Two Pieces

“Farris Windmill in West Yarmouth,” date unknown. Photograph courtesy of the Historical Society of Old Yarmouth,Yarmouth Port, Massachusetts.

Read Statement on Poetic Research for Two Pieces

Cape Cod 1837 [found document: obituary]

Jan 19, 1837, *Barnstable County Archives*

Died at the Almshouse in this town, Mr. Thomas GREENOUGH, aged 90. The last of the tribe of Indians which in this town have been struggling to keep alive the ashes of their nationality since the first withering influence of the white man was felt upon these shores.

In noticing the death of this venerable specimen of aboriginal simplicity, we are reminded once more of the painful and melancholy fate of that race of men,

whose freedom once was boundless as their forests, and whose harmless pride towered aloft in haughty resolution of importance and power.

The few miserable natives who have survived till the present time are the diminutive samples of nations once mighty in battle, sage in the counsel of whatever permeated to the administration of uncivilized governments, and cunning in all the wiles of savage diplomacy.

There are specimens of other nations among whom once was found all that was known or can be conceived of intelligence, of refinement, of honor, and of grandeur in this half of the world. As relics, then, of time past, as living records of our country's history, they are interesting to us; and well may we exercise our feelings of sympathy, as we witness their council fires fading and being put out, one after another, leaving us to grope about in the uncertain twilight of traditions, or in the utter darkness of song.

But aside from the fact of being the last of his race, Mr. GREENOUGH was a curious and in many respects, a wonderful man. We doubt if many, or even any, of our citizens laboring under the same disadvantages would have displayed more wisdom and good sense than he evinced on many occasions. Endowed with an uncommon share of penetration and capable of a just appreciation of rights, he wore, through the last year of his life, the title of "Lawyer."

He displayed in the management of the business, such tact and skill as few of more pretentions or statesmanship would have blushed to own. He read much, thought more; and though always supplying himself with such wild productions as he found upon what he called and believed to be his own territory, but the legal seizing of which unfortunately was the home of his white neighbors—he has gone, we hope, where he has free course in those hunting grounds where "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest."

Farris Windmill, South Yarmouth, Massachusetts

He painted his initials in black inside the windmill,
my great grandfather times five,
Thomas Greenough, who would come
to be known as the last surviving Indian in this town,
hand on the inner wall beside the winding
staircase, the beams and tower, overlook:
"T.G." and the date "1782,"
on *one of its massive oak posts,*
though the windmill was sold,
collected, and now stands next
to the oldest post office, vanes
raised like arms, canvas hooked in a shroud.

Thomas helped to lift the windmill
with forty yoke of oxen,
move it from West to South
years before it was given to the father
of modern assembly on his eightieth
birthday by a group of automotive dealers,
dismantled and shipped to the Henry Ford Museum
in Dearborn, Michigan, the oldest windmill
on Cape Cod, with his name inside it like a letter.

