1980

The Morale of Consciousness Wails

John Stigall

The College at Brockport

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THE MORALE OF CONSCIOUSNESS WAILS

by John Stigall

A Thesis

Submitted to the Department of English of the State University of New York, College at Brockport, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

1980
THE MORALE OF CONSCIOUSNESS WAILS

by John Stigall
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NATIONAL BOARD YWCA 600 BULLETIN: Now Hear This(1974).

HARAMBEE POETRY ANTHOLOGY: Raven by the Deep; Child(1976).

THE BROADSIDE (TRANSITION): Haiku(1976); To Poet(1977); Poem for a UFO, or: A Young Beheaded Female Corpse Thrown From A Roof On 118th(1978); Poem for a Lady Who Now Sleeps Alone(1978); I have seen that smile(Volume II, Number 3, May 1978).

TRANSITION: Dementia Praecox; On Leaving(1976); Poempoempoem...; Approaching(1977); She; Dinner; Christmas Eve; Love Poems for the Scholarly Lady; Harlem(1978); Beginnings; Proxemico(1979).

BROWN BAG: An Aspect of Nommo(1980).


I Want A Real Poem was a ditto pamphlet distributed to the Third World Student Alliance, December 1977.
It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

-William Edward Burghardt Du Bois
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I ON LEAVING
To poet is all.
Times before and after are anticipation.
She was blind to looking glasses,
And she cried because she thought
She had snakes instead of hair.
She fancied herself as the Soul-Mate
But in reality she was just herself.
All the fleas, flies, ticks, and gnats would congregate.
At dawn to hear her curse the sun.
She looked like a mental-picture,
A self-portrait from the museums of her soul.

Her fingers ran across her face as she calmly
Made her tongue flicker like a flame;
And every summer she was absolutely sure
That she was Mother Nature.
She wrote love notes to Narcissus who would
Not even kiss her behind
Closed doors.
Narcissus looked at his ass in the looking glass
And began to masturbate.

She locked herself inside her
Room and climbed the walls
Because she was getting none.
By the next day she tried dying
And by mid-afternoon she had died trying.
Her body self-destructed
And then violently erupted like a volcano.
Her suicide note read like an antidote,
It read just like an antidote.

I said, I said, I said IsaidIsaidIsaidIsaidIsaidIsaidIsaidIsaid

Her suicide note read like an antidote,
It read just like an antidote.
I

schizophrenia

Picture me lonely
Alone in the stratosphere
Imagine me floating
On moody-grey clouds
Just think of the weekdays, the sky-blue frustration
the nightly terrors, the hallucinations

Must I mash my chin on my chest
And flash through life feeling hostile and shy
Must I crash windowed-persecution
And slash my wrist on the jagged edges
Maybe I'll stab your spine with ice picks
And watch you die like a fish on the sand

I'm gonna kill your finger!
I'm gonna kill your finger!
catatonic

I've been sitting in this chair
quietly quiet quietly still
just listening to your oily hair
dangling loudly to and fro
I've the right to remain silent,
the right to be left alone

I've been sitting in this chair
hearing voices in my hands
silently silent listening still
faces gather in my head
voiceless faces in my head
faceless voices in my hands

I could kill myself I think
I could kill you too I think
cold rain falls from the sky
maybe it's the sun in disguise
I wouldn't put it past the sun
to disguise himself as drops of rain
but I could be stretching things too far
it might be rain after all

picture me lonely
alone in the chromosphere
imagine me burning
cremated alive
just think if my smoke signals spell out your name
would I then convince you that you are the blame

loneliness flows through my veins
my friends have left me in the rain
hebephrenic

they say I build sandcastles with my tongue
yeY claim my words expand like lungs
yeY say my goals are just like sand
countless...ha-ha...too weak to stand
I don't give a damn what they say
I'm involved with my self, my plans

eyeY say I talk to myself
eyeY that I giggle at the air
I know they say that I am weird...ha-ha
but I have friends they can't see
I know castles need stone foundations
eyeY say mine are sand grains, frustration

smiling at everything I see
why are their eyes turned toward me
paranoid

my friends and even people I don't know
talk about me on the sly
they glance at me and then turn away
and pretend they're talking about something else
but I see their lips shaping my name
I'll pay those bastards back one day

