

☐ Contemporary  
Literary Criticism

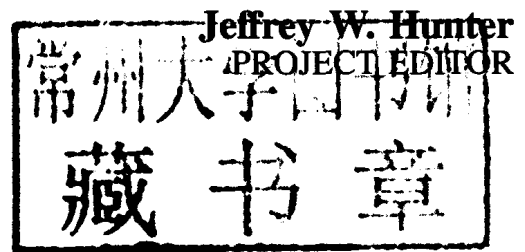
**CLC**

**283**

Volume 283

# Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works  
of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,  
Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and  
Other Creative Writers



 **GALE**  
CENGAGE Learning™

Detroit • New York • San Francisco • New Haven, Conn • Waterville, Maine • London

**Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 283**

Project Editor: Jeffrey W. Hunter

Editorial: Dana Ramel Barnes, Lindsey J. Bryant, Maria Carter-Ewald, Kathy D. Darrow, Kristen Dorsch, Jelena O. Krstović, Michelle Lee, Thomas J. Schoenberg, Lawrence J. Trudeau

Content Conversion: Katrina Coach, Gwen Tucker

Indexing Services: Laurie Andriot

Rights and Acquisitions: Beth Beaufore, Tracie Richardson, Kelly Quin

Composition and Electronic Capture: Gary Oudersluis

Manufacturing: Cynde Lentz

Associate Product Manager: Marc Cormier

© 2010 Gale, Cengage Learning

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of this work covered by the copyright herein may be reproduced, transmitted, stored, or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including but not limited to photocopying, recording, scanning, digitizing, taping, Web distribution, information networks, or information storage and retrieval systems, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

This publication is a creative work fully protected by all applicable copyright laws, as well as by misappropriation, trade secret, unfair competition, and other applicable laws. The authors and editors of this work have added value to the underlying factual material herein through one or more of the following: unique and original selection, coordination, expression, arrangement, and classification of the information.

For product information and technology assistance, contact us at  
**Gale Customer Support, 1-800-877-4253.**

For permission to use material from this text or product,  
submit all requests online at [www.cengage.com/permissions](http://www.cengage.com/permissions).

Further permissions questions can be emailed to  
[permissionrequest@cengage.com](mailto:permissionrequest@cengage.com)

While every effort has been made to ensure the reliability of the information presented in this publication, Gale, a part of Cengage Learning, does not guarantee the accuracy of the data contained herein. Gale accepts no payment for listing; and inclusion in the publication of any organization, agency, institution, publication, service, or individual does not imply endorsement of the editors or publisher. Errors brought to the attention of the publisher and verified to the satisfaction of the publisher will be corrected in future editions.

*Gale*  
27500 Drake Rd.  
Farmington Hills, MI, 48331-3535

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 76-46132

ISBN-13: 978-1-4144-3979-2  
ISBN-10: 1-4144-3979-2

ISSN 0091-3421

## Preface

**N**amed “one of the twenty-five most distinguished reference titles published during the past twenty-five years” by *Reference Quarterly*, the *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)* series provides readers with critical commentary and general information on more than 2,000 authors now living or who died after December 31, 1999. Volumes published from 1973 through 1999 include authors who died after December 31, 1959. Previous to the publication of the first volume of *CLC* in 1973, there was no ongoing digest monitoring scholarly and popular sources of critical opinion and explication of modern literature. *CLC*, therefore, has fulfilled an essential need, particularly since the complexity and variety of contemporary literature makes the function of criticism especially important to today’s reader.

### Scope of the Series

*CLC* provides significant passages from published criticism of works by creative writers. Since many of the authors covered in *CLC* inspire continual critical commentary, writers are often represented in more than one volume. There is, of course, no duplication of reprinted criticism.

Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication or dramatic production of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, revival of interest in past writings, or the adaptation of a literary work to film or television.

Attention is also given to several other groups of writers—authors of considerable public interest—about whose work criticism is often difficult to locate. These include mystery and science fiction writers, literary and social critics, foreign authors, and authors who represent particular ethnic groups.

Each *CLC* volume contains individual essays and reviews taken from hundreds of book review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning from the beginning of an author’s career to the most current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other published writings that offer insight into the author’s works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the general critical and biographical material in *CLC* provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete bibliographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

### Organization of the Book

A *CLC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- Whenever possible, a recent **Author Interview** accompanies each entry.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

## Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Gale, including *CLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Nationality Index** lists all authors featured in *CLC* by nationality, followed by the number of the *CLC* volume in which their entry appears.

A **Cumulative Topic Index** lists the literary themes and topics treated in the series as well as in other Literature Criticism series.

An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *CLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, films, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces an annual cumulative title index that alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in *CLC* and is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

## Citing Contemporary Literary Criticism

When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as University of Chicago Press style or Modern Language Association (MLA) style. Both the MLA and the University of Chicago formats are acceptable and recognized as being the current standards for citations. It is important, however, to choose one format for all citations; do not mix the two formats within a list of citations.

The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a bibliography set forth in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

James, Harold. "Narrative Engagement with *Atonement* and *The Blind Assassin*." *Philosophy and Literature* 29, no. 1 (April 2005): 130-45. Reprinted in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Vol. 246, edited by Jeffrey W. Hunter, 188-95. Detroit: Gale, 2008.

Wesley, Marilyn C. "Anne Hèbert: The Tragic Melodramas." In *Canadian Women Writing Fiction*, edited by Mickey Pearlman, 41-52. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993. Reprinted in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Vol. 246, edited by Jeffrey W. Hunter, 276-82. Detroit: Gale, 2008.

The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a works cited list set forth in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 5th ed. (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1999); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

James, Harold. "Narrative Engagement with *Atonement* and *The Blind Assassin*." *Philosophy and Literature* 29.1 (April 2005): 130-45. Reprinted in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Ed. Jeffrey W. Hunter. Vol. 246. Detroit: Gale, 2008. 188-95.

Wesley, Marilyn C. "Anne Hèbert: The Tragic Melodramas." *Canadian Women Writing Fiction*, edited by Mickey Pearlman. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993. 41-52. Reprinted in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Ed. Jeffrey W. Hunter. Vol. 246. Detroit: Gale, 2008. 276-82.

