

African American Writers of North Carolina, From New Sensation Stephanie Powell Watts Back to George Moses Horton

by Margaret D. Bauer, Editor

I have been thrilled by the enthusiastic reception to our 2019 special feature topic, which inspired more submissions than we've ever received, including four interviews. I knew as soon as I heard an NPR interview with Stephanie Powell Watts that I wanted an interview with her for this issue, and I thank DeLisa Hawkes and Maia Butler for taking on this assignment. Thanks too to Jennifer Larson, who accepted my invitation to interview Jason Mott. And finally, thanks to Lisa Sarasohn and George Hovis for proposing interviews with Glenis Redmond and Randall Kenan, respectively. As it turned out, while Lisa and Glenis were working on their interview, the poet had four poems selected as finalists in the 2018 James Applewhite Poetry Prize competition, including one for third place. That one and another are here; read the other two in *NCLR Online* 2019. And about the time that George was interviewing Randall, we received the news that Randall would be a 2018 inductee into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame (read about that too in the online issue).

I want to express special thanks to L. Teresa Church, one of the poets featured in these pages, who helped us to spread the word of our 2018 competitions through the Carolina African American Writers' Collective (read her essay on the Collective in *NCLR* 2016). I certainly hope that the writers who discovered *NCLR* through Teresa's prompting will continue to submit in years to come. I was pleased to match three of the finalist titles with Teresa's name. One appears here, the other two in *NCLR Online* 2019. We thank Amber Flora Thomas for selecting the 2018 Applewhite Prize winners and for sharing three of her North Carolina poems with us. Finally among the poetry you will read in the pages to come is another familiar name I was pleased to unveil as a finalist: Kevin Dublin, who served as an editorial assistant when he was a graduate student at ECU several years ago.

More literary scholars than usual responded to this issue's call for submissions, and the seven essays published here offer a variety of critical

perspectives on African American writers. Patrick Horn takes a biographical, intertextual approach, examining George Moses Horton's relationship (it's complicated) with his writing patron, Carolina Lee Hentz, while Justin Williams reads Horton poems from a political perspective. Ashley Burge provides a feminist/gendered critical analysis of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Trudier Harris examines Charles Chesnutt's conjure stories under a contemporary cultural studies lens, while Jennifer Harding takes a more reader response approach to the writer, providing an overview of his oeuvre within her own pilgrimage to pay homage to him. Francine L. Allen applies her interest in literature and religion to introducing a little-known 1980s novel by C. Eric Lincoln. And Jessica Cory applies ecocritical theory to Stephanie Powell Watts's novel *No One Is Coming to Save Us*.

I will add that Jennifer Harding's Chesnutt essay "Looking for Charles" received second place in the 2018 Alex Albright Creative Nonfiction Prize competition. And Patrick Horn's essay on Horton and Hentz was selected for the premiere John Ehle Prize, which *NCLR* established with Press 53 to honor the writer's memory. Thanks go to Terry Roberts for serving as the judge this year, choosing from essays accepted for publication whose subjects are writers who have not been given the critical attention they deserve.

We also thank the North Carolina Arts Council, which awarded *NCLR* a grant that provided honoraria to writers featured in this issue. This funding also contributed to our ability to attend more events than usual so as to host our writers at bookstore readings, to sell subscriptions at literary festivals to make sure their writing is read, and always, to tell other writers about what it is we do in our pages: preserve the rich literary history of our talented state.

And finally, speaking of talent, thank you to all of the artists and art sources who allowed us to complement the African American literature of North Carolina with work by many of the state's African American artists. ■