



# DIAGRAM 20.4

## OF TWO MINDS

*Sylvia Jones*

half shuttered, half bright  
 soft powered, I—  
 astrally projecting, subpoenaed  
 midair, feet up walking pink  
 clouds on the water's edge, angling  
 upstream, these shiny limbs folding  
 into human tears, logic jettisons, abrupt like  
 a red-crowned crane, on stilts  
 half shuttered, half bright  
 soft powered, I—  
 alien eyed underneath  
 nights awning, subjective  
 as dead armadillos, below  
 goliath sized power grids  
 soft powered, I —  
 half have not, half bright  
 reenact my blackness  
 in manufactured shade, keen  
 on splendor, live  
 in the shadow of a much larger tree  
 undimmed perennially wholly  
 uncool chase—  
 ransom captive evergreens, sullen  
 mouth shaped things

The germ of this poem came from two places :

- 1) a quote by David Shields from his book, *Reality Hunger : A Manifesto* (Knopf, Vintage, 2010): "I'm interested in the ways in which stories of suffering might be used to mask other, less marketable stories of suffering."
- 2) The 2019 film adaptation of Richard Wright's novel *Native Son* (Harper & Brothers, 1940)





# SHENANDOAH

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## Man with Shotgun and Alien

Sylvia Jones

after Noah Davis's *Man with Shotgun and Alien*, oil and acrylic on canvas

selling two-minute clocks, high above  
 an out of focus past, invisible from the street,  
 my first decapitation was a sweetheart  
 in the backseat hereafter of a good pollen-covered car  
 glass-arched, under the whirring ceiling fan, pounding  
 mornings in the floor with my moonroof forehead  
 the more cars they make, the more people die  
 all it takes is a half-inch of another moment's thigh  
 sometimes it's good to be afraid of the future  
 it's the year of that feeling  
 everyone has when they're dancing  
 and I'm not lonely cause I'm friends  
 with my neighbors, and my childhood home  
 is an airbnb is a brothel  
 of vacationing millennials and hallelujah  
 money, it's the bootstrap trick mirror, waiting  
 with bated breath; I lost my face or the face I had  
 when you're inside the bank everyone knows you're robbing it  
 the more cars they make the more people die  
 when was the last time we had fun?

**Sylvia Jones** is poetry editor for *West Branch* and serves as a Fellow at the Stadler Center for Poetry & Literary Arts at Bucknell University. She earned her MFA from American University. Her writing appears in *Santa Clara Review*, *DIAGRAM*, *Ponder Review*, *Spilt Milk* by The Poetry Society of New York, and elsewhere. She lives in Baltimore with her partner Agata and their buff tabby Theo.



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## Tender-Headed

Sylvia Jones

*a cento*

between youth and whatever's up next  
 the river is moving  
 Nobody sees me running toward the sun  
 her hands are cold. What time is it?  
 sweet clot of wakefulness, what is mercy?  
 A pony on the balcony!  
 a man who swam in his house three days  
 with God banging on the door like the police  
 At eight I was brilliant with my body  
 My mother had two faces and a frying pot  
 how embarrassing is love  
 Isn't it wrong, the way the mind moves back.  
 Will grief and loss swamp us?  
 I am trying, I think, to forgive myself  
 but in the geometry of my mind  
 I'm at a double wake  
 discussing politics with an unemployed butterfly  
 the musk of rotten apples everywhere  
 I don't know what pain is, do you know what pain is?  
 Can beauty save us? Yesterday  
 echoes from the handball courts nearby  
 What was incomprehensible will be comprehended  
 forget the world's smallness. I'm tired

Sources: Craig Morgan Teicher, Wallace Stevens, Patricia Smith, Philip Levine, Fady Joudah, Ilya Kaminsky, Andy Young, James Nolan, Gary Soto, Audre Lorde, Cornelius Eady, Richard Hugo, Kyle Dargan, Harmony Holiday, Maggie Nelson, Ross Gay, Dave Brinks, Tim Dlugos, Bob Kaufman, Alan Chong Lau, John Murillo, Czesław Miłosz, and Justin Phillip Reed

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## LA VIDA

After Martin Wong's [\*La Vida \(1988\)\*](#) oil on canvas

You flutter your hands rapidly by your side where in the world maybe in spring do grandmothers hide all the junipers secrets a lavender snow at sunset is a hand moving glacially with its index finger outstretched far past February. House with the red porch. I think I was born thinking in a drained quarry brown recluses dangle there now meant for dawn's glib, My shifty-eyedness. Us fashioned increasingly abstract, backsliding like two yellowed down mechanical pencils. Everytime we took the edibles. I grew up in this house. I remember the loss of memory and indistinct chatter. I wanted to arrive at this point, but didn't know how to get there. I grew up in this house, my mom grew up in this house. Unanimously one-ing up what the wind might do next. From the inside out of a dropped kicked fog, feet scuffing gravel. Today's the day recycling comes. That fake waterfall was very beautiful. Later on, I will watch a man wrap his car into a tree, and listen for the people, melting into the trees. If only pushing away could pass as an admirable way to love something back. I grew up in this house, my mother grew up in this house, we walked in through the side door only.