### Suggestions are Welcome

Readers who wish to suggest new features, topics, or authors to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions or comments are cordially invited to call, write, or fax the Associate Product Manager:

Associate Product Manager, Literary Criticism Series  
Gale  
27500 Drake Road  
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535  
1-800-347-4253 (GALE)  
Fax: 248-699-8983

## Acknowledgments

The editors wish to thank the copyright holders of the criticism included in this volume and the permissions managers of many book and magazine publishing companies for assisting us in securing reproduction rights. Following is a list of the copyright holders who have granted us permission to reproduce material in this volume of *CLC*. Every effort has been made to trace copyright, but if omissions have been made, please let us know.

### COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL IN *CLC*, VOLUME 283, WAS REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING PERIODICALS:

*Américas*, v. 56, January/February, 2004. Copyright © 2004 *Américas*. Reproduced by permission of *Américas*, a bimonthly magazine published by the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States in English and Spanish.—*Art Journal*, v. 67, fall, 2008. This text was first published by the College Art Association in the fall 2008 issue of *Art Journal*. Copyright © Jonathan Thomas. Reprinted by permission. Compilation copyright © 2008 College Art Association, Inc. Contents copyright © 2008 Reproduced by permission of the author.—This interview was commissioned by and first published in *BOMB Magazine*, Issue #74, winter 2001, pp. 42-47. Copyright © *Bomb Magazine*, New Art Publications, and its Contributors. All rights reserved. The BOMB Archive can be viewed at [www.bombsite.com](http://www.bombsite.com). Reproduced by permission.—*The Booklist*, v. 105, May 1, 2009. Copyright © 2009 by the American Library Association. Reproduced by permission.—*Bright Lights Film Journal*, April, 2002. Copyright © 2002 by Maria van Dijk. Reproduced by permission.—*Canadian Woman Studies*, v. 17, 1997 for a review of “*Éclats de sel*, by Sylvie Germain” by Siobhan McIlvanney. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and the author.—*Christianity and Literature*, v. 54, winter, 2005. Copyright © 2005 Conference on Christianity and Literature. Reproduced by permission.—*CineAction*, v. 70, summer, 2006; v. 73-4, summer, 2007. Copyright © 2006, 2007 *CineAction*. Both reproduced by permission.—*Cineaste*, v. 28, summer, 2003; v. 32, spring, 2007. Copyright © 2003, 2007 by Cineaste Publishing Inc. Both reproduced by permission.—*CLA Journal*, v. 42, June, 1999. Copyright © 1999 by The College Language Association. All rights reserved. Used by permission of The College Language Association.—*Clues*, v. 19, spring, 1998; v. 24, fall, 2005. Copyright © 1998, 2005 by Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation. Both reproduced with permission of the Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation, published by Heldref Publications, 1319 18th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-1802 and the author.—*Colby Quarterly*, v. 34, September, 1998. Reproduced by permission.—*Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction*, v. 26, fall, 1984. Copyright © 1984 by Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation. Reproduced with permission of the Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation, published by Heldref Publications, 1319 18th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-1802.—*Film Comment*, v. 38, March/April, 2002 for “Living in Never-Never Land: Michael Haneke Continues the Search for a New European Cinema” by Richard Combs. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*Film Quarterly*, v. 60, summer, 2007 for “Haneke: The Coercing of Vision” by D. I. Grossvogel. Copyright © 2007 by The Regents of the University of California. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and the author.—*Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, v. 47, spring, 2006 for “Pain and the Limits of Representation” by Brian Price / v. 47, fall, 2006 for “Michael Haneke and the Discontents of European Culture” by Christopher Sharrett. Copyright © 2006 by Wayne State University Press. All rights reserved. Both reproduced with permission of the Wayne State University Press and the respective authors.—*The Germanic Review*, v. 81, fall, 2006 for “A Melancholy Labor of Love, or Film Adaptation as Translation: Michael Haneke’s ‘Drei Wege zum See’” by Fatima Naqvi. Copyright © 2007 Heldref Publications. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*Harper’s Magazine*, v. 315, November, 2007. Copyright © 2007 by Harper’s Magazine Foundation. All rights reserved. Reproduced from the November issue by special permission.—*Journal of American Culture*, v. 12, fall, 1989. Copyright © 1989 by Ray B. Browne. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of Blackwell Publishers.—*Journal of the Kafka Society of America*, v. 24, June/December, 2000. Copyright © 2000 Kafka Society of America. Reproduced by permission.—*L’Esprit Créateur*, v. 40, summer, 2000. Copyright © 2000 by L’Esprit Créateur. Reproduced by permission.—*Los Angeles Times Book Review*, November 29, 1992. Copyright, The Times Mirror Company; Los Angeles Times 1992. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—*Modern Austrian Literature*, v. 32, 1999; v. 39, 2006. Copyright © 1999 International Arthur Schnitzler Research Association. Both reproduced by permission.—*The Nation*, v. 260, May 1, 1995. Copyright © 1995 by *The Nation Magazine*/The Nation Company, Inc. Reproduced by permission.—*New Statesman & Society*, v. 6, May 28, 1993; v. 7, October 21, 1994. Copyright © 1993, 1994 New Statesman, Ltd. Both reproduced by permission.—*Psychoanalytic Inquiry: A Topical Journal for Mental Health Professionals*, v. 27, September/October, 2007 for “Perversion Annihilates Creativity and Love: A Passion for Destruction in Haneke’s *The Piano Teacher*” by Harriet Kimble Wrye. Copyright © 2007 Taylor & Francis Group, LLC. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis, Ltd., <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals> and the author.—*Publishers Weekly*, v. 247, June 26, 2000. Copyright © 2000 by Reed

