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Borne the Battle; Creative Writing for Military Trauma and Personal Trauma

DAMIEN L. WARE

Bachelor of Science in Social Work

Bachelor of Science African American Studies

Eastern Michigan University

April 2007

Master of Social Work

Wayne State University

April 2009

Submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree

Master of English

at

Cleveland State University

May 2020

We hereby approve this thesis for

DAMIEN L. WARE

Candidate for the Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing degree for the

Department of English,

and the CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY'S

College of Graduate Studies

Thesis Chairperson, Caryl A Pagel

Department of English & Date

Thesis Committee Member, Julie Burrell

Department of English & Date

Thesis Committee Member, Imad Rahman

Department of English & Date

Student's Date of Defense: 4/22/2020

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DEDICATION

For my wife Vimbayi Kasto-Ware and my three sons
Dakarai L. Ware , Garikia D. Ware and Danayi C. Ware

R.I.P Rayshawn D. Armstrong

Borne the Battle; Creative writing for Military and Personal Trauma

DAMIEN L. WARE

ABSTRACT

Research shows that – creative and expressive can be used as a therapeutic tool to address military and personal trauma. As a Combat Veteran and Cleveland Literacy Advocate – I have used poetry as a means of personal healing and community development. As a Poet – I use my art as weapon for personal and community change. The following manuscript provides a critical introduction and poetry – which speaks to literary technique, inspiration and purpose.

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Borne the Battle

I write poetry in a language that seeks to connect with anyone who cares to know about my human experience as Black man in America. I am Poet. I am Activist. I am lover. I am father. I am husband. I was friend. I am son. I am civil servant. I am citizen. I am a proud Army Veteran, but I do not have any recognizable name or identity that is my own. People only value the color of my skin, where I am acknowledged as the person this country has made my presenting self out to be which is menace.

Being judged by my skin color, compounded with my combat stress, I struggle with the rejection of this world, where I can feel invisible, unwanted and left for dead. This is the reality of the Black male's American experience, where in 2015 the NY Times reported that 1.5 million black males between the ages of 25-54 years of age are missing from today's society due to incarceration or early death. And yet, I hold on to my compassion and service for others, with a reasonable paranoia of American racism and the possibility of being killed or thrown in prison for anything, at any moment. A psychosis that will keep me weary for the rest of my life. Reflecting on, writing and sharing my experience is my salvation because Poetry has given me the ability to creatively transmute my frustration into a verse, a manuscript, a voice, a workshop that speaks to the hearts and minds of those who care to participate, read and listen.

In my Poetry- I am alive, I am visible, I am in my purpose. I exist in my word choice, my rhythm and rhyme scheme. My line breaks become a source of empowerment. I am healed in recitation as the words come from a sacred place and my most formidable experiences. I am connected when sharing with those who believe, who can relate, who know and can understand. Through poetry my voice is acknowledged and respected. This is why I find solace in creative writing, because of its power to slay our demons, grow from our past and learn from our mistakes. I have had the opportunity in working with Poets of all ages and backgrounds. I have organized and created programming to address literacy and making the literary arts accessible. I have taught creative and expressive writing workshops in the Cuyahoga county jail and the juvenile detention center. Served as poet in resident at John Adams High School and facilitated free creative writing workshops in my neighborhood library. Hosted readings and written with Veterans and bored neighborhood school children on summer break. I have developed life long friends and a community of writers full of support and encouragement. In every instance, I served with the intention to inspire, inform and influence.

I have always had an interest in creative writing, but in my mind I officially became a Poet in Iraq. It was in 2003 during my tour of duty in Baghdad where I served as a Military Police Officer. While on tour, I read anything and everything that I could get my hands on. Among other things, my friends and family would send me books and magazines. My girlfriend at the time, sent me a copy of *“The Norton Anthology of African American Poetry”* (2006) where I was introduced to the poetry of Audre Lorde, Lucile Clifton and Gwendolyn Brooks. Yusef Komunyakaa, Etheridge Knight and Henry Dumas. I escaped through the reading and writing of poetry. The influence of those

mentioned, inspired me to write. I wrote prolifically. I kept a journal to document my experiences. I wrote letters to friends and family. Short stories and essays. Literature became my refuge, a way of life. It allowed me to creatively escape from my surroundings. The writing helped me to spiritually and emotionally process the daily hazards of living in a war zone.

After combat, one of the most alienating experiences was coming back to an old civilian lifestyle that was there before the war. I was a different person directly after my service. My temperament was different and I felt like I had no purpose. The things that brought joy and excitement were now flat and unappealing. I had truly lost a sense of myself. The old mild mannered college student that loved to go to frat parties no longer existed. But since my discharge from the Army in 2004, poetry as a form of expressive writing – has been the only thing that has helped me reinvent myself and create community. In knowing that poetry helps me address my personal challenges with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, I seek to help others experiencing the same personal setbacks because of their own military or personal trauma. My daily writing habit has transformed into the thrill of a genuine purpose.

