

## Potomac River

*“Historians seeking to explain the growth of the area’s slave population have paid little attention to the extent of African importations to the Potomac....”*

*--Donald M. Sweig, The William and Mary Quarterly, 1985*

I come to let my eyes wander over your waves.  
Every sine and cosine cycle infinite,  
one following the next, an open-ended flowing.  
Each trough and crest holds its own tale of migration,  
a beginning without ending, forced from its original home.

Beneath these bobbing glassy undulations  
are untold histories looking for the sun.  
Not just the fish and algae and twigs  
but also sunken secrets, waiting  
for hundreds of years to emerge.  
With them are coiled the terror in slave ships,  
the grinding of shackles, wails of children.

All of this, and today’s repentance:  
people sieving stories from the currents  
to tell and remember, honor and rectify,

knowing there is no way to make this river fully clear again.  
But maybe a lost justice at the bottom can be recovered—  
pull it out, gather it in, unclench the fisted tales  
and let the dark waves  
lap ashore.

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