

# MERCENARY ENGLISH



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Mercenary Press

## MERCEDES ENG

In its strident and unsettling debut, Eng's *Mercenary English* seized "the politics of language" from the usual handlers and reassigned them to new terrains: the colonial battlefield, the racialized/radicalized body, and the insurgent neighbourhood. This second edition of a book that quickly became something of a benchmark in Vancouver poetry and poetics now seizes its own critical frames through the inclusion of a new afterword and an expansive conversation with poet and critic Fred Moten.

a mercenary pursuit to unsettle, rechart, and set ships in motion. woman at the helm. "dead, almost, and alive" making the money, women hold it down. body of work on the table, more weapons in the drawer. with all her might Eng speaks from experience, intervenes to right the vertical, spits hard words that shine like justice and the concrete trembles. "the eagles know."

—Cecily Nicholson

she knows complicit explicit illicit attack apology abattoir she is poet opticon sposed she maps narrative down her turquoise hustle her vortex velocity slams scenes frontline back alley corner she is fierce flash authentic arsenal of poems she chants protest she lookin tight women in grid stare surveillance back she speaks sex sweet easy she says come in come out fill in whole sisters now know how Mercedes spells out stasis séance how disappeared women scream shout volatile skin of text strikes oscillates back upside down fist upward soars improbable limits of the expressible she is percussive what comes round

—Annharte

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AUTOCARTOGRAPHY



G. HILL - 2012

Literally meaning the science or practice of map-drawing, cartography is integral to the exercise of colonial and neo-colonial power. The products of precise research, the first physically accurate maps were constructed in the early Modern period with the development of navigational aids and effective mapping tools. The cartography that followed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries paved the way for nineteenth century expansion.

initially created for  
mercenary pursuits  
maps marked out  
trade routes between Europe and the trading posts of the East  
benefiting merchants who called for new accurate maps

I call for new accurate maps



G. HILL • 2012

**how it is (November 2007)**

MAIN	MAIN
Owl Drugs	the heart of the community
no-name money mart	the Roosevelt
Hotel Washington	Coastal Health Authority
convenience store	the Regent
empty building	closed business
the Balmoral	closed business
pizza shop	closed business
porn store	closed business
Insite (North America's 1st legal safe injection site)	the Blue Eagle
Vancouver Drug School	the Brandiz
empty lot	closed business
empty building (the old Smilin' Buddha where my dad saw Jimi Hendrix)	convenience store
art gallery	convenience store
subsidized housing project	COLUMBIA
COLUMBIA	Pigeon Park Savings
pawn shop	empty lot
	convenience store

empty building development	the Shaldon
parking lot	meth clinic
United We Can (poor people endeavouring every day to make money by cleaning up your environmentally friendly water bottles)	subsidized housing project
	closed business
	the Only
ginseng store	subsidized housing project
the Dodson	
drop-in for the street	Downtown Eastside Residents Assc. (they helped my dad then me with housing)
meth clinic	empty building development
art gallery	CARRALL
CARRALL	Contemporary Centre for Asian Art
Pigeon Park	subsidized housing project
pawn shop	closed business
closed business	pawn shop
the Backpacker's Inn	BladeRunners
Army and Navy	empty lot
closed business	closed business
closed hotel	the Grand Union
Funky Winkerbean's	subsidized housing project

Save-On-Meats	ABBOTT
pawn shop	closed pawn shop
empty building development	convenience store
hooker store (Model Express)	Salvation Army drop-in
empty lot	the Golden Crown
ABBOTT	closed business
Woodward's development	closed business
store selling Chinese stuff	closed business
Money Mart	the Triple Crown
CAMBIE	discount fabric store
	empty heritage building
	CAMBIE