One of the most challenging aspects of war related mental illness, is acknowledging it. Anxiety and psychological disorders are familiar among Gulf War, OEF and OIF Veterans. For Veterans having difficulty processing the traumatic experiences and events of combat, having the opportunity and platform to express ourselves creatively is crucial. By focusing on meaning in finding significance in the traumatic memory can help Veterans endure the onset of depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress. From poetry to prose, fiction to memoir, the mending power of creative

writing has been found to be therapeutic by moving our Veterans along the continuum of readjustment and personal transformation. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs the rate of suicide among Veterans who do not use V.A. services, increased by 38.6%. In 2014 1,846 Veterans took their own life. Approximately 30% of Veterans with time in a war zone experience *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder* (PTSD) with an additional 20-25% reporting symptoms years following service. Readjusting to daily life can be challenging and sometimes fatal. In 2017 the Los Angeles Times reported that 22 Gulf War Veterans commit suicide daily. In an attempt to address the epidemic of Veteran suicide, recent trends in mental health treatment suggest that creative writing, as a form of art therapy, has the power to heal. Because creative writing has helped me to understand and connect with my new identity as a combat Veteran, I developed a creative writing workshop for Veterans entitled “Veterans’ Voice”, a 9 week creative writing workshop to help Veterans explore, support and celebrate their military experience across literary genre.

My combat experience attracts me to Veteran Poets. Veteran Poets that I have come to know are Yusef Komanyakaa, Etheridge Knight, and Brian Turner. I intentional seek out their work that is specifically about their service. I seek out and pay attention to the military terms and phrases that they use. I consider the poem’s imagery and if it conjures my own memories of service. I mimic the Poet’s form, scene and tension. Line breaks and length in terms of the use of page. But the subconscious reason I am attracted to their poetry, is the knowing that the overall purpose of the poem was to heal.

The Hurt Locker

Nothing but hurt left here.

Nothing but bullets and pain

*and the bled-out slumping
and all the fucks and goddamns
and Jesus Christs of the wounded.
nothing left here but the hurt.*

*Believe it when you see it.
Believe it when a twelve –year –old
rolls a grenade into the room.
Or when a sniper punches a hole
deep into someone’s skull.
Believe it when four men
step from a taxicab in Mosul
to shower the streets in brass
and fire. Open the hurt locker
and see what there is of knives
and teeth. Open the hurt locker and learn
How rough men come hunting for souls.
(Turner.p45,2005))*

Brain Turner is a U.S. Army Veteran where he served in Iraq as an Infantry team leader. The poem “*The Hurt Locker*” from his book “*Here, Bullet*”(2005), has left quite the impression on me as a Combat Veteran. The imagery he uses engages the senses. I can remember suspecting children to be enemy combatants as he states; “Believe it when you see it/ Believe it when a twelve-year-old / rolls a grenade into the room.” Turner’s ability to capture the tension of the frontline in Iraq – reminds me that I am not alone in my combat experiences. The language that Turner employs is universal when it comes to explaining the emotional dysfunction of combat. His first line – “Nothing but hurt left here.” connects with the memories of my own service where I was constantly in fear of losing my life.

Yusef Komanyakaa as a Vietnam Veteran, served as a war correspondent during the Vietnam War where he received a Bronze Star for his service. His award-winning book *Neon Vernacular* encourages me to keep writing about my military experience,

although I am seventeen years removed from my service. Komanyakaa's narrative approach made me realize that our voice lives within the experience. The use of grammar and his technique around the use of short lines makes the rhythm of poem happen naturally. The importance of imagery paints a mental picture especially in his war poems. Komanyakaa's war poem "*We Never Know*" get us as close to the front lines of Vietnam as we can get.

We Never Know

*He danced with the tall grass
for a moment, like he was swaying
with a woman. Our gun barrels
glowed white-hot.
When I got to him,
a blue halo
of flies had already claimed him.
I pulled the crumbled photographs
from his fingers.
There's no other way
to say this: I fell in love.
The morning cleared again,
except for a distant mortar
& somewhere choppers taking off.
I slide the wallet into his pocket
& turned him over, so he wouldn't be
kissing the ground.
(Komanyakaa, p145. 1993)*

When considering the situation of the poem, Komanyakaa talks about recovering a soldier's body finding a crumbled photo in the soldier's dead hand. He creates and maintains some of the tension in the poem by not mentioning the subject of the poem. When he states that he fell in love – he brought a sense of compassion to the battlefield- where we can feel the camaraderie in the act of turning the body over in showing respect for the dead soldier and the subject of the crumbled photo.

