

SOUL AIN'T: SOUL IS POEMS BY SARAH WEBSTER FABIO

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES FOR SOUL AIN'T SOUL IS.

Born in 1928 in Nashville, Tenn. she was one of six children of Thomas and Mayme Webster. She received a B.A. degree from Fisk University in 1946. She began writing poetry early—around 7 years old, and she was a member of a writers workshop during her college days at Fisk and had previously published some of her work. She received an M.A. degree in creative writing from San Francisco State College in 1965. In 1966, she joined Langston Hughes and other poets in a reading at the First World Festival of Negro Arts at Dakar, Senegal. She has read her poetry nationwide and is widely published.

Soul Ain't Soul Is is a collection which represents a wide range of poems, these cover a 10 year span of writing and lifelong experiencing. Poem structure, content and idiom of expression come together to give a pressing and, often, impressive image of "what it is." Although Sarah Webster Fabio has written poems for the fun of it since early childhood, and in later years composed poetry as self expression and artistic experimentation, these poems are from her mature years where she is most concerned with the craft of poetry, and with the spiritualism communicated by the poems in which she sees and tells it "like it is". This post sees poetry as voice, vision, spirit, time, image encapsulated into the poem a vessel for storing and permitting a communion of truth."

SOUL AIN'T: SOUL IS

And, Lord, Lord, who knows just a good feeling bad; one who knows what it's like to have been had with no doubt about it; one who knows the real reason for the blues is that, in this life, it's so damn hard to be for-real black. For more lifetimes than we care to count our souls have been sucked dry

by the funky beast who stays brutally on our case, keeping us off our god-given track, never letting us pay enough dues to get our righteous lost soul back. Soul in' with Lou is a trip or tightening up with Bell and the Drells, we've moaned too long with Ray. The blind can't teach the blind to see. So we'd better get on our jobs and

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"I am bearer of water, woodchewer's mother, prophet, poet, rival, lover; nymph, hag, kitten, bitch even I often can't tell exactly which."



PHOTO BY GROVER CLEVELAND OAKLAND POST NEWSPAPERS

This quote from the poem "Estrangement" notes the many faces, the multiplicity of roles that the contemporary woman of the 1970's is expected to handle with sophistication; and it also implies conflict and crisis of identity. Our poet, Sarah Webster Fabio, does not shy away from conflict, confrontation, crisis. She has an activist orientation and is a kindred spirit with a force such as that found in "A Mover". Motion, mobility, natural rhythm is what she is most about. Poetry is soul expression and craft, and she takes this calling seriously. Her poems range from reminiscent "Sassafras Toned, My Grandma"; the civil rights movement and race turbulence of "The Hurt of It All" to the transcendent love poems: "Echo of Rain", and "I Would Be For You Rain".

Soul is not a negative force for Sister Sarah Webster Fabio, it is the essence at the core of her being that makes her what she is as described in "My Own Thing." In the title poem, she tries to make this concept even clearer.

Professor of language and literature—special emphasis on Black language and literature, she has taught English in secondary schools of No. Calif. since 1960. During the mid 1960's she found herself at Merritt Jr. College, Oakland 1960 and later at The University of California, Berkeley pioneering in the field of Black Studies. She lectured coast-to-coast in this area. She combines teaching, homemaking, writing, and is the mother of five young adult offsprings.

find out how it bees sometimes with Nana when she croons. We've been flunking around too long. and still don't know whether to heading West with Duke and the Blazers over unknown peaks and or to go out on a "Trane kick—only to find, riff that he's out to blow our minds. or messing around with Richie Havens' mixed bag or catching yourself being plunged deep into that forever brand new, upright, cool bag

with that mighty man of soul, that James Brown cat. Being into something is feeling around with Aretia—"Miss Whole Lotsa Soul," while she belts away with gutsy punch where it hurts, letting you know how it feels to be Dr. Feelgood or his natural woman, demanding, commanding, R-E-S-P-E-C-T. After that you know you know what soul is and where's it's at; I mean you're into some sho-nuff tough, jelly-roll soul, that tells it like it is and leaves it where you find it

Sassafras Toned, My Grandma Sat Stolidly silent, like, 30 years past her promised three score and ten. Despair, depressions, death dismissed with a nod and whispered prayer, the Lord Giveth and taketh."

Her silences were broken usually with proverbs and metaphor.