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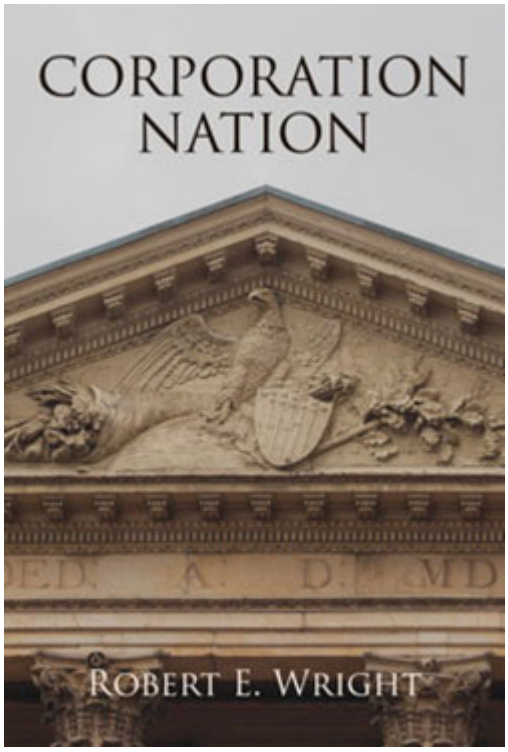
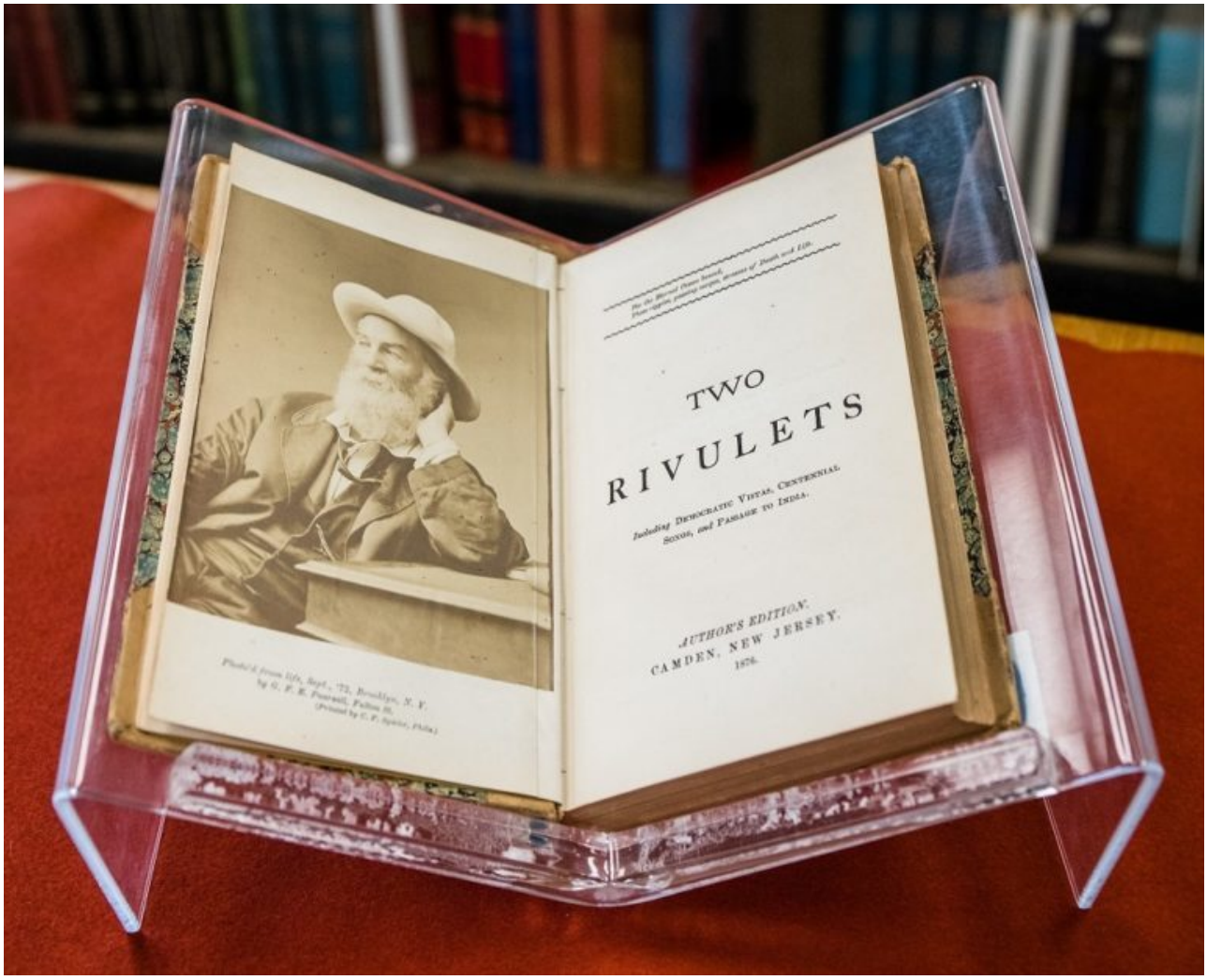
Kelle Groom is a poet and memoirist. Her memoir, *I Wore the Ocean in the Shape of a Girl* (2012) is a Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers selection, New York Times Book Review Editor's Choice, a Library Journal Best Memoir, Oprah O Magazine selection, and Oxford American Editor's Pick. She is the author of three poetry collections: *Five Kingdoms, Luckily* (2010), and *Underwater City* (2004). Her work has appeared in AGNI, The New Yorker, New York Times, Ploughshares, Poetry, and Best American Poetry. She is the recipient of fellowships from the American Antiquarian Society, James Merrill Writer-in-Residence Program, Black Mountain Institute, University of Nevada-Las Vegas, Library of Congress, Djerassi Resident Artists Program, Millay Colony for the Arts, Atlantic Center for the Arts, Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, Sewanee Writers' Conference, and Ucross Foundation. Her awards include a 2014 National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowship in Prose, as well as a state of Florida Division of Cultural Affairs grant, two Florida Book Awards, and a Barbara Deming Memorial Fund grant. Recently distinguished writer-in-residence at Sierra Nevada College, Lake Tahoe, she is now on the faculty of the low-residency MFA program. She is currently at work on her second memoir, The Cartographer's Assistant, and her fourth poetry collection, Letter from Aphrodite.

