

# APPENDIX 1

## TRANSLATING POETRY INTO FILM

*The Black Unicorn: Dudley Randall and the Broadside Press*

54 minutes. Distributed by Cinema Guild, New York.

**M**Y DECISION to make *The Black Unicorn: Dudley Randall and the Broadside Press* was motivated by a need to document history and culture in a visual and aural medium and to preserve Dudley Randall's image and imagery. Insofar as poetry, especially African American poetry, is as much performance art as it is print art, film provides the optimal means to preserve it by projecting the image of artists reading their own words. Within the broader dynamics of the medium itself, film also affords an opportunity to critically and creatively interact with the presentation of the poet within the visual vortex of the screen through improvisational imagery and a musical score. *The Black Unicorn* is one poet's interpretation of another poet's life and work in another art form, which attempts to provide biographical and historical insight in a manner that enhances the reception of the poetry and the poet's creative perspective.

Documentary film has a particular reach, including public television and the classroom. Accepting the limitations of this cultural reality, it was my intention to prepare a film/video that would appear in educational and social settings for long-term purposes. I wanted to preserve a glimmer of Randall's personality and voice in a form that would more easily attract young people and yet at the same time create an experience that would affirm memory as history.

The initial plan was to make a film that would run approximately twenty-eight minutes, a time frame that would fit easily into classroom schedules

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with ample room for introductory remarks and follow-up discussion. However, after all the shooting was done and after significant agonizing in the editing room, I soon realized that the story and the concept were too large for the time allotted. If the film were cut to fit the assigned format, the integrity of the project would suffer. Therefore, I decided to break with the original film treatment, expand the narrative, and increase the number of poems included. Rather than let marketing dictate the length and limitations of the film, I opted to let art determine the outcome.

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

*The Black Unicorn* has three levels of experience. Randall's poetry is arranged as peaks or apexes, wherein the film begins and ends, rises and falls. The poems are not introduced, nor do they appear in a bibliographical or sequential manner. The poetry presentations provide the creative context for the film and thematic coherence. Poetry is the impetus of Randall's life, and it is the core of his relationship to art and publishing. His profession as a librarian further emphasized his love of books and literature. His awareness of political and social events in African American history, which is conveyed in his narrative, is also reflected in his poetry. The film pivots around the poems as point and counterpoint, thematically and historically. The selection of the poems also represents the range and breadth of Randall's creative reach.

The first scene is the first stanza of the poem, "Black Poet, White Critic." White letters on a black screen literally and figuratively convey the irony of Randall's words and the cultural paradox:

A critic advises  
not to write on controversial subjects  
like freedom or murder,  
but to treat universal themes  
and timeless symbols  
like the white unicorn.

These lines dissolve into the second stanza, which is only one line in length:

A white unicorn?

This is followed by the author's name, Dudley Randall, then, a fade to black.



The visual contrast of white words on a black screen emphasizes distinctive aesthetic values; it also conversely reflects the title of the film. The cultural conflict between black and white is expressed with subtle sarcasm in a rhetorical question that is answered specifically in the next poem, "Ballad of Birmingham," which is presented with newsreel footage containing images and sounds drawn from history.

The presentation of the poem was crafted in a manner to avoid redundancy in either imagery or sound. Another challenge was to include some of the critical civil-rights imagery reflected in the poem, such as dogs, clubs, and hoses, without simplifying the significance of these historical facts as cliché images associated with the Civil Rights Movement. Hence, the more familiar imagery appears in slow motion before the reading of the poem begins and is later retrieved as quick flashes during the reading. No human voices are heard during the pretextual imagery to suggest a temporal distance in a historical sense, but at the same time, this shift suggests a haunting echo in cultural memory.

The sound of barking dogs and the whirl of fire hoses are heard over images of black people being attacked mercilessly. Then, the sound of a siren is heard as an image of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church appears: 15 September 1963, and Randall's voice begins the poem. The background music is a funeral dirge, but it emerges with an undercurrent of hope. The emotional complexity of the music intersects with the timbre of Randall's voice and the tension of the historical images related to the bombing of the church, which resulted in the deaths of four girls.

The power of the poem hinges on irony. In the larger thematic sense, the bombing of the church and the deaths of the four young girls confirms the violent horror of racism. Their deaths are far more terrifying than murder because they symbolize a deeper hatred of humanity. The church, which should be a sanctuary, is where the mother sends the child for safety. As Randall reads, the image of protesting children appears as the child appeals to join them and the mother explains her restrictions—"No, baby, no. You may not go," which are the words heard as the policeman stops the protesting children. Again, the police dogs are seen barking and biting people and the spray from fire hoses beats the protesters against trees and along the ground is seen as quick flashes at the moment Randall's voice invokes them. It is a recall of the initial, more surreal imagery viewed in the preliminary footage.

