

JEDIAEL S. FRASER

poems of self & others

A COLLECTION



the 1990s, the number of people in the UK with a mental health problem has increased by 50% (Mental Health Act 1983, 1990). The number of people with a mental health problem in the UK is estimated to be 5.5 million (Mental Health Act 1983, 1990).

There is a growing awareness of the need to improve the lives of people with mental health problems. The Mental Health Act 1983 (1983) was the first piece of legislation to provide a framework for the care of people with mental health problems. The Act was amended in 1990 (1990) to provide a framework for the care of people with mental health problems who are in the community. The Act was amended again in 1998 (1998) to provide a framework for the care of people with mental health problems who are in the community.

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introduction

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In its planning stages, this collection began as a project meant to, in part, celebrate Black artists, creatives, advocates, and friends local to Auburn who have poured into me. Though this original intention still remains, through writing these poems, a new purpose has emerged: discussing and celebrating identity while being Black. The subjects of these poems, sometimes myself and sometimes a fellow Black student I wanted to uplift in verse, are Black and immigrant, Black and queer, Black and woman, and so much more. Of course, each subject – and each poem – contains so many more multitudes than can be properly conveyed here. But what this collection aims to be, in its final state, is a celebration of the community that we share as Black people in Auburn through our common experiences due to shared and differing identities.

In writing and revising these poems, I enjoyed referencing works which inspire me, from Lucille Clifton's elegant poetry to a Wikipedia article. As they explore this collection, readers will also find evidence of the context in which these poems were written and revised (specifically the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing Black Lives Matter movement), as these conditions seemed to affect my thoughts and experiences at every turn.

Thank you for reading.

everyday something

.....

- after "won't you celebrate with me" by Lucille Clifton

a traffic stop somewhere in restless daylight, where home lies out of sight but a gun hangs within reach; a lofted pickup truck (high horse with no conscience) veering too close to our toes with hateful flag flapping in tow; the president (pick one); myself; the klansmen cooking crosses in the neighborhood nearby; the sun's respondent glare as i impart to a megaphone a list of names i never should have learned; a classroom with no sympathy for the dead, undead, and dying; a callous glance into a future where the list of names is longer; a person, like you and me, but this one peeling red under aforementioned sun, open-mouthed coughing vitriol into the air; myself again.

won't you celebrate with me,
that friendship prospers through the trials?
that we found a way to smile while being
both non-man and Black? you can choose
the recipe and i'll select the movie. together we'll
place bets on how often we appear on screen
(and how infrequently we speak).
share this ginger beer with me and we
can laugh like it's not summer.
won't you?

vita malt

to be Black in this anti-Black
and suffocating world is to be
the last evasive drop of vita
malt or malta goya
at the bottom of the bottle. never

disappearing. only decreasing
on each sip. the former would be
too satisfying, the completion too
sweet, the finale too inviting for
one as humble-brewed as we are.

simmer still, instead, in your
condensed puddle of caramel
brown tinted barley product
brewed to bubble lightly
against beckoning tongues.

marinate, instead, where the world
is wide and hollow, where your
voice echoes and slaps you with its
bitterness, the bottle necked tunnel
to freedom growing narrower still.

i would have died waiting to be
consumed as an afterthought by
some other-bodied stranger,
spiteful of my barley-sweetness or
brown buttered hue.

so i escaped. and ceremoniously
poured myself to grass instead,
not alone at the bottom of
some known world, but a
dark-amber angel of my own.

my Blackness is the malt
that fell in love with the slopes
of movement grappling with the
bottle's curves, to finally escape the
glass, meet the unseen familiar sun, saying,

"i am fluid. i am beloved, colored
bedrock-dark as beer with much
more forgiving taste. fallen into freedom,
holy syrup-tasting malt returning
what is earth's to earth."

let no one tell you dewdrops
are less beautiful
when colored barley brown.

Photo Shoot: Notes to Self

Click.

Dark skin is best photographed in vibrant light or dull shadows or however, so long as it's being captured by one who loves and understands dark skin.

Click.

