

KEVIN HEATON

Mississippi Crossing

I rise from black dirt, reconciled to mallows
slaked in deep swallowtail kisses, fretting blues
riffs to lick the fog from off the levee. My yang
for this place is the yin in its ground,

the stock and staple of my talk. Its outcroppings,
more earthy than hallowed, hitched to walking
plow calluses too poor to miss depressions.

And yet, a provender of sorts: an olio of King
Biscuit Flour, lard corn dodgers, and loose leaf
tobacco twist doled out to mildewed gunny sacks,
hung on half-crushed millstones to never dry.

There's a jubilee here that began as a prayer
where humid evenings come to listen. More refrain
than spirit at first, but even so, a voice: one

that would free the Delta from herself, and reclaim
her with a psalm—a hymn, in a tongue for every color,
distant but resounding. Own-rolled, scored with folklore
and cipherings, grist to mill and list into river bottom

dusters, dis privies with old chamber pots, and bury
company store tokens in dandelion tumbledowns
still cottoning to rebel ordnance. Pawned

to one-armed bandits in sundering Woolworth parishes.
Cyclones that began as gusts with gales of their own,
fanning seed for more flowers—boasting blossoms
much too handsome to heart half bloomed.