

[Malcolm Cash]

Thank you and welcome.

You knew him. For a lifetime, he walked the streets of Lorain in a circle.

And as you watched his beautiful face, containing the memory of a people in struggle. A child was being born in Birmingham, Alabama in 1934. Yes, in 1963, a misnamed man put a bomb on the steps of a black church and killed four little girls. And today, we remember this. How?

We remember it through the power and passion and wisdom and love of memory made whole by the word, by the writer. Today, we come to honor a most extraordinary writer. In celebrations of the gift and love of Miss Toni Morrison, we bring her sister writer, Miss Sonia Sanchez, to share her own love with us.

We bring a woman of the South, a woman of the spirit, a warrior for justice and freedom for black people throughout the world. Any true writer loves the world, and to reach the inner texture and full dimensions of the world at its center, the writer must search and explore the heart of the single individual and give us a joyful and painful glimpse of our national soul. The writings and political activism of today's speaker, Miss Sonia Sanchez, is a great testament and witness to the clarion call of love and action to change the world for black people and for all people.

Miss Sanchez, on behalf of the citizens of Lorain County, of the Lorain Public Library, of all your readers, for all community activists, for our dear wandering man, Smiley, for your fellow sister writer, and for those four little children from your city who are still with us, on behalf of all of us, I thank you for coming to share this monumental event with us with a special reading room dedication for Miss Toni Morrison. We look forward to your words of grace, and again, thank you.

(applause)

[Sonia Sanchez]

As you can see, how tall I am. (laughter)

Good afternoon, and I say good afternoon to my brothers and sisters, all of you. Good morning, Toni.

The gods call out to you this afternoon, my sister. As you return home, ayoyoyoyoyoyoyoyo, the gods know you have returned home.

Olokun, olokun, olokun, olokun, olokun, olokun, olokun.

Open the morning nets to receive her.

I was born in Birmingham, Alabama, where many of the women were mothers and servants. The men worked by chance, casual laborers, or in companies like my grandfather, Wilson L. Driver, who worked at the American Cast Iron Pipe Company. As pipes came out,

he tagged them with a number. And my grandmother, Elizabeth Driver, was a domestic and housewife and head deaconess in the Amy's Zion Church.

We live within the shadow of overt racism and discrimination, within the shadow of black folk, at the mercy of the police, merchants, families, and government. Our relation to food, God, the courts, were influenced daily by these forces. I say this because I believe George Lyman's definition of culture is quite comprehensive and clean. Culture is the means whereby people feed themselves and the ways in which they experience their existence. And Sister Toni Morrison has supplied us with this evidence with her words.

A dominant class, exclusively white, laid the foundation of a cultural force that would influence all our lives. It was the ideology of racism, a morality whose guiding light was the aristocracy of the skin. Black, a commodity for cheap labor, fight was the symbol and source of authority. So, the struggle for freedom and identity against this system has influenced the imagination and creativity of many writers.

So therefore, it is an honor for me to come to Lorain, Ohio, to speak about a great black woman writer, a woman who has named us, given us identity, a cultural bearer, a writer who touched the part of our whole, who has portrayed sisters and brothers erect in their blackness, moving imperfectly, voices nasal against distinguished actors, erect in their beloved deaths.

Shadrach, Shadrach,

Lead us into your temptation.

Turn the day black,

Let the day catch fire,

possess their hands filled with madness

Until they destroy the tunnels, the tunnel visions.

The tunnel was alive with water, water,

Water with legs, and water with legs,

And how far away the sky was that day.

So much water walking us towards death.

high above the sky is blue.

Below the water is singing death.

So much life coursing through her pages, Toni.

So many vacancies filled by her eyes, Toni.

Listen, listen, listen,

Toni, Toni, Toni Morrison,

Daughter of Lorain, daughter of Africa,

Daughter of America,

The world,

The universe,

*Author of *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, *Tar Baby*, *Beloved*, *Jazz*, *Playing in the Dark*, *Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, *Race-ing Justice*, *En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality**

Listen, listen, listen, Miss Toni, recipient of both the National Book Critics Circle Award and the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award for *Song of Solomon*, the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the Robert F. Kennedy Award for *Beloved* and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993.