### low track

it's twelve midnight  
and the hustle begins  
eastside hustle, nobody wins  
kitty's gonna bounce to the track  
kitty's gonna skip to that trick  
lean on the car door, have a chat  
let him think he's brought the mac  
be a bit sassy  
so the cake'll lead him back  
and for a little price  
kitty's got her smack

cause once she catches that mark  
kitty's gonna light the spark  
then it's bang bang bang  
till mr. trick hits his mark  
a lil stack, made on her back

kitty's gonna jump off the stroll  
to where the boys and girls go  
lookin for the dope to fill the hole

so they're off to by the hour rooms  
where kitty done seen so many moons  
this man, he wants it unwrapped  
cause he can tell by lookin  
she's unclapped  
but to kitty that's a no  
a please and an extra twenty  
don't make it a go  
okay now man you down to the wire  
cock that four four and fire



kitty's got three more  
beatin beatin on her door  
kitty's gonna jump off the stroll  
to where the boys and girls go  
lookin, lookin, lookin

then it's back to the corner to troll  
and kitty hooks another  
this one she knows well  
lawyer from the westside  
he asks her, yeah he tells her  
why don't you quit that smack  
but keep openin those legs  
that way you still got the money  
without lookin like you're running low on honey

enough talk woodsman  
grind that axe  
cause your time  
it's at the max

kitty's gonna jump off the stroll  
to where the boys and girls go  
lookin, lookin, never findin

this one, he wanna go twice  
second time half price  
but kitty learned capitalism well  
she knows time is money  
gotta bring many bees to her honey  
second time takes a long time  
and she's workin for little  
but she ain't workin for a dime

so kitty's gonna jump off the stroll  
go pick up, go fix up  
go fall down that hole

### **schoolyard hooker**

another day another dollar  
i'm standin on my corner  
and who do i see  
but a lil babygirl  
from the same lil town as me

i know her from back in the day  
when our daddies robbed we would play

she's only five feet  
narrow as a side street  
and lookin, lookin  
like she did when we were innocent  
when we didn't open our legs to pay rent

i ask after her mom and dad  
and do they know  
she's on the stroll  
they know how it is,  
she tells me

her daddy sure knows  
cause next time i see her  
she's buyin him a rock  
and he knows she got the cash suckin cock

well natasha, she's gotta eat  
girl's out on the street  
making money to eat

she's barely five feet tall  
you push her she falls  
tasha, she's been workin since she was 13  
went to what our daddies called school of hard knocks  
but for you old men, it wasn't about hard cocks

even though we standin here  
sellin our wares  
like we ain't got cares  
and though we both been tired for years  
it moves me to tears

that this is the same lil girl  
i used to run the block with

still runnin, but a different block now  
this one no play time no pickup sticks  
this one sell time pick up tricks  
and tasha she picks up quick  
the ones who like em young  
she does the trick

tasha's daddy is conspirin in a murder plot  
feedin off her while she's still hot  
but like other girls on the stroll, she's fadin  
a lot less customers and a whole lotta waitin

and soon that bad daddy of hers will be gone

### **global hooker**

the way she told it  
it was like the wild west  
men cussin, fightin, put to the test  
gals all sassy, can drink with the best  
makin that money, fuck all the rest

the way she told it  
it was summer vacation  
goin to hawaii for a weekend trip  
no need to pack, he'll buy all that  
first class flight  
fancy cocktails all night  
but too many showers  
hot water for hours  
and your skin gets dry  
but you don't cry  
cause you're movin  
cause you're shakin  
bringing home that bacon

the way she told it  
it was studio 54 in a snowglobe  
when she disrobe  
boys be cryin, men be vyin  
wanna be havin, wanna be buyin

the way she told it  
it was like carnival  
hot sand, hotter sun  
good food, better rum  
the shimmy shake  
always on the take  
always on the make  
the way she told it

## blue skyes hooker

on the corner  
she's trying  
in the street  
she's crying  
but on pop rocks  
she's flying

so if she's trying but failing

so if her man is lying, if he's denying  
but the men are eyeing, still buying  
then it's time for Skye to take flight

but babygirl didn't know you couldn't just up and run into a name  
something she tried to do when mindflight wasn't enough

just up and running down the hallway and up out the window  
trying to fly into that blue she named herself after

