

prose volumes, *Lesser Evils: Ten Quartets*. The last poem in the first portion is about death, finishing with the book's title line, "Who will know us when we breathe through the grass?"

The second set of verses contains sixteen pieces that are just as serious in nature as those in the first, yet here the poet occasionally deals with lighter matters. "Target Practice," for example, describes an afternoon two boys spend shooting rifles at cans and bottles. Soto's skillful hands make the poem spring to life so the reader hears the reports of the guns, senses the fear of the canine companion, and smells the gunpowder. The poetic voice returns often to more serious themes. In "Learning My Lesson," the young narrator first comprehends danger and death. "Small Town with One Road" is a reflection on what life would have been like if a person who makes his living with "only words" had instead been forced to work outdoors and with his hands, "a hard life where the sun looks."

The third division has a few more personal poems, especially in that the reader familiar with Soto's entire corpus of prose and poetry will sometimes be on familiar ground. "Our Days" is a family portrait of Saturday activities and "Evening Walk" describes a man and his daughter's shared outing. But the voice persistently returns to a thread running throughout *Who Will Know Us?*--death--as it does in the final section "Ars Poetica, or Mazatlan on a Day When Bodies Wash to the Shore." In *Who Will Know Us?* Soto once again demonstrates that he is both technically and thematically a highly-skilled poet. Gary Soto's previous work is excellent and praiseworthy, but his latest collection contains poetry that is brilliant, resonant, lucid, highly evocative, and immensely satisfying.

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**Jon Michael Spencer. *Sacred Symphony: The Chanted Sermon of the Black Preacher*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987) xvi, 160 pp., \$29.95.**

In his latest book to date, *Sacred Symphony: The Chanted Sermon of the Black Preacher*, Spencer states in the introduction that there are seven musical elements that make up the "chanter sermon" and these include melody, rhythm, call and response, harmony, counterpoint, form, and improvisation. He not only states that these musical components appear in the chanted sermons, but he illustrates how they are manifested in the sermon event through sermons and/or testimonies of white male and female observers, ex-slaves, ministers, and scholars of black preaching.

The Introduction is followed by twelve sections of what he terms “modern spirituals.” The spirituals include “Sinner, Please Don’t Let This Harvest Pass,” “Give Me Jesus,” “You Must Have that True Religion,” “Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel?”. The 100 transcriptions of musical excerpts from “modern spirituals,” or chanted sermons, contained here in the *Sacred Symphony* evolved during sermons or prayer services of sixteen ministers representing various Baptist, Methodist, Holiness, and Pentecostal demoninations across the United States and were collected and notated by Spencer over a three-year period.

One exciting element about Spencer’s work is that it is the first of its kind: notating the chanted sermons of black preachers in America. I believe he is correct in suggesting that the continuity between antebellum spirituals and their modern counterparts notated in this book can be easily traced in a comparative study with earlier collections like William Francis Allen’s *Slave Songs of the United States* (1867) and Natalie Curtis Burlin’s *Negro Folk-Songs* (1918). Moreover, the main accomplishment of this work is how it, by its theme alone, illustrates the continuity of elements in African American culture. In each description of a musical component, Spencer concisely describes and details how this element was seen in other African American musical forms and West African musical forms and practices. For example, when he writes about the musical component, melody, he states: “That black preachers intoned their sermons and prayers is no historical novelty, for their African ancestors chanted oral history and folk stories, and their African-American progeny moaned bluesy hollers, and vendors whooped street cries. Additionally, just as Africans chanted tribal laws, folk stories, and proverbs, so have black preachers intoned biblical laws, Old Testament stories, and folkloric exempla.”

Spencer’s work also suggests documentation possibilities for connections to newer African American musical forms like hip-hop, or rap music. For instance, when he includes research done in Macon County, Georgia by William Pipes, he summarizes that Pipes found that “black preachers customarily fit sentences into metrical units by squeezing together and stretching out words, while simultaneously accompanying their delivery by striking the lectern or stomping the foot.” Is that not what rap artists do (with the substitution of the lectern for a turntable) “fit sentences into metrical units by squeezing together and stretching out words”? So, Spencer’s compilation will certainly open up opportunities for documenting continuities between black preaching and rapping, for example, and other projects not yet investigated.

Although at times Spencer’s use of terms seems burdensome, he rephrases and simplifies most concepts so that they can be fully understood. Additionally, his inclusion of examples and primary sources help to fully develop his ideas.

Other features of *Sacred Symphony* include a Foreword by William C.

Turner, Jr. (one of the ministers observed by Spencer) of the Divinity School at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. Turner explains homiletical musicality, or black preaching, as a product of culture, kratophany, oppugnancy, and glossa. He, too, employs terms which are not readily accessible to the “lay” ethnic studies scholar, but, in most cases, he endeavors to rephrase and to simplify concepts wherever possible. In addition to the sections already noted, the book includes a select bibliography, an index of first lines, and a general index.

*Sacred Symphony*, indeed, relates to the ethnic experience, or more specifically, the African American ethnic experience, in that it documents musical excerpts from a style of communication that grew out of the needs of African peoples in a New World. Black preaching, along with other African American products like jazz, rhythm-and-blues and hip-hop music, has been and probably will continue to be looked down upon by European Americans as well as many African Americans; but it neither needs nor wants any excuses or apologies for itself because it is and has been one of the unifying elements of African American communities all over the United States.

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**Marion Wilson Starling. *The Slave Narrative: Its Place in American History*. Second Edition (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1988) xxx, 375 pp., \$12.95 paper.**

This is another reprint of Marion Wilson Starling’s breakthrough study of the slave narrative, which she undertook for her Ph.D. dissertation at New York University in 1946 under the advisorship of Oscar Cargill. During the 1960s and 1970s when slave autobiography became a serious critical endeavor, many scholars referred to Starling’s thorough historical and literary research; however, her dissertation was not published until 1981. Then, Starling’s work became more readily available, and now the paperback edition allows this well-deserved book to reach a wider audience.

One reason the dissertation took so long to be published is explained by Starling herself in the prologue in the first edition. Surprisingly enough, it was her family that stood in the way. Belonging to the genteel tradition of African American cultural society, her family never forgave her for wanting to teach black students and for concentrating her scholarly pursuits on slave narrative studies.

The value of much of Starling’s work lies in the monumental research