

## EN 123: Modern World Literatures

# Term 2 handouts

- Lu Xun, “Diary of a Madman”
- Guillaume Apollinaire, “Zone”
- Aimé Césaire, “Notebook of a Return to the Native Land”
- Frank O’Hara, “Ode: Salute to the French Negro Poets”; “The Day Lady Died”
- Elizabeth Bishop, “Questions of Travel”
- Edward Kamau Brathwaite, “Letter Sycorax”



by Han Shaogong. She has also edited and translated in part *Lust, Caution*, a collection of short stories by Eileen Chang. A lecturer in Chinese history at the University of London, she is the author of *The Great Wall: China against the World, 1000 BC-AD 2000* and *The Politics of Cultural Capital: China's Quest for a Nobel Prize in Literature*.

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# The Real Story of Ah-Q and Other Tales of China

*The Complete Fiction of Lu Xun*

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PENGUIN BOOKS

alleviate their fear of the struggles ahead. I have no interest in passing judgement on these things of mine: on whether they are brave, despondent, contemptible or ridiculous. But since they are battle-cries, I naturally had to follow my generals' orders. So I often stooped to distortions and untruths: adding a fictitious wreath of flowers to Yu'er's grave in 'Medicine'; forbearing to write that Mrs Shan never dreams of her son in 'Tomorrow', because my generalissimos did not approve of pessimism. And I didn't want to infect younger generations – dreaming the glorious dreams that I too had dreamed when I was young – with the loneliness that came to torment me.

These attempts of mine are no works of art; that I understand perfectly well. And yet I now enjoy the great good fortune of seeing them collected together and passed off as a volume of fiction. Though I feel some unease at this undeserved stroke of luck, it also brings me some happiness – that they might, at least fleetingly, find a readership.

And so I have dispatched my pieces to the printer and, for the reasons given above, named them *Outcry*.

Lu Xun

3 December 1922, Beijing

## DIARY OF A MADMAN

At school I had been close friends with two brothers whose names I will omit to mention here. As the years went by after we graduated, however, we gradually lost touch. Not long ago, I happened to hear that one of them had been seriously ill and, while on a visit home, I broke my journey to call on them. I found only one of them at home, who told me it was his younger brother who had been afflicted. Thanking me for my concern, he informed me that his brother had long since made a full recovery and had left home to wait for an appropriate official post to fall vacant. Smiling broadly, he showed me two volumes of a diary his brother had written at the time, explaining that they would give me an idea of the sickness that had taken hold of him and that he saw no harm in showing them to an old friend. Reading them back home, I discovered his brother had suffered from what is known as a 'persecution complex'. The text was fantastically confused, and entirely undated; it was only differences in ink and styles of handwriting that enabled me to surmise parts of the text were written at different times. Below, I have extracted occasional flashes of coherence, in the hope they may be of use to medical research. While I have not altered a single one of the author's errors, I have changed all the local names used in the original, despite the personal obscurity of the individuals involved. Finally, I have made use of the title chosen by the invalid himself following his full recovery.

2 April 1918

## I

The moon is bright tonight.

I had not seen it for thirty years; the sight of it today was extraordinarily refreshing. Tonight, I realized I have spent the past thirty years or more in a state of dream; but I must still be careful. Why did the Zhaos' dog look twice at me?

I have reason to be afraid.

## II

No moon tonight; a bad sign. I went out this morning – cautiously. Mr Zhao had a strange look in his eyes: as if he feared me, or as if he wished me harm. I saw a group of them, seven or eight, huddled around, whispering about me, afraid I would catch them at it. Everywhere I went – the same thing. One of them – the most vicious of the bunch – pulled his lips back into a grin. I prickled with cold fear; their traps, I realized, were already in place.

Refusing to be intimidated, I carried on my way. A gang of children blocked my path ahead – they, too, were discussing me, their eyes as strange as Mr Zhao's, their faces a ghastly white. What quarrel could these children have with me, I wondered. 'Tell me!' I shouted, unable to stop myself. But they just ran away.

