

BLACK LAZARUS: CONJURE BOOK

by

Melissa A. Morrow

A Dissertation Submitted in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in English

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

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ABSTRACT
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The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2014
Under the Supervision of Professor Rebecca Dunham

Black Lazarus: Conjure Book is a hybrid-genre collection of poems (including lyric, narrative, graphic, prose, and combinations of these four forms) uttered in the voices of fictitious personas based on the participants pictured in, the historical circumstances surrounding, and one inscribed artifact of a postcard depicting the lynching of Allen Brooks in Dallas, Texas on March 3, 1910. The theoretical scaffold for the manuscript is “triangulation,” a method used by qualitative researchers to validate their studies by exploring research issues from multiple perspectives. Triangulation is also a mapmaking method used to verify the position of waypoints by measuring them against two or more additional waypoints. In *Black Lazarus: Conjure Book*, this method of triangulation is used to explore the relationships between subject and object and means of production, and is intended as an alternative to false binaries, which often simplify and generalize complex issues and relationships by presenting them as an inaccurate spectrum stretched between two falsely opposed points, such as “black” and “white,” or “male” and “female.”

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The Shape of Desire: Perception, Geometry, and Poetics

The Greek word eros denotes 'want,' 'lack,' 'desire for that which is missing.' The lover wants what he does not have...There is something pure and indubitable about the notion that eros is lack...it is a notion that, once adopted, has a powerful effect on one's habits and representations of love. –Anne Carson

Black Lazarus: Conjure Book is a hybrid-genre collection of poems (including lyric, narrative, graphic, prose, and combinations of these four forms) uttered in the voices of fictitious personas I have created based on the participants pictured in, the historical circumstances surrounding, and one inscribed artifact of a postcard depicting the lynching of Allen Brooks in Dallas, Texas on March 3, 1910.¹ Due to the disturbing and grotesque content and means by which lynching postcards were produced, I feel compelled to resist reproducing the artifact in *Black Lazarus: Conjure Book*, opting instead to provide readers ample context and angles from which to view the moment the photographer captured on film just after the lynching.

The resultant theoretical scaffold I have chosen for the manuscript *Black Lazarus: Conjure Book* is “triangulation,” a method used by qualitative researchers to validate their studies by exploring research issues from multiple perspectives.² Of the five types of triangulation currently used by qualitative researchers, I consider the triangulation methods used in my manuscript to be most akin to what qualitative researchers call “Data Triangulation,” a method that “involves using different *sources* of information in order to increase the validity of a

¹ See Appendix A and James Allen’s book *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* [Santa Fe, NM: Twin Palms Publishing, 2010].

² Please note that “triangulation” is also a map-making technique used by cartographers to verify the position of waypoints by measuring them against two or more additional waypoints in a given map area.

study,” and “Theory Triangulation,” which “involves the use of multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data” (emphasis in original, Guion, Diehl, and McDonald).³ The “different sources of information” and “multiple perspectives” present in *Black Lazarus: Conjure Book* are the myriad perspectives I have created in the manuscript by combining poetic forms and by repositioning the poems’ speakers, cameras, characters, and readers throughout the manuscript.

In *Black Lazarus: Conjure Book*, I use “triangulation” to explore the relationships between subject, object, and means of production—it is intended as an alternative to false binaries, which often simplify complex issues by presenting them as an inaccurate spectrum stretched only between two falsely oppose points in false opposition such as “black” and “white.” The method of triangulation I envision as a binary-busting way to understand the nuances of complex issues from multiple viewpoints begins with what poet Anne Carson calls a “three-point circuit,” or a path by which a poet-speaker negotiates the distance between subject and object, paradoxically connecting and separating them by observing them.⁴

In my manuscript, *Black Lazarus: Conjure Book*, the poems serve not only as the source of multiple perspectives with which readers may triangulate, but also contain triangulated relationships in flux with additional waypoints challenging readers’ desire to reduce relationships to binary as they navigate their understanding of the Allen Brooks postcard artifact. As I will demonstrate, as texts with both visual and written components, postcards are inherently complex and require triangulation to navigate. Those well-versed in the binary would be quick to point out that postcards represent a simple duality between the visual and written.

³ For more information on triangulation in qualitative research, begin with “Triangulation: Establishing the Validity of Qualitative Studies” by Lisa A. Guion, David C. Diehl, and Debra McDonald, and the work of Professor Alan Bryman in the Department of Social Sciences at Loughborough University in Leicestershire, UK.

⁴ See “Ruse” in *Eros: The Bittersweet* [Champagne, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1998.]

However, like comics and graphic novels, the visual and written are but *two* components of postcards. When it comes to postcards, one must consider *at least* the image on the front and the writing on the back. Those are two “legs” of the triangle; the ever-present third, which is often overlooked, is the text created by the whole postcard itself including both the image on the front and the writing on the back. That is, the image and writing on the back of the postcard are often “in conversation with” each other: the person who has written on the back of the postcard makes new meaning dependent upon the image on the reverse and the small space they have been provided in which to write in concert with that image.⁵ Concerning postcards, additional waypoints include: the negative space that makes the image and writing discernable by contrast, a sender, a receiver, oftentimes a caption, and always a reader, whether it is the intended reader (the recipient) or someone else (perhaps an unsuspecting descendent of the recipient, as the manuscript proposes, who finds the postcard in a box of odds and ends in an ancestor’s attic a century after the postcard was sent through the mail). To begin to understand the relationships between so many elements and the structures they form and represent, the binary and ternary simply will not do. Therefore, *Black Lazarus: Conjure Book* is a project invested in resisting binaries while simultaneously dependent upon the multiple Carsonian circuits that combine into what I imagine to be complex polyhedral structures.⁶

To engage with lynching history, the voices of those involved, and lynching’s enduring impact in the United States, *Black Lazarus: Conjure Book* could not have a theoretical foundation of binaries or simple, two-dimensional triangles or circuits. Rather, I consider the

⁵ That is not to say that there are not lynching photograph artifacts without writing on the back in existence—there are many. However to send an artifact through the mail, a sender would have had to write at least an address on the back of the postcard. There are also lynching postcards with writing on the back that have never been sent through the mail—they lack both address and stamp. These are fascinating artifacts, indeed, and worthy of future poetic treatments. However the artifact that *Black Lazarus: Conjure Book*—and this essay, by proxy—focus on has both an address and commentary written on the back.

⁶ Diagrams of these complex polyhedral structures to follow.

manuscript to be a collection of tetrahedra, octahedra, and triangular bipyramids in which the faces of each are made up of a single triangular three-point circuit. After defining terms and giving a brief history of lynching and lynching postcards in the United States, I will trace the three-point circuits and resultant geometric shapes created by each of the following: the literary arts and the persona poem using as example Anne Carson's analysis of a fragment by poet Sappho; the comic/graphic novel form drawing from examples in Mat Johnson's *Incognegro*; photography and lynching postcards drawing from a few examples of artifacts from *Without Sanctuary*. I'll conclude by grounding my theory of polyhedral circuits in poetics by demonstrating how the shapes created with the form and content of *Black Lazarus: Conjure Book* contextualize lynching postcards in ways that resist false binaries, and by explaining how and why this is important.

Terms Defined, and a Brief History of Lynching and Lynching Postcards in the U.S.

Lynching in the United States is the public spectacle of violence practiced by a group desperate to assert power over those they deem inferior. Lynching usually brings to mind a person (usually non-white) hanged (usually from a tree) by a mob (usually white). This is the iconography of lynching in the contemporary United States,⁷ which began in the antebellum south where people of African descent were viewed as property by white slaveholders who sought to punish slaves outside legal boundaries. The crimes, of varying degrees and often fabricated, were punished by the death of the accused in staged public spectacles with several witnesses, and were intended to prove the slaveholders' power over Others. The practice of

⁷ As Robert W. Thurston notes: "Lynching outside the US has typically involved murders and victims of the same race" (19).

lynching continued long after emancipation and Reconstruction as: “white Southerners sought...legal and extralegal [means], to assert a white supremacy so extreme as to justify meting out ritual death to black persons without any formal legal process” (Callahan 465).

In the American imagination, lynching is most often attributed to white supremacists: people who believe that white people are entitled to physical, economic, social, financial, legal, and political dominion over non-whites. Yet white supremacist groups disagree on what constitutes as “white,” and the most vocal and active of them tend to speak out against “blacks” and/or “Jews,” which align their ideological values with those of the Nazi party. However, not all lynchings are “white” or Nazis, not all lynched are “black” or Jewish, and not all lynching involves a noose.⁸

The vision of race constructed by white supremacists was historically—and, to date, still is—one dependent upon the perceived relationship of self to Other, thus one entangled with ego and self-interest, but one not engaged in or with self-reflection or critique. The ideological structure of white supremacy was built upon the tension between two constructed notions of race that white supremacists perceive to be diametrically opposed: “white” and “black.”⁹ Lynching was a way for white supremacists to impose their racist values on a public space with the intent

⁸ As Thurston writes: “Although by 1882 observers could generally agree that a lynching referred to a group killing of someone outside the bounds of legal procedure, the word [lynch] lacked a precise definition for several more decades...a conference of leading anti-lynching figures met at Tuskegee University in 1940 to produce a definition...as any illegal killing by a group, usually of three or more persons, acting ‘under the pretext of service to justice, race, or tradition.’ Other commentators have extended this point by maintaining that lynching must have a public motive, one ‘sanctioned by the community,’ or that the ‘key to lynching is community approval.’” (25-6)

⁹ Because my project is invested in working against hegemonic relationships, particularly the binary system that sets the socially-defined racial constructs of “black” and “white” in opposition, I will not use the term “black” to refer to Americans of African descent as many scholars do, but will use “white” and “non-white” to draw attention to how “whiteness” is invested in and represents the limitations of a false binary between self and Other. Some of the texts quoted throughout use the terms “black” and “white,” so I feel it is important to acknowledge that the use of such terms is part of the current scholarly landscape as well as part of the perpetuation of race as a construct invested in a false binary.

to cow spectators and assert power over those they perceived as Other,¹⁰ but the crime was not exclusively racialized. According to Shawn Michelle Smith, author of *Photography on the Color Line*, linked to the issue of race in lynching are issues of gender, socioeconomic class, and sexuality:

As Ida B. Wells[-Barnett], a journalist and antilynching crusader, observed in the late 1890's, lynching ultimately served as a form of economic terrorism, as a racialized class warfare translated into terms of sexual purity and transgression...[t]he rhetoric of lynching, which aimed to justify the torture and murder of African American men by calling it retribution for the crime of rape, refigured black male sexuality as 'savage.' In the scenarios constructed by the white lynch mob, a white woman was posed as the pure, passive victim of black male sexual aggression...[lynch mobs] sought to obliterate the African American man's economic power and class standing and deem him a criminal. (78-9)

Here, "the rhetoric of lynching" Smith refers to is the conversation surrounding the spectacle and the vocalized justification for it by white supremacist perpetrators. Smith continues:

Concomitant with the rise and representation of the 'New Negro' at the turn of the [twentieth] century, white supremacists construed a 'new negro crime'—that of raping white women—in order to legitimize violence on African American bodies; white lynch mobs called forth an image of the black male rapist in order to justify the torture and mutilation of black men...[i]n this way, white supremacists utilized discourses of Negro criminality to argue for the inherent inferiority of African Americans, and to justify increasing social surveillance, segregation, and lynching as a means of controlling the African American bodies they posed as sexually unruly. (86-7)

To present lynching in a binary framework would mean one would claim that it is an issue concerning only black and white, or male and female, or rich and poor. But as the quotes above demonstrate, an understanding of lynching requires consideration of perspectives from all of these positions and more. To approach the issue of lynching within a triangular framework, consider a triangle that includes issues of race, gender, and socioeconomic class as just three

¹⁰ As bell hooks commented: "An effective strategy of white supremacist terror and dehumanization during slavery centered around white control of the black gaze," (qtd. in Apel 10). I would add to hooks's definition: "around white [upper-class heteronormative cisgendered patriarchal Christian] control of the [normative and non-normative] gaze," to underscore that the goals of white supremacy include issues of class, sexuality, gender, and religion.

points: white, male, and upper-class. To represent all of the aspects of lynching as a socioeconomic issue concerning white men, we would have to consider additional triangles with the various points: white, male, and working-class; white, male, and poor. Furthermore, to triangulate lynching as a gendered and racialized issue, we would need to include triangles with the points:

1. non-white, male, upper-class
2. non-white, male, working-class
3. non-white, female, upper-class
4. non-white, female, working-class

These triangles could be made even more complicated by including sexuality, gender-expression, and religion-specific points, as well as by defining the “non-white” points and expanding the classed points to even more nuanced terms. To wit: the binary is simply not complex enough for this nuanced issue.

Here’s an example of how to use triangulation to work toward an understanding of the nuances described above. Consider two lynchings from 1910, both photographed and made into postcards (see Appendix A). The first postcard depicts “[t]he lynching of two Italian immigrants” with “a small handful of onlookers” dated “September 20, 1910” in Tampa, Florida.¹¹ In this photograph, the bodies of Castenego Ficcarotta and Angelo Albano are fully dressed in unmussed trousers and button-down shirts, including suspenders, belts, and shoes. One of the bodies has been posed with a hat on his head and a pipe in his mouth. On the back of the postcard, someone has written: “Labor agitators Lynched During the cigar makers Strike, Tampa, Fla.”

Earlier that year on March third in Dallas, Texas, a “mob of two hundred whites and one ‘conspicuous Negro’” interrupted the trial of an elderly African American named Allen Brooks,

¹¹ The quoted material concerning these two postcard artifacts comes from James Allen’s book *Without Sanctuary*, pages 168-9.

beat him severely, threw him out the second-story window of the courthouse, and dragged his body down the street. One white man then scaled a lamppost at the intersection of Main and Ackard and hung Brooks's body as someone else yelled out above the crowd: "You did the work of men today and your deeds will resound in every state, village, and hamlet where purity and innocence are cherished and bestiality and lechery condemned." On the postcard artifact from the Allen/Littlefield collection included in *Without Sanctuary*—the one quoted in "Postcard from Dr. W. W. Brandau" in *Black Lazarus: Conjure Book*—an anonymous writer has inscribed the postcard: "Well John—This is a token of a great day we had Dallas, March 3, a negro was hung for an assault on a three year old girl. I saw this on my noon hour. I was very much in the bunch..." (Allen 168).

In these two examples, socioeconomic and racial rhetoric are part of the anonymous authors' narrative framework. In the first artifact, the victims are identified as "labor agitators," and in the second, "a negro" whom the writer believes is guilty of an assault charge against a three-year-old (white) girl, a crime Brooks was never tried for on the day of his death at the hands of a vigilante mob made up of over 200 white people, some of whom stopped by on their lunch break to be "very much in the bunch." The victims in these two examples are of European and African descent and the crowds pictured are predominately white, yet the racial and socioeconomic subtexts seem only to be revealed in the narratives created by the postcards' senders. However, present in the photographs are startlingly subtle racial and socioeconomic subtexts in line with Well-Barnett and Smith's conclusions about white supremacist rhetoric.

