



Black Crow Dress

Roxane Beth Johnson

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"These poems move forward like a novel in verse with a real understanding of the differences between the past and history. Or, as Johnson herself says in the opening poem, 'Each one is hungry for a voice & music to re-bloom.' This is a poet the best readers will be reading for the rest of their lives."—Jericho Brown

A haunting collection of lyrically intense persona poems, *Black Crow Dress* is at once about the emancipation of slaves in their myriad voices as well as a meditation on the self. The collection's lush imagery takes us from churchyard to church, chanting the old spirituals, as Roxane Beth Johnson seeks to embody the spirits of the dead: Clea, Caroline, and Zebedee.

From "Slave Ancestors Found Unburied in a Dream":

Each one is hungry for a voice & music to re-bloom

them alive in this room like water softens beans.

Leaning near, close to me they see my tooth & tongue

that test doneness, licks stamps & hums.

Their ear listens to what a hand might fiddle

if it had fingers.

Stare this way with eyes like smudges . . .

Roxane Beth Johnson's first book of poetry, *Jublilee* (Anhinga Press, 2006), won the 2005 Philip Levine Prize for Poetry. She won an AWP Donald Hill Prize in Poetry and a Pushcart Prize in 2007 and has received scholarships and fellowships from The MacDowell Colony, Cave Canem, The Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, San Francisco Arts Commission, and Vermont Studio Center. She lives in San Francisco, California.



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