

## Artist Work Sample #1 — Literary Arts

### REDEMPTION STORY

The scene is from Luke 2:15. Jesus has been born, and the three Magi have followed a star and its divine message to Bethlehem, where they gather with shepherds to behold the infant for themselves. I am instructed to imagine the setting in detail—the smell of the animals and afterbirth, the strangers on pilgrimage, the texture of the manger's edges, the squall of the new Messiah. The scene is so familiar and worn that even I, an unreligious child from an immigrant community, know it well. In trying to see the birth anew, I must detach it from the legion of lawn decorations and animated Christmas specials that saturate my consciousness every winter. I must begin to appreciate the gravity, danger, and awe of the moment. Then, I am to place myself *there*.

As I learn a new form of prayer called composition of place, my imagination rebels. Also called imaginative prayer, the practice of placing oneself in a Gospel scene comes from St. Ignatius of Loyola, whose compilation of prayers, meditations, and reflections titled *The Spiritual Exercises* includes guidance on how to contemplate the Gospels through our imagination. This meditative form of prayer uses our full set of senses to cultivate intimacy and helps us hear God speaking to us through our imagination. Then we attend to the feelings stirred up by the scene. A guide to the Spiritual Exercises explains that this kind of prayer “is not simply remembering [the Gospel story] or going back in time. Through the act of contemplation, the Holy Spirit makes present a mystery of Jesus’ life in a way that is meaningful for you now.”

In my first attempts, I find composition of place uncomfortable and impossible. The members of the faith-sharing group I've joined have all been practicing this prayer too. In our sharing circle, one woman describes herself at Mary's side, like a midwife, cleaning and swaddling the infant Jesus, almost too afraid to tend his fragile body. A man in our group sees himself as a shepherd, too worried about his flock to fully take in the Savior before him. Their encounters are powerful, and they are visibly moved by their proximity to Jesus, by the revelation of their anxieties and desires, and the gift of their own imagination.

I am nowhere with this kind of prayer. To visualize myself accompanying Jesus requires defiance of all the boundaries of story that I know. Besides, where does a forty-something Chinese American mother from the twenty-first century belong in the Nativity scene? How would I even justify my bewildering presence among the Holy Family? Every time I try, I can conjure the scene vividly, but the picture cuts to static when I try to take my place in it. The same thing happens when I try to imagine I am at the banks of the Jordan River for Jesus's baptism, or at Golgotha for his crucifixion. I feel that in order to occupy any Gospel scene, I have to imagine myself looking like someone who is not Chinese, and I give up.

Until I remember that I imagined myself inside stories for most of my childhood. I put myself into nearly every television show and movie I'd ever watched. I loved episodic television the best, any series with a new weekly crime or mystery I could easily slot myself into—a patient on *ER*, a witness on *NYPD Blue*. I could even fashion myself into an almost-historical migrant on *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*. I rewrote the script as it played out, making room for myself and inventing any reason for being in the story. If I couldn't find a way to play more or less myself, I would just take the place of an existing character, even if they were white, take up their life for a while, and feel everything for them during my hour of borrowed intimacies.

My childhood home was silent, a place where equanimity was prized above all. Emotions, especially unpleasant ones but even exuberant ones, distressed or overwhelmed my parents. Strong

feelings were like a virus against which they shielded themselves. The place for feeling and expression was on television, which I watched almost constantly. I didn't escape into books until closer to high school, learning to accompany characters rather than impose myself on them. But television was my early and easy portal into worlds that flared with drama and then resolved neatly in under an hour. I watched, treasure hunting for moments of expression and connection, but missing the larger narrative and the delights of suspense, plot twists, irony, resolution. I felt by approximation and mimesis. Feelings that were not mine were better than nothing, even if only tried on and returned.

Entering the prayer of composition of place, I collide with my old disappearing and with the belief that because feelings threaten equilibrium, my dealings with them must remain scripted and vicarious, and that I am never the protagonist. Like so much of my new faith life, imaginative prayer is a healing and a betrayal, a grief and a hope for my own imagination.