Mr Zhao, all the others I saw that morning – what was the source of their hatred? All I could think of was that twenty years ago, I stamped on the Records of the Past, and it has been my enemy since. Though he has no personal acquaintance with this Past, Mr Zhao must have somehow got wind of the business, and resolved to take up the grudge himself. He must have rallied everyone else I saw against me. But what about the children? They weren't even born twenty years ago – so why do they stare so strangely at me, as if they fear me, or wish me harm? I am hurt, bewildered, afraid.

Then the answer came to me. Their parents must have taught them.

## III

My nights are sleepless. Only thorough investigation will bring clarity.

Those people. They have been pilloried by their magistrate, beaten by their squires, had their wives requisitioned by bailiffs, seen their parents driven to early graves by creditors. And yet, through all this, none looked as fearful, as savage as they did yesterday.

The most curious thing of all – that woman, hitting her son. 'I'm so angry, I could eat you!' That's what she said. But looking at me all the while. I flinched in terror, I couldn't help myself. The crowd – their faces bleached greenish-white – roared with laughter, exposing their fangs. Mr Chen rushed up to drag me home.

To drag me home. Back home, though, everyone was pretending they didn't know me, that same look in their eyes. The moment I stepped into the study, the door was latched on the outside, as if I were a chicken in a coop. I had no idea what lay at the bottom of it all.

A few days ago, one of our tenants – a farmer from Wolf Cub Village – came to report a famine. The most hated man in the village had been beaten to death, he told my brother, and some of the villagers had dug out his heart and liver, then fried and eaten them, for courage. When I interrupted, the farmer and my brother glanced at me – repeatedly. Now – now I recognize the look in their eyes: exactly that of the people I passed yesterday.

I shiver at the very memory of it.

If they are eating people, I might well be next.

That woman scolding her son – 'I could eat you!' – those bleached faces and bared fangs, their roars of laughter; the farmer's story; the signs are all there. I now see that their speech is poisoned, their laughter knife-edged, their teeth fearfully white – teeth that eat people.

I don't think I'm a bad man, but I now see my fate has been in the balance since I trod on those Records of the Past. They keep their own, secret accounts – a mystery to me. And they can turn on you in an instant. When my brother taught me to write essays, he would always mark me up if I found grounds to criticize the virtuous or rehabilitate the villainous: 'It is a rare man who can go against received wisdom.' How can I guess what they are really thinking, when their fangs are poised over my flesh?

Only thorough investigation will bring clarity. I seem to remember, though only vaguely, that people have been eating each other since ancient times. When I flick through the history books, I find no dates, only those fine Confucian principles 'benevolence, righteousness, morality' snaking their way across each page. As I studied them again, through one of my more implacably sleepless nights, I finally glimpsed what lay between every line, of every book: 'Eat people!'

All these words – written in books, spoken by the farmer – stare strangely, smirkingly at me.

Are they planning to eat me, too?

#### IV

I sat quietly a while, through the morning. Mr Chen brought me some food: a bowl of vegetables and a bowl of steamed fish – its eyes glassily white, its mouth gaping like the village cannibals. After a few slippery mouthfuls, I could no longer tell whether I was eating fish or human; up it all came again.

'Tell my brother,' I said to Chen, 'that I feel stifled inside – that I want to take a walk in the garden.' Chen left me without a word but shortly afterwards unlocked the door.

I did not move; I wanted to see what they planned to do with me next; I knew they would not relax their grip so easily. And so it proved. My brother brought an old man in to see me. My visitor approached slowly, head bowed, afraid I would catch the savagery in his eyes, sneaking glances at me through his spectacles. 'You seem well today,' my brother said. 'Yes,' I

answered. 'Dr Ho here has come to examine you,' my brother went on, 'at my request.' 'Be my guest!' I replied. My executioner, of course! Come to check how fat I was, while he pretended to take my pulse. Presumably his fee would be a slice of my flesh. Yet I felt no fear: my nerve remained steadier than those of the cannibals about me. I held out my wrists to see how he would go about it. Taking a seat, the old man closed his eyes, held my wrists for a considerable length of time, stared blankly a while longer, then opened those terrible eyes of his. 'Avoid overexcitement,' he pronounced. 'A few days' rest and you'll be fine.'

