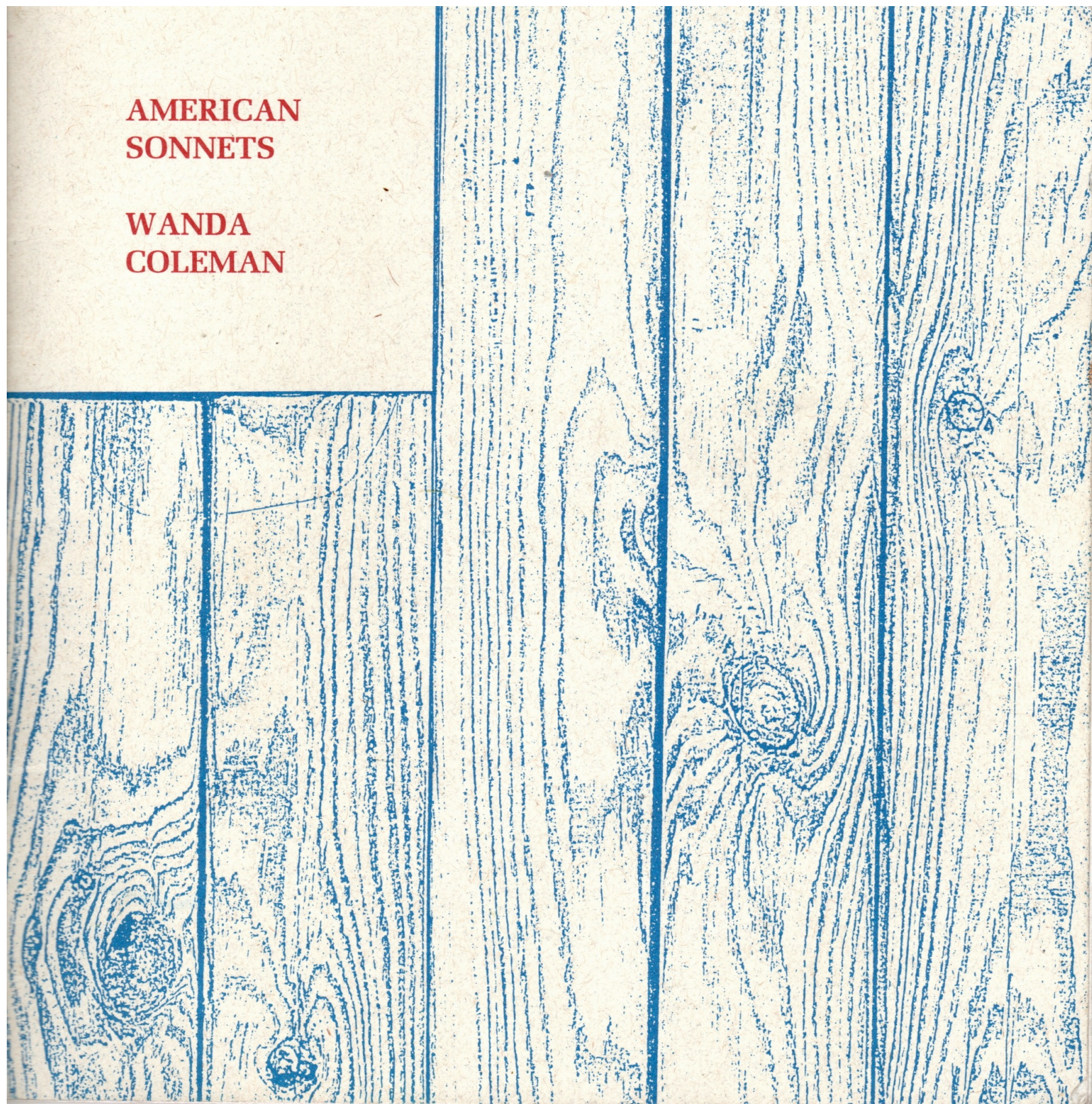


**AMERICAN
SONNETS**

**WANDA
COLEMAN**



AMERICAN SONNETS

BY WANDA COLEMAN

Co-published by
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and Woodland Pattern Book Center

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for Austin Kat

1.

the lurid confessions of an ex-cake junky: "i blew it
all. blimped. i was really stupid. i waited
until i was forty to get hooked on white flour
and powdered sugar"

white greed

black anger

X

=

socio-eco dominance

socio-eco disparity

- a) increased racial tension/polarization
- b) increased criminal activity
- c) sporadic eruptions manifest as mass killings
- d) collapses of longstanding social institutions
- e) the niggerization of the middle class

the blow to his head cracks his skull
he bleeds eighth notes & treble clefs

(sometimes i feel like i'm almost going)

to Chicago. baby you want to go?