My mom has three stories. The first is about leaving China with her mother when she was twelve years old. The harrowing details of their escape, under cover of darkness and financed by my grandmother's jewelry, engrossed me as a child. The second is about marrying my dad two weeks after they met, and only because of a last-minute twist that brought my dad, and not my dad's cousin, to their blind date. The third is about my grandmother walking out during dinner, but this one is not a story so much as a pulse of memory, gushing forth anytime my mom eased the pressure on the wound. My grandmother was making dinner, my mom somewhere around age ten. A famine was beginning to choke their country, forcing my grandmother to stretch one cup of rice into many bowls of thin porridge. Sometimes there were scraps of wild onion and garlic from the parched yard. But there had always been fermented fish called haam ngui, literally salty fish, deeply pungent, almost

## Artist Work Sample #2 — Theatre

### Courtney Bailey, Playwright Brief Work Samples

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT MY WORK CAN BE FOUND AT  
[WWW.COURTNEY-BAILEY.COM](http://WWW.COURTNEY-BAILEY.COM)

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#### Selected Links for Recent Projects

[\*Romanov Family Yard Sale: a purgation play.\*](#) This play was both a yard sale and a real theatre play, produced by Equally Represented Arts at The Kranzberg in July 2024.

[\*How to Write a Weird Play: Cultivating a Posture of Impossibility.\*](#) The development of this free workbook was partially funded by a previous Individual Artist Grant from the Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis. The workbook focuses on creating genre-averse plays, with special emphasis on creating pieces for one actor.

[\*Britches! A Play for Lady Romeos.\*](#) The writing of this play was fully supported by an Artistic Research Fellowship from the Folger Shakespeare Library. It was produced by Prison Performing Arts (St. Louis) at Women's Eastern Reception, Diagnostic, and Correctional Center.

[\*The Caverns of Wingwood: a parable of reptilian philosophy.\*](#) Commissioned by Prison Performing Arts (St. Louis) for performances at Northeast Correction Center in Bowling Green, MO. Developed in collaboration with currently incarcerated artists.

[\*The Society of Dream Interpreters.\*](#) Commissioned by Prison Performing Arts (St. Louis) for performances at Missouri Eastern Correctional Center in Pacific, MO. Developed in collaboration with currently incarcerated artists.

[\*The Golden Record.\*](#) Commissioned by Prison Performing Arts (St. Louis) and optioned for professional performance by PPA in 2023. Developed in collaboration with returning citizens and currently incarcerated artists.

[\*Immersion Play: Video highlights from St. Louis pop-up performance.\*](#) This is a montage video from an *Immersion Play* performance, featuring original music from the play. This play was originally produced by SheNYC Arts (Connelly Theater, 2019).

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#### Playwriting Reviews for *Brontë Sister House Party*, produced by SATE in 2022; winner of the St. Louis Theatre Circle Award for Outstanding New Play

*"The script is a marvel of inventiveness, seamlessly mixing boisterous ensemble comedy with serious elements of striking insight. Bailey has clearly given great thought to the inner logic of her premise and has arrived at a remarkably satisfying conclusion that honors that logic."* - [HEC Media](#)

*"[The pandemic] inspired Bailey to write a play that 'tapped into the tyranny of repetition. Something that explored how we can still be creative in the midst of repetition.'" - [St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#)*

*"[T]his is such a terrific comedy, set in the afterlife: the blades of truth spin around like some giant, ghostly Cuisinart in Brontë Sister House Party at the Slightly Askew Theatre Ensemble (SATE). It's pretty radically funny."* - [Talkin' Broadway, St. Louis](#)

"Courtney Bailey's *Brontë Sister House Party* is another example of SATE's remarkable legacy of excellence. This production, with its clever production and first-rate cast, is at once hilarious, poignant, thoughtful, challenging, educational, historical, and modern." - [Snoop's Theatre Thoughts](#)

"*Brontë Sister House Party* is a dazzling mashup of a party, a love story, uproarious antics, an incredible soundtrack, and the Brontë Sisters. SATE has outdone themselves." - [KDHX](#)

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**Excerpt from *Brontë Sister House Party* by Courtney Bailey  
Monologue spoken by Anne Brontë**

ANNE:

I can tell it makes you a little uncomfortable that I'm not "being funny" right now.  
In this play, poor neglected Anne Brontë is a ditz.  
She's the silly one. The comic relief.  
The one who chitters and giggles and can't hold her cordial.

