

METAPHORS FOR A BLACK FUTURE

**TO THE BODY
TO THE EARTH**





WELCOME

Welcome to the second Metaphors for a Black Future zine - *to the body, to the earth.*

Over October - December 2022, we came together as Black and Black mixed-heritage writers to build community and experiment with new work, forms and processes, with no pressure for excellence or outcome. This publication grew from this season of workshops, provocations and gatherings.

Held by Amanda Thomson, Ashanti Harris, Clementine E. Burnley, Lateisha Davine Lovelace-Hanson, Dr Sheree Mack, and myself, we were invited to write in embodied ways and in response to our environments. We explored myth, gesture and dream space. We went outside and wandered, giving new attention to the everyday.

Together we created a space that honours the fullness and abundance of 'the process' - the failure, the surprise, the excellent, the discarded, the not-yet finished, the meaningful, the crafted, the waste of time and the worthwhile, and, most of all, the opportunity to witness and be witnessed.

Inside this zine, you will find work that grew from these offerings; finished work and works-in-progress. The work has undergone the lightest of editing and honours first and foremost the writer's process.

For those who were there, I hope this zine provides a way to be able to hold and revisit a memory, a feeling, a constellation of relationships, reflections and practices. For those who weren't, welcome.

Now, I leave you to enjoy the writing.

In love and power,

Martha Adonai Williams

CONTENTS

Black Bodies Breathing into Trees

Sheree Mack 4

Mountain Swimming

Sheree Mack 5

SeaSwim

Sheree Mack 6

Black man Resistance

Zaki El-Salahi 9

Walking in their footsteps at night: Geographic Dysmorphia in Dùn Èideann

Zaki El-Salahi 12

BLACK QUEER JOY

Dean Atta 16

Talking Therapy

Dean Atta 18

If all the world were dreams	
Dean Atta	19
when fires start	
Loraine Masiya Mponela	21
Bridges	
Nichelle Santagata	24
Rushing Winds Journey Home	
Nichelle Santagata	26
Dormancy: A means, slowly broken	
Martha Adonai Williams	29
Replenish	
Jeda Pearl	35

CONTRIBUTORS

Sheree Mack is a Creatrix with a practice which manifests through poetry, storytelling, image and the unfolding histories of black people. She engages audiences around black women's voices and bodies, black feminism, ecology and memory. She advocates for black women's voices, facilitating national and international creative workshops and retreats in the landscape, encouraging and supporting women on their journey of remembrance back to their bodies and authentic selves.

Zaki El-Salahi is a British-Sudanese lyricist, performance poet & community educator. Zaki's work is rooted in Rap & Dub poetry, and the role of MC culture in Black British consciousness.

Dean Atta was named as one of the most influential LGBT people in the UK by the Independent on Sunday. His debut poetry collection, *I Am Nobody's Nigger*, was shortlisted for the Polari First Book Prize. His Young Adult novel in verse, *The Black Flamingo*, won the 2020 Stonewall Book Award, and was shortlisted for the CILIP Carnegie Medal, YA Book Prize and Jhalak Prize.

Lorraine Masiya Mponela is a Community Organiser and Migrants Rights Campaigner based in Coventry, England. She writes to process and understand herself and life. Lorraine is originally from Malawi, and has a lovely son, Comfort.

Nichelle Santagata is a nonfiction/fiction, prose and poetry writer, hip hop and contemporary dancer, movement artist, photographer, sound artist, filmmaker, videographer, and illustrator from so-called Arizona, United States. She is currently based in Scotland pursuing her PhD in Sociology focusing on Black women's mental health and healing using arts-based methods and autoethnography.

Martha Adonai Williams is a writer, facilitator, black feminist and friend. Her practice departs to and returns from black feminist world-making, always, with regular layovers in front of trash tv or at the allotment. Her work considers the wilderness and margins as sites of resistance, refusal and homecoming. She works with writing and storytelling as therapeutic tools and as methods for community building.