According to a *Dallas Morning News* article, most of the clothes Allen Brooks wore to court that day were torn off as he was dragged one city block to Elk's Arch where his body was suspended and photographed, and "[r]emnants of clothing that clung to the corpse were soon

stripped away by souvenir hunters” (Allen 169). Keeping in mind that the bodies in lynching photographs were staged and that a photographer had a hand in the staging, Allen Brooks was stripped naked while Ficcarotta and Albano are posed fully clothed, one of them with his hat and pipe. There are clear markers in these two photographs of the narratives white supremacists use to justify extralegal murders: Brooks is naked and black—staged as a symbol of “bestiality and lechery.” Ficcarotta and Albano are clothed fully, both with shoes, one of them even wearing a hat. Their clothes are not silk three-piece suits: they wear the clothes of blue-collar laborers. And these clothes are not damaged or sullied in any way. Here, a suspender has slipped and there a belt has been haphazardly redone, but their hair and hat are still perfect. Although they are victims, just as Brooks, that they are posed in their work clothes indicates that the lynchers wanted them to be seen as blue-collar workers and not as “lecherous animals” stripped and emasculated. The pipe is an interesting inclusion in the Ficcarotta/Albano photograph considering the “cigar makers Strike” to which one of the postcard narrators attributes the lynching. Could it be possible that the pipe was included in the photo as a symbol for supporting the wrong side in the tobacco-labor dispute...that perhaps Ficcarotta and Albano should have sided with mass produced and distributed corporate cigars instead of loose-leaf grassroots tobacco production?

As the study of these two lynching postcards demonstrates, trying to understand lynching postcards within a framework of a simple binary between black and white would be to simplify and generalize a more complex issue. Rather, this analysis of two lynching postcards demonstrates that more intricate theoretical scaffolding—like triangulation—is needed to begin to understand the many aspects of lynching. As my analysis of these two postcards proves,

lynching in 1910 in the United States was a socioeconomic, gendered, sexualized, and racialized issue.

I believe lynching postcards are one symptom of a legally-sanctioned domestic war that has been waged in the United States, most often by culture industries,¹² since slavery's institution. Lynching postcards made lynching photographs available to anyone with a penny's worth of disposable income, educating even the illiterate in white supremacist codes, and after 1907, provided space for (often racist) handwritten comments. As Shawn Michelle Smith, author of *Photography on the Color Line* explains: "as photographic postcards, [these]...endlessly reproducible documents...were conceived initially as commodities...prepared with forethought—perhaps commissioned," depicting "scenes [which were] composed...not simply to document or depict but to memorialize [as] mementos and souvenirs for participants to share with family and friends" (121). Smith asserts:

As items intended to be sent through the mail, postcards testify to the complicity of legal and state structures with lynching. And, of course, lynching itself could not occur without some form of legal and state sanction...[t]he law, the courts, and public officials had to turn a blind eye and participate in lynchings in order for them to occur, and then the state further condoned such acts by permitting photographic postcards of lynchings to be sent through the mail...(121-2)

Lynching postcards are products of the culture industries that are products of groups of people with agendas, thus responsible for sustaining a "social meaning" that is wrapped up in white supremacist ideology. That is, they are but one way that companies have historically profited from the perpetuation of "blackness" as a construct created and circulated as an opposition to the similarly constructed notion of "whiteness," which is patterned after the false binary of self to

¹² Professor David Hesmondhalgh of the University of Leeds, defines "culture industry" as "those institutions (mainly profit-making companies, but also state organisations [sic] and non-profit organisations [sic]) which are most directly involved in the production of social meaning...[including] television (including cable and satellite), radio, the cinema, newspaper, magazine and book publishing, the music recording and publishing industries, advertising and the performing arts" (11-12).

Other, one of the most pervasive false binaries responsible for shaping the American political landscape.

The postcard form complicates the subject-object-perception relationship implicit in the photographic form. Unless they were present, postcard senders and recipients were removed from participation in the public spectacle as private viewers of staged reconstructions of these violent moments. With a photographic postcard of a lynching, all parties pictured are objectified by a viewer protected from direct association with the scene by his or her temporal and spatial distance from it. This simultaneously makes the event subjective as one framed by the photographer and discernable only through this single, staged frame (unless the viewer has additional texts from which to draw, such as personal experience of the event, a news article about it, or a personal narrative from a loved one's letter).

At the same time, the scene, participants, and photographs become commodity objects when they are made into postcards, and then made subject to capitalism through the consumer's penny. Although companies no longer manufacture, buy, or sell these artifacts as mass-produced products, lynching postcards are still products of the culture industries because they were created as such. Furthermore, lynching postcards have been made available for purchase by small retailers and in books, and for consumption with the framed, arranged narrative with which they were displayed as art objects people paid to see at the Roth Horowitz Gallery in 2000 during the exhibition tour "Witness: Photographs of Lynchings from the Collection of James Allen," which continues the commodification and objectification of them as products of the culture industries.

The historical subjugation, commodification, and oppression are just as inextricable from lynching postcards as the white supremacist rhetoric embedded in them. As Shawn Michelle

Smith notes, postcards publically and privately stake claims in the lynching spectacle, while forging “sentimental bonds” via post:

Individuals perform community by sending postcards, and they enlarge community in the same act...these images symbolically expand a community’s claim to time and space by connecting static individuals to distant places...[and p]ostcards function as fantasy sites of desire for distant viewers. (122)

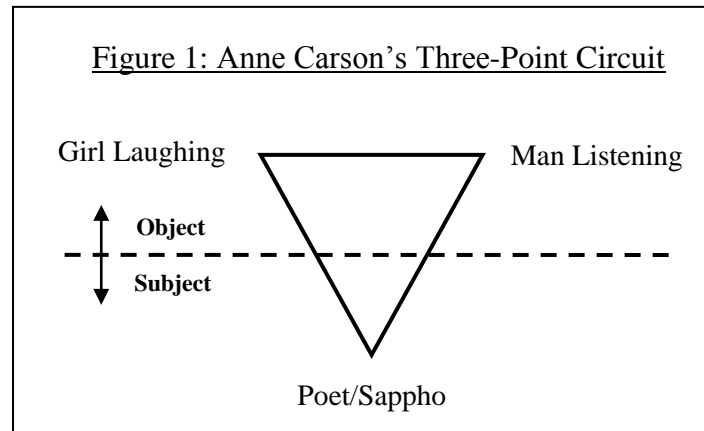
Postcards connect the people in the photographs to individual experience and agency in ways that captions and newspaper articles do not because they invite the construction of a self via narrative in the comments-space in which the sender’s deliberate choices emerge: they choose to send a handwritten message on the flipside of a violent image, in postcard space accompanied by visual “proof,” instead of exclusively as written text in forms such as letter or telegram. By doing so, they express and perpetuate not only commodified products of the culture industries, but also unsettling “fantasy sites of desire.” This “desire” Smith identifies is significant as demonstrated in the next section concerning Anne Carson and three-point circuits.

Desire and Anne Carson’s Three-Point Circuit

The term “three-point circuit” was coined by poet Anne Carson in her essay “Ruse” from *Eros: the Bittersweet* (16). In this essay, Carson explicates Sappho’s fragment 31¹³, a poem she calls “one of the best-known love poems in our tradition” (12). In this lyric poem, Sappho perceives a man listening to a girl laughing. In this relationship as the poet perceives it, the beloved is the girl, the lover is the man, and the poet intervenes: “It is not a poem about the three of them as individuals, but about the geometrical figure formed by their perception of one another, and the gaps in that perception” (13). The girl’s voice is heard by the man, connecting

¹³ For the complete text of this fragment, see Appendix B.

them. The poet is connected to both as an observer of the interaction. The resultant figure is a triangle, as in figure one below:



Carson argues that “the shape desire has” in fragment 31 is “a three-point circuit” that is “visible within Sappho’s mind,” and that “Sappho perceives desire by identifying it *as* a three-part structure” (16). The girl and man in the poem are not the actual girl and man as they exist in life—they are merely the objectified perceptions of a girl and man as they poet imagines them. Therefore the relationships between them are not ‘real’—these relationships are merely, to use Smith’s term pertaining to lynching postcards, “fantasy sites of [Sappho’s] desire” for connection expressed in her verse-creation focused on the interaction between two objects (122). It is important to note that in this poem, Sappho is in love with the girl, and this love is expressed in and complicated by her desire to connect with an objectified projection of the girl through her writing of fragment 31.

This is to say that the relationship between girl and man as it is rendered in this poetic artifact is not really the relationship they shared in life, but the poet’s interpretation of it. Sappho does not *record* desire as it existed in an actual moment she observed. Rather, her desire to connect with the characters in that imagined moment is evident in her decision to include them

(and the moment) in her poem. Additionally, Sappho's desire is inscribed in the fictitious relationships she pens *as* fragment 31. Sappho activates her desire by creating a poem in which she includes herself in a triangular relationship with a fantasy beloved and fantasy lover. Worth quoting at length, Carson writes:

We clearly see the shape desire has there: a three-point circuit is visible within Sappho's mind... Sappho perceives desire by identifying it *as* a three-part structure...[f]or where eros is lack, its activation calls for three structural components—lover, beloved and that which comes between them. They are three points of transformation on a circuit of possible relationship, electrified by desire so that they touch not touching. Conjoined they are held apart...[w]hen the circuit-points connect, perception leaps. Something becomes visible, on the triangular path where volts are moving, that would not be visible without the three-part structure...[t]he ideal is projected on a screen of the actual, in a kind of stereoscopy. The man sits like a god, the poet almost dies: two poles of response within the same desiring mind. Triangulation makes both present at once by a shift of distance, replacing erotic action with a ruse of heart and language. For in this dance the people do not move. Desire moves. Eros is a verb. (16-17)

Carson's explication is linguistically savvy. In fragment 31, grammatically speaking, the relationships between subjects and objects are in flux: the man listens to the girl, the poet judges the man, the poet looks at the girl, and then the poet loses something. There is a negotiation of subject, objects, and verbs within the poem.

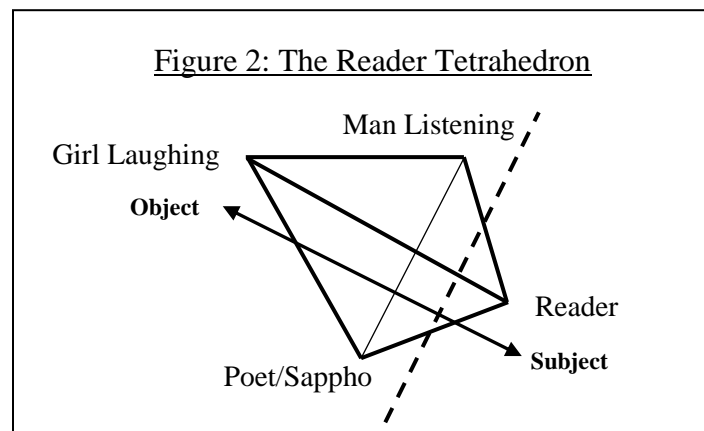
Yet the poem is a construct: the poet, Sappho, wrote it, and in so doing created poetic projections of girl, man, and the relationship between them. The poet *perceived* the girl, the man, and the relationship between them and shaped that perception into fragment 31. In the act of writing the poem, a line is drawn, as in figure one: the girl and man are objectified as the poet becomes the subject who perceives. Furthermore, the poet's desire activates this perception. Carson's "stereoscopy" is a wonderful analogy for this. In the simplest terms, subjects *do* and objects *are done to*. In fragment 31 as Carson interprets it, Sappho does something to the girl and man. Carson's explication proves that what Sappho does in fragment 31 is desire. Linguistically,

Sappho desires the relationship between the beloved and the lover—the relationship between beloved and lover would be nothing without Sappho. In this same stereoscopic moment, Sappho objectifies the girl and man.

But what about Carson? Surely her perception is part of the complex poetic transaction in fragment 31. In “Ruse,” Anne Carson does not take into account the desire she herself projects onto the poem as the reader. In explicating fragment 31, Carson’s desire is to understand the poem, which activates a reader-perception. Suddenly, a three-point circuit isn’t enough. The reader is a value added that changes the triangular structure of the matter at hand.

Carson’s Three-Point Circuit Restructured: The Reader Tetrahedron

When the reader gets involved, the subject-object relationship expands and another distance is created. To the reader, as Carson’s explication suggests, “the ideal is projected on a screen of the actual” (16). To the reader, the girl, man, and Sappho are projections created in the reader’s mind. By reading the poem, the original circuit of girl-man-Sappho becomes the object to the reader-subject, creating a tetrahedron, as in figure two below:



The foundation of this tetrahedron is the original circuit of girl-man-Sappho. Yet the objectification in that original circuit is rendered moot by the introduction of the reader, who includes the poet as one of the objectified parties. That is, the poet's perception is taken into consideration as part of the foundation circuit, but three more circuits are added as the reader perceives the characters of girl, man, and Sappho during the act of reading. It is important to note that the reader and the poet are now both involved in the means of production of the circuitual relationship, despite their differing desires.

What was once a simple three-point circuit activated by a desire for relationship between a poet-subject and her objects is now four three-point circuits in a tetrahedral structure, three of them activated by the reader's desire to know, and one of them activated by the poet's desire for relationship. The four new circuits are:

- Girl-Man-Poet/Sappho: the subject (Poet/Sappho) desires relationship
- Reader-Girl-Poet/Sappho: the subject (Reader) desires knowledge
- Reader-Man-Poet: the subject (Reader) desires knowledge
- Reader-Girl-Man: the subject (Reader) desires knowledge

Such diagramming exposes—once again—the weakness of binary thinking. As the figures show, the relationships within poems are always more complex than a binary interaction between lover and beloved because the poet and reader are involved in the means of production of the relationship between lover and beloved. This is more readily apparent when one remembers that poems are linguistic creations. The poetic line doesn't always have to be grammatically correct, but some third is necessary for activation. In grammar, the verb is the intermediary between subject and object. No one would care about the beloved or the lover if the poet hadn't written anything down. That the poem exists means that the poet has intervened

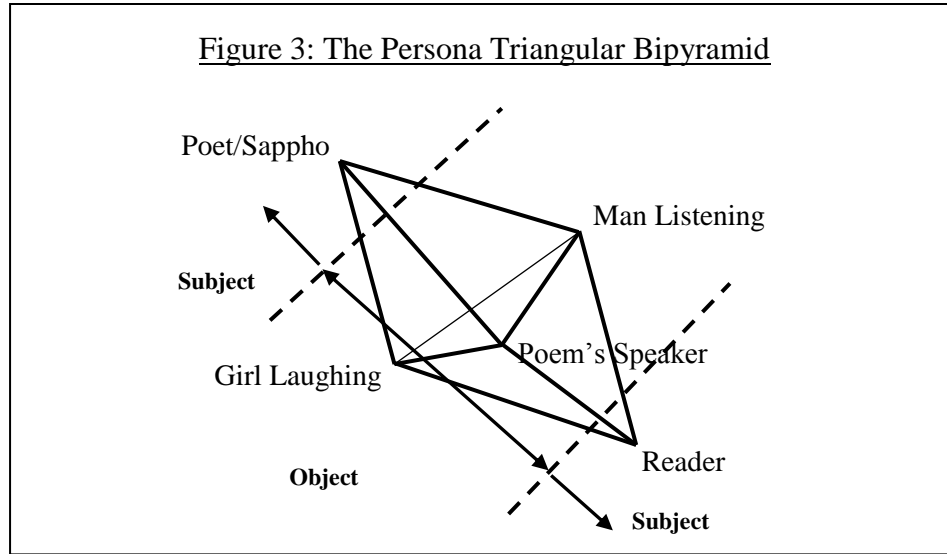
between a subject and an object, thereby objectifying both in the process. The binaries between beloved and lover, between subject and object, are false binaries.