Did it ever occur to you that the ditzes,  
the airheads,  
and the clueless souls  
make everything a little more bearable?

Have you considered that they may be the wisest among us,  
the ones who understand that our confrontation with *total chaos* can only be alleviated with stupid and joyful *lightness*?

If you let something get worn down with too much seriousness, it loses all its life.  
Like plants, I think.  
Okay, I don't know much about plants,  
but I heard someone say once that if you over-water them,  
it provokes *reverse osmosis*.  
All the nutrients get *sucked* out of them when they get too much of what they need.  
I don't know if that's true, but it feels true.

We may act stupidly, but we are not irreverent.  
I am not irreverent.  
I know the stakes.

In all the thousands of parties we've thrown, I've had only a handful of moments where the silliness ran its full course  
and matured into something genuinely profound.  
Those are the best moments in a timeloop, of course.

Here's one I remember:

Perhaps seven hundred nights ago, we hosted the party around the theme of "baked ziti."  
That was the theme: "Baked Ziti."  
Simple and elegant, in my opinion. A perfect theme.  
Cheese and tomato and more cheese and thick cylinders of starchy carbohydrates—*pure ziti*.  
And we invited all our friends from the Void to come and eat ziti all night at our house party.

At Ziti Night, I got into a conversation with a gentle young man at the drink table.  
We talked about the ziti,  
about purgatorial timeloops,  
and about goats.  
This kind man kept goats, which I thought was sweet.

We stood over the drink table, fussing over what to drink next,  
and across the room, like a beautiful specter, I saw him:  
this... pirate-looking dude.

I fuck everyone who looks like a pirate.  
I think I like pirates.

And the sweet man I'm chatting with picks up a bottle of beer for me,  
and the inevitable question poses itself:  
*pop top or twist off?*

He fiddles with it to no avail.  
The bottle opener is long-displaced from the flurry of Ziti Night, lost in the couch perhaps.  
And the gentle young man cannot puzzle out this godforsaken bottle, and, in our tipsiness, we giggle at the silliness of  
it all—of struggling to open a beer bottle in a timeloop where the house party will begin again in another day and the  
bottle opener will be in its proper place, neatly set on the bar cart in plain sight.

The pirate man approaches.  
I feel him coming over without even catching him in my periphery.  
The pirate reaches for the bottle,  
pushes up his sleeve,  
and smoothly opens the cap of the bottle by twisting it off *in the fold of his forearm*.  
Right on his skin.  
He hands me the bottle, and, inside the quiet of my head, I hear a chime.  
A chime just for me.

(We hear a bright, heavenly chime.)