Of "Shared" Governance



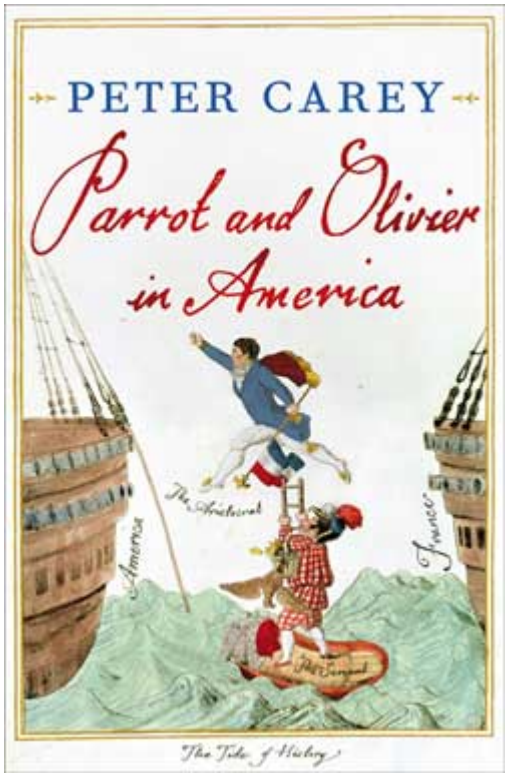
Public opinion, explosive economic growth, and jealous state legislatures would not countenance the abolition of corporations.

“Garments,” “Glances,” “Limbs,” and “Rivulets”



Written to mark the bicentennial of Whitman’s birth, my poems operate within that lacuna, occupying the dissonant threshold between Whitman’s optimistic vision for America, “out of hopeful green stuff woven,” and my own personal history.

