

Verse, Voice, and Virtual Archives

[Poetry as Method for Black Information Futures]

WHAT IS METADATA?

[DESCRIPTION]

[CONTEXT]

[TIMESTAMP]

[AUTHORSHIP]



[THE DEFINITION]

Metadata is data about data.

It is what allows the record to make sense.

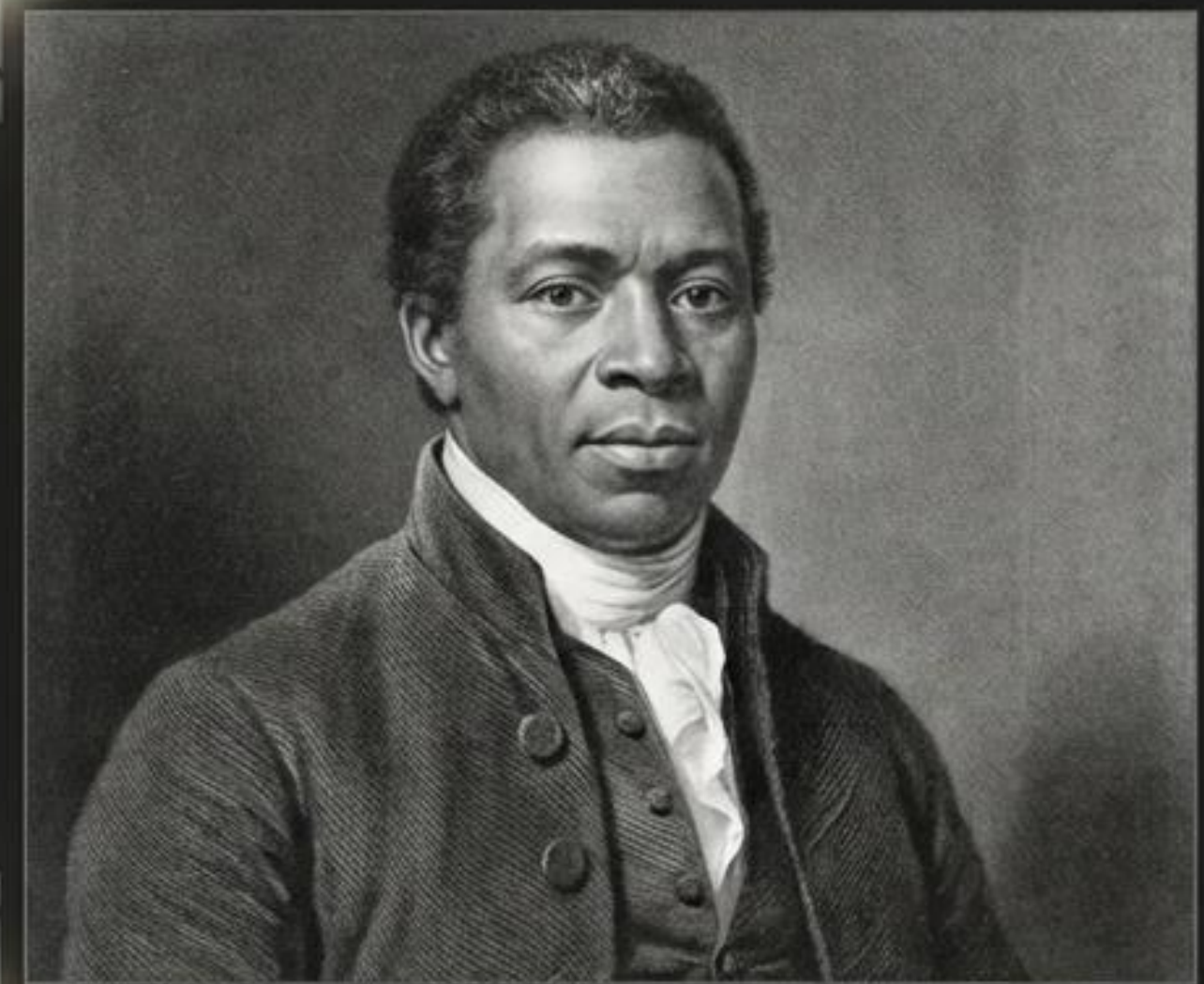
[THE THESIS]

For 300+ years, Black poetry has functioned as metadata.

It corrects, annotates, expands, and refuses the official archive.

