

1975

# Power

Audre Lorde

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## Power / Audre Lorde

The difference between poetry and rhetoric  
is being ready to kill  
yourself  
instead of your children.

I am trapped on a desert of raw gunshot wounds  
and a dead child dragging his shattered  
black face off the edge of my sleep  
blood from his punctured cheeks and shoulders  
is the only liquid for miles and my stomach  
churns at the imagined taste while  
my mouth splits into dry lips  
without loyalty or reason  
thirsting for the wetness of his blood  
as it sinks into the whiteness  
of the desert where I am lost  
without imagery or magic  
trying to make power  
out of hatred and destruction  
trying to heal my dying son with kisses  
only the sun will bleach his bones quicker.

The policeman who shot down a ten year old in Jamaica  
stood over the boy with his cop shoes in childish blood  
and a voice said "Die you little motherfucker" and  
there are tapes to prove that.  
At his trial this policeman said in his own defense  
"I didn't notice the size or anything else  
only the color," and  
there are tapes to prove that too.

Today that 37 year old white man with 13 years of police forcing  
was set free  
by 11 white men who said they were satisfied  
justice had been done  
and one black woman who said "They convinced me"  
meaning  
they had dragged her 4'10" black woman's frame  
over the hot coals of four centuries of white male approval  
until she let go of the first real power she ever had

and lined her own womb with cement  
to make a graveyard for our children.

I have not been able to touch the destruction within me  
but unless I learn to use  
the difference between poetry and rhetoric  
my power too will run corrupt as poisonous mold  
or lie limp and useless as an unconnected wire  
and one day I will take my teenaged plug  
and connect it to the nearest socket  
raping some 85 year old white woman  
and as I beat her senseless and set a torch to her bed  
a greek chorus will be singing in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time  
"Poor thing. She never hurt a soul. What beasts they are."

## Ungod at the Font of the Blues / Anthony McNeill

*Poetry is a case of the loser winning. And the genuine poet chooses to lose, even if he has to go so far as to die, in order to win . . . . He is certain of the total defeat of the human enterprise and arranges to fail in his own life in order to bear witness, by his individual defeat, to human defeat in general.*

—Jean-Paul Sartre

ungod who endure in the desert lift  
the lush way  
to taste listen smell touch  
see the shape of this One  
bird through the garden,  
its acute, tinnient cry.  
The adamant know  
clear methods of tracking,  
then lay the grief down  
raggedly singing.  
One rises announces  
the sky  
has burst into flames;  
another—