"Pretty is as pretty does," was her favorite yardstick to squelch easy praise. Her words, so sparse, became precious: quarrels were beyond her, and having entered one, she soon gave the final word.

"Gonna lay down my sword and shield, down by the riverside,"

with all the sisters and all the fellows feeling mellow—just hanging in, letting it all hang out while digging it the most.

I'd play for
her, time and
time again,
on the pianos
of my
childhood.

Often,
I'd wonder how
she'd manage
that in
Tennessee
where rivers
were scarce
and was sure
she'd tripped
herself
into a
fatal
lie.

But, then,
when time
came snowing
down to
claim her
that winter,
she gave up
her world
in a quiet room
overlooking
the red clay
muddied
waters
of the
Cumberland.

THE HURT OF IT ALL

Ain't
nobody
heard me
singing
sweet songs
lately;
my sweet notes
soured
some time
ago—
raped,
robbed,
abandoned,
left rotting
in some
Southern
swill
which
stayed
too long
in the
Heart-of-
America
still,
turning
bad.
Ain't
nobody
heard me
singing
sweet songs
lately;
Where have
life's
sweet things
gone?
Flowers,
friends,
love and
tokens of love,
security,
beauty,
hope?
Nope.
nobody
seems to
know
where or
even when
all those
things,
those dreams,
those sentiments
we cherished
perished.

Otis Redding
had an
inkling of
this truth
while sitting
on the dock of
the bay, both
of us swaying
with Aretha
plumbing the
depths of
the black
race's soul,
voicing a
juju of our
visions;
shaking her
head sadly,
she said,
"ain't
no way."

Martin
tried to love,
tried to be
a drum Major
for peace,
but juxtaposed
on his deep,
resonant sound
of rolling drums
was the U.S.A.'s
shotgun blast of
apartheid, shattering,
blood spattering
his dreams, our
dreams and those
of his strong

Nina
Giving
Mr. Backlash
The Blues

for Nina Simone
(especially singing
Langston Hughes' "Mister
Backlash Blues")

Gonna
leave ya',
Mr. Backlash,
with all these
mean old dirty blues
ya' laid on the backs
of folk of the world--
Reds, Yellows, Browns, Blacks.

black, stoic
mother, prophet
father, four
brave and beautiful
youth and the
bronzed wonder
of his too-soon
widowed, devoted
wife--and all
of us blacks
poor in the
riches of
the world and
spirit.

Mahalia heaved
her deep bosom
and dropped a
tear on the
rough hewn
wooden bier,
crying a cop-out
plea, straining
beyond the trials
of the earth
and the veils of
hate and scorn,
reaching toward
other worldness
from a soul weary
voice, gutted with
despair, "Precious
Lord, take my hand
lead me on."

Where we
gonna go, Mahalia.
Don't toll the bell
heralding for our
folk an eternity of
hell in the beast's
Wahalia.

Gonna
tell ya'
where its at
so that ya' can't
hide from the truth.
And, yo' funky gifts
we're giving them
right on back to ya'--
War games
like Vietnam
maiming and killing
our youth; raised taxes,
fixed wages, second-class
houses and schools;
closed doors, no jobs,
being treated like
second-class fools.

Giving ya'
sleepless nights
about that centuried-old trip
with nothing but
white backlash,
burning salt on sears
left by slavers whip.

Yeah! Gonna
fix you
a wanga
stuffed with all that rot.
Gonna
pull from my old voodoo bag
the heaviest spell
I've got.

Gonna
lay it on ya'
till you've paid
your dues.
But 'till then,
Mr. Backlash,
gonna
leave yo'
with the blues.

A Five-Year Old Scream
Breaking Through The Night

For Imamu Ameer Baraka
(written in 1968 for LeRoi Jones)

Screamer,
from way back
you and Lynn and
his horn and that
funky Newark crowd
were grinding, stomping,
making the perverted
hopes of a black ghetto
possible, immediate,
sensual, wailing your
riot-torn hearts out,
crushing them beneath
swaying heels moving
across the sawdust
strewn floor--shadow lit.

A fragment, a creature
born in the figment
of your imagination,
a hero of what could
therefore what would be;
this screamer and the
scream now becomes one
and fills the silence
of your lonely cell.

The note was blown
and its scent of despair
aroused the poor, those

Those honkers screams
erasing everything;
the new form being
only the length of
the stomp and the
howl, that screamed
riff of man and horn
and listener filled
with hate and frustration.
wild ones who had not
already been choked
to death, and they
climb aboard the
Night Train, grinding,
rubbing, dragging
slow-like behind them
their stunted heads.