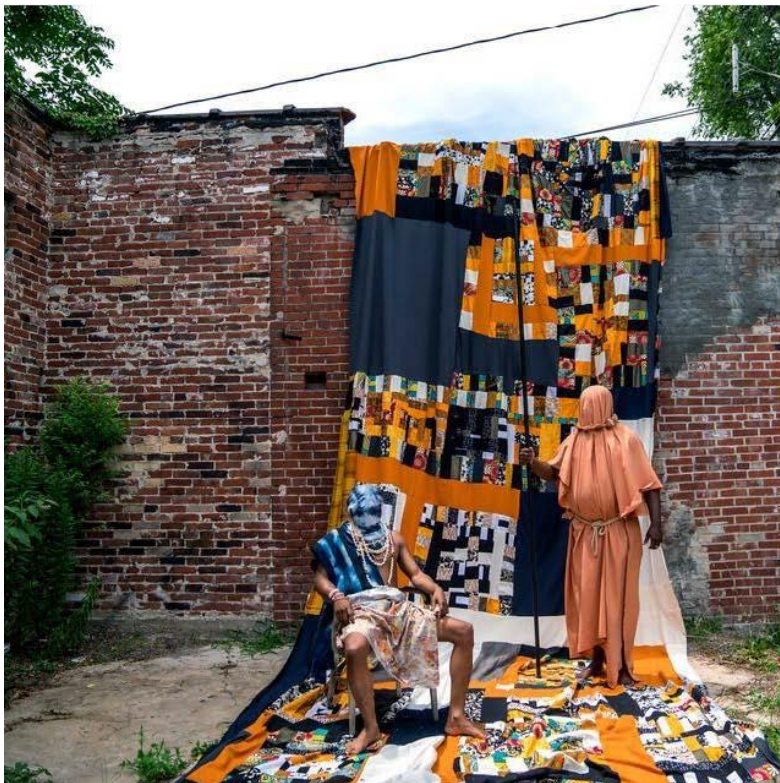
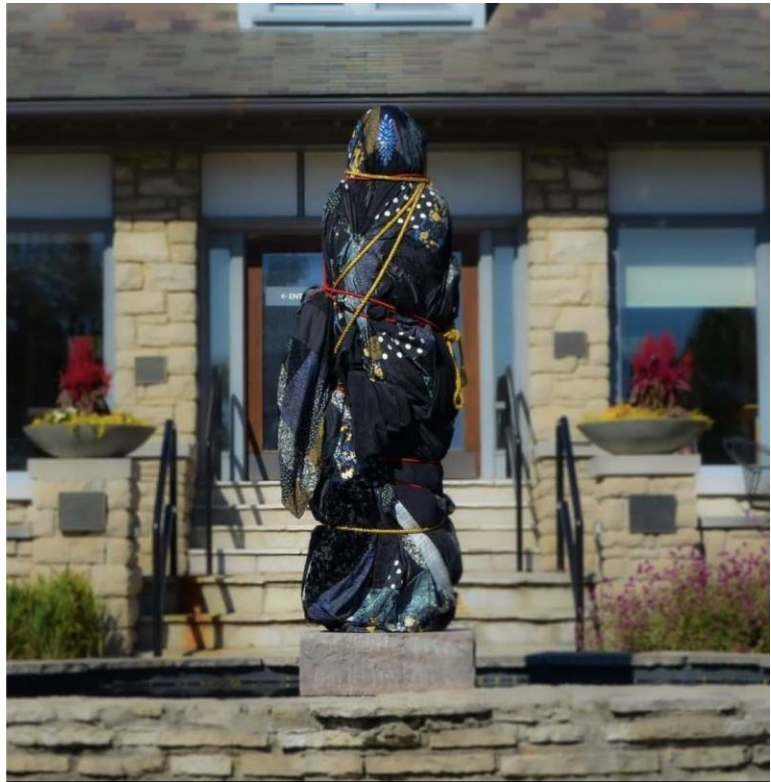
And I thought, *Is this what I've wanted my whole life?*  
For someone to happily do me a kindness that burned them just a little?

It was silly and strange and carried out by a pirate, but it gave me... information.  
The sweet young gentleman left me then, perhaps returning to his goats.  
And I was left with a pirate with a red raspberry in the small of his arm and a cold drink,  
opened just for me.

It was silly, but it was not irreverent.

### Artist Work Sample #3 — Visual Arts

Basil Kincaid  
*Take Me Home, 2022*  
Cotton, Denim, Silk, Knit, Brocade wrapped around  
artist Manuel Neri's marble sculpture, *Aurelia Roma*  
120 x 24 inches  
Sited at Laumeier Sculpture Park, St. Louis, MO.



Basil Kincaid  
*Awaiting Instruction, 2017*  
Various Fabrics Reclaimed by the Artist,  
Patchworked Fabrics, Curtains, Sequins  
240 x 120 x 120 in.  
Installation, St. Louis, MO.



Basil Kincaid

*Dancing the Wind Walk*, 2023

Various Fabrics Reclaimed by the Artist, Patchwork  
of Various Ghanaian Fabrics, Embroidered Ashanti

Kente, Embroidery, Batting, Curtains, Sequins

240 x 240 x 300 inches.

Frieze LA, Santa Monica, CA.

Image credit: Eric Thayer via BFA