

Are teaching one god
They are ripping the limbs
Off our fetishes
They are carving the sea
Monsters from our totems
They made a pile of our
Wood sculpture and set fire
To it

Julian
Come back
Rude hags
Have crashed the senate
And are spitting on the
Elders

Meanwhile, Julian
The perennial art major
Ponders in the right wing
Of the monastery museum

The Egyptian collection

Alice / Michael S. Harper

"The word made stone, the stone word"

*"A RITE is an action the very form of which is the
result of a Divine Revelation."*

I

You stand waist-high in snakes
beating the weeds for the gravebed
a quarter mile from the nearest
relative, an open field in Florida: lost,
looking for Zora, and when she speaks
from her sunken chamber to call
you to her side, she calls
you her distant cousin, her sister
come to mark her burial place
with bright black stone.
She has known you would do this—

her crooked stick, her straight lick—
and the lie you would have to tell
to find her, and that you lied
to her relatives in a conjure-riddle
of the words you have uttered,
calling her to communion.

A black rock of ages you have placed
where there was no marker,
and though the snakes abound
in this preserve from ancestral space,
you have paid your homage
in traditional line, the face open:
your face in the woman-light of surrender
toughened in what you were.

II

Floods of truth flow from your limbs
of these pages in a vision swollen
in experience and pain:
that child you stepped into blossom
of a man's skull beaten into smile
of submission, you gathering horse nectar
for offering over a baby's crusted gasp,
for centuries of motherhood and atonement
for which you write, and the rite written.

And for this I say your name: Alice,
my grandmother's name, your name,
conjured in snake-infested field
where Zora Neale welcomed you home,
and where I speak from now
on higher ground of her risen
black marker where you have written
your name in hers, and in mine.

for Alice Walker