

to belong.

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FEBRUARY 2017

to belong: chapbook: poems about nature,
written in nature. my time in
Israel/Palestine. nature and Blackness.
history's effects on present
manifestations. tensions and inner
conflict. perseverance.

For: all those who are trying to
overcome historical pathologies based
on identity; and to those who wish to
understand the magical force that is:
being in nature.

i. before

before i boarded the plane
before i left the city
before,
there was so much concrete
before my freedom was bound to buildings
before the air was constricted by architecture
and artificial texture
before i saw my reflection only in windows lining
the street
before the sidewalk held me
before i studied cities
before i was accessible

i was a flower
growing in the uterus of my mother
her insides were my surroundings
her nutrients were my nature
before, i was a flower
and now
i'm becoming a flower again.

ii. here is here

My skin smells of dirt
A characteristic I associate with children
My fingertips drip with recycled water
I stand, whole body consumed by fresh air
The trees dance
Unbothered by my presence
The birds chatter
as if to gossip
There is only sun and bees
we need nothing more in this life,
other than:
sun and bees and water.
the trees agree with this.

iii. no meat, no heat

“There is meat here, but we don’t eat it”
she said

When the sun goes down
only the moon is left
all the warming energy
transforms itself into close bodies

“We stay here because it’s paradise”
he said

movements improvised like blues
she really meant like jazz
Their bare feet black from the earth
The soil I continuously brush from my socks
and empty out of my shoes
as if it’s intruding on me,
and not the other way around

Why are they so close to nature
and I feel foreign when my skin
blends in like the seeds?
why are they blushing from joy with no meat
and no heat,
while I hold myself tightly and consider stealing
away
with one of the live chickens?

Why am I unfamiliar when I am made from this
raw dirt
and they claim it as their own?

History repeats itself, making the
indigenous--strangers
and the colonizers pioneers?

I belong to this earth.
I am only of this dirt.
My ancestors, with bare feet, threaded through
these forests
Like thieves in the night, their eyes became stars
and in the dark, they made a way
Yet and still, I am here
wondering when I will finally find myself...

iv. it's heavy

Dirt is heavy.

Mulch is lighter.

Compost is heavier.

Compost is shit.

It is used to nurture the roots of young trees.

Still, it is shit.

Compost is proof
anything can be transformed.

v. i only know

what follows is a series of lies Black people are told

and reproduce for ourselves

they are lies, not because they are untrue,

they are lies because they are limits

they are lies because they are opposite to our creation

they are lies because they keep us fearful of what were born from:

- 1) Black people do not go camping
- 2) Black people cannot swim
- 3) Black people don't "do" nature
- 4) Black people don't like bugs
- 5) Black people are scared of the forest

what follows is a series of historical truths, propagated by the present

and the premise that we constantly define what Black is, we continue to defy

what Black "is not"

and everything else is for the birds

- 1) my father told me one of his friends would make fried chicken over an open fire when they went camping
- 2) Many Africans jumped overboard with their children and chose to drown rather than live as someone's slave
- 3) We are nature, because we are survival and each other

4) All children harass ants, Black children included

5) Lynching was not too long ago

These are not facts

They are only things I know

vi. second

it is hard to be confronted with nothing, but what is.

the quietness of nature allows for the loudness of thoughts.

talking to myself is talking to all things around me.

there are no secrets kept from the earth.

all of our desires, wishes, and misdeeds are noticed by the flowers, the bees, and the trees.

all of our longing, grief, and reprieve is performing for an audience of the sky, the wind, and the leaves.

we are not good or bad

we are not ugly or beautiful

we just are.

and nothing that exists naturally in the world will tell us otherwise,

if we truly listen.

vii. discomfort

I don't know why this is so hard for me
being here
becoming apart of the scenery
I don't know why I feel so misplaced
trying to melt into the sky
it's easier to disappear than
to be present
it's easier to escape than
to deal with the discomfort

