

Red Beans and Ricely Yours

## Winner of the 2005 T. S. Eliot Prize

The T. S. Eliot Prize for Poetry is an annual award sponsored by Truman State University Press for the best unpublished book-length collection of poetry in English, in honor of native Missourian T. S. Eliot's considerable intellectual and artistic legacy.

Judge for 2005: Ishmael Reed

# Red and Ricely Beans & Yours

poems by Mona Lisa Saloy



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For my family  
and extended family

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# Acknowledgments

Some poems in this collection were published in the following journals.

*African American Review*: “Word Works”

*Black Scholar*: “Marie Laveau” (earlier version of “The Ballad of Marie LaVeau”)

*Cricket*: “French Market Morning,” “For My Brothers”

*Faulkner Society’s Double Dealer*: “Shotgun Life”

*Ishmael Reed’s Konch*: “The N Word”

*Louisiana Cultural Vistas*: “French Market Morning,” “Daddy Poem IV,”  
“Recycling Neighborhood Style,” “End Notes”

*Louisiana English Journal*: “On Writing,” “A Few Words on My Words,”  
“Daddy’s Philosophy,” “Jim Crow,” “The Last Mile,” “Summer in New Orleans, 1999,” “Southern Sisters,” “Heritage,” “We’ve Come this Far,”  
“End Notes”

*Southern Review*: “Song for Elder Sisters”

Some poems in this collection were published in the following anthologies.

*Dark Waters, North West Anthology of Black Writers and Poets*: “French Market Friend,” “French Market Morning,” “For Frank Fitch,” “This Afternoon”

*From a Bend in the River: 100 New Orleans Poets*: “Word Works”

*Furious Flower: African American Poetry from the Black Arts Movement to the Present*: “The N Word,” “For My Sister,” “We’ve Come This Far”

*Immortelles, Poems of Life and Death by New Southern Writers*: “Charm Fails Death,” “Villanelle for Voodoo”

*This Far Together: Haight Ashbury Literary Journal 1980–1995*: “For Frank Fitch,” “For Nat King Cole Babies”

*Word Up: Black Poetry of the 80s from the Deep South*: “My Mother is the Daughter of a Slave...,” “Frontliners”

Some poems in this collection appeared in the following newspapers.

*Gambit Weekly*: “This Afternoon”

*San Francisco’s Appeal to Reason*: “For Frank Fitch”

Some poems appear in the following films.

*Color: A Sampling of Contemporary African American Poetry* (The Poetry Center and American Poetry Archives 1995): “For Frank Fitch”

*Poets Sanctuary* (New Orleans, 1998): “Crescent City Mambo” [here titled “Word Works”]



*Word Works* (Poets in the Dream State Video Anthology, New Orleans Film and Video Access Center, 2001): “Word Works”

“Hey there, Sugar Darlin’, / Let me tell you something...” from “Groove Me,” written by New Orleans-born R&B singer King Floyd (Malaco Productions, 1970).

# Glossary

**bamboula:** traditional African dances that slaves performed in Congo Square and at Voodoo celebrations on Lake Ponchartrain. Some participants went into trances. These dances were outlawed during slavery, but were practiced in secret.

**bébé:** [Creole from the French] baby, a term of endearment, often shortened to *bey*

**Black-Faced Zulus:** masked members of the Zulu Social and Pleasure Club as they appear on Mardi Gras Day

**Black Indians (Mardi Gras Indians):** Black men from New Orleans neighborhoods who mask as Indians in elaborate costumes of ostrich plumes and beaded designs. A typical suit takes one year to produce. Each “tribe’s” Big Chief adopts a color and parades on Mardi Gras Day, or St. Joseph’s Day, referred to as Super Sunday.

**Blood:** of African blood, a Black person

**Bogalusa:** a city in Louisiana

**calinda dances:** orgy-like Voodoo dances performed by slaves on Sundays in Congo Square through the mid-nineteenth century

**Carré Français:** [French] “French square,” another name for the Vieux Carré in New Orleans.

**cawain:** swamp turtle, said to have 21 meat tastes.

**Chitterling Circuit (Chitlin Circuit):** the round of tours Black musicians made through the south and north in “Colored Only” nightclubs during Jim Crow days.

**Congo Square:** seeking to curb the influence of West Indian immigrants in the early 1800s, the New Orleans city council prohibited assemblies of slaves for dancing and other purposes except on Sundays in an open place. Congo Square, an open field northwest of the city limits, became the place for slave dances. In the later nineteenth century, it was the site of the old parish prison; now it is the home of Armstrong Park.

**congris:** dish of black-eyed peas and rice cooked with sugar, used for casting spells. Also, a good-luck dish served with cabbage in many Black homes at the New Year; represents the eyes of God watching over a household.

**courtbouillon:** stewed fish, usually redfish or sheephead, prepared with highly seasoned gravy.

**Crescent City:** nickname for New Orleans, so named because the city curves around the Mississippi.

**dream books:** a book that interprets dream images and assigns the image a number, which carries considerable luck according to most Black people.

Those “dream” numbers influence bets on horse racing or lotteries.

flambeaux: flame carriers accompanying floats at Mardi Gras parades.

Frank Fitch: the poet’s maternal grandfather; a bricklayer and Baptist minister.