Avoid overexcitement! Rest! Of course: they want to fatten me up, so there will be more to go round. 'You'll be fine'? They were all after my flesh, but they couldn't be open about it – they had to pursue their prey with secret plans and clever tricks; I could have died laughing. Indeed, I burst into uncontrollable roars of mirth – a laughter that rang with righteous courage. The old man and my brother blanched at the robustness of my morale.

But my boldness succeeded only in sharpening their appetites – the braver the prey, the more glory for the hunter. 'To be eaten immediately!' the old man muttered as he left. My brother nodded. *Et tu!* And yet I should have foreseen it all: my own brother in league with people who wanted to eat me!

My own brother was a cannibal!

I was the brother of a cannibal!

And destined to be eaten myself – this brother of a cannibal.

#### V

These last few days, I have reconsidered a couple of my earlier suspicions: perhaps the old man was not my executioner, perhaps he really was a doctor. But he will still have eaten people. In his *Book of . . . what is it? Herbs? . . .* Li Shizhen openly observes that boiled human flesh is perfectly edible.<sup>1</sup> He must have tried it himself.

Neither were my suspicions of my own brother unfounded.

When he was teaching me history as a boy, he once told me people could 'exchange sons to eat' in times of scarcity; or then again, while discussing a notorious villain, he told me death alone was too good for him; that 'his flesh should be devoured, his skin flayed into a rug'.<sup>2</sup> For hours afterwards, my heart pounded with fear. A few days ago, when the farmer from Wolf Cub Village told him about the business with the heart and liver, he merely nodded; nothing surprises him. At heart, he is ruthless; still perfectly ruthless. If sons are fodder for the dinner table, then anyone could be. I used to just let him preach at me – to let his sermons pass me by. Now, I know his lips were smeared with human grease, his thoughts only of eating people.

## VI

There is darkness all around me. I cannot tell day from night. The Zhaos' dog has started barking again.

Fierce as a lion, cowardly as a rabbit, cunning as a fox . . .

## VII

I know their ways. They do not want, or dare, to kill me openly; they fear the vengeance of the ghosts. Instead, they conspire to drive me to suicide. I see through their plans, most of them – I remember their looks on the street from a few days ago, and my brother's behaviour. Their first, fondest hope is that I should sling my belt over the beam in the ceiling and hang myself; that they will achieve their heart's desire without staining their hands with my blood – I hear their gasps of jubilant laughter already. Failing that, I could always pine away, of melancholy or nerves. Though my corpse would have less fat on it, it would still be a corpse.

They can eat only carrion. I remember reading in some book somewhere about a fearfully ugly creature called a hyena, with terrifying eyes and a fondness for dead meat, capable of chewing the most enormous bones down to a pulp. I shiver just to think

of it. This hyena is cousin to the wolf, the wolf cousin to the dog. The way the Zhaos' dog looked at me the day before yesterday, he's in on it, too; and that old man who couldn't look me in the eye – but he couldn't fool me either.

It's my brother I feel sorry for. He's only human: he must feel the dread of it, and yet still he conspires to eat me. Has he become hardened over time – can he no longer see how wrong it is? Or is his conscience in pieces: does he commit his crimes in the full knowledge of their evil?

A curse on all cannibals – beginning with my brother. And if I am to turn them, I must begin with him, too.

## VIII

They should have been able to see it for themselves.

Suddenly, another visitor. A young man, barely in his twenties, his features a blur – except for his broad grin. He greeted me with a nod; I found no sincerity in his smile. 'Is it right to eat people?' I asked him. 'What are you talking about?' – his smile did not flicker. 'No one's eating anyone; it's not a famine year.' I knew then that he, too, was of their number: that he too feasted on human flesh. Screwing my courage, I determined to press him further.

'But is it right?'

'I – I don't understand the question. What a . . . sense of humour, you have . . . Lovely weather we're having today.'

The weather is indeed fine, and the moon indeed bright. But I will repeat my question: 'Is it right?'

'No . . .' he mumbled, beginning to sound vexed.

