

PAUL BENNETT

Fine Arts Festival

A stone's throw from memorials to
McKinley, Garfield, Harding, Grant,
We gathered on capitol grounds
Smelling of legislators and lobbyists,
A businessman's government,
To hear writers read their poetry.
You followed me (thank God!)
Barefooted, clothed in fine-spun cloth,
African as sunlight,
With water-carved head, eyes and smile.

You said, as you were introduced,
"My mother would never understand
My way of saying goodbye
To Columbus, Ohio."

When you came to your poem
"Is It Art," your escort's
Long fingers lifted a tucked fold
Of your one-piece gown, and unwrapped slowly,
As Bougainvillia leaves might be pulled aside.

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed a woman,
Attempting to block her husband's view.
"Police! Where are the police?"
Called an old man on the outer edge
Of your applauding audience.

"And is it art?" you asked,
Turning as a leaf upon its axis.

No one answered that I heard,
But marble statues of Ohio's dead
Gave assent with staring eyes.