## how it is (June 2009)

MAIN

Owl Drugs

no-name money mart

Hotel Washington

convenience store

empty building

the Balmoral

pizza shop

porn store

Insite (North America's 1st legal safe injection site)

art gallery

community garden

empty building (the old Smilin' Buddha  
where my dad saw Jimi Hendrix)

art gallery

subsidized housing project

COLUMBIA

pawn shop

huge housing development

MAIN

the heart of the community

the Roosevelt

Coastal Health Authority

the Regent

closed business

closed business

closed business

closed business

the Blue Eagle

the Brandiz

art gallery

convenience store

convenience store

COLUMBIA

Pigeon Park Savings

empty lot

convenience store



huge housing development continued the Shaldon  
 United We Can meth clinic  
 (poor people endeavouring every day  
 to make money by cleaning up your  
 environmentally friendly water bottles) subsidized housing project  
 ginseng store closed business  
 the Dodson the Only, closed due to the Health Act  
 (I never got sick eating there)  
 drop-in for the street subsidized housing project  
 meth clinic Downtown Eastside Residents Assc.  
 (they helped my dad then me with housing)  
 art gallery the Pennsylvania Hotel  
 CARRALL CARRALL  
 Pigeon Park Contemporary Centre for Asian Art  
 pawn shop empty hotel: dev. app. no. DE411818  
 closed business Pot Luck Café  
 the Beacon Hotel empty lot  
 Army and Navy empty lot  
 Vancouver Women's Health Collective empty lot  
 empty building empty lot  
 Funky Winkerbean's the Grand Union  
 Save-On-Meats minus the meat subsidized housing project

the unbuilt second half of a planned condo dev. ABBOTT  
 the first and built part of that development closed pawn shop  
 hooker store (Model Express) convenience store  
 empty lot Salvation Army drop-in  
 ABBOTT the Golden Crown  
 Woodward's development retail space in development  
 store selling Chinese stuff retail space in development  
 art gallery retail space in development  
 fancy furniture store retail space in development  
 retail space for lease discount fabric store  
 CAMBIE Vancouver Film School  
 CAMBIE

## representation of hooker

i am not a dismembered head with  
a pair of hands inside it  
i am not dna evidence on a farm  
i am not a mugshot  
i am not a pair of legs for you to  
look at and buy  
i am not a subject/object of your intellectual discourse  
i am not a future you fear for your  
wayward teenage daughters

i breathe  
i shout  
and  
i get mad

someone told me  
my anger is a gift  
and  
I'm gonna knock your teeth out with this gift.

## how it is (January 2012)

MAIN	MAIN
Owl Drugs	the heart of the community
no-name money mart	the Roosevelt
Hotel Washington	rest in peace AM & VS
convenience store	the Regent
empty building	dev. app. no. DE414810
the Balmoral	dev. app. no. DE414810
pizza shop	dev. app. no. DE414810
porn store	dev. app. no. DE414810
Insite	dev. app. no. DE414810
art gallery	the Brandiz
community garden	art gallery
empty building (the old Smilin' Buddha where my dad saw Jimi Hendrix)	convenience store
art gallery	convenience store
subsidized housing project	COLUMBIA
COLUMBIA	Pigeon Park Savings
convenience store	empty lot
closed pawn shop	convenience store

subsidized housing project	the Shaldon
United We Can (poor people endeavouring every day to make money by cleaning up your environmentally friendly water bottles)	meth clinic subsidized housing project closed business
ginseng store	
the Dodson	the Only, closed due to the Health Act (I never got sick eating there)
drop-in for the street	subsidized housing project
meth clinic	the Hotel Pennsylvania
art gallery	CARRALL
CARRALL	Contemporary Centre for Asian Art
Pigeon Park	craft beer place
pawn shop	Pot Luck Café
closed business	a memory of tent city
the Beacon Hotel	a memory of tent city
Army and Navy	a memory of tent city
Vancouver Women's Health Collective	a memory of tent city
empty building	the Grand Union
Funky Winkerbean's	subsidized housing project
city-sponsored Save-On-Meats	ABBOTT

the Paris Block	closed pawn shop
Acme Cafe	convenience store
hooker store (Model Express)	Salvation Army drop-in
parking lot	retail space for lease
ABBOTT	closed BeFresh Salon & Spa
SFU Woodward's	fancy furniture store
Goldcorp Centre for the Arts	Versus Training Center
store selling Chinese stuff	Money Mart
fancy furniture store	discount fabric store
fancy furniture store	CAMBIE
Bean Around the World	
CAMBIE	