Publishing USA. Reproduced from *Publishers Weekly*, published by the Bowker Magazine Group of Cahners Publishing Co., a division of Reed Publishing USA, by permission.—*Queen's Quarterly*, v. 113, summer, 2006 for "Caché and the Private/Public Secret" by Maurice Yacowar. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and the author.—*Religion and Literature*, v. 32, spring, 2000; v. 39, summer, 2007. Copyright © 2000, 2007 by the University of Notre Dame English Department. Both reproduced by permission of the University of Notre Dame.—*The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, v. 21, spring, 2001. Copyright © 2001 *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*. Reproduced by permission.—*Revista de Estudios Hispánicos*, v. 40, May, 2006. Copyright © by Washington University. Reproduced by permission.—*Sankofa: A Journal of African Children's and Young Adult Literature*, v. 6, 2007. Reproduced by permission.—*Screen*, v. 48, winter, 2007 for "Drawing Trauma: Visual Testimony in *Caché* and *J'ai 8 ans*" by Guy Austin / v. 48, summer, 2007 for "Hidden in Plain Sight: Bringing Terror Home" by Elizabeth Ezra and Jane Sillars. Copyright © The Author 2007. Both reproduced by permission of the publisher and the respective authors.—*Senses of Cinema*, no. 26, May-June, 2003. Copyright 1999-2009 Senses of Cinema Inc. and the contributors. Reproduced by permission.—*The Southern Literary Journal*, v. 34, spring, 2002. Copyright © 2002 by the University of North Carolina Press. Used by permission.—*Studies in European Cinema*, v. 5, 2008. Copyright © 2008 Intellect Ltd. Reproduced by permission.—*Studies in Twentieth Century Literature*, v. 19, winter, 1995. Copyright © 1995 by *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature*. Reproduced by permission.—*Times Literary Supplement*, October 2, 1998; November 28, 2008. Copyright © 1998, 2008 by The Times Supplements Limited. Both reproduced from *The Times Literary Supplement* by permission.—*The University of Dayton Review*, v. 18, summer, 1986 for "A Sketch-Map of Álvaro Mutis' *Reseña de los hospitales de ultramar*," by W. Nick Hill. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*World Literature Today*, v. 77, July-September, 2003. Copyright © 2003 by *World Literature Today*. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.—*YankeeMagazine.com*, v. 67, October, 2003. Copyright © 2009 Yankee Publishing Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.

#### **COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL IN CLC, VOLUME 283, WAS REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING BOOKS:**

Brinkema, Eugenie. From "'Not to scream before or about, but to scream at death': Haneke's Horrible *Funny Games*," in *Caligari's Heirs: The German Cinema of Fear after 1945*. Edited by Steffen Hantke. The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2007. Copyright © 2007 by Steffen Hantke. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Evans, Georgina. From "Social Sense: Krzysztof Kieślowski and Michael Haneke," in *After Kieślowski: The Legacy of Krzysztof Kieślowski*. Edited by Steven Woodward. Wayne State University Press, 2009. Copyright © 2009 by Wayne State University Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced with permission of the Wayne State University Press and the author.—Holladay, Hilary. From *Wild Blessings: The Poetry of Lucille Clifton*. Louisiana State University Press, 2004. Copyright © 2004 by Louisiana State University Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Hull, Akasha Gloria. From "In Her Own Images: Lucille Clifton and the Bible," in *Dwelling in Possibility: Women Poets and Critics on Poetry*. Edited by Yopie Prins and Maeera Shreiber. Cornell University Press, 1997. Copyright © 1997 by Cornell University. Used by permission of the publisher, Cornell University Press.—Hutton, Margaret-Anne. From "'Il n'y a pas de troisième voie' (There is no third way): Sylvie Germain and the Generic Problems of the Christian Novel," in *Women's Writing in Contemporary France: New Writers, New Literatures in the 1990s*. Edited by Gill Rye and Michael Worton. Manchester University Press, 2002. Copyright © Manchester University Press 2002. Reproduced by permission of Manchester University Press, Manchester, UK, and the author.—Mance, Ajuan Maria. From "Re-Locating the Black Female Subject: The Landscape of the Body in the Poems of Lucille Clifton," in *Recovering the Black Female Body: Self-Representations by African American Women*. Edited by Michael Bennett and Vanessa D. Dickerson. Rutgers University Press, 2001. This collection copyright © 2001 by Rutgers, The State University. Individual chapters copyright © 2001 in the names of their authors. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of Rutgers, The State University.—Peucker, Brigitte. From "Fragmentation and the Real: Michael Haneke's Family Trilogy," in *After Postmodernism: Austrian Literature and Film in Transition*. Edited by Willy Riemer. Ariadne Press, 2000. Copyright © 2000 by Ariadne Press. Reproduced by permission.—Riemer, Willy. From "Michael Haneke, *Funny Games*: Violence and the Media," in *Visions and Visionaries in Contemporary Austrian Literature and Film*. Edited by Margarete Lamb-Faffelberger and Pamela S. Saur. Peter Lang, 2004. Copyright © 2004 Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., New York. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Rippetoe, Rita Elizabeth. From *Booze and the Private Eye: Alcohol in the Hard-Boiled Novel*. McFarland & Company, Inc., 2004. Copyright © 2004 Rita Elizabeth Rippetoe. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of McFarland & Company, Inc., Box 611, Jefferson NC 28640. www.mcfarlandpub.com.—Siemens, William L. From "Maqroll's Rebirth in Álvaro Mutis's 'Jamil' and 'Un Rey Mago en Pollensa,'" in *Studies in Honor of Myron Lichtblau*. Edited by Fernando Burgos. Juan de la Cuesta, 2000. Copyright © 2000 by Juan de la Cuesta-Hispanic Monographs. Reproduced by permission.—Svoboda, Frederic. From *Gender in Popular Culture: Images of Men and Women in Literature, Visual Media, and Material Culture*. Ridgmont Press, 1995. Copyright © 1995 by Ridgmont Press. Reproduced by permission.—Williams, Crystal. From "On Lucille Clifton," in *Women Poets on Mentorship: Efforts and Affections*. Edited by Arielle Greenberg and Rachel Zucker. University of Iowa Press, 2008. Copyright © 2008 by the University of Iowa Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.