3.

fair splay/pay — the stuff myths are made of
(cum grano salis)

that thoughts become things
words weapons

who gives the african violet the right to bloom
rain the right to be wet
who permits the moon to draw menses

i protest this tyranny of ghosts
who reign in the world of letters
would-be betters

in actuality

pseudo-intellectuals with suck-holes for brains
so dense even when the light goes on
they're still in the dark

today i protest the color of the sky
that it is not the color of my skin

2.

for Robert Mezey

for outshining the halos of heaven's greedy archangels
the sensitive nightfall with her dazzling teeth
is sentenced to the eclipse of eternal corporate limbo
the exquisite isolation of endless neon-lit hallways

for the miscegenation of her spirit to earth's blood
for giving her moonrises to tropical desires
powerful executives syphon off her magic
to face the consequences of devilish exploitation

towards the cruel attentions of violent opiates
as towards the fatal fickleness of artistic rain
towards the locusts of social impotence itself

i see myself thrown heart first into this ruin

not for any crime
but being

4.

rejection can kill you

it can force you to park outside neon-lit
liquor stores and finger the steel of
your contemplation. it can even make you
rob yourself

(when does the veteran of one war fail to
appreciate the vet of another?)

the ragged scarecrow lusts in the midst of
a fallow field

and the lover who prances in circles envies me
my moves/has designs on my gizzard/kicks shit

this is the city we've come to
all the lights are red all the poets are dead
and there are no norths

5.

rusted busted and dusted

the spurious chain of plebeian events
(aintjahmamaauntjemimaondapancakebox?)

which allows who to claim the largest number of homicides
the largest number of deaths by cancer the largest
number of institutionalized men the largest number of
single female heads of household the largest number of
crimes of possession the largest number of functionally
insane the largest number of consumers of dark rum

largely
preoccupied with perfecting plans of escape

see you later alligator
after while crocodile
after supper muthafucka

7.

to take the outer skin in. rehumanize it

is

swallowing whole the dourness of
an unremitting scorn and unstoppable cruelty
the exploitative ambition of pricey looks
stealing meat off the bone

is

to know grief my unnamings tongue
it reaches for its lyric the mother of
all pain to birth to know this ugly/an
abandoned stillborn blued around its eyes and
bodily bruised. found buried in a dumpster
beneath the rages of an unsung life

is

to know i must survive myself

6.

portfolio profligates of creative capitalism
proliferate — wage slave labor intensive

pack up all your crates and dough
here we go interest's low
bye-bye bankbook

pro rata (whacked-out on assonance
and alliteration)

middle management mendacity
(let jesus do it on his lunch hour)

i hit forty before i got my first credit card

zed-to-zed/the game of bird association

when one's only credentials are the holes
in one's tired bend-overs

what does fame do without money?

8.

not just another marketeer

a billion a year racket owned by
everyday business folk
an exciting all-cash opportunity
the latest schemology! no monthly overhead!
run it at home or out of the trunk of your car
can be operated part-time earning you deep
pockets while you keep your regular job
no experience or special training needed
start today with low initial investment

quick returns/the coins stack up
your latest crack at securing a future

try it yourself. it's high-octaine for
maintaining cool under pressure

9.

love people use things

later a possible emergence at
effortless forms of illumination drift
across the screen of the set/swaying bodies
converging/ghosts of divisions
city after city, oh ruthless decay
— these skin disruptions —
the sport of confession for pay
(loose shoes, tight pussy, warm place to shit)
splendid moments when all visions of ghosts/
convergences/bodies swaying adrift
illuminating new behavioral norms
effortless emergence? possibly. later

use people love things

11.

the moon is livid white. pacifica boils
we are going under
ship afire the sea pools with blood

women and children first

i cannot swim
and i have been refused a mae west

i fight the mob to board a lifeboat
a bronze-haired aryan roughly grabs me by my arm
his eyes a feast of loathing
a tear tattooed beneath his left orb

“i have as much right to live as anyone”
i demand. he slams me to the deck

“go back to the jungle where you belong”
he spits. “and stay there”

10.