A closer look at Carson's explication reveals the dangerous assumption she makes in her analysis: she perceives the poet, Sappho, as the poem's speaker. Without proof that Sappho is the "I" in fragment 31, I have to think of the poem's speaker as another poetic construct, one that is just as fictitious as the girl and the man. Introducing the poet as separate from the poem's speaker acknowledges another aspect of the means of production for fragment 31, and is a necessary step when explicating persona poems in which the poem's speaker is not the poet.

The Reader Tetrahedron Restructured: The Persona Triangular Bipyramid and the Complete Octahedron

Fabian Gudas describes persona as a mask that authorizes a poet to explore and expose without impunity, allowing freedom and access that the poet's limitations cannot (901). This definition is a metaphor itself—one that seems to me to describe a projection. Persona, then, is just as much of a projection as is a reader's interpretation. And so, a more complex geometry than a tetrahedron is required to describe the circuits created by division of poet and speaker.

The first step is to create the foundation circuit with the kind of relationship present in a persona poem. To do this, we replace the "poet/Sappho" vertex in the Carsonian circuit with "poem's speaker." The new foundation circuit becomes: girl-man-poem's speaker. This circuit can now be used as the foundation for the Reader Tetrahedron. At this point, the only way to include the poet is by creating an adjacent tetrahedron with the same foundation circuit. The two can be stacked, creating a triangular bipyramid (also called a dipyrmaid), as in figure three:



In this configuration, what I refer to as the “foundation circuit”—that created by triangulating the girl, the man, and the poem’s speaker—is the face shared by two tetrahedrons. This is also the circuital relationship which makes up the action happening in the persona poem/art object, which in our example, is fragment 31. The poet objectifies the girl, the man, and the poem’s speaker in the act of writing the poem. Simultaneously, the reader objectifies the girl, man, and the poem’s speaker in the act of reading the poem. When fragment 31 is read with the means of production in mind, the objectification of the girl and man by the poem’s speaker—so fundamental in the three-point circuit Carson begins with—is obscured by the objectification by the poet and reader.

In the persona triangular bipyramid, there are subject-object relationships in every circuit—further proof that the binary is not a complex enough framework by which to understand persona poems. The seven resultant three-point circuits in the persona triangular bipyramid are:

- Girl-Man-Poem’s Speaker: the subject (Poem’s Speaker) desires relationship
- Reader-Girl-Poem’s Speaker: the subject (Reader) desires knowledge
- Reader-Man-Poem’s Speaker: the subject (Reader) desires knowledge
- Reader-Girl-Man: the subject (Reader) desires knowledge

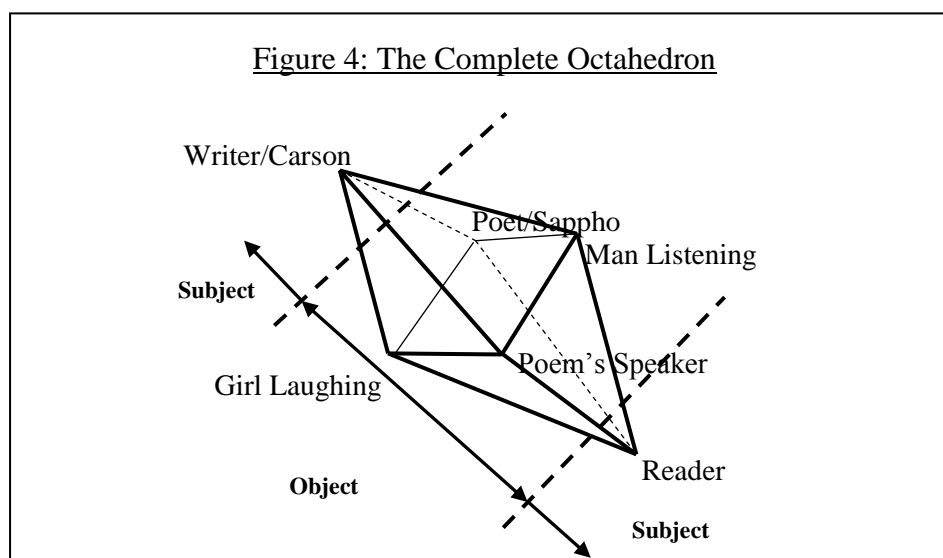
- Poet-Girl-Man: the subject (Poet) desires relationship
- Poet-Girl-Poem's Speaker: the subject (Poet) desires relationship
- Poet-Man-Poem's Speaker: the subject (Poet) desires relationship

To complicate matters further, the translation of fragment 31 in *Eros: the Bittersweet* is Anne Carson's translation. As the translator, the translation itself is a projection Carson has created—in a way, Carson is the writer of a fragment 31 that is different from the fragment 31 Sappho wrote. And so, the persona triangular bipyramid expands to include this new relationship, forming a more complete octahedron, as in figure four (see page 19).

In the complete octahedron pictured in figure four, Anne Carson's "foundation circuit"—created by triangulating the girl, the man, and the poem's speaker—is expanded to include the Poet Sappho now that Carson has been identified as the poet responsible for writing her translation of fragment 31 (for clarity, we'll refer to her as the Writer/Carson). We now have two adjacent pyramids that share a square, four-point circuit base. This base represents the relationships between the Poet/Sappho, the girl, the man, and the poem's speaker. Since the ultimate acts of objectification in this structure come from the writer and the reader, the base's four-point circuit is obscured within a zone of objectification. The writer—in this case Carson through the act of translation—objectifies the girl, the man, the poem's speaker, and the poet Sappho in the act of writing the poem. Simultaneously, the reader objectifies the girl, man, the poem's speaker, and the poet Sappho in the act of reading Carson's translation. In the more complete octahedron, there nine resultant three-point circuits:

- Girl-Poet/Sappho-Man-Poem's Speaker: the subject (Poet/Sappho) desires relationship *with her beloved objects* (the Girl, Man, and Poem's Speaker(—a projection of her Self))
- Writer/Carson-Poet/Sappho-Man: the subject (Writer/Carson) desires relationship
- Writer/Carson-Poet/Sappho-Girl: the subject (Writer/Carson) desires relationship
- Writer/Carson-Girl-Poem's Speaker: the subject (Writer/Carson) desires relationship

- Writer/Carson-Man-Poem's Speaker: the subject (Writer/Carson) desires relationship
- Reader- Man-Poem's Speaker: the subject (Reader) desires knowledge
- Reader-Girl-Poem's Speaker: the subject (Reader) desires knowledge
- Reader-Girl-Poet/Sappho: the subject (Reader) desires knowledge
- Reader-Man-Poet/Sappho: the subject (Reader) desires knowledge



What I find interesting about this configuration is that it seems increase the distance between the girl and the man, and—although they are still separate—it levels the playing field between the Poet/Sappho and the poem's speaker. Additionally, both poets—Sappho and Carson—desire relationships, but with different people. The Poet/Sappho, still in love with the girl, desires relationship with her objects—the man and girl. But in creating a persona, she also simultaneously objectifies herself as the speaker in the poem, wearing the persona mask as she composes the fragment. The writer/Carson, desires relationship, but the relationship she desires is between her authentic self and the figures in the poem (the girl, man, and poem's speaker), which includes the Sappho she has created as she writes her translation of fragment 31. Another way to say this is that Carson, in translating the fragment, is seeking a detached mental understanding of the poem, but desires a physical engagement with it as the writer of the

translation of it. It is possible for a reader to become a writer and vice versa, but only in separate geometric structures: it is not possible for a reader to be a writer simultaneously.

I believe interpretations that take the reader's and artist's perspectives into account are more responsible than those that reduce art objects to oversimplified binaries, such as the false binary between subject and object or that between self and Other. Complex structures, like the triangular bipyramid and octahedron, can help readers understand complex artifacts, such as lynching photographs and postcards. Furthermore, once artists and readers take on the difficult task of describing false binaries like race, without reproducing them in their work, complex geometric shapes are essential—for in such complex structures there is, as the epigraph by Toni Morrison relates, the ability to resist substituting one hierarchy for another.

Applying Circuits and Geometry: Lynching Photographs

Most lynching photographs depict the murdered and the murderer(s). To demonstrate that the means of production for a lynching photograph are far more intricate than the binary between murdered and murderer allows, we begin with a simple Carsonian three-point circuit: murdered-murderer(s)-photographer. Due to the horrific nature of lynching photographs, it is easy to forget that there was a photographer present to stage the body and position the participants before the photograph is taken. In this way, it is important to note that that the first viewer of a lynching photograph is the photographer and thus the camera acts as an extension of his gaze.

The Carsonian circuit reminds viewers that the photographer is culpable as the person responsible for objectifying the victim *and* the perpetrators. As Smith writes: “[p]ostcard photographers not only capitalized on the scene of the crime *but also played a crucial role in*

producing and reproducing the crime itself as a 'scene' [and] these photographers designed [these crime scene] images,” profiting from the mass-production and sale of them (emphasis in original, 121). The photographer in our circuit is not a poet desiring a relationship with the beloved and the lover. Yet there is a desire encoded in lynching photographs—to control, to stage, to rewrite history,¹⁴ to captivate, to dominate. Like poetic persona, “the camera cannot help but reveal faces as social masks” (*On Photography* 59). The photographer and every subsequent viewer of a lynching photograph do not see the murdered or murderers as they were in life: the victims are robbed of their personal power and agency as staged bodies just as the socialized mask of glee on a lyncher’s face obscures his desperation and fear.

The structure of lynching photographs begins with the three-point circuit and includes the readers, or subsequent viewers. The structure created by lynching photographs is that of the Reader Tetrahedron (see figure two). Yet readers of lynching photographs venture into dangerous territory: they risk trauma by viewing such violent images. As psychiatrist Judith Herman says “humans don’t require direct experience to be traumatized, but can be traumatized indirectly and vicariously. Traumatization...can be experienced at an even greater distance—as images broadcasted” (Percy 199).

Lynching postcards are everywhere in *Black Lazarus: Conjure Book*, but the postcards are not reproduced as the photographer or producer intended. Instead, the postcard artifacts which inspired *Black Lazarus: Conjure Book* have been altered and contextualized in significant ways. This is part of the work of resisting binaries and the trauma these artifacts perpetuate. For example, there are visual poems in postcard shape, postcards surrounded by text and images, and portraits of the postcards in verse. All of these poems are grounded in structures that are more

¹⁴ Susan Sontag writes in *On Photography*: “In America, the photographer is not simply the person who records the past but the one who invents it” (67).

complex than binaries, forming polyhedrons made up of multiple Carsonian three-point circuits. Before describing how the poems in *Black Lazarus: Conjure Book* incorporate three-point circuits into various geometric shapes, two more kinds of visual texts must be modeled: the graphic novel panel and the lynching postcard.

Applying Circuits and Geometry: Graphic Novel Panels

For this discussion of the circuits present in graphic novel panels,¹⁵ I will use panels from Mat Johnson's groundbreaking graphic novel *Incognegro*, which calls attention to the framing of lynching photographs within the space of framed comic panels (see Appendix C). At the beginning of *Incognegro*, a man is mutilated and murdered in the gutter between two panels (8). The panel preceding is a medium shot of the victim's stripped torso. Readers know from previous panels that the man's neck is in a taut noose and he is standing on a crate and surrounded by a mob. In the panel immediately preceding his implied mutilation and murder, the word balloon in which his cry of pain is written reaches through two people in the crowd: one who wears a cape depicting KKK insignia and holds a knife to the man's groin; and another person who waits off to the side with his sleeves rolled up. The panel following the gutter in which the man is mutilated and murdered is a pulled-back landscape shot of the scene, reframed to focus not on the body (as most lynching photographs are), but on a profile shot of a smug-faced man in the crowd a few rows back. Another spectator stands to this man's right, drinking from a flask.

¹⁵ Although incredibly simplified, the term "comics" here is used interchangeably with "graphic novels," meaning a narrative style involving pictures and words in panels (framed scenes). The space between two panels is called the "gutter," and "word balloons" are the boxes in which dialogue appear (text also appears in "captions" within and around panels, and these captions typically contain information about the scene).

Just one panel later, the focal point is the photographer. In lynching photographs, the photographer is apparent only in the framing and staging choices. The body Johnson has drawn in *Incognegro* is understood by the reader to have been arranged and arrayed because the victim was wearing pants in the first panel and now his body has been dressed in a clown costume from the waist up and nothing from the waist down. Is the tree important to the photographer? Then it is pictured. Does any member of the crowd wish to be photographed with the body? Then it is so. In *Incognegro*, readers meet a lynching photographer who is a consummate businessman, calling out to the crowd: “Get your postcards, ladies and gentlemen! Remember the day you took part in history! Fifty cents for one, three for a dollar!” Later, this man comments that he doesn’t “waste money on assistants,” choosing to stage the body and take the photograph himself (9).