Listen, listen, listen, gentle persons, gentle sister. I come to you this afternoon with two voices.

I come to praise this lady, this woman, this genius, this holy woman, this weave of words threading silver and gold into our veins. I come with the voice of the praiser. I come with the voice of the poet.

I come to you to praise this woman who gave us her eyes in a moment of sudden love and we shine, shine, become perennial.

Ay-yo-yo, yo-yo-yo-yo, yo-yo-yo-yo-yo. Ay-yo-yo-yo-yo

She comes, she comes, she comes, carrying our thirst in her mouth.

She comes, she comes, coming out from Lorain, Ohio. You rose up to tell our story, our narratives. You piloted us into the slow bloodstream of America. We tagged behind, walking on our tiptoes, heard your words like jazz, like spirituals, agitating, keeping us on the edge.

Something underneath your skirt, huh, woman, huh? You lady of first and last rights and we became small miracles. It was the good times you wrote about with eyes like stars and we saw our villages, neighborhoods breathing in our own noise.

You gave us the still air, the Ajax stars, the unaccented Charlies accenting their daughters' flesh. We observed ourselves in an unfamiliar city where we returned as birth, blood, water, death. We became traveling men, turning corners, moving like black trains across the country, landless men, immortal in our moving, living with nothing and dying from everything.

And you gave us early names, Miss Toni, twirling your emerald lariat. You named us Pecola and Claudia and Pauline and Sula and Eva and Hannah and Mel. You made us figure out the evil in good, the good in evil.

Taught us who we was really missing in our lives.

Oh, Lord, oh, Lord, Sula.

Oh, Lord, Sula.

girl, girl, girl, girl, girl.

You wanted the right of any man.

Oh, Lord, Janie Mae, Janie Mae.

Oh, Lord, Janie Mae,

Girl, girl, girl.

You wanted the right of the first tongue. Love and practice is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love and dreams, said a Russian writer. I know you fed us all.

I was talking about something else like, like, like playing with us.

Did you ever, you know, play with us?

Have we played, can we play?

Do we know how to play?

Have I been loved, loved, loved?

How to love?

How to love?

How to love?

After slavery, enslavement, harsh treatment.

How to love,

How to love,

How to love,

Man, woman?

How to stamp pay on our lives?

How to be a man,

A man,

A man?

And how to ferry Vashti from the silence,

The young master's hand.

All through the day,

The birds have been singing.

Breasts, all through the day,

The birds have been singing.

Colors, her breasts flowering

Under another man's hands.

How to be a woman,

A woman,

A woman?

All through the day, I hear the sound of master,

Mistress, the cries of Vashti,

A creamy name in an unholy place.

And years pass and she is home.

Vashti to the queen's name.

Home from an unfriendly year,

But she is still yours, Joshua.

The taking of her from you didn't make her less yours.

The master cannot dehumanize you unless you cooperate.

She still looks like the dawn

And you are still the evening sun.

Joshua put the battle of Jericho,

Jericho,

Jericho.

Joshua put the battle of Jericho

And the walls come a-tumbling down.

You, you, you, Miss Toni, have offered up gifts like Joshua, like Seth, like Paul D.

You, you, Miss Toni, have told us of the sacrifices and our dues done, been paid, been paid off. We don't owe nobody nothing but ourselves, ourselves.

Not to look at each other like the slave masters. Hey, Pauline, no secondary consciousness here. No looking at that black man secondarily through the eyes of the master.

Hey, Pauline, Pauline,

no looking at yourself secondarily

through the eyes of your mistress.

Give you an upstreet like Jean.

Holla, girl, girl, girl, girl, girl, girl.

Go look at yourself primarily.

Hey, Bottom.

Hey, Bottom.

Hey, black townspeople.

Money won't buy us love or freedom.

Let us be moral with each other.

How to love,

How to love,

How to love.

Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha.

Ha ha ha ha, oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, hee,  
hee, hee, hee, hee, hee, hee

I'm, I, I, I, I, I, I, I, I, I am,

Hee, hee, hee, hee, hee

I was, I am,

I was,

I am, I am,

I was, I was,

I am, I am, I, ah, ah, ah, ahh

It was, it was,

It was the coming,

It was the coming that was bad.