—after Lowell

our mothers rung hell and hardtack from row
and boll, fenced others’
gardens with bones of lovers. embarking
from Africa in chains
reluctant pilgrims stolen by Jehovah’s light
planted here the bitter
seed of blight and here eternal torches mark
the shame of Moloch’s mansions
built in slavery’s name. our hungered eyes
do see/refuse the dark
illuminate the blood-soaked steps of each
historic gain. a yearning
yearning to avenge the raping of the womb
from which we spring

12.

after Robert Duncan

my earliest dreams linger/wronged spirits
who will not rest/dusky crows astride
the sweetbriar seek to fly the
orchard’s sky. is this the world i loved?
groves of perfect oranges and streets of stars
where the sad eyes of my youth
wander the atomic-age paradise

tasting

the blood of a stark and wounded puberty?
o what years ago? what rapture lost in white
heat of skin/walls that patina my heart’s
despair? what fear disturbs my quiet
night’s grazing? stampedes my soul?

o memory. i sweat the eternal weight of graves

13.

— after Sergio Macias

today i'm with you braiding hate into a rainbow
picking up trash off the cement banks of the Los Angeles river
human feces litters the corporate dreams downtown
i already feel my soul's freedom hymns
*(i am drunk on disturbing things. hopelessness flows
from the wounds of my negritude. when light reaches me
i cringe and pray for darkness to return)*
i navigate through the streets, my compass broken
smashed by a hunk of stormy history.
i savor the stench of auto exhaust and unwashed bodies
sweat stinging the unhappy eyes of my region. the
illuminati enforcers mapping my deathwalk toward night

the eagle preens above our bleeding bear

15.

dear most important believer

on behalf of everyone i'd like to thank you
for your trust and loyalty. to recognize
you as among the sincerest of followers. i'm
pleased to personally welcome you to the many
privileges and benefits. you'll enjoy exclusive
advantages unavailable to others. because you deserve
special attention. i've enclosed your emblems
of guaranteed earned recognition. please take a moment to
contemplate and admire them. we've gone to great lengths
to exceed your every expectation. if you have questions
about a higher level, remember there is none. if
you feel you need extra recognition this is all there
is since it is special indication of your status

thank you for showing us your best

14.

summersong escape from the coast. a
mile-high up it's bleak and dry, Denver sky giving
back no breath. i'm looted and burned
an aborted discourse on emotional colonialism/
no longer my own. the cultural carpetbaggers
have stolen my thunder. betrayed, by Zeus!

begging rescue. the loneliness of cool baptismal
church on a childhood of Sundays — whitest wall
of virgin stucco, oblation —
the seduction of high desert heat

on my knees i drink the wine

my heart assumes the flesh of a two-year-old
thumps like waves rising in my chest
leaps into wonder. drowns

16.

— after Huey P. Newton

the clairvoyant activist ever ready to
face the consequences of his/her perceptions must

subsist on stubborn hope (D. Brutus) for maintenance
aids dogged determination to construct required change.
revolutionary homicide/suicide means awareness of
reality in combination with potential sociocentrism.
those ill-equipped to struggle against brutal powers risk
extinction. [to cooperate in the imprisoning of one's own
people-psyche is reactionary homicide/suicide which will be
rewarded by ever-watchful scions of the oppressive belief
system. but to pretend to do so is to trick.] specific
group resistance of rampant narco/necromania may be
manifest in periodic eruptions of spontaneous civil
violence. it is imperative that visionaries see

war as ultimate service for resolution

17.

i am seized with the desire to end

my breath in short spurts. shoulder pain
the world lengthens then contracts
(in deep water — my sudden swimming. the surface
breaks. thoughts leap. the Buick bends
a corner. an arc of light briefly sweeps the dark walls)
everywhere there are temples of stone
and strange chantings — ashes angels and dolls
i forget my lover. i want a stranger —
to shiver at the unfamiliar touch of the one
who has not yet touched me

a furred spider to entrap my hungers
in his silk. with virulent toxin
to numb my throat

18.

