

Annunciation: Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey

after Mary Szybist

Fra Angelico, 1433-34, Cortona

Change the light and dove floating
upon daggered rays. Gaze a bit, take in
the jungled lawn or gilded backgrounds. Hold space
elsewhere: altar, staircase, monastery plaster, chapel—
to better orientate halos
or overflowing gowns, this space deep
in southern heat, inescapable for generations
heat, a free life unthinkable heat. Reconsider
distance, an angel addressing Harriot Bailey— not Mary.
Hear and heed these announcements to Harriot's
chapped and aching slave hands, hands full
of grace, close to grasping Gabriel wrapped
in the light of her likeness to dispel fear, shock, her
cloistered breasts still wondering: *why me?*
*What Lord? What work to make ready, set asunder
and burn? What to prep before the boy arrives?*

Botticelli, 1601, Florence

Do not run,
my intrusion—:
not a violation
but a warning

These lilies observe
opposites, containers for
 birth, for death,
 flowers so fleeting

I understand
shunning,
 back peddle—
 evading eyes

Working forever— what
this land provides:
 shameful commerce,
 people without leisure

Take my cape,
this veil for Frederick—
 protection for
 the unformed or unframed

Hail Harriot,
hail your hands:—
 blessed be your offspring,
 blessed be your duty

Hail Harriot,
the surprise
 your gaze pushes,
 gathering the answer: *yes*

Begotten :: February, 1818

Douglass Panel 1

Black runs wild in Talbot.
Runs like the river runs
Through water,
Runs like a child
Through childhood.

The women do chores
In the middle of this.
Do the bulk of black living.
They hold stars on their heads.
Call the gold, *grain*,
Or call the gold, *East*.
Call it, *ripe for the pluck*, or *safe*
Passage. Say, *make a move*,
And call it, *gone*.

So much black everywhere.
Ubiquitous on trees,
Grows in a buzz
On elbows, streaks
The reeds, and strides across
The plains. A crooked
Hand out of the sand
Black hand of God, *Save us*.

But the white men approach,
Holding what could be shovels
Or rifles. Trying to dig

Or shoot God gone,
Right out of sight.

And still, here is this
Baby, born unto this land
In these matchstick
Boxes, born unto the silt
As bold as black lighting
Or a tree. He's a quake,
Cracking the earth
From limb to limb.

Darkness, My Mother

Douglass Panel 2

My restlessness, from my mother.
Her gift to tell a tale into the wood & dirt
Feeds me for the rest of my life.

She cups gold for me, butter
Or could be a cookie, a coin for a ferryman.
Could be a canary or just a candle

To guide her. Twelve miles
Of danger, and back to danger. *Massa,*
I aint no fool, been here all along.

A lie worth the gamble, worth the luck.
She could disappear through
The seams, the boarded wall, and into

The nowhere of night.
But I've come to love the blue diamond
Darkness—her risk keeps these quarters

Taut. Her grip in the huddled light,
Only has a few glimmers left.
Corn bread, coated with sugar

Or just the corn. Might be a shirt,
Her name stitched across
The yoke I will grow into.