

# The Black Outside

Joy Priest

*after Kehinde Wiley*

We brought the Blues, the voices of the field  
into the commemorative Big House.  
We carried seeds from home in our hair  
like lice. We wore blue lilies, ecosystems  
above our ears. We came into this world  
but were not of it: — of the refuse  
but not the refined, the ritual of wormwood  
but not waste. Here's to the rot  
in us, which would otherwise be abundance,  
if we could be otherwise,  
which would otherwise be alive if we could  
otherwise be. The way  
our feet hover spectral among the foliage,  
the way we recognize  
one another across the long centuries inside  
without the right language &  
names. We brought the Blues, we carried them  
between our ears: — in from outside,  
the voices of our dead alive in our hair  
like seeds. We survive spectral.  
Outside the Constitution we are otherwise  
abundant. *Consider the lilies  
of the field, how they grow: they neither toil  
nor spin.* We brought the Blues  
into this world but refused to be of it.  
We went missing, went marine.  
Marooned in grief's aquatic caves. Ate the dirt  
and the lice. Among the foliage  
there is no language of waste. There is no rot.  
We commemorate the ecosystems  
that would otherwise be. The centurion worm  
wearing the field: —  
O beloved  
I hear you outside singing so clear  
my ritual names.