

Writing North Carolina: Notes of a Native Son

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North Carolina has a long history of black writers creating literary works that resonate. I have read a number of those writers' compelling literary works. In doing so, I am reminded that there is such a rich tradition of black writing in this state. I am attracted to the way these writers have depicted the rhythms of black life. To that end, this special black North Carolina writers issue of *Obsidian* is a celebration.

Clearly, Charles W. Chesnutt, Anna Julia Cooper, George Moses Horton, Harriet Jacobs and David Walker are the most noted and studied black writers from North Carolina. Of course, there are others who have written important works, but Chesnutt, Cooper, Horton, Jacobs and Walker rise above them. Their works are taught in African American and Southern Literature courses because they warrant interrogation.

Yet prominent black scholars including John Hope Franklin, Sandra Govan, Trudier Harris and Karla Holloway have written extensively about African American expressive cultures in terms of history, life and literature. The canonized black North Carolina writers and those included in this special issue have contributed greatly to the literary culture of this state. They have enriched American and African American Literature, and they are part of the literature of the New South that should rightly be recognized.

And when I focus on poetry, I would argue that Gerald Barrax, my former teacher and editor emeritus of *Obsidian*, is one of the best poets in North Carolina. He has written superb poems. In 2006, Barrax was inducted into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame.

Then, too, there is the poet Jaki Shelton Green, who certainly deserves more attention. She has been creating poems and doing cultural work in North Carolina for many lifetimes. Furthermore, the poets herein have chosen to write in such ancient forms as ghazal, haibun, persona poem, tanka and villanelle, and have written in such newer forms as bop and kwansaba. In this issue, I have included three interviews: Evie Shockley's 2004 interview with Jaki Shelton Green, which has not been updated; April C. Turner's interview of TJ Reddy; and L. Teresa Church's 2004 interview with me. These interviews and the other literary works in this issue reveal the significance of place.

No special collection in a journal or anthology can be comprehensive. Such is the case with this sampling of black writers in North Carolina. Many writers on our wish list—including Gerald Barrax and Chimalum Nwankwo, novelists Gloree Rogers and Randall Kenan, playwright Nathan Ross Freeman, and other writers too numerous to mention—have produced important works that would have resonated with the other works in this collection. This sampling of work, however, provides a unique perspective on the continuing work of black North Carolina writers.