## **superhooker in the hall of justice**

in the city  
i can be who i wanna  
ain't no past tellin

i feel good today  
and bam  
i'm a stone cold fox  
my ass is tight  
and lookin right  
i star in my own mtv videos  
flashy cars, stacks a cash, fly hos  
i'm makin boys run  
ready to fire their gun

and tomorrow  
i'm someone else

i got on my glasses, feelin smart  
and bam  
i'm deconstructing art  
i'm eating lunch at a french cafe  
talking about poetics over crème brulee  
i'm gonna write books  
about chinatown crooks  
add to the story  
tell all the glory

and tomorrow  
i'm someone else

this city is feelin like rot  
and i remember feeling caught  
but today that don't make me feel like a tired ol ho  
instead

i'm a cool motherfucker and i'm fully in control

and bam  
i'm a superhero  
i take this city by night  
jumpin skyscrapers, midnight flight  
i'm down for the fight  
i give the ladies all my might  
i show them cops wrong from right

i fly all over this city  
a one woman committee  
and i gather up all my girls  
all my pearls

dead, almost, and alive

**how it is (September 2012)**

MAIN	MAIN
Owl Drugs	the heart of the community
no-name money mart	the Roosevelt
Hotel Washington	rest in peace AM & VS
convenience store	the Regent
empty building	dev. app. no. DE414810 approved
the Balmoral	dev. app. no. DE414810 approved
pizza shop	dev. app. no. DE414810 approved
porn store	dev. app. no. DE414810 approved
Insite	dev. app. no. DE414810 approved
art gallery	the Brandiz
community garden	art gallery
empty building (the old Smilin' Buddha where my dad saw Jimi Hendrix)	convenience store
art gallery	convenience store
subsidized housing project	COLUMBIA
COLUMBIA	Pigeon Park Savings
convenience store	empty lot
	convenience store

closed pawn shop	the Shaldon
subsidized housing project	meth clinic
United We Can (poor people endeavouring every day to make money by cleaning up your environmentally friendly water bottles)	subsidized housing project
ginseng store	closed business
the Dodson	the Only, closed due to the Health Act (I never got sick eating there)
drop-in for the street	subsidized housing project
meth clinic	the Hotel Pennsylvania
art gallery	Cartem's Donuts \$27/dozen
CARRALL	CARRALL
Pigeon Park	Contemporary Centre for Asian Art
pawn shop	craft beer place
Window Community Art Shop	Pot Luck Café
the Beacon Hotel	a memory of Olympic Tent Village
Army and Navy	a memory of Olympic Tent Village
Vancouver Women's Health Collective	a memory of Olympic Tent Village
empty building	the Grand Union
Funky Winkerbean's	subsidized housing project

city-sponsored Save-On-Meats	ABBOTT
the Paris Block	closed pawn shop
Acme Cafe	closed convenience store
hooker store (Model Express)	closed Salvation Army drop-in
parking lot	Work BC Employment Services
ABBOTT	Au Soleil Salon & Spa
SFU Woodward's	fancy furniture store
Goldcorp Centre for the Arts	Versus Training Centre
store selling Chinese stuff	Money Mart
fancy furniture store	discount fabric store
fancy furniture store	Vancouver Film School
Bean Around the World	CAMBIE
CAMBIE	

## in dreams

the duress  
the mess

it doesn't belong to the ladies and their people

instead

the duress  
the fear

is yours

cause my arms are just that  
strong and wide  
these arms made of blood and bone  
not pipelines not prisons not cops not judges  
not ministries of what-the-fuck-ever  
not residential schools not rezs  
not truth and reconciliation industry

in my dreams

i slay you with my electric guitar  
made of unceded wood  
powered by woman blood and bone in earth  
its sonic edge reverberates  
through tailing lakes  
resurrecting the birds  
who take flight  
an army of blackbirds  
hunting you in the night

i kill the fascist within  
whenever you



try murder  
of this ground  
and the people who own it

instead of you raping women in ancient trees  
and me hearing their cries  
you hear  
my warrior cry  
its sound so loud this earth shakes  
the blood and bones in it recombine  
they rally  
they call war  
and they win

the oil rigs me and my baby brother saw  
as we drove all over Alberta  
to visit our dad in correctional facilities  
that span the same provinces as the pipelines  
the institutions where you house the nation  
i take them  
extraction machineries  
gathered in arms of blood and bone  
up up up  
the northern lights guide my way  
and i hurl them  
at all the prisons that held my dad  
and made me ashamed  
when people mistook this half yellow body for a red one