Newark-- home of the
finger poppers, the
hippies, the hipsters
who walked their walks
talking that talk; they
were cooking even before
the turbaned Lynn turned
Pied Piper and led those
Biggers away from the
prisons of their ghettos
toward the clear image
of their beings.

Hucklebucking into the
wasted city, they let
the oppressors lindy hop
out but the Nabs were
there before the Bugaloo
and the bottles and
guns and razors gleamed
while Splivs floated
by in the gutters
and already you were
screaming, screaming,
screaming.

The calendar is
prophesy as much as
memory; the dead lecturer
touched the scream that
soured your song as you
looked out from inside
the one who hated you
and watched in the
compromise of silence
your own death.

It was you who said
you were a man "Publicly
redefining each change
in my soul, as if I had
predicted them"; and,
of course, you know now
you did. We are still no
closer to the question
you posed:
When they say, "It is Ro'
who is dead," I wonder
who will they mean?

Screamer, scream
While you are here,
scream in your pure
black rage, whoever you are
your black and beautiful
brothers and sisters
feel, taste the blood
of the sound that,
in their deep souls,
tell them that they,
too, are screamers--
Bloods, Splivs....
Bloodletting Nabs....
faggoty judges.....
kangaroo courts.....
Orisha, save us...
Shango....Obatala!

Cross-fire

by Sarah Webster Fabio

Bombs
of Birmingham
that broke
those small
Black bodies
ignite,
afresh, explosions
the explosions
in Watts.

Malcolm's
corpse bleeds again
in the riddled
mosque of the
Muslims, and

limelighted,
those bloodless bones dug up
deep in the
heart of
Mississippi,

Turn up,
again and again in the dog's
jaw of our
alleys.

Battle weary,

the nevers and
Evers, heartlessly
hosed,
riot,

drop fast,
in the fronts
of store-laden,
city streets.

Dialogue Between Two
Messengers of Peace...

For Leopold Sedar Senghor

It is your voice
that whispers,
"Time To Go,"
and opens my
eyes to the
rites of Spring; and,
it is your eyes--
gazing deep into
the No-world
euphoria of
New York--which
sparks in me
a plumed and
pupiled passion
for uptown sights.
You are right.
Mermaids serve
no need here in
the City, but
welcome still
are rainbows.

It is your ears--
with pulsing beat
and sundown furor--
which translate
night sounds into
language for
sleepwalkers; and
I am aroused.
My land, also, is
at home with drums--
our abysses are
brimmed with
endless choked
drumbeats.

Your hand reaching
for mine tells me
yours is a lover's
heart (protesting
all the while your
estrangement, while
yet unweaned, from
the dusky lovesome
breasts of Dakar)
and I marvel at
this love which
still holds you
to your firm
resolve.

And when Saints go marching in, that
trip'd be a bummer,
if Black folk checked it out and you
weren't in that number.

H E L L -----
O, Dolly, we gotta know whose calling
shots
Dealing out those cards to the haves/
have nots,
Jazz is life to you. Jazz is Art.

Louis, Louis, Louis, Louis,
we gotta know right now
Louis, Louis, Louis, Louis,
befo' you go right now.
Saint Louis Louis, Saint
Louis Louis
you gotta go right now
Saint Louis, Saint Louis
Go Man, Go right now.
Blow, Man, blow right now.
Blow on out of
this
world.

For Mary Washington,
A Black Woman

MY OWN THING

Like this
hand-sized
bit of
driftwood—
sanded, beaten,
reshaped,
straying from
its roots
in some distant
corner of
the world—
I stand.

Always
at the mercy
of the elements—
weather, tide,
currents,
who can but
wonder that
both of us
would lose
our once
pure
form.

But,
like it,
I have now
become
my own thing.

And like this
gnarled shape,
yet with
a balanced,
graceful line—
hard, rough,
still radiating
life—
I have, too
retained
the spark,
that grain

I pick it up,
this driftwood,
this thing
another man
might toss
aside as waste.
I pick it up,
this mojo
working its
magic, this
divining stick
and really dig
the power
that it brings
because
it
is my own
thing.

Louis, Louis, Louis, Louis,
You gotta go right now.
Saint Louis, Saint Louis,
You gotta go right now.