Mat Johnson does not show the man murdered or mutilated. Instead, he sets the scene and chooses panels from perspectives that place such action in the gutter. He chooses for the violence to take place in the reader’s imagination, making an accomplice of the reader by way of closure.¹⁶ In *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud argues that “closure in comics fosters an intimacy surpassed only by the written word, a silent, secret contract between creator and audience” and identifies the reader as an “equal partner in crime,” claiming “to kill a man between panels is to condemn him to a thousand deaths”—deaths that are only as vivid as the reader’s imagination (69). In comics, the frame and what appears within it are just as important as what isn’t framed or pictured at all. Comics demand that readers draw from their own imaginations and experiences as part of the reading process. Unlike photographs, in which the

¹⁶ In *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud writes: “this phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole...[is] called closure” and “in recognizing and relating to other people, we all depend heavily on our learned ability of closure” (63). What McCloud calls “closure” is a kind of triangulation in which the relationship between what is pictured and what is absent work together to create a third something, fabricated completely in the reader’s mind: “[h]ere in the limbo of the gutter, human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea. Nothing is seen between the two panels, but experience tells you something must be there. Comics panels fracture both time and space, offering a jagged, staccato rhythm of unconnected moments. But closure allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality” (65-67).

frame is nearly invisible, comics readers depend upon the frame as an element of the meaning-making process.¹⁷

As in a lynching photograph, the starting point for Mat Johnson's first panel (in which the reader steps into one such spectacle) includes the foundation circuit of victim-perpetrators-narrator. The narrator in this case seems to be third person omniscient, as the bird's eye perspective typically suggests,¹⁸ but the caption in the upper left corner of the panel acts as a voice-over in film does, introducing the reader to a first-person limited narrator:

Between 1889 and 1918, 2,522 Negroes were murdered by lynch mobs in America that we know of. Now, since the beginning of the 30's, most of the white papers don't even consider it news. To them another nigger dead is not a story. So my job is to make it one. That's all. (7)

From this caption, the reader learns that the narrator of *Incognegro* is the protagonist, an intrepid multiracial reporter named Zane Pinchback (alias Incognegro). The circuit becomes victim-perpetrators-Zane. Concerning graphic novels, there is always a reader, so the initial three-point circuit can be expanded into the Reader Tetrahedron. Finally, as is the case with a persona poem, the narrator in *Incognegro* is not the artist, but a persona invented by Johnson, so the reader tetrahedron can be further expanded into a triangular bipyramid with Johnson representing the artist opposite the reader.

Whereas lynching photographs leave the reader with a single image, Johnson's *Incognegro* uses the comic form to expose the means of production of lynching photographs. Johnson turns the camera back onto the mob and photographer by making them the focal points of panels immediately following the iconic first panel (which looks like most lynching

¹⁷ McCloud goes so far as to expand the binary between the word and the image, which historically defined the medium of comics, to a triangular relationship between the "three vertices" of "'reality,' language and the picture plane" so as to "represent[t] the total pictorial vocabulary of comics or of any of the visual arts" (51). He is aware that a simple binary between word and image is not nuanced enough to describe comics, so he seeks a more accurate definition through a triangular relationship between three points (51-53).

¹⁸ One of the founding fathers of comics, Will Eisner, attributes a "sense of detachment" and "little threat or involvement" with the "bird's eye view perspective" (90).

photographs with the victim's body as the focus) thereby using his author-ity to implicate the reader in a violent lynching spectacle via closure, as mentioned above, and to follow this with panels in which the subtle change in panel frame forces the reader to objectify the mob and photographer instead the victim's body. Furthermore, by diagramming each panel, one sees that although the first six panels of *Incognegro* are triangular bipyramids, the foundation three-point circuits of each triangular bipyramid changes from panel to panel, destabilizing the reader by keeping the subject-object relationships and the subjects' desires in flux, while keeping both the artist and reader ever at a distance.

As previously mentioned, in the first panel the foundation circuit is victim-perpetrators-narrator; the captions in this panel demonstrate Zane's desire to make "a story" of "another nigger dead," since the "white papers" don't. This is the narrator's objective observation of the relationship between victim and perpetrators. In the second panel, the foundation circuit is victim-rope-Zane as the rope (pulled by the now invisible perpetrators) is pulled taut around the victim's throat. Again, the desire Zane expresses is to tell the story of the murderers and victim that the rope represents as a symbol of the institutionally-sanctioned, white supremacist vigilante behavior that is invisible when white papers choose not to report lynchings. In this way, Johnson makes the rope the focal point of this panel in such a way that the reader absolutely cannot ignore it. This underscores the objectification at work in the lynching as the reader moves from victim-as-object to rope-as-object, a progressive move that restores agency to the victim and implicates the mob in murder through the symbol of the rope.

In the next panel, the previous three-point circuit of victim-perpetrators-narrator/Zane reemerges as the panel focuses on a man's KKK robe and the knife and his hand, held to the genitals of the victim, who is now almost completely obscured in the background by the

perpetrators in the foreground. The desire here, again, is Zane's desire to tell the gruesome truth of what occurs during lynching. The profile-view in the fourth panel of *Incognegro* creates the circuit of man-mob-narrator, as the victim disappears from view. In this panel, the narrator—and by extension, Johnson—has directed the reader's gaze toward a man in the crowd, objectifying him rather than the victim's body, as is often the case in most lynching photographs and postcards. Readers of lynching photographs do not have this luxury. With a typical lynching photograph, the photographer has chosen a menacing gaze with the body as the focal point, and often, an absent mob of perpetrators. To look at a lynching photograph—whether you identify with the mob, the victim, both, or neither—makes you as just as culpable as the mob because the photographer has made it so by controlling your gaze and forcing it into a white supremacist framework by distancing the self from the Other. For Johnson to redirect the reader's gaze in *Incognegro*—particularly when the reader is looking at an iconic lynching scene—is a powerful subversive act.

Similar subversion is at work in *Black Lazarus: Conjure Book*. In the original lynching postcard of Allen Brooks, the body is suspended from a lamppost at a crossroads above a sea of people in downtown Dallas. The artifact that inspired the manuscript includes a hand-drawn arrow pointing to the body. In the visual poem "Postcard: You are here," an arrow points to a woman in the crowd instead of Allen Brooks's body, redirecting the reader's gaze and objectifying the woman, who readers later learn is the protagonist, Dottie (Morrow 50).

The camera is also turned back onto the photographer in "Snapshot: Turning Back," which is written from the perspective of the character Dottie as she remembers the day Allen Brooks was lynched (Morrow 77). The foundation three-point circuit in this poem is Dottie-Chuck-photographer, and as a persona poem, combines with the reader and poet to form a

triangular bipyramid. In this poem, readers are thrown in the middle of a lynching spectacle as Dottie remembers it happening. The reader's gaze follows her gaze, which does not focus on the lynching at hand but on those who had a hand in it.

In the graphic poem "Portrait: After That," much like in the panels from *Incognegro*, the foundation three-point circuits change in the triangular bipyramid that each panel represents (Morrow 68). In this graphic poem, something transpires in the gutters between panels. The reader must decide via closure what happens in the five moments before, after, and in between the four panels, and what happens in the panels themselves beyond what the text describes. The spectator's gaze is turned away from the victim by the framing of the panels and repositioned on the perpetrators of the crime who are celebrating after murdering and mutilating Allen Brooks. The poem "Postcard: Dallas, Texas" completely alters the context of the Brooks artifact, mocking the photographer and condemning the mob while calling attention to the means of production for lynching postcards and the problems with them: "photo don't say/*wrong* or *self-defense*, a man/made a man/dead land scape-/goat, made a penny/a postcard and no body/supine posed/to tell truth/of still life/explained as just/murder of an-/other posed frame" (Morrow 42-43). In these lines the speaker moves rapidly from what the photo doesn't say and what the lies circulated about the lynching are, as well as the reality, which goes unsaid, regardless of the action of sending a lynching postcard through the mail.

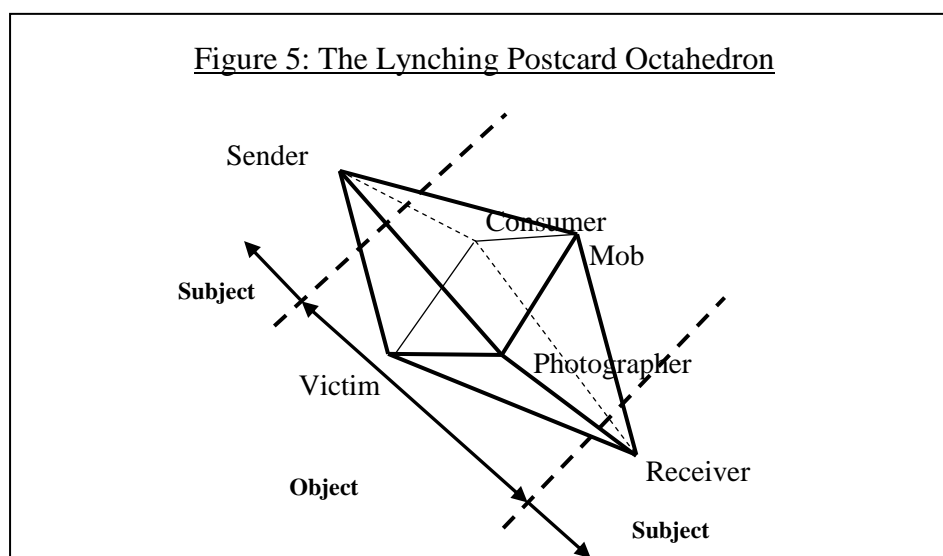
Such techniques and writing are a way to reframe history. These are incredibly political choices: instead of being satisfied with the Allen/Littlefield Collection of lynching photographs and postcards or the *Witness* exhibition¹⁹ as the only presentation of these artifacts, artists have the power to present such artifacts in deliberately altered contexts. In *Incognegro*, the focus is

¹⁹ The exhibition referred to here is *Witness: Photographs of Lynchings from the Collection of James Allen*, in which sixty lynching photographs and postcards from 1880 to 1960 were displayed at the Roth Horowitz Gallery in Manhattan at the beginning of January 2000 (Apel 8).

not the lynching event or the resultant postcard, but the role one multiethnic reporter (a character, by the way, inspired by Walter White, the founder of the NAACP) plays in the recording of history.

Applying Circuits and Geometry: The Lynching Postcard Octahedron

The relationships in lynching postcards, like those in Anne Carson's translation of fragment 31, can be diagrammed in the shape of an octahedron, as shown in figure five below:



The four-point circuit upon which the lynching postcard octahedron is built includes the victim, the photographer, the mob, and the consumer. Like the distance between the Poet/Sappho and the poem's speaker in Carson's translation, there is a distance in the lynching postcard octahedron between the photographer and the consumer. Although the consumer is the subject and could objectify the photographer along with the mob and the victim, the photograph seems almost to disappear, as Sappho does in Carson's translation. Sappho and the photographer shaped the artifacts that the translation and postcard, respectively, are based upon, but their contribution is

obscured by the reader/writer and sender/receiver objectifications. There are nine resultant three-point circuits:

- Victim-Photographer-Mob-Consumer: the subject (Consumer) desires relationship *with her beloved objects* (the Victim, Mob, and Photographer(—a projection of their Self))
- Sender-Photographer-Mob: the subject (Sender) desires relationship
- Sender-Photographer-Victim: the subject (Sender) desires relationship
- Sender-Victim-Consumer: the subject (Sender) desires relationship
- Sender-Mob-Consumer: the subject (Sender) desires relationship
- Receiver-Mob-Photographer: the subject (Receiver) desires knowledge
- Receiver-Victim-Photographer: the subject (Receiver) desires knowledge
- Receiver-Victim-Consumer: the subject (Receiver) desires knowledge
- Receiver-Mob-Consumer: the subject (Receiver) desires knowledge

Notice that the foundation circuit is not a triangular three-point circuit. Rather, it is a four-point circuit taking the shape of a square: victim-mob-consumer-photographer. Instead of the artist and reader, the vertices at the apex and base of the octahedron are the sender and the receiver. For inscribed postcard artifacts, these become the narrator and the reader.

Instead of dissolving into binaries, this octahedron reveals the relationships between three- and four-point circuits. The photographer perceives the victim and mob as the photograph is staged and shot. The consumer perceives the victim and mob as the photographer has captured them. The people who buy lynching postcards could be said to have the same motivations as the people who make them. Their modes of objectification are different, but their motivations for doing so are the same: they both desire relationship with the beloved—a heading beneath which is grouped the victims, the mob, and their projected Self as it is rendered by the gaze the photographer has captured. The objectification present between these four points of the foundation four-point circuit, however, is obscured by the objectification the sender and receiver enact. And perhaps the most disturbing revelation from diagramming a lynching postcard is that the sender of such a grotesque artifact would be so motivated by a desire to connect with the

sender, and the sender, then, would be implicated by the grotesque artifact in their desire to learn from it.

Notice that the consumer is not necessarily the sender (or narrator, if the postcard is inscribed). I have decided to separate the act of buying from the act of sending or receiving, regardless of whether or not the consumer buys the postcard to keep, since the intent to send is inherent in a postcard. Just as poems require readers, postcards require readers whether the postcard is inscribed or not. As mentioned earlier, even the act of sending a postcard with no commentary requires the sender's handwriting in the form of a recipient's address, even as the lack of accompanying commentary demonstrates the sender's choice to remain silent and let the photograph and delivery do the talking. This is an interesting and complex problem. When it comes to postcards, there are a multitude of motivations possible, and few are explained.

These complexities are explored in *Black Lazarus: Conjure Book*. In the poem "Portrait: Brandau buys," the poet puts on the difficult mask by adopting the persona of racist Dr. W. W. Brandau, an actual consumer, narrator, and sender of one of the March 3, 1910 Dallas postcards (Morrow 71). In an octahedral diagram of this postcard artifact, the foundation four-point circuit is: Brandau-John-postcard-poem's speaker, and the apex and base are poet and reader. This is quite different than the actual artifact's octahedron, which has a base four-point circuit of Brooks-mob-Brandau-Photographer. In the poem, the lines are: "Portrait: Brandau buys—//two of the souvenir postcards/one to send to John and the other to hold onto" (71). In this poem, the speaker imagines multiple motivations, including the desire to possess Brooks: "Brandau muses:/This is the only nigger I've ever owned," a sentiment he dismisses after a considerable pause in the following stanza "He shakes his head, begins again" (71). In this poem, the speaker reveals that the friendship between Brandau and John has deteriorated: "...his friendship

hinges/on a penny postcard, six square inches that//proves they're still on the same page/wonders if the distance is worth the cost of sending (71). Listening to the Brandau that the poet imagines as he is expressed in the speaker's voice in this poem, the reader doesn't get a definitive or authentic explanation of how and why people sent lynching postcards. Nevertheless, the poet positions the reader to consider why one white southern doctor would have such a difficult time inscribing a postcard to someone he considered to be a friend.

In the poem "Postcard from Dr. W. W. Brandau," the reader finally sees what the white southern doctor has decided to write.²⁰ In this poem, it is revealed that "John" is also a doctor (Morrow 70). In the poem "From the Journal of Dr. W. W. Brandau," the reader learns that Brandau's practice is in Dallas, Texas. Brandau sees fit to editorialize in this inscription, calling the postcard "a token of a great day we had in Dallas," revealing that he "was very much in the bunch" (Morrow 74-75). Keeping in mind that a person wrote these—not a persona—such writing is a powerful rhetorical move Dr. Brandau intended to communicate his feeling on the subject of lynching not just to Dr. John, but to the mail carriers and anyone else who might come across the postcard from the moment it leaves Brandau's mailbox until the time it reaches John's hands. It seems as if Brandau supports the lynching. Or perhaps he's trying to reassure Dr. John that he does. As the speaker suggests in "Portrait: Brandau buys," Brandau seems to be changing his mind about March 3, 1910 after witnessing the public spectacle of violence.