Jeda Pearl is a disabled Scottish-Jamaican writer and poet. She's been published/commissioned by Black Lives Matter Mural Trail, New Writing Scotland, Tapsalteerie, Shoreline of Infinity, Rhubaba, Collective, StAnza and Peepal Tree Press.

SHEREE MACK

Black Bodies Breathing into Trees

The quickening light.

Trees, you release your leaves
once more as we stretch our Black limbs,
still here, still breathing across the land.

Unfurl your greenness like greedy tongues,
in regimented lines, planted for profit.
Confined to others demands.

We feel your tremors as we shelter under you.
We will twist and scream and break free,
free from the plantations of history and lies.

Mountain Swimming

We climb in the rising heat and I feel heavy.
Rucksack clinging around my waist like a troll,
I'm at the end of the line, always, as if I need
the others, fitter and whiter than me, to pull me
up the steep pass. I tell myself, I'm taking my
time to savour the moment, enjoy the view as
my breath escapes like a monoprint; white lake
surrounded by shades of grey; flint, slate, gun-
metal to charcoal. The majestic mountain.
Because I'm afraid to love, I keep my wetsuit
on and enter on foal legs the clearest blue lake
known locally as bottomless as well as home
to a water dragon. The dragon does not scare
me. However, letting go does.

SeaSwim

I discard boots before I hit the sand.

Dense turfs of grass tickle my ankles.

Raised veins signal the cold.

Stripping down to my costume

rich flesh graces the air.

Dip one. Slip one. Soon come.

Into the sharp shallows.

Howling with a hunger.

Dip one. Slip one.

White winter light under a wolf moon.

Seagulls.

Wingbeat to wingbeat song.

Handfuls of sea slipping

through fingers towards

total immersion.

Welcome these little deaths,
to be born again and again.
Here and there and afterwards,

in solitude, as traces of you linger.

ZAKI EL-SALAH

Black man Resistance

I have a lot of prejudice in my body

how a man should hold himself

how a man should stand/by

how a man should define/defy

wedded to violence is how bell hooks defines my problem

when I step back

in moments of stillness and silence

- rare for a body whose value is in productivity -

I can see

the anger in me

finger the triggers with deadly accuracy

wedded to violence

it breaks my loves as it has broken me

at times

How can tears need years
yet rage release with such ease?
swifter than a language learnt in infancy
more familiar and intimately close than the
partner I say I love

wedded to violence
what would separation feel like
when it has served me so well for millennia?
more faithful than my own intuition

my body is my privilege
muscle memory resists the will to change
supremacy woven within my dna
did not attend
attend
at end

But I am here
I am present
I can present
not just represent
reproduce
resist

Bismillahi
let me begin

...

Listen to Zaki El-Salahi read Black man Resistance:

<https://tinyurl.com/blackmanresistance>



Walking in their footsteps at night: Geographic Dysmorphia in Dùn Èideann

*Route: Holyrood Park (Commie Pool entrance) to Duddingston, via the
Innocent Railway*

Quiet
in humming harmony
the stars bare witness to human betrayal
Rockface crumbles in its age old pace
blocking my path to knowing
until its god given time to say
god damn.

this not so innocent path from
Nature to de Nile greets
a blood brown moon
kissing goodnight to this cold, mudpacked earth,

onward

onward

onward to victory

over that sandswept Southern civilisation

as old as this Northern volcanic rock I awake on

forwards ever

backwards never

as You tell me to step back

the inheritance of these desert bleached bones crown my searching

trophies tearing at my heart and soul

a long forgotten tale

rips us from the fringe to the centre

characters washed

long watched

tallies kept by this king's throne of stone

frozen mid-flight
I choose to fight
feet bound
In rhythm to this living thread
of a well trodden story underfoot
understood better
by its walkers
than its mappers
recording without resonance
all the proceeds they won
weighing heavy as the loss I feel
each time I visit
my cousins' homes in Abasiya
destroyed
by this beautifully peaceful place

