

it true to my characters and their time. This has led to several unexpected and difficult moral issues. In *Sky* I had to convey to modern readers that, although Norah thinks of the war as an exciting game, it is far more dangerous and evil. I tried to do this by gradually increasing the severity of the news from home. In *Moon*, I presented both sides of Andrew's dilemma of whether or not to sign up; to convey not only a modern, anti-war view but also, in his ultimate decision to fight, the view that would have been accurate for his times. In *Lights*, both the world and Gavin are losing innocence. To reflect how we now perceive World War II — that it was one of the worst, if not the worst, events in world history — I had to include the tragedy of his parents' death as well as awareness of the Holocaust. I tried to channel these horrors through the very limited viewpoint of a ten-year-old in 1945, well aware that a modern reader knows more, or can find out more, than Gavin.

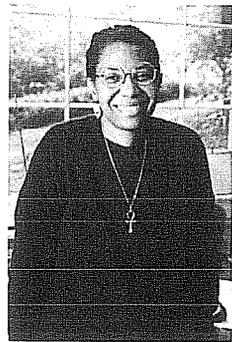
History is the story of humanity and inhumanity. Although I tried not to shrink from writing of the evil of war or the unfair treatment of children, I also believe in leaving readers with hope. What unites the past and the present are the qualities of love and courage. I hope that my readers, through identification with my characters, are left with the conviction that these qualities endure through the ages. Perhaps that is the greatest reward of reading — and writing — historical fiction.

**Kit Pearson**, who lives in Vancouver, is the author of six novels for children. She has received six national awards for her writing. Her newest book, *Awake and Dreaming*, is a ghost fantasy set in Victoria.

## LOOKING FOR BLACK ANCESTORS

*Marlene Nourbese Philip*

**Résumé:** Dans cet essai, l'auteur compare l'héroïne de son roman *Harriet's Daughter* à son modèle historique, Harriet Tubman. Elle fait remarquer que son personnage découvre son identité en s'attachant à la mémoire de Tubman le guérillero et que cette pratique du culte des ancêtres est une composante de la spiritualité africaine.



Marlene Nourbese Philip

Photo credit: Joanna Eldredge Morrissey

Some books begin with a title; others may not have a title until completed, and still again there are some that have a working title to carry them through to completion. Whatever the case, once the book is done, the writer is faced at the end with finding the best title for it. It may be the one you started out with, or as often happens, a completely different one.

I don't recall if I had a working title for the manuscript that eventually became *Harriet's Daughter*, but I do know that when I was finished I spent several weeks trying to come up with a title. I knew that the title had to bear some reference to the

legendary Harriet Tubman who led so many of her people, Africans all, from the oppressive and exploitive life of slavery in the United States to freedom in Canada.

Harriet Tubman appears as a leitmotif throughout the novel, *Harriet's Daughter*. The young protagonist, Margaret Cruickshank, initially spurred on by learning about Harriet Tubman in her Black Heritage classes, then by reading about her, refashions the historical Harriet Tubman in her imagination as someone who embodies what she is struggling towards — a sense of identity, wholeness and freedom from what she considers to be the oppressive rules of her home:

On the back of one of the Tubman books was a picture of Harriet Tubman; for someone who lived dangerously she looked quite harmless. I don't know what I was expecting, but it wasn't the calm strong face that stared back at me from the cover — and plain too. The eyes though, looked like they had seen things. Would I trust my life to this woman? I looked at the face, stroked the picture yes, yes, I would. I would trust her.

Margaret dreams about Harriet, ties her head in a style she thinks Harriet would have. More importantly, she decides she wants to change her name from Margaret to Harriet because the latter name, unlike her own, means something to her.

It is as if by renaming herself Harriet, she would enter that liberatory history. As if this were not enough, Margaret decides to recreate history literally — playing the Underground Railroad game with her school friends, thereby re-enacting in the present the past struggle and flight to freedom.

What these actions say is that traditions and history have to be re-enacted, in as many different ways as there are people, in order for them to survive. In so doing, we rename ourselves, not necessarily literally, but symbolically on behalf of those who earlier blazed the path for us. This sets up a dynamic dialogue between the past, present, and future.

Honouring and revering one's ancestors is central to African cultures and spiritual practices. Ancestors are seen be in active and dynamic relation with the living. Unfortunately, when Africans were brought to the Americas and the Caribbean, there was an abrupt severing of their links with their homeland and of course many of its practices. Further, those Europeans promoting the oppression and enslavement of Africans, also actively promoted the lie that Africans had no history. So cut off from their past, Africans were condemned to wander sans history, sans past, and apparently sans culture. A people without a past or history is essentially a people without a culture. However, in the face of tremendous odds, Africans did remember their history, and their past, and did recreate a culture here in the "New World."

What Harriet embodies in her desire to rename herself after a woman who not only talked the talk but literally walked the walk, and in her playing the game, is indeed another way of honouring one of our ancestors, Harriet Tubman, who mothered and continues to mother so many of our dreams of freedom in this not-so-New World. In this act she also defies a history of attempts to erase the continuities within African cultures that have helped to bind "New World" Africans together. In so doing she defies the view of Africans as lacking a history.

And so Margaret emulates Harriet Tubman in helping her friend Zulma

“escape” back to her beloved Gran and Tobago. Margaret makes the promise to get her friend back to Tobago when she is filled with sympathy for her in a seemingly impulsive moment. It is, however, the memory of Harriet Tubman’s work that will give shape and solidity to her attempts to help her friend return to where she belongs.

By the end of the book, Margaret is reflecting on the possibility of changing her name to an African name which harks back to a yet older history — the history of Africa — which she will no doubt exploit as she becomes a woman.

In successfully helping her friend to return to Tobago and her Gran (albeit with the help of another older woman, Mrs. Billings — a foremother); in challenging her loving but misguided parents who refuse to understand her; in making a claim for her own uniqueness and identity as a young woman of African-Canadian heritage, Margaret was and is indeed a direct descendant of Harriet Tubman. I had it — the name of the book! *Harriet’s Daughter*.

**Marlene Nourbese Philip** is an award-winning poet, fiction writer, and essayist. She has degrees in economics (BA) and political science (MA). She is also a lawyer, and a teacher in the Women’s Studies Program at New College, University of Toronto, a Guggenheim Fellow in poetry (1990-91), the winner of the Casa de las Americas prize (1988) and the Toronto Arts Award (1995). She is best known for her novels, *Harriet’s Daughter* (Heinemann 1988) and *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence* (Mercury 1991), her critically-acclaimed collections of poetry — including *She Tries Her Tongue: Her Silence Softly Breaks* (Ragweed 1989) — and her recent collection of critical essays, *Frontiers: Essays and Writings in Racism and Culture* (Mercury 1992). Her most recent work is *Showing Grit*, 1994 (Poui Publications).

## REFLECTION OF BLACK CANADIAN HERITAGE

*Rosemary Sadlier*

**Résumé:** L’auteur explique les raisons qui ont motivé son choix du métier d’écrivain; elle insiste sur l’importance d’éveiller ses jeunes lecteurs à la richesse de l’héritage africain du Canada.



Rosemary Sadlier

Where I grew up, I never saw a person of African ancestry in a routine way. I was the only Black student at my school and I never had a Black teacher until I was in high school. I never saw Black people reflected in the books that I read, I never saw Black people in significant positions of authority and respect. I rarely saw