Korean War Army Veteran, Etheridge Knight's voice lends itself more so to prison reform, afrocentricity and drug addiction. I have yet to come across anything that speaks about his military service, but it has been said that his military trauma was the cause of his addiction. In Michael S. Collins book "*Understanding Etheridge Knight*" (2016). In speaking to Knight's military trauma, Collins states "After leaving and then reenlisting, he was sent as a medical technician to the Korean War, where he sustained a tremendous "psyche/wound". Collins goes on to quote Etheridge Knight saying, "There was a whole lot of dying and blood. No 17-year old is ready for that. So I started using morphine. I started using drugs because it killed the pain." (Collins 4.) With Etheridge Knight, I have learned that my personal is political – where he vividly gives us insight on prison life and culture before the prison industrial complex. Knight's black aesthetic speaks to me the most because of his contribution to the Black Arts Movement where he too had a healthy paranoia of American racism.

For Black Poets Who Think of Suicide

*Black Poets should live-not leap
From steel bridges (Like the white boys do.
Black Poets should live –not lay
Their necks on railroad tracks (Like the white boys do.
Black Poets should seek –but not search too much
In sweet dark caves, nor hunt for snipe
Down psychic trails (Like the white boys do.*

*For Black Poets belong to Black People. Are
The Flutes of Black Lovers. Are
The Organs of Black Sorrows. Are
The Trumpets of Black Warriors.
Let All Black Poets die as trumpets,
And be buried in the dust of marching feet.
(Knight, p45. 1973)*

These lines carry a call to action, that identifies a duty, a courage and commitment to the literary craft of poetry as a Black Artist. A call that puts the reader/ audience in the

forefront of the poem as a service to community – making poetry out to be so much more than an art form.

As a literary artist within the City of Cleveland – I use my poetry as a platform for activism and advocacy work concerning adult literacy and learning, in knowing that the responsibility of the Poet, is to be of service to humanity. We adhere to this call, by pushing our poetry beyond the pages of academia and into the streets and the hands of the people, where poetry can serve as a catalyst for personal and societal change. I started hosting free community creative writing workshops in neighborhoods across the City of Cleveland in 2010, starting in my neighborhood Cleveland Public library branch. Starting as a volunteer and Cleveland State student- I naturally progressed into a teaching artist with Literary Cleveland and Lake Erie Ink. I have also created and facilitated my workshops and Literary Arts organizations to include the Buckeye Neighborhood’s “Griot Project” and East Cleveland’s “Anansi Artist Alliance”.

In 2015, I was commissioned by LAND Studio, a nonprofit public art organization that is responsible for the development of various public art installations throughout the City of Cleveland. The name of the literary public art installation is entitled “*Love Lunes Over Buckeye*”, a literary art project that transformed Lune Poetry into a series of broadside installations, that is displayed on abandoned buildings, public surface and gathering spaces throughout the Buckeye corridor. This project was completed with 9th grade English honors students attending John Adams High School- located in South East Cleveland.

Lune Poetry is an American poetic form that is modeled after the Japanese Haiku. The word “Lune” is French for moon and was created by Poet Robert Kelly; the “Lune”

is a three-line poem with a syllable count of 13, which functions in the order of 5/3/5.

The poetic structure of the “Lune” allow short and concise poetic messages specifically themed after commitment, caring, communication, respect and responsibility - in speaking into the sprite of love, community and togetherness that exist within all of us.

In 2016, I was commissioned by LAND Studio and the Northeast Ohio Sewer District to write “Ode to Lake Erie” an ode and calligram poem that celebrates Lake Erie shaped in the form of a drain. An ode is a poetic form written in celebration of someone or something. A calligram is a poem that is written in the shape of its subject matter. In this case, the poem was in the shape of draining water that eventually ends up collecting in Lake Erie. In the summer of 2019 the poem was celebrated at its unveiling as an inlayed poem into the corner of Buckeye and Shaker Blvd.

In acknowledge my work as a literary activist – the Cleveland Plain Dealer, U.K. based internet publication The Guardian and local City of Cleveland leaders acknowledged my as a 2019 Cleveland City Champion.

For me, creative writing is most impactful when it is used as means to create and celebrate community. By incorporating my passion for literacy with my professional background as a Social Worker, my efforts in creating free poetry workshops at the community level, with residents, families, adults youth and Veterans is an attempt at making the literary arts accessible, enticing and inviting, where as 66% of the adults in Cleveland are functionally illiterate. In my community – the Buckeye/ Mt. Pleasant neighborhood, the illiteracy rate is as high as 90%

In terms of my own technique and approach to the page, some of the major devices that I use are imagery, line structure and meter. I enjoy using assonance and

alliteration when I can and I am always up to the challenge in creating an impactful poem in a poetic form. In certain aspects – writing in form gives me creditability and technique- in continuing to craft my own poetic voice. I enjoy writing Jazz, Blues and narrative poems. I like the brevity and strictness of the Lute. I am learning the power of the Prose Poem. And I enjoy constructing the Syllabic Verse. I became familiar with traditional poetry. In knowing the science of phonetics and the importance in making the language sing – I know that rhythm is paramount in making the poem impactful and delivery effective.

