

Copper Woman And Other Poems

Afua Cooper

Natural Heritage Books, Toronto, ON, 2006

Afua Cooper's fifth book of poetry *Copper Woman And Other Poems* combines history and art to tell a story expressed through emotion and thought. The writing creates a message for readers, emphasizing the importance of humanistic thought and the possibilities for change. By presenting and incorporating various themes, Cooper both describes and reveals the history relating to her Afro-Caribbean origins and events and circumstances evident in the world today. As one of Canada's pioneers of the rhythmic form on dub poetry, Cooper has remained true to the style of spoken word and rhythm to explore issues of a social and political nature, both in the past and present.

The collection of poems is divided into five parts with each containing poems similar in theme. The result provides not only a range of topics but also numerous interpretations of a single issue. Cooper calls for the reader to develop greater insights and understanding of both the present and the past. She manages to contrast opposing feelings and experiences to present a story or picture from various angles. For example, the topic of slavery is depicted through the eyes of a child too afraid to speak, as well as from the vantage point of Cooper's own ancestors fighting to attain freedom from injustice.

The themes of survival, remembrance and spirituality among others, are unveiled in Cooper's exploration and description of her own life and that of her ancestors. Her writing presents her views on the possibility that through remembrance and understanding one can learn to facilitate change, which would build a society based on humanism and tolerance, thereby reducing inhumanity. The themes of rebirth, remembrance and history are evident in the poem entitled "Negro Cemeteries" which describes Black cemeteries surfacing with ancestors "demanding we remember them, insisting we reveal their history, All over Ontario." This poem was the result of a past visit by Cooper to Grey County, specifically the Old Durham Road Black Pioneer Cemetery, near Priceville.

Themes expressed culminate to create a sense of wholesomeness. Cooper places particular emphasis on the remembrance of women. She describes the experiences of women as warriors, as victims of slavery, as mothers and as daughters. This theme is closely connected to that of spirituality and rebirth. Cooper explores themes of peace, sexuality, creation, love and happiness, and their capacity to offer sustenance and security. These ideas are juxtaposed with themes and ideas relating to injustice, both past and present, and to current social and political issues. Cooper examines the turmoil of here and now; daily threats of violence, discord and acts of inhumanity.

Cooper provokes the reader to question the past, the current situation and the need to create change. She may provide some answers, but more importantly Cooper poses questions for us to ponder. Cooper's poems are described in her own words in the poem, "Daily Bread," thusly; "dark-earthed poems emerge from the blood and bones of our memory." This poignant collection evokes feeling and allows one to gain a

greater understanding of the poet, her Afro-Caribbean heritage and her illumination of the present. Whether spoken aloud or read to one's self, *Copper Woman and Other Poems* can provide an enjoyable and insightful experience.



Nora Milne