The next stanza uses contrast to reflect irony as the poem relays how the mother dresses the little girl to go to church while imagery of a policeman

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with a gun follows the paddy wagon full of children entering a dark passageway, an allusion to death. This is juxtaposed with images of the child's funeral. As Randall reads, "bathed rose petal sweet," a coffin covered with flowers is being carried to a hearse. The film crosscuts to a crying mother as Randall reads, "the mother smiled." The stanza includes forms of the word "smile" three times, but the corresponding imagery is of weeping and grieving.

The next stanza intersects with the stark reality of the bombing and images of destruction as Randall describes the mother's frantic search through the rubble. The movement of the camera over the devastation parallels Randall's reporting of the mother's futile plea and efforts to find her daughter. Instead, by contrast, crosscutting back to the funeral, the closing of the hearse door, and the wide shot of the crowd swaying to the voice of Randall and the musical score is the answer to the mother's question and the final line of the poem, "And baby, where are you?"

Further irony can be derived from the small American flag being held above the sea of sad and hopeful faces as well as from the billboard in the distance that advertises: "Citizens National Savings." Clearly, as the film is a documentary, the sign was not deliberately planted there, but when I identified it as an oblique statement on the meaning of the Civil Rights Movement's larger purpose, to save its citizens and the country, it was included rather than fading to black before it comes into focus. Unfortunately, this broader spiritual meaning is rarely observed because the nation is too often torn by racial antagonisms and economic competition rather than bonded by national harmony and historical responsibility.

"George" is a poem that uses time as its conceptual basis as it reflects the life of a retired laborer, whom the poet met when he was a young man working in the famous Ford foundry in Dearborn, Michigan. The cinematic strategy for this poem was determined by the challenge to integrate the concrete and the abstract dimensions of the life cycle and the meaning and value of physical labor. In a larger sense, the poem emanates from Randall's upbringing in a pro-labor union church and home.

As in "Ballad of Birmingham," the character in the poem "George" is not identified visually, but his image is reflected in actual footage of workers in a steel foundry that corresponds with the descriptions and activities in the poem. The real and historic imagery is juxtaposed through crosscutting with imagery of the Diego Rivera mural in the Detroit Institute of Arts, which is composed of complex layers of industry, nature, science, and religion. The panning of the camera across, up, down, reverse, and in and out of focus affects the reception of the more abstract dimensions of Randall's poem derived from another art form derived from the actual life experience



of workers. The film reenvisions the poem by responding to it. The imagery in the film approaches the ideas and the feeling expressed in the poem, but it does not attempt to duplicate it. Like jazz, it is an interpretation of an experience, which allows space for the audience to interact with the poet's vision and the film.

The opening shot is from the fresco and is a color image focused on the back of a man squatting before a machine, as Randall reads: "When I was a boy desiring the title of man / And toiling to earn it," the camera pulls back and the image expands into a larger view of the factory, containing various levels of industry along with its complement of engineers and laborers. As Randall continues, "In the inferno of the foundry knockout," the image shifts into actual footage of a foundry and workers engaging a fiery furnace.

The next image focuses on the "masks" and the "goggles," and the film shifts back to the mural for still shots of these color images, which then dissolve into the furnace as sparks fly and the fire rages. When the poem refers to "shoulders bright with sweat," the imagery shifts to the mural and images of workers and their rounded shoulders almost merged with the cylindrical blocks and wheels of the factory, Randall relates, "You mastered the monstrous cylinder blocks." The imagery returns to the actual moving footage and the action of the poem intensifies, "with force enough to tear your foot in two, / You calmly stepped aside." The workers move away from the furnace.

In the second stanza, the imagery highlights the power of the factory and the transformation of raw materials into steel. Randall personifies this power with words like "groaning" and "grinding" and a huge roll of steel moves down a track. The action of Randall's "ocean wave" is portrayed as a huge band of steel flexes like a wave, and an "avalanche" of molten liquid is poured from a huge vat. The transition from the foundry to the mural implies the melding of the workers with the elements as these bodies are interpreted in shades of gray and in geometric figures merging with the cylinder blocks: "then braced our heads together / to form an arch / to lift and stack them." Strength is first visually associated with the image of a fist at the end of the stanza, when George is quoted, "You strong as a mule." The symbol recurs throughout the sequence with various images of a fist.

The next stanza requires a shift from a fast-paced rhythm and an intense tone to a slower, reflective rhythm and a sense of melancholic repose, as the poem moves to the present tense and explains that George is in a nursing home. Images from the mural reflect aspects of a hospital, including a doctor in an operating room, as the camera pans down to reveal research. The shift in mood is also related to "a ward where old men wait to die," with gray drawings of men in boats. The camera pans across the river scene in reverse,



from right to left, symbolic of the passage of time and impending death as a skull appears directly above the scene.