Tocqueville, Falling for America

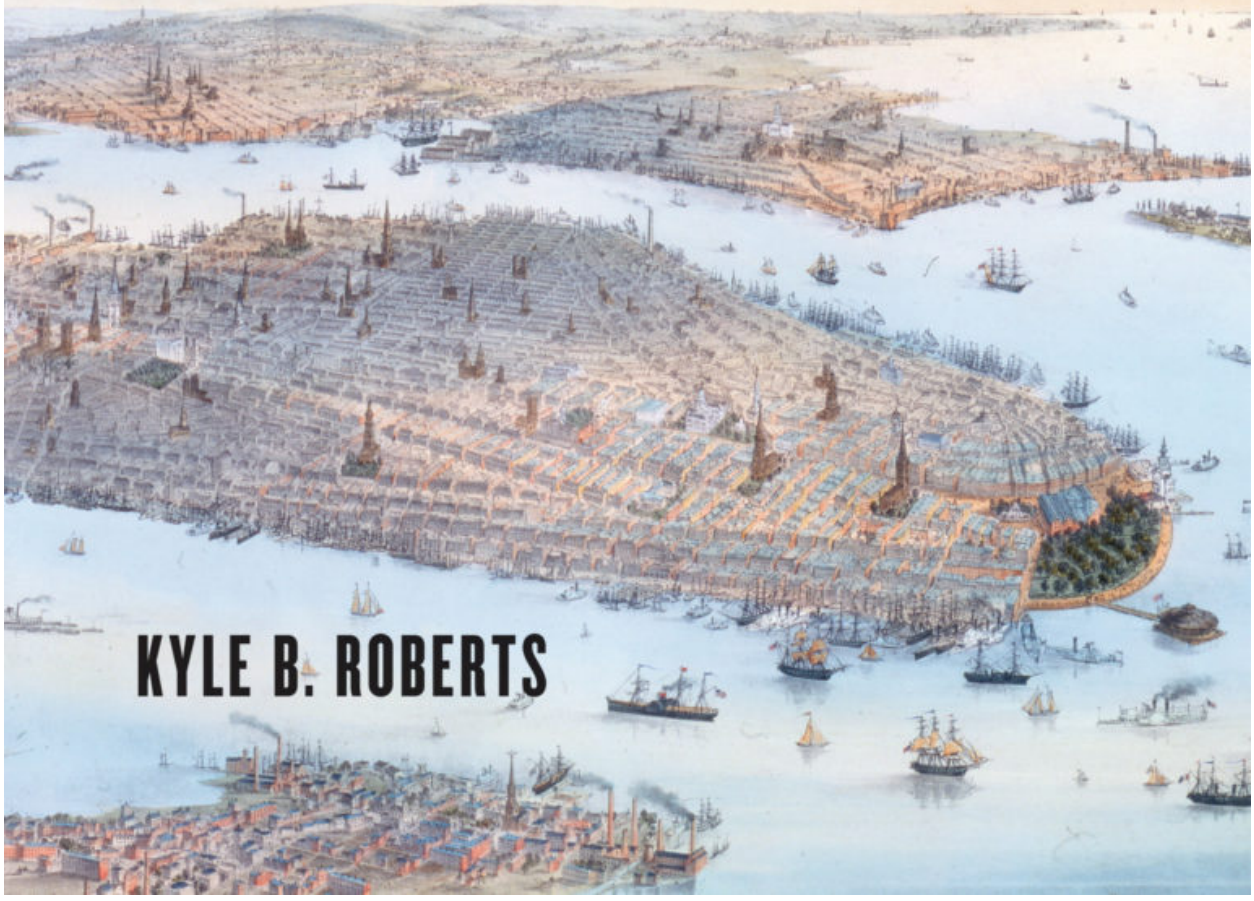


So who, in Parrot and Olivier in America, is Parrot?

Power, Space, and Race: Evangelical Gotham

RELIGION
and the
MAKING OF
NEW YORK CITY,
1783–1860

EVANGELICAL GOTHAM



KYLE B. ROBERTS

Even as New York was becoming an evangelical power center, it nevertheless also remained a foil against which ministers committed to the New England ideal of village life—homogenously white and Protestant—could rant and rail.

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from “Bright Advent”

'These seen Gen.I, 1-2.
'Yeush naumukish Gen.I, 1-2.

These words are single notions
Yeush kuttiwongash siyeumoe wahittumiash.

God, created, in beginning,
God, ayum, weskekutchissik,

heaven, earth:, earth, not formed
kesuk, ohke: ohke, matta kukkenauuneunkquttinno,

nothing in it; darkness, upon deep:
monteagwuninno; pohkennum, woskeche moonoe:

the spirit of God moved upon waters.
Nashauanit, popomhau, woskeche, nippekontu.

These words binding words:
Yeush kuttowongash moappissue kuttiwongash:

And, was, or, again, but,
Kah, mo, asuh, wonk, qut,

another, like, for, but,
onkatuk, netatup, newutche, webe,

as, in, so, the, for this cause is it, &c. …
neane, ut, nemehkuh, ne, newaj sun, &c. …