DEAN ATTA

BLACK QUEER JOY

I'LL BEGIN WITH ME AT THE SUMMIT
WITH A SANDWICH

AND THAI SWEET CHILLI SENSATIONS
TAKING IN THE VIEW

YOU ARE USED TO ME ANGRY
AND TRAUMATISED BEGGING

TO BE SEEN AS FULLY HUMAN
WHILST ALSO STRUGGLING

WITH MY SELF WORTH
MENTAL HEALTH AND INTERSECTIONS

OF CLASS RACE SEXUALITY
AND GENDER YOU ARE NOT

USED TO SEEING ME HAPPY
ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STRUGGLE

WITHOUT THE STRUGGLE
RATHER THAN CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN

FOR A CINEMATIC ENDING
I'LL BEGIN WITH ME AT THE SUMMIT

WITH A SANDWICH
AND THAI SWEET CHILLI SENSATIONS

TAKING IN THE VIEW.

Talking Therapy

I tell my therapist

I have so many unpleasant sexual experiences

So many reckless nights

So predictably patterned

I could sleepwalk through them

I tell him I needed to

Break the cycle of drink, drugs and sex

With the blunt tools

Of celibacy and sobriety

Like a rolling pin in the spokes of a wheel

He tells me You might feel free

As you fly through the air

Thrown off your bicycle of shame

But you will come crashing down

And the pain you have been peddling

Away from will remain.

If all the world were dreams

I would build snowmen with my nieces

Climb mountains with my boyfriend

Dine with James Baldwin and Maya Angelou

Ask them what they'd write about

In this dream world where we're all equal

Now their pens are free from fighting

What did they always dream of writing?

**LORAINÉ MASIYA
MPONELA**

when fires start

when fires start
there is a space in me
where no mind or body
exist, I am just alone
observing, analysing and celebrating it all

nobody can
touch me
I need no company at all
I am alone
and it's alright

all memories lie there
next to me an undisturbed pile
once in while
I pick up one and flick through it
and cast it away when need be

in this place

I am just me

I don't bleed, hate, cry or fear

I am just me an observer, analyser, dancer, queen and warrior

in a kingdom I rule undisturbed

this is a place I run to every time

when fires start

this is a place I go to every time

when storms visit

I go in and lock myself in

I may be in a train full of people

and watch through the window of my soul

the inaudible insults thrown at me

all wash over me like water

making me wet but I don't melt

this is the place I dwell in
and keep myself sane, protected from the turbulence
outside
next time you are in a storm look for
this place for you have it in you too.

NICHELLE SANTAGATA

Bridges

I burn down and build up bridges within
To cross through the next stage of myself.



Rushing Winds Journey Home

I journey as the Winds,
Howling and rushing
Back and forth
Across all Lands,
Passing through
Endless Trees
Year after year.

But,

New distant Lands
Heard my howls
And called to
Invite me in...

I rushed out with
One final gust
Across the Sea

I've crossed
Many times before.
No whirling backwards...

I finally made it
To a place I've never
Physically graced upon but
Somehow have always
Known.

I stay here now,
Softly swaying
Back and forth
Across the same Lands,
Through the same Trees
Day after day.

**MARTHA ADONAI
WILLIAMS**

*Dormancy:
A means,
Slowly broken*

The dark that had pooled into shadows about his feet grow faint in the burgeoning dawn and he turns towards home. Now the light triggers a homing instinct that his body understands more than his mind does. I have become nocturnal, he thinks, amused, as if I belong to the hours that no one else uses. He felt the air to be most empty then, when thoughts could travel and linger without interference, when the body could just be. He imagined himself to have mastered the art of lucid dreaming and was walking the streets of his own resting mind, drifting left or right, whichever way he leaned. Sometimes, if someone had forgotten to draw their curtains or had fallen asleep on the sofa he would imagine visiting them in their sleep, what they would do, what he would say, leaving messages. The night felt like a secret he kept between himself and an eternal omniscient version of himself. He felt safe when they were together. Together in flux. He could enjoy himself.