I write a lot about my service as a Combat Veteran. In 2014, my best friend Rayshawn D. Armstrong murdered due to a mistake in identity. He was 24. In 2018, my God brother and childhood friend, Douglas Clements was murdered he was into the “Streets”. He was 38. Both were from my neighborhood. Both were due to gun violence. Jeffery Young was an elder who died of emphysema. He smoked cigarettes until the day he died. He was 65. I have uncles and cousins attached to the justice system by way of parole or prison. I write for them because their experience is also mine as Black men.

In my past – I focused more on performance pieces in terms of utilizing rhythm and rhyme as the device and political content for slam competitions, open mics and even protest. But as I have grown in the art – I have come to recognize the importance of the page as well, in my own teaching of poetry for community. I have a desire of becoming published in furthering my contribution to the literary arts and teaching at the college level.

I am a Poet who represents the people and places that make up the City of Cleveland. I am committed to Cleveland because she is the only City I know. My voice,

my identity and influence are in the very streets, avenues and blocks that make up the South East. It can be found in the beauty of the rustic abandonment of its neighborhoods. My tension is its frantic gun violence that takes the lives of loved ones. The same gun violence that reminds me that I am too familiar with war. I am the siren's and the jail cell's reminder that I am black. My voice will remain in the triumphs of the sufferer, who at the end of the day, can still find a reason to celebrate.

A Veteran's Grace

He has seen a lot.
Stacked away the
bodies in separate piles.
Sweating in the Iraqi sun.

Diary from the War

June 21, 2003;
Today, Baghdad Iraq
taught me how to
anticipate explosions
and swallow my fear,
while bathing in another
country's blood.

February 2004 (Welcome Home)

When he left
 he came back different,
saluting your flag
 with that “Far Away” look
and rearranged mind, adjusting to life
with
thoughts of suicide bombings.
Coming back from combat,
 we are never the same.
Familiar smiles gleam on distant faces. Embraces
never feel me
 clutching to life,
while still holding sand in my pockets
 and
thinking of reaching for weapons
to point ready aim
and pass judgement with
 finger squeezing triggers.
When War consumes all
peace is far removed
to the back of our minds
 our Soldiers
 return Veterans.
We posted “Old Glory” somewhere in sands,
replacing their freedoms with
shock and awe,
 shock and awe, shock and awe,
see the flying colors fly from atop the pyramid high?
with an allegiance that spills the oil
blotting the blood from drying,
I remember battlefields.
Staring into
 Iraqi night skies.
Death was at every instance,
looking to kill or be killed.
Pledged my allegiance because we are taught how
to sacrifice our lives for this country.

To the American minded loyalist
 Eagles will scream your name.
When the flag drapes the
Casket drop
A mother goes insane.
A father goes insane.

When the flag drapes
the casket drop
a Veteran goes insane.

Who's going to sign their Memorial Certificates

When I hear
their discussions
about war

I think of
of the youth

already
shocked

already
martyred

already
mutilated

or bound
to the slow
death of

mortal wounds.

I think about
their headstones
their place makers
their medallions

and the folded
burial flags
made of cotton.

Holding triggers

The worst thing about
the trigger
squeeze is the hold

a situation
that a civilian
will never
understand

Because
The smell of kabob
can take me
there
at any given moment.

3,000 Cruise Missiles

American Soldiers
learn how to appreciate
the glow and spangle
of the incoming artillery.
In the night sky
beneath the star
and crescent moon
on sacred ground.

Don't you remember watching
the bombs approach
Baghdad?
Like the thunder
rolling in
to bring about the
shock and awe
from the napalm
that melted then harden
or hearts. Singed and charred the skin
off their backs with a stench that is familiar
because there was no room for
the emotions of humanity.

So we crushed
all that remained
beneath our boots
and battle tanks
after the heat wave
from the flashing lights
that has turned an entire
city into the dust partials
hidden in the sand.

August 2003; Baghdad Iraq

We were in a convoy of 12 vehicles
transporting Iraqi prisoners to Abu Ghrab.
I was riding atop
my invading Hummvee
with my Mark 19 covering
our 9:00 position.
Through the sights of my weapon,
I could see small Iraqi children
playing in spent ammunition.

The brass shell casings
that remained from
last nights assault, were kept
in 3 large piles
on the side of the road.
The empty cartridges shimmered
in the sun and heat against
their dirty and worn faces,
as they rolled the metallic
cylinder shapes
between their fingers.

They had small weary hands
and they played about bare foot.
They were kicking up dust
with dried blood on their feet.
They had an awkward
sense of playfulness
in the aftermath of
God knows what.

The children saw
us approaching
and they started running
closer towards the road.
As the children ran at us,
one of them kicked a pile of brass
into a puddle,
darkened by gunpowder
and despair.

I watched them through my
scope and crosshairs.
Their fiery tearful eyes

examined my weapon
and me with disdain.