I'm sick and tired of persecution
ain't nothing wrong with me
my neighbors laugh and point their fingers
they point their fingers like I'm a thief
and my mother my gentle sweet kind mother
keeps trying to poison my food

I'm gonna kill your finger!
I'm gonna kill your finger!
Picture me lonely
Alone in my living room
Imagine me answering
The unknocked at door
Just think of yourself in the same situation
Would you then welcome hospitalization

Must I barricade myself in the house
And promenade in my solitude
Must I evade the fascist hit-men
Who parade the streets like plainclothes cops
Maybe I'll plaster my walls with suspicions
And hang from my ceiling with hostile intentions

I'm gonna kill your finger!
I'm gonna kill your finger!
ON LEAVING

1.

Been locked out about seven years
They are sending me back into a world of postcard places,
a world of pinup smiles.
Been alone about seven years
Happy in my own way
Doctors say "you're well and can go."
As if I had been sick.

2.

Doctors slap me on my back.
Patients scribble down addresses
of best friends (who never wrote them
never came to say farewell).

Bags are packed. Doctors are smiling.
Doors open. Nurses applaud.
Patients scribble down addresses
of best friends (who've lost contact).
Running through the doors in laughter,
laughing like a maniac.
Running, eyes are swiftly chasing;
I stumble, the chase scene halts.
Every eye is on my body.
Every eye is on the scene.
My hands blankly stare at my face—
I stare back at them and frown.
II THE REDEATH
CHRISTMAS EVE

Got a telephone call
For Christmas.
It was from a childhood friend.

"Guess whos" ran through my ears,
across my face, over my eyes.

"We grew up together. You haven't heard from me in years."

He made me guess. I could not guess any longer. His voice was strange.

He told me we grew up together. He told me his name. He told me Merry Christmas.
I laughed. He told me I laughed the same. He told me he grew up.

I told him goodbye.
HAIKU

The ivory Buddha
whose smile ate into my flesh
was a polar bear.
maggots on the naked flesh
of an unburied baby
slimy tiny guts exposed--
    my
skin crawls
like roaches in a kitchen
heated tears defrost my frozen stare.
When the bullets pierced
the skull
and splattered brain tissue
before our eyes,
the people weaved
wreaths of blame and
placed them on
one man.

A wide-eyed nation could not conceive
conspiracies whistling in the dark,

we squint our eyes when light threatens
the dark.

The photographs pierced.
The head-
lines bled our thoughts.

Unknown sources claimed to

know
what guilty men refuse
to tell:
we are our enemy

    it seems--
we run like mad

    pigs to the Bay
and drown in blood
on Dallas streets.
Your nurse turns you over easy
with cold spatula-hands,
she turns you over easy like a frying-egg. 
You turn over easy like you always turned
in a.m. bed-hours for your husband,

Your body rots, smells
like that old straw-buried easter egg
you exhumed
one June in the barn yard.

Your bones are egg shells.

Your nurse did not comb your hair today
like you can/cer/tainly remember
combing your hair that promnight
when you lost
your virginity.

A year ago only
soapoperas made afternoon-housewife-eyes
tear.

A year ago only
your husband woke you from dreams.
Your eyes tear and drip
like your husband's premature ejaculations.
Your insides must be ugly. They must be
uglier than the outsides
of that girl you laughed at when you were 17.

Tonight you are sleeping.
She slashed her wrist, knotted her fist,
Then raised her arm toward heaven.

The sun was flash bulbs in the flowing blood.

Her pose was calm, her face bloomed song.
She sang, she moaned, stared down the sun.

