

# commentary

from other pens...

## Poetry charts slavery course over 150 years

At first it seems a contradiction in terms: the toil of generations of African slaves and the quiet reflections of poetry.

As a new anthology demonstrates, however, poets on both sides of the Atlantic focused an early, bright, harsh and unwavering light on slavery even as the slave trade flourished and plantation owners prospered from it.

A newly published book, "Amazing Grace, An Anthology of Poems About Slavery, 1660-1810," brings together a remarkably diverse cast of more than 250 poets.

They are represented by more than 400 poems spanning 150 years. Some, like William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, were among the most celebrated poets of their age. Most were obscure, even in their own time. Many remain anonymous. Some were slaves themselves.

"Most of these poems were written to transform slavery from a distant phenomenon to a personal tragedy that had a human face," said James Basker, a professor of English at Barnard College of Columbia University.

He uncovered poems and poets during a 10-year trek through pamphlets, newspapers, advertising, hymnals, operas, children's verse, forgotten books, even a gravestone inscription. The aim was to bring to light poems or poetic fragments that bear on slavery.

"It was like a vast archaeological dig, restoring to view a whole landscape that has been lost for centuries," Basker said in a recent interview. "There was so much human suffering over the 400 years of the slave trade, and poets were the people who could transform it into art, into literature."

The poems begin as slavery establishes roots in North America. They end in 1810 on a note of celebration and expectation. Two years earlier, after a long struggle, Britain and the United States ended importation of slaves. Many expected, incorrectly as it turned out, that slavery itself would soon be extinct.

"Compiling this book told me there was always dissent, and in the 18th century it was huge," Basker said.

"Amazing Grace," the book's title, is also the title of a famous hymn published in 1779 by English clergyman John Newton and adopted as their own by generations of slaves and free blacks in the American South. Newton wrote the hymn to atone for his early life as a ship's captain in the slave trade. "I once was lost but now am found/Was blind but now I see," the clergyman wrote.

"Behind every one of these poems is a story," Basker said. Among the stories is "The African Slave," published anonymously in Trenton, N.J., in 1802. It presents itself as the work of the slave Itaniko, captured in Africa, sold in the United States and now a prisoner in the New Jersey state penitentiary.

Itaniko's poem ends with an indictment of America. "You boast of your Freedom, your mild constitution," the poet writes. He asks: "Why then for the hue of my race am I hated? Why, faultless, to misery and chains am I fated?"

Using the poetic name for America, the poem ends: "O God of Columbia, behold with compassion/The Cruelties, Insults, and Wrongs of My Nation/And blast, by thy justice, that Tyrant — Oppression/That holds from his country poor Itaniko."

"There are a number of first-generation American writers and they all wrote that slavery was something to get rid of," Basker said.

Phillis Wheatley, an African-born slave, one of the best-remembered black writers in the collection, dedicated a poem to Washington to celebrate his 1775 appointment to lead the Continental Army.

The general invited the poet to visit him at Mount Vernon. "Washington had simply never seen a black person of her career and talent," Basker said.

Her poetry, he said, is a declaration by a talented black person that "I'm here to speak. That in itself is an act of self-assertion and an implicit claim for equality."

EDITOR'S NOTE — Lawrence L. Knutson has reported on Congress, the White House and Washington's history for 35 years.

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## Is world peace possible? How?



sharon corcoran

• use it or lose it

A part of Isaiah 2:4 is quoted on the United Nations building in New York saying, "they will have to beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning shears. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither will they learn war anymore."

Bringing about world peace is the organization's goal, but is it reasonable to think the United Nations is capable of bringing such peace? If the United Nations cannot bring about world peace, who can? Can we believe the Bible's promise of world peace is even possible?

When we consider that the United Nations has been in place since 1945, 57 years, and wars continue, it is reasonable to believe the organization has failed in its purpose.

Some may say the end of the cold war, the fall of the iron curtain and the increase in memberships in the organization are signs of its success. But are they? All of these advances in getting the nations to reach agreements have not brought world peace. What is missing?

