

# Losing the 440-Yard Dash

Afaa Michael Weaver, 1951

If he hits the curve before you do, all is lost  
is all I remember when the coach yelled out  
to start, to kick it down the short straightaway

into the curve, the curve a devil's handiwork,  
with Worsenski ahead of me, two hundred sixty  
pounds, one hundred pounds more than me,

and all I could see were the Converse soles  
of a boy I dusted in my dreams on the bus  
out here to make the track team, letters

for my sweater, girls going goo-goo over me,  
coaches from big-league schools with papers  
to say I was headed for glory, my unkempt

disappointment in me now sealed by winged  
feet beating me in the curve, Worsenski as big  
as the USS Enterprise sliding through Pacific

waters, parting the air in front of him that  
sucked back behind just to hold me in my grip  
of deep shame until I wished I were not there.

I wanted more than being human, a warrior  
of field and track would be bursting out now  
ripping open my chest with masculinity

to make Jesse Owens proud or jealous,  
or inspired or something other than me  
the pulling-up caboose slower than mud

running like an old man really walking,  
all the most valuable parts of me inside  
my brain in wishes, in dreams, in things

not yet born into the world, in calculations  
of beauty, in yearning for love, for the word  
of love, for some adoration from Wanda,

the most beautiful girl in the whole block,  
black like me and wondering just what  
life had to give those of us who can fly.