And then I saw her body yield

As she made music in the field.
O she made music in the field.
YOU KNOW WHO

When I am jubilant
My intimates evade me

When I am quiet—brooding,
And now that I am dying
Guess
Guess who's near
APPROACHING

Cough Cough
urine-yellow blood-flecked phlegm
the breath smells like damp ashtrays
the lungs hiss--vomit and blood.

I am tiptoeing in circles
eavesdropping on silent pain
the deathday approaches
I can taste it in the air

I breathe needles
visions stumble before me
like the naked ballerina
whose legs cough,

Cough
Cough
ON THE DEATH OF JEAN-PAUL SARTRE.

The future is a virgin, a nude
sunrise over the crossroad. There is nothing
to embrace, no semantic.

This morning
before the mirror
the shattering glass made laughter, essence
at the junction: The teeth rot, moonbeams pour
over the cranium, gray
matter hugs the gums, flesh sags
over the elbows, flesh hangs
from the face, desert winds dry the eyes.

There is nothing to embrace,
nothing.
Nothing.
III PIVOTALS
You are at another table.
I am alone.
I watch you
eat. I cannot
eat. But I
am feasting
on wine.
Getting high.

I am feasting on wine.
I feel fine.

The floor is a tightrope.

I want to cross it
and speak to you, tell you what
I am doing these days, tell you why
I am feeling those days, tell you

I want
to talk of old times, tell you how
I have been, tell you why
I have been
alone.
NOW HEAR THIS

red, white, and blue
orange marmalade, and turquoise too
mellow yellow, aqua, and beige:

love is the space between your eyes and this page.

and love is black and love is white
and love is depth and love is height
oh, say, can you really see that
love is the space between you and me
Preamble to the Love Poems for the Scholarly Lady

"But love itself cannot question itself and it cannot be questioned by anything else."

-Paul Tillich

It is not in the image, it is not in the figurative. It is only words, the language.

Tillich states that it is relative and absolute, an unchanging principle. Nevertheless, it always changes in concrete application.

It is abstract.

It is only abstract words careful in concrete definitions.

"I love you" is the statement.
26 February 1978

"It is an old and ironic habit of human beings to run faster when we have lost our way; and we grasp more fiercely at research, statistics, and technical aids in sex when we have lost the values and meaning of love."

-Rollo May

Let your love be manifesto, righteous syllogism, synthesis of psyche & flesh. (Meaningful as Cuban troops in Africa.
Political as intention.

Let your love be matrix of truth.

"I love you" is a personal abstraction, concrete.

Let your love be tenure, grip rational flesh. (Exposure, polysyllabic kisses. Literary as touch. Literal.

In context.
Unabridged as Oxford.
Needed as air.
Personal as eye contact.

Let your love be academic as pain. Closer than weak eyes to the page.

Closer than slow dancing off-beat. Theoretical as distance. Beyond my "I love you."

Let your love be

affirmative potential, statement:

Eros of all, Thanatos of none, Muse of all you are.
27 February 1978

"The antithesis of the impulse to love
is the apprehension of aloneness."

-Rashima Sheba

Love is the complex simplicity, the simple
complexity.
Let your love be simple, minus the compound
expressions. Let your love plagiarize only love, but
let your love have intention.

Let your love contradict only love, but
let your love have intention.

"I love you" means there is no aloneness.

Let your love be in context.

Let your love be.
Let your love be.
Let your love be
regardless.
27 February 1978

"Society highly values its normal man. It educates children to lose themselves and to become absurd, and thus to be normal."

-R.D. Laing

It is. (All
is done for love.
It is. (All.

Let your love be thoughtflowers.

Let your love be avant-garde. Let it be thoughtflower in avant-gardens. Let it be creative.