The words, "You cannot read the books I bring," are juxtaposed with a winding circular shot of a book in the mural. As the shot broadens, one can read the imprint of the inscription that Diego Rivera gave the mural. An abandoned factory, darkly lit with only faint blue light reflected in narrow slits of windows, appears while the poem relates: "And you sit among the senile wrecks, the psychopaths, the incontinent." In this instance, George's death is related to the decline of the automobile industry and end of the industrial revolution.

The final scene reconnects with the mural as the image of a baby in the womb comes into view behind the dissolve of a wrought-iron obstruction, as if looking through a gate:

One day when you fell from your chair and stared at the air  
With the look of fright which sight of death inspires, . . .

The image of the baby dissolves instantly into a funeral scene from historic footage of a burial of a union member killed during a United Auto Workers strike in the 1930s. The visual scene expands the meaning of George's life and the pride of laborers in the industry. As the poet lifts George "like a cylinder block," a retrieval of the earlier image in the first stanza recurs as the strikers lift the coffin of their fallen comrade, followed by the lifting of their fists in a salute of solidarity. This image is juxtaposed with the meaning and power of life in universal struggle.

The final lines return to the mural as the lifted fists of the strikers are connected to the fists emerging from the earth, grasping the raw materials that industry transforms in the foundry to make cars and trucks. The final image is of a fist, but it is clenched and reflects the power of the worker and George's statement is heard in the poet's tribute to him, "because you're strong as a mule."

"Profile on the Pillow" is the only love poem included in the film, and though the poem is not specifically dedicated to Randall's wife Vivian, it is employed in this instance to underscore the strength of the marriage. The poem was selected because it is his most famous love poem and would be the most useful for reflecting his skill with this theme.

A series of photographs beginning with their wedding pictures are transposed to relate the passage of time and the longevity of the union. Several photographs of the couple relate the closeness and a bond that endures despite internal difficulties and possible external threats. Since this presenta-

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tion does not include profiles on a pillow, which is the primary image in the poem, the photographs and image of time unfolding portray a profile of the couple's marriage.

"Poet" was presented without the infusion imagery. In this treatment, Randall is identified with and as a poet and not as an external voice or as an observer or interpreter of experience. It was also desirable to show him reading without the intersection of visual effects because the poem is an interior statement about creative values. The close-up shot of his face situates the audience with the direct gaze and delivery of the poem. In contrast, "I Loved You Once" ("Ya Vas Lyubil"), a translation of the Alexander Pushkin poem, is a presentation that emphasizes printed language. Randall's voice is heard while the Russian dissolves into English. In this instance, language is privileged to accentuate Randall's encounter with the poetic experience, first in Russian and then translated into English.

"Roses and Revolutions," on the other hand, combines visual and aural treatments with regards to imagery and sound as well as the interspersions of Randall's face reciting the poem as a critical aspect of perspective. The poem starts with "Musing on roses and revolutions," which is a direct reference to the process of creative reflection and revelation. The poet as muse is a key feature in this poem, and, as the last poem in the film, it draws from earlier visual imagery in "Ballad of Birmingham," "George," and from Randall's reflective narrative.

The initial imagery scans the Detroit cityscape in a bird's-eye shot of burning buildings during the 1967 Race Riot as Randall reads "musing on roses and revolutions." The image shifts to a black bird perched in black tree limbs, which is part of the wrought-iron gate and entrance to the Diego Rivera mural. The poem continues, "I saw night close down on earth like a great dark wing."

The imagery returns to newsreel footage of the riot and converges with "and the lighted cities were like tapers in the night." Flames abound and overwhelm the buildings burning in the night with firemen in the foreground trying to extinguish the fires. The camera pulls back into the darkness, "and I heard the lamentations of a million hearts regretting life and crying for the grave." In the darkness, a national guard searches two black men standing next to their car with their hands behind their heads and their legs spread apart, while another soldier stands on guard with his rifle.

The scene dissolves into a man in a hospital bed with bandages across half his face and body, waving his arm as part of as Randall narrates, "and I saw the Negro lying in the swamp with his face blown off." Then, a stream of black men exit a paddy wagon as soldiers direct them with guns. The scene

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shifts to four armed soldiers goading two protesting black men to cross the street. A stop sign in the foreground conveys the sentiments of the poem. The images interpret the lines:

and in northern cities with his manhood maligned and felt the writhing  
of his viscera like that of the hare hunted down or the bear at bay,

The next scene reflects the futility and emptiness of unfulfilled lives as men shovel trash, and Randall relates: "no joy in their work," and "joyless excitement" This image recedes into Randall's face as he reads: "as I groped in darkness and felt the pain of millions," which indicates the poet as source of introspection. "Gradually, like day driving night across the continent," the camera pulls back from a shot of a statue in front of the Detroit Institute of Arts providing a larger view dissolving into "I saw dawn upon them like the sun a vision." The camera moves into the image of an African woman in the Rivera mural.

