem Renaissance poet, and younger generation of writers like Jamaica Kincaid, Terry Mcmillan, Yusef Komunyakaa, Rita Dove, Walter Mosley, Nathaniel Mackey and Essex Hemphill, the first celebrated black gay writer who died in 1995 at the age of 38.

The six literary periods which defined and describe the motion and canon of African American letters as

presented in the NA are 'The Literature of Slavery and Freedom, 1746-1865', edited by William Andrews; 'Literature of the Reconstruction to the New Negro Renaissance, 1865-1919', edited by Andrews Frances S. Foster and Richard Yarborough; 'The Harlem Renaissance, 1919-1940', edited by Arnold Rampersad; 'Realism, Modernism, and Naturalism, 1940-1960', edited by Deborah McDowell and Hortense Spillers; 'The Black Arts Movement, 1960-1970', edited by Houston Baker Jr. and 'Literature since 1970', edited by Barbara Christian.

In a similar and refreshing way, the RA responds to this canonical categorisation with a definition of six historical periods of African American literary expression and traces the emergence of African American art right from the inception of institutional slavery. Using the blues idiom for its subtitles, the RA is deliberately constructed to exact the impression of some antiphonal (call/response) dialogue between the oral and the written word, between the critical imagination and the creative spirit, between Africa and America. The

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scholars including Patricial Liggins Hill, Bernard Bell, Trudier Harris, William J. Harris, R. Baxter Miller, Sondra O'Neale and Horace Porter, this anthology can also be described as a theoretically ambitious work which not only connects centuries but which merges geographies of black experience especially in its survivalist projection of the African(ist) origins of African American (slave) folk culture. The first part of RA (otherwise titled *Call and Response*) aptly provides samples of slave proverbs, worksongs, praise songs, praise poems, sermons, spirituals, epic narratives and folktales preceded by excerpts from the traditional cesspool of African oral literary tradition; interestingly, the African text is referred to as prototype to impact more powerfully its structural qualities of continuity, antiphony, repetition and fragmentation in the African American text.

The NA is divided into seven sections with the first, entitled 'The Vernacular Tradition', being a collection of anonymous memorable sacred and secular songs, the blues, the jazz, the rap, the folktale and the remarkable ser-

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sections are 'Go Down, Moses, Way Down in Egypt's Land, 1619-1808' edited by Sondra O'Neale; 'Tell Ole Pharoah, Let my people go, 1808-1865' edited by Patricia Liggins Hill; 'No More Shall They in Bondage Toil 1865-1915' edited by Trudier Harris; 'Bound No 'th Blues, 1915-1945' edited by Baxter Miller and Liggins Hill; 'Win the War Blues, 1945-1960' edited by Hill, Bernard Bell and Horace Porter; and 'Cross Road Blues, 1960 to the Present' edited by William J. Harris.

Presenting over 500 selections from the works of over 150 writers with broad introductions, author headnotes and selected bibliographies, containing over thirty short stories and nine full-length works ranging from Douglass's slave narrative to Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* and Earnest Gaine's 'Three Men', the anthology negotiates the history, sociology and gender discourse of African American literary tradition. In its revisionist course, the anthology situates itself, more than the NA, as a gender-conscious text by representing the works of over seventy women 'many of whom have been critically misunderstood or summarily dismissed from existing anthologies' (xxxv). Anna Deavere Smith and Kamaria Muntu are introduced here as two notable and emergent black female authors. Also, there is a prominent addition of gay consciousness to black writing, after such earlier efforts of Samuel Delany, George Wolfe, Billi Gordon and others, in the essay of Charles Nero - 'Toward a Black Gay Aesthetic' and in the works (poetry and fiction) of Essex Hemphill (earlier noted in the NA).

As part of its strategy of presentation, the RA imbeds in each of its six sections a series of critical debates, as generated by leading intellectual figures of African American literature, which represent the consciousness of each of the literary periods. For instance, the editors of parts Four and Five of the Anthology draw on the literary crossroad of the theory of black art, during the Harlem Renaissance and later in the 60s, as generated between Alain Locke and W.E.B. DuBois and between Hugh M. Gloster and Nick Aaron Ford. Part Six contains the more recent debate on the nature of black art between Joyce Ann Joyce, the black aesthetician, and Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Houston Baker Jr., the proponents of black post-structuralism.

Apart from the practical attempt of the editors of RA to initiate a concrete re-tracing of memory through art, a reaching or journeying back to *primordial* creativity of the African person of imagination in America, both

anthologies have as supplements respective audio compact discs which afford the 'reader' the lisible possibility of *de lire et de comprendre*, the dual advantage of reading and listening to the text. Thus, that opportunity given the reader/critic to encounter the text both as written and as oral basically establishes the verbal tonations and the rhetorical backgrounds of the African American literary work; the essence, the phonocentric actuality of the written work becomes performed rather than imagined.

The audio CD to NA, edited by Robert G. O'Meally (containing twenty-one tracks) and the CD to RA, produced by Robert H. Cataliotti (containing twenty-six tracks) are a pragmatic journeying into history through sounds whereby the cadences of black experience are recorded by testamental voices of African American legends, musicians, singers, orators, poets and preachers. Notable in both CDs are texts like 'Go Down, Moses', 'John Henry', 'Blackwater Blues' and the original 'I Have a Dream' by Martin Luther King Jr. Other platinum acts of performance include 'Steal Away to Jesus', 'Take My Hand Precious Lord', 'You May Go But This Will Bring You Back' and Malcolm X's 'The Ballot or the Bullet' (all from the NA CD); 'Sunyetta', 'Bars Fight', 'The Meaning of July 4 for the Negro', 'If We Must Die', 'For My People', 'Nikki-Rosa' and 'Dope' (all from the RA CD).

Finally, I should add that these anthologies have done more persuasively for African American literature what *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature I & II* and the *Concise Anthology of American Literature* have established for the general and specific reception of their respective literary traditions in this century.

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## Walking Still

M.Z. Malaba

**Charles Mungoshi, WALKING STILL, Baobab Books, Harare, 1997, 167pp.**

CHARLES Mungoshi is Zimbabwe's leading writer and his latest book *Walking Still* is a powerful collection of short stories. Mungoshi's earlier works, *Coming of the Dry Season* and *Some Kind of Wounds*, demonstrated his masterly command of the short story and his deep insight into the psychological profiles of his characters. These qualities have, once again, been amply demonstrated in *Walking Still*.

Mungoshi is a keen observer and this latest work foregrounds the socio-economic devel-

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