
Nikki Giovanni

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Out of all of your writing activities and creative ideas, how do you decide which ones to pursue or develop?

Well, I think writing poetry is largely a case of the heart. I don't have any question about that ... but it's also a big head case because your heart gets interested in things, but if your head doesn't know about them, you end up with this trite crap. I'm a big fan of the black woman and so I'm always looking at aspects of the black woman — what she's doing and how she does it.

I do a lot in remembrance. I was asked recently what makes me an Appalachian writer. I was trying to think about it because this is actually not a term I would use — I think of myself as an urban writer. My Appalachian roots come out because of my sense of independence. My Southern roots come out because of my sense of remembrance, and I do see the difference between how Appalachia and the South handle independence ... or individuality, I should say ... and remembrance.

You asked about my activities. I do what brings me an amount of pleasure. I have a writer's workshop, and I enjoy cooking for friends and family. The things I do bring me great pleasure but also satisfy my sense of responsibility as an individual. I think you should do what you can do. People overlook that and always want to do something way bigger than they can. You are capable of making lamb stew, for example, or frying some shrimp. You don't do that because you want to tilt windmills. Someone once said to me, "You're Quixotic." But I'm not Quixotic. I don't tilt at windmills. I don't fight battles I can't possibly win.

You only have so much time. There are things you stand up for because it's right. That's not a battle that you're losing. You're just adding your body and your best wishes to a fight that has to be won.

What advice would you give to young writers today?

Let's own it. This is mine. This is how I feel about it. The catchword I use with my classes is: The authority of the writer always overcomes the skepticism of the reader. If you know what you're talking about, or if you feel that you do, the reader will believe you. That's why we believe Frank Baum. Who would believe Dorothy and a house and a dog up in a tornado? We believe it because the author believes it. We believe *Peter Rabbit* because Beatrix Potter believes it. You have to.

The authority of the writing will always overcome that. You can't hedge your bets. If you do, people will say, "Hmm. Where did you get that from?" You can't do that. Just don't do it.