

SYLVIA JONES

poetry

FAST BACKWARDS

After Toi Derricotte & Charles Simic

isms aside conjuring
 Derricotte, *I see my father after his death*
 in Baltimore covered in soot shopping

for groceries at the 24 hour Giant, then again hurtling
 through the dark, outside a Bronx ale house punching
 the air behind me citing

Simic, *the blood-curdling shriek of my mother audible*
 what registers first is this kinda subsonic rumble, following
 a glance, yet there he is slouched as a french horn sitting

on a nocturnal pew giving
 away golden parachutes, pacing
 in continuous circles, quicker than a soft boiled egg peeling

its own shell: thin as an antenna bending
 into a medusa curl, reneging
 on tomorrow, seeing him feels like naysaying

down an engine of hilarious grief
 all those fat rodents sounding
 violently like tires, oozing
 into a rottweiler

Family Crowds Around Open Oven for Warmth, Harlem, New York, 1967

here beneath the Manhattan Bridge
absentmindedly night shines
like a loose shawl
being worn
to a completely wordless opera

pinballing off
Eastern Standard Times
grid like posturelessness
a plaster latching cracks
between the floorboard
alternating nostrils
other people's loss
sounds like rainfall—
demonstrating genetics
via four flanking columns contemplating
Decembers psychic income
until tomorrow yields a better batch of replicas

our combined stomach
becomes a rock bounces
the daylight back

EDIBLE, BUT UGLY

Sylvia Jones

Winner of the Amendment 2015
Literary Contest: Poetry Category

Respect is wit
 unpredictable it lives
 between public and private
 which is why
 our lives are as intense as they are sudden
 we cross roads to be respected we exit too
 we stand accused with the weight of an unshaped
 hunger
 our doubts pregnant and outnumbered by a unilateral
 need to be politically correct
 we inherited it, this debate room its linoleum floors its
 waxed opinions
 we are eating dirt to avoid peer censure
 we taxidermy ourselves to keep from having to
 consider the innuendos of small talk
 an exact fear
 a metallic taste
 an anthem
 a menagerie maybe
 blackness demands too much from us
 all I have left is a fatigue and a fear that my bad breath
 might ruin my friendships
 how asinine
 how eager we are to argue, to be consumed
 to maximize our potential.
 To become The Ballot or the Bullet*

**Malcolm X's "The Ballot or the Bullet" is the title of a public speech by human rights activist Malcolm X which was delivered on April 3, 1964, at Cory Methodist Church in Cleveland, Ohio.*