

“The last ghost is always the lies that are told”:

An Interview with Khalisa Rae Thompson

by Maia L. Butler

Khalisa Rae Thompson, a poet, performer, and organizer originally from the Midwest now resides in Durham, North Carolina. She attended the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) before transferring to North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (NC A&T) for her bachelor’s degree. She later earned her MFA from Queens College. She has published her work in such venues as *Frontier Poetry*, *Electric Literature*, *iamb Poetry*, *Florida Review*, *Hypertext Review*, and *Southern Humanities Review* and is also a contributing writer and editor for *Catapult*, *Autostraddle*, *Lit Hub*, *B*tch Media*, *Black Girl Nerds*, as well as *The LA Times*, *Washington Post*, and *NBC OUT*. Her writing has won awards from the *Southern Humanities Review* and *Rainbow Reads* and has received the Bright Wing Poetry Prize, White Stag Poetry Prize, Gwendolyn Brooks Prize, and *Voicemail Poems Poetry Prize*. She founded Athenian Press in Wilmington, North Carolina, and regularly facilitates workshops and courses virtually for *Catapult*. She has taught classes in English at Cape Fear Community College, Elon University, Davidson Community College, St. Augustine’s University, and she directed the writing center at Shaw University. Her husband, Eric Thompson, is also a poet; they met through the slam poetry community.

In her childhood years, Thompson witnessed abuse in her family, and she experienced racism in her schools, and these experiences would influence her creative concerns with silences and secrets – ghosts that continue to haunt – that young Black women are encouraged to keep. In her college years, she encountered racism on the campus of UNCW, a predominately white institution, and felt deeply the lasting effects of the 1898 coup d’état and race massacre, which Wilmington is still coming to terms with. Her experiences during this time led her to transfer out to finish school elsewhere, but she still felt a pull to the city, a desire to return to teach and run community arts initiatives, specifically to challenge the lack of diversity she had perceived when she was there. She and her husband did move to Wilmington after she completed her MFA but ultimately relocated in Durham for



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