

Purple Lines (Doors Closing)

Vein between beltway and district a stent to unclog exhausted arteries
This purple shawl draped over crossed and bruised stations
Knitted with time and tears to warm old bodies and nuevas almas
Who discover that their American Dream is a bad wrap

bethesda / doors closing

Fur and tobacco and lives traded along this dirt road arrow-
Shaft straight to Patawomeck banks where Piscatawa waded
Waist-deep with *waappayu* Jesuits washing healthy native souls
This new Pool paralyzed people with sins carried from Europe

connecticut avenue / doors closing

Planks across a splintered bridge worried thin by our calloused feet
Back and forth between “same as” and “hope ever” to antebellum houses
Where we were welcomed to polish, fix, and cook but not dwell within
Cross again home past two churches and the two-room schoolhouse

lyttonsville / doors closing

Believers fell hickory trees and built a holy house
Until trolley tracks were laid shockingly close
Forcing sinner-saints to move a mile up the pike
Church hauled by inches by harnessed draft horses

woodside / doors closing

Time has past swiftly since Lincoln played town ball beside mica-chipped springs
That sprung into American suburbs that morphed
Into world headquarters that Zippy the Pinhead
“Discovered” while eating chipped-beef on toast in a diner that slowly crawled away

silver spring / doors closing

Life began when she got a free card
Her first emancipation found in stacks
Books borrowed before the day innocence
Slipped away like a sip from a fountain

neighborhood library / doors closing

Reminder of home for immigrants toiling along the C&O

Sligo's surface mirrors emerald green of leaves above
Long ago it churned grist mills and quenched thirsts
Its ripple still tries to wash away deep creek blues

dale drive / doors closing

Green space brings green peace to dense blocks
Nature's beauty muscles against artifice
Engines muffle the creek's eternal voice but listen
Close to the call to retreat from it all and hit the trail

manchester place / doors closing

I drop from the edge of a single sycamore leaf
Into a tranquil branch that meanders to a creek
That feeds a river that joins another toward a bay
I grow mightier with others on my current journey

long branch / doors closing

Cook a third-world stew in a cauldronous melting pot
Brown halal chicken in a pool of palm nut oil and kosher salt
Take stock and add cowpeas mungbeans kumara and gai lan
Ladle over cassava bread and share with all who hunger

piney branch / doors closing

Weary commuter where do these tracks lead?
Is your station elevated or underground?
At this juncture are you halfway there
halfway home or having to veer off?

takoma / doors closing

The shortest route around the world is along the International Corridor
And through stomachs that fill themselves on the global grain of rice
Bún Chả Bibimbap Biryani Kabuli Pulao Tahdig Chelo Mansaf
Majadra Plov Paella Thieboudienne Jollof Jasmine Casamiento

riggs road / doors closing

Eighty-five gilded youths swathed in under armor
Two-a-days and end the day climbing stadium steps
Under a searing sun at the heatstroke of midnight

Just to rub Testudo's nose to a fiercely turtled shine

college park / doors closing

On granted land sown with bones and tear-watered
Charles Calvert's seed of an agricultural college
Cultivates educators from the ashes of devastating fire
To harvest thinkers reap knowledge glean empathy

plantation campus / doors closing

Miss Bettie in a long yellow gown dressed for an "Old South Ball"
Did not notice me admiring her in the gilded mirror as she arranged
Sweet magnolias in a porcelain vase and swayed to the fiddler's tune
When I turned she was gone leaving me spurned like Northern scum

haunted inn / doors closing

In a station of the Metro
As silent as Pound's apparitions
Our crowded faces glow like ghosts
Brightened violet by devices

metro station / doors closing

Everlasting rest of the founding Calverts' name
Between river branches Anacostans left pure
Counterculture meets higher educators
And old-timers elongate their accented O's

riverdale / doors closing

Geniuses in the zone
Incubate every day
A climate of change
Candling their ideas

discovery district / doors closing

Go tell it on the mountain said Baldwin
To faithful stewards marooned on a hill
So many crowns bought and paid for
Gifts for their children to claim and wear

beacon heights / doors closing

“Deplete our State armories of their artillery
To defend the most dangerous places on the
Annapolis road for now the honor of the country
Depends upon keeping this communication open”

annapolis road / doors closing

Remember Carroll’s sacred trust
Signed on the dot-dash-dotted line
Declared a purpled contradiction
Bruised by deeds despite words

new carrollton / doors closing

Post Script

This series of quatrains was written as a project for the DC Metro Purple Line, the original version attempted to balance commemorating historical events and repulsion for the region’s history, which was built largely by the labor of enslaved or formerly enslaved African-American people and displaced Indigenous people. “Purple” then is not only the color-coded name of the Metro line, but recalls the scars of abused Black bodies and the association with death in some Native American tribes. Still, I wanted to imbue the poem with moments of grace and hope, such as the Long Branch, Piney Branch, and Riggs Road stanzas.

