

# National Poetry Month Featured Poet: F. Douglas Brown

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## 1) Why poetry?

A few reasons:

b/c my mother carries 80 years of unearthed memories;

b/c my kids need me unearthed and open;

b/c as a man, I need to practice silence and space;

b/c there is something about a buzz that always equals danger :: electric ::  
arresting, and the only way to destroy it is to add something more corrosive  
and potentially fearful;

b/c I have many, many questions;

b/c I have to better understanding and make sense of this land;

b/c I can;

"b/c I could not say it, I fix'd it in verse" -Emily Dickinson

b/c "I stand waist deep/ in the decadence of forgetting./ The vain act of  
looking the other way./ Insisting there can be peace/ and fecundity without  
confrontation./ The nagging question of blood hounds me./ How do I honor it?"

-Essex Hemphill

b/c its economy tells a thousand stories;

b/c my uncle taught me how to kill a nest of yellow jackets by dousing them  
with gasoline. I took a glass filled to the rim, and chucked the contents on  
the nest, and the buzz quieted and I was flanked by an approving father and  
sober smiling uncle. And there was no harm done to the house. And there was  
no harm done to us.

b/c poetry helps heal the harm done to us.

**2) Do you feel like poetry is more or less important & relevant today?**

Poetry has always been important. Pundits are now put to the task of “fact checking” and not providing “alternative facts.” Despite what Nietzsche felt about poets as liars, poets have always been connected to truth seeking (at least the poets I like). Look how remarkable the last 20 years of poetry has been as the dawn of people of color (POC) voices fill the awards and publication pages. Although there are still ceilings that need collapsing to become fully realized for POC writers, it should be remarked that while the 20 years have seen an uptick of trauma for POC communities, our response has been artistic, heartfelt, and healing. If mainstream America would listen a bit more to these the tomes being created, perhaps the mess of November 2016 would not have become a reality (that is a wish...neither poetry nor truth).

**3) Tell us about one poet who has greatly influenced you as a writer and a thinker.**

Goodness...so many. This is like selecting one's favorite song in a sea of favorite songs. I have to cheat, but I'll be brief and keep it to single categories.

My voice: Jewel Gomez, Edward Kleinschmidt-Mayes

My poetry pedagogy: Toni Mirosevich

My process and practice: Myung Mi Kim, Richard Garcia

Collection Books: Natasha Trethewey, Terrance Hayes

My approach to creating a book: Jenny Factor, Doug Kearney

Most recently, and most hands on: Geffrey Davis, Chiwan Choi

I think about these folks when I teach, write, collect poems for manuscripts.

**4) Tell us about one lesser-known contemporary poet who you'd like more people to know about.**

Ironically, the person I am selecting has been featured on [Entropy](#) as well. Poet [Rocio Carlos](#) is all the wonderful of poetry: thoughtful, seer clarity of voice and form, reflexive. The poem I provided was published in Chaparral, a beautiful online lit mag, four years ago. A slight narrative that is so haunting and fierce, my skin crawls at the violent actions, coupled with the stillness of a lie. She creates this is real life truth in poem after poem, or observation after observation (see, [Attendance](#), her collaborative work with poet, Rachel McLeod Kaminer) we as readers need learn from, and pay attention to in our own lives.

**5) Share with us one of your recent poems and tell us a little bit about its context.**

This poem is from a new collection I am finishing, *Icon*. Much of the collection focuses on a series of panels the Harlem Renaissance painter Jacob Lawrence created depicting the lives of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman. It also pays homage to poet, Patrick Rosal and his beautiful kundiman poems from his second book, *My American Kundiman*. A kundiman is a Filipino love song, and this love poem imagines the work a runaway Douglass does just

prior to his historic launch as an abolitionist. Although there is little written on his wife in his autobiographies, it is known that they were separated briefly while as a fugitive. I like to think while he worked as a free person, eagerly waiting for their reunion, his thoughts must have been gone to his wife, Anna, who was instrumental to his escape.

### **Anthem Kundiman: Work**

*after Patrick Rosal*

*Panel 16.*

North begets safe  
labor with coals—  
a char so black they crack blue.

I feel rocky beauty  
as if carrying pieces  
of me for night,

For caves shielding  
runaways. O mysterious  
shine, I am your jet and sable

cradled by a bright bird,  
flight to the edges. This body  
of blue— dearest Anna,

her deep patience keeps me  
steadfast. Even though  
I sleep with a shovel,

my hand reaches  
for Anna. She is freedom—  
wide as a wharf,

or the clipper  
it harbors— wide as the heat  
the coals bring

to white folks. Heat  
helps the day drift and doze—  
but I never will.

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**F. Douglas Brown** of Los Angeles is author of *Zero to Three* (University of Georgia 2014), the 2013 Cave Canem Poetry Prize recipient selected by Tracy K. Smith. He also co-authored with poet [Geffrey Davis](#), *Begotten* (Upper Rubber Boot Books 2016), a chapbook of poetry as part of Upper Rubber Boot Book's Floodgate Poetry Series. Brown, an educator for over 20 years, currently teaches English at Loyola High School of Los Angeles, an all-boys Jesuit school. He is both a [Cave Canem](#) and [Kundiman](#) fellow. His poems have appeared

in the *Academy of American Poets*, *The PBS News Hour*, *The Virginia Quarterly (VQR)*, *Bat City Review*, *The Chicago Quarterly Review (CQR)*, *The Southern Humanities Review*, *The Sugar House Review*, *Cura Magazine*, and *Muzzle Magazine*. He is co-founder and curator of [un::fade::able – The Requiem for Sandra Bland](#), a quarterly reading series examining restorative justice through poetry as a means to address racism.

When he is not teaching, writing or with his two children, Isaiah and Olivia, he is busy DJing in the greater Los Angeles area.