The vision continues by connecting with the image of the Asian woman in the mural, and the camera pans in reverse movement as a temporal shift and to converge with "of a time when all men walk proudly through the earth." Bones, fossils, and hands clenching raw minerals come into view, an allusion to the sequence in "George" and "the bombs and missiles lie at the bottom of the ocean / like the bones of dinosaurs buried under the shale of eras." The camera ends with the image of the European woman.

The next scene is a negative against the preceding positive vision of humanity. A shot of a military airfield with carrier planes and government bureaucrats in dark suits carrying briefcases rushing across the airfield in unnatural and stiff steps. The accelerated time frame was used to produce a mechanical effect as "men strive with each other not for power or the accumulation of paper."

The next scene returns to Randall's image: "but in joy create for others the house, the poem, the game of athletic beauty." Images appear in sync with words: "a house"—Randall's home; "the poem"—a close up of poetry lines; "athletic beauty"—Joe Louis.

The final stanza returns to the image of a black bird in the wrought-iron gate "washed in the brightness of this vision," which then goes out of focus, and in the distance the image of a Native American woman holding fruit comes into focus: "and benourished." The symbols of insight and life are transformed with a return to raging flame and smoke coming from a building, "suddenly burst into terrible and splendid bloom," as the fire rages. The final

lines return to Randall's narrative prologue, a freeze frame after

The film begins "Revolutions," Randall points in his literary film. Both poems provide the point of the poem in the film. As stated in "Revolutions" context, the broader point is that the black unicorn.

Just as the poetry in Randall's narrative prologue later manifested itself in the film, Randall in 1981 for the first time during editing period when Randall's subtle nuances of

In his own words, information that affects Randall's biography is that the film is a story of the events of his times during the World War II period during World War II, Broadside Press.

The film supplies and his personal experience. It is a film about a cinematic character, regard, the words in the film, as lines of poetry reflect them relatively real experience and



lines return to Randall's image and "the blood-red flower of revolution," with a freeze frame after the last word of Randall's downcast gaze. Run credits.

The film begins with "Ballad of Birmingham" and ends with "Roses and Revolutions," Randall's most famous poems. These poems denote high points in his literary career and assure a strong opening and closing for the film. Both poems possess the tension and thematic depth necessary to affirm the point of the poem, "Black Poet, White Critic," the prelude or preface for the film. As stated in that poem, "Ballad of Birmingham" and "Roses and Revolutions" contain controversial subjects, like murder and freedom. The broader point is that these are the universal themes and timeless symbols of the black unicorn.

### RANDALL'S NARRATIVE

Just as the poetry sequences serve as passages of creative expression, Randall's narrative provides historical events and personal experience, which are later manifested through artistic expression. The 1989 interview was videotaped at the home of Lotus Press in Detroit, but a previous interview of Randall in 1981 for the "Hastings Street Opera Project" replaced the 1989 interview during editing because the earlier interview was recorded during a period when Randall's responses were more animated, and he displayed the subtle nuances of his personality and a more vibrant spirit.

In his own words, Randall supplies the historical and biographical information that affected his muse, his imagination, and his poetic industry. Randall's biography is filled with Detroit's African American history in particular and African American history in general. He explains the nature and events of his times by discussing the migration of his family to Detroit, growing up during the Great Depression, serving in a racially segregated army during World War II, observing the 1943 Race Riot in Detroit, and developing Broadside Press during the Black Arts Movement.

The film supplies historic photos related to his family, Detroit, culture, and his personal experiences. But the film also supplies imagery of literature. It is a film about a poet, and words are as critical to the visual contour of the cinematic character as the allusions that emanate from those words. In this regard, the words are images, and they appear and dissolve in his handwriting, as lines of poetry or as stanzas or as poems on pages, while Randall reflects them relative to his emerging or diverging vocabulary in the wake of real experience and imagination interacting in the service of art.

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To reaffirm this dynamic, these flashes of words and poetic formulas reappear in the presentation of "Roses and Revolution" to remind the audience that words are the imagination and the memory of past and future poems. The narrative demonstrates that poetry melds with the poet. Further introspection reveals Randall's upbringing by educated and religious parents who valued books and respected the human-rights struggle. This background rendered a fertile field for a person possessed by independent creative expression and motivated by progressive social and cultural values. Racial discrimination alienates African Americans and determines a peculiar social construction that, in this instance, contributed to a deeper understanding and a unique consciousness with regards to class issues. Moreover, Randall's early introduction to books and the publication of his first poems in the city's newspapers when he was still a teenager primed a strong sense of confidence in his abilities as a writer despite the pervasive consequences of racial discrimination.

