

The New Abolition:

A Collection of Poems Inspired by Modern Black American Literature

Julia Robitaille

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Sea glass

this is a glossy leaf
that looks like glass.
like the sheep I count
from the comfort my bed
or from a bed of grass

It's sea glass I was told.
so I believed.
because as far as I could see
nature's anomalies we're millennials old,

written on the face a broken stopwatch-
on the brink of a lie
of belief, of deceit-
but once turned,
crushed my fantasy of conceited defeat
- why couldn't I simply believe?

that this glass comes not from the sky
but from the sea

*Inspired by Carter G. Woodson's *The Mis-Education of The Negro* (Preface & Chapter 1)

Constellations

Now I know why they call them constellations
 they draw figures,
 famous and raptuous
 to the soul,
 as I gaze into the abysmal darkness
 of the sky
 a group of visible stars forming a
 perceived
 pattern -
 it's a *pattern*,
 representing

Andromeda, Canis Minor, no, it's Orion,
 Or maybe Eagle Nebula

But how i see multitudes of patterns emerging -
 Dog, skyline, shipyard, tree -
 Or maybe a willow flower
 Yet none of mine recognized by NASA

As I gaze up through
 myriads of zodiacal light,
 parceled into figures I try to label yet cannot,
 I wonder how all of the visible, viable universe
 can be
 mapped out, reduced to a mere eighty-eight figures
 recognized by dream-catching astrologists spanning
 across, over, and past the US of A,
 chronicled in textbooks, history books, stories of old
 biblical, mythological, and inherently old
 shared by anyone and everyone with the eye to look up in the night and agree,
 and still -
 I just don't see it.

As I look up into *the* darkness above,
 filled with a thousand fragments of shattered light glass i wonder
 Which one is the north star,
 and what they mean when they say each one was once
 One of us;
 a thousand unfulfilled promises a thousand unrequited loves, a thousand lost dreams a thousand
 unmet goals a thousand broken promises a thousand unheard wishes,
 a thousand dead prophets living through legacies left on land
 Great-great grandmother, I look you in your eyes
 and ask why,
 Why should we feel so close to the dead, it feels haunting, cryptic
 to look them in their faces, to say their names

in air, they pass, carried by the wind, not forgotten
but collecting in spirals of speckled dust
overhead, visible
and shining on the darkest of nights
 promising tomorrow and the sorrow of yesterday,
 calling to me
and so
I refuse to name them constellations.

*Inspired by Aracelis Girmay's "The Black Maria"

Welcome Home, John

It rings true to the ears of the wealthy many
 the cries of glory the cries of any
 who dare to leave their role of kin
 and join the militia - it's not heartless sin
 or shameful chagrin

It's a learning/unlearning of people, places, things you've been
 It's a "valor of duty sought for freedom within"
 The exceptional elite except for a few they say
 The brotherhood is closed - if just for a day
 Why can't you simply just sit and wait and "by the way
 the front door's not for you, anyway"

It's push and scrape for a moment's word's meaning
 work for the reversal of the established order of being
 sometimes not enough
 until it's too much
 to make means of the most of what space has provided
 no cash back, the check's overridden
 the deposit – secured
 was never promised
 and the bag - it was empty.

And when there's no place to go, but to humbly go home,
 You find a place that once was, but is now not your own
 A people forgotten, memories sewn
 You're plastic king knocked off his paper throne
 A veneer of a certain degree that was loaned
 As you navigate waters uncharted, unknown

Through the lifted veil, feeling words reviled,
 the rage of an unwanted stepchild
 But despite many a dreams, unreconciled
 you,
 with the strength of a thousand, managed to smile a feigned smile

Why you blue, John? Why you blue?

Sometimes,
 Freedom
 Is feeling like a motherless child

*Inspired by W.E.B. DuBois' *The Souls of Black Folk*. "Of The Coming of John"

Burgundy

she was wearing burgundy
 that day
 bundled up it was blue outside, a bitter winter chill
 she wore burgundy bows tucked in pigtails
 tied with all the care in the world
 & a neatly plaited plaid skirt
 skipping the sidewalk squares
 black scalloped trim laced-up flats
 along the pavement
 traversing realms she could not yet see

she carried
 more than she was lent from the library
 in her backpack
 that blue day
 when fate heard the ricochet of a loose bullet
 penetrate the burgundy
 backpack
 burgundy bows strewn in pigtails
 the blue day the vessel lifted the girl in burgundy
 too soon the heavens took her in

echoes of piercing screams
 felt that day
 in the hearts of little burgundy girls everywhere
 and grown burgundy women, and mothers and fathers
 of burgundy children
 who hope and pray
 and take comfort in the ritual
 that is
 the tying the bows,
 the dressing her up in the burgundy plaid skirt,
 knee high socks and scalloped dress shoes
 bows in hair with a kiss atop the head

on any blue day
 when endless burgundy hearts sank
 they ascended

*Inspired by June Jordan's "Notes of a Barnard Dropout" (1975)

How to clean your house like a 1950s housewife

It lingers in the air
 for four – no,
 8 hours afterward, and on surfaces it can
 Exist for days, depending on the surface, of course -
 4 hours on copper, 3 days on plastic, 4 days on wood, 5 days on metal,
 5 days on glass, on paper it can vary from hours to days -
 Food, water, fabric, shoes,
 Counters, tables, handles, toilets, all -
 We must
Keep Surfaces Clean

Disinfect all surfaces after touching
Disinfect hands and avoid
Touching
Of your face and others
Whenever possible
happy birthday your hands with soap and water
and wipe down the souls of your shoes
Hinder all the ways
All the ways
Through which the most conspicuous ways
it can permeate your white body

after contact with the infected
 or suspected infected
 (for safety assume they're all infected)
Drink the bleach!

