

BLACK, HOLY TIME

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A portal is a conduit to transformation and a star's death is varnished with black, holy time. Ecstatic pedestrians move between spaces with grace and some whispered conjure or cross-signed blessing on their foreheads.

I am witness. Portal is lined with humming: echoes from dreams and red earth and rustles of petticoats, cotton voile, and touches in the night.

Secret histories channeled and the wounded unstitch themselves so we can see their bones chalkwhite against skin glistening beneath asteroid belt, Polaris, and heat. Unstitched, unraveled, undone they become loud enough to enter dreams—oneiric pedestrians who just want to kiss the lunula of their beloveds.

I am witness. Portal is lined with voices: tongues from Babel, Georgia, Mississippi, Carolina, Tennessee, and mountain laurel growing toward light in Appalachian hills and hollers.

Who channels, who listens, who speaks, who dances? Who unstitches untruths and threads the needle with caterpillar silk? Who channels, who listens, who speaks, who dances? Who unweaves the rice, coffee, and gold dust that hold prayers, blood, and vision? What pedestrians gave up sole and hip and hamstring to waltz under cover of new moon?

I am witness. Portal is lined with shuffles: feet that run and creep and dangle. Feet that long to return to the Atlantic where pedestrians sink toes into sand and emerge newly pavé.

But who can return? How is return woven into flesh, cries, or wishes placed on altars? Return is sewn into cotton housedresses, leather boots left on the porch, and handkerchiefs. Return erupts from hymns and hums and guitar strings. It's found in woolly curls and broad noses and proud foreheads. Return lives in pedestrians ecstatic to walk without fear.

And I am witness. Hewn and stitched with love and prayers. I do not fear the portal that conducts, contracts, and transforms. I do not fear the thread that binds me to those who walk between realms and through histories. As I am witness to starlight from long-dead origins, I am witness to them.

The phrase “I’m an ecstatic pedestrian who moves with grace” inspired this poem, which began in “Passing Their Word: An Oral History/Playwriting Workshop” led by Sylvester Allen, Jr., which was a part of the 2024 The Commons: Southern Futures at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill’s Carolina Performing Arts programming. This poem’s first line references an earlier unpublished ekphrastic poem I wrote for Lina Iris Viktor’s site-specific installation *Triumvirate: Constellations I, IV, IX*, at the North Carolina Museum of Art (NCMA) (2016, 2017/8, 2020).