Matsqui, Mission, Mountain,  
Drumheller, Bowden, BC Pen  
prison industrial complex explodes  
but all the right people live  
and the blood and bones in this ground  
is yours

i pick up a shard, pencil-sized  
i write poems all over your pipelines  
directing the oil back to the ground

in my dreams  
i lay you motherfuckers down

**how it is (November 2014)**

MAIN	MAIN
Owl Drugs	the heart of the community
no-name money mart	the Roosevelt
Maple Hotel (PPP Canada SRO Initiative)	rest in peace AM & VS
convenience store	the Regent
empty building	dev. app. no. DE414810 approved
the Balmoral	79 units of market housing
pizza shop	9 units of "affordable" housing
porn store	9 units at welfare-shelter rate
Insite	dev. app. no. DE414810 approved
rest in peace Bud Osborn	the Brandiz
art gallery	art gallery
community garden	convenience store
empty building (the old Smilin' Buddha where my dad saw Jimi Hendrix)	convenience store
art gallery	COLUMBIA
subsidized housing project	Pigeon Park Savings
COLUMBIA	empty lot
	convenience store

convenience store	the Shaldon
closed pawn shop	meth clinic
subsidized housing project	subsidized housing project
United We Can	closed business
closed and moved 2km out of the DTES	the Only, closed due to the Health Act (I never got sick eating there)
ginseng store	
the Dodson	subsidized housing project
drop-in for the street	the Hotel Pennsylvania
meth clinic	CARRALL
art gallery	fancy lighting store
CARRALL	craft beer place
Pigeon Park	Pot Luck Café
closed pawn shop	100% social housing now!
closed business	100% social housing now!
the Beacon Hotel	100% social housing now!
Army and Navy	100% social housing now!
Vancouver Women's Health Collective	the Grand Union
empty building	subsidized housing project
Funky Winkerbean's	ABBOTT

city-sponsored Save-On-Meats	closed pawn shop
the Paris Block	convenience store
Acme Cafe	Salvation Army drop-in
hooker store (Model Express)	Work BC Employment Services
parking lot	retail space for lease
ABBOTT	closed BeFresh Salon & Spa
SFU Woodward's	fancy furniture store
Goldcorp Centre for the Arts	Versus Training Center
store selling Chinese stuff	Money Mart
fancy furniture store	discount fabric store
fancy furniture store	Vancouver Film School
Bean Around the World	CAMBIE
CAMBIE	

## post hooker micro.macro

### i. unceded

I'll wage an insurrection  
 against/beside/from below  
 disavowing my connection

but as I climb  
 (yes, it's vertical here too)  
 the rhyme drops

like a yellow prairie son  
 a common man  
 a jerk

its good that it's not all about me anymore  
 but does it have to be so close to all about you

here  
 lyrical I battles I need to grow  
 cultivate aesthetic methodologies  
 in unseeded territory

it's a lie, this poem  
 it's not about you but it is

and in order for me to explain  
 I have to explain like you would  
 and I'm a lazy scholar  
 so I'll do it my way

you're white  
 and when you say  
 the acknowledgment  
 doesn't mean anything

you're wrong  
or  
you're correct  
where you are  
where I am sometimes

but you're honest  
and you helped me arm myself for this  
attached that tricky little clasp at the back of the maille protecting  
my neck

but it's wider  
this blood-soaked earth that makes my half-race step sticky  
and it needs to be acknowledged  
by me  
and by you

## ii. my affective labour

this can I come in/can I not  
is an awful lot  
like going out in glossy Gastown with my girl  
not the waiting to see if we'll get in  
cause shit, me and my girl don't wait  
but easy entrance doesn't mean through the door

do I look good enough  
tight  
poetic  
enough?  
it seems like it should be different here because it's not about  
looks/money/youth/money  
and my hot to trot story was what got me across the  
threshold

a plus here  
a minus there  
and sometimes you're super fresh  
and then you just ain't  
it's like that with sex work too  
I wish I'd charged more for my first foray  
into that space of trade

would you like to buy it  
it's after-school-special good  
turned myself out on my 23rd birthday  
wearing the dress my grandma bought me

a burgundy babydoll  
with a cheap rayon skirt  
falling midway between knee and pussy  
a bow at the back  
tying me up like some sweet little birthday present for  
someone

