Auctioned

Sophia K. Reid
Gettysburg College
Auctioned

Abstract
This poem, Auctioned, is about slaves who were severely punished simply because of their skin tone. The setting of the poem is in the early 1800s. This poem vividly describes the hanging, whipping, and shooting of slaves.

Keywords
Slave, auctioned, punishment, hanging, shackles, whipping, shooting, black

Disciplines
Creative Writing | Poetry

Comments
In the Fall of 2012, Professor Nadine Meyer brought her students from ENG 302 The Writing of Poetry: New Poems, New Poets to Special Collections, Musselman Library, to view some primary source collections and exhibits.

Sophia Reid, Class of 2014, was drawn to the exhibit Slaves, Soldiers, Citizens: African American Artifacts of the Civil War Era. The plantation era objects she witnessed were on loan to Special Collections from the private collection of Angelo Scarlato.
Auctioned

Auctioned upon arrival,
Separated from families,
Divided and conquered,
Slaves, defenseless in their wretchedness.

Shackles,
Ropes,
And rifles.
Chains
Whips,
And mutilations.

***

Restricted from freedom,
A pair of old rusty metal rings,
U-shape brackets,
Fastened by shackle pins.

Face worn away,
By wind and rain,
His blank eyes,
He never shows pain.

Taken to the marsh,
Infested by Bloodsucking gallinippers,
Stripped to the waist,
He never lost sight of the big dipper
Hovering in the sky like a ladle.

Nine-and-thirty well laid on,

Bleeding cuts,
Swollen red weals,
Hands tied behind his back,
His emotions he conceals.

***

He was stretched,
On the ground,
Between two stakes,
Ten feet apart,
His head tied to one,
His feet to the other,
And he became a still photograph,
Painted by his master.

His lifeless body lay,
A worn out fetter that the soul
Had broken and thrown away.

***

She was marched to the whipping house,
Feet on the ground,
Bound with a small cord by the wrists,
Her hands were then pulled to the ceiling,
Until she stood on tiptoe.

Stripped to the waist,
Her breasts dangling,
In the cold winter air,
She was whipped,
With the Cat-o-nine tails,
Gashing through her skin.

The moment her heart stopped
She was disembodied,
Just a spirit
Hovering over her corpse.

***

A nine-year-old slave boy,
Same age as his master’s son,
Was always laughing,
For he was a general favorite on the plantation,
And had no worries.

Under the walnut tree they played,
Who could first get a kernel out whole from the shell,
And when the slave boy won,
The master’s son ordered the slave
To give him the nut.

The slave said “no,”
And received a blow to the face,
With sprightliness he returned it.
The master’s son went into the house crying,
With muddy clothes and a bloody nose.

The mistress gave him a rifle,
Cocked it,
And said “go shoot that slave,”
And the boy fired,
And shot the slave boy in his head.
Eyes wide open,
The little slave boy dropped dead.

***

Bloodied and bruised,
Mutilated chains of slaves,
Scavenged through their skin,
Tears in their eyes,
Minds filled with doubts.

Slashed,
And slithered machete,
Pierced the pulse of tissues,
Sliced through veins,
Chopped off ankles,
Feet, ears, arms,
And hands,
Drained the innocent victims,
E’er they bleed and plea,
Their weep
Of death.

***

The head,
The command centre of the body,
Housing the brain and major sense organs,
Ears, eyes, nose, and mouth,
Are sensitive to pain and easily damaged.

The temple,
Throat,
Chin, Collarbone, Chest,
Jaw,
And ribs,
Are all vulnerable points of the body.

The body is vulnerable to pain.
It has thin skin,
And blood right underneath,
An adequate stock of teeth and nails,
But its bones are brittle,
And its joints are stretchable.
In tortures all this is taken into consideration.
Cat-O-Nine Tails Whip (from Charleston, SC) and Slave Shackles. Antebellum Era.
Special Collections, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College