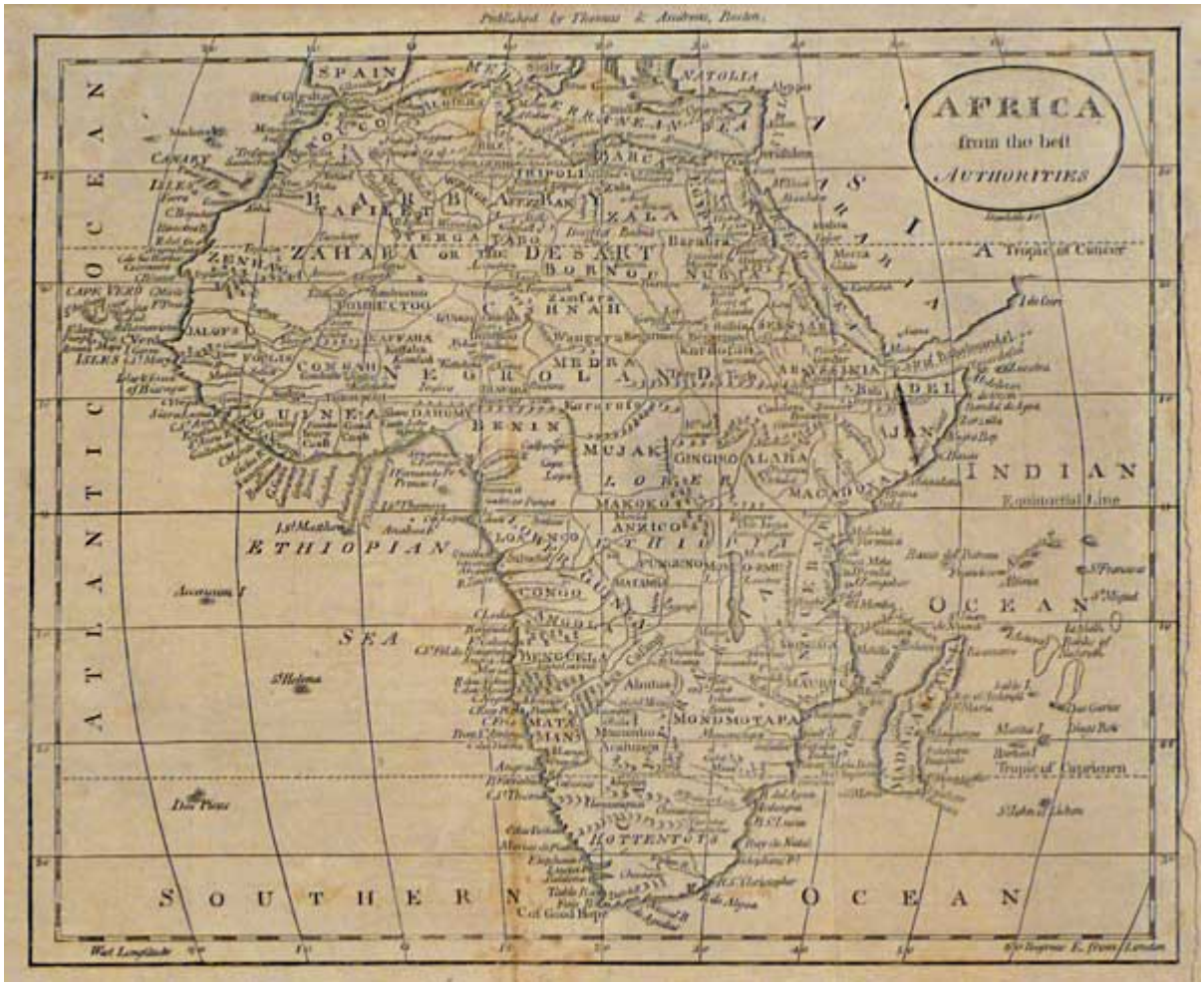
All single Notions are Pairs
Wame siyeumie wahittumiash nequtayittumiash

which inlighten each other,
nish wequohtoadtumiash,

& them only:'
& nish webe:'

all source material is from the 17th century and appears in single quotes

A Home: Liberia Poems



But when it came to poetry, like many young poets, my first poems focused on myself. It was this exploration of my personal identity that ultimately led me to an exploration of the past. I'd brought several poems about my relationship with my father to a creative writing workshop, and a female classmate challenged me to write about the women in my family.

Poems

Research has been at the core of my poetic work for the past 15 years—largely because it gives me the chance to pursue questions of language while I pursue a subject in the world at large that interests me.

Duck River Latitudes

I conceived of the series of poems as a lyric travelogue, in which, mile by mile, the speaker positions himself on a raft floating on the Duck River, or on its banks, or beneath its surface, or no more than a quarter of a mile from the river.

Poems

A Letter to Jefferson from Monticello

Westward the course of empire makes its way. —Bishop George Berkeley

I

I climbed through what remains of your oak forest
& passed again our gated family graveyard

(Granddaddy’s stone & Bennett Taylor’s
& Cornelia J.’s & all the Marthas—)

& up the leafy slope to Monticello
& slunk into your study filled with pedestals,

translations of the Bible, Livy, Herodotus,
porcelain head of Voltaire as inkwell, plans for

an ornamental farm, Nouvelle Maison Carrée,
feeling that Rome might yet exist, forum, project

of appropriation: your America.

O hypocrite—you make me tired.
Like Whitman, you contradict yourself.

II

Images: you, lofty, curious,
child of a mapmaker & New World aristocrat

in your one-room schoolhouse on the Randolph land grant,
learning Latin in a wilderness.