Charlie, I believe his name was  
\$80 for half and half in his little car  
in some alley just off Clark and Venables

is it bad that I can't remember the exact alley?  
should it be burned into my memory, just like my clean date?  
I can't remember that shit either  
now my body of intellectual work  
is about  
the work  
I did  
with my body

so I'm selling  
with my body

**how it is (July 2016)**

MAIN	MAIN
Owl Drugs	the heart of the community
no-name money mart	renovating the Roosevelt to Molson Bank
Maple Hotel (PPP Canada SRO Initiative)	rest in peace AM & VS
convenience store	the Regent
empty building	Sequel 138
the Balmoral	Sequel 138
pizza shop	Sequel 138
porn store	Sequel 138
Insite	Sequel 138
rest in peace Bud Osborn	the Brandiz
boarded-up building	art gallery
community garden	closed convenience store
SBC Restaurant (the old Smilin' Buddha where my dad saw Jimi Hendrix)	convenience store
	COLUMBIA
building for sale	Pigeon Park Savings
subsidized housing project	empty lot
COLUMBIA	convenience store

convenience store	the Shaldon
closed pawn shop	meth clinic
subsidized housing project	subsidized housing project
social mix housing	closed business
market/subsidized/social	the Only, closed due to the Health Act (I never got sick eating there)
the Dodson	subsidized housing project
drop-in for the street	the Hotel Pennsylvania
meth clinic	CARRALL
art gallery	fancy lighting store
CARRALL	craft beer place
Pigeon Park	Pot Luck Café
closed pawn shop	Vancouver Tent City
dev. app. no. DE418918	Vancouver Tent City
the Beacon Hotel	Vancouver Tent City
Army and Navy	Vancouver Tent City
Vancouver Women's Health Collective	the Grand Union
empty building	subsidized housing project
Funky Winkerbean's	ABBOTT
city-sponsored Save-On-Meats	

the Paris Block	coffee shop frequented by skinny-jeans-wearers
Acme Cafe	
hooker store (Model Express)	\$7 juice store
parking lot	Salvation Army drop-in
ABBOTT	Work BC Employment Services
SFU Woodward's	retail space for lease
Goldcorp Centre for the Arts	back to Au Soliel Salon & Spa
retail and office space for lease	fancy furniture store
retail and office space for lease	another fitness place
Purebread	Money Mart
Bean Around the World	discount fabric store
CAMBIE	Vancouver Film School
	CAMBIE



## weapons

i want aks and lugers and walther ppks  
i want typewriters and barbed wire  
i want panopticons and control over value  
i wanna hurt people  
i wanna cut them open  
see how they work  
i wanna buy them, own them  
map  
and  
categorize  
them

i wanna make them my object.  
in a sentence, i act on them.

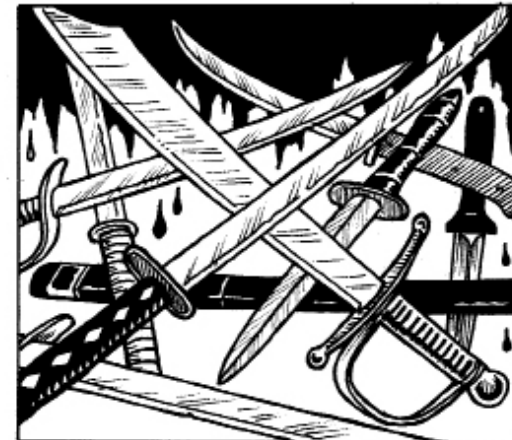
i have this tool belt see  
it's powerful  
i got it from you  
and i know it works

its evidence is in my body, this mixed race body

you had your cartographers  
and language  
and ships  
and taxonomy  
and guns  
and progress

but i got all that  
plus i'm fucking fierce

and this time  
it's me taking the women motherfuckers



but i wanna set free them  
and own you

this time  
i'm a pirate  
and your pathetic white ass is my booty  
this time  
i lead the ship

this time  
i'm at the helm  
in nothin but panties  
and a leather belt that holds my sword

does that fantasy work for you man?  
a sexy bare-breasted halfbreed with dusky skin?

I steer the ship this time.

your navy tries to stop me  
but i don't capitulate  
like a white actress  
playing a coloured woman  
in the old movies  
would

nah, i take my sword  
the one you're supposed to turn on me  
and  
and I cut you with it

i make you and your sailors  
give me and my all-woman marauding crew pedicures  
while we storm the seas

you don't even see us comin