dizzying long-term effects
 include but are not limited to
 difficulty breathing
 fear, anxiety, isolation from ones we loved
i can't breathe -

But never mix ammonia with household cleanser
Shoot up! lyse 'em -ol
Bolster your defenses
With quickie kleening products
& heroes like Mr. Clean,
Ajax, Palmolive
A tub of bleach,
O, tub of truth,
Twisted by knaves
you must

clean, to be safe - to be sane, like
bleach in-your-veins and
Windex-on-your-windowpane sane
 To escape being slain
 by your inner fears,
 a hostage to your microscopic tears

Of this - this self-assembling body
 Of not-body,
 Half-living, Half-alive, never dead but never alive because
 It was never live
 Production of massive macrophage cytokinetic storm
 Capable of mass infection
 hidden in the crevices
 Existing in shadows free rent
 In your mind

We incarcerate the blind disseminate the wicked
 to stop the spread
 Stop the spread and flatten the soul,
 a foul odor-
 Pests for pesticide
 Insects for insecticide
 Abomination; it's a nation of vaccination, chloroquine
 Genocide

When did
 The capacity
 To breathe and to remember
 Become objects of the state

But we can't forget
 What was never ours
 No matter how hard you try
 It's a shame you can't
 Sanitize the past with UV light

*Inspired by Audre Lorde's "The Brown Menace, or Poem to the Survival of Roaches"

Not a ballad

The city of broken homes, the city of broken dreams
 The city of hopes, of moldy mill factories covered in a linoleum sheen,
 The city with a many street corners dominated by overgrown weeds and underground dreams
 The city of sirens, the city of chaos, of loud noise in your head and louder in the streets
 The city where you have to be the peace you want to see-
 the home of the working-class steed, never was a prized breed
 But she could run as her heart yearned - and damn she ran free
 And she ran as she pleased
 For it was the only place in the city where sirens didn't take priority
 Safety in the echoes of footsteps and striders on Conant street
 Even though she had to look five ways before crossing on green
 T'was the only place where big money didn't make big deeds -
 Where change came from the ground up and not from the greed
 While people were dying
 She was sowing, planting seeds
 To make believe and to make deceive that being a force
 is to inside, have peace
 While being the fastest on the sidewalk block
 and racing brownstones became her weed
 Jungle dance but make it slogged-up, smoked-in music, blasting time machine
 -Tires are screeching-
 But to care less is survival
 And she'd be damned if she didn't make it out of this jungle breathing-
 In the place where the big orange sweater makes the big stage
 Where a little brown runner makes herself a hero
 In a city of broken dreams -
 a city she calls home.

*Inspired by Reginald Dwayne Betts' "For the City that Nearly Broke Me."

I see the faces

Look out on a summer's day
 see the pastures of green
 wilted lilies swaying in the summer breeze
 o how majestic a day
 in paradise
 but I see the faces,
 bloody ancestors torn
 from this land to displacement
 sacrament and deadly sin
 families torn,
 babies dying, mothers holding
 in tears,
 Fathers fighting-
 a scrupulous victory-
 conquer to this land - thankfully
 resounding and a proclaiming
right to this land
 for they won and that is
 why I am here, sitting and staring
 on such a majestic summer's day
 at the hauntingly beautiful pasture that lay before me
 built by thieves and the blood of peoples before,
 A grave of sacred bodies -
 if I turn off the memory I can turn off my guilt
 if only temporarily
So that I might righteously enjoy this beautiful summer's day

*Inspired by Ed Roberson's *We Must Be Careful*

I tend to the Fire

if I tend to the fire 'will you tend to my fire-side?

Kindle and hearth- warm me up soul bearing the name on your sleeve I wipe my face on and
laugh my sides out we make this fire once ago, its kept to vigilantly but never let it go / I wonder
when you'll be home soon, my love awaits like the warm embers when struck, hot, red-hot and
black stone, waiting, for a dry log is all I need to catch into flames it warm the whole home now
- ugh why we chose to heat our home with a wood stove it needs constant tending. scrupulous
mending but o how it warms the heart it warms the home.

*Inspired by Barry Jenkins' *Moonlight*.

Ode to Darkness

for those born in the night,
it's only the natural state of the earth
it's partitioned 12 hours for each
hemisphere, I know,
and depending upon the season
daylight lingers longer
but the night is inherent
looking up into the darkness I am transported
to the boat
it's looking down into the darkness we call the sea
yet no one knows no vastness
larger than those depths
up into the nighttime sky,
speckled with faraway lights
which, by the way, only appear visible
on the darkest of nights
we were born
and know it's only the natural state of the earth

Kevin Sampson: Monument Man

Bureau of Land Management
 Using this land for development where
 Kea's ark bears the flag
 Cut in half
 in New ark
 Much like
 Monument Man building a vessel
 to learn how to be held & how to hold
 cast off things
 the tide pulls in
 with the same mystical force
 that can make hurricanes even
 a space for the discarded
 people and yet
the dark ships move
 Hayden says
 Something about the middle passage
 Bringing together brothers under the moon
 In the locking room of history */in the rocking loom of history*
 & a moral universe of obligation
 under the sea

*Inspired by "Artist Kevin Sampson at Mystic Seaport" and Robert Hayden's "Middle Passage"

Jimmie Fails?

it's hip or cool
under the title of American Culture
but you go to the boat
and instead opt for the sea,
work with the fish
but to fail in a long line of people
who have in succession all failed before
you is
to succeed
for not those who speak loudest but through memories
on a long street in San Francisco
the people leave before the prophet does

*Inspired by Joe Talbot's *The Last Black Man in San Francisco*