Go on, my man,
move on up a little higher.
Yeah, you heard me say say
Satchmo.
Giant among peers, genius,
gentleman
Yo' greatness didn't come 'cause
God gave you
a generous dental plan;
far more than the teeth in yo'
smile was what
made you catch so.
Pame's a hungry bitch but you
had bread enough
to buy her.
So Saint Louis, move on up.

Jazz was yo' art. Jazz was yo' life.
Graveled voice, groveling,
groping from
the day you were born,
asking no quarters, being man
among men;
taking the lows, the downers,
the blue
making them hi-life,
taking weary-hearted Blacks
all the way
back home,
back, back to Mother Africa,
back where
we come from,
back to the natal cord,
the tie broken
by Slavery's knife,
back to Beale St., the
Mississippi bottom,
New Orleans,
leatherin' yo' lips--Satchel
mouth,
working the voodoo of yo'
horn.
Jazz was yo' art. Jazz was yo' life.

Saint Louis Louis, Saint
Louis, Louis,
You gotta go right now,
Saint Louis, Louis, Saint
Louis, Louis,
You gotta go right now.

Go on, my man,
take your throne on high,
take your place among the
immortal host,
do your thing forever,
world without end,
as long as music lives in
the memories of men.
You who took earth, life,
soul, scarred lips
and wind
and blew forth Jazz,
as much course as boast
Scoped music in noise,
truth in lie.
Saint Louis keep a movin' on.

Jazz is yo' life. Jazz is yo' art.
Yo' birth turned on the
Twentieth Century
Like an age come with the
wind, you've
gone with the wind,
and in between, you blew
and mastered
the voice of the wind,
and through your music
made the life of
mankind a little more free.

But, how can you,
with burning fervor,
earnestly proffer
this binding balm
and, at the same
time, with hemlock,
avenge your father's
death? Speak to me
again. There is
so much of God and
man that I cannot
understand.

I am awake now
with quick questions
that somehow must be
answered now.
Where can I go but
to you for them?
Suppose God is black?
And we, of course,
must suppose as any
other man our
reflections in
god-like visage.

Was it some
Mephistophelian racket
with a purgatorial
payoff that betrayed
our innocence?
And if so, is this
to say that this
world is all
the hell that
we shall ever
really know?

Black World

For Louis Armstrong, Ju-Ju

Louis, Louis, Louis, Louis,
You gotta go right now,
Louis, Louis, Louis, Louis,
You gotta go right now.

Go on, my man,
move on up a little higher,
you've blown all the trumpet
that any one man can do on earth.
You've made music, shed mirth;
you've paid dues any way you hump it.
Fortune's a gambler's purse;
coins made you buyer.
So, go on, my man, take yo' rest.

Jazz was yo' art. Jazz was yo' life.
From waif to world impresario,
you
befo' there were jets, rockets to the
moon,
you entered the Cosmos on notes
blown
from yo' horn:
got yo' SOUL in minor key
befo' you
were born,
like a mojo, turned the blues
of yo'
life into a Black tune,
yo' sef into a thing of beauty
and
envy, the heavy way
you singed it.
Jazz was art to you. Jazz was life.

I Would Be For You Rain

Sarah Webster Fabio

I would be for you rain,
yet, might bring into your
life, again, the storm;
summer days exact their dues:
troubled skies bring earth greener
hues. Lightning flashes through
the heavy air, rending it with
blinding light and thunderous
swells which press against the
inner drums of my still ears.

Have you forgotten
the grace of having witness
rain about your face, of
watching greenness sprout,
bursting through the earth
beneath your mudcaked feet?

And for as far as the eye
can see lush fields abound,
and rainbows span the distant
hills.

I would be for you rain;
insistent, persistent, yet
intermittent. Too much
would swell the nearby waters,
flood your fruitladen fields,
laying them to waste. And,
drought has kinder hands.

Life stirs to be born again.
The waters usher in flowers
and grain. I would be for you
rain.

Sarah Webster Fabio

Echo
of Rain

the rain
falls fast
pattering
on the green
turf outside
my window
like remembered
footsteps
rushing to
my side,
drives home
the empty
places
occasioned
by the loss
of you;

awakes me
in the dark
hours of my
loneliness, and,
in tor-
ment of
you I flood over,
bathing me
with tender
longing;

and, then,
the rain
is gone;
the sun
comes up, the
scatters and
clouds and
clears my
room of
your haunting
presence.

In the quiet
moist air
and stirring
wind there
remains only
the echo of
rain falling
and the feel
of what it is
to love and
to be
loved.