That same verse in Isaiah begins: "And he will certainly render judgment among the nations and set matters straight respecting many peoples."

Who will render this judgment and set matters straight? The previous verse says that before these matters, leading to peace, take place people will flock to the house of the God of Jacob. God is the one who will set matters straight.

How will he do this? By ending human rulership and bringing the whole world under one government.

About that event, Daniel 2:44 says, "In the days

of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be brought to ruin. And the kingdom itself will not be passed on to any other people. It will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, and it itself will stand to times indefinite."

With only one government ruling the earth, there will be no competitions between national governments. Of course individual people could still compete and start wars, so more must be done.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 emphasizes a quality that people will need to have for wars to end: "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but do not have love, I have become a sounding piece of brass or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophesying and am acquainted with all the sacred secrets and all knowledge, and if I have all the faith so as to transplant mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my belongings to feed others, and if I hand over my body, that I may boast, but do not have love, I am not profited at all."

While on earth, Jesus emphasized the need for love of neighbor, love of fellow worshippers of God and even love of enemies. Why? Because God created all of us, and he doesn't want us killing each other.

1 John 4:20 says, "If anyone makes the statement: 'I love God,' and yet is hating his brother, he is a

liar. For he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot be loving God, whom he has not seen."

And 1 John 3:15 says, "Everyone who hates his brother is a manslayer, and you know no manslayer has everlasting life in remaining in him."

The Bible hated to killing and says that those who hate and kill will not have everlasting life. This prohibition on killing is not just concerning people of the nation you live in or of the same race, for Acts 10:34, 35 says, "For a certainty I perceive that God is not partial, but in every nation the man that fears him and works righteousness is acceptable to him."

Speaking of the event referred to in Daniel 2:44, Revelation 20:11, 15 says, "And I saw the heaven opened, and look! a white horse. And the one seated upon it is called Faithful and True, and he judges and carries on war in righteousness. And out of his mouth there protrudes a sharp long sword, that he may strike the nations with it, and he will shepherd them with a rod of iron. He treads too the winepress of the anger of the wrath of God the Almighty."

God's war is righteous and final. As the creator of mankind, he has the right to rule the world but has allowed us time to see the results of mankind's rulership. In describing those results, Ecclesiastes 8:9 says "man had dominated man to his injury."

The hatred, killing and crime that have prevented world peace are a result of people seeking their own interests rather than showing love for everyone. When people pray the Lord's prayer, asking for God's kingdom to come, they are praying for world peace. But that peace comes on God's terms rather than by means of a human organization.

## Agencies react, regroup; budget crisis not solved



john milburn

• ap news analysis

Most state agencies learned before the long Thanksgiving holiday weekend that they must live with an average of 3.9 percent fewer dollars than they expected for the remainder of the fiscal year.

That's the good news. The bad news is the cuts could still be deeper this year if legislators do not follow Gov. Bill Graves' blueprint for closing a \$310 million shortfall.

Leaders who will be charged with charting the budget course are scheduled to be elected Monday by House Republicans and Democrats. The outcome of the race for speaker will determine whether more spending cuts can be expected or whether new revenues will be generated.

"It's the same song and dance that we have heard for the last three years," said Senate Minority Leader Anthony Hensley, D-Topeka.

Hensley said Graves may have given a plan, but the state was not out of the financial crisis that some argue was created by tax cuts in 1998.

"There is still a lot of heavy lifting to do," Hensley said.

In announcing the cuts, Graves said legislators had to put partisan politics aside. He said his decision not to cut education was not about forcing Gov.-elect Kathleen Sebelius to break a campaign promise, but it did demonstrate that legislators did not go far enough in 2002 to fix future budget messes.

"This is more about the Legislature than it is about Kathleen," Graves said.

Also expected this week are the first revenue numbers since official estimates were slashed by a record \$363.5 million on Nov. 5. Because of the late Thanksgiving, a traditional Christmas bounce will not be reflected in the numbers.