After our 12 vehicles convey rumbled
through the small village,
I couldn't help but to wonder,
how my occupying

presences altered their fate.

Brought the War home

Our Veteran's
have returned
home to eat their
own bullets,
living with a courage
that isn't always
recognizable
after the War.
It's frontline and
enemy combatants.

After their tour,
Soldiers come and go empty
only to bury themselves
deep into the depths.
The depths of a painful solitude
and hollowed out chest.
Inside the
shell of a former self.
A confinement
that most wont see.

Do you care to know?
About the conditioning
and military past that
is carried like bazookas.
Fully armed with the things
that make the explosions reoccur.
Remembering the taste of blood
sweat and heat embedded on your tongue.

We brought the War home,
with its maneuvers on our mind.
Fascinated by sudden death
and the freedom of hot lead.

In my mind, there is a National Cemetery.

In my head

I continue to
Soldier like
the fighting Zombies
of human suffering.

In their Tanks with their Bombs.
With their Bombs and their Guns.
In their Uniforms.

A uniform,
that reanimates
a former me
surrendered to sand
explosions, expired orders
and an allegiance to “defend”

with our Guns and our bombs,

with our Tanks and our Guns.

A consequence
of the War that
I remember.

Baghdad, Iraq

War was
where the blood ran
like sweat and the
drinking water boiled
over into the murky
sands and missions
of the day.

Things are different after explosions

When there is
an explosion
they can never relate to
the shake and alert
the damage the hurt nor
the heat that curled my skin.

The fear that pushes
the spin erect and
hollows the breath
to breathe

or the force held between

the shoulder blades
nor tension that makes me
feel electric.

The red eyes and vigilance
and inflated heart thickens
the blood clogs the artery and
vision.

they could never
feel the danger
a fact that keeps me
misunderstood.

I remember the night she wore Vanilla Fields

She left her scent
between my lapel and right shoulder,

a hint of
mimosa and jasmine.

A fragrance
cherished like
the ink on
fading pictures
favorite letters,
her aroma lingers making
me remember,
our dance and
whispered words.

During my service,
my orders
and the War
controlled me.

Her sweet perfume
carried me to
risk my life,
to please
her with my return.

Her scent is
adorned above
my medals, insignia and device.

She made
me forget
I was there.

The Gestapo and the East Cleveland Run Down

For Timothy Russell and Melissa Williams

Black Cops, White Cops, them boys wear blue.
Yet their blue be the color of,
an occupying Army. With
their dispatch, regalia and guns.
Army. Patch, badge, bullets, pistols
on patrol. Army. Ready with
special weapons and tactics. Army.
sirens, handcuffs, nightsticks. Army.
tasers, chokeholds, backseat cages.
Army. shotguns, flak vests. Brute force
violence. The Army police, harass and arrest,
with their knee on your throat, slug to
the back. Slug to the chest. Army.
drones, curfew and gas mask. Army.
snipers, k-9 and bomb squad,
Army. Gestapo on the run
down, with intimidation and
fear, it is our duty to fight
for our freedom, which justifies
their riot gear.

Black Cops, White Cop them boys wear blue.
Yet their blue be the color of,
an occupying Army.

During the 80's, Uncle Big Wheel Loved Kryptonite

Uncle Big Wheel
had two digits on his right hand,
a pinky and thumb.
He once was
a heavy weight fighter,
with fist made of brick,
and mortar.

As children
we watched him,
get high like the swings
we swung
not knowing
the addict
his antics
his addiction
and quiver.

On our playground

we'd wonder
why this man,
was on his knees
picking white
specs of gravel,
discarding the lint.

And as children,
we watched him get
higher than the swings
we swung.

Hits from the
crack pipe with an
inhale that would take him to the moon.

isssssssssssss

When he tweaked
he would shadow box
for fighting was all he
he knew,

and as children

we wondered how
the man that could
clap down thunder
and slap down trees,

be so weak.

His time had come

Black men die everyday
and I wonder
if Rayshawn
felt that bullet
take his life.

If he felt the
spinning lead expand and
melt into his medulla oblongata.

Did he hear the
trigger squeeze
cocking hammer,
high caliber bang
that initiated
the sounds of
screams and
shattering glass
and the crush of
his cartilage to
ascend his soul?
Did the Saints know
his time had come?
Did he smell his
burnt flesh and
the fresh gunpowder
from the ejected cartridge
made of the brass
that tap danced
atop the cold
cement and roses
in the red
moonlight?

Were the planets involved?
Were the stars aligned?
Did the galaxies shift?
Did the universe know?

That his time had come.

Black Roses and the brothers of Ogun

Sing your song for black roses
to watch them sprout and grow
out the bed of dried blood
and constant libation.

Our brothers, boyfriends
cousins, husbands
uncles, nephews, fathers, sons,
sunken into early graves
blood once bright black
red full of life now dried
atop inner-city concrete.