*galait*: [Creole] shortening bread; a pan-fried bread of basic dough with no yeast.

Grand Marshall: the leader of the Second Line dance in a funeral procession or parade.

*greya*: [Creole] tomato gravy added to any protein or meat.

griot: [French] a storyteller who passes on the history of the people

gris gris: Voodoo fetish, charm, amulet, or talisman of power for good luck, also used to cast spells, thought to be of African origin.

guiana peppers: peppers used in casting spells.

*haint*: [Creole] patois for ghosts or spirits of the dead.

handbone: Rhythmic hand-clapping with thigh and chest slapping that accompanies song or tales, and brought by Africans to the New World. It imitates drumbeats and is a popular past time activity since slavery.

“Hey there, Sugar Dumpling...”: from a popular New Orleans rhythm and blues song, “Groove Me,” written and performed by King Floyd

high-yellow nigger: in the South, a very fair-skinned Black (with little or no visible African features) who can pass for white; in the North, any fair-skinned Black with an olive skin tone.

Houma: “red” in language of Native American tribe of the same name living in Louisiana; currently the largest tribe in the state. Also the name of a city in Louisiana.

hucklebuck: originally, colored water sweetened with corn or cane syrup served in a paper cup; now, frozen fruit juice, Kool-aid, or other sweetened beverage in a paper cup (also called “Dixie cups” or “frozen cups”); sometimes fruit is added.

Irma Thomas: “The Soul Queen of New Orleans;” popular singer and performer of rhythm and blues.

jusqu’aux bontemps rouler: [Creole from French] “let the good times roll,” New Orleans city motto.

*lagniappe*: [Creole from Old French] “something extra;” a continuation of an age-old West-African tradition of giving a purchaser a little extra to encourage repeat business.

Loa: Voodoo god personality that possesses a child or believer while the participant is in a trance. Believers trance to communicate to spirits; in turn, spirits speak or act through the entranced believer, during which time the believer may change physical characteristics, mannerisms, and speech, and become the spirit for the period of the trance.

loup-garou: famous New Orleans *haint* or spirit with a wolf head and large black bird wings; said to haunt the garrets and rooftops in the French

Quarter as well as swamps.

Maison Blanche: [Creole from French] “white house,” name for the long-term residence of Marie Laveau.

Major Lance: popular rhythm and blues performer.

Mardi Gras: [French] “Fat Tuesday” (Shrove Tuesday); the last day of the carnival season; affectionately called *Mardi Gras Day*.

*Marie Philome Glapion*: the family name of Marie Laveau; the name on her tombstone.

mashuquette: [Creole] “gossip”

mirliton (meliton): a favorite native vegetable in the eggplant family, called “cayote pears” in the West.

mulatto: [Creole from French] first generation offspring of a Black and a white person; also a person of mixed Black and white ancestry.

*omni*: ancient Nigerian head sculpture in bronze.

*panné*: breaded veal cutlets, a popular Creole dish

*pas connais*: [Creole from Old French] “don’t know”

Saint John’s Eve: June 23; the largest and most important Voodoo celebration of the year, when practitioners visit graves and make offerings of money and flowers. It is said that dead Voodoos converse with those praying on St. John’s Eve through tomb walls.

Second Line: a walk or step dance; the joyful walk on the return from a burial (the loved one’s troubles of this life are over, mourning turns to great rejoicing for the living), the First Line is the sad walk to the grave.

shotgun: a long, narrow house (single or double) in which the rooms are in a direct line front to back; ideally, one can look through the front door and see out the back door; a common style for slave homes. Actually, some shotguns are not straight through, but all are considered historic. Historians have connected this style to the architecture of the Caribbean and West Africa.

suppers: neighborhood speakeasies; generally held on Friday or Saturday nights, families might serve plates of food (chicken or fish with potato salad and pastry) to raise money or to socialize. Tables would be decorated with candles and wildflowers, and people could purchase drinks.

tack: Derogatory name for a Black person with hair that supposedly doesn’t grow or is very short.

*tafia*: Dark, thickly sweet alcoholic drink distilled from molasses and used in Voodoo.

Tchoupitoulas: “people by the river or water.” Purportedly a Native American Indian tribe honored by a street name and related to the Houma Indians.

Vieux Carré: [Creole from the French] “old square;” another name for the French Quarters, the original walled city of New Orleans bordered by

Canal Street, North Rampart Street, Esplanade Avenue, and the Mississippi River. Later it became the trade center of New Orleans.

Voodoo: African religion of the Yoruba from Dahomey and Benin, brought to the New World and practiced in the Caribbean as well as New Orleans.

Yé Yé Mamzelle Marie, Li Konin tou La Gris Gris: [Creole] “Spirit gives you the power of healing and magic; the power of the Spirit is yours.”

yella: yellow; fair-skinned Black, can be used in a derogatory or affectionate manner.

## About the Author

Mona Lisa Saloy is associate professor of English and director of creative writing at Dillard University. She received her PhD in English and MFA in creative writing from Louisiana State University and her MA in creative writing and English from San Francisco State University.

Displaced by Hurricane Katrina, Saloy is a visiting associate professor of English and creative writing at the University of Washington for the 2005/2006 academic year.