# Gale Literature Product Advisory Board

The members of the Gale Literature Product Advisory Board—reference librarians from public and academic library systems—represent a cross-section of our customer base and offer a variety of informed perspectives on both the presentation and content of our literature products. Advisory board members assess and define such quality issues as the relevance, currency, and usefulness of the author coverage, critical content, and literary topics included in our series; evaluate the layout, presentation, and general quality of our printed volumes; provide feedback on the criteria used for selecting authors and topics covered in our series; provide suggestions for potential enhancements to our series; identify any gaps in our coverage of authors or literary topics, recommending authors or topics for inclusion; analyze the appropriateness of our content and presentation for various user audiences, such as high school students, undergraduates, graduate students, librarians, and educators; and offer feedback on any proposed changes/enhancements to our series. We wish to thank the following advisors for their advice throughout the year.

**Barbara M. Bibel**

Librarian  
Oakland Public Library  
Oakland, California

**Dr. Toby Burrows**

Principal Librarian  
The Scholars' Centre  
University of Western Australia Library  
Nedlands, Western Australia

**Celia C. Daniel**

Associate Reference Librarian  
Howard University Libraries  
Washington, D.C.

**David M. Durant**

Reference Librarian  
Joyner Library  
East Carolina University  
Greenville, North Carolina

**Nancy T. Guidry**

Librarian  
Bakersfield Community College  
Bakersfield, California

**Heather Martin**

Arts & Humanities Librarian  
University of Alabama at Birmingham, Sterne Library  
Birmingham, Alabama

**Susan Mikula**

Librarian  
Indiana Free Library  
Indiana, Pennsylvania

**Thomas Nixon**

Humanities Reference Librarian  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Davis  
Library  
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

**Mark Schumacher**

Jackson Library  
University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
Greensboro, North Carolina

**Gwen Scott-Miller**

Assistant Director  
Sno-Isle Regional Library System  
Marysville, Washington

# Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board xiii

<b>Lucille Clifton 1936-</b> .....	1
<i>American poet, memoirist, and author of children's books</i>	
<b>Sylvie Germain 1954-</b> .....	75
<i>French novelist and nonfiction writer</i>	
<b>Michael Haneke 1942-</b> .....	102
<i>Austrian director and screenwriter</i>	
<b>Álvaro Mutis 1923-</b> .....	260
<i>Colombian short fiction writer and poet</i>	
<b>Robert B. Parker 1932-2010</b> .....	315
<i>American novelist</i>	

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 367

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 481

CLC Cumulative Nationality Index 497

CLC-283 Title Index 513

# Lucille Clifton

## 1936-

(Born Thelma Lucille Sayles; full name Thelma Lucille Clifton) American poet, memoirist, and author of children's books.

The following entry presents an overview of Clifton's career through 2008. For further information on her life and works, see *CLC*, Volumes 19, 66, and 162.

### INTRODUCTION

Clifton is a highly respected African American poet and children's author. Her unadorned, graceful, and incisive verse is presented in straightforward language and symbolism, which contributes to the accessibility and open-endedness of her ideas. Marked by an understated yet insistent—and occasionally wryly humorous—sensitivity, Clifton's poems invoke the idioms of black America to communicate the hardships and inner strength that characterize the cultural experience of both women and African Americans. Although her early work grew out of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s, her poetry and prose transcend racial limitations, giving life and voice to the all-encompassing human need for pride, hope, strength, and love.

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Clifton was born in Depew, New York, to Samuel Louis Sayles Sr., a steel mill worker, and Thelma Moore Sayles, a laundry employee. Neither parent completed a formal education; however, Clifton's mother wrote poems, which she read to her four children, and her father often told stories about his ancestors, particularly his great-grandmother Caroline, who was abducted from her home in the Dahomey Republic of West Africa and brought to New Orleans, Louisiana, as a slave. Clifton incorporated the image of this great-great-grandmother into a number of poems and detailed her story in the memoir *Generations* (1976). In 1953 Clifton attended Howard University in Washington, D.C., where she met such writers as LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), A. B. Spellman, Owen Dodson, and Sterling Brown, some of

whom, like Clifton, became associated with the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. A drama major, she acted in the first performance of James Baldwin's *The Amen Corner*. Clifton left Howard after two years and attended Fredonia State Teachers College, where she often read and performed plays with a small group of black intellectuals while simultaneously developing her craft as a writer. In 1958 she married educator and artist Fred James Clifton, with whom she had six children before his death in 1984. Her submission of poems to noted African American poet Robert Hayden resulted in her receipt of the YW-YMHA Poetry Center Discovery Award in 1969—an accolade that prompted the publication of her first collection, *Good Times* (1969), which was cited by the *New York Times* as one of the best books of the year. She served as the poet laureate of the State of Maryland from 1979 to 1985. Clifton's children's book *Everett Anderson's Goodbye* (1983) received the Coretta Scott King Award in 1984, and her 1987 book of verse *Good Woman* was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. In 1991 Clifton became Distinguished Professor of Humanities at St. Mary's College of Maryland. She garnered the Shelley Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America that same year. Additionally, she received the Lannan Literary Award for Poetry in 1996, the National Book Award for Poetry in 2000, and the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize in 2007.

### MAJOR WORKS

Clifton's poetry presents a world in which the extraordinary is revealed through the ordinary. The optimistic tone of survival that permeates her work, the religious undercurrent in her verse, and the dignified self-pride that characterizes her voice are all rooted firmly in her ethnic heritage. The poems in *Good Times* and *Good News about the Earth* (1972) showcase Clifton's unique blend of irony and earnestness. Reflecting the widespread social unrest of the civil rights era, these collections recount the travails of black family life and racial injustice. Although not as optimistic as their titles indicate, they are far from cynical. In both volumes, as in all her work, hope and defiance coexist as a single beacon of strength. The brief, powerful, and simply expressed poems in *Good*

*News about the Earth* place biblical stories in a contemporary African American context. The religious overtones in this volume reflect Clifton's personal views of social mores and individual morality while supporting the recurring themes of love and optimism amid desperation.