'So it's wrong? Then why is it going on?'

'It's not . . .'

'They're eating each other here and now – in Wolf Cub Village. Look here: it's written in all the books, in fresh red ink!'

His face went a ghastly white. 'Maybe,' his eyes bulged, 'maybe that's how things have always been . . .'

'But does that make it right?'

'I've had enough of this. You shouldn't be talking about it.'

I sprang to my feet, my eyes flying open. He had disappeared. I was covered in sweat. He was much younger than my brother, and yet already he was in on it with the rest of them; his parents must have taught him. And he will have taught his son; even the children stare at me like wild beasts.

## IX

Craving flesh, dreading the teeth of others, eyeing each other with fear . . .

If only they could leave it all behind them, how easy, how comfortable their lives would become. Such a tiny thing. But they are all part of it – fathers, sons, brothers, husbands, wives, friends, teachers, pupils, enemies, perfect strangers, pulling each other back.

## X

Early this morning I went looking for my brother. I found him standing by the door to the hall, staring up at the sky. Approaching from behind, I placed myself between him and the doorway.

'I have something to tell you,' I said, taking care to keep my voice soft, meek.

'Go on.' He spun round to face me, nodding.

'A few, difficult words. Primitive men probably did eat human flesh. But their thinking changed, developed over time, and some of them stopped – they were determined to become human, genuinely human. Those who wouldn't give it up remained reptiles, some of them changing into fish, birds or monkeys, then finally men. But they remain reptiles at heart – even today. The shame of the cannibal, brother, before the non-cannibal! Greater than the reptile before the monkey.

'Thousands of years ago, the royal cook Yi Ya steamed his own son for his king to eat. We all know it's been going on –

since the creation of the earth itself. That revolutionary, Xu Xilin, a few years back – didn't they eat his heart and liver?<sup>3</sup> Then there's the Wolf Cub villagers; and last year, I heard that a consumptive ate a steamed roll dipped in the blood of an executed criminal.

'And now it's my turn to be eaten. I don't expect you to fight on my behalf, alone against the rest of them. But do you have to join the conspiracy? They'll do anything, eat anyone: me, you, each other. Pull back from them, change – and we will all live in peace. However long it's been going on for, we can decide to stop today, we can! I know you can do it. Why, when that tenant of ours wanted his rent reduced the other day, to start with you said it was impossible.'

As I began my speech, his lips curled back into a scornful smile. Then his eyes shone with a terrible, savage gleam. When I set to exposing their awful secrets the colour drained dreadfully from his face. A crowd gathered outside the gate, Mr Zhao and his dog among them, craning forward to listen in. Some faces remained only a blur, as if masked in gauze; on others, I saw the same bleached pallor, the same bared fangs as before – their lips distorted into smiles. I recognized all of them: the eaters of human flesh. But I knew they were divided in their thinking. Some believed that the eating of men must go on because it was how things had always been. Others recognized it for the sin it was, and yet still they ate, terrified of exposure. The more I said, the angrier they became, through their frozen smiles.

My brother chose this moment to show his true, unrepentant colours.

'Clear off!' he roared ferociously at them. 'Where's the fun in gawping at a madman!'

Another of their ingenious devices: to discredit me as insane. The plot was too well laid; they would never change. And when the moment arrived for me to be eaten, there would be not a murmur of opposition, only sympathy for my butchers. Death by character assassination – a method tried and tested by the farmers of Wolf Cub Village.

Chen stormed in through the gate. Though they wanted to shut me up, I was not yet finished with my audience.



'You can change! In your hearts! Soon there will be no place for cannibals in this world of ours. And if you don't change, you will all be eaten. However many children you have, you will all be destroyed, like reptiles – by real humans, just as a hunter kills a wolf!'

Chen chased the crowd away. My brother disappeared. Then Chen coaxed me back inside. A stifling darkness hung over the room; the beams and rafters shuddered, then began to swell – piling distendedly down on me.

They pinned me to the ground; they meant me to die beneath them. But I struggled through my illusion, drenching myself in sweat.

'Change, in your hearts!' I gasped. 'Soon there will be no place for cannibals in this world . . .'