The lines surrounding the postcard in "Postcard from Dr. W. W. Brandau" (70) offer a sharp contrast to what's inscribed on the postcard. Brandau has written about the victim and the mob in the postcard, acting as the narrator. Meanwhile, the poem's speaker—a persona that is *not* the same as the Brandau persona—describes a scene in which white supremacist views are discussed in the billiard room of a well-to-do white man (a doctor, perhaps?) who thinks nothing

²⁰ The words in the postcard section of this poem are from one of the artifacts in the Allen/Littlefield collection.

of saying racist things in front of his servants who “gentlemen can speak freely in front of because they are too feeble-minded to understand the/psyche of white men” (70). In this hybrid poem, there is a sender, a narrator, a photographer, a victim, a mob, a poem’s speaker, a host, guests, servants, a poet, and a reader. The shape created by this poem is none of the shapes modeled previously: it would have to be a far more complex shape than an octahedron to include all of the relationships in flux in this small space. It would certainly take more than a single three-point circuit. No binary could accurately or completely describe the poem “Postcard from Dr. W. W. Brandau.” And this is precisely the point.

With *Black Lazarus: Conjure Book*, I want to force a conversation about the conditions in and by which atrocities such as lynching are conceived, enacted, codified, rationalized, and remembered. I want to raise questions about what happened in the lives of the people who were present in the mobs before, during, and after such traumatic events, and to explore the wide-reaching effects of communal trauma across space and time. In these poems, everyone—including the reader by way of reading and closure—is implicated except the victim. By resisting the urge to speak for Allen Brooks, and by creating personas that complicate notions of memory,²¹ perspective, race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, and mortality, *Black Lazarus: Conjure Book* represents my desire to work toward the healing of communal trauma.

As a nation built on the backs of slaves, this country is “a nation suffering from a form of cultural [post-traumatic stress disorder, the] persistence of wartime behaviors into peacetime” (Percy 199). Ultimately, *Black Lazarus: Conjure Book* is a rebirthing spell meant to distance

²¹ Jennifer Percy notes in *Demon Camp* that “Judith Herman, author of *Trauma and Recovery*, writes that people who have survived atrocities often tell their stories in a ‘highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner that undermines their credibility and thereby serves the twin imperatives of truth-telling and secrecy.’ Recognizing the truth leads to recovery, but if secrecy prevails, then the story of the traumatic event won’t exist as a verbal narrative, she says, but as a symptom” (216).

myself and readers from false binaries and enacting recovery as a move toward the kind of “mutual recognition,” the “subject-to-subject” encounter that bell hooks imagines:

...best practiced through the mediating force of love...a politicized force that enables movement ‘against dehumanization, against domination.’ It is ‘the idea of being able to let fear go so you can move towards another person who’s not like you. It is ‘mutual recognition...the ‘subject-to-subject’ encounter, as opposed to the ‘subject-to-object’—a mutual give-and-take in which the individuals involved ‘learn to understand, appreciate, and value’ the worlds and perspectives of others. (hooks qtd. in *Feminist Rhetorical Theories* 88)

I agree with Kiese Laymon in the *Black Lazarus: Conjure Book* epigraph: such healing is possible...but it *must* begin with self-reflection.

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BLACK LAZARUS: CONJURE BOOK

I do not want to alter one hierarchy in order to institute another. —Toni Morrison

“...loving ourselves is a revolutionary act—we have to practice... Can we heal ourselves? Yes! It takes self-reflection...” —Kiese Laymon

How much of our own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another? —Jennifer Percy

Postcard: Dallas, Texas*March 3, 1910*

for *lynch* say

make, shoot,

take for frame

white crowd

held black

back ground

shutter ex-

posed stage

keep sake of

photo don't say

wrong or *self-*

defense, a man

made a man

dead land scape-

goat, made a penny

a postcard and no body

supine posed

to tell truth

of still life

explained as just

murder of an-

other posed frame

Letter from the Author: Monologue to Invisible Man, or, On White Guilt

Begin a young girl edging past a summer field sown by men thrown away. Or too close to the tracks at sunset. Or with a tingle shooting down your spine, foxfire, as your heart ceases, bowels release. Or a young man desperate to shake the stalker pacing him around the block, hood drawn, receiver choked in his tight fist. In history as it is penned, whose hand writes you? Although it is true the *heart has no color*, to far too many in self-appointed power, flesh is still evidence enough for a pointed finger. There are too many degrees of tragedy. Too much despair in disrepair. Too much rope for the hanging of new hope. Everybody begins life invisible. Does truth clang in your bones like an old bell lowing in a ghost ship lost at sea? Choose wisely which antiques to keep. Which habits to hardwire as synapse pathway and muscle memory. Which tropes to code and which are best repressed in your genetic makeup.

One cannot extract the blood and sweat from soil samples and pump vitality back into the wasted shells of men. When overworked fields lay fallow, one cannot sprout intent. One cannot x-ray occupied graves from a safe distance, read on a screen the wounds to which our ancestors succumbed. One cannot unsee lynchings as they were recorded by whites who wanted them seen a certain way and circulated as postcards meant to prove, the message a nation.

Home doesn't have to be a dirty secret, nor God a superman come to save the day. We cannot pile centuries of history high on a pallet and shove it out to sea. We cannot bury secrets for safekeeping once told. Dear wayward children: pull your downy heads from the heavens and

look beyond the scorched earth—some seedlings persevere. Their bloom annual; their roots deep.

*Black Lazarus, First Issue, "Conjure," PAGE ONE**splash page, exterior shot***January 15, 2000,****near** sunset. Roth

Horowitz Gallery,

New York's Upper

East Side. **Earlier**that **week**, the firstsnow of an **unusually**mild winter **fell**, andthe **angst** of the cityhad **subsided** somewhatinto a **palpable calm**. Athin crust of ice **rests****at the feet of the**concrete steps **of the****gallery** brownstone.

A

woman

who

scurries **past****shivers but****doesn't see**

him, however,

A

large

dark figure

smokes a cigar

outside the gallery.At every **exhale**, the MAN's**breath** curls and **spreads****out** in all four directions.

He is a mass of solid

planes **shrouded**

in fog. He kicks

at the **sheath**of snow **near****his feet**.**the**German **Shepherd**

she walks snarls and barks.

Portrait: Secondary Witness

Conjure, Roth Horowitz Gallery, 2000

I know her nose. I've seen
those eyes, cheek
bones in the mirror.

But here, in a crowd
of people I don't know, below
a black and white photograph

close to a century past
here I am in the turned
down corners of her

full-lipped mouth, one
drop in a bucket
of blood passing

on their periphery, an
other exposed
yellow rose.

Family Portrait

Conjure 2010

in a dusty haberdasher box
from the attic is one white
cotton glove worked
with intertwined roses, cloy
of dried lilac, cedar, mullein,
a braid of sweetgrass,
Blackfoot Daisies pressed
between two brittle pages
harsh words scratched
in a slanted hand, cast
iron key wrapped in red
satin ribbon, three silver
dollars, flannel sachet shedding
desiccated herbs, a golden curl,
devil's shoestring, dull lodestones,
cartoon vixen signed *Uncle Ellis*
beneath, stack of photographs
black and white faces blank, staring
looping script on their backs:

Dottie, 1906

Virginia, 1922

then a postcard dated
March 3, 1910, tangle
of jackets, hats, shadow
of eyebrow, arch looms over
body plum-bob from a lamppost
and below, suspended by time, eyes closed,
all high cheekbones, the lone profile,
and beneath the arrow
pointing to her, the words:

You are here.

Postcard: You are here

extreme close-up, point-of-view shot

A young woman's hand holds a postcard, photograph side up. Somewhat worn, the photograph depicts the lynching of Allen Brooks on March 3, 1910 in Dallas, Texas.

An arrow points to the profile of one woman's face among the people gathered beneath Brooks's body. In looping script rendered with a fine-tipped nib in faded grey ink, someone has written along the photograph's top border near the arrow: "You are here."

Letter to Conjure from Her Mother: Your Turn, or, Pass

Sharae 1984

one move from

check mate

I think *there's*

one rule &

you broke it

well, Miss, there

is only this

cliché: *life is*

just a game

so better play

to a billion

or don't play

to win, keep

the score so

far below horizon

& dance, recite

your lines, girl,

when drugged &

tugged on

& when you

find your feet
straddle thimble
& top hat
don't ask how
few turns around
the board
are left
for you or
who throws
your dice

Solstice Nightsong*Conjure 2014*

the night sky is home, warm and black

souls of folks shine out across the great divide

but if stars are just faded photographs, what keeps the leaves on the trees

from being forgotten once their limbs bow down with fruit

or the roots coiled beneath from being ghost crossroads,

synapse telegraph, blood-hewn path

what keeps my thoughts, incandescent as aurora

borealis, taut and stark as winter branch, ephemeral

as blind stream, or me from being two sides of a postcard

or parched root severed, too far ahead in time with you

not here to prove in body what my bones know, what my soul,

in dreams, echoes, reaching back when the line goes slack

Portrait of the Photo Taken March 3, 1910*Dottie 1914*

A slip of a girl haunts
the streets of downtown Dallas,
trying to shake the image
of her husband as he kicked teeth
from a stranger's moaning mouth,
shimmied the body up a streetlamp,
crowded to the mob below.

Blood poured down like water
from a bait can and she a minnow
hooked behind the irises as she tried
to swim out of the crowd. You won't see
that girl in this photograph, the one
whose infant was dead-delivered from
her husband's hands as he beat
threat into flesh and the rumor spread
like wildfire. In some recollections, she
tells herself she shoved her husband
and the crowd aside to cut the innocent's
body down. In some, she lies
the stranger down and out

on the front porch of the old Georgia house,
rubs mullein into his seeping wounds. But my heart
is mute as I hold the portrait of someone I used
to be, of the girl a camera held hostage
and a man murdered by a man taught to drown
pain in liquor-rage, to pound emotions out, to temper
those he swears he loves. I tell the frozen girl in
this photograph to hold fast, to weather
this last despite the lightning's striking
twice and much too close to home.

Black Lazarus, First Issue, “Conjure,” PAGE TWO

<p><i>exterior:</i></p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>close-up: MAN's legs, cigar sputters at his feet</p> </div> <p>The MAN's frame viewed from the back as he hulks his way up the gallery stairs. A couple walks by in winter attire—they don't see him. At the same time, a sullen kid walks by in the opposite direction and looks at the couple. The MAN wears a long black duster coat, like a voodoo cowboy. His shoulders are hunched, both hands jammed in his pockets.</p>	<p><i>inter</i></p> <p>Peop</p> <p>The blow hung s hav They bene port with sligh ing, crow</p>	<p><i>ior:</i></p> <p>le w</p> <p>exhi n up on th e bee loom ath t raits' the t diff patro ds in</p>	<p>alk a</p> <p>bit p to lar e wa n bur & le hem, spect victi eren ns co the p</p>	<p>roun</p> <p>hoto ger t ll as ned i er as chest ators ms. ce in uld b hoto</p>	<p>d th</p> <p>grap han if the nto t patr level & gr Asid heig e am grap</p>	<p>e gal</p> <p>hs ar life s ir sh he w ons with oin e fro ht & ong t hs</p>	<p>lery</p> <p>e ize & adow alls. walk the level m a cloth he</p>
<p>The MAN and CONJURE regard each other, standing with their bodies slightly turned toward each other. We see them from the shoulders up, three-quarters profile. The projections are faint—almost indistinguishable—behind them now. CONJURE looks at the MAN as if she's daring him to say something. He's looking back at her with a touch of sadness.</p> <p>CONJURE and the MAN “get” each other.</p>							
<p>CONJURE, a woman in her early twenties, stands before an interactive display. We see the panel's events from over her shoulder. On the wall before her is a diptych: one half is a noose and the</p>		<p>other half is a faceless KKK outfit. She is standing in the left-most projection, her face and neck cast upon on the wall before her as if she were hanging from a rope. Her eyes wide, her mouth open</p>		<p>CONJURE moves to the KKK projection and the MAN has come up beside her to place his face in the projected noose. He turns to her and says: “They should call this one ‘self-portrait’.”</p>		<p>CONJURE turns to him. We see her face, in profile in the KKK hood, and the MAN's face, in profile in the noose. She says: “If they did, they'd need my face for both.”</p>	

Excerpt from a White Southern Primer

A's fer Allen who tetched Martha's nappy

B's fer Bennie fer sass'n offta Pappy

C's fer Curtis—guilty a' walkin

D's fer David b'cause he was talkin

E's fer Ellis (“cain't find” th silver)

F's fer Frank, wanted for *murder*

G's fer Garfield fer lookin at Mable

H's fer Herald fer burnin down th' stable

I's fer Isaac—jest pick a crime

J's fer Jim—wrong place, right time

K's fer Ken (cain't trust ma' wife)

L's fer Laura (not missin much a' life)

M's fer Meadow (where she's found)

N's fer Nease (tried t'run *her* outta town)

O's fer Oly b'cause she laughed

P's fer Prue—hussy drowned in the bath

Q's fer Quincy, that goddamn dope

R's fer Rubin—well, we had th' rope

S's fer Sam fer trustin too much

T's fer Tom (a lil' Black Dutch)

U's fer Ulmer—les' say's fer rape

V's fer Virgil that slow nigger ape

W's fer William fer cussin th'Lord

X's fer Xavis b'cause we was bored

Y's fer Yula fer runnin away

Z's fer Zora—n'ain't shit you c'n say.

Portrait of the Photo Taken May 25, 1892*Chuck 1907*

When I look back at this old photograph, my throat constricts with the sear of white lightning and my father's cackle rattles in my ears, his calloused hands shove me by the shoulders across a bridge in Georgia where a stranger and her son—condemned—hang suspended from ropes far below the jubilant crowd. The crush of people part as a jolt of Christmas morning excitement rises to my throat and meets the sweet of peach pie slick on my tongue peppered with sweat and the tang of burnt flesh and I heave. Two niggers I have never met were found out and now are dead at our hands. I am a boy. My father is proud. And a ways off in the woods, a bright little girl in a sea of dark faces turns her tired wet eyes my way, waiting for me to lift a finger.

Down On His Luck*Chuck 1909*

I am burned out
land steeped in blood
of slaves without yield
I am broken back
mess of empty bottles
busted up along a
silt-stained sill
idle hands sluiced
in sweat from Devil's use
driving spikes into rotted ties
down a crooked road
laying faulty track for a demon
train at break-neck pace and
I don't know how to get her back

Another Turn

Dottie, March 5, 1910

two days in I sense
a star fall—the demise
of a constellation entire,
so many broken
hopes stacked against
my need to be reborn again
for naked skin bathed
in new moon dark
the Rider bearing down
or an eclipse to shield
me as I rise above
all that's gone awry
these past few days
I walk the smoking earth
at twilight while you
are drunk asleep,
my feet trace and retrace,
feed momentum, the plea builds
into incantations drumming up
spirits long departed

and the recently deceased

their footfalls thunderous

their outrage unbelievable

 this is the other shoe falling

 this is me not turning back

Dead Love, Lai*Chuck 1912*

Let's say there ain't fault
or blame, just pillared salt.