Her next two volumes, *An Ordinary Woman* (1974) and *Two-Headed Woman* (1980), are distinguished by their distinctively feminine point of view. The poems in *An Ordinary Woman* celebrate everyday things and highlight the interpersonal bonds found in marriage, motherhood, sisterhood, and shared cultural experience. The predominant images in the poems are bones—representing strength and connection among generations—and light, which symbolizes knowledge, existence, and life. Characterized by dramatic tension and original groupings of words, the poems in *Two-Headed Woman* are tributes to blackness, celebrations of women, and testimonies to familial love. *Good Woman* is comprised of Clifton's first four collections and her autobiographical prose work *Generations*. Indebted to Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" for its inscriptions and structure, *Generations* is an ode to the survival of the African American family, chronicling Clifton's genealogical history through five generations while also recording her personal journey of self-discovery. Fusing the intimate with the universal, *Next* (1987) addresses themes of maternal strength and sisterhood, war's cruelties, the deleterious effects of racism, and death. In *Quilting* (1991), the title's unifying conceit symbolizes the importance of female friendships and communal action. The section titles come from traditional quilting designs, such as catalpa flower and eight-pointed star, and suggest that artistic patterns evolve organically from human experience and observation. Biblical themes recur in *The Book of Light* (1993), which features poems that deftly link the name "Lucille" with "light" and "Lucifer," all three of which share the same Latin root. Throughout the volume, light signifies creativity, spirituality, and love, and accentuates the affirmation of African American womanhood in poems such as "Daughters" and "Won't You Celebrate with Me." *The Book of Light* also pays tribute to dearly departed family members, particularly Clifton's mother. Inspired by the author's battle with breast cancer, *The Terrible Stories* (1996) deals with the horror and nearness of mortality. At the same time, the collection tackles the difficult aspects of American history, such as the shame of slavery and its dire aftermath. *Voices* (2008) utilizes humor and the imagined perspectives of such commercialized African American cultural icons as Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben to probe issues of memory and physical decline.

Clifton is also a prolific author of children's books. These titles emphasize self-love and self-acceptance in a world in which both joy and pain are present. Infused with Christian values and racial pride, Clifton's best-known children's picture books are those that focus on Everett Anderson, a young African American boy. The first book in this series, *Some of the Days of Everett Anderson* (1970), was chosen as one of *School Library Journal's* Best Books of 1970. The Everett Anderson series documents everyday moments and difficult transitions in the title character's childhood—including the death of his father—utilizing simple verse, African American vernacular, and psychological insight to lend authenticity and immediacy to the subject matter. Clifton's other works for children include *The Black BC's* (1970), which teaches the alphabet and American history from an Afrocentric perspective. Similar to *The Black BC's* are works such as *All Us Come Cross the Water* (1973), *The Times They Used to Be* (1974), and *Amifika* (1977)—books that celebrate the African American experience, proclaim the beauty of blackness, and insist that poverty need not mean a lack of love, warmth, or dignity.

## CRITICAL RECEPTION

Reviewers have consistently praised Clifton's writing throughout her career. Specifically, they have emphasized her ability to craft accessible verse that limns problems of racial and gender inequality while retaining a dynamic affirmation of African American and feminine pride. They have also responded favorably to her inclusive, humanistic tone. While exploring thematic aspects of her work, critics have noted the importance of names in her slavery-related poems of the American South and have analyzed the biblical allusions in her poetry as a modern-day reflection of African American tradition. As commentator Jeannine Thyreen-Mizingou maintained, "[Clifton] often articulates grace within a specifically African/African American culture, using the black vernacular. Her patterns or techniques reflect African American spirituals, such as repetition, refrain, call and response, characteristic adornment and dramatizing, suggestions of dancing and communal life, and various forms of traditional negro expression, such as verbal nouns, asymmetry, and nouns used as verbs." Furthermore, scholars have examined Clifton's evocation of myth and magic, particularly with regard to her presentation of black women as figures of both empowerment and oppression. They have also highlighted the transformative quality of such motifs as divine prediction and incanta-

tion in Clifton's poems. According to critic Tiffany Eberle Kriner, "Clifton uses prophecy and conjure to diagnose and to resist problems in the present, to anticipate the future, and to set in motion the transformation from present injustice to future possibility." Moreover, reviewers have treated two common elements in her poetry and children's books that speak to her strengths as an artist—the simple presentation of complex ideas, and the refusal to talk down to the reader. Such qualities bolster Clifton's reputation as an author of eminent grace and talent and complement the following assertion by scholar Hilary Holladay: "To read one of Lucille Clifton's poems is to experience an epiphany, a swift flowering of personal observation into social insight. To read all of them is to apprehend a far-reaching, essentially hopeful vision of humanity."

## PRINCIPAL WORKS

- Good Times: Poems* (poetry) 1969  
*The Black BC's* (juvenilia) 1970  
*Some of the Days of Everett Anderson* (juvenilia) 1970  
*Good News about the Earth: New Poems* (poetry) 1972  
*All Us Come Cross the Water* (juvenilia) 1973  
*Everett Anderson's Year* (juvenilia) 1974  
*An Ordinary Woman* (poetry) 1974  
*The Times They Used to Be* (juvenilia) 1974  
*Generations: A Memoir* (memoir) 1976  
*Amifika* (juvenilia) 1977  
*Everett Anderson's 1 2 3* (juvenilia) 1977  
*Everett Anderson's Nine Month Long* (juvenilia) 1978  
*Two-Headed Woman* (poetry) 1980  
*Everett Anderson's Goodbye* (juvenilia) 1983  
*\*Good Woman: Poems and a Memoir, 1969-1980* (poetry and memoir) 1987  
*Next: New Poems* (poetry) 1987  
*Quilting: Poems, 1987-1990* (poetry) 1991  
*The Book of Light* (poetry) 1993  
*The Terrible Stories: Poems* (poetry) 1996  
*Blessing the Boats: New and Selected Poems, 1988-2000* (poetry) 2000  
*One of the Problems of Everett Anderson* (juvenilia) 2001  
*Mercy: Poems* (poetry) 2004  
*Voices: Poems* (poetry) 2008

\**Good Woman: Poems and a Memoir, 1969-1980* (1987) contains *Good Times* (1969); *Good News about the Earth* (1972); *An Ordinary Woman* (1974); *Two-Headed Woman* (1980); and *Generations: A Memoir* (1976).