Writing that in sixteen generations
the “aboriginal” Native Americans

would be like the Britons after Caesar
& produce “their own Cicero.”

Defending America’s greatness
from French snobbery with a moose.

Nine generations later
very few of us read Cicero,

moose reclaim New England after heavy farming,
& your house is a *museum*, whose enormous gift shop

sells your profile cast in crumbly chocolate,
versions of your favorite peony

& umbrellas with your signature…

Here’s your garden:
marrow peas asparagus

& nubbed beginnings
of the scarlet runner bean.

I still hear schoolchildren asking
why you needed slaves to grow them.

O great rhetorician, tell me: What should I say?

III

I wait
where your publics did
in the balconied front hall, your wonder cabinet.

Re-creations of buffalo-skin & beaded dress,
relics of tribal peoples
you courted Roman-style, with coins.

As tourists shuffle
off to the last buses, I hear other silence:

Behind this great hall and upstairs
a dome room and wasp-filled cuddy,
the cramped quarters of your grandchildren

who inherited your debt.

IV

Families are still stories: Now we look
for them with DNA. DNA would have
fascinated you: It is

symmetrical, almost rational,
the way you thought America's rivers would be
when you sent Lewis & Clark west

to collect & cross the continent, to gather birds & roots
& pipes & pelts & herbs & a ram's skull that hangs here,
& dialects of tribal languages, which they

subsequently lost.

We haven't found those dialects.
We have found DNA:
& tests of it suggest (though cannot fully prove)

that you had two families:
legitimate & illegitimate,
two rivers proceeding out from you—

remembered unevenly,
like names that have been saved and those
that have been lost.

Your family

made of structured absence.

Some people in your
white family this makes furious.
Others simply wonder what a *family* is.

The word, like *freedom*, shifts
beneath us, recombinant, reforming.
Our country argues now about it.

We can’t decide what it should mean.

V

Looking at the buffalo robe that is a Shawnee map

I think about asymmetry,

the ever-presence of a story we can’t tell / won’t see.

All stories contain opposites:

If only you look at DNA, you do not

see the whole buffalo: country: self.

Whatever frame you look through

changes what you see.

(I admire your 17th century micrometer, your telescope.)

We saved your hand-cast silver spectacles,

but I don’t know how to see you despite

wanting to, also because of

your fractured families.

You disappear behind

your multitude of portraits.

VI

So much (I think) of what we love about America
is hybrid like a fiddle, like rock ‘n’ roll, which holds

African and English rhythms meeting
near a river that in the 1800s you

called *the Cherokee Tainisee*—
“beautiful & navigable,”

you said. Aesthetic, practical.

A complex way of being, a difficult pose to hold.

I wondered driving down here

listening to *True Colors* & the Christian station,
how to feed body & soul. Cherries bloom

at Shadwell, near the ex-grounds of Lego

(all the lost plantations

where our many families lived)—

VII

In this house museum I get special permission
to touch your bedspread, peer into your Virgil, hunt as if
for clues.

It all only looks still
but was always unfinished. You designed

porches & dumbwaiters, elaborate passages
like those beneath the Coliseum

where the Roman slaves died
in the *Panis et Circenses*. Your craft:

Keeping people hidden. I ask you:

Must beauty do this?
On what must beauty rest?

VIII

Nine generations later,
I live on a fault line.

I hike through redwood, sorrel, live oak—plants you'd love to name.

Berkeley, where I grew up, is utopian, too.

Many people there build experimental gardens

& devote their lives to cultivating

the best kind of tomato: Because one has to try

to make the world a better place.

& Berkeley is segregated.

Its promise is unhealed.

(O & this is also inheritance from you)—

IX

California's road map calls it

"geologically young and restless"—

it is literally in motion & in ten million years

will be someplace else.

Now it is coastlines, traintracks, mountains,

underfunded universities, overcrowded prisons,

factory farms, expensive cheese.

Pesticides & ocean, budget crises, artichokes.

I learned Latin there. I re-crossed the continent.

I stand in your mote-filled sunlight in my solitary fancy.

The doors close any moment.
Mr. Jefferson: You've also left me this.

I've never had to work in

any field except for gardens that I've planted.

I roam with a lion's share of your uneven freedom.

I pass as a dreamer, recording names.

These are beautiful & come from many languages,

reminding me how in Rome columns rear & overlap:

Madrone: Eucalyptus: Manzanita:

Scars themselves—unsolved or healing.

