

Opal Moore

The Wintergreen Women Writers Collective is known to exist in various corners of Black academe, especially in our presence at College Language Association's annual conferences; however, I don't know that many know of our history or why we came into existence. The "why" of our existence and our continuation (and perceived purpose) would seem a good beginning for an initial newsletter. It is important to me that a group of Black women came together to welcome a writer, albeit a famous writer, into a community that was new to her. Also, that the initial gathering unveiled to all of us the need for such gatherings and for such support of Black women whose primary professional environments were academic/teaching and not uplifting of our more creative pursuits. It may seem natural now (in this era of the dismantling of the uses of genre) but at the time, there was (and in many places still is) a rather hard line between creative and academic/research-based, theory-based creation. The continuation of the WWWC was a realization that Black women needed to create our own shaping environments that are fluid and responsive to our diverse pursuits--that intellectual work is not separate from creative writing. Ultimately, WWWC has expanded our own make up to include other modes of creative expression, especially choreography.

Re: audience: I would hope that the newsletter would allow us to carry forward the story of the importance of non-institutional gatherings of creative workers, the fact that even in the presence of increasingly public platforms for conversation, the space of intimacy matters. Social media platforms are neither a substitution for such gathering, nor do they model the kind of creative exchange that the Wintergreen collective has provided for its participants for more than 30 years. Re behavior: Perhaps one aspect of the initial and subsequent newsletters could include thoughts on the return to intimacy of conversation and non-competitive exchanges in the creative space. Perhaps also the newsletter might feature other small groups that are gathering to foster the creative pursuits of their members, groups that we know of and become aware of in time (to lift up such groups and affirm their quiet work.) We might invite them to comment on what values have mattered in their creative spaces and gatherings. Also, I could only hope that the Wintergreen story might in some way enrich the academic spaces, perhaps inspiring fresh thinking about the importance of the informal creative gathering as a natural response to what the academic environment will require in this era of externalization, contestation and instability.

I have an interest in (and perhaps a gift for) hearing the aims of others and finding the language to shine a light on those aims, desires, proposals. Someone once referred to me as "an encourager", meaning that I get involved in the visions of others and encourage the thinking and pursuits of others with my gift for analysis, strategic thinking and problem solving. Joanne Gabbin has often referred to me as her muse, which I think involves my close listening and my habitual process of teasing out possibilities in the midst of exploratory thinking and planning. I love collaboration, and often recommend it. Collaboration is not enough encouraged or celebrated in our culture and structures of competition and celebrity. Within the Collective's workshop activity, I am an excellent critic and editor. I trained in the University of Iowa Writing Workshop with James Alan McPherson from whom I took one very important lesson--that one must take great care in how one approaches the discussion of the work of others. I follow the writer's aim--I try to take care not to "lead" or "push" a writer who invites me to consider their in-progress project. I mostly remember to rely on questioning rather than assertions or directives.