Let your love be.
Let your love be.
Let your love be regardless.
No page 33 in original thesis
PROXEMICS

the singular: we.
raw, natural we. sum.
tout ensemble. we

feel, conjugate spatial
bubbles. are physical. we

sweat, become limbed tongues--touching.

woman, we perch. our bodies touch. we
sing. we are bare breasted as birds. we
touch. we
sing.
MY SONG

My song is verbal, flesh that makes you fertile.
Is a sweating word, an expression
that involves
the physique.
A crude painting. A bonegrammar. A
function. A nightflesh lexicon. Say, it is
a crude tenderness. A
simple song. A

song.

Woman, we
sing.
Observe

Venus, the white period, ending
the nocturnal
sentence. Moon, a pendant,

hangs

from the celestial
ebony throat.

Thought, the
Promethean vulture,
risas,
flies,

lights

on figurative rock, conjures
a liver.

Sun rises.
IV THE RAGE
A carnation poses still
as an image on an oil painting, still
and fixed as Hesperus,
the evening star. She is
the ego-handed sculptress
designing hemispheres
beneath

craniums. Heroes ride toward her
at sunset.

And comprehend indigo

song, she cannot. And comprehend
what capital does not,
she cannot. And she has
so many

meanings.
Nights light up with grey bones, bitches.
Fleshstars, Pinktoes. Are witches. They are dogs, per se. Damballah seekers.
Polka dots of clear noonsky

make eyes

that search our streets till dawn. They gawk.
Their shags are whips that flog the hawk.
POEM FOR A UFO, or:
A YOUNG BEHEADED FEMALE CORPSE THROWN
FROM A ROOF ON 118TH

Wonder Woman couldn't
have landed more
gracefully.
People still lose
their heads in the City.

Your head must be on
someone's bed receiving
kisses.

Wonder Woman couldn't
have touched
more gracefully
on city concrete.

Because you are dead, body-young and beheaded,
we stare. Because you are white,
we stare. Because you are still
white in your death,
we think.

We let our children kick
your body, kick your ass. We only wish
you were alive
to feel it.
Result is the only fact of the matter, the only matter. Bloodmoon rises. Open sores suck the wind. Flesh like land is a container. The heart has shaped its own technique: a flame outlines capacities. An effortless walk at dawn. Result is the only matter, the fact.

(White owls penetrate indigo sky, encircle the lone Saviorless cross that stands like a balanced scale: the airborne whirlpool hugs the cross.)

Here is the forecast:

Hell.

"Is this the same hell you told me about, the same place you told me to visit, the same hell you alluded to, the same hell you wished upon me, the same hell that will come to you? I could wish that on no man. Say, is it coming soon?"
Someone struck a match
& held it to the sun
  to study the flame.
Whatever he saw
  was a visible
  black line
    burning,
      going
        for
          a

  finger.
MY ANGER

I keep my anger decent,
treat it
as delicate fabric, wash it
by hand.

I wring.

I hang my anger on a wire hanger then hang the hanger
on a wire line that hangs between my window and a tree.

It suns. It dries.

I steam. I press. I crease
my anger. I scream. I dress

without a mirror.
YUSEF LATEEF
"Down in Atlanta"

Alone.

This night
I
muse.

Inside
I
rage blues:
inside
I
brood jazz.

I
moan clear--

like the saxophone.
I wasn't born in Harlem, (had I)

I just might have been

Blacker or
Blackblacker or
Blackblackblacker or Blackerblack or Black

but I showed up at 17, years after
the riots years before
the shit will hit

[break]
the
Man
again.
RAVEN BY THE DEEP

There is a raven by the deep
perched on discriminating sands
pressed on the verge of Seagull-land
his croaking cries are not heard

He has forsaken the Master's cage
his lifelong flight has led him here
not to be tortured or ensnared
but to sanctify the seascape

There is a raven by the deep
his bird's-eye-view can clearly see
that he is in place upon the sand--

There is a blackbird on the sand
he is the phoenix of this land
Green trees a-bending,
Po' sinner stands a-trembling,
The trumpet sounds within-a my soul,
I ain't got long to stay here.

Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus,
Steal away, steal away home,
I ain't got long to stay here.

the Code still exists in Babylon. the Brotherhood
is the blood, the Identity.
the Blood is Bibleblack.

the Code still exists in Babylon. the Code is the Knowledge we lean on and peep over
Charlie's shoulders, over Charlie's head.
the Code is the Black language within the white language.

Black shoulders are not to cry on.
Black shoulders hold our heads up
in Babylon.

the Code is the Knowledge we lean on and see
that when Charlie
points the accusing finger,
three are pointing back at him.
Meanwhile, Black folk sprout stomachs, copy what the oppressors did to them, copy the bourgeoisie, dream chariots and tugging unicorns. Overhead there is a silence--the melting pot. D' dop B' bop D' D' bop

The Code still exists in Babylon.

Years ago Charlie taught them to pray for the Merchants, taught them amnesia, taught them about blackugliness, taught them unhistory. D' dop B' B' bop D' D' bop.

The Code still exists in Babylon.

And there is loneliness in our purpose, there is darkness in our speech. O there is no peace, no rest. Here in Babylon sisters dress, brothers talk a natural rhythm. Yo, Blood. Hey, man. Hey, man. Hey now...D' D'

The Code still exists in Babylon.

Meanwhile, Black folk play stupid, breathe deeply the fumes. Overhead [break]
there is a silence,
a letting up. "Git up up up up up"
Someone told them the dream is accomplished.
Someone's propaganda lies
during my time in the world.
Meanwhile, Black folk watch TV, purchase
any product to ease the mind.
Ole Charlie has their interest at heart.

Meantime we'll express our darker purposes.

Meanwhile, it be's.
Nonetheless, stay strong.
I am tired of work; I am tired of building up somebody else's civilization.

-Fenton Johnson

I am tired
I'm tired of hanging in the middle way
--but where can I go?

-Mabel Imoukhuede

I am tired of April, the cruellest with its showers sweet, I am tired of waiting for vacations to sprout on the calendar and inform me that I am free to go, relax, run up the ole Master Charge card. I am tired of Charlie's subliminal propaganda, the advertising, the casually said metaphors, the discovered puns. Oh, bald men who forget their sins bug me. I am tired of television shows implying that if my skin was white and my lips thin and my eyes green that my life would be the American fantasy. I am so tired of mothers-in-law finding prospective sons-in-

[break]
law with post graduate degrees and
titles before their names. I am so
sick of bullshit. I am not made to
heed Charlie's implicit judgements.
I am not made to take my hat off and stand at New York Met games
when the National Anthem is played on that organ.
Further, Black children's behaviors are being modified by
Standard English speaking white teachers (and even
demo colored teachers). Clark
Gable keeps acting out my fantasies (and maybe
his too). I am tired of waiting for Godot. I am waiting
for the negro middle-class to become
Black and plan a revolution--any revolution. I am
waiting for the Black revolution to jump off
to jump off the white pages
of them turgid essays. White scholars are still writing
about the inner city kids and the "Negro Problem." There is
no Negro Problem--it is white. I am sick of white
girls who think I am some sexual beast or some exotic primitive
who fucks endlessly. I am
tired. I am
tired.
I HAVE SEEN THAT SMILE

in a card game
when the joker smiles as if he knows.

I have seen that smile
on my lover's face as she dances nude before the mirror in the bedroom. That smile is on flat-chested prostitutes who stare like assassins watching a motorcade.
That smile is on
rocking-chair junkies who gaze through bloodshot windows with glassy eyes.
That smile freezes on the faces of Harlem pimps with their cocaine-egos and mink-lined bedroom slippers. I have seen that smile on a blind man on Lenox Avenue staring at a mirror.
That smile bothers me on the face of the lady in the University Bookstore at Fordham when I ask for Superman Comics & Sartre & Trojan-enz & Rollo May.
I have seen my uncle with that smile and his rainbow-coloured neckties and
white shoes and purple Cadillac. That smile poses on art professors at NYU when they lecture on the Mona Lisa or van Gogh or Jimi Hendrix.

