**Dream Variations**

*Langston Hughes*

To fling my arms wide  
In some place of the sun,  
To whirl and to dance  
Till the white day is done.  
Then rest at cool evening  
Beneath a tall tree  
While night comes on gently,  
    Dark like me—  
That is my dream!

To fling my arms wide  
In the face of the sun,  
Dance! Whirl! Whirl!  
Till the quick day is done.  
Rest at pale evening . . .  
A tall, slim tree . . .  
Night coming tenderly  
    Black like me.

*won’t you celebrate with me*

*Lucille Clifton*

won’t you celebrate with me  
what i have shaped into  
a kind of life? i had no model.  
born in babylon  
both nonwhite and woman  
what did i see to be except myself?  
i made it up  
here on this bridge between  
starshine and clay,  
my one hand holding tight  
my other hand; come celebrate  
with me that everyday  
something has tried to kill me  
and has failed.

*Still I Rise*

*Maya Angelou*

You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I’ll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?  
Why are you beset with gloom?  
’Cause I walk like I’ve got oil wells  
Pumping in my living room.  
Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I’ll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?  
Bowed head and lowered eyes?  
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,  
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?  
Don’t you take it awful hard  
’Cause I laugh like I’ve got gold mines  
Diggin’ in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I’ll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?  
Does it come as a surprise  
That I dance like I’ve got diamonds  
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history’s shame  
I rise  
Up from a past that’s rooted in pain  
I rise  
I’m a black ocean, leaping and wide,  
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear  
I rise  
Into a daybreak that’s wondrously clear  
I rise  
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,  
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.  
I rise  
I rise  
I rise.

**Microwave Popcorn**

*Harmony Holiday*

I think a lot of y’all have just been watching Dr. King get beat  
    up and, ah

                      vacillating opportunists straining for a note of  
    militancy     and ah

Hold your great buildings on my tiny wing      or     in my tiny    
    palm      same thing different sling

and then they shot him   and     uh               left him on the front  
    lawn  of everyone’s    vulgar  delirium    
for          having been chosen       walking home that night  
     that’ll show you like    candy     and   love    
god     openly          reverse   order

A bird gets along beautifully in the air, but once she is on the  
    ground that special equipment hampers her a great deal.

         And               Thereby home never gets to be a jaded  
             resting place.

# In Memoriam: Martin Luther King, Jr.

# June Jordan

**I**

honey people murder mercy U.S.A.

the milkland turn to monsters teach

to kill to violate pull down destroy

the weakly freedom growing fruit

from being born

America

tomorrow yesterday rip rape

exacerbate despoil disfigure

crazy running threat the

deadly thrall

appall belief dispel

the wildlife burn the breast

the onward tongue

the outward hand

deform the normal rainy

riot sunshine shelter wreck

of darkness derogate

delimit blank

explode deprive

assassinate and batten up

like bullets fatten up

the raving greed

reactivate a springtime

terrorizing

death by men by more

than you or I can

STOP

***II***

They sleep who know a regulated place

or pulse or tide or changing sky

according to some universal

stage direction obvious

like shorewashed shells

we share an afternoon of mourning

in between no next predictable

except for wild reversal hearse rehearsal

bleach the blacklong lunging

ritual of fright insanity and more

deplorable abortion

more and

more

**Shafro**

*Terrance Hayes*

Now that my afro's as big as Shaft's   
I feel a little better about myself.   
How it warms my bullet-head in Winter,

black halo, frizzy hat of hair.   
Shaft knew what a crown his was,   
an orb compared to the bush

on the woman sleeping next to him.   
(There was always a woman   
sleeping next to him. I keep thinking,

If I'd only talk to strangers. . .   
grow a more perfect head of hair.)   
His afro was a crown.

Bullet after barreling bullet,   
fist-fights &amp; car chases,   
three movies &amp; a brief TV series,

never one muffled strand,   
never dampened by sweat--   
I sweat in even the least heroic of situations.

I'm sure you won't believe this,   
but if a policeman walks behind me, I tremble:  
*What would Shaft do? What would Shaft do?*

Bits of my courage flake away like dandruff.   
I'm sweating even as I tell you this,   
I'm not cool,

I keep the real me tucked beneath a wig,  
I'm a small American frog.  
I grow beautiful as the theatre dims.

**One Today**

*Richard Blanco*

One sun rose on us today, kindled over our shores,  
peeking over the Smokies, greeting the faces  
of the Great Lakes, spreading a simple truth  
across the Great Plains, then charging across the Rockies.  
One light, waking up rooftops, under each one, a story  
told by our silent gestures moving behind windows.

My face, your face, millions of faces in morning’s mirrors,  
each one yawning to life, crescendoing into our day:  
pencil-yellow school buses, the rhythm of traffic lights,  
fruit stands: apples, limes, and oranges arrayed like rainbows  
begging our praise. Silver trucks heavy with oil or paper—  
bricks or milk, teeming over highways alongside us,  
on our way to clean tables, read ledgers, or save lives—  
to teach geometry, or ring-up groceries as my mother did  
for twenty years, so I could write this poem.

All of us as vital as the one light we move through,  
the same light on blackboards with lessons for the day:  
equations to solve, history to question, or atoms imagined,  
the “I have a dream” we keep dreaming,  
or the impossible vocabulary of sorrow that won’t explain  
the empty desks of twenty children marked absent  
today, and forever. Many prayers, but one light  
breathing color into stained glass windows,  
life into the faces of bronze statues, warmth  
onto the steps of our museums and park benches  
as mothers watch children slide into the day.

One ground. Our ground, rooting us to every stalk  
of corn, every head of wheat sown by sweat  
and hands, hands gleaning coal or planting windmills  
in deserts and hilltops that keep us warm, hands  
digging trenches, routing pipes and cables, hands  
as worn as my father’s cutting sugarcane  
so my brother and I could have books and shoes.

The dust of farms and deserts, cities and plains  
mingled by one wind—our breath. Breathe. Hear it  
through the day’s gorgeous din of honking cabs,  
buses launching down avenues, the symphony  
of footsteps, guitars, and screeching subways,  
the unexpected song bird on your clothes line.

Hear: squeaky playground swings, trains whistling,  
or whispers across café tables, Hear: the doors we open  
for each other all day, saying: hello / shalom,  
buon giorno / howdy / namaste / or buenos días  
in the language my mother taught me—in every language  
spoken into one wind carrying our lives  
without prejudice, as these words break from my lips.

One sky: since the Appalachians and Sierras claimed  
their majesty, and the Mississippi and Colorado worked  
their way to the sea. Thank the work of our hands:  
weaving steel into bridges, finishing one more report  
for the boss on time, stitching another wound  
or uniform, the first brush stroke on a portrait,  
or the last floor on the Freedom Tower  
jutting into a sky that yields to our resilience.

One sky, toward which we sometimes lift our eyes  
tired from work: some days guessing at the weather  
of our lives, some days giving thanks for a love  
that loves you back, sometimes praising a mother  
who knew how to give, or forgiving a father  
who couldn’t give what you wanted.

We head home: through the gloss of rain or weight  
of snow, or the plum blush of dusk, but always—home,  
always under one sky, our sky. And always one moon  
like a silent drum tapping on every rooftop  
and every window, of one country—all of us—  
facing the stars  
hope—a new constellation  
waiting for us to map it,  
waiting for us to name it—together