When we realize how stiff we've become
how inflexible, how unadaptable
we are reminded of all the pain of failure
we are reminded of all the broken traumas
we are reminded of the stagnation of difficulties
the discomfort of difficult things

But all it takes is one victory
to remind us why we started in the first place

viii. there is no such thing as a plan

on a bus, we are all strangers
on a bus, we are all part of an ecosystem
on a bus, we speed past nature
on a bus, we try our hardest to remain within
ourselves, are examples of chaos
The process of life is planning life
Time is only effective if you are aware of it
otherwise, on a bus
otherwise, it could be Tuesday or Wednesday
otherwise, you could shower or not
otherwise, why try to plan anyway

we are creatures of habit
constructed by chaos
produced by freedom
but constantly building walls around all of this
but constantly laying waste to all of this
but constantly trying to organize what is

there is no such thing as a plan
there is only opportunities and timing
there is only now or later
there is only this bus or that road
there is no turning back
there is no doubt

Caution to the wind
Freedom to the water

on a bus, to somewhere I've never been
i don't know why i even made a plan in the first
place

ix. EcoME

Meet me at the Dead Sea,
where death is hardly a metaphor

The salt heals
The salt kills

Meet me at the Dead Sea,
where death is hardly a metaphor

They rub their bodies with the mud
They float on the surface of the ripples
They press their feet into the red dirt
They breath deeply at the lowest point on this
earth

Meet me at the Dead Sea,
where death is hardly a metaphor

We can see the other side of this sea
We can see the end of the center of civilization
We can see the beginning of history
We can see the depth of an oasis in the desert

Meet me at the Dead Sea,
where death is hardly a metaphor

Like Palestine, there is water that you can not
drink
Like Palestine, the salt heals but also stings

Like Palestine, the sea creates natural borders
Like Palestine, the days are longer and the lives
are shorter

Meet me at the Dead Sea,
where death is hardly a metaphor
hardly, hardly
a metaphor.

x. breathe, manar, breathe

our bodies fight all that is nature
we are nurtured to fight nature
some believe this is what separates us from
animals

although we shit in toilets
and sit on chairs
we are violent
but somehow better than animals

we buy and sell water
we pollute air with chemicals
we inject false beauty into food
then throw away imperfect nutrients

our bodies are at war with everything that
naturally grows
we have a constant tension to consume and
destroy our environments
we are products of thousands of years of trauma
pathologies from whence we were hunters and
gatherers

some of can no longer breathe fresh air
I'm pretty sure I am allergic to nature
we fall ill from low consumption and high organic
exposure
we fall sick from soil, made from shit, and fruit
that hasn't travelled two oceans over

those of us who force closeness to the ground
those of us who encourage our children to meet
the earth
with their hands, feet, and heads
those of us who have no choice but to live
those of us with the privilege to choose
we are suffocating by the structures we have
created
choking on the trees we chopped down
blind to clouds we've produced synthetically
literally, coughing up nature

she stooped, to think:
"breathe, manar, just breathe"

xi. i can't go there

There is only freedom in things that are not
man-made

If man makes it then it will no doubt be a prison
Even a nice prison is still the antithesis of
freedom

For centuries humans have found ways to limit
the mobility
of other humans

Throughout history humans have found new
ways to construct borders

We have managed to develop transportation and
make the world smaller

All the while restricting the movement of so
many claiming the right to order

The first thing we learn is where we can and can't
go

and for some us, we will spend the rest of our
lives losing our freedom

xii. To Petra

I cannot be conquered by the death of the desert
I cannot be consumed by the depth of the valley
I cannot be moved by an earthquake or the
Romans
and i will never, ever bow to you

to be Black in nature is to be both a monument and a revelation. to consume less is both activism and ecological self-preservation. to travel is to look at yourself naked in the mirror. to discover, explore, and open up is to liberate deeply hidden pathologies. a "conflict" only means a resolution has not yet been realized.

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