The narrative was crafted in a manner to convey a sense of intimacy with the poet. Against the backdrop of a stone wall, his physical image is framed in a black leather easy chair surrounded by woodcarvings, books, and a colorful African weaving. This is not a prearranged setting, but in fact a favored reading corner in Randall's den. The camera moves in for tighter framing as expressions of personal feelings encourage closer proximity. In order to further capture this relationship, pauses after statements and instances of repose are used to contain his pensive nature. The interruption or interference of this mood with stills would have countered this effect. At other times, the interspersed family photos and images of Detroit's Black Bottom, the neighborhood where Randall came of age, provide a visual frame of reference as Randall relays history through memory.

About growing up, Randall remembers being a Boy Scout and going to camp in the western part of Michigan where runaway slaves settled and became farmers. A photo by a Detroit historian, Orlin Jones, provides a partially obscured image of Randall peeking above another boy's head. This photo also contains two of his brothers, James, on the left and in full view, and Arthur, standing next to Dudley. Photos of James and Arthur as adults are seen when Randall talks about his induction into the army. Images of Joe Louis and jazz musicians emerging from the radio highlight and simulate the importance of radio during the 1930s.

His discussion of the Great Depression is largely a class-based analysis. As he explains with dry humor, "It was a happy time. We never locked our doors because there wasn't anything to rob." His reporting of the nature of things is a poet's perspective, which penetrates the effects as well as the ex-

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perience. He offers the example of racial insult in the Penny Kitchen Restaurant when the proprietor refused to serve him and his brother in the dining room. Randall's discussion of the 1943 Race Riot in Detroit considers this event a critical moment in African American memory, while it is merely a footnote in mainstream history. Randall connects that event with racial tension in the labor movement and with housing discrimination. He also extends the consequences of the riot to the increase in the number of black males drafted into the armed services.

Randall's account of the war reveals not only the effect on his poetry, but also on the irony of encountering a Jim Crow South during a time when the United States was fighting a war against fascism. The story about the black troops resisting their removal to a Jim Crow car is highlighted with irony and cryptic humor: "in the dining car, a black cloth separates the whites from the black, so as to not upset the digestion of the white people." It is this wry sense of humor that is a part of Randall's charm and his capacity to rise above racial adversity. It is also his belief in poetry that makes his life special, and it becomes his political contribution to social progress.

Since he did not face military action during the war, he viewed his experience in the army an opportunity that expanded his poetic vocabulary through unique exposures to exotic lands. Randall's exposure to other cultures in the South Pacific during World War II continued after the war, when he studied Russian literature and language during his undergraduate education at Wayne State University. Randall describes his experiences at Wayne State University as an English major, which furthered his formal training with poetry. Photos from the college's 1949 yearbook appear of him alone and with other members of the Miles Poetry Workshop as he explains the founding and the publication of their poetry series.

His 1966 tour of the Soviet Union demonstrates the universal dimension of his poetry and the broad scope of his intellectual interests, which affected the publication of the first Broadside publication, *Poem Counterpoem*. His first collection of poems with Margaret Danner was designed after the format of a book he encountered during his visit to the Soviet Union in 1966. Randall's reflections on the Russian tour reveal his knowledge of the culture and the language. The inclusion of the reading of "I Loved You Once," a translation of a Pushkin poem, articulates the depth of his linguistic and aesthetic knowledge. The emphasis on the reception of poetry and poets by the Russian people illustrates what dynamics affected Randall's decisions as a poet, scholar, and publisher. This is a key view into Randall's identity and the universal dimensions of his poetry and his interest in world culture.

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## THE SECONDARY PERSPECTIVE

The voice-overs are limited to structural considerations. They provide information for connections, for context, and for clarification. The first commentary occurs after "Ballad of Birmingham," and uses the broadside of the poem to establish the historical connection between its publication and the founding of the press. Randall's achievements are presented by showing his books, and the impressive line-up of Broadside authors are introduced. The camera pans the ninety titles of books to demonstrate the extent of Broadside Press's bibliography, then the image converges with a 1975 photo of Broadside books and me, when I was the assistant editor of the press, to identify the relationship between the filmmaker and the subject. Photos of Randall with poets Gwendolyn Brooks, Sonia Sanchez, Sterling Brown, Haki Madhubuti (Don L. Lee), Etheridge Knight, Paulette White, Hilda Vest, and others facilitate visual associations for future reference.

"Ballad of Birmingham" becomes the founding poem for Broadside Press, as explained in the voice-over and the introduction for the film. What is special about Randall's life is that he was a poet-publisher who made significant sacrifices to open the literary canon to the benefit of writers traditionally discriminated against because they write about "controversial subjects." It is just such a poem that initiates that poetry press, which was an outgrowth of the political impetus of the Civil Rights Movement.