O architect of hopes and lies,

brilliant, fascinating—

ambitious foundering father I revere & hate & see myself in.

Statement of Poetic Research

I have had the strange experience of coming of age as a white descendant of Thomas Jefferson just at a moment when Jefferson, always somewhat contested, became a more complex figure for us all. The news about the DNA evidence linking Jefferson's family line to Sally Hemings's came out just as I was studying rhetoric in college. The evidence was many things: to some people it was validation of a long-held family history; to others it was a pioneering use of new science to probe old mysteries. For me, it provoked a dramatic realignment of how I saw my own family, how I understood the ancestor I acknowledged but had not spent much time thinking about. The arrival of the DNA evidence coincided with a moment when I began to understand the tide of history itself as slippery and malleable, subject to multiple transformations. Like the chain of canonical authors in Harold Bloom's seminal work of literary criticism, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry,* our own canons of personal knowledge can be reshuffled. I was discovering that the very facts by which we come to understand ourselves can be realigned, reframed, resettled. *Family, history, ancestor, knowledge, truth, proof:* all these words gained a new and challenging sense of provisionality.

Even for those not given to thinking in poetic forms, it is hard to miss the ways the figure of Thomas Jefferson can feel allegorical. Again and again he enacts the dramatic metaphor: at Monticello he had an inkwell in the shape of Voltaire's head, suggesting his writing was formed in the ink of Voltaire's brain. The very desk on which that inkwell might have rested—the desk on which he was said to have crafted the Declaration of Independence—was itself made by enslaved carpenters who were members of the Hemings family, men who were, in essence, already his wife's unacknowledged family, her inheritance. Jefferson—the great-grandson of William Randolph, scion of one of Virginia's most powerful families—sometimes avoided eating sugar, and bought maple syrup instead, in the hopes that doing so would hasten slavery's demise. Jefferson once shipped a moose skeleton to France, directly to the naturalist Comte de Buffon, so that it could serve as a testament to American greatness. This was an earnest attempt to prove the American continent's superiority by showing off the size of its mammals.

Despite having revered Jefferson as a child, I was coming to realize that Jefferson's stories embodied not just mammoth acts but dramatic absences. Even for a keeper of many of his era's best scientific instruments, only some volumes deserved to enumerated, only some fields were worthy of study. Jefferson, who only partially recorded the names of his enslaved population, donated all of his books to what would eventually become the Library of Congress as a way of settling his debts. Jefferson then bought many more books. When Jefferson died, he did not free his slaves, but left them (and the debt) to his children to settle. The catalog of books at the Library of Congress is a national treasure, while the records of where the enslaved men and women and

children went after this auction is incomplete. Here is a fact that vibrates in my heart with every allegorical quiver: when Jefferson died, his personal debt was greater than the nation's.

I can trace some of the stories that lead forward from Jefferson, that mark the paths where his story bleeds toward mine. Jefferson's grandson, Thomas Jefferson Randolph, lived until 1875 and spent his life literally settling Jefferson's debt, before then losing a great deal more money by investing in Confederate bonds. My grandfather's grandfather, Bennett Taylor, Thomas Jefferson Randolph's grandson, fought in the Civil War and was captured at Pickett's Charge, at Gettysburg. Bennett sits at a hinge in American history. There are as many generations between Thomas Jefferson and Bennett Taylor as there are between Bennett Taylor and me. But how was Jefferson's debt my debt? How was his legacy my inheritance? And how is Jefferson's legacy our broader inheritance? What did the presence of this newly validated set of family relations have to do with it?

When I teach poetry, I discuss with students ways that the uses of pronouns in poems can be slippery—the way an "I" can speak for a "we," or a "you" can imply an "us," or a poem about one event can resound beyond what is spoken. My challenge in this project was to marshal material that folds between "I" and "we," between private history and public reckoning, between specific circumstance and allegorical resonance. After all, if Jefferson is a founding father, what does it mean to be his family? I spent two summers in archives looking at old wills, at elaborate family trees scratched in by distant and long dead Randolph and Taylor ancestors, at a commonplace book kept by Martha Jefferson Randolph. In residence at the International Center for Jefferson Studies at Monticello, I hiked around the mountains with the gardener and the archaeologist looking at the grassy berms or wooded dells where they were excavating the remains of the dwellings of enslaved people. I held in my hand a few buttons that seemed to have come up from underneath a cellar, the small hooked nail that some young boy whose name we may never know might have surreptitiously made into a fishhook in the nailery. I heard the latest news on the Getting Word Project, the genealogical work to reconnect African American descendants to their ancestors who had been at Monticello.

