

COMMITTEE ON THE FACULTY RESEARCH LECTURE
Annual Report, 2004-05

To the Academic Senate, Santa Cruz Division:

The Senate Committee on the Faculty Research Lecturer enthusiastically nominates Professor Nathaniel Mackey of the Literature Department to deliver the 2005-06 lecture.

Nathaniel Mackey is a creative writer and a critical scholar of rare breadth and distinction. During his twenty-six years at UCSC he has produced a corpus of seminal work—including cultural criticism, literary analysis, journal editing, lyric poetry and prose-poetry—that has earned him national and international recognition.

Mackey graduated with High Honors in English from Princeton University in 1969. After completing his PhD at Stanford, he taught at the University of Wisconsin and at USC, where he directed the Black Studies Program. In 1979 he joined the UCSC faculty.

Mackey's honors include the selection of his book of poems, *Eroding Witness*, for publication in the prestigious National Poetry Series; a Whiting Writer's Award in 1993; and—perhaps the highest honor in the poetry field—election to the Board of Chancellors of the Academy of American Poets in 2001.

He is the author of two volumes of literary/cultural criticism: *Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing* (Cambridge University Press, 1993) and *Paracritical Hinge* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2005). A notable feature of these wide-ranging books is their engagement with the work of major Caribbean authors such as Kamau Brathwaite and Wilson Harris, authors Mackey has labored to bring into the mainstream of American literary critical discourse.

Eight books of poetry, including *Four for Trane*, *Septet for the End of Time*, *Outlantish*, and *Song of the Andoumboulou*, are widely regarded as among the most innovative examples of contemporary American experimental writing. *From A Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate*, an ongoing prose composition of which three volumes have been published, is perhaps Mackey's most original textual experiment. It displays a characteristically austere lyricism, speculative imagination, and profound musical sensitivity.

Mackey is probably best known as an authority on the relations of African and African-American music and writing. He has edited an influential anthology, *Moment's Notice: Jazz in Poetry and Prose* (1993), and has produced a poetry CD in collaboration with contemporary jazz musicians. A fine ear for the musicality of language and a jazz aesthetic of improvisation within constraints permeate everything he writes.

Mackey's innovations in prose and poetry have drawn widespread attention from scholars, writers, and musicians. He was the "Featured Poet" in the "Conversations with Poets" series at the 2002 Modern Language Association. He is frequently sought for interviews and is the subject of PhD dissertations. *Callaloo*, the premier African and African-American literary journal, devoted an entire issue to his work.

Nathaniel Mackey's distinctive range is reflected in the teaching he has sustained over more than two decades for the UCSC Literature Department: courses on The Harlem Renaissance, Introduction to

African American Literature, Open Field Poetry, Caribbean Literature, New World Poetics, Literature and Jazz, William Carlos Williams. . .

Here, and throughout his work, Mackey is always attentive to the larger, interactive contexts within which African and African-American traditions are sustained and made new. Mackey never assumes a unitary racially- or ethnically-defined identity. Rooted in cosmopolitan Black cultural traditions, he opens out these living currents, cross culturally and internationally. His writing, whether poetic or academic, engages with a wide range of contrapuntal influences from cultural history, anthropology, musicology and most crucially from the rich vein of modernist American poetry associated with Ezra Pound, HD, William Carlos Williams, Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, Robert Creeley, Susan Howe, and Rachel Du Plessis, among many others.

The vibrant legacy of this complex tradition is most visible in the literary journal, *Hambone*, which Mackey has edited, single-handedly, for thirty years. *Hambone* brings together very diverse strands of innovative writing from established and emerging writers, in a venue that has become legendary for its rigorous selectivity, critical openness, and sureness of taste.

Finally, no evocation of Nathaniel Mackey's contributions to scholarship, poetry, and the university would be complete without mention of his long-running, and much admired radio program on KUSP. "Tanganyika Strut" has brought an incomparable musical mix to the Santa Cruz airwaves: sounds from country and city, church and mosque, recording studio, radio, and street; from experimental jazz, popular song and Sufi rituals... Not just the music of Africa, but the African musics of the world.

Therefore, in recognition of Nathaniel Mackey's extraordinary accomplishments in many fields of scholarly and creative activity, the Committee recommends that he be invited to deliver the 2005-06 Faculty Research lecture to the UCSC and Santa Cruz communities.

Respectfully submitted,

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Sandra Faber, Chair

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