

from Kamilah Aisha Moon's "Initiation"

When mothers are lowered, daughters
break out of boxes, unbossed by
the minutia that comes with breathing.
You saw it happen, see it in your friend's
furrowed brow, the revised way she leans
in a doorway, across a kitchen counter.

Her mother has gone there, dragging her
into a new here. This missing flares. Gone
is the banter of carefree homegirls;
a deeper cadence reigns—that grown
alto, *mama*
heavy on her tongue, loud and loving
in her mind, in lucid dreams.
Heiress to her mother's wellspring and
might,
she finally gets what *humph* really means.

When mothers are planted,
daughters begin a furious blooming

*Furious Flower: Seeding the
Future of African American Poetry*



FROM TAYLOR JOHNSON'S
"AERATION"



THE PROBLEM WITH LANGUAGE
IS THE PROBLEM WITH HISTORY.
I WAS GIVEN WHAT I DIDN'T ASK FOR,
SIMPLE.

SO I OPENED THE WINDOWS—
BORED WITH THE VESTIGIAL CONCERN
TO SING WHAT MY GHOSTS COULDN'T.
I'M EASING YOUR YOKE
SINGING LIKE THIS.

THE AIR IS POPULATED, YES,
AND SO IS MY ONE NAME.

FURIOUS FLOWER: SEEDING THE
FUTURE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN POETRY



from Damaris B. Hill's "A
Reckoning: Assata in 1980"

Despite the fact that the new world's
maps are carved out of the ebony

underbellies of Africans, you
grew into a "Moses"

woman, a Harriet Tubman, standing
between the ocean sprays

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from Xandria Phillips'
"A Fruit We Never Tasted"

when we carried the ocean over and over itself we /
thought more of the places we
left / than the places we would
become / we pulled rotten teeth
from we / heads and we did so
without medicine / and we did so
anyway /

when we carried the ocean to we god and slatted
residences / we

places rowed in singular flora
/ we death huts / we sold into
shacks / we blistered dreams
we / split-back houses / we silver
and china confinements /
we hot blank speech /



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from francine j. harris'
"Versal"

And a black girl is standing on it, over a river rocking.
Sidebank isn't thug among us, not
a rush gang, not a flower snatched from sidewalks,
which isn't breaking in root. Nothing

for jewels, isn't watching through windows. The black meadow
isn't sniper squatting, cheapening the field reek,
eyesore cattail driving down
the sound of stream driveby. The wood

is an eager, a Negus among us, a runner like eagle,
a brown sighting, root system gathered in growl
of curl, of amassed vein feed. Say it with us.
The wood is a falcon, a clean stretch of might.



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from Phillip B. Williams' "Discipline"

Second thought: not birds, suddenly up,
but a hand across, five digits their own
five violences:
betrayal, velocity, bloodtooth, quiver,
"will he return?"

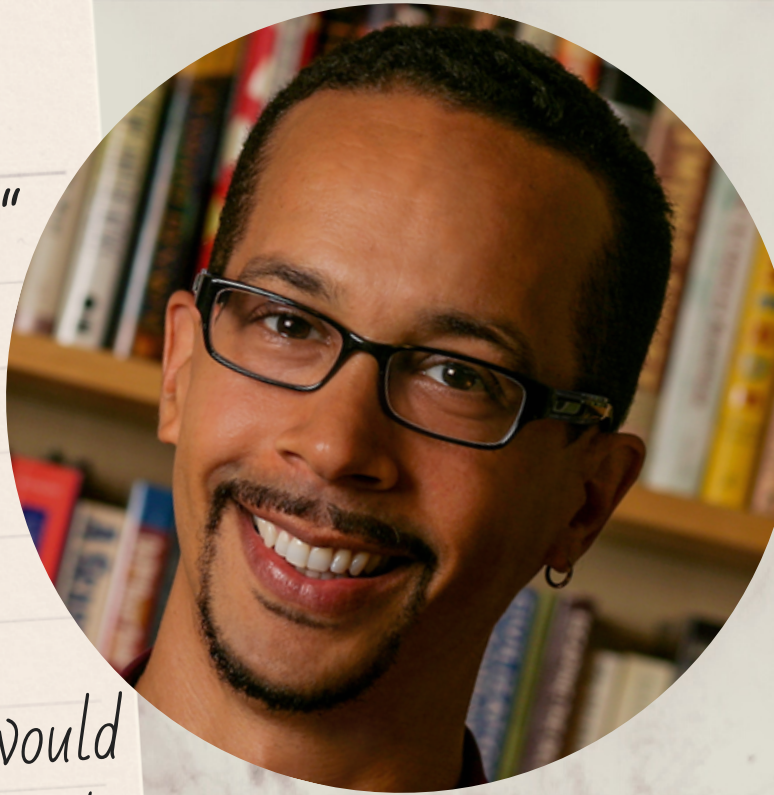
Then thinking itself became uncanny.