This sequence is followed by images of the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of Broadside Press in 1990, which was a tribute to Randall, the founder. Randall is introduced, and then Coleman A. Young, who was at that time the mayor of Detroit, pays tribute to him as the poet laureate of the city and to Randall's identity as a vital part of the city. The film returns to the format of its opening, as the ending includes a return to the celebration, a final voice-over, a pan of the hundreds of Broadside poems, and an closing poem. The second voice-over is informational. I explain that in 1951 Randall achieved his master's degree in library science from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, after graduating from Wayne State University, and that his first marriage produced a daughter and later a divorce. The bridge also introduces his lasting marriage to Vivian Spencer and the next poem, "Profile on the Pillow."

The interviews with other poets provide testimonials that position Randall's life and work as points of departure and the central focus for these other artists. The sequence on the late Etheridge Knight provides a specific illustration of Randall's impact as an editor and publisher. It begins with Knight reading a poem in a public setting surrounded by white concrete

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Knight was selected cause his biography most intriguing story lost or hidden before. Therefore, he is the presence as he explains Randall's statement in

The interview view commentary on Randall viewed from the lens of Randall's publisher as the reason for the downward of Arts with the previous important transition.

Naomi Madge poet, and published book, *A Litany of* and W. E. B., as in Shirley Woodson office, framed in the African World Festival lower left-hand corner



walls. The poem, "The Idea of Ancestry," was written when Knight was in prison, therefore the setting intersects with the concrete cell where the poem was composed. The second half of the poem is read in Randall's home and the transition between settings is an aural one. The inclusion of the poem reiterates poetry as the primary energy in the film, and of course in Knight's relationship with Randall. Knight explains that poetry saved him from a life of crime and that Randall visited the prison to help him develop his craft. The publication of his first book, *Poems from Prison*, which was published by Broadside Press, was a significant factor in his early parole. Knight's poetry has won several awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship and the National Book Award. He was one of the most prominent Broadside poets, and his talents were largely directed by Randall's tutelage. Historic photos reflect Knight with Randall, as well as in connection with Gwendolyn Brooks. The broadsides of his poems are viewed and scanned by the camera as Knight relays history and fond memories about Randall's gentle presence and personality, his example as a major literary influence, and his dedication as an editor.

Knight was selected to represent the experience of a Broadside poet because his biography is the most dramatic example of achievement and the most intriguing success story. Knight is a clear example of the kind of talent lost or hidden because of the lack of opportunities for African Americans. Therefore, he is the poet who is most capable of influencing a young audience as he explains the power of poetry to transform life, an echo of Randall's statement in the preceding Russian sequence: "Poetry is Power."

The interview with Marvin Bell moves the perspective of the film to commentary on Randall's impact as a poet and publisher and how that legacy is viewed from the broader American artistic community. Bell traces the genius of Randall's poetic gifts and his larger contribution as a poetry publisher as the reasons for his Life Achievement Award from the National Endowment of Arts in 1986. Bell's comments, as a "white" poet juxtaposed with the previous sequence, the reading of the poem "Poet," effect a significant transition.

Naomi Madgett's discussion of Randall is from a closer view as friend, poet, and publisher. As a black American poet and publisher of Randall's last book, *A Litany of Friends*, Madgett exalts the special qualities of "Booker T. and W. E. B.," as images of this and other poems translated into visual art by Shirley Woodson complement the discussion. The setting of the Lotus Press office, framed in such a way that a partial view of a famous print for the first African World Festival in Detroit by visual artist Carl Owens occupies the lower left-hand corner, enhances Madgett's interview. The eye of the figure

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in the print, who is symbolic of the dual heritage or the "double consciousness" of African Americans, a concept explained by W. E. B. Du Bois, appears to affirm what Madgett relays about the poem "Booker T. and W. E. B." The setting obliquely and graphically conveys the layers of art, history, and culture.

Madgett's sequence changes settings and reconnects with the earlier celebration sequence, wherein she discussed her status as a Broadside poet and Randall as the pioneer in black poetry publishing. This transition moves the film back to the setting of the earlier sequence, when Randall appeared in dynamic footage moving into another temporal framework. With humor and humility, Randall comments on the many years of his cultural service, the people who influenced him, and some of the people who came to pay tribute. He makes reference to Malcolm X in Harlem during remarks about a reading he performed there. This intersects with the film's introductory sequence and the book, *For Malcolm*, the first anthology and the second book published by Broadside Press. His acknowledgment of Chester Cable, his English professor at Wayne State University, also retrieves the importance of that particular segment.

