

CAVE CANEM FOUNDATION, INC

**Literary Balms: A Virtual Community Writing Project**

Week Five: April 20, 2020

In keeping with Cave Canem's mission to develop Black poets and foster community, *Literary Balms: A Virtual Community Writing Project* is an initiative to help keep writers engaged with their writing process and virtually connected with each other during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Literary Balms* offers three writing prompts generated by Cave Canem fellows and poetry-related suggested readings. We encourage you to share your experiences with these prompts on our social media channels as we release them publicly each week, using #LiteraryBalms and tagging us @CaveCanemPoets. Please return to our website, [cavecanempoets.org](http://cavecanempoets.org), for a digital archive of weekly prompts.

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**The Writing**

**Prompt #13**

Go to your bookshelf or largest stack of books, preferably some books that are mixed up across genres. Close your eyes and run your hands along your books until you instinctively pick three, it doesn't matter what genre they are (technical manuals can be great). Open each and flip to a random page, the first line or sentence or instruction your finger lands on, write those down. Now connect them. Thinking of Ockham's Razor helps. When you are done, remove the sentences you began with. Edit.

*Contributed by Cave Canem fellow Jessica Lanay.*

**Prompt #14**

Think of a scene that could appear in your life, one that is plausible but one that people who aren't you wouldn't necessarily think of or believe. Create a persona to inhabit that scene, one that looks and sounds like you, but one that's fundamentally different—perhaps meaner, more assertive, or brave. What does that persona do that you'd never do? What does that persona say that you'd never allow yourself to say? What does that persona enable in yourself?

*Contributed by Cave Canem fellow Dustin Pearson.*

**Prompt #15**

This prompt is inspired by [Jonah Mixon-Webster's Stereo\(TYPE\)](#): Choose a word/term/phrase that is important to you/your life/your identity. Trace this word in popular culture, in history, in academic texts, in the news, anywhere you can find it and everywhere you cannot escape it. Once you have created an archive around the word, mine that archive for material and use it in a creative work. You are not limited to the page.

*Contributed by Cave Canem fellow Lauren Russell.*

**Jessica Lanay** is the author of [am•phib•ian](#) (Broadside Lotus Press, 2020), winner of the 2019 Naomi Long Madgett Poetry Award. Her poetry, which has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, can be found in *Poet Lore*, *The Normal School*, *Indiana Review*, *The Common*, [PANK], *Prairie Schooner* and others. Her short fiction has appeared in *Tahoma Literary Review*, *Duende*, and *Black Candies*. Jessica is a 2018 recipient of a Millay Colony Residency and is a frequent contributor to *BOOMB Magazine*. The opera she librettied, *Virgula Divina*, will premiere at Pittsburgh Festival Opera's Fight for The Right in 2020.

**Dustin Pearson** is the author of [Millennial Roost](#) and [A Family Is a House](#). He is a McKnight Doctoral Fellow in Creative Writing at Florida State University and holds an MFA from Arizona State University. He won the Academy of American Poets Katharine C. Turner Prize and the John Mackay Graduate Award. His work appears in *Blackbird*, *Vinyl Poetry*, *Bennington Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *The Literary Review*, *Poetry Daily* and *Hayden's Ferry Review*.

**Lauren Russell** is the author of *What's Hanging on the Hush* (Ahsahta Press, 2017) and *Descent* (Tarpaulin Sky Press, June 2020). She was a 2017 NEA fellow in poetry, and her work has appeared in *The New York Times Magazine* and the Academy of American Poets' *Poem-a-Day*, among others. She is Assistant Director of the Center for African American Poetry and Poetics at the University of Pittsburgh.

## The Readings

Edited by Janet Neigh, [Dialogues with M. NourbeSe Philip](#) is composed of essays and interviews with the poet on how to read Zong! (Wesleyan University Press, 2008).

The [Winter/Spring 2020 issue of The Fight & The Fiddle](#) features [Matthew Shenoda](#), with contributions by Cave Canem fellow [Lauren K. Alleyne](#) and Northwestern University Press Poetry Prize-winner [Tsitsi Jaji](#).

Cave Canem faculty [Nikki Finney explains "occasional poetry" in this National Public Radio interview](#) on her newest collection, *Love Child's Hotbed of Occasional Poetry: Poems and Artifacts*.

*Cave Canem Foundation, Inc. is the premier institution for supporting the many voices of Black poetry: the home of the nation's largest collection of Black writers. Formed in 1996 as a response to the lack of support and resources for poets of African descent, Cave Canem has become the national leader within the poetry community moving toward greater racial diversity, inclusion and accessibility in the field. The organization is entering a pivotal moment in its history and future as we prepare to celebrate our 25th Anniversary. In 24 years, Cave Canem has become an influential movement with a renowned faculty, high achieving national fellowship of over 400 and a workshop community of 950 plus.*



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