## XI

The sun will not come out, the door does not open; two meals, every day.

As I held my chopsticks, I thought again of my brother. Now I know what happened to my sister. I can see her now, in all her heartbreaking vulnerability; only four years old when she left us. I remember my mother's uncontrollable sobs, my brother's efforts to stop her. He'd probably eaten her himself, and all the crying was making him uncomfortable. If he had any conscience left . . .

I wonder if Mother knew.

I think she must have known, even though she didn't say a word about it as she wept – maybe she just accepted it. When I was three or four, I remember my brother telling me, as I sat in the courtyard enjoying the cool of a summer evening, that a filial son should cook a piece of his flesh for a sick parent. Mother said nothing to contradict him. If it's all right to eat a piece of flesh, then why not a whole person? But the way she wept that day; the memory of it, even now, is painful. How inconsistent people are!

## XII

Further thought is painful.

I now realize I have unknowingly spent my life in a country that has been eating human flesh for four thousand years. My sister, I remember, died while my brother was managing the household. He probably fed her secretly to us, by mixing her into our food.

I, too, may have unknowingly eaten my sister's flesh. And now it's my own turn . . .

With the weight of four thousand years of cannibalism bearing down upon me, even if once I was innocent how can I now face real humans?

## XIII

Are there children who have not yet eaten human flesh?

Save the children . . .

April 1918



J'ai vu ce matin une jolie rue dont j'ai oublié le nom  
Neuve et propre du soleil elle était le clairon  
Les directeurs les ouvriers et les belles sténo-dactylographes  
Du lundi matin au samedi soir quatre fois par jour y passent  
Le matin par trois fois la sirène y gémit  
Une cloche rageuse y aboie vers midi  
Les inscriptions des enseignes et des murailles  
Les plaques les avis à la façon des perroquets criillent  
J'aime la grâce de cette rue industrielle  
Située à Paris entre la rue Aumont-Thiéville et l'avenue  
des Ternes

Voilà la jeune rue et tu n'es encore qu'un petit enfant  
Ta mère ne t'habille que de bleu et de blanc  
Tu es très pieux et avec le plus ancien de tes camarades  
René Dalize.

Vous n'aimez rien tant que les pompes de l'Église  
Il est neuf heures le gaz est baissé tout bleu vous sortez  
du dortoir en cachette

Vous priez toute la nuit dans la chapelle du collègue  
Tandis qu'éternelle et adorable profondeur améthyste  
Tourne à jamais la flamboyante gloire du Christ  
C'est le beau lys que tous nous cultivons  
C'est la torche aux cheveux roux que n'éteint pas le vent  
C'est le fils pâle et vermeil de la douloureuse mère  
C'est l'arbre toujours touffu de toutes les prières  
C'est la double potence de l'honneur et de l'éternité  
C'est l'étoile à six branches  
C'est Dieu qui meurt le vendredi et ressuscite le dimanche

This morning I saw a pretty street whose name is gone  
Clean and shining clarion of the sun  
Where from Monday morning to Saturday evening four  
times a day  
Directors workers and beautiful shorthand typists go their  
way

And thrice in the morning the siren makes its moan  
And a bell bays savagely coming up to noon  
The inscriptions on walls and signs  
The notices and plates squawk parrot-wise  
I love the grace of this industrial street  
In Paris between the Avenue des Ternes and the Rue  
Aumont-Thiéville

There it is the young street and you still but a small child  
Your mother always dresses you in blue and white  
You are very pious and with René Dalize your oldest crony  
Nothing delights you more than church ceremony  
It is nine at night the lowered gas burns blue you steal away  
From the dormitory and all night in the college chapel pray  
Whilst everlastingly the flaming glory of Christ  
Wheels in adorable depths of amethyst  
It is the fair lily that we all revere  
It is the torch burning in the wind its auburn hair  
It is the rosepale son of the mother of grief  
It is the tree with the world's prayers ever in leaf  
It is of honour and eternity the double beam  
It is the six-branched star it is God  
Who Friday dies and Sunday rises from the dead