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from Hayes Davis'
"Jim on the Raft after His 'Dream'"



and my voice bite sharper than I thought it ever would
around any white person, even a boy. His eyes bug out,
he stare at me, then he set his jaw, walk off, stay

on the far corner of the raft for fifteen minutes.
When he come back slow, mouth quivering, apologizing
I let my breath out. Later he ask why I

didn't beat a tin pan in the fog, keep beating it
till we found each other. He get real quiet when I
ask how many runaways he know want attention.

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from Abdul Ali's
"I Don't Think for a Second
That We Won't Survive This"

Time loses seconds; I make a silly face to break the gravity.
I pick her up and we're flying. Her arms stretch across the sky
With crayola lines of fleshy pinks and browns.

Her body grows small, reversing time as she runs down the hall,
A little rocket, shooting towards light where karate, jump rope,
The sound of her feet beating the swollen ground,

Her learning ancient colored girl chants
Let's get the rhythm of the hot dog

The air thins, my thoughts lift me to outer space,
I don't worry
I mouth something to the gods

And I don't think for a second that we won't survive this.



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from Destiny O. Birdsong's "From Home"

And the Ferris wheel,
whose narrow, paint-cracked seats
take turns reeling above the tangle of
queues.

Through the window blows
the smell of roasting meat;

we think of the black mother,
the black son,
the charred turkey leg.

We look down at our black hands
and laugh uncomfortably.

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from Remica Bingham-Risher's "Fish Fry"

My family sat around a table
sharing fried fish and a bushel
of June's first crabs,
all female and tender.
I ate only legs, watching one uncle
break back upon back with his teeth,
not stopping for claw or egg or eye.



[...]

One by one I counted, the transgressed
and transgressors, the men, laughing
chiming Uh-huh, that's right
and all the empty shells of women—
heads down, eyes tame as those
in our hands.

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from Teri Ellen Cross Davis's "Knuckle Head"

My son cannot continue this path.
Black boys can't lose control at 21, 30, even 45.
They don't get do-overs.
So I let him flail about now,
let him run headfirst into the wall
learn how unyielding perceptions can be.

Bear the bruising now,
before he grows, enters a world
too eager to spill his blood, too blind to how red it is.



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FROM SAFIA ELHILLO'S "SELF-PORTRAIT WITH NO FLAG"

i come from two failed countries
& i give them back i pledge
allegiance to no land no border
cut by force to draw blood i pledge
allegiance to no government no
collection of white men carving up
the map with their pens



i choose the table at the waffle house
with all my loved ones crowded
into the booth. i choose the shining
dark of our faces through a thin sheet
of smoke glowing dark of our faces

slick under layers of sweat i choose
the world we make with our living
refusing to be unmade by what surrounds
us i choose us gathered at the lakeside
the light glinting off the water & our
laughing teeth & along the living
dark of our hair & this is my only country

FURIOUS FLOWER: SEEDING THE FUTURE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN POETRY



FROM DURIEL E. HARRIS' "MAKING"

The body is a phrase I repeat, a vibration I recover from silence. In the absence of memory, I invent from fragments a garment with which to cloak the body. It is a fair substitute, a kind of skin: pliable & durable, imbuing the body with superlative resilience.

In this instance, for these purposes, the body is the self. Like water and space, the self exists throughout the body. Proprioception—beneath the level of consciousness—allows for the projection of the self beyond the body to the extent that I imagine myself without substance, moving in the absence of flesh, unencumbered, untethered, impervious to pain.

In the narrative I inherited, the girl body is synonymous with pain. Its form dictates function & from engendering through decline it seizes in its constraints. Despite age, wisdom, intellect or skill, she is a girl: a body refashioned in language to serve, fixed in injury to compel yielding.

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from Darrel Alejandro Holnes
"Bread Pudding Grandmamma"

Our hands mush together our pains with
a few grains of salt for style she says, with
a few slices of butter, the secret to life
in each mixing bowl.