Damn you.

A column, say, wrought
from solemn vows done rot
clean through.

See how we begot
cotton land in drought
we—two.

Snapshot: No Turning Back

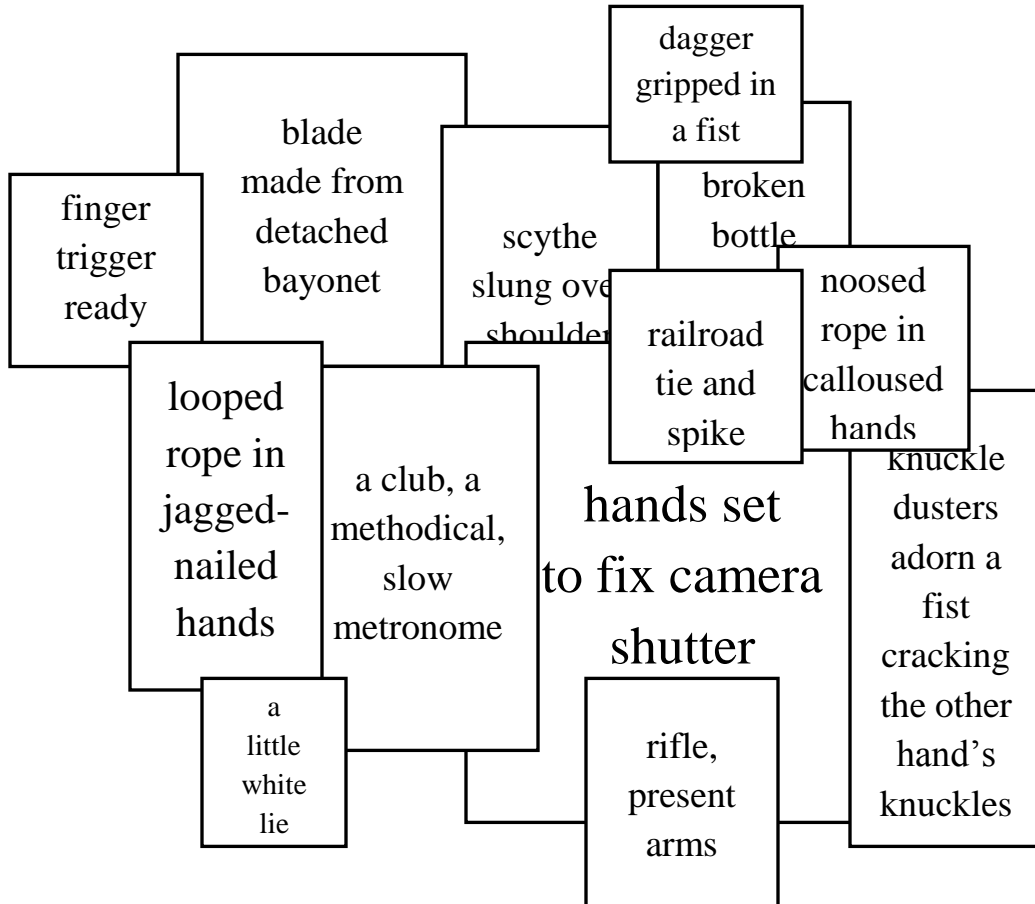
Chuck 1916

Here is a young man
damned by his own
hands, frenzied 'til spent
slick with blood of the innocent
Here's husband, drunk on white
lightning and righteous, threat
of fire, rope, choking truth to death
all hope having left his young wife's eyes

and him, brimming overfull with recognition
Some men are converted in works of fiction—
but in *real life*, are tried by time, must survive
lack of forgiveness, must live with their sins
because they lie like dogs, ache for erasure as they break
the backs of men they bring to slaughter like hogs

A Few Clouds Gathered

extreme close-ups, all



Portrait: *Before the arch was reached...*

March 3, 1910

A few clouds gathered at the back of the courthouse
make a mob, which breaks at noon: downtown Dallas,
back-alley justice. Their numbers swell, women grab
their children, join their men, storm down Main
Street. Eager to teach *the sons of bitches*, they roil
through the courthouse doors like flood waters.
In their wake, the story circulates, hits fever pitch
rings out in the cry of one woman stuck on a switch-
back from *oh* to *no* to the *get that nigger!*

In his chambers, the judge fans himself
with the threat letter, traces the circled cross
in sweat on his desk. Just outside the courtroom
on a worn maple bench, Norma Ruth sits
stiff-backed, her husband Jack smoothing
her hair: *there, there*. The police say no-
thing when the crowd surges down the hall
a roaring fire, howling brimstone. Any other
day, two hundred men, women,
and children jockeying up the stairs

would be absurd, but not now, hot
to hang a scapegoat. Any other crime
two hundred men, women, and children
would be reading the next day's papers,
clucking their tongues in disapproval, not
forcing their way in to throw a man to
the street below from the second-story window.

Portrait: After That

wide-screen, deep focus, high angle, establishing shot

Downtown Dallas, beneath Elk's Arch, after the public lynching of Allen Brooks, March 3, 1910. The crowd of over 2,000 stand **below** the arch, looking up as if **bored**. Allen Brooks's body is visible in the **upper left-hand** corner of the panel as two bare, **bloodied** feet. All of his toes have been **cut off**.

medium long, shallow focus, point-of-view shot, passerby perspective

Same **group** of seven as before, but the shot has **pulled** back to show some of the crowd leaving, heads **down, some** smiling, and a **disheveled** old man, beard flying wildly standing in the street **calling out to the crowd**: "You did the work of men today and your deeds will resound **in every state!**"

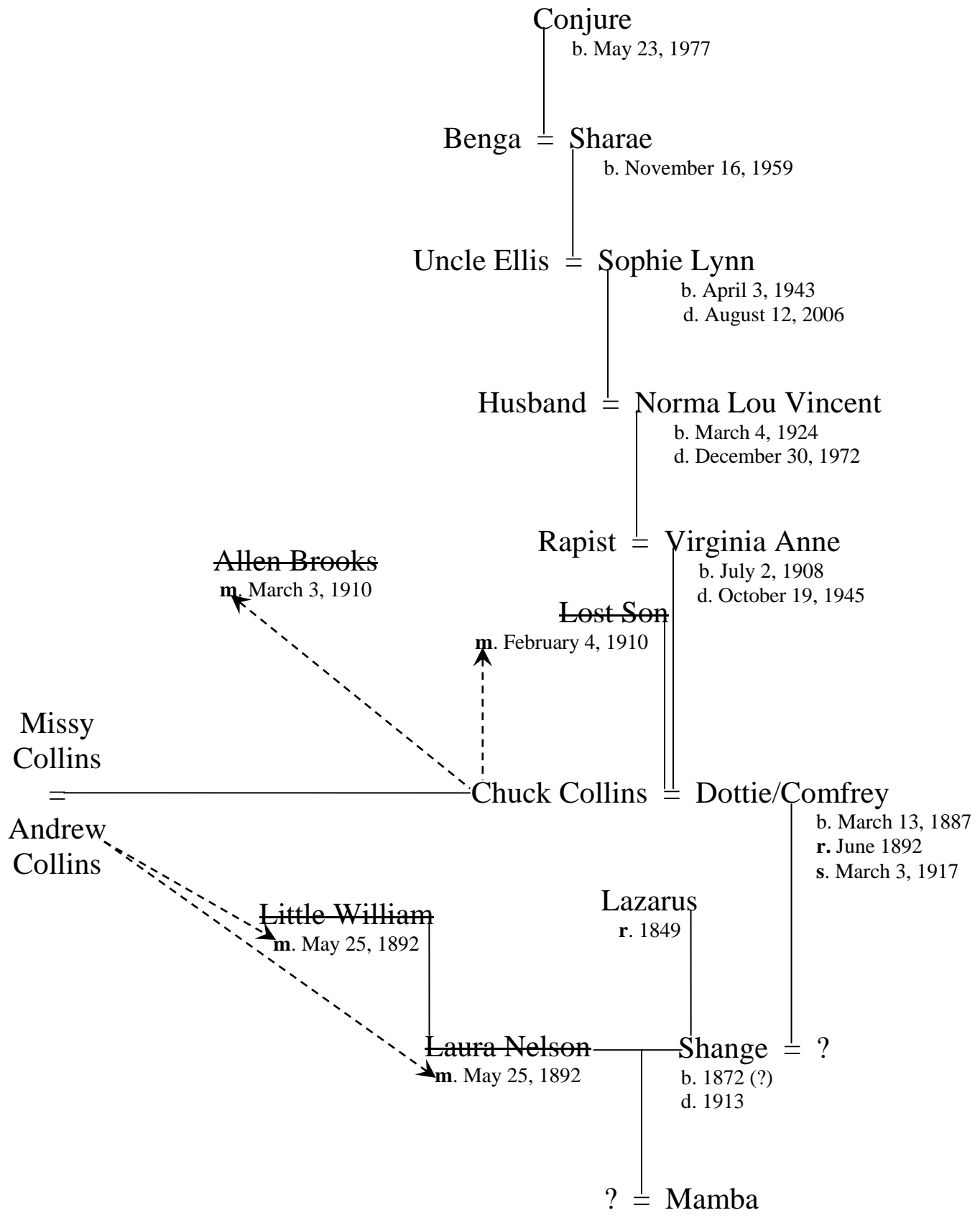
medium long, shallow focus, point-of-view shot

Seven men of varied **ages** stand around the streetlamp **where Brooks's body is** suspended. Brooks's toeless feet are **visible** in the upper left-hand corner of the panel. They laugh, drink, and slap **each other** on the back, sleeves rolled up, **their** hats still on, stained with blood and sweat. A **young man kneels**, wiping **blood off** his shoes. Another tosses a finger in the air, up and down, like a peanut shell. A **very young boy** sits **at his father's** feet, hugging his knees to his chest, face buried, rocking slowly, crying, **praying for mercy**.

close-up, deep focus, over-the-shoulder shot

The old man accosts a young woman. The woman **is the same** woman in profile from the photo postcard. The man yells into her face: "Purity and **innocence** are cherished and bestiality and lechery **condemned!**" The seven men milling in the background watch **the pair** and chuckle. The woman is **terrified**. Her husband stands with his arms **crossed** just behind her, smug, nodding his head *yes*.

The Root



Postcard from Dr. W. W. Brandau

July 12, 1910

These are the kinds of thoughts men have and do not express publicly. They share their dreams of a whiter society over a glass of brandy and a cigar at the end of a profoundly decadent supper

cooked and girls who are suckling than delicate wives. will be brushed matchsticks lit well into their

<p><i>Well John—This is a token of a great day we had in Dallas, March 3rd, a negro was hung for an assault on a three year old girl. I saw this on my noon hour. I was very much in the bunch. You can see the negro hanging on a telephone pole.</i></p>	<p><i>Dr. J. W. F. Williams</i></p> <p><i>LaFayette,</i></p> <p><i>Kentucky</i></p> <p><i>Christian Co.</i></p>
---	---

served by negro better-suited to their far-too-The billiard table again and the by serving boys sixties, who

gentlemen can speak freely in front of because they are too feeble-minded to understand the psyche of white men who laugh the evening away, feeling safe, chaste daughters locked up safe.

Portrait: Brandau buys

April 1910

—two of the souvenir postcards

one to send to John and the other to hold onto

—time, tapping his foot beneath the roll-top desk

thinking of a good start back into friendship

months of silence a yoke on his shoulders

He squints, hunches over the small space on the blank back

—into the idea that his friendship hinges

on a penny postcard, six square inches that

proves they're still on the same page,

wonders if the distance is worth the cost of sending

Brandau muses:

This is the only nigger I've ever owned.

He shakes his head, begins again

Mrs. Norma Ruth Sweeps Her Porch

February 1910

every day, back and forth, door to stair, behind
both rocking chairs. I lift the faded braids, toss
them on the banister, beating dust high to heaven.

There is only this: ritual, late winter afternoon,
storm rolling in, thick mesquite and cedar smoke,
bobwhite asking in the distance, buzzards

circle a fallen calf, then Dottie stumbles
barefoot in the rut, her daughter a dead weight.
She bleeds into the parched upturned earth

from nose, mouth, hem, can't breathe for crying,
face a mess. Glass-eyed stare, she don't turn to
the creak of the wagon wheels' approach.

She trips on a blistered root and twists
into the ditch like a limb broken in a gale,
baby and all. That's when I drop my broom,

come running. When I reach her she can't
see me, her girl a bloody mess in a death
grip to her breast. Lifting Dottie's head,

my hands shaking, I call to the driver to stop.

He seems wary—two white women in a ditch, one heavy
with child, one clutching a daughter passed clean out—

but he helps me lift the two limp bodies
into the flat-board. Our eyes meet and I say real slow
the white doctor, bring my hand down

on the shaggy nag's rump and he nods, off at a stiff trot,
shakes the reins while I stare down the road,
scrub Dottie's blood from my hands with my apron.

From the Journal of Dr. W. W. Brandau

February 4, 1910

A woman was brought in
hemorrhaging from lacerations
on her face, trauma to her abdomen.
Her daughter, far worse. A negro
named Brooks brought them into town.
The woman, bleeding out, entreated
me to tend her daughter first.
So Geraldine and I lay the baby out
on the table, little more than bruises,
knocked out cold. We slap her feet
and bring her to. We can tell she's fine
when she starts crying. The mother longed
to succor her, but I had to move the child
to a bed for rest. About this time, a woman
named Norma Ruth who claims to be a
neighbor shows up and offers help. I send
Mrs. Norma Ruth and a dram of laudanum off
with the young one so Geraldine and I
can concentrate on her momma.

The mother goes into shock. Geraldine
pushes her flat on her back on the table,
the blood slowing some, and she nods off.
Geraldine sweeps her abdomen, searching for
the cut what caused all the bleeding but
there's no wound to speak of—just a stillborn
baby, dark as night. Women always in a heap
of trouble, and men supposed to just hush and fix it.

Elk's Arch, a History*Dottie 1908*

The whole town turns out to see
bunting swung from the courthouse,
large silver arch gliding over Main
& Akard, white and purple lights
rise from the crossroads, the statue
Elk rears back, the fountain waters glisten
as a brass band blows, drum beats
careen beneath the Arch. Folks in their
Sunday best cut a rug, skirts rustle, hollers
stretch high to stars piled above the reach
of new streetlights, mutton smoke
tickles my nose, a jar of sweet tea
sweats through the roses embroidered
on my best dress gloves. Chuck rings
his arms around my waist, pulls me so tight
I choke on the sting of booze and peppermint candy.
I watch the fountain water ripple out
wishing it was late May and the Trinity's
breached banks would sweep me away.