Graves leaves office Jan. 13, leaving a new cast of characters to decide how the budget horror story plays out. Leading the way will be Sebelius, who must submit a revised fiscal 2003 budget reflecting the cuts Graves made in August and in November. That budget now has a \$4.3 billion price tag.

Her fiscal 2004 budget picture is not any rosier. State law requires that she base that proposal on current revenue estimates for the year. Budget Director Duane Goossen said last week that the shortfall for the budget year beginning July 1 still was more than \$600 million.

Sebelius will submit a budget that reflects cuts in programs, though public schools would not be harmed. But with schools taking more than 52 percent of the budget, it is unlikely that remaining state agencies could absorb the entire \$600 million. Sebelius is expected to submit another budget

proposal that includes new revenue sources and any savings uncovered during her "top-to-bottom" review of state government.

Many agencies had little time to digest the cuts Graves made. The decisions about where to find the savings will begin in earnest this week, including asking budget authority to shift programs from state funding to federal funding.

For example, Kansas Department of Health and Environment spokeswoman Sharon Watson said the agency's budget cut reflected 12 percent of its state general fund allocation. Of that, 77 percent is devoted to salaries.

Watson said KDHE will be asking to review contracts with local agencies or to shift funding mechanisms in hopes of finding the \$1 million Graves cut. If not, programs may be eliminated as the Pregnancy Maintenance Program was in August, or cut as were similar services for teen mothers.

"We have held many positions open once someone retires or leaves for a new job," Watson said. "We have done many smaller things such as we stopped printing our agency newsletter on paper and put it only on the Internet and we're sending press releases only by e-mail or fax rather than through the mail."

Officials in the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services announced in August that they

would accelerate a program to consolidate field offices in rural counties to cut costs. Where they will find another \$25 million to cut from a \$646 million budget has not been announced.

Hensley said the elimination of a \$48 million transfer to cities and counties resulted "in an unfunded mandate" from Topeka.

"When it's pulled back, locals are faced with cutting services or raising the mill levy," said Hensley, noting that local tax rates were already set for the current budget cycle. "You're looking at cuts to services."

Graves said he made his proposal based on what he would have suggested if he had another term in office. With that in mind, he said, Kansans can expect changes in services as the latest cuts are absorbed.

"Those are issues the Legislature and the governor-elect will have to deal with," Graves said.

On the Net: Gov. Bill Graves: <http://www.ink.org/public/governor/>; Kansas Legislature: <http://www.kslegislature.org>; Department of Health and Environment: <http://www.kdhe.state.ks.us/>

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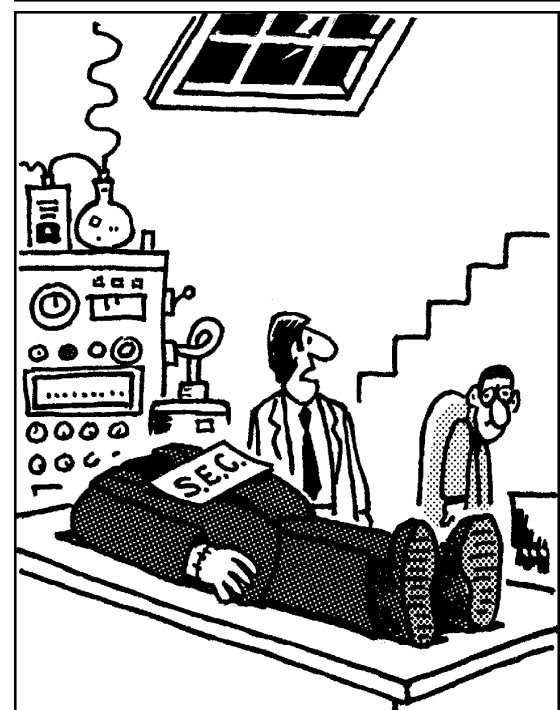
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