AMOSOS EN MILLONES DE HOGAREN TODO EL MUNDO

ouvrez l'électricité
The woman who was too tall

Annie Christmas six foot eight
her muscles as worn as tow ropes;
she trimmed her moustache
and donned the linsey-wolsey trousers
for stevedore days
on the baking New Orleans levee
and she could, single-handed, haul
a loaded keel boat on the dead run
up the Mississippi to Natchez.
She would stalk off a flat-boat
with two barrels of flour and a third
balanced on her head.
When she shaved her moustache
and crowded her huge skirts about her
she would float a brothel of scarlet women
downstream for the river men.
On every debauched cruise her great legs
thashed about to win a keg of whisky
for the Most Customers Satisfied contest.
Let me tell you the story of Annie Christmas,
who could whip any river bully and warned Mike Fink
she would rope him to the bottom of a keel.
Her 30 foot necklace had one bead
for each nose and ear chewed off,
with two for a gouged-out eye;
and that was just the white men.
Ah well, Annie Christmas,
murdered meanly in a gambling house in the 1800s.

Let me tell you the story of Annie Christmas,
as seen by the "Negroes": not white, but black,
and near a deity.
She stood seven foot tall,
had 12 black sons,
and fell wretchedly in love.
Dressed in her 30 foot necklace
and her brothel skirts,
she no doubt stabbed herself with an ebony knife.
Six by six walked her sons
beside the black coffin drawn by six black horses
to the black barge under a moon in hiding.
Twelve men and a coffin floated downriver
to a sea of no return.

Let me tell you the story of Annie Christmas,
the Mississippi legend.
Because she was too tall
her narrow eye,
glancing side to side with the caramel gleam
of the river line,
saw only causes for cannon-thunder rages.
But in my story she is really a slowhead
whom bravery and short-sightedness
sent down the crookedest river,
called Necessity,
her great knees flexed like a cricket's
as she lay dreaming on a flat-boat,
backing out of a creek and straightening,
then winding through limitless swamps
of indecency and corruption
down to towns of violence,
until wide and generous slowness
could no longer save her
until hot jets invaded her giant heart.

Douglas Oliver,
with acknowledgements to
Herbert Asbury's "The French Quarter",
Mockingbird Books.
IN MEMORIAM
DARRELL GRAY
KANSAS 1945 - CALIFORNIA 1986

SUbs: £25/$45 (incl. post.) for 52 issues. 132 Ditton Fields, Cambridge, U.K.