Home, he pushed the heavy glass door open with a sigh, depositing

himself into the cold concrete lobby. The lift was already travelling downwards and he watched the red lines on the screen above the doors swap places like a rotating Tetris block finding its position. 3, 2, 1. The doors slid open and he waited as two boots exited before stepping inside. He leant his head against the cool metal, enjoying how it felt for the ridges to make indentations in his skin.

In the flat he boils the kettle, makes tea, takes it to the bedroom, sits at the desk beneath the window. He takes note of the cloud cover and the colour of the sunrise in the notebook open on the desk.

Cirrocumulus, deep orange. Like clusters of lily stamens laden with pollen. Quite unusual. Feels like a sunset. Heavy air. Strangely warm for the morning, dreamlike.

He curls his hands into the shape of a foetus and rests his cheek on its upturned belly. He realises he has been doing this for years, since he was a child, the same as his mother. He thinks of where they kept her in the flat, how they all brought lilies until every room felt humid, thick with their sweet fragrance. How the smell was nauseating to him. How he had had to lay down. How they had

whispered arrangements outside of the bedroom door so that by the time he got up it was all settled; without him, without mum. After the funeral, when he went back, the bed and carpet were stained with flecks of orange and the stamens were bare and black. He had sat on the floor and wept with guilt and relief.

The tea grows cool on the desk. He begins to feel a hollow ache. He pushes his waistband away from his tummy and begins to make firm circles over his abdomen with the heel of his hand. He supposes he is hungry or perhaps he might bleed today.

A flicker below draws his eyes to the scrubland at the back of the flats. A bird scratches in a pile of fallen leaves. He's too far up to see what kind it is and probably wouldn't know anyway. It scratches and pecks until it pulls a worm from the ground and with a flick of its head, swallows it whole.

When he stopped going to church, his mum used to tell him that just because you can't see something doesn't mean that it's not there. He begins to imagine the life that moves beneath the surface, insects and worms, ghostly fungus reaching out beneath the scaly

feet of the bird, underneath the flats. He thought about decay and restoration and found himself comforted that wherever he walked there was an invisible world beneath his feet of creatures and beings that also belonged in the dark. He was always so preoccupied with finding some air, with documenting the horizon, that thoughts of the earth and its cycles felt unfamiliar and firm and welcome.

He had never had a garden. Had always lived in flats. Grew a few herbs on the windowsill and listened sometimes to Gardener's Question Time by chance. He knew his family had had a farm, well they had had animals and grown their food, but not in living memory anymore and in a different climate anyway. He wondered how it would be to observe the soil instead of the sky. Something he could touch and taste and be with.

The sun moved from behind a cloud and began to warm his face. He realised he had been holding his breath. He exhaled, let his shoulders settle, and got up to make some breakfast.

Later that day, he dug out a pair of old trainers and made his way downstairs to the rough ground where the bird had been. Looking around he realised he was wrong to think nothing grew there.

Weeds grew in patches, small but tough. He recognised one plant his friend had showed him. Plantain. He remembered it was good for healing wounds and picked a few leaves to take inside with him.

He began to come down daily and poke about. He ordered a book off the internet about wild plants and started a new notebook, noting down what was out there and what he had done with it. As the weather warmed he began to experiment. He bought a watering can and started to water the patch selectively. He didn't want to decide who should live and who should die but thought that perhaps he could have some small influence. He watered in a spiral and planted a blackcurrant bush in the middle. He had a small harvest that first year and found that he liked picking the sour fruit from among the thorns.

JEDA PEARL

Replenish

Imagining beyond the sky dome
from my sea of watercolour bedsheets
creating to survive, surviving to create

Crafting a lung-space in this momentary stasis
to replenish mobility – an active rest

Observing my body: breathing
my reminder, to drink in deep the air
absorb the lush forest of my lungs

My body: a garden to tend

\ feed, water /

– let it overgrow

Let it wild

let it

be





SCOTTISH
BPOC
WRITERS
NETWORK