Splattered across walls,
hospital walls, brick walls,
gritty walls, prison walls,
ghetto walls names painted
hieroglyphics. In loving memory of

in loving memory of,
where a Blackman once stood.

So pour out a little liquor
where the teddy bears lay.
Where the grass has no life.
Broken glass seeds the soil,
black rose bushes sprout out
the wet of mamas tears.

Black rose bushes sprout out
the gasp of stolen breathes
and broken hearts.

Not red but black rose bushes sprout out
the blackness of being black.
Male. Boys. Men. Warrior. Martyrs.
ascending to Gods.
Most die young
before their time,

Black rose bushes sprout out
the mud towing the line.
Towing the front line
battlefield where the bullets zip and bounce

with tips that hollowed

Most die before their time
black rose bushes
sprout out the mud
towing the line
the front line battlefield

where the bullets
zip and bounce
with tips that are
hollow.

Where the camera
and police are sure to
follow

black men are prey
on ground that is
hollowed.

So Sing your song.
Your sweet song,
for black roses.

The Gods Invented Thug Life

I used to mimic my
Uncle's hand dance
because thug life
made his fingers
twist voodoo
magic to incarnate
Ogun.

He kissed gun metal,
repped his set
and dodged bullets
like a God.

We Created the Burn For Fred Ahmed Evans and the Glenville Shootout

Home is where the hatred is,
so taste the drops of blood
that sizzle the tongue.
Our story makes us angry.
Born from the inferno
of my father, my resemblance
reignite the moniker
that is so familiar:

“My fear is not death but a death without meaning.”

when seeking
refuge from the violence
behind the western gun
badge and the reasons
why we are profiled.

Once created the burn,
from the pit of our bellies
to the strength in
our spines, destroyed
American cities
in response
to her loveless choke.

A brutality
born from the whip lash
on our back
shackles on
our feet,
turning our outrage
into blue flames,

in the spirit of the ancestors
we prayed on every breath
to command the bullets
carried the bombs and coffins
for the tired and weary
because there is more
to life than this:

An inherited struggle
that our melanin has claimed.

New Light as Rayshawn D. Armstrong

My brother
will spend the rest
of my life
in a casket.

He has spread
his wings to float
back to the essence.

In memories
he's gone yet his
soul drifts
between planets,
existing where the
suns are no longer Stars.

The suns are no longer stars
for he has transformed into light.
Energy created can never be destroyed,
so he might as well be light,
right?

The type of light
that dances with Obatala in
the eternal sea of darkness,
his laughter enchants
the night. When I close
my eyes, nothing is there.
I reminisce on
his mama's face in the
hospital. A bullet in his brain,
heart was still beating
because he loved us.

80's Baby

Growing up
I used to always run
from the violence that claimed
my favorite colors, red
and blue. Like the sirens
on my heels matched the bright
white lights from the swirling
ghetto bird that always
reminded me that I
was black.

An American Battle Flag

This is my country,
yet they still fly their
battle flag high
and that rebel yell
is for the land of Dixie.
(yeeeeehaaaaawwwww)

A racist symbol
of America's failure
and fear of a people
still terrorized
by white supremacy
and its bondage.

A system still horrified
of a people made of
distant quasars
and struggle because
my ancestors created
the stars in their confederacy.

Louisiana, Mississippi,
Alabama, Texas,
Florida, Georgia

Those stars were born
out of African womb.
Its crimson be the color
of the whiplash
that gashed
the bright red blood
out the back
of African kings
atop white fields of cotton.
Neck bulged from the Noose.

Those "Stars and Bars"
represent the war scars
that mark the x of the
Southern crosshairs,
my people survived the
Southern crosshairs.

Its blue is made of the
shackle and auction block.

It's blues be our
abuse and trauma.

Our blues be
America's soliloquy,
made of the slave songs
bound to my roots,
bound to your roots,
bound to our roots.

So we must speak
like drums with the fresh breath
of runaways,
to turn our pain into outrage.
To ignite the inferno in our veins.
To sing the song of our pain.
To awaken the gate keepers
of Elegua and Eshu.

Let us rebel
over this rebel flag,
which is a battle flag,
which is our flag
to remind us
of America's racist
foundation.

Conversations and the Journey; Blue Line Transit

For the moment
let us contemplate
the past
our paths,
our desires,
our will to survive,
and as we share
this space and time

know that
it is guaranteed
that

we all have

struggles.

We are made strong from despair

One day
his soul will
sing.
Because he will
find that

we

are made
strong from
despair.

Give up the Ghost and my Mama the bones

Bury me on
my block and
pave the streets
with blood.
Give the mothers
our bones
because
Thug life can't
be left alone.

Heavy Clouds Over South East Cleveland reminds me of Gunmetal Grey

Grey clouds over the
South East reminds me
that these Streets
have nothing to offer.

