

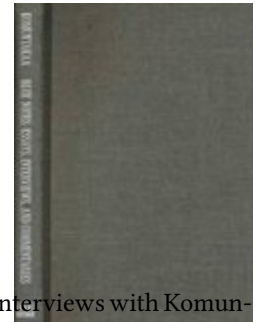
H-Net Reviews

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Yusef Komunyakaa. *Blue Notes: Essays, Interviews, and Commentaries*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000. viii + 165 pp. \$44.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-472-09651-0.

Reviewed by Angela M. Salas (Department of English, Adrian College)
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This volume is useful for undergraduates needing basic information about Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Yusef Komunyakaa and for those engaged in more systematic study of his work. Following the basic design of the University of Michigan's distinguished Poets on Poetry series, *Blue Notes* is divided into four distinct sections. The first section includes short essays written by Komunyakaa himself; in them Komunyakaa examines the works of poets and musicians who have been significant to his development. Readers are thus treated to musings on Jazz, Thelonious Monk, Etheridge Knight, Robert Hayden, and many other luminaries of the music and poetry worlds. In Komunyakaa's hands, these mythical talents become more human and less remote to the general reader.

Section two of *Blue Notes* includes five of Komunyakaa's poems, followed by his own brief comments about them. These comments provide information about the processes Komunyakaa employed in writing and revising the poems; they are mini-lessons in prosody, and are both fascinating and useful, showing, as they do, that poetry is not simply the result of divine inspiration. The perspiration shows in Komunyakaa's commentaries. Perhaps most useful for those seeking a crash course in the poetry of Yusef Komunyakaa is section three, in

which seven seminal, oft-quoted interviews with Komunyakaa are reprinted. Covering, as they do, a ten-year span, the interviews permit readers to witness the evolution of Komunyakaa's prosodic theories and personal reflections. Collecting the interviews here rescues solid, informative interviews from eternity in back issues of such volumes as *Callaloo* and *New England Review*, and will bring them to a wider readership.

The final section of *Blue Notes* includes Komunyakaa's ongoing projects, such as "Buddy's Monologue", an imaginative inquiry into the mind of the legendary cornet player Buddy Bolden. This section may be less interesting than the other three to some, but those readers who are interested in seeing a vigorous mind expand its boundaries will find it both fascinating and delightful. The gathering together of materials in *Blue Notes* is a service to devoted readers of Yusef Komunyakaa and to those who need a little extra information to get a handle on the work of this allusive, elusive, and rewarding poet. I recommend this volume whole-heartedly.

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