

## WE WEAR EACH OTHER'S NAMES

*after reading If Beale Street Could Talk and The Odyssey*

### I. Fonny recast as Odysseus

*He knows that he must do something to keep himself  
from drowning in this place, and every day he tries.*

James Baldwin

I understand the liquor in us  
We are away seizing  
each other's throats stomaching all the bitters  
and here you are an audience making me  
a boy waiting  
to wife the eye of want again  
Stop turning the pages Don't reposition your antennas  
Mold me out of the hollow that governs my joy  
to the mouth of rest  
The water fights me over  
and over while  
Penelope bathes him in a tub of big water  
that babbles his name  
I am every tongue  
my son learned to use  
in the lack of me  
my son come  
seek a ship that survives its trip home  
call it mercy

II. Alonzo Jr. recast as Telemachus, Age 21

*The baby asked,  
“Is there not one righteous among them?”*

James Baldwin

Is there an ethics to mythmaking?  
Is there a family that imagination is not allowed to touch?  
Fonny wanted to build Tish a table. To remain the center,  
my father tried to run me over. A wound is a bare patch  
of grass on which a baby’s head falls. A plow that parts  
the earth like a rat tail comb. I hold my father’s absence  
because it is the blade of my becoming. I twist  
my wrist so every vein is upright and exposed. Do you see  
me bleeding in the way only children can?  
In what way would *you* like to be devastated? I already know  
the color of my own tenderness. Yours is next to mine tracing  
diamonds around the television. Breathing  
is a tender type of breaking. A myth is just someone bathing  
a boy in water not yet made from weeping.

III. Tish recast as Penelope

*And now again the stormwinds have caught away  
my beloved son.*

Homer

I say I live in a shushing (a woman waiting while a hero is out). Can you tell me it doesn't hurt to live here? Can you return to (for) me, silence me out of witnessing my selves: unmistakably American (I stab the onions), I wash a boy's hair in a warehouse fashioned into love, sleep (I never do this). You are the toy civilian perched in the glass window, your bow an arm stuck flexing. I am the hand that paddles your parting. You are the shape *without* makes around the body.

moiety is an arrow campaigning for

our

now

all the world

the water

and just like the water

these throats

want you dead

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