There is more to clothes than getting dressed and more to bodies than being seen. Breathe smoke in the bathroom and fall in love with your reflection. Practice your bed eyes for the camera.

Click.

When someone shows you how to love yourself in stills, all your memories are polaroid candids and your dreams are magazine covers. Your name adorns the space in loud slab serif font.

Click.

Corrupted Beyond Recognition by Anglo-Norman Scribes

.....

Maybe if I were man of household
(if I were man at all) I would feel this name
adorn my head. The consonants would form
the stoic and persistent metal, as the vowels
arrange themselves as jewels all aglitter.
They would make even a father proud.

Maybe the Scottish clan would feel
familiar, not foreign. And the histories
that link us, which I've imag-inferred –
man becomes voyager, my pillager, then,
somehow, my father – would not confound
upon my mind like the letters of a printing press.

Instead, six letters stamp me. I am bound
by fraying ribbon as a parcel sent to be
forgotten. My return address is empty and
my stamp looks nothing of home. Instead, its
edges blacken-peel and curl up to reveal a portrait
of exploitation, all knowing eyes and wicked smile.

Call me something else. If I could, I'd scrub
the stamp with brillo pad and cleansing water.
I'd break down the adhesive, sever and
unfurl the ribbon, and find home within myself
without a name that spells my hurt. Call me
the empty space remaining.

Pronounce my first and middle with your
head tilted to the sky, like you already
know you should. They sound like purpose,
ring clear with meaning meant for
my own understanding and not for carrying
the ghosts of thieving men.

Then my surname: [inhale here] ,
a breath and not a crown. Because the wind
is weightless. Because a breath bears no burden.
Because a crown costs centuries of spilled blood
to amass those crooked jewels. Besides, you should
have noticed: it could never fit me to begin with.

Everything Worthwhile

is done with complementing measures
of ardent care and passionate rage.

When you act in righteous anger, does your heart
remember why? Will the stones you throw build us a home
upon the earth where they land? As you rage against the system,
will you love your people still? Like how Nina sang for Martin while
the South was all ablaze, lighting conflagrations on its crooked streets.

When you express your love, does something boil
within your chest? Does your heart stoke little fires
where there is someone to defend? In this fight,
there is no taste for the lukewarm, no space for platitudes.
We are a garden unprotected. Will your cherubim come armed?

homie

.....

how do you tell your homie boy
I wish I was a tear on the side of your face
so I could refract the light from your
bottom-of-the-purse butterscotch candy eyes
and roll down your cheek
dragging myself through the bed of rose petals
on the slope of your hill
slicing my skin along the knife-edge of your jaw
and hanging unshakably at the bow of your chin
swelling with every heave
living in the moment
knowing I exist only
to be all at once wiped away

How to Care for Your New Bamboo

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*"Observe the progress of the plant, in a few days, and you will know if your plant will survive."
– an online article titled "Why is My Garden Bamboo Dying? – 7 Steps"*

Humble apartment, too-expensive box which I
am grateful for and graying in, an honest place
to make no living, a decent place to have lived.

The same beige walls which bore witness to
me panicking in bed when the world was blistering
with summer for the first time and the Klan
was burning crosses within the county lines
also saw my partner gift unto me
a painted pot of bamboo.

Once my mother spent the day here, her
warm and worried presence wafting through
the kitchen like the scent of spices on a stovetop.
She made me dhal. So that night I stared
at the ceiling and thought of home and its
unmeanings. It does not mean this country, who
is equally exhausted that I
have so far refused to die. Nor this
state, where hate hangs so hotly it warps
the horizons. Nor this city where I wish
anyplace else were closer. It means I am a transplant.
Or a misplant. Either way I was uprooted. So now,
this will be the place I lived.

I will pour plant food into the bamboo
pot every two weeks until I don't,
like it says to do on the bottle in fine print. My thumbs
are nothing close to green, but my old therapist once
said it might be safer to refrain from being alone.
We talk – the new bamboo and I. And wonder together
how long it will take for us to be found. How
long our yellowed bodies will wait after the last
of our wilting. After the last of our living.
I still have not removed the pot
from the last bamboo that lived here.



poems and cover art
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