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Yolanda Franklin

As a Southerner, I find myself drawn to write about difficult personal, cultural, social, and political aspects of the South. I frequently generate poems that capture the personas, landscapes, and facets of Southern living. I like to take the point of view of an ethnographer and historiographer in my work, so I often write about family. This point of view allows my poems to portray and highlight specific personal experiences— towards a universal experience, in a nuanced way. Like Confessional Poets and poets of the New York School, I also write about the quotidian, but I purposefully push cultural, social and political envelopes by evoking the personal, which invites the reader into an inescapable space. One of the signatures of my poems—a “double-helix syntax”—is a technique that elicits readers to interrogate the multiple connotations of each line while simultaneously layering these connotations from line to line and stanza to stanza to create images that evoke visceral images. This vicissitudinous effect creates caesuras and deep breaths for the reader.

YOLANDA FRANKLIN

Blurry Vision

Tallahassee, FL Summer 2002

These lines read

like a story I wish
to tell, turned
thirty-three this year.

Though dead now,

even before death,
all ability to talk or listen
was lost.

I remember

on Orange Ave.
buying a fresh bunch of collards,
green as usual.

Home, visiting mom

with the kids that summer,
running errands from
my daughter's to-do-list,

Drove by,

parked in front
of a makeshift produce stand,
squinting for a clearer image:

Time shined a spotlight

on the center of your head.
Baldly, I purchase turnips,
green, right next to you.

Eyes squared towards me

familiar,
the way the old
recall time.

(Now, I am the iris

out of focus). Squinting:
You don't even notice who I am.

No One I Know Alive Today Was a Slave

--a response to a Facebook comment

If someone abducted your family,
affected your present
with an infectious amnesia,
then erased your past
for pure sport of profit,
then forced you to bend
like a scarlet ibis, slaved
to pick the South's tropical snow—
 the offspring
from Earth's womb, begging
not to be orphaned, but to be
nursed, begging not to be
last on its crucifix,
a surrogate to history, whose
urgency profits only
white faces—I ask
what to tell a family
still forced to bow.
I tell them
to “cotton on.”

De Oppresso Liber

I.

Texan tycoons lure masses of American soldiers
into empty barrels & scope tunnels
of destruction as weaponry weeps
over deserts—booby-trapped Kleenexes.

Their jeweled skulls enter a darkroom, expose
black wash memory & discover
the dollar bill being raped well by oil wells:
thirst-fatigued fowl who bow, die
& disrupt this holy skyline.

II.

At dinner, Uncle Sam pitches a
fork to initiate the disruption
of *American Gothic*. It's the fourth
Thanksgiving in three years

a soldier serves in The Kingdom's blazing porridge:
a traditional murder-suicide
outlines a woman, infant, & child in arms
amputated by the refusal of change.

III.

A dollar bill marches to taps, points
at fatigued soldiers & lulls the pin
as the spitting grenade hopscotches
across the turbaned battlefield.

Where mirages melt under Allah's sun, a soldier
daydreams, down the scope of his rifle: there
is something drier than my wife's turkey & canned
cranberries are jellied homicides.

IV.

A news reporter ambushes a wad
of ones, the rubber band escapes,
a dollar bill interviews a camel spider
under a shaken quarter moon—
a grocery clerk palms convoys of dimes,

dishonorable pay scales of government
issued poverty, an exchange for martyrs
toting machine guns for W.I.C.—

stamps, checks, food. Hunger
is a Blackhawk humming; a hero
waits in line for change.

American Kennel Club

At dinner, lost time forms tears. It's my first
holiday here as host in this small
town that shares its traditions: Turducken,
green beans & sweet potato casseroles,
mac & cheese, dressing with all the fixings, here
where I rent an original Florida home built when Zora
wrote *How It Feels to Be Colored Me*, amidst
astonishment of *how anyone could deny themselves*
her company. "Tur who?" I ask. "Is that German?"
My landlord brags about how Crackers
laid those blonde hardwood floors,
says they're stripped now, rambles on about
how a structure can withstand any storm.
Over dinner, she shares with my family how difficult
it is to bury a thirteen-year old lab, pipes up:
"Good news is: we found a litter of beautiful black
labs—their mother's a blonde, their father,
chocolate." Another interjects,
then passes the near burnt Turducken: a turkey stuffed
with a chicken, that's stuffed with a duck,
initiates a sorority of laughter—
"How could they litter *black* puppies?"