ForeWord Reviews

Song for Anninho
Gayl Jones
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Sometimes casting itself up among the clouds, sometimes caught in terse humidity, this long poem, a love song, rises and falls in "raw time."
With grace and clear vision, Jones moves effortlessly between the spiritual and the material, the past and the present, with a handful of voices now in unity, now in discord:

> *Hear the birds.*
> *They are making a racket, aren't they?*
> *They are all singing together.*
> *They are trying to sing in one voice,*
> *but one discordant voice,*
> *one voice with many variations.*

Well known for her fiction (The Healing, Mosquito, Corregidora, Eva's Man, White Rat), and for her scholarship, Jones now steps with agile feet into the realm of poetry. Song for Anninho offers to readers some of Jones? very best verse.

The poem is set in colonial Brazil, following the destruction of Palmares, the last of seven fugitive slave enclaves beset by the Portuguese. Amid the fight, flight and reenslavement of its inhabitants emerges the love story of Anninho and Almeyda, former African slaves. The song is sung by Almeyda searching the wells of her memory for her lover, Anninho, who has been killed. This love song rises out of a time where there was no time for love, making time, making a new voice where there was none: "I watched you put the seeds on a string for me. They were seeds that came from the meat of some fruit we had eaten. Some kind."

The poem is strung like beads on a necklace, it goes in circles, doubles back on itself, uses repetition to alter the meaning; it meditates. The song is also a song of healing, of making whole the several dismembered figures in the poem: Almeyda, who not only has been severed from her lover, but whose breasts have been cut off; Zumbi, whose head is served on a silver platter, and the mutilated woman who "did that thing to herself" so no man would have her.

Song for Anninho has an organic composition and is exquisitely crafted. The language is

subtle and mellifluous, with not a shard of sentimentality. These elements together make a new voice, a new song to heal the old wounds of persecution. Jones has created a tribute to a story which is generally known, but whose details have been lost to history.

Jennifer Sperry