I'm the darling grandchild,
her favorite, I believe.
At school there is trouble
and medication for her is expensive,
so we make bread, bake bread,
the sweet kind to satisfy our appetite

She digs from the bottom of a jar for
fruits soaked in wine—
Only the best ones.
We add this last.

This is what give it that taste man,
any liquor is all right.

She talks, I smile.
Eighty-six years old,
I believe her old hands and weak eyes
but strong legs and big smile.



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From JP Howard's "Praise Poem For My Leo Self"

Praise mothers. Praise us all. Lesbian. Queer. Bi. Trans. Questioning women.
Praise how we nurture, when the rest of the world pushes us down.
Praise women who keep rising to the top.

Praise my scared little girl self.
Praise her memories.
Praise Mama's sadness.
Praise Mamas who sometimes want out of the world and away from their children.
Praise Mamas whose sadness swallows a whole childhood.

Praise a child's ability to survive.
Praise my inner strength.
Praise that smart, confident person that breathes in my skin.
Love her when she's bold and then again, when she's scared.

Praise all the marches I've been in.
Praise the call for justice for black boys and girls everywhere.
Praise all the people that will continue to march for justice, when I can't anymore.
Praise my weary feet. Let them dance tonight remembering all that love. All that love.



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**from Jacqueline Jones Lamon's
"We Put So Much Faith in the Power of Doors"**

Yes, we heard it would storm but we'd heard it before—
how we should buy water and board up our windows,
test out our flashlights, and stock up on gas.

What is it you need when you're fleeing your home?
When you're hungry and frantic, in need of clean clothes?
When the neighborhood's empty and they've shut

down one bridge, toll takers dismissed in the darkening
swirl? You pack up the puppies. You water
your plants. Throw clothes in a suitcase. Drive away . . .



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from Raina J. León's
"what we lose in the fire a blown tire makes us see"

we burned there though we were not there
or perhaps we were and

only high flying birds could intuit our story
as they flew in circles cinder-blinded until
they fell

for the trees are tinder
and the earth grays over

above a death mare's mane blocks the sun
that sears still in orange glow

how terrible the psychedelic colors at sunset
how terrible the smoldering beauty

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from Clint Smith's
"what the cicada said to the black boy"

but you

you're lucky if they let you live that long
i could teach you some things you know
have been playing this game since before

you knew what breath was
this here is prehistoric
why you think we fly?

why you think we roll in packs?
you think these swarms are for the fun of it?
i would tell you that you don't roll deep enough

but every time you swarm they shoot
get you some wings son
get you some wings



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from Tara Betts'
"Another Clearing of the Land":
Epitaph for Hadiyah Pendleton

Who was she?

One in school, & two not, & all
Black South Side teens
with nothing in common but a pained echo
for a future;

descendants of migrants & hustlers & . . .
one recalled as an honor student,
softly saying slogans against gunfire
in her city

that goes on popping at street lights
of suffused glass & screeching getaways
in what is not quite pursuit.

What I hate, what I

will forever hate, is how she fades with every
day from numbness, from
an empathy undone, not bound to anyone,
the swift, ruthless slap casual
as someone swiping a bus pass,
for this is what Death wanted:

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from Reginald Dwayne Betts' "Night"

She stared at me, once, & said she saw her brothers
doing life in my eyes. In this night, when we talk to each other,
it is in shouts. The guilt of solitary cells I've known confess

that my woman has never been my woman. How ownership
& want made me split that bastard's. head into a scream
is what I'll never admit to her. What she

tells me: prison killed you my love, killed you so dead
that you're not here now, you're never here, you're always.
Her eyes closed at night and I awaken and swear she

stares at me, she is saying that brown liquor owns me, saying
that the cells own me & that there is no room for her, unless
she calls the police, the state, calls upon her pistol, & sets me free.

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from Samantha Thornhill's
"Bring Back"

Bring back the milk cartons;
air brush them with brown girls

Bring back our girls
with invisible skins.

Bring back our lost in the sauce,
the done up and dressed down,

our around the way girls from Nigeria,
Atlanta, South Africa and the Bronx,

dredge them up from swamps
on the hills of capitals.