C'est le Christ qui monte au ciel mieux que les aviateurs  
Il détient le record du monde pour la hauteur

Pupille Christ de l'œil  
Vingtième pupille des siècles il sait y faire  
Et changé en oiseau ce siècle comme Jésus monte dans  
l'air

Les diables dans les abîmes lèvent la tête pour le regarder  
Ils disent qu'il imite Simon Mage en Judée  
Ils crient s'il sait voler qu'on l'appelle voleur  
Les anges voltigent autour du joli voltigeur  
Icare Enoch Élie Apollonius de Thyane  
Flottent autour du premier aéroplane  
Ils s'écartent parfois pour laisser passer ceux que transporte  
la Sainte-Eucharistie

Ces prêtres qui montent éternellement élevant l'hostie  
L'avion se pose enfin sans refermer les ailes  
Le ciel s'emplit alors de millions d'hirondelles  
A tire-d'aile viennent les corbeaux les faucons les hiboux  
D'Afrique arrivent les ibis les flamants les marabouts  
L'oiseau Roc célébré par les conteurs et les poètes  
Plane-tenant dans les serres le crâne d'Adam la première  
tête

L'aigle fond de l'horizon en poussant un grand cri  
Et d'Amérique vient le petit colibri  
De Chine sont venus les pihis longs et souples  
Qui n'ont qu'une seule aile et qui volent par couples  
Puis voici la colombe esprit immaculé  
Qu'escortent l'oiseau-lyre et le paon ocellé  
Le phénix ce bucher qui soi-même s'engendre

It is Christ who better than airmen wings his flight  
Holding the record of the world for height

Pupil Christ of the eye  
Twentieth pupil of the centuries it is no novice  
And changed into a bird this century soars like Jesus  
The devils in the deeps look up and say they see a  
Nimitation of Simon Magus in Judea  
Craft by name by nature craft they cry  
About the pretty flyer the angels fly  
Enoch Elijah Apollonius of Tyana hover  
With Icarus round the first airworthy ever  
For those whom the Eucharist transports they now and  
then make way

Host-elevating priests ascending endlessly  
The aeroplane alights at last with outstretched pinions  
Then the sky is filled with swallows in their millions  
The rooks come flocking the owls the hawks  
Flamingoes from Africa and ibises and storks  
The roc bird famed in song and story soars  
With Adam's skull the first head in its claws  
The eagle stoops screaming from heaven's verge  
From America comes the little humming-bird  
From China the long and supple  
One-winged peehees that fly in couples  
Behold the dove spirit without alloy  
That ocellate peacock and lyre-bird convoy  
The phoenix flame-devoured flame-revived

Un instant voile tout de son ardente cendre  
Les sirènes laissant les périlleux détroits  
Arrivent en chantant bellement toutes trois  
Et tous aigle phénix et pihis de la Chine  
Fraternisent avec la volante machine

Maintenant tu marches dans Paris tout seul parmi la foule  
Des troupeaux d'autobus mugissants près de toi roulent  
L'angoisse de l'amour te serre le gosier  
Comme si tu ne devais jamais plus être aimé  
Si tu vivais dans l'ancien temps tu entrerais dans un  
monastère  
Vous avez honte quand vous vous surprenez à dire une  
prière  
Tu te moques de toi et comme le feu de l'Enfer ton rire  
pétille  
Les étincelles de ton rire dorent le fond de ta vie  
C'est un tableau pendu dans un sombre musée  
Et quelquefois tu vas le regarder de près

Aujourd'hui tu marches dans Paris les femmes sont  
ensanglantées  
C'était et je voudrais ne pas m'en souvenir c'était au  
déclin de la beauté

Entourée de flammes ferventes Notre-Dame m'a regardé  
à Chartres  
Le sang de votre Sacré-Cœur m'a inondé à Montmartre  
Je suis malade d'ouïr les paroles bienheureuses  
L'amour dont je souffre est une maladie honteuse  
Et l'image qui te possède te fait survivre dans l'insomnie  
et dans l'angoisse  
C'est toujours près de toi cette image qui passe

