

Mimic the Devil



STORIES, ESSAYS, AND POEMS BY
MAWI ASGEDOM AND FRIENDS

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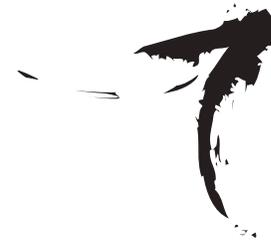
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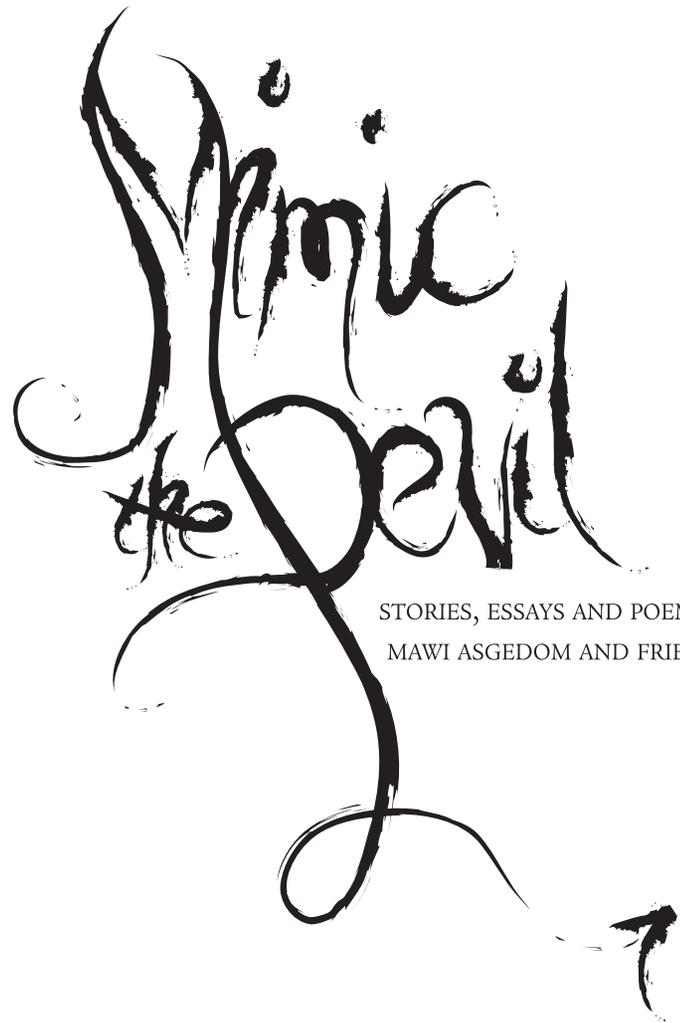
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Dedicated to my father Haileab,
the Son of Zedengel, who was the Son of Asgedom





Sinner
to the Devil

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Introduction

As a teenager, I loved to read but I detested writing. So it was no small miracle when at age fourteen I started to journal each night. Within months, my journals became emotional safe havens. I lamented about girls, outlined my dreams, and vented. Somewhere along the way, I started writing poetry.

By the end of college, I'd filled more than fifteen journals. But I never considered myself a writer, much less a poet. I simply wrote when deep emotion or passion forced me.

Many of my deepest emotions arose from one fact: I was unavoidably different. I was half Ethiopian, half Eritrean; half first world, half third world; half African-American, half African. I was a minority on welfare living in a white, upper class suburb.

What does my difference have to do with *Mimic The Devil*, the collection of poems, stories and essays you have in your hands?

Hybrid people like me are everywhere now. Many suburban schools that ten years ago had 2 to 3 % minority populations now have minority populations exceeding 20%. Immigrants increasingly make up a larger segment of our country. And as more Americans intermarry, more will have multiple identities.

Yet how much do we as a culture seek to understand or affirm the perspectives of those from multiple backgrounds? Do we have novels, poetry, or memoirs that chronicle their experiences? Do we read them?

As a history major at Harvard University, I learned that if you're not part of a culture's writings, the implicit assumption is that you don't matter. Your voice is nonexistent because you're irrelevant.

Yet hybrid voices, when given a chance, can contribute beauty and power. Hybrid voices, forced to traverse a multitude of worlds, can connect things we would never normally connect. And sometimes, hybrid voices can show that we all have some hybrid in us.