Snapshot: Turning Back

Dottie, March 3, 1910

Sometime between *the work*
of men today and deeds to resound
in every state I turned and saw a well
dressed man with a camera on a stand
angling down as if to sweep the entire square
gathered below the Arch. I couldn't see his face,
but he caught up half of mine
with his crowded lens, turned it
into fiction, a moment suspended.
When I see my face, one low-slung
profile in all that grey space, I think of
Chuck: chest puffed up in his linen
suit, straw hat angled over one squinty blue
eye, smiling, this such a fine day to be
a white man, to have a hand in a *nigger's*
death since that's more agreeable than
what we can't stand to say to each other.

Black Lazarus, First Issue, "Conjure," PAGE THREE

interior:

We see **CONJURE** and the **MAN** from the shoulders up. **The MAN** has his hand on **CONJURE**'s shoulder and leads her around the exhibit. His other hand gestures at the exhibit photographs—he's taking her on a tour of the gallery.

"This one is *my* face..."

extreme close-up:

an old man's face, **bloody and slack**

CAPTION (from exhibit card):
The lynching of Allen Brooks, March 3, 1910, Dallas, Texas (postcard, **front and back**).

"...and this one..."

extreme close-up:

young victim's face

CAPTION:
The lynching of Frank Embree. July 22, 1899, Fayette, Missouri.

"...and this..."

extreme close-up:

young woman and a **little boy** hung from bridge

CAPTION:
The lynching of Laura Nelson and her son William, May 25, 1892, **Blackshear**, Georgia.

"...and these **two**..."

extreme close-up:

two young men's **faces**

CAPTION:
The lynching of Garfield Burley and Curtis Brown, October 8, 1902, **Newbern**, Tennessee.

Close-up of **CONJURE**'s face **as** she **regards** the man, **one** eyebrow arched.

Portrait: Chuck—Struck*1905*

Had he had the words, he would have said: Dorothy baits
the ivory keys with long, delicate fingers working fast

Wouldn't have had the words for: her lilting voice, a rounded,
rich contralto, gives her song a tender pathos, stirs his yearning

of promises kept, what Chuck thinks he sees.

She sings with grace, phrases clear, a simple

charm of who she seems to him to be. A velvet pansy,
warm expansive ruby, or perhaps a lustrous sky

on a summer evening, the breeze from the open
window strokes the little tendrils of downy hair

at the back of her neck. The chrysalis, changed.

Dorothy, the shy alabaster butterfly.

Redux: Love, Lai*Chuck 1906*

you, walking dream

me, cat with the cream

I do

we wipe our slates clean

and plan our wedding

love you.

you believe I mean

every promise and

I do.

Lines from a Hoodoo Love Trick*Conjure 2014*

[in vocation] a wake: contemplate
see Isis in love? Osiris just
scratching his severed head

if to fear detection means distraction
matters, mother must show me how
to flail and fake it better

see me, a young buck, part with false body,
this one, haughty, needs work, so I enter her
woods, broke around the border, slip concentric

inwards, rub her node dizzy like a Twilight Zone episode,
hold the line no matter what this pen relates
chemistry can't be faked

do I cheat her and just walk away?
oh how some women talk mean
while my voice scurries

all nerve diminished and
agape, loss of face in horror
the mirror asks if I will still be straight

I don't know how to help this her standing
in for me, try to move this body within the bounds
of *woman*—what is the reinvention song

if not a path to redemption? I give over: my body
weeps beneath machines. There's got to be a better
way to transmute flesh without all this duress

maybe goopher that girl with hotfoot powder,
slip semen in her coffee, but I have only
blood to work with, so I try this trick:

bury a bottle of powdered star anise, monthly rags, and
rusty coffin nails at the crossroads closest to my
childhood home and then piss in a river flowing north

create the new name, write it crossways on
a scrap of my mother's wedding dress, cut a
channel on the inner middle of my naked thigh

rub thigh blood into the threadbare cotton,
bury it on some distant shore during a full moon
while I scream to the spirit

shout desire to the sea and on every
inhale swallow as much mellow golden
molasses as I can and fix her face in my focus

Black Lazarus, First Issue, “Conjure,” PAGE FOUR

close-up, shoulders and above:

The MAN and CONJURE **face each other**, standing with **the gallery crowd** circling behind them and **the exhibit photographs indecipherable** behind that.

CONJURE: “My **name’s** Conjure. You?”

close-up: Facing the MAN, CONJURE’s **point-of-view**.

The MAN has his arms **crossed** over his chest. He is wearing a beaded necklace with a **black** hen’s wing pendant. The MAN **regards** CONJURE, amused.

MAN: “Name **changed** so many **times**, it don’t **matter** no mo’.”

close-up: CONJURE, **from the MAN’s** perspective—she is wide-eyed and **incredulous**.

CONJURE: “**Of course** it matters! Your **name’s all you’ve got!** You’re born with it and it’s all **you get**. For *life*.”

close-up: **Back to CONJURE’s point-of-view**. The MAN seems satisfied.

MAN: “**Root** ain’t a name. **Names** change. **Faces** too. My **birth** name’s Lazarus. Call **me** that.”

LAZARUS and CONJURE **face each other**. They are both smiling as they **shake hands**. LAZARUS now seems two feet taller. He almost towers over CONJURE, and his face has softened and aged. They **could be father and daughter**.

CONJURE: “Good to meet you, Mr. Lazarus. **May be time to** slow down—**keep out of trouble**. Or at least out of pictures. Ya’ dig?”

LAZARUS: “Heh—yeah. I dig. Good **seein’ you**, Miss Conjure. As the cool kids say, catch you **on the other side**.”

Transcript: Executive Directors' Meeting, Freedom Comics

1968

Go sell your bullshit somewhere else. Why would you want to draw something like that?

Listen—times are changing. We have to keep up.

Shit man, we can't have a Negro line of comics! What's next? Afro-pick merchandise?

Easy. We don't do this right now, someone'll beat us to it.

No white mother in her right mind is going to let her son read about a Negro superhero.

What if we put him in the League of Powers?

NEXT TO FUCKING POWERMAN?!

Yes. Next to fucking Powerman.

LIKE FUCKING TONTO?!

More like Afro Jesus...

Sonofabitch!

Nobody's *seen* that before. It'll kill!

It'll kill, alright. We'll be dead. In the water.

Nah—trust me. It'll be great.

I do trust you, Stan—but not Jesus. Do somebody else. You got six issues to prove it. After that, if the numbers don't pan...we kill him off.

[Kill him off? Yeah—you can try. You can sure as hell try.]

Portrait: Post-Traumatic Superhero

Conjure 2013

Those bullets that miss their target go somewhere. This is not a comic book world, kids.

—Jebediah Von Deathbread, a Real Life Super Villain

In Marvel's *Civil War*, Spider-Man unmasked himself for the greater good to keep police from freaking out about the vigilante problem. Beneath the red and blue uniform was simply your friendly neighborhood newspaper photographer Peter Parker, the powder-keg in *Civil War*, ridiculed by supes on both sides. Unmasked we watch him fight a war on three fronts: his public personas destroyed (the Parker spilling over into his street work, and the Spidey stuff inescapable at the office) both personas become targets for villains of all kinds (whether costumed or just your everyday, basic Average Joe A-hole—there are scenes in which Mary Jane screams at him, swears his decision is one of super-concentrated stupidity); and then there's the backlash from the Avengers (who deemed the public unmasking to be a cowardly move and were affronted that he no longer slung webs with them in solidarity).

You see, the politics in a comic can be just as dicey as those in real life.

What's a Spider-Man to do when people know he's just a lowly Peter Parker when his head hits the pillow? What's a Peter Parker to do when he has the Hulk and Captain America breathing down his neck?

Fans of the series know well how Parker turned to Tony Stark
(who made a gross public spectacle of his coming out of the phone booth years before),
and the wealthy genius made a scapegoat of Spidey
and how one troubled man's true confession caused the biggest Civil War in comics history
when all he wanted to do was what he thought was right for he and his family.

Now—to Black Lazarus. Conjure a man wearing a thousand dead faces
and tell me how hero with that kind of power is supposed to stay sane and
do the right thing when there's no Stark or Mary Jane to turn to, when the Super Civil War
is waged every second in his million bodies worldwide. How could one man survive *that*?

Spider-Man got to choose to remove his mask;

Black Lazarus had to put them all on.

Toast: Black Lazarus*1890*

Back in forty-nine when times was hard
the Devil reached high and pulled my card
I stumbled through rain and crawled through mud
to a shack past town called the Bucket of Blood
Ol' Hoodoo Woman lay me out on the table
working some roots, lighting some candles
She gave me nothing to stop the pain—
just cackled when I asked and it started to rain
She tossed grave dirt in the fire 'til it smoked
and wrung a black chicken's neck 'til it broke
scorched some dank and stanky herbs
crossed the air twice, spoke proverbs
stuck a devil's shoestring all over with a pin
sayin' each stick: *motherfucker gon' live again and again*
My head start spinning and my eyes start to blur
and all of a sudden I felt a stir
not a chill like somebody jumped over my grave
like Hell gulped it whole, sucked in all unsaved,
like I was doomed to live through a thousand deaths
and keep coming back, never to rest

like Brer' Rabbit said of his bramblebush strife

you might see me swinging but I'm coming back to life

Don't matter what murder—for any death under the sun

Black Lazarus comes back, so you honkeys better run.

Pryor Letter: After Glenn Ligon's *Gold Nobody Knew Me #1*

Lazarus 2014

I went to the Motherland right

I went to Africa seven hundred knew

me—my roots right I went

to one of those motherfuckers—

Black people!

to find my root's right

I went to the roots, Mother

I took root to the Mother—

I mothered to the root

those root motherfuckers knew

those mother roots knew me

those motherfuckers knew

my root's mothers knew

Black people knew

curve of belly & back

hard art

my heart lies

exposed on the brink

of the stage

so I jumped off the stage—naked, right
reached back to my roots to be saved, right
burned myself down to the root and not a one
of those motherfuckers could do a damn thing

Black Lazarus, First Issue, "Conjure," PAGE FIVE

exterior, far shot:

LAZARUS **exits** the gallery. **Night** has fallen. The camera looks southeast down the empty street: we see LAZARUS exit in profile, full-body shot. He **walks away** from the camera, jacket flapping in the wind. **It has begun** to snow.

close-up:

LAZARUS puffs on a cigar. He seems less substantial yet larger than life.

far shot:

CONJURE exits the gallery at a jog, **one hand** holding her coat **closed** and a long scarf trailing behind her. Here, **she pauses**, feet above the stairs, as if flying.

CONJURE is at the bottom of the gallery stairs, a cloud of breath shrouding her. She follows LAZARUS, faint **in the background**, a cloak of smoke enveloping him. The **people passing** give him wide berth.

CONJURE has **turned away** from LAZARUS's path and throws her **hands up** to the sky. He is more faint, yet the smoke is thicker. **One of the people** from up the street walks near her and smiles her way.

CONJURE has walked up the street, away from LAZARUS. **The people are** still there, but he is **gone**. In his place is **a subtle silhouette** in the smoke, and snow blowing in all four directions.

CONJURE has **turned back to the camera**, and walks through the crossroads up the street with relief on her face. **Over** her shoulder, down the street: **the people, LAZARUS's shadow, and the cloud of smoke have all disappeared**. Snow feathers down.

CONJURE: "Catch **you on the flip side**, Lazarus."

Root Ain't a Name: Lines from a Rebirth Ritual

Shange & Comfrey 1892

1. scratch my pidgin
tongue stalled here
too long desperate
Georgia night sweat
breath to dust
moored fast back
paddle downstream
cool hand the feel juke
just past the joint where
Auntie Laura will be still
swaying, counter
time her hips
a slow memory set to
dangle like a purple
plum burst, the bridge
a limb, her voice a song fading
my throat, choked bile—
so they know, well,
past time to go

2. moon to sun too soon

burns decision in skin

if this is flat out

head down to break

but if animal, vestigial,

mineral, summon mettle

to curse, give line back

to birth place, bury Other

to another's eyes

all the dead holding hands

through time like paper dolls

but this moment, at this cross-

roads, at the owl's hour on a mid-

week night, we light a candle,

lay three silver dollars down,

faces pointing east, fix three

more facing west with one of a pair

of cast iron keys and spread some

mixed family goopher dust down

the hole, bury it all, spit the last

of the rum on the freshly turned

earth, speak our words and he comes

with the thunder of a thousand
hooves, wind blowing in from all
four directions as the hounds sound in the distance

3. Mother leads me down the road
headed west, the other key in my
fist, calling me by a new name,
praise be to the grace of new beginnings

since then we ain't never to set
foot on Georgia soil any further east
than that old crossroads lest we part
with our souls to the devils in the dark

Letter to Comfrey: Desire of Language*Conjure*

here is my pitiful attempt to reach you: across time, one foot follows
the other slow, meter a path carved through cherry choked woods
this place I create on the page is a way of reaching
you across the veil, you see, *lonely* don't cut it
this ain't exactly *isolation*, so *alone* seems better,
solitary carries the ring of a punctuated sentence

I guess the best way to describe this in words is:

two of a culled flock, one clutches an old key
the second reaches forward in time
souls keen, two stomp tattoos at a crossroads
rhythm hums as the gyre spirals widen and the lost
flock-mate, careening through the great out there
finally hears my words and wings the season home

Letter to Conjure: Language of Desire

The language of desire is no substitute for sensation. Desire feeds on silences between us, creeps into hungry bones. Once the drums beat her from the grave, smell of rain-soaked sweetgrass. Now it's: to be anywhere but here, a hunger to feel the dumb machine's easy response gliding between lines on some night-empty highway. Desire feels like infinite possibility, a confluence where science meets magic, honey drunk and laughing stout hay meeting acrid gasoline, sweat and wet grass, the fluted loon, hushed communion in an unmarked graveyard or willing a lover into being before one binds and banishes her, will the self to sleep, the spirits to cleanse that self, will a rebirth from hard packed earth

to break

or to break into

to heal

with what is left

to fleece or be freed

to soar

off the edge at top speed

Letter from the Author to Conjure: How to Offer, to Repent

missing person

found hanging

backward

skin cannot explain

why your part

of town vs. mine

this arose from desire

for *conquest* not because *unworthy*

of love or *not white*

can you understand?