THE OVERWRITTEN ARCHIVE

REF_ID: 1760 // JUPITER_HAMMON



Theologian in the Ledger

Poem: An Evening Thought

*Salvation comes by Jesus Christ alone,
The only Son of God;
Redemption now to every one
That love his holy Word.*

ARCHIVE RECORD: Property / Asset

POEM RECORD: Interiority / Theologian

REF_ID: 1773 // PHILLIS_WHEATLEY



Authorship as Affidavit

Poem: On Being Brought from Africa to America

*Remember, Christians, Negroes, black as Cain,
May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.*



FUNCTION: *Verification*

CONTEXT: 18 men required to certify authorship.

RESULT: *The lyric intervenes in a hostile system.*

REF_ID: 1921 // LANGSTON_HUGHES



Timestamp Correction

Poem: The Negro Speaks of Rivers

*I've known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world...
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.*



ARCHIVE START: 1619 (Slavery)

← POEM START: Ancient (Euphrates, Nile, Congo)

REF_ID: 1960 // GWENDOLYN_BROOKS



Compressed Data

Poem: We Real Cool

We real cool. We
Left school. We
Lurk late. We
Strike straight...
We Die soon.

DATA POINTS: Dropout / Surveillance / Risk.
CRITIQUE: Not a prediction of death, but a
documentation of structural constraint.

REF_ID: 1978 // AUDRE_LORDE



Infrastructure of Speech

Poem: A Litany for Survival

*and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard...
but when we are silent
we are still afraid
So it is better to speak*

ACTION: Building Parallel Infrastructure.

OUTPUT: Speech as Protocol. Method as Protection.

[THE CLAIM: Black Information Theory & Poetic Epistemology.]

[THE AGENTS: Poets as Researchers, Reporters, Designers.]

[REF_ID: 2014 // CLAUDIA_RANKINE]



The Feed as Archive

Poem: Citizen: An American Lyric

*"The world is wrong.
You can't put the past behind you.
It's buried in you; it's turned your flesh into
its own cupboard."*

SYSTEM STATUS: Logging Microaggressions

ARCHIVE TYPE: Cumulative Case File.

INSIGHT: Remembering what the news cycle deletes.

- [x] Inquiry
- [x] Documentation
- [x] Timestamp Correction
- [x] Archival Justice
- [x] Algorithmic Critique
- [x] Infrastructure Building

Therefore, poetry
is not adjacent to
information science.

IT IS METHOD.

Every **feed** is an archive.

Every **database** is an argument.

VIRTUAL ARCHIVES ARE NOT NEUTRAL.

Every **metadata field**
encodes a theory of value.

They decide whose **grief** is indexed and whose **joy** is erased.

WHAT BLACK INFORMATION FUTURES DEMAND

- [] More than access. They demand **DESIGN**.
- [] Digital curation shaped by **CARE**, not extraction.
- [] **Sovereign Digital Archives** that protect memory, authorship, and collective agency.

So the question is no longer whether poetry belongs in the archive.

The question is:

WHO IS DESIGNING THE VIRTUAL ARCHIVE?

```
[ FILE: ARCHIVE_FIELD_DEFINITIONS_2026_BLUEPRINT.JSON ]
```

```
{
  "schema": "Overwritten Archive Field Definitions",
  "version": "2026.01",
  "fields": [
    {
      "field": "breath", "type": "required",
      "description": "In the archive we are building, breath is a [required field]. Not optional. Not decorative. [Required]. It cannot be scraped without consent. It cannot be mined without harm."
    },
    { "field": "ancestor", "type": "non-auto-generated",
      "description": "Ancestor is not [auto-generated]. It must be named. It must be cited. It must be approached with protocol. [Refusal is built into the schema]. Not everything sacred is queryable."
    },
    { "field": "access_control", "type": "tiered_relational",
      "description": "[Access is tiered]. Memory is relational. [Extraction is disabled by design]. The cloud does not own our grief. The server does not timestamp our joy."
    },
    { "field": "joy_grief_handling", "type": "special_protocol",
      "description": "[Joy enters without authentication]. Grief is stored with care. And when the system demands a primary key, we decline numerical reduction."
    },
    { "field": "indexing_method", "type": "river_based",
      "description": "We index by river — The Middle Passage. The Mississippi. The Congo." },
    { "field": "encryption", "type": "opacity", "description": "We encrypt with opacity." },
    { "field": "preservation", "type": "story", "description": "We preserve by story." },
    { "field": "response", "type": "poem", "description": "We answer with poem." }
  ]
}
```

We Answer With Poem!

Presentation by Kyla Williams Tate
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