To Turn from Love

No.
I cannot
turn from love,
in affirmation,
with measured
finesse, like some
dull fuzzed cocoon
metamorphosing into a
bright-winged butterfly,
a light-brown bud
transforming, with
sunburst halo, into
a chrysanthemum,
a five-o'clock
blossoming, with
daily gusto, into
full bloom.

No.
if I must,
turn from love,
it will be with
the cadence of an
addict flinging poppy
from tremorous grasp
while retched with
the effort of breaking
the habit, or a
gravedigger turning
daisy-filled clouds
on a fresh made
bed.

For My People, A Jubilee

For Margaret Walker

Something
all our own--

you saw as
our great need
beyond
bread and shoes
and land and
money--
a history,
a past and
future, of
a day of
glory
all our own;
and when
you asked
yourself,
"What am I
to give for
my people?"
you gave
a Jubilee.

For Black people
who sang their
slave songs, dirges,
ditties, blues
and jubilees
and prayed
their long nights
prayers from
Rumpart Street
to Lenox Avenue
and 47th Street
who tried and tired
of trying to
fashion "a better
way from "
confusion,
but who remained
Believers
in spite of
whip and lariat
and bayonet
and being preyed
on by "facile force
of state" and
"false prophet."

A Jubilee
heralding
the new world
aborning
into a beauty
of healing
and strength
and caring
and knowing
and understanding.

Yes.
We have been
Believers
and you Give
us faith in
our great
belief.
you who give
your love
and sweat
and tears
and blood
and life
For My People.

For Gwen With Love

an anthology by Johnson Publishers

Bronzeville Breakthrough

For Gwendolyn Brooks,
Poet Laureate, Illinois

by Sarah Webster Fabio

Real.
Cool.
The Real
thing
We are
And you--
giving us
the courage
to be
real
while we
grow
steadily
strong,
beaneating
with Sadie
and Maud,
De Witt Williams,
and those
nameless
Black
heroes.

Growing
stronger,
Oakener,
with you
and those
Oakener
each day
like
reeds
tossed
in life/death
by the
furious
winds of
our times--
always
the tempest
for us, the few
who are
not afraid
of "No."
a breakthrough
into
Yes.

What you
gave was
beauty.
Black beauty.
You saw
the beauty
of the Sundays
of Satin Legs
and all
his put-ons
of lotion, and
lavender and
pine oil--
those styles
and scents
and ego feats,

those necessary
trips in
compensation
for those
Oh-so-many
put-downs,
deprivations
flowing
bitter
from too-scant
mother's milk,
too few desserts,
too many butt
spanks, grumpy,
bumpy-mattressed
sleep
of cold-wintered
starless
nights.
Yes, give
Satin Legs
his senses
and his scents
soul meats at
"Joe's Eats".
Give him back
his jazz and
his sculpture
and his art.

Being.
Just being,
in the squalor
of our world
and time,
Nothing
but a plain
Black boy
is deserving
of a purple
heart
for valor
and remembrance
with the lean
face indelibly
impreinte on
our walls of
R-E-S-P-E-C-T.

And Trouble
in Bronzeville,
in the Mecca,
in South Side
Kitchenettes,
comes stalking
dead-end streets,
unannounced by
"gold-flecked
beautiful banner."
Trouble is
The Washerwoman's
blues,
Staggerlee's
Stormy Monday
Blues,
The Lonesome
Blues, The
Weary Blues,
the low-down-
funky-bring-'em-
right-on-down-
to-the-real-
nitty gritty
blues.

Tea
is nothing

more than
tea: and
there ain't
no bread and
Life is the
Supreme
effort of
paying one's
dues on a
day-to-day
credit plan,
trying to
live,
trying to dodge
those
deathly
games
fixed
by the man.
Black chaos
hawked in the
windy grays
of hopeless days,
One mother bends,
kissing her
stilled
"killed boy"
and another
and another
and another
enter
the womanhood
throwing
parting kisses
of goodbye
to early
killed dreams,
vacant lots,
abortions
which are
not so soon
forgotten
by the mother.

And yet.
And yet
we must
forget and
forget and
begin
to
Be,
now.

And
in the end
as it was
before
so many
blindingly
bleak
times before,
we find a
job that's
just begun.
For only
the likes
of you, late
at this late
hour,
can show
us how to be,
Be
Cool
Real
Cool
Be Real.
Cool.