

HONORÉE FANONNE JEFFERS

MAMMY KNOW

*after a Half-Plate Daguerreotype Photograph
of a Slave Woman and Her Young Charge,
by Asa C. Partridge, c. 1840s*

no paycheck in this year
this year something is free

free wine after Jesus rebuked water
water sweeter than milk

love in the hour before turning
turning this black body this much mammy

68 mammy don't you know me
me come back to a year

twice millennium be still auction block dues
due this woman this is a woman charge's sharp teeth

teeth on nipple this is not her child sucking dry that
teat of white Confederate need

need let my people & her nipple go
go Moses tell old Pharaoh to pay her

mammy don't you know me
mammy who knows the centuries' possibility

years of heirloom cat o' nines
whipping humping a sleepy constructed tale

amnesia for sale "happy spayed slave cat"
littered mother's milk don't leave mammy

mammy
don't you know me

me know me no me what Cause will rise
rise again southern monuments

wench contentment & other lazy miracles
wonder-full the hands stroking Old Master's whip

cruelty estate frozen in a frieze free unchecked

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Italicized portions are quoted from "My Mammy," arrangement by George Gershwin.