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from Glenis Redmond "I Wish You Black Sons"

I wish you the ability to bear only black fruit
I wish you only sons
I wish them black
spilled from your loins like black ink
I wish you code words like: inner city urban hip-hop
I wish you Baltimore, DC, Newark, Philly, Ferguson,
Charleston, Charlotte, and Greenville and so on ...
I wish your sons long walks home
through white neighbors' yards
I wish the neighbors' curtains peek open
I wish they call the cops
I wish you that you live your life on the lip of this terror
I wish you dreaming of ways to whisper protection
in your sons' ears

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FROM DANTE MICHEAUX'S "DEW-DRIVER"

In my mind, I taste the sweet dew untouched
by morning light, but my eyes see only blood
on the leaves of the rock-fig tree—
bright birds, shot from the sky, caught in its branches.
Where is the paradise of my naked boyhood
and the fireflies that nibbled at my lobes
like the gold of mother's earbobs?

Ghosts have long been here, but not longer than the beetle,
yet they cast pale shadows on ancient dark land,
preying on hospitalities of people *long bared to the world's disdain*
siblings of the leafcutter, children of the dirt.



**FURIOUS FLOWER: SEEDING THE FUTURE
OF AFRICAN AMERICAN POETRY**



from Lynne Procope's "American Religion"

with their maker sit in—

I mean they resist

the urge to lower their eyes from seeking
just rewards and yet; each of them slips
in their meditation to questions unanswerable
by faith,

and if God replied,
seek me and you wild, yet definite, and
(must I mention) Black, you—
will find yourself staring back, the voice of God

reverberating in your head like sweet
madness, you will find a form of yourself.
A person capable of abiding in joy.
But here, the voice of God is a distraction

from gunfire exploding the statuary,
bullets cracking the cavity, the recoil snap
of a human turned to a flinching muscle
arching away from the rapid reports.

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from Valencia Robin's
"Cathedral"

Not that I need reminding, but even the trees, the trees!
Like giant awestruck afros grown in the laboratory
of a mad brother, the nerdy Nerudian of my dreams
who's somehow isolated the colors of all the saddest love songs

in the world—*Baby, baby red* and *Please, please, please*
yellow, yes, even the browns are talking to me, the greens
blue in this early autumn light that makes everything shout.
And where's my hopeless agnostic when I need her,



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from Mariah Adessa
EKere Tallie's
"Global Warming BLues"

The ocean had a laugh
when it saw the shore
I said the ocean had a big big laugh
when it saw the shore
it pranced on up the boardwalk
and pummeled my front door

There's no talking to the water
full of strength and salt
no, there's no bargaining with the water
so full of strength and salt
I'm a Mama working two jobs
global warming ain't my fault

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from Amber Flora Thomas's
"Blackberries"

drupelets wicked in fine hairs.
Aggregate seeds multiply in my teeth.
My stained fingers pointing out blue
magna, heart inside some living,
porous and lit. I eat

sunlight's purplish-black answer
to hunger. Light crushing around
my tongue. The night I hid down in me found to
be golden.

after all; a pollinator's domain
when I am my hand back through
memory and thorns and yellow jackets
for the blackest berries. The bucket I carried
beside my best friend spilling

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from L. Lamar Wilson's "Resurrection Sunday"

We want a body, not mangled like ours,
we can love without shame. The boy feels
so small in his body, its scars that beckon

stares & gasps. I am he, doubled in size
& solemnity. I churn. I am an ocean
of want. This video's hustler must do.

His left pec brandishes a lion's paw
& skull-&-bones. A broken heart heaves outside
his right. With each kiss, our heads swell.

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from Ama Codjoe's
"Garden of the Gods"

The playbill is shut and I'm thinking
of the book Octavia Butler never wrote:
how it could begin with the death

of the last black man in the whole entire
world, which is the name of the play
we are about to see: "The Death of the Last

Black Man in the Whole Entire World A.K.A.
The Negro Book of the Dead."
My date and I share the armrest



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from F. Douglas Brown's "Brown to Bowne :: Douglass to Tubman Remix"

So let me bring the midnight sky, so the silent
stars beatbox and hum. Show me how devotion
be a rattle, be your freedom from the tongue.

Heroism, all theirs, encountered perils and
hardships, a service for our people. Yes, we
be the living with great privilege to bear

our people's testimony and character.
Let them run through our works,
leading us, and I will regard your everyway

truthful, trustworthy. I'll gather the gold,
you carry the gun. Browne, I will be your dearest
friend, and companion in this war.

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