

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

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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