Nothing to offer but the
type of grief that
conjures sacred spirits
living in the names of
clouds that hover
over us, keeps their
memory alive,
in my mind a time when
we played as children.

Douglas Clements. Rayshawn D. Armstrong. Jeffery Young.

Theses streets
paves the way,
like a stairway
to heaven, Gangstas
die early or be gone for long,
grown out the past,
into the future of
an early grave,
often times
for nothing.
So, my frustration is too
familiar with the violence
that consumes
the spaces between
my block, that alley, these streets
and every goddamned corner.

So many have given their very lives to walk these streets

93rd, Martin Luther King, 131st, 116th

bound to the corners
as the prey.

So many risks their lives to walk these streets

Buckeye, Woodland, Kinsman, Union Ave

Praying for their loved ones
And a safe return home.

Love Lunes Over Buckeye

Your neighbor is the
family
you have never known.
Interdependence

Children are to be
cherished and
lead by example.
Guardianship

Speak loud enough to
conjure words
to sing a joyful noise.
Together our voice
can heal the
silence and weary.
hope

The place where we
live should be
considered sacred.
Fortitude

When unified souls
turn gold and
attract like magnets.
readiness

The streets will never
love you like
a neighborhood should
cooperation

All hope exists in
the power
of togetherness
humility

Protect our children
by holding
them close to our hearts
Divinity of mother earth

Aerophone General – For Miles Dewey Davis

A lover and a fighter
with the world in his palms,
Miles Davis clutched painted brass
like an Areophone General.

He commands horns,
strings, piano keys
with a warm timbre.
His solo space vibrates air
from his windpipe
expansion.

With a poise that
puts me in the mind of
black mouthed mambas
ready to strike
like a jazz bound solider
in rhythmic sound
styled from the cold
to the cool
to the coldest.

Bellowing colored blue
from out his belly
to the bell through tubes
and pressed finger buttons
in trumpet
to create
the breeze
that timelessly
taps our feet.

Miles Dewey Davis
born with bop bulging
from his veins
with harmony
in his heart.
Crafting rebellions
so, to battle demons
and to battle demons
you gotta know how
to evolve.

He clutched painted brass
like an Aerophone General.

The Distance of Miles

There is a distance
in his eyes like the
oceans bottom blue

with a sway
on his breathe
and hints of violet
in his laughter
he preached sermons
to howling, whipping,
withering, wandering
winds.

The distance
in his eyes is
like the hue
of midnight
twilight

With a black tongue,
chill whisper
purple fingertips,
he sketched and painted
the melodic cool of gospel jazz
smooth scribbled
musical notes into
grooves that
chased the void
time after time

there was
A distance
in his eyes
like the azure
of day-lite sky

We seek his
indigo style trapped
in clouds and smoke
as his voice rides
wind trails and
the hussssssh

There is a
distance in
his eyes

Wind Resistance- For Miles Dewey Davis

Running toward the wind
will cause you
to grow your own wings.

Peeling back black skin
will reveal
the blue in our veins.

Wind resistant breathe
built tunnels
for sonic travel.

Black magic cast jazz
through brass tubes
miles conquered voodoo

The Theme of Lester – Charles Mingus

Thud of oak and string brings the ability
to cry to sad songs
and the wrongs we wish
we never did
cause the pain throbs hard.

It's hard like the blues
of the sax blowing
trade wind west.
Bass of string
throbs hard like
the rhythm
and blues of
Jesus riding
trade winds west.

We live the blues
played by the strings
that composed pain
in the dead of night.
Silent and lonely
is the journey,
in the wet of
tears and sweat,
Rolling down our long
scarred backs. Rolling
down my long-scarred
back spin upright.
Strings played close,
in between fingers
over trumpets under thorns.

Faces digging into
the dark blend into
the scene playing
the unseen cool.

Like the forgotten winter
that hold the blues and pain
of night and mystery
that explains the deep
sapphire color of our skin
the strength in our glare
We live the blues

composed by
our pain.

What is hidden is true.

The Truth is
omniscient
it is powerful,
it is worthy,
forthright.

it is justice
it is freedom
undisputed
with its might.

it is darkness
it is secret,
it is shadow,
in the night.

it is silence
it is chaos
it is ugly
in the light.

it can hurt
it can heal
and reveal.

it can kill
and destroy
and rebuild.

it can teach
it can preach
it can shield.

in our soul
it remains
Gods will.

Meditation

I seek the darkness
in all things
because
what is hidden is
the ultimate truth.

To see vision and intuition
the mind is
A power,
A freedom
A balance that
attracts and repels

the unknown
hones in
from a sacred place
of the obscure
at the seat
of my
subconscious

that is inevitable
with a purpose.
That's what truth is.
Secrets and shadows
that are treasures
tucked away in a
chamber of the mind.

I seek the solitude to
best listen to
the God within.

The wrong skin color

My country
is made of a
dark truth and
hue.