All with its ardent ash an instant hides  
Leaving the perilous straits the sirens three  
Divinely singing join the company  
And eagle phoenix peehees fraternize  
One and all with the machine that flies

Now you walk in Paris alone among the crowd  
Herds of bellowing buses hemming you about  
Anguish of love parching you within  
As though you were never to be loved again  
If you lived in olden times you would get you to a cloister  
You are ashamed when you catch yourself at a paternoster  
You are your own mocker and like hellfire your laughter  
crackles  
Golden on your life's hearth fall the sparks of your laughter  
It is a picture in a dark museum hung  
And you sometimes go and contemplate it long

To-day you walk in Paris the women are blood-red  
It was and would I could forget it was at beauty's ebb

From the midst of fervent flames Our Lady beheld me  
at Chartres  
The blood of your Sacred Heart flooded me in Montmartre  
I am sick with hearing the words of bliss  
The love I endure is like a syphilis  
And the image that possesses you and never leaves your  
side  
In anguish and insomnia keeps you alive

Maintenant tu es au bord de la Méditerranée  
Sous les citronniers qui sont en fleur toute l'année  
Avec tes amis tu te promènes en barque  
L'un est Nissard il y a un Mentonasque et deux

Turbiasques  
Nous regardons avec effroi les poulpes des profondeurs  
Et parmi les algues nagent les poissons images du Sauveur

Tu es dans le jardin d'une auberge aux environs de Prague  
Tu te sens tout heureux une rose est sur la table  
Et tu observes au lieu d'écrire ton conte en prose  
La cétoine qui dort dans le cœur de la rose

Épouvanté tu te vois dessiné dans les agates de Saint-Vit  
Tu étais triste à mourir le jour où tu t'y vis  
Tu ressembles au Lazare affolé par le jour  
Les aiguilles de l'horloge du quartier juif vont à rebours  
Et tu recules aussi dans ta vie lentement  
En montant au Hradchin et le soir en écoutant  
Dans les tavernes chanter des chansons tchèques

Te voici à Marseille au milieu des pastèques

Te voici à Coblenz à l'hôtel du Géant

Te voici à Rome assis sous un néflier du Japon

Te voici à Amsterdam avec une jeune fille que tu trouves  
belle et qui est laide  
Elle doit se marier avec un étudiant de Leyde

Now you are on the Riviera among  
The lemon-trees that flower all year long  
With your friends you go for a sail on the sea  
One is from Nice one from Menton and two from La Turbie  
The polypuses in the depths fill us with horror  
And in the seaweed fishes swim emblems of the Saviour

You are in an inn-garden near Prague  
You feel perfectly happy a rose is on the table  
And you observe instead of writing your story in prose  
The chafer asleep in the heart of the rose

Appalled you see your image in the agates of Saint Vitus  
That day you were fit to die with sadness  
You look like Lazarus frantic in the daylight  
The hands of the clock in the Jewish quarter go to left  
from right

And you too live slowly backwards  
Climbing up to the Hradchin or listening as night falls  
To Czech songs being sung in taverns

Here you are in Marseilles among the water-melons

Here you are in Coblenz at the Giant's Hostelry

Here you are in Rome under a Japanese medlar-tree

Here you are in Amsterdam with an ill-favoured maiden  
You find her beautiful she is engaged to a student  
in Leyden

On y loue des chambres en latin Cubicula locanda  
Je m'en souviens j'y ai passé trois jours et autant à Gouda

Tu es à Paris chez le juge d'instruction  
Comme un criminel on te met en état d'arrestation

Tu as fait de douloureux et de joyeux voyages  
Avant de t'apercevoir du mensonge et de l'âge  
Tu as souffert de l'amour à vingt et à trente ans  
J'ai vécu comme un fou et j'ai perdu mon temps  
Tu n'oses plus regarder tes mains et à tous moments  
je voudrais sangloter  
Sur toi sur celle que j'aime sur tout ce qui t'a épouvanté

Tu regardes les yeux pleins de larmes ces pauvres  
émigrants

Ils croient en Dieu ils prient les femmes allaitent des enfants  
Ils emplissent de leur odeur le hall de la gare Saint