Shahida Mausi, the director of the Detroit Council of the Arts, makes the closing remarks in the celebration sequence: "We want to thank you for what you have done for us and our young people. Thank you for this legacy you have left us," which is interfaced aurally with the concluding voice-over, my poem, "The Black Unicorn":

Dudley Randall's legacy  
is the deep reach of poetry  
larger than thousands of voices  
disrupting library silence.  
A black unicorn works quietly,  
diligently,  
with ink on paper  
opening the pages of  
history and poetry,  
where freedom dreams  
and roses and revolutions  
bloom.

A still photo of me, working at my desk at Broadside Press, followed by a pan across scores of broadsides accompanies the voice-over. This scene dissolves

into a bird's-eye shot  
Randall reads "Roses

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into a bird's-eye shot of a smoldering fire in the center of 1967 Race Riot, and Randall reads "Roses and Revolutions."

### COMPOSITIONAL STRUCTURE

The compositional arrangement provides an external temporal framework for the interviews and Randall's narrative, which takes place in both the immediate past and the distant past. The voice-overs operate outside of the temporal order of the film as introductory, transitional, and concluding remarks by the filmmaker. These sections are related and interrelated to the poetry sequences, but not in a historical order. The film operates in layers, a sequential development, the beginning of the documentary proper, and the ending. These structural units are related and interrelated, forming a pattern that can be likened to a series of interlocking circles, each cycle of narrative connecting to several others in more than one temporal flow. This pattern allows a holistic and multidimensional presentation of the pivot between life and work, providing sight and insight, perspective and introspection, creative expression, collaboration, and interpretation.

A key element in the construction of the imagery in "Ballad of Birmingham," "George," and "Roses and Revolutions" was the timing of the imagery. The aesthetic sensibility of the on-line editor, Mark Yazenchak, was especially important. As the director, I determined the selection and arrangement of the imagery, but he determined the timing and the nuances during the construction of the imagery. The mise-en-scène visually converges with the rhythm and timing of Randall's voice, and Yazenchek's broader talents as a musician and sculptor contribute significantly to his editorial craft. Yazenchak's genius was further executed in the laying of the musical score; as the on-line editor, he intuitively interacted with the aesthetic perspective of the composer. His editing was more like sculpting or playing an instrument than simply manipulating a machine.

### THE MUSICAL SCORE

The original score was composed and performed by Kenn Cox, an internationally acclaimed Detroit composer and pianist. He was my first and preferred choice because I knew his talents were boundless. He has a broad cultural reach and a deep appreciation for the work of Dudley Randall. All of



the music was performed on the synthesizer, which allowed for an expansive range of simulated instruments.

"The Black Unicorn," the first piece that Cox composed for the project, has a thematic reprise that sonically underscores the film's narrative, which is expanded when performed with "Roses and Revolutions." About the composing process, Cox said, "Dudley is such a great character, it's almost like he wrote the music. The texts of his work and his interviews had a provocative influence on the composing process. To see and hear what he was saying in relation to the cinematic images made it considerably easier than I had anticipated."

"The Ballad of Birmingham," on the other hand, was a serious challenge because of the magnitude of the historical event. In particular, Cox said, "John Coltrane's piece, 'Alabama' was such a benchmark that I didn't want to be influenced by it." Cox extrapolated the music from the rhythmic patterns in the poetry and from the thematic thrust of the poems. In the case of "Ballad of Birmingham," he employed strings, which resulted in more of an organic sound. There is an electronic choir. It delivers a religious and a spiritually heavy sound that is haunting, and yet it is interlaced with a hopeful and uplifting quality. In "George," the pulse of the music stays the same except during the bridge in the middle of the poem, when the poem shifts in tense and in time frame. Cox uses arco strings, which simulate the cello and the bass to affect a masculine quality that relates to the theme of male bonding. The inclusion of the pizzicato provides the lighter strings, which is more feminine and contributes to the spiritual quality of the funeral scenes. There is no resolution to the piece; it fades out.

The sound for the Etheridge Knight sequence was determined by the blues qualities in his poem "The Idea of Ancestry." Cox uses a solo clarinet, an alto range which is plaintive and appropriate for the blues, not only in the rhythm of Knight's poetry, but also in his voice. The solo instrument is also reflective of the solitary existence in prison, where Knight wrote the poem. The music serves as an aural transition as Knight's reading of the poem changes settings. The clarinet solo is retrieved toward the end of the sequence, but it converges with the variations in Knight's speaking rhythm.

The sound track for "Poet" was distanced from the poem itself and plays with the even rhythm and mocking tone Randall employs in the poem. It operates as a complement and as counterpoint to Randall's voice. It is fast and quick, sharp and direct, emulating the attitude of the poem. In contrast, when Naomi Madgett talks about Randall's poetry, the score is in a soprano voice. The xylophone highlights a merry sense of rhythm, which reflects the nature of the poets' camaraderie.