— after June Jordan

this is the place where all the lives
are planted in my eyes. black things writhe
on the ground. red things gush from
volcanic gaseous tremblings/become blood and light
mountains of flesh raging toward rapturous seas
where crowns of trees inspired by flame extol the night

(my abysmal heart compels the moon compels
wave upon wave. compels reason)

the tombs are fertile with sacred
rememberings. the ancient rhymes. the
disasters of couplings. the turbulent blaze of
greed's agonies. shadows reaching for time and time
unraveling and undone

sky river mother — your tongue plunders my mouth

19.

faster harder
he moans to his imaginary lover

be wary of those who cannot read in bright light
those blinded smiles seem so enchanted so wise so kind
they show what they think they know of feeling yet
know nothing and do not believe that anything at all
can be felt. they rub up against flesh and map its
destiny with the swiftness and certainty of geometry. with
eager fists they translate cries into grammars of pleasure.
nightmares into treatises on desire. nowheres into
comfortable
finalities. their seduction the bookish cat which mauls the
flitting bird. beware the love-starved hands that twitch
beneath the table's philosophy. fingers like razors dismember
tenderness with mean-minded diatribes. eat every word

20.

by moonlight the lost is again found
he breaks and enters thru the upstairs window. divests the
dust of its treasures. awakes the ticking of a clock
gone mad. frightens the mirror into confessing

the intruder wields his pistol/invades her praline gloom
candles. incense. the radio's fever — a ballad for
the somber dreamer. black nylon and yellow toile
her voice is thick/dislocated from the beauty of her face

these are all the secrets i have, she shrieks. take them

he lowers the weapon. cautions. will do no harm. offers
his ears. she returns the tears to her eyes
there's no longer a need to call the authorities. his crime
has become an art of faith

21.

this den of grieving houses the apocryphon
in which he uncovers her/8x11-inch sheets tossed
in languid ritual of coauthorship. fingers claw his
portfolio, bookmark meaning in apian movement of
lines/eyes begging/schizophasia. phallic primacy — his
tongue surrounds her as he lowers his voice, enters
and subjugates her perfumed yet kinky vocabulary

all she utters is his name. repeatedly. then —
earth rumbles then tremors then quakes

she creates a new language of stilted breath/dzugu
jukes his ears only. between them coffee stained pages
burned and written and burned again. smoldering
in the aphotic archives of passionate mind

the lover of the poet eats the poet. comes

22.

“ ’twould be better,’ said the gypsy, “were you
from another country and not from their coal closet”
no one anoints me. i anoint myself with my own oil
purchased with my mad black lucre earned by the
grace of the blind

spotless hard swept and daily dusted. no visitors.
overhead the ceiling crackles/change riddles the fevered
white plaster/my wakings. vermin infest my politics. i
don’t function at the junction anymore. rage rots my
stomach. no resolve. something heavy and skeletal tugs
the boots from my man-sized feet. blue air chills
my feet. strange rings circle my feet

caffeine i cry. caffeine! and tear these tumors from
my glory like stones from a quarry

23.

— *after Akhmatova*

here’s to my ruined curbless urban psyche/the spent
tempest fleeing the golden rain of cruel day
wandering star-starved punched-out bleached-blind

here’s to the poison i greedily consume as sustenance
to the killer humdrum of my life without fulfillment
my love’s isolation, my nation and me — our bickerings

i drink the cold ugly of funky negro divas who
cast me down their death-dealing amused eyes
delighting in my writhing/castration/made numb
in this world — made brutal made coarse made jealous of
they who have usurped and commodified god

here’s to

my uncompromising vision and to the young blood who
tells me i carry the broom like a cross

24.

i’m on uptime/have no resting place/cannot rest
constant strive constant drive
getting into bed is an act of creation. i’m putting
on weight and hope with unequaled relish — trapped twixt
the
illusion of escape and the hallucination of release

i am the love wish of secret rapists/the men
who break before they enter
they fight to maintain the myths i die by
(when underthegun who has time to keep a war journal?)

in that blues pocket of need reed where sweet darkness
begins befogged in the snooze of mist, my legacy
the slave-soaked night wailings of misbegotten dreamers
beseeching the dead to rise once more — that fierce
hoodoo of humans consumed in the defiant flames of living



Judi
AT SPLAB
11/16/2000