Beneath the depth,
weight and pressure
of what is America.
It's threat will be
forever in our skin.

We the
color of cosmos,
much deeper
than blue.

Black not
invisible, permeates
their shadow,
foundation
and fear their in.

Black, brown, Copper,
bronze and ebony
hidden in plain sight.
we create the night,
the unknown,
the mystery.
so, they don't want
to see

my America treats
us differently.

Single Lives in Their Mother's Eyes

Her eyes can
sometimes
be like
rising suns.

when they
are not radiating
they are like the
grey clouds

that can't see
the blue.

The tears
gives water
for the seeds
already planted.

Amber Glass and the Spirit to Disappear

My love
has been
encased in
amber glass
to be placed
on her dresser
and shelves
for its beauty
and waves of passion.

he no
longer fits
with Her space
and time.
where it's hands
and spirit has
become filthy
and muse-less

After creating
the whirlwind

I have
no choice
but

to
leave.

Lune Poems for Oba

Truly blessed to peer
deep into
the eyes of divine.

A face the color
of honey
has my attention

making me forget
yesterday's
blood and bruises

The safest place is
in the heart
of a Goddess

Hypertension

If you could
feel my heart
beating,
you would
know the
thud and
the lighting
that strikes
constantly.

If you could
feel my
beating heart,
you'd know that
It beats heavy
like tons
and elephants

Two faced

I have grown
a second face
because my
first face
can no
longer endure

My second face
has become
my first face
because
there is
no turning back

The Love that is reserved for my kind

Love without
conviction can
only translate
into an unwillingness
to see growth in the
space of the
heart and mind
that has been
left desolate and
intended to

empty expectations,
the promises
that gives an embrace
that is cold and trapping
where the four letter word
glides across my
throat like melting
glaciers prepared
to drown in my blood
and loneliness w/ carried kids
keeping the heart
heavy and quivered

So the love
that is reserved for
my kind
flees when indifferent
and is captured
In the better days
when I couldn't
feel my face
nor hold my
liquor

Shed dead weight

New skin
feels good
because
the weight
of what
is dead

can holds
us back

weigh me
down

turn to
rot and
confusion

King of the Jungle

When he
would yell at
the top of his
lungs,

I learned
how to adapt
to his pain

when my
mother decided
to leave

Father to son

My Dad
trained like
a warrior
with me
on his shoulders.

Showing me the
way in which
warriors
go.

Ode to Lake Erie

The water we shed
is the love that pours
out the heart of mother nature.
Her cloud washes grey,
rinsing Cleveland's landscape
clean water is our only salvation.

To bathe, to drink
and replenish lives,
fresh water,
runs from our faucets.
rain water,
glides into gutters.
grey water,
holds rainbows in puddles.
waste water,
escapes into tunnels.
To seek and find
A love that will guide,
our water divine

For she adores
the ocean
mending in waves,
high and low tides.
To collect as the
worlds water,
Lake Erie is where
our love resides.

A subtle lesson that came from trees

Like groves we must
stand grounded
collected and firm,
in our truths and
weathered skin.
Vulnerable and
Naked. all scars
are layered like
the rough bark destined
to endure.

New beginnings blossom
in due season,
roots dig deep
with purpose
pushing branches
that will continue
to learn and grow.
That will continue
to touch and reach
towards the sky
and togetherness.

As humans, we all
can learn a lot
from trees.

My country tis of thee

My blood sings
America,
colored skin
inheritance,
which represent
a dark truth
and hue.
With the scares
and bruises that
can prove it's lie.

To be in tune with the color green

The emotions of the color green
can be seen in the harmony
of blue and yellow. Can be seen in the
ripening witnessed in our growth
and determination.

A shade that transforms
close to nature.
From light green to cool green to dark.
Green is an energy that is calming;
green is a color that brings peace.

True Love provides shelter

real love
brings life and
provides shelter
because family
is meant to be,
in a house
of brick built
from vision, to stand on
foundation to
uphold and uplift

see we pillars
as refuge from the
harsh and hatred
with love and support
we provide and protect
in shared time and space
we bring our best
to the middle

When there is no love – there is no love making

You can learn
to hold yourself
in solitude
knowing that
no one else can
as a result of
making adult decisions
It is okay to
sit quietly
win the voice explodes and
shoulders are tense
God gives us
the strength to stomach
the madness

In The lost hours in day light savings

Catch me
hanging in the
hours lost.
wandering in a past
life.

Catch me as I
fall into the hurt
of bad decisions
of what was
of what should
have been
the possibilities
and the fact that
I should have
followed my first mind.

Meaningful Relationships

Connections are the
things that keep us.
Rooted and grounded
deep in the knowledge
of what is,
what should be
of the self and
your surroundings.

Connections are reflections
like the mirror
you don't see, that
reveal the things
that you can't see
from inside.
In face and action
reactions, as we live
and breathe and grow,
as one reflects
outward thoughts
and imagination.

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