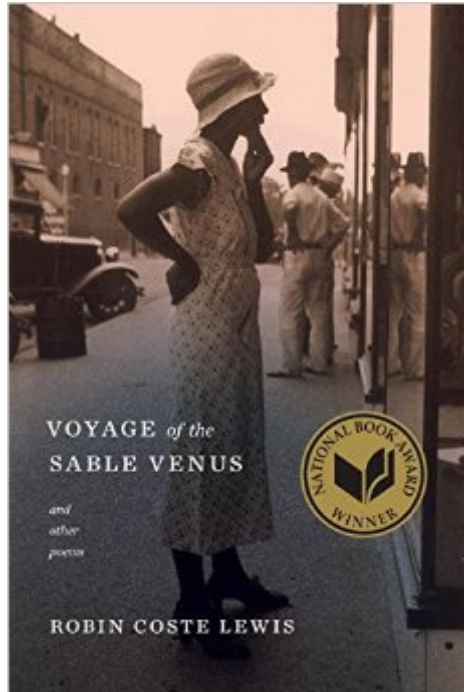


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# Voyage Of The Sable Venus: And Other Poems



## Synopsis

WINNER OF THE NATIONAL BOOK AWARD A stunning poetry debut: this meditation on the black female figure throughout time introduces us to a brave and penetrating new voice. Robin Coste Lewis's electrifying collection is a triptych that begins and ends with lyric poems considering the roles desire and race play in the construction of the self. The central panel is the title poem, "Voyage of the Sable Venus," a riveting narrative made up entirely of titles of artworks from ancient times to the present—titles that feature or in some way comment on the black female figure in Western art. Bracketed by Lewis's autobiographical poems, "Voyage" is a tender and shocking study of the fragmentary mysteries of stereotype, as it juxtaposes our names for things with what we actually see and know. Offering a new understanding of biography and the self, this collection questions just where, historically, do ideas about the black female figure truly begin—five hundred years ago, five thousand, or even longer? And what role has art played in this ancient, often heinous story? From the "Young Black Female Carrying / a Perfume Vase" to a "Little Brown Girl / Girl Standing in a Tree / First Day of Voluntary / School Integration," this poet adores her culture and the beauty to be found within it. Yet she is also a cultural critic alert to the nuances of race and desire and how they define us all, including herself, as she explores her own sometimes painful history. Lewis's book is a thrilling aesthetic anthem to the complexity of race—a full embrace of its pleasure and horror, in equal parts.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Poetry can lift us from ourselves, take the ego and absorb it. Voyage of The Sable Venus

transforms what we know about poetry, breathlessly removing us from our perch; it satiates our desire to feel, our demand for secondary consciousness. If ever there were a poet who understands that words matter by virtue of their generosity, by their very power to transcend what we think we know, it is surely Robin Coste Lewis. This is poetry redefined; a glance to magical verse betwixt the pages of a treasure. I am utterly astonished by Ms. Lewis's gift to the hungry, and I am mesmerized by her abundance of poetic verse. *Voyage of The Sable Venus*, by Robin Coste Lewis, is an unequivocal poetic masterpiece.

A book to keep. Haunting and beautiful - like falling into roses unaware of the thorns until you are tangled. Robin Coste Lewis's voice is gifted. The narrative in her poems is finely tuned - invoking an invitation to travel deeper.

A very strong anthology. I heard her read at the National Book Awards and I found her poems so memorable that I had to order to collection right away. The titular poem takes me back in time as well as allows me to analyze the way the world views and has viewed black women. A very powerful read.

The title poem of this collection is my favorite. I have done lessons on writing "found poetry" with my students before. We have used titles of books, or stories, or songs. But Lewis has taken the names and descriptions of artworks and pieced them together to create a lengthy poem. I cannot imagine the patience it took to read all those museum catalogs and then arrange and rearrange the chosen entries to make meaning. Another poem, "From: To:" refers to soldiers in World War II signing a bomb with the words - FROM HARLEM, TO HITLER. The entire collection is full of images that will linger with you long after you have finished reading.

A wonderfully varied and vastly creative collection of poetry that won the National Book Award. The title poem is a long narrative composed entirely of entrees of descriptions of art at museums and in catalogs (everywhere) across the world. What a unique undertaking by making descriptions of art into art itself. The unifying subject of the art is that it involves black women. I also really loved the poems at the end of the collection which are more personal about the author's life over the years. A tremendously well done book start to finish.

Beautifully savage stories that relate the injustice, fears, deaths and loves of all Sable Venus'. I can

not empathize but I can try to sympathize. I have no racial injustice to beat down, but I have social, physical and feminine injustices. How much more, then, does the Sable Venus have to endure than I? More than I can feel because I am a pale version of this incredible, enduring woman. I can only add my tears of honey in tribute.

Robin Coste Lewis is a great poet. Read the Pen Ten with Robert Coste Lewis. I enjoyed reading *On the Road to Sri Bhuvaneshwari* as it was a common ground. The center big piece 'Voyage of the Sable Venus' is an experiment in terms of the arrangement of the content from the titles of museum exhibits, but so is every poem. In one when poem, where every scene is in the 'not' frame, I knew something dreaded was coming. In Verga, a jumbled pantoum, a reverse rubik cube where any move from the horror is only weirder. Every word of her seems well strained. Most likely poems to be sent to moon, as they represent humanity.

Reading this book is like walking through a museum. The poems are exquisite, well-crafted, and impressive. But they are also a bit sterile, like the museum pieces whose titles and descriptions make up the title poem. I understand the context in which these poems are presented to me, but it feels like a theme in an exhibit. This book is a brilliant show of post-modern poetry, but there is a distance between the poems and the reader, a velvet rope that separates the reader from experience and relegates one to appreciation.

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