## CRITICISM

### Akasha Gloria Hull (essay date 1997)

SOURCE: Hull, Akasha Gloria. "In Her Own Images: Lucille Clifton and the Bible." In *Dwelling in Possibility: Women Poets and Critics on Poetry*, edited by Yopie Prins and Maera Shreiber, pp. 273-95. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.

[In the following essay, Hull traces the interweaving of traditional and idiosyncratic elements of spiritualism in Clifton's poetry, stressing the gender- and race-based utilization of biblical allusions in her work.]

The Bible has functioned as a sourcebook for Lucille Clifton throughout her illustrious, twenty-five-year poetic career. In three cycles of poems written between 1972 and 1991, she directly treats many of its major characters and events. On one level, her use of this biblical material is—in every sense of the word—faithful; yet, in fundamental and crucial ways, she is startlingly heterodox. Perhaps the simplest way to describe her transformative mode is to say that she (1) Africanizes, (2) feminizes, (3) sexualizes, and (4) mysticizes the original text. Thus she rewrites it in her own image as a black and cosmically spiritual woman. The poetic genre through which she mediates her vision is the personal, free verse lyric but here, too, she negotiates a mutually illuminating relationship between the traditional and the new, the ordinary and the extraordinary. Invariably lowercased, brief, and deceptively simple in form, style, and diction, her poems ultimately authorize themselves as complexly crafted pieces redolent with both mystical-spiritual and sociopolitical consciousness.

As important context, it should be mentioned that Lucille Clifton is one of an impressive number of contemporary African American women writers whose spiritual consciousness is providing both content and modality for their work. They are writing about supernatural experiences and phenomena, and also utilizing what Toni Morrison has called "ways of knowing beyond the five senses" to access their material. Morrison herself has spiced her novels with flying Africans, ghosts, supernatural birth, rootworking, and so forth. She has also spoken in propria persona about her connection through her grandmother and father to the world of dreams and spirits (Strouse 1981). Alice Walker has said that the characters of *The Color Purple* (1982) visited her to have her transmit their story (A. Walker 1983); and in a later book, *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989), she deals undramatically with such matters as karmic union, reincarnation, and the physical materialization of energy.

Adopting science fiction, Octavia Butler deploys shape-shifters and an array of telepathic powers, as in *Mind of My Mind* (1977) and *Wild Seed* (1980), two of her earlier works. Another poet, Dolores Kendrick, prefaces her 1989 volume with these words:

I thank these women  
for coming, and I thank  
the good God who sent them.

The Women of Plums

Toni Cade Bambara's novel *The Salt Eaters* (1980) is a brilliant compendium of ancient, black, and New Age spiritual wisdoms. Paule Marshall's heroine in *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983) undergoes a psychic rebirth that catapults her into ancestral visions and Yoruba gods. This list could be extended to further enforce the point that spirituality is a vital current for black women writers—just as it increasingly is for United States society and the whole of pre-twenty-first-century civilization. This special dimension of their work seems to account significantly for their current popularity, for the way unprecedented masses of readers are attracted to their writings.

Fitting generally into this movement, Lucille Clifton is yet unique in her unclouded self-revelation and the meshing of personal autobiography with her art. Spiritually endowed, she practices her gifts in both her life and her poetry. Clifton hears voices, automatically writes, reads palms, senses realities, and speaks normally unknowable truths. She and her family—which she has described as “spiritual and even perhaps mystical” (Clifton 1983)<sup>1</sup>—learned over time to “incorporate the nonvisible” into their everyday cosmology. How she does so makes her spirituality a force that could be described with the following adjectives: black, natural, rooted, unpretentious, practical, quietly powerful, good-natured, good-humored, ethically and politically edged, humanly respectful, lovingly shared, transformative.

Clifton's way of functioning in this area breaks down the boundaries between this world and the “other” world. Likewise, her spirituality-driven poetry transgresses categories of form, genre, and artistic convention. One very striking example of this is her poem “**the light that came to lucille clifton**” (from *two-headed woman*, 1980). Immediately, the use of her own, real name is arresting. In earlier poems, she had incorporated fanciful references to “lucy girl,” but she had never instated herself with this degree of fullness, formality, and solemnity. Thus, with a dramatic move that upsets modesty and convention, the reader is invited to see the person behind the persona, the lady behind the mask.

Poetically working Clifton's actual experience, “**the light that came**” [“**the light that came to lucille clifton**”] recounts a pivotal time when “a shift of knowing” makes possible the breakthrough to higher levels of awareness and personal power.

it was the summer  
she understood that she had not understood  
and was not mistress even  
of her own off eye. then  
the man escaped throwing away his tie and  
the children grew legs and started walking and  
she could see the peril of an  
unexamined life.

(Clifton 1987a:209)

Among this series of concrete details is Clifton's allusion to her half-blind eye, whose functions she cannot control. This image inversely resonates with her finally being able to see that she needs to scrutinize her own autonomous being more closely. However, she closes her eyes, “afraid to look for her / authenticity.”

but the light insists on itself in the world;  
a voice from the nondead past started talking,  
she closed her ears and it spelled out in her hand  
“you might as well answer the door, my child,  
the truth is furiously knocking.”

(209)

Thus the poem ends, with reference to an automatic writing experience and active resignation/acceptance.

In addition to incorporating her full name, this poem presents the oddness of Clifton referring to herself in the third person within a work that otherwise fits into the “I” frame of confessional or autobiographical verse. This disassociative effect is heightened by the way she linguistically distances obviously intimate elements: “the man” is her husband, “the children” her own six maturing ones (whose just-growing legs strike an almost surreal chord). These features tip the ambience of the poem toward madness—which is reflected in its initially de-ranged lines. Yet this craziness is effectively contravened by a simultaneous, convincing lucidity.

For an epiphanic poem, “**the light that came to lucille clifton**” is strangely low-key; as a rendition of mystical experience, it is singularly nonelevated. Seemingly, Clifton is conveying through her form and style what she believes: that the extraordinary is really quite ordinary, nothing to get overly excited about, and available to us all. Cumulatively, this is a highly original poem. It is followed by a remarkable final sequence through which Clifton testifies to having seen the light and heard the voices of another world. Despite being called mad, she holds onto the truth of her experience and authoritatively declares in the last lyric:

in populated air  
 our ancestors continue.  
 i have seen them.  
 i have heard  
 their shimmering voices  
 singing.

