



The Ringing Ear: Black Poets Lean South

Nikky Finney (Editor)

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The South: to render all that it means to an African American takes someone with acutely tuned senses, someone with a patience, a passion even, for the region's history and contradictions. It takes a poet. In this new anthology, the first of its kind, more than one hundred contemporary black poets laugh at and cry about, pray for and curse, flee and return to--the South. Voices new to the scene appear in *The Ringing Ear* alongside some of the leading names in American literature today, including Sonia Sanchez, Yusef Komunyakaa, Harryette Mullen, Nikki Giovanni, Kevin Young, Cornelius Eady, and Al Young. The southern worlds opened up by these poets are echoed in how their poems are grouped, under headings like "Music, Food, and Work: Heeding the Lamentation and Roar of Things Made by Hand," or "Religion and Nature: The Lord Looks Out for Babies and Fools," or "Love, Flesh, and Family: The Hush and Holler Portraits."

"Not all of us on these pages have come to or from the South by the same dirt road," says anthology editor Nikky Finney. "We have not chosen our dark olive words from the same patch of earth. Some have come by way of birth and others have followed street musicians and urban corner preachers, dream and myth, to stand before its pine and iron gates."

The Ringing Ear: Black Poets Lean South Details

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From Reader Review **The Ringing Ear: Black Poets Lean South** for online ebook

Lauren says

An anthology this huge is going to be mixed. I was more drawn to the imagist/lyrical poems (surprise surprise) than I was to the talky or prosaic ones. But I'd recommend this book to people who are interested in poetry on any level.

Diann Blakely says

I rarely, rarely give five stars to books that are not considered canonical or by living authors, but Nikky Finney's landmark anthology, like its successor, **BLACK NATURE** (ed. Camille T. Dungy, (UGA Press), IS already canonical. And Dungy, who first came to my attention through the "rogue snnets" of **WHAT TO EAT, WHAT TO DRINK, WHAT TO LEAVE FOR POISON** (Red Hen) has gone on to publish two other splendid individual collections, **SUCK ON THE MARROW** (also Red Hen, winner of the Northern California Book Award, the American Book Award, as well as a NAACP Image Award nominee), and now the just-released **SMITH BLUE** (Southern Illinois Press and winner of the Crab Orchard Series in Poetry Prize).

Finney's title raises many of the usual arguments about identity politics and aesthetic quality. But another, and more personally interesting, comes from a different quarter: why is this anthology so much better than any Southern-based collection edited by a white writer in recent years? After all, these have contained African-American writers (and even women). But they have not been nearly as representative of the old and the young; the native-born Southerners and the emigrés, even the visitors; the formalists and the writers of free verse, not to mention Ebonics and spoken word poets. Forrest Hamer, most recently the author of **RIFT** (Four Way Books) from whose work the book's title is taken, is one of the better-known newcomers; others I'm delighted to say I originally wrote "to watch for" are Honorée Fanonne Jeffers, a 2010 NEA winner; Sharan Strange, Thomas Sayers Ellis, now nationally praised for **SKIN, INC.** (Graywolf), Hermine Pinson (check out **DOLORES IS BLUE/ DOLOREZ IS BLUE** (Sheep Meadow, 2007), Earl Braggs, Harryette Mullen (**RECYCLOPEDIA**, Graywolf, 2006), and Kendra Hamilton (**THE GODDESS OF GUMBO** (WordTech Press, 2006, author of "The Search for the Perfect Sidecar," in a 2009 issue of **CALLALOO**, and now at work on a new manuscript **MIRROURS OF THE WORLD: POEMS INSPIRED BY LIE LIFE OF BELLE DA COSTA GREENE**.)

There are moments in Finney's anthology when readers might well feel that quality has been sacrificed for inclusiveness. Preferring gumbo to poached okra when it comes to such matters, if I may rely on what seems a heaven- (or at least Hamilton-) sent metaphor, licked the bowl clean.

As for Dungy, assistant editor for **GATHERING GROUND**, the first Cave Canem anthology, **SUCK ON THE MARROW** won the American Book Award, and her newest collection, **SMITH BLUE**, has finally arrived. That soaring eagle on the cover, mentioned in a previous version of this essay, grasped my heart in its talons--to change metaphoric strands--which I read the epigraphs and the first poem, all of which are concerned with the difficulty of maintaining balance between private emotion that struggles to express itself through our sullen craft and art and the horrors dished out to us daily--forgive, please, the change of metaphors once again--by "the world, the world, the world," to quote a "cousin on the light side," the late

Lynda Hull. (Please see my review of THE ONLY WORLD [here](#).)

Alicia (PrettyBrownEyeReader) says

Great collection. The collection contains various poetic styles. Anyone could pick this collection up and find poems that speak to them.

Georgia says

I came across this book at AWP 2007. It is interesting in the sense that it does expose us all to many African-American Poets that are unknown or not present in other anthologies. However, I find that the quality of work sometimes to be just avg.

M.cholewick says

The Ringing Ear: Black Poets Lean South is a complex anthology. This anthology would best be used in a high school classroom, but with heavily teacher selection and chunking. I really appreciated the context of African American poets joining together to poetically illustrate the significance and imagery of the south. On downfall of this anthology, honestly, is its complexity. It requires intricate background knowledge in regards to the impact and legacy of the south for African Americans. Although complex, I think it's important that teachers not star away from the benefits of using such a text. Although difficult, I think it is definitely doable at the high school level.
