

Langston Hughes, 'Jazzonia'
from *The Weary Blues* (1926)

Oh, silver tree!
Oh, shining rivers of the soul!
In a Harlem cabaret
Six long-headed jazzers play.
A dancing girl whose eyes are bold
Lifts high a dress of silken gold.
Oh, singing tree!
Oh, shining rivers of the soul!
Were Eve's eyes
In the first garden
Just a bit too bold?
Was Cleopatra gorgeous
In a gown of gold?
Oh, shining tree!
Oh, silver rivers of the soul!
In a whirling cabaret
Six long-headed jazzers play.

Frederico García Lorca, 'Landscape'

From *Poem of the Cante Jondo* (1931)

The field
of olive trees
opens and closes
like a fan.

Above the olive grove
a sunken sky,
and a cold dark rain
of morning-stars.

Half-light and rushes tremble
at the river's edge.

Grey air crinkles.

The olive trees
are freighted
with cries.

A flock
of captive birds
moves long long tails
in the gloom.

Allen Ginsberg, 'Howl'

(extract, 1955–1956)

ah, Carl, while you are not safe I am not safe, and now you're really in the total animal soup of time—
and who therefore ran through the icy streets obsessed with a sudden flash of the alchemy of the use of the ellipsis catalogue a variable measure and the vibrating plane,
who dreamt and made incarnate gaps in Time & Space through images juxtaposed, and trapped the archangel of the soul between 2 visual images and joined the elemental verbs and set the noun and dash of consciousness together jumping with sensation of Pater Omnipotens Aeterna Deus
to recreate the syntax and measure of poor human prose and stand before you speechless and intelligent and shaking with shame, rejected yet confessing out the soul to conform to the rhythm of thought in his naked and endless head,
the madman bum and angel beat in Time, unknown, yet putting down here what might be left to say in time come after death,
and rose reincarnate in the ghostly clothes of jazz in the goldhorn shadow of the band and blew the suffering of America's naked mind for love into an eli eli lamma lamma sabacthani saxophone cry that shivered the cities down to the last radio
with the absolute heart of the poem of life butchered out of their own bodies good to eat a thousand years.

Gwendolyn Brooks, 'We Real Cool'

from *Selected Poems* (1963)

THE POOL PLAYERS.

SEVEN AT THE GOLDEN SHOVEL.

We real cool. We

Left school. We

Lurk Late. We

Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We

Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We

Die soon.

Amiri Baraka, 'Legacy'

From *Black Magic* (1969)

(For Blues People)

In the south, sleeping against
the drugstore, growling under
the trucks and stoves, stumbling
through and over the cluttered eyes
of early mysterious night. Frowning
drunk waving moving a hand or lash.
Dancing kneeling reaching out, letting
a hand rest in shadows. Squatting
to drink or pee. Stretching to climb
pulling themselves onto horses near
where there was sea (the old songs
lead you to believe). Riding out
from this town, to another, where
it is also black. Down a road
where people are asleep. Towards
the moon or the shadows of houses.
Towards the songs' pretended sea.

Toi Derricotte, 'Blackbottom'

From *Captivity* (1990)

When relatives came from out of town,
we would drive down to Blackbottom,
drive slowly down the congested main streets
 -- Beubian and Hastings --
trapped in the mesh of Saturday night.
Freshly escaped, black middle class,
we snickered, and were proud;
the louder the streets, the prouder.
We laughed at the bright clothes of a prostitute,
a man sitting on a curb with a bottle in his hand.
We smelled barbecue cooking in dented washtubs,
 and our mouths watered.
As much as we wanted it we couldn't take the chance.

Rhythm and blues came from the windows, the throaty voice of
 a woman lost in the bass, in the drums, in the dirty down
 and out, the grind.
'I love to see a funeral, then I know it ain't mine.'
We rolled our windows down so that the waves rolled over us
 like blood.
We hoped to pass invisibly, knowing on Monday we would
 return safely to our jobs, the post office and classroom.
We wanted our sufferings to be offered up as tender meat,
and our triumphs to be belted out in raucous song.
We had lost our voice in the suburbs, in Conant Gardens,
 where each brick house delineated a fence of silence;
we had lost the right to sing in the street and damn creation.

We returned to wash our hands of them,
to smell them
whose very existence
tore us down to the human.

Evie Shockley, 'Color Bleeding'

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one year, i carried the blues around
like a baby. sure, my coffee mugs cupped

amethysts: water gushed, rose-tinted
and -scented, from the faucets at my touch:
the air orange with butterflies that never

left me. meanwhile, indigo held fast
to my toes: lapis lapped my fingertips:

and a hue the shade of mermaid scales
bolted through my hair like lightning.

my eyelids drooped, fell, heavy with sky.
that year i carried the blues around

left me mean: while indigo held fast,
the daily news tattooed azure to my back.
true, festivals of lilies buoyed me. but what

good could white do? the blues grow like
shadows in late sun: stretch creep run.