(221)

From this point on, spiritual-mystical themes and materials become an even more prominent feature of her work.

\* \* \*

Situated against this background of expressed—and expressive—spirituality, Lucille Clifton's handling of the Bible effects a perhaps contradictory-seeming union of Christian subject matter and her own brand of spirituality, which is certainly not traditionally religious but rather mystical in the broadest sense of the word. Having defined herself as "someone who is aware of mystery," Clifton illuminates on multiple levels the even more marvelous mysteries that lie behind received Mystery.

Moreover, her treatment of the Bible places her among contemporary women poets who, like herself, are engaged in what the critic Alicia Ostriker terms "revisionist mythmaking"—the poets' appropriation "for altered ends" of "a figure or story previously accepted and defined by a culture," including historic and quasi-historic figures, folktales, legends, and Scripture (1986:212-13). Ostriker notes that these poets no longer hide behind the characters to make their socially seditious points but openly "deviate from or explicitly challenge the meanings attributed to mythic figures and tales." She sums up the revisionist mythmaking of this poetry thus:

These poems generically assume the high literary status that myth confers and that women writers have often been denied because they write "personally" or "confessionally." But in them the old stories are changed, changed utterly, by female knowledge of female experience, so that they can no longer stand as foundations of collective male fantasy or as the pillars sustaining phallocentric "high" culture. Instead, they are corrections; they are representations of what women find divine and demonic in themselves; they are retrieved images of what women have collectively and historically suffered; in some cases they are instructions for survival.

(Ostriker 1986:215)

Ostriker's emphasis on the legitimacy gained through employing respected cultural myths and the ultimate feminization of this material is a particularly helpful context for understanding Clifton's work.

Another necessary context is Clifton's own African American religious background. Her mother belonged to the Sanctified church, and her father was Baptist.

She grew up in the Baptist church of her father, no doubt absorbing the Bible along with its interpretations and embellishments in Sunday school and sermons. Though she does not believe it "as a literal book," she herself has read the text from cover to cover. Clifton says that she finds it interesting but really does not know why she uses it so extensively in her writing: "It just interests me. The figures there interest me." One might also surmise that the Bible has possibly influenced her literary style. Both it and her poems possess a terse but affluent concreteness, an elliptical fullness.

As an African American woman, Clifton effortlessly balances a respectful—and even, one could say, affectionate—use of the Bible with her other nonorthodox attitudes, ideas, and beliefs. As is true for many of her counterparts (especially of her generation), she feels no need to rail against God and Christianity. It would be highly unusual to find someone like her expressing angry, negative sentiments about this religious code. It is too African American, too much who we are—our culture, blood, survival; the faith of our fathers and grandmothers. Not surprisingly, while Clifton relentlessly lowercases absolutely everything else, she always capitalizes "God" and his pronouns. Furthermore, as a truly spiritual person, Clifton would know that (1) fundamentally, all spiritual systems are essentially the same, and (2) they all (can) work for whoever sincerely believes and faithfully practices them.

Clifton's equipoise of contrasting doctrines can also be framed as an agile juxtaposition of folk and religious beliefs. Dianne Johnson uses this dyad in her helpful discussion of Clifton's books for children. She notes that even though, after 1947, (mostly) white writers of black children's books tended to eliminate superstition, while continuing to portray black people as religious, Clifton "sees no reason to avoid the 'superstitious' merely because it may evoke images of the 'primitive' or to deny the overlay of the superstitious with the religious." Her perpetuation of these "superstitious" images can, in fact, be "viewed as an acceptance of a world view rather than as a resignation to stereotypes" (Johnson 1990: 86-87). This notion of seeing what Clifton does as considered ontology is absolutely correct. As both her life and her work demonstrate, she accepts phenomena usually dubbed superstition as valid reality and does so from a deep rootedness in her cultural identity as an African American woman.

Johnson illustrates Clifton's syncretism of the folk and the religious with a discussion of her children's book *The Lucky Stone* (1979). This stone—originating as a talisman that helped save the life of a slave girl Mandy

and subsequently handed down to generations of her successors—is now, after Emancipation, in the possession of Mandy's daughter, Vashti. One Sunday when the weather is "strange and threatnin," Vashti attends a special and very spirited church service. The last to ascend the platform to testify, Vashti does so with her mother's stone worn in a pouch around her neck. The pouch string breaks, "hurling the stone to the ground"—and just as she jumps down to retrieve it, a mighty bolt of lightning strikes the platform, destroying it with fire. In the story, Vashti's descendant, Tee, who is being told this tale by her great grandmother, whispers, "That stone was sure lucky for her." The "Grandmama" replies with a smile, "That's cause it's a lucky stone" (Johnson 1990:88). Johnson comments on the meaning of this passage:

[T]here is little or no differentiation between the "religious" and the "superstitious" as commonly understood in everyday English. Recognizing this, the passage is both remarkable and unremarkable for the same reason—for the Black worshippers on this stormy afternoon, Vashti's shiny black stone is a savior just as God himself is a deliverer. Belief in God's power is at the base of the events taking place. Yet the power of the stone is an inextricable element too. Both are part of the acknowledged order of things. In this version of the event, in fact, it is the stone that is finally hailed as the protector.

(88)

Born of African cosmology and of experiences in America that often made no "sense," this ability to live well and happily with apparent contradiction is a notable feature of African American culture. It is certainly relevant for Clifton's overall spirituality and for her handling of the Bible and Christianity in her work.

These biblical poems occur in three primary places: (1) the "some **jesus**" sixteen-piece final section of *good news about the earth* (1972), (2) the eight-poem sequence about Mary in *two-headed woman* (1980), and (3) the "Tree of Life" section in *quilting* (1991), which consists of ten poems revolving around Lucifer, the fallen angel. One of the most immediately striking features of all these selections is Clifton's ability to see the ordinary in the extraordinary, to bring heaven "down" to earth and make "men" of gods (the hierarchical metaphors are inappropriate). This is a critical ingredient of her uniqueness and success. The intermingling of ordinary and extraordinary—whether she begins with one side or the other—is a characteristic feature of her consciousness and is reflected in her style. She reports that a friend of hers expresses the same idea by saying that she, Clifton, tries to find "the human in the mythology and the mythology in the human."