Sometimes Cox takes care a moment when Randall reunderscores his statements instrument of thirteen string Eastern philosophical effect universal truths." In a more to represent the description up during the 1920s because the times.

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## CONCLUSION

The making of *The Black Unicorn*, and editing. Because of it and because my own poetry I realized that a more objective po



Sometimes Cox takes creative liberty and improvisational leaps. During a moment when Randall reflects on his philosophy of human nature, Cox underscores his statements with the sound of the koto, a small Japanese instrument of thirteen strings. He explains, "The point was to invoke an Eastern philosophical effect, which speaks to the wisdom of the ages and universal truths." In a more traditional reach, Cox uses "The Cake Walk" to represent the description of Randall's reflections when he was growing up during the 1920s because it was the popular African American sound of the times.

When Randall describes his wartime experiences the music races with excitement and dances with the upbeat sound of his voice. This sound is retrieved during the Russian sequence, emitting the same sense of adventure and excitement. Conversely, when he describes the disappointing experience when the Jim Crow law was enforced while his army unit was traveling on a train through the southern states, the sound track at the end of the sequence simulates the churning of train wheels, over and over.

Cox had the most difficulty with "Profile on the Pillow" because originally he tried to apply Chopin's Prelude in C Major, but it was too restrictive. Ultimately, he resolved to derive the first eight bars from Chopin's influence, but he improvised with a twentieth-century bridge. Cox, as a composer and pianist, was strongly influenced by Chopin during his studies and found a sense of kinship with this aspect of Randall's creative psyche. It is a lovely and enduring piano solo.

Kenn Cox undertook the score as a new composing challenge and feels it opened his imagination in new ways because he had not worked in this genre. Relating to both the poetry and the film stimulated his creativity: "The experience was enjoyable and was a challenge that was not frustrating. It was more a matter of I can do this, as opposed to what am I going to do." As the director, I rarely interfered during the composing process, but we did consult when he reached an impasse. And in some instances, we resolved to eliminate music altogether and to use the sound of words or silence as the aural amplifier.

### CONCLUDING: MAKING THE FILM

The making of *The Black Unicorn* required many hours of research, writing, and editing. Because of my experience as a worker at Broadside Press and because my own poetry has been influenced by Dudley Randall, I realized that a more objective portrayal of him would be disingenuous and the

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the work would be lacking. On the other hand, I did study the relationship between film and literature in graduate school at the University of Michigan, and this training was critical in terms of the drafting and crafting of the film.

One of the most dynamic aspects of this project was the crew. In many ways, it was an experience peculiar to the Detroit attitude about promoting our cultural heroes. I was privy to an excellent set of professionals with strong social and political consciousnesses. They were committed to the integrity of the project, and without their generous spirit the film would never have been completed.

I was the writer, producer, and director, and I also did research and conducted the on-camera interviews. The crew consisted of Terry Kelley, field director; Kenn Cox, musical composer and performer; Rich Weiske, off-line editor and camera operator; Mark Yazenchak, online editor; Robert Handley, camera operator; Bill Bryce, camera operator, Dave McNutt, camera operator; Ron Scott, interviewer; Judy Schonberg, researcher; and Dorothy Donise Clore, Kamala Kempadoo, Robert Matthews, and Denise Swope, production assistants.

My major difficulty was financial. Filmmaking is an expensive enterprise; the cost of equipment rental for recording and editing was often stifling. Acquiring funds for a documentary is a tedious process, and when funds were awarded they were always cut. The crew worked at reduced, proletariat rates, and, thanks to Bill Bryce, I was able to access editing equipment at moments when I did not have funds to pay for the time.

The Arts Foundation of Michigan, the Center for New Television, the Detroit Council of the Arts, the Ohio Arts Council, the Michigan Council for the Arts, the Department of Africana Studies at Wayne State University, and the University of Michigan Rackham Graduate Faculty Research Grant provided funding for the Black Unicorn Film Project. At different junctures, Progressive Artists and Educators Incorporated, the Société of the Culturally Concerned, and the Department of Black Studies at Ohio State University sponsored the film project.

The film served as a blueprint for the larger project, this biography of Randall, and was conceived as a complement to *Wrestling with the Muse: Dudley Randall and the Broadside Press*. The interviews for the film narrative were edited for the limitations of this format, but the extended conversations with Randall are included in the book. The book also provides a more detailed examination of his poetry and the development of Broadside Press. In this regard, the film is an introduction to his poetry and his life's work.

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The film reflects Randall's person, voice, and history. It also relays his creativity, personality, and industry in a manner that informs and inspires. The composition not only conveys the substance of Randall's work, it also combines the essence of his biography in a manner that demonstrates how and why he became a dynamic force in American literature by challenging the aesthetic tenets of tradition and by printing words that voice another time and alternate symbols.

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