

Preface

Corresponding Voices once again brings together a select group of diverse poets, offering an encounter, one we hope engenders an appreciation for both the idiosyncrasies of the individual voices, as well as the syntheses between them — intersections that are at once convergent and divergent in musicality, theme, vision, and voice.

In putting this issue together, what struck me as a vital kinship between the voices collected here, was the way these poets charge the quotidian world with the power of estrangement in order to “dwell in Possibility — A fairer House than Prose,” as Emily Dickinson put it in poem 657. In other words, the poetic mind is aware of its own constructions, and constructs spaces that are “numerous of Windows — Superior — for Doors.” It’s a venture that is at once empowering and disempowering, a testament to the lure of language that can, by the same token, create apertures of meaning that saturate and satiate us with stability, even as it continually arches out of itself, and threatens (or promises) to scatter into disillusionment.

Yusef Komunyakaa opens this issue of *Corresponding Voices* with a section from a longer work-in-progress, “The Last Bohemian of Avenue A.” Here, the speaker talks to his dog, Roscoe, about “a tune I was born to carry beyond earthy dominion,” a tune whose notes bent life into the perpetual question — a grasping, a condemnation, where the cure was part Coltrane, part Miles, part love. There is dog sense and man sense, and a communion between the two that makes more of each, that spins the extrasensory language of memory and longing, the language we use like a canine instinct, to sniff out the evidence of our own lives, “to witness the unheard-of.”

“What fantasy do you dwell in” ask the poems of Jane Springer. To answer,

Springer seems to say, is like trying to grasp at the snarl and unruliness of our lives. And the entropy is everywhere: in the memory and mishap of the quotidian, in the machines and propaganda that infiltrate domestic spaces, in a house that arches towards both Pluto and Lethe, where the dogpack tears up the linoleum floor and the “bloodhounds bellydance.” Springer sings the ballad of “the rural art of decay,” of the ever-fluxing dwelling place of the soul.

In Caitlin Vance’s hands, a smile becomes the conciliatory gesture that inflicts harm, and we get the uneasy feeling that we’re unprepared for a new sort of violence wrought by a misogynistic society, “The terror that awaits if you follow it/ someone else telling us what to do.” There’s a deceptive declarative quality to these poems, a rawness that lends the illusion of being resigned to endure a violence made common, blunt, raw, frank. But the poems assert themselves, shove back, make traceable the false and sinister gestures of hatred and self-hatred.

Slow embers burn in the lines of Santee Frazier’s “Ventilator” series, which is part of a longer work-in-progress; a chiaroscuro where one image seems to black out as another presses through, like a “wood stove in the dark/ its bulbous hull a womb/ of popping embers.” In the pivot and press of thingyness, between the static of TV and “kin clacking billiards/gulping down pickled eggs and beer,” this world is rendered in quick cuts, in flashes that sear and leave us “lonesome as setting a fire with a match & antifreeze.”

To build each stanza, each little room, in a way that dares to tell us something about the way we make meaning — in “Chambers as the Cedars — Impregnable of Eye,” as Dickinson put it — is to do the work of the soul; and to sing of the soul demands the most daring acts of improvisation and imagination. I hope you will find that the poems in this issue of *Corresponding Voices* act as small but powerful apertures that alter perception, disrupt the static materialities of our world — and release new meaning.

Jules Gibbs