A single work from *Next* (1987), "my dream about God," illustrates Clifton's manipulation of these two dimensions. The beginning stanzas of the poem read:

He is wearing my grandfather's hat.  
He is taller than my last uncle.  
when He sits to listen  
He leans forward tilting the chair.

where His chin cups in my father's hand.  
it is swollen and hard from creation.  
His fingers drum on His knee  
dads stern tattoo.

(Clifton 1987b:41)

Here, God becomes anthropomorphic, family, familiar, complete with the appurtenances and mannerisms of the poet's male relatives, down to his work-hardened hands. This poem is reminiscent of Gwendolyn Brooks's "the preacher: ruminates behind the sermon" from her first collection, *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945). Brooks's work begins with the arresting lines: "I think it must be lonely to be God. / Nobody loves a master." It goes on to picture a Jehovah who strides importantly through his halls, but who has no one to take his arm, tweak his ear, or buy him a coke or beer. Perhaps, the poet wonders, "He tires of looking down. . . . Perhaps sometimes He tires of being great / In solitude. Without a hand to hold" (Brooks 1963:8). Not so with Clifton's God. He is a companionable father who, in the poem, "leans forward" and "strains to hear" his good daughter's wishes. Clifton has taken this basic conceit one step further, from the problem of Divine isolation to a solution which releases Him from His misery. Everyone is happier.

Her anthropomorphic strategies in this poem appear on a larger, amplified scale in the "some **jesus**" sequence. These are brief (as usual), first-person monologues, which read like soliloquies rather than like traditional dramatic monologues that assume a listener and an active context. The biblical characters—who obviously do interest Clifton—are projected as ordinary folk. They are demythologized, debunked, leveled through homely imagery and contextualizations. Cain "plants tears" in the desert every morning that his brother Abel, whom he has slain, does not rise up (1972). And Job comes to the rags of his suffering "like a good baby / to breakfast." Perhaps the most heterodox (for some readers) of Clifton's stratagems is that she further "levels" these biblical figures by making them racially black. This is apparent throughout in their language, for they speak an African American folk dialect of "be's," third-person subject-verb "disagreements," and colorful metaphor.

In addition, as if this were not enough to make her point, Clifton either clearly Africanizes history and historical context or slyly suggests their Afrocentric

possibilities. Moses becomes “an old man / leaving slavery,” which is literally and biblically true and also redolent of black United States history. Solomon blesses blackness in all its forms, from “the black skin of the woman” (the dark lover in his Song of Solomon or Songs) to the “black / night turning around her.” On Palm Sunday, the people lay turnips for Christ’s mule to walk on and wave beets and collard greens in the air (an especially humorous visualization). John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus Christ, announces:

somebody coming in blackness  
like a star  
and the world be a great bush  
on his head

.....  
i’m just only a baptist preacher  
somebody bigger than me coming  
in blackness like a star

(98)

The “great bush” calls to mind God inaugurating Moses’ mission by speaking to him from the burning bush, while it simultaneously—and almost as a pun—becomes a head of natural black hair, also called a “bush.” After a reference like this and locutions such as “he be calling the people brother,” it is almost impossible not to make John a *black* “baptist preacher.”

Another arresting poem in this category is “*jonah*”:

what i remember  
is green  
in the trees  
and the leaves  
and the smell of mango  
and yams  
and if i had a drum  
i would send to the brothers  
—Be care full of the ocean—

(97)

Speaking from the belly of the whale that swallowed him, Jonah waxes nostalgic about the sights, smells, and tastes of his tropical home. The crowning touch, however, is his yearning for one of the famed talking drums with which to warn his kin about the dangers of the ocean, a trope that spells enslavement and the Middle Passage—in addition to its accurate Bible reference.

Even in their biblical guises, many of the figures about which Clifton writes exhibit ordinary human traits—and this is probably what attracted her to them in the first place. (Limning these traits is certainly one way that Baptist preachers make their sermons interesting and effective for their congregations.) Jonah himself, for instance, runs away from responsibility, sleeps during a crisis, gets angry, inflexibly holds a grudge, and

sulks (see his story in the Book of Jonah). Clifton picks up on human cues like these and refracts them in her own image. The result is sometimes surprising, sometimes humorous, and always impressive. Her working in this way fits into the anthropomorphizing tendencies of African American folktales, where characters from the Bible and even God himself are similarly “raced” and humanized. Another, earlier woman writer, Zora Neale Hurston, displays this approach in her highly original folklore collection, *Mules and Men* (1935). Finally, it must be said that transforming biblical figures into plain black folks is a move that simultaneously levels and elevates. It brings the Bible’s inhabitants down to earth, while it imparts to black people some of the status of universal heroes and heroines.

Clifton treads even further into heterodox territory when she adds sexual overtones to the human characteristics that these biblical personages exhibit. Often this is ambiguously referenced and ripples as a delicate undercurrent, but for almost any perceptive reader, it is there. Attend to her poem “*mary*”:

this kiss  
as soft as cotton

over my breasts  
all shiny bright

something is in this night  
oh Lord have mercy on me

i feel a garden  
in my mouth

between my legs  
i see a tree

(1972:99)

This poem recounts Mary, the virgin betrothed to Joseph, being “gotten with child” by the Holy Spirit. However, it adds flesh and body to traditional projections of this event, corporealizing and even eroticizing what is usually treated as a strictly nonphysical and ethereal phenomenon. In the incoherence of their grammatical structure and the vague wonder of their words, the first two “couplets” indicate a mating experience. After this, a series of short, definite sentences follow, even though fear and awe are still present—especially in the plea to God for mercy. The final two “couplets” show Mary as a visionary who sees through this present happening to its ultimate result.

The garden in her mouth is Gethsemane, the place where Christ prayed shortly before the Last Supper, and the tree is certainly representative of his subse-