I sometimes have that smile and it recurs like those old Charlie Chaplin movies do on educational television.

I have seen that smile on the cover of Playboy & Club & Hustler & Penthouse & most recently on the cover of Time & Newsweek & Family Circle. That smile is always on the faces of young Catholic priests whenever someone says The Exorcist was a great movie.

My mother hides that smile when she decides to look at her wedding pictures. That smile is on the pictures of my father before he died at 33 with his baseball gloves & kinky hair & oriental eyes & beige Olds & 9 room house on the hill. That smile sparkles like a ruby on the lips of my brothers when they discuss the soon-to-be released essays on "Social Ethics." That smile tears me apart on my sisters when they kiss on me and call me baby and give me money for my birthday. That smile is projected in the letters my family used to receive from our congressman before he became the Republican National Committee Chairman.
I have seen that smile on Mississippi housewives as they tell about how Jesus & God & white folk are blood relatives. That smile is on the posters of Betty Grable & Marilyn Monroe and more recently on Billy Carter & Lee Majors & Hank Aaron. I imagine Howard Hughes had that smile in Las Vegas when the press thought they saw him in London. I have seen that smile on the picture of Christ my cousin painted which hangs loosely over my boyhood bed. That smile is on all those pictures of me as a child with my baseball cards & cowboy boots & red wagon. That smile is on Santa Claus in that old photo when I was 6. I have felt that smile on my face while humping through wet dreams...and I have felt it vanish upon awaking to find myself alone.
I WANT A REAL POEM,

a poem with streetrhythm, fleshsounds; a poem with human movements: a poem that shits twice a day. I don't want a poem that sees with oedipus-eyes of blue or green or hazel or grey even with guilt blindness. I want a poem that smells like ultrasheen &/or pepsi-colabreath &/or thunderbird &/or koolcigarettes. I want a poem that leans out of a ghettowindow with a headdrag covering nappy hair & yells at a barefoot child smoking reefer on the stoop. That poem will know where to throw the blame-and-bricks like through NYPD windshields & glassfaces

in riot-time. I want a poem that feels like sweat after running a full-court on 117th with youngbloods or that feels like Dominican stab wounds from 165th or that feels like the aftersweat of fucking very hard.

That poem might make white faces cringe with embarrassment when it is read & say

"O Lord, help that nigger." I wanna

fuck poempoempoem

a poem that will make my dick hard & sore like fucking for five hours only stopping for cigarettes that create redlights in the dark.... a poem that will fuck you in any opening on your body like in your ear or your ears or your ear or your ear or your ear or your ear or in your mind. You see, mind fucking is what white intellectuals do when they cannot love anymore. I don't want a poem

[break]
that will address itself to punk English professors
or faggot scholars. I wanna poem that will address itself to
Sallie Ruth in that Georgia grave--a white man raped her
& killed her & claimed self-defense because he was
afraid of who the child would look like. A poem that will put the
Cuban
Invasion
Agency out of Fidel's bathroom. I wanna poem that will remember the
Carter-
Iranian
Annals as having arrived at a peaceful settlement. I wanna poem
that will remember
Emmitt&Medgar&Malcolm&Martin&
even Cool Lonnie Jones.

That poem will be realer than smelly feet, that poem will be
realer than than bad breath, that poem will be realer
than in-grown toe-nails, that poem will be real--I mean, sho
nuff real. It will vomit on liquor store floors, it will
walk into plush bathrooms on 5th Avenue & piss
& piss & piss & piss piss in empty
wine bottles.

I Want A Poem that will make southafrica re-interpret God & say:
"Hey, let's get our shit together, let's get our souls together,
let's get our hearts together, let's get our hearts together
and and and