

Textual Analysis
Admissions by Application, 2016
MA Program in English and American Literature
National Taiwan University

Watch the first two minutes of John Coltrane's performance. Then analyze the sound (including the vocal and the musical, the jarring and the rhythmic, the audible and the imaginary) qualities of this poem and explain how they could contribute to delivering meanings.

Dear John, Dear Coltrane¹²

*a love supreme, a love supreme a love supreme, a love supreme*³

Sex fingers toes
in the marketplace
near your father's church
in Hamlet, North Carolina—
witness to this love
in this calm fallow
of these minds,
there is no substitute for pain:
genitals gone or going,
seed burned out,
you tuck the roots in the earth,
turn back, and move

¹ This poem by Michael Harper addresses John Coltrane, a revolutionary saxophonist in the American jazz history. When this poem was written, Coltrane's death was impending since he suffered seriously from a bad liver problem due to his previous drug abuse.

² This poem follows Coltrane's life from his childhood up to the point of Coltrane's last performances.

³ A quote from a line repeated in the Coltrane's masterpiece that expresses his spiritual awakening.

by river through the swamps,
singing: *a love supreme, a love supreme;*
what does it all mean?

Loss, so great each black
woman expects your failure
in mute change, the seed gone.
You plod up into the electric city—
your song now crystal and
the blues. You pick up the horn
with some will and blow
into the freezing night:
a love supreme, a love supreme—

Dawn comes and you cook
up the thick sin 'tween
impotence and death, fuel
the tenor sax cannibal
heart, genitals, and sweat
that makes you clean—
a love supreme, a love supreme—

Why you so black?
cause I am
why you so funky?
cause I am
why you so black?
cause I am
why you so sweet?
cause I am
why you so black?
cause I am
a love supreme, a love supreme:

So sick
you couldn't play *Naima*⁴,
so flat we ached
for song you'd concealed
with your own blood,
your diseased liver gave
out its purity,
the inflated heart
pumps out, the tenor kiss,
tenor love:
a love supreme, a love supreme—
a love supreme, a love supreme—

⁴ A song Coltrane wrote for and named after his wife.