Ars Poetica from This Vale

VIEVEE FRANCIS

Weary of being fog I sometimes open up
Touch my torso to make sure I'm still here I'm here
As much as any Echo
Like servant to master I read every book

Book upon book Then told my own Story I am telling
it now I was never anyone's muse So what is a muse to me?

He said, “You don't have the sensibilities of a poet”
He meant, You are not among the favored.

I sat for years with that stinger in my palm
Jefferson told Wheatley the same Jefferson enslaved his own
History reveals and so the books are burned
I burn my fingers pulling pages from the fires

I a phoenix of memories singed the stinger out

Come here Phyllis, lay your head in my lap

To oil the hair is to anoint the head Come Darling
Let my lap be yours Let me stroke your brow

I will live in your kitchen

I laughed at the chains on me Laughed until I almost died
So off they fell
I have no children
But I hold valleys and mountains
Like fog I fall and
fill like fog

You wake to find me

The fog begat—fog
And what lives in the fog can't be unmoored.

About the author

Vievee Francis is the author of four books of poetry: The Shared World (Northwestern University Press, 2023); Forest Primeval (TriQuarterly Books, 2015), winner of the 2017 Kingsley Tufts Award and the Hurston Wright Legacy Award; Horse in the Dark (Northwestern University Press, 2012), winner of the Cave Canem Northwestern University Press Poetry Prize; and Blue-Tail Fly (Wayne State University Press, 2006). Her work has appeared in numerous journals, textbooks, and anthologies including Poetry, Harvard Review, Yale Review, Best American Poetry, spin.com, and Angles of Ascent: A Norton Anthology of Contemporary African American Poetry. She is also the recipient of a 2024 Guggenheim Fellowship and a 2021 Aiken Taylor Award for Modern American Poetry. She is a Professor of English and Creative Writing at Dartmouth College.