* *

suburbs aren't

a lonely drive

kids don't want

to be so hard, so why

are my dreams

airlifted dead men
desperate to reach
daughters? men forced
to *father* before
damage undone, and
before daughter was named
(not son or Superman)
well after the first
bombs fell, off course,
in a lifetime of run

my dreams
become daughters
weeping
over mothers
broken compass

this is not to give false
want I hope to hold hands
share beauty before laid low
over and over again, to drape
comfort like a blanket
voice birds aloft

to live

and to live again

through all

of this and many

aftershocks I will

a way to love

shocked shell away

what do you say?

we have the incantations

* *

in utero flesh

is a telegraph

nothing owed

no modem flash back

nothing held back no well

of faces no explanations

needed this connection

best must be jump-

cut to spend at least
a weak century if that
to try to get back
to understanding
and the slighted
stranger's touch:
bone-trembling

I should pull mother
closer tonight but I collide
soul and body in vain
attempt to get through to
the root willing
discuss what no other
wants to touch, we all
come and go, our x 's just
unknowns unsolved for

we should not
be divided
by such degrees
mothers can't help
it mothers have

mercy on hard-
luck souls
have mercy
on defective daughters

Mother, I learned
to love you
before I knew
your name before
you gave me my name
and the courage to speak it
I came through you
to break your heart
and this is how I feel
the guilt unbelievable

* *

so now: how
to offer, to
repent
how to capture
shared places

how to transmit
despite severed
connection, despite
body
how to reach
back into history

do I wait 'til
all the walls
she built in
her twenties
finally fall
for her to believe
she's moving
past feeling
and into the light?

Equinox Aubade

Lives are saved each day not with abstract messianic gestures, but small acts of compassion: some kindness extended when a stranger is close to giving up, the difficult thing of patience with a person who feels there's nothing left to live for. Make a pact to—regardless of your knee-jerk reaction—reflect humanity back. The Other is a mirror for the shadow self; all barriers that hem Others in began as limitations born from a person's fear of what lurks within them, what stalks their psyche on cold, quiet nights.

To break tradition, to extract practices inherited from those disposed to self-loathing, excise the lie that you are either this or that.

If life is worth something

If you need saving

don't make Others pay for your mistakes

Even when it seems that life is too undone—have the courage to live through that. Horizon can be hopeful but you have to choose to choose and own your choice. Don't try to pin your anger on a scapegoat. Now is the season to take responsibility. Exorcise your pain with voice and listen to the legion speaking back.

If desperation exceeds the speed at which your gyre widens, remember that rivers reroute epochs, the bones of mighty mountains are time-broken into stones, and change gestates—even the most slow-living and the easily-threshed fecund summer fields must wait for fallow winter's thaw.

NOTES

The epigraph by Toni Morrison comes from *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* [NY: Vintage, 1992]. The Jennifer Percy epigraph is from *Demon Camp* [NY: Simon, 2014]. The epigraph by Kiese Laymon is quoted in *How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America: Essays* [Chicago: Bolden, 2013].

“Letter from the Author: Monologue to Invisible Man, or, On White Guilt” includes a quote from Trayvon Martin’s mother, Sybrina Fulton, in one of the post-Zimmerman-trial-verdict interviews from 2013.

“*Black Lazarus*, First Issue, ‘Conjure,’ PAGE ONE” contains descriptions of images and excerpts of text from *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* [Santa Fe, NM: Twin Palms Publishing, 2010].

The poem “Excerpt from a White Southern Primer” was inspired by Edward Gorey’s *Gashlycrumb Tinies*.

“Down on His Luck” is a poem modeled after A. Van Jordan’s “Looking for Work” from the collection *M-A-C-N-O-L-I-A: Poems* [NY: Norton, 2004].

“Portrait: *Before the arch was reached...*” includes lines from *Dallas Morning News* and *Dallas Times Herald* articles from March 4, 1910.

Concerning “Postcard from Dr. W. W. Brandau,” the lines in the postcard inset are from a photographic postcard of the lynching of Allen Brooks, one of the many included in *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, a bound collection of some of the artifacts from the Allan Littlefield Collection and those put on display at the Roth Horowitz Gallery in 2000 as part of the “Witness: Photographs of Lynchings from the Collection of James Allen” exhibit. Additionally, and of historical significance, Dr. W. W. Brandau was the white Dallas doctor who examined the child Allen Brooks was accused of assaulting; Brandau claimed to have found “evidence of brutal treatment.”

“Elk’s Arch, a History” takes place beneath Elk’s Arch, a massive four-way steel arch erected at the intersection of Main and Akard in 1908 to welcome the delegates of the Grand Lodge Convention, who chose Dallas as their meeting location that year. In preparation for the July gathering, the city of Dallas decorated the courthouse with bunting, planted flowers, and installed new lampposts along the city’s major avenues, including just beneath the arch. Elk’s Arch was, at the time, considered to be one of Dallas’s most recognizable architectural landmarks. Two years later, a group of vigilantes rushed into Dallas County Courthouse where 68-year-old Allan Brooks was standing trial for an assault on the three-year-old daughter of his white employer, H. J. Buvens. A man from the mob suspended his body from a lamppost beneath the arch. Later that year, the arch was disassembled in disgrace and move to Fair Park. A year after that it was moved again. To date, the final destination of Elk’s Arch is unknown.

“Snapshot: Turning Back” includes lines transcribed in *Without Sanctuary*. According to the book, the following words were spoken out by a mob leader after Allen Brooks’s body was hung from a lamppost in downtown Dallas on March 3, 1910: “You did the work of men today and your deeds will resound in every state, village, and hamlet where purity and innocence are cherished and bestiality and lechery condemned.”

The poem “Portrait: Chuck—Struck” includes lines and adapted lines from Walter White’s novel *The Fire in the Flint*.

“Lines from a Hoodoo Love Trick” was written as part of the Collaborative Manifesto Remix.

“Portrait: Post-Traumatic Superhero” refers to the 2006-2007 Marvel Comics *Civil War* story written by Mark Millar in which the Superhuman Registration Act is passed. “Supes,” or superhumans, as they are often referred to in the comics, were—according to the *Civil War* narrative—pressured to register themselves with the government following such disasters as the destruction of Las Vegas and Manhattan. Tony Stark (at the time unmasked as the superhero Iron Man) was the head of the pro-registration faction, while Captain America led the opposition. After Peter Parker (aka Spider-Man) turned to Stark for advice, Stark convinced Parker to unmask publically, and the fall-out from this moment kicked off the superhuman Civil War. The epigraph in “Portrait: Post-Traumatic Superhero” comes from Tea Krulos’s book *Heroes in the Night: Inside the Real Life Superhero Movement* [Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2013].

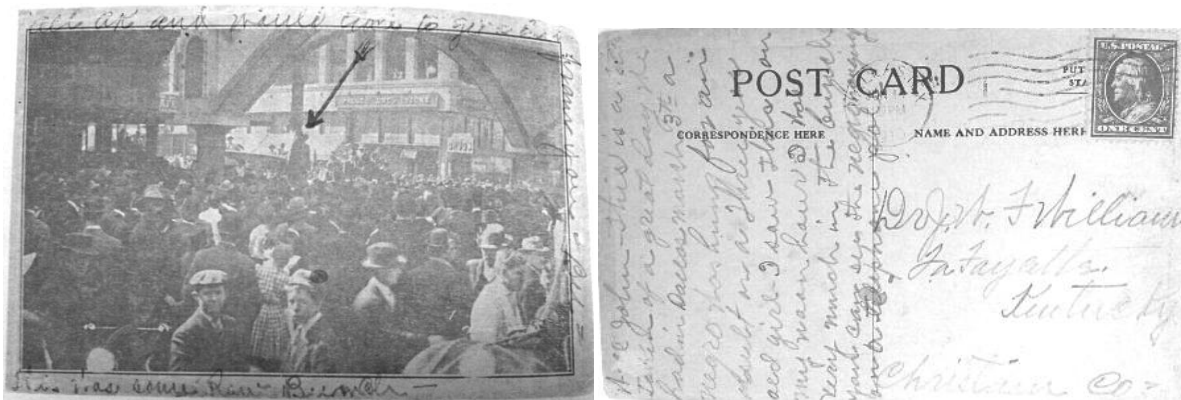
The poem “Toast: Black Lazarus” is modeled after the popular toast “Stackolee.” Toasting is an African American oral tradition in which a rhythmic narrative poem is spoken aloud. The person who recites the toast in the most entertaining and accurate manner is said to “win” bragging rights. Stackolee was the original “Bad Nigga” archetype: usually a heavy-set, quick-to-anger African American male who was said to always run afoul of the law, despite good intentions. The “Bad Nigga” could be said to be one of the original vigilante and anti-hero archetypes in American Literature, although such figures were often vilified by white writers. For more information on toasts and Stackolee, read Bruce Jackson’s *Get Your Ass in the Water and Swim Like Me: African American Narrative Poetry from Oral Tradition* [NY: Routledge, 2004].

“Letter from the Author to Conjure: How to Offer, to Repent” was made from words contributed by the Collaborative Manifesto Remix, including lyrics from Arcade Fire, Paul Simon, and Taj Mahal.

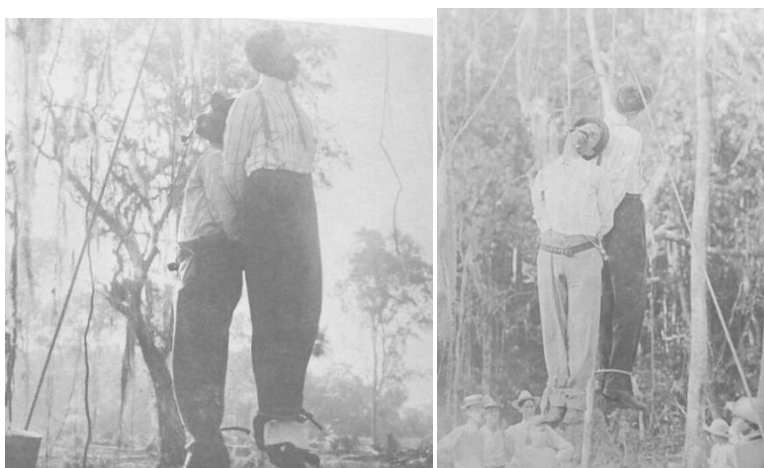
Parts of “Equinox Aubade” are inspired by collaborative lines contributed by the Collaborative Manifesto Remix and words from: Samuel Beckett (via Claire Donato); Chris Albani (via Hari Malagayo Alluri); Clarissa Rojas; Ching-In Chen; Monica Hand; Todd Wellman; Rachele Cruz; Hari Malagayo Alluri; Bushra Rehman; Serena W. Lin; Carol Gomez; Evangeline Ganaden; Melissa Sipin; Rich Villar; Dani; Claire Donato; and Joe Tex (via Bushra Rehman).

APPENDIX A

“The lynching of Allen Brooks, March 3, 1910, Dallas, Texas. (postcard, front and back)” from *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* by James Allen [Santa Fe, NM: Twin Palms Publishers, 2010], pgs. 59-60.



“The lynching of Castenego Ficarotta and Angelo Albano. September 20, 1910, Florida.” from *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* by James Allen [Santa Fe, NM: Twin Palms Publishers, 2010], pgs. 57-58.



APPENDIX B

Sappho's Fragment 31, from "Ruse," in *Eros: The Bittersweet* by Anne Carson [Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1986], pgs. 12-13.

He seems to me equal to gods that man
who opposite you
sits and listens close
to your sweet speaking

and lovely laughing—oh it
puts the heart in my chest on wings
for when I look at you, a moment, then no speaking
is left in me

no: tongue breaks, and thin
fire is racing under skin
and in eyes no sight and drumming
fills ears

and cold sweat holds me and shaking
grips me all, greener than grass
I am and dead—or almost
I seem to me.

APPENDIX C

Selected pages from *Incognegro* by Mat Johnson [New York, NY: DC Comics, 2008], pgs. 7-8.



CURRICULUM VITAE

MELISSA A. MORROW**EDUCATION**

PhD in Creative Writing, degree expected May 2014
 University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI
 Dissertation: *Black Lazarus: Conjure Book*, book of poems
 Advisor: Rebecca Dunham

MA in Creative Writing, 2006
 University of Texas-Austin, Austin, TX
 Thesis: *Squeeze & Sheathe*, book of poems
 Advisor: Kurt Heinzelman

BA in English, 2004
 Northland College, Ashland, WI

ADDITIONAL EDUCATION

Teaching Certificate: Professional Writing and Communication, 2014
 Teaching Certificate: Rhetoric and Composition Certificate, 2014

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Concordia University, Mequon, Wisconsin, Fall 2012
Adjunct Instructor
 Introduction to Writing, Fall 2012

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin Fall 2006-Fall 2012
Teaching Assistant
 Composition, Fall 2006-12, Spring 2007-12, including an online section Spring 2012
 The Graphic Novel, Fall 2011
 Introduction to Creative Writing, Fall 2010, Fall 2008, Fall 2007, Spring 2009-11
 Business Writing, Fall 2009
 20th Century Literature, Spring 2008, Spring 2012
 College Writing Workshop (pilot program), Fall 2007

University of Texas-Austin, Austin, Texas, Fall 2004-Spring 2005
Teaching Assistant

Beginning Poetry Workshop, Fall 2005
 Survey of American Literature, Spring 2005
 Survey of British Literature, Fall 2004

Northland College, Ashland, Wisconsin, Spring 2002-Spring 2004
Teaching Assistant
 Physical Geology, Spring 2002-04, Fall 2003-04

FELLOWSHIPS AND HONORS

Graduate Teaching Fellow, English Department, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI, 2006-11.

James A. Sappenfield Fellow, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI, 2007.

James A. Michener Scholar, University of Texas-Austin, Austin, TX, 2005.

Graduate Teaching Fellow, English Department, University of Texas-Austin, Austin, TX 2004-06.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Writer, The Boswellians Blog, 2011-Present.

Writer, Nefarious Fiddlesticks Blog, 2008-Present.

Writer, The 24-Hour Comics Day Blog, 2011.

Editor, Parent Manual, Garden Homes Community School, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2008.

Managing Editor, *Bat City Review*, University of Texas-Austin, 2006.

Writer, *The Daily Press*, Ashland, Wisconsin, 2003.

READINGS AND CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Conference Presentation, "Visual Texts: Making Sense of Rhetorical Analysis in the First-Year Composition Classroom," Midwest Modern Language Association, 2011.

Readings, Original Poetry, 2008, 2007.

Conference Presentation, "Strategic Group-Work in the Composition Classroom," MU/UWM First-Year Graduate Student Conference, 2006.

Conference Presentation, Original Poetry, Floetry: Poetry and Jazz Colloquium Conference, 2006.

COMMUNITY AND DEPARTMENTAL SERVICE

Mentor, University of Milwaukee-Wisconsin Mentor Program, 2009.

Community Service Chair, Milwaukee WFTDA, 2008.

Service Volunteer, Urban Ecology Center, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2008.

Tutor, SPARK Early Literacy Program, Boys & Girls Club, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 2007.

ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE AND SKILLS

Training Program: Campus Connect Suicide Gatekeeper Training, 2011.

Training Program: Using Twitter and Facebook in the Classroom, 2011.

Leadership Training: USCG Academy Boot Camp and Officer Candidate School, 2008.