

1975

Nightmare Begins Responsibility

Michael S. Harper

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but i am not a crook
i am not a descendent of crooks
my father was not president of anything
and only secretary to the masons
where his dues were a quarter a week
which he did not shirk to pay.
that buys me a new dream
though i am weak and i may slip
and lust after jewelry
and a small house by the sea:
yet i could give up even lust
in proper times
and open my doors to strangers
or live in one room.

that is the new dream.

in the meantime i hang on
fighting
addiction
to the old dream
knowing i must train myself to want
not one bit more
than what I need to keep me alive
working
and recognizing beauty
in your still undefeated face.

Nightmare Begins Responsibility / Michael S. Harper

I place these numbed wrists to the pane
watching white uniforms whisk over
him in the tube-kept
prison
fear what they will do in experiment
watch my gloved stickshifting gasolined hands
breathe *boxcar-information-please* infirmiry tubes
distrusting white-pink mending paperthin
silkened end hairs, distrusting tubes

shrunk in his *trunk-skincapped*
shaven head, in thighs
distrusting-white-hands-picking-baboon-light
on this son who will not make his second night
of this wardstrewn intensive airpocket
where his father's asthmatic
hymns of *night-train*, train done gone
his mother can only know that he has flown
up into essential calm unseen corridor
going box carried home, *mamaborn,sweetsonchild*
gonedowntown into *researchtestingwarehousebatteryacid*
mama-son-done-gone/me telling her 'nother
train tonight, no music, nobreathstroked
heartbeat in my infinite distrust of them:

and of my distrusting self
white-doctor-who-breathed-for-him-all-night
say it for two sons gone,
say nightmare, say it loud
panebreaking heartmadness:
nightmare begins responsibility.

FICTION

Introduction / Al Young

John McCluskey, James Alan McPherson, Alison Mills and Ishmael Reed are all American writers of fiction. They each happen to be under forty and of visible sub-Saharan African descent, Black, if you will, but there the resemblance rapidly fades. Having emerged from varying backgrounds and generations, each of them proceeds from a style, a sensibility, a vision and voice that is peculiarly his or her own.

During his undergraduate days at Harvard, John McCluskey—whose important first novel, *Look What They Done to My Song*, was brought out by Random House last fall—was a highly-regarded athlete, a star quarterback. Always a searching prose writer, he later attended Miles College in Alabama (where he also taught) and Valparaiso College in Indiana before winding up his M.A. in creative writing at Stanford. He is presently an assistant professor of English at Cleveland's Case Western Reserve Univer-