1975

Alice

Michael S. Harper

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.uiowa.edu/iowareview
Part of the Creative Writing Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.1824
Are teaching one god  
They are ripping the limbs  
Off our fetishes  
They are carving the sea  
Monsters from our totems  
They made a pile of our  
Wood sculpture and set fire  
To it  

Julian  
Come back  
Rude hags  
Have crashed the senate  
And are spitting on the  
Elders  

Meanwhile, Julian  
The perennial art major  
Ponders in the right wing  
Of the monastery museum  
The Egyptian collection

Alice / Michael S. Harper

"The word made stone, the stone word"
"A RITE is an action the very form of which is the result of a Divine Revelation."

1  
You stand waist-high in snakes  
beating the weeds for the gravebed  
a quarter mile from the nearest  
relative, an open field in Florida: lost,  
looking for Zora, and when she speaks  
from her sunken chamber to call  
you to her side, she calls  
you her distant cousin, her sister  
come to mark her burial place  
with bright black stone.  
She has known you would do this--
her crooked stick, her straight lick—
and the lie you would have to tell
to find her, and that you lied
to her relatives in a conjure-riddle
of the words you have uttered,
calling her to communion.

A black rock of ages you have placed
where there was no marker,
and though the snakes abound
in this preserve from ancestral space,
you have paid your homage
in traditional line, the face open:
your face in the woman-light of surrender
toughened in what you were.

II
Floods of truth flow from your limbs
of these pages in a vision swollen
in experience and pain:
that child you stepped into blossom
of a man's skull beaten into smile
of submission, you gathering horse nectar
for offering over a baby's crusted gasp,
for centuries of motherhood and atonement
for which you write, and the rite written.

And for this I say your name: Alice,
my grandmother's name, your name,
conjured in snake-infested field
where Zora Neale welcomed you home,
and where I speak from now
on higher ground of her risen
black marker where you have written
your name in hers, and in mine.

for Alice Walker