It was, it was the coming

Across the ocean that was bad.

It was the coming,

It was the coming that was bad.

It was,

It was,

It was,

It was the packing,

The packing,

The packing,

The packing of all of us

In ships that was bad.

It was the packing,

It was the packing,

It was the packing of all of us

In ships that was bad.

It was the coming, it was the coming,

It was the crossing, it was the crossing,

It was the crossing, it was the crossing,

It was the crossing, that was bad,

It was.

The raping, that was bad,

It was.

The raping, that was bad,

It was.

The raping,

The raping,

It was,

It was,

It was.

The raping, that was bad,

It was.

The silence,

The the the the the noise,

The the the the the silence,

The the the the the noise,

The the the the the silence,

The the the the the noise,

The the the the the silence,

The the the the the noise,

The the the the the silence,

The the the the the noise,

The the the the the silence,

The the the the the noise.

It was, it was, it was, it was.

Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah.

I am, I am, I am, I am, I am,

I was, I was, I was, I was, I was,

It it it it it was, it was the boat,

It was the boat,

It was the ship,

It was the ship,

It was the landing that was bad,

It was the landing that was bad,

It was the landing that was bad

It was,

It was,

It was,

It was the standing,

The standing of ocean blood that was bad,

It was the standing of ocean blood that was bad

Don't,

Don't,

Don't,

Don't,

Don't

Don't ,

Don't,

Don't touch me,

Don't,

Don't,

Don't

Don't touch me,

Don't

Don't

Don't

Don't touch me

Don't

Don't

Don't

Don't touch me

Please, please, please, please, please

Olokun, olokun, olokun, olokun, olokun, olokun, olokun.

Ay-yo-yo, yo-yo-yo-yo, yo-yo-yo-yo-yo. Ay-yo-yo-yo-yo-yo

It was

It was

It was the standing

Standing

Standing

That was bad

It was

It was

It was

It was the giving birth

That was bad

It was the giving birth

That was bad

Every nine months

Every nine months

Every nine months

Every nine months

Every nine months

Every nine months

Every nine months

I am,

I am,

I am,

I am,

I am,

I was,

I was

I was,

I shall be,

I shall be,

I am,

I am,

I was,

I shall be,

I was,

I am

I am

I was

I am

I am

I am

Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oooooohhhhhh,

Mama,

Mother,

Mother,

Madre,

Mama,

Mama,

Mama,

Mama,

Ma,

Father,

Father,

Dada,

Dada,

Baba

Baba,

Father,

They know not what they do here

Do they,

Do they,

Do they,

You want to know who I am, huh?

You want to know who I am, huh?

You want to know who I am,

Can't you see who I am, huh?

Don't you know who I am, huh?

Can't you see who I am,

I am,

I am,

I am,

I am,

I am,

I am,

I am.

What?

What, where?

Where are you?

Where are you?

Where, what?

There you are,

There you are looking at me.

Thought I lost you.

There you are, Beloved,

Looking at me,

Looking at me,

Looking at me,

Looking at me.

Oh my God.

I'm looking at you.

You are looking at me

You're looking at me

Looking at you

Looking at me

Looking at me

Whatever

I remember

I forget

Whatever I forget

I remember

Whatever I don't want to remember

I forget

Whatever I want to forget

I remember

I remember

I remember

I remember

It is there

Here

There

Here

There

There love love love

What is it love love

I don't know no no

You know we know

We are the love that you remember

It was the coming

It was the coming that was bad

It was the coming that was bad

Across oceans.

It was the coming, coming, coming,

Loving, loving,

Coming, dying,

Living, killing,

Dying, living,

Dying, living,

Dying, killing,

Coming, coming, dying,

Living, living, living,

Living, living,

How to live, live,

How to live, live,

How to live, live,

Live, live, live

Live, live, live

Live, live, live

Live, live, live

Live, live, live

Live, live, live

Live, live, live

Live, live, live

Live, live, live

Live, live, live

How to live,

How to live,

If we live like Miss Toni Morrison,

Miss Toni Lady,

Miss Morrison.

If we live, we live,

Live, live like Miss Lady,

We will learn how to live

And to love

And to live

And to be

And to live

And to live

And to love, love, love.

(applause)