There was a great deal of information about some things. At Monticello one can examine files on what Jefferson thought about sheep or wine or importing glass from England, and one can consult a bevy of talented librarians at work on multivolume editions of his letters. In fact, at times I would feel that there is almost too much information about Jefferson. I would go to my room at night overwhelmed, dizzy, feeling as if Jefferson was disguised behind the sheer magnitude of his artifacts. Turning up a Virginia Department of Transportation report about a freeway spur being built above the site of Wilton, a former Randolph plantation, I was struck that no one had a name to connect to any one of the human bones found in the unmarked burial site. When I found a will of an early Taylor ancestor that said that he was deeding "books, Negroes, and land" to his sons, I did not know what people had been so traded. All I could see in

that document was something hauntingly telling—a sense that bodies and books had been seen as being of equal worth. For a writer, who reveres books, who was spending her days with written material, this was chilling. I felt the paradoxical position of being a writer who had inherited written proof of my own descent from Jefferson, my legitimacy. To put it allegorically: I had inherited the books, and the debt.

At each turn there was a dialogue between what was written and what was not; whose history was written and whose was not; what could be inferred through artifact and what must be inferred through margins. I felt the jaggedness of relation between what was seen and what remained tantalizingly invisible. And I felt the presence of secrets and powerful unknowns not only in written documents but within my family's oral history, within its own understanding of itself. I talked to cousins. I looked at wills and letters and deeds. The poems began to form as a kind of shorthand. When something I learned felt most painful or quivering, I would hear a little song vibrating in my head. Auden once said of Yeats that "mad Ireland hurt him into poetry," and it is possible that I began to think of this as poetry because there is a madness to this history, because it hurts to uncover.

Indeed, because so much of what I initially knew about my own history relied on dramatic and sometimes violent absences, I began to feel that looking closely at the absence *was* the center of the story. My challenge was to find a way of dramatizing this incompleteness. For indeed, part of what is haunting about Jefferson's debt, and Jefferson's drama, are the omissions in the record, the presence of all we still do not know. What is haunting about my family story is how much is still left out.

Who then is the "I," the "we," the "us," the "they," the "them"? What is the dialogue between the material in the archive and the material on the margins? To what extent are such absences themselves representative of wider absences in American history? What are the politics of cultural transmission, of historic survival? As I began to write, I found that the poetry suggested ways of exploring shards, of exploring their margins. In a piece of prose, a text occupies the page with its fullness. In poetry, the line breaks, and we are invited to make use of silence.

To some extent this is a specific story about my inheritance; yet I hope in its search through archives and imperfect family stories it provokes questions about how we inherit anything at all. When I ask my cousins, who are genealogists, about the names on our family tree, they know many facts about every one of the recorded ancestors. But when I ask them about how slavery was practiced by the Randolph-Taylor family (of which Jefferson was only one member) from 1680-1865, they know little. We have few records, few names. In my reckoning, I perch my speaker between the public and the domestic—at the space where family lore and torn attics themselves begin to constitute what we know as the archive. My poems retrace misremembered family stories even as they explore deeply flawed American ones. When I stumbled on those things that

seemed to quiver, I wrote. I tried to follow them where they would lead. If they pointed toward something absent, I tried to walk up to the edge of that absence.

Ultimately, I came to feel that this work embodied the role of the poem. It is what the poem can offer that the report or essay might not. The poem uses its own incompleteness. It attempts to point not merely toward what has been said, what can be said, but toward the sources of its own silence, toward what has not been said, toward what cannot be said, and toward what may still need saying. It is my hope that these poems do justice to this difficult margin; that the poems grapple not only with historical mystery, but also record the strangeness of trying to encounter the past at all. In this gesture, I hope they move through my reckoning, and lean toward some lyric truth.

Tess Taylor was the 2010-2011 Amy Clampitt Resident. Her chapbook, *The Misremembered World,* was published by the Poetry Society of America. Her book*The Forage House* is forthcoming from Red Hen Press in August 2013. She teaches writing at UC Berkeley and reviews poetry for NPR’s *All Things Considered.* She lives in El Cerrito, California.