So I asked myself several months ago: Who do I know that writes from a place of mixed identity? Who would I be proud to feature?

I thought of my friend, Nisrin, who's labored on behalf of oppressed peoples all over the world. I thought of Frehiwot, an Ethiopian orphan I met while speaking, and the cross-continent heartbreak she shared with me.

I thought of my proud African brothers, Derrick and Victor, both who shine like the Equatorial sun. And my friends Jen and Laurie, and their tireless quests for a brighter world. Then, of course, I had to invite my little sister Mehret to share her journeys.

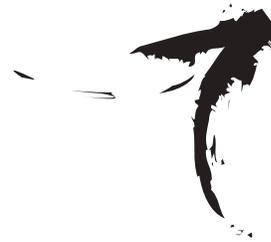
Each of these contributors writes from the heart. From their hope and pain, their struggles and joy. Agree with them or not, relate to them or not, here are their voices.

Enjoy,

Selamawi "Mawi" Asgedom

September 1, 2006

Selamawi Asgedom



Thanks for journeying with us this far. It's my turn now so here's the context for some of my poems. I wrote "Mimic The Devil" on July 4, 1998. I was taking the train home from the fireworks celebration in Chicago when a dozen intoxicated teenagers came on the train and picked fights with passengers.

I wrote the poems "Brothers at War," "Accusations," and "Democracy" after my homelands of Ethiopia and Eritrea went to war again in 1998. Most of my pieces were written during college.

Mimic the Devil

While some chumps revel, mimicking the devil,
and redefining his level
While they mock their gifts, and ignore the rifts,
between self and misfits

On another hemisphere, and sometimes near,
life means fear

Not of passing classes, hallway passes,
or chasing lasses

But of lack of water, mindless slaughter,
and sell my daughter
35% AIDS rate, an unwavering fate,
salvation too late

No money for pills, no blankets for chills,
no remedy for ills

Just a dream,

That amidst the muck,
Life won't always suck.

Democracy

Ah panacea, cure-all, finally we have you.
No more dictators, ciao privileges, adios coup
Democracy, equality, liberty, see our bill of rights
Capitalism, free markets, our economy at newfound heights.

But wait, what's that you say, Reality bites?
Old elites hide new privileges; new days, old nights?
Those who had have twice as much
While those who hunger still can't spell lunch.

Without education, transportation, communication
Democracy just a catch word of lubrication?
That smoothes our throats, oh we masses uncouth
So that chumps up above can force-feed dark truth?

Ahhh "Democracy"...where are you now?

Accusations

Accusations made, of last night's raid, and tomorrow's crusade
of land mines laid, signs of aid, and payment delayed..

Now shift to rumors, malignant tumors.
The stories spread, five thousand dead, or so it was said

More propaganda, directed slanda, makes peace stew blanda
So masses believe, while chumps deceive, and peace takes leave.

And we just wonder, how far under, they can blunder,
and tear asunder, after thirty years of plunder.

AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

What sad mystery, why African history, always means misery?

About Mawi Asgedom



Selamawi “Mawi” Haileab Asgedom fled civil war in Ethiopia and survived a Sudanese refugee camp for three years. After being resettled in The United States at age seven, Mawi overcame welfare, language barriers and personal tragedy to graduate from Harvard University.

Since 1999, Mawi has dedicated himself to uplifting America’s teenagers. He has spoken to over 300,000 students and educators across North America, and his 3 books and 4 CDs have won multiple awards, sold over 100,000 copies, and been used by thousands of classrooms. Citing the impact of his work, The Illinois Association of Teachers of English named Mawi the 2006 Illinois Author of the Year.

Mawi has hosted a yearlong teen series on PBS Chicago and many prominent media outlets have featured him including:

- The Oprah Winfrey Show
- *ESSENCE*, one of “The 40 Most Inspiring African-Americans”
- *Ebony*, one of “30 Black Leaders Under 30”
- *Chicago Tribune*
- *The Boston Globe*
- *Harvard Magazine*

Mawi is 29 years old and lives in Chicago, where he’s been known to stay up until 5 a.m. playing video games.

He maintains a website at www.mawispeaks.com.