

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

James B. Golden: Four Poems

James B. Golden · Wednesday, April 23rd, 2014

James B. Golden has edited *Kapu-Sens Literary Journal* and the *Hip Hop Think Tank Journal*. He is the author of *The Inside of an Orange*, *Sweet Potato Pie Underneath The Sun's Broiler*, and 2012 NAACP Image Award Winner *Afro Clouds & Nappy Rain*. His articles have appeared in such periodicals as *Vibe*, *The Root*, *Clutch Magazine*, *Jazz Times*, and *Los Angeles Our Weekly*.

All poems appear in his new book, *Bull* ([Silver Birch Press](#)).

MEMPHIS

What Memphis is to me:
the South's spaceship or slick anthill
hole of August ginger and brick brown
anybodys avoiding the evening's temper.
Penniless men steering bicycles to the ghetto
eggplant-bottomed women rolling hair in brick ovens,
rattling, skipping Frankie Lymon & The Teenagers
records, and Doo-Wop makes a home
on every corner.

It is Elvis Presley playing photo time with
Tennessee State Troopers in front of Jerry's Barbershop
on St. Jude Street, as The Diamonds
sha la la la "Why Do Fools Fall in Love" like lukewarm
yogurt attempting to feel-up Mammy's smothered chops,
their silly winces and American Bandstand
children rolling in yard dirt with German Shepherds.

And, it's where a writer said before Elvis,
there was nothing. And where nothing referred
unwaveringly to the maids brushing bleach dust
from aprons at a mid-street bus stop and
the ice man delivering five hundred plus pounds of
freezing glaciers to every white-only store across town,
where only Black-owned bookstores made

Giovanni's Room front-shelf-worthy
and put Ginsberg in the 'Others' section.

Memphis 1956 displayed photos of
Aurtherine Lucy alongside Nigger Bitch in newspapers
and sold them at the restaurant all seven of us,
because Fair made the 7th, had to saunter
front to mud-covered backyard to grab
doggy bags for our journey west.

It's where I learned The Platters had
no faces in record stores and were
meant to integrate or crossover or some
other justified blanching of our skin,
to help whites feel more comfortable with
the artists they'd always gotten drunk to
at their Bridge games and dart-throwing
competitions in pissy pool halls.

Simone would say it choked her
scooped her guts soft-serve, sprinkled
coconut flakes and stamped it with a
waffle cone for Pat Boone to taste.

And Memphis,
marble cake with clear fences
dog shit on white vinyl
pale hand slapping a Black woman's face,
is a spaceship
from a place where Black was used only to
polish shoes or streak a toilet.

FIREPLACE CINDERS

Last night, my leg beloved
met with Ezell's fireplace.

It preached from the Genesis flood narrative
of raven-hued boys that don't listen.

God gave Noah the rainbow sign
and baptized me in the fire this time.

I jitterbugged for him, blessing each room
of the ark parading an Indian infrared glow
through my corduroy chaps.

Four hundred feet high the fire crept up and up

as the cymbals shook water from floodgates
and the heavens opened on my behind.

On the six hundredth year, and seventeenth day of fire
the Columbia voodoo witch doctor severed Comfrey
and talked to the ghost of luminosity
resting like quiet chicken grease over the stove eye
on my right calf.

She blew breath strokes and huffed the
pit brewing on my leg, yes
she wafted and exhaled cigarette
scented suspirations on my leg.
She blew the rainbow on my rolling pin
my chair post
and then my
tail went red.

MOSS LANDING BEACH

A giant log sits beneath my butt
the sun squints my eyes
and the buzz of a sounding horn
pierces the lapping waves.

Two dogs traipse the shore
chasing seagulls through wind.
Brown children splash water in
parent eyes, singing lullabies
in Spanish.

My Vans flood with sand
turn Black brown.

This is what humanity is made of.
One with the Pacific.

We live, multiply, and die
as the shore surely hides us
in the sunset.

Our feet aren't meant for shoes.

WHAT FOLLOWS A RAIN (BOBBIE)

What follows a rain

but silken misty air and
spikes of coolness.

To what purpose, Seaside wind, do you return again?
You will no longer reside on a place where Bobbie Jean had life.

I know nothing of love anymore.
Love died in the Maryland April snowfall.
It is inconceivable that living is heartache.
Death remains not only underground,
but in the turn of Fall
wind caresses broken leaves along the airwaves.

Life alone
is nothing
a stringless piano, an empty teacup.
Grief comes like an idiot,
sits on the other side of a rain.

Author photo by Alexis Rhone Fancher

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