Notes

BETHESDA

The poem’s overriding theme of hope is conveyed in the metaphor of a shawl on the back of a 250-year-old country that still welcomes immigrants. The notion of “quilted” suggests the stitched-together tapestry of American people. The image is also meant to echo the Purple Line’s curved route beneath the beltway’s “cloak” and across the “shoulders” of D.C.’s borders against the two Maryland counties. However, this stanza grew more pessimistic after the first, then second, Trump presidential elections.

CONNECTICUT AVENUE

In the 1600s, Connecticut Avenue was a Native American trail where Englishman Henry Fleet traded with the Piscataway people (the word *waappayu* is Algonquin for “white”). I could not work Bethesda into the opening stanza, so I reference it

in connection with the biblical site that translates as “house of mercy” because its ritual pool was used for healing ceremonies (a nod to the NIH headquartered in Bethesda).

LYTTONSVILLE

The bridge is not only worn by traffic but by the back-and-forth lives of African Americans aspiring for true equality while dealing with daily reality. Play on the word “ties” that serves the wooden rail supports as well as links to the past. “Preservation” also plays on preserving a way of life (perhaps not always a “good” thing) and historic preservation of an important artifact (like a bridge).

WOODSIDE/16TH

Based on the story of the Sligo Village Methodist Church that was rolled up Georgia Avenue by a team of horses in 1897 after tracks for the Forest Glen Trolley were laid too close to the original building. Hauled “by method” is a nod to how Methodists acquired their name. The congregation evolved into Silver Spring UMC.

SILVER SPRING TRANSIT CENTER

Transition/progress occurs rapidly. Lincoln played town ball (precursor of baseball) on the lawn of Francis Preston Blair’s estate at Silver Spring, so named for the silvery flakes of mica in the springs. Silver Spring became a blueprint for the quintessential American suburb, then headquarters for corporations. Discovery purchased land on which the Tastee Diner (known for its chipped beef) was located. Cartoonist Bill Griffith commented on the diner’s relocation in his syndicated “Zippy the Pinhead” strip.

SILVER SPRING LIBRARY

Best-selling author Rita Mae Brown, who earned her doctorate and organized activists in Washington during the 1970s, once said, “When I got my library card, that was when my life began.” Coming of age when she did and working for civil, women’s, and LGBT rights, I imagine she had frequent encounters with being denied access (someone saying “no” to her) and refusing to be subjugated (not taking “no” for an answer).

DALE DRIVE

Irish immigrants working the C&O Canal likely named the creek after Sligo County, Ireland (“emerald green”). The creek was once used to power mills and supply water. Food and drink also point to comforting immigrants, those who

thirst for freedom and opportunity even when down on their luck. The last line is a nod to Takoma Park guitarist John Fahey's song, "Sligo River Blues."

MANCHESTER PLACE

Inspired by the Sligo Creek Trail in the middle of a densely populated area. It is literally a lifesaver for residents.

LONG BRANCH

This quatrain follows a single droplet through the system of watershed tributaries—Long Branch, Sligo Creek, Anacostia River, and Potomac River—as it grows increasingly stronger. It's a metaphor for commuting as one leaves a singular house, joins the rush with others on the Purple Line, and empties out into a huge office building. The word "current" works as meaning "now," meaning "water flow," and as a homophone for "currant" (which is colored purple!).

PINEY BRANCH ROAD

Riff on the "Great American Melting Pot" adage that imagines a stew made with international ingredients possibly available at the popular Americana Grocery on Piney Branch Road. The phrase "take stock" means both to assess a situation and to add broth. Again, there's a message of providing for those who are in need.

TAKOMA/LANGLEY TRANSIT CENTER

Station #11 represents the mid-point of the Purple Line and the middle of the poem. It is a time to pause, reflect, and assess. I differentiated it as the only quatrain that uses an interrogative structure, asking questions directly to the rider. The stanza uses sound-play with "halfway" and "having."

RIGGS ROAD

This swath of land that stretches west from Riggs Road along the southern edge of Langley Park represents what makes this entire area of Maryland truly rich: its ethnic diversity. Using food as a common bond, and given that most cultures feature some sort of typical rice dish, I included here Donburi (Japanese), Bún Chả (Vietnamese), Bibimbap (Korean), Biryani (South Asian), Kabuli Pulao (Afghan), Tahdig (Iranian), Chelo (Persian), Mansaf (Jordanian), Majadra (Israeli), Plov (Uzbek), Paella (Valencian), Thieboudienne (Senegalese), Jollof (West African), Casamiento (El Salvadoran), Coconut Rice & Peas (Jamaican).

ADELPHI ROAD/WEST CAMPUS

Originally written as a tribute to University of Maryland athletics, this stanza pivoted after the tragic death of Jordan McNair after football practice in May 2018. It wonders whether the intensity and economic pressure of collegiate sports is worth the loss of life of athletes.

CAMPUS CENTER

The University of Maryland is the state's "land grant" college originally chartered as the Maryland Agricultural College and further established, through purchase of the Riverdale Plantation, by Charles Benedict Calvert (descendant of George Calvert, first Lord Baltimore). As such, this land has roots in slavery. A devastating fire in 1912 destroyed every building on campus (except Morrill Hall) and all institutional records. From these ashes rose the Maryland State College and, eventually, the University of Maryland of present-day.

BALTIMORE AVENUE/EAST CAMPUS

The haunted Rossborough Inn on Route 1 (completed 1812) has served as tavern, farmhouse, faculty residence, and—for a brief period—a Confederate headquarters. Rumor has it that Henry Onderdonk (president of the Maryland Agricultural College) threw an "Old South Ball" in honor of General Bradley Johnson and his Confederate troops, who temporarily camped on college grounds. The most frequently spotted specter is Miss Beattie who tended to the tavern during the Civil War period.

COLLEGE PARK METRO

This metro stop is rather unremarkable and set apart from campus, so I borrowed the first line from Ezra Pound's short poem "In a station of the Metro." He likened faces in the crowd to apparitions. I simply modernized it by having their ghostly faces glow purple because their heads are buried in smartphones.

M SQUARE

This part of campus—rebranded as the "Discovery District"—is an epicenter of research and technology, innovation spaces, and start-up incubators. It was hard to boil all that activity down, but I started with the notion of being "in the zone" (which doubles for being "focused" and literally in the "district"). The "Discovery District" is all about progress, so I played with "climate of change" (advancement) and "climate change" (science), as well as with the idea of an "incubator" as a place where something is hatched.

RIVERDALE PARK

This stanza travels through time, too, by referencing the historic Calvert Cemetery, the troubled Anacostia River that indigenous people kept clean, site of a mish-mash of hippies and intellectuals during the 1960s, and where in some parts, older residents still have the unique Marylander accent (similar to, but not as exaggerated as, the Baltimorean accent).

BEACON HEIGHTS

Beacon Heights, a historic African-American community that no doubt wishes to retain its identity in changing times, sits on a steep hill (a mini-mountain) overlooking B/W Parkway and Veterans Parkway. I thought of James Baldwin, novelist, social critic, and author of *Go Tell It On the Mountain*. Baldwin said, “Our crown has already been bought and paid for. All we have to do is wear it,” meaning African Americans’ ancestors (through slavery, the fight for civil rights, and sacrifice of all sorts) suffered for their descendants’ advantages (crown). The obligation then, Baldwin thought, falls to future generations to wear the crown (live) responsibly.

ANNAPOLIS ROAD/GLENRIDGE

These lines are lifted directly from an anonymous *New York Times* editorial published in the spring of 1861, just a week after the Pratt Street Riots, when it was still unclear whether Maryland would side with the Union or the Confederacy. The pro-Union writer recommends that the entire Pennsylvania corps be sent to Maryland to threaten Baltimore, establish a telegraph between Annapolis and Washington, and keep lines of communication open in defense of the Capital.

NEW CARROLLTON

“Remember Carroll’s sacred trust” is pulled from the controversial anti-Union state song, *Maryland, My Maryland*. Charles Carroll of Carrollton (for whom New Carrollton was named) was Maryland’s signatory of the Declaration of Independence. Although Carroll questioned the evil practice of slavery, he did not free his own slaves; hence, the contradiction mentioned in the stanza (that, and the fact that “all men are created equal” was in fact hyperbole). The dotted-dashed-dotted line echoes Morse code for “emergency” that perhaps the Declaration’s tenets should be applied more justly. However—even today, given this history—there’s still reason for hope, just as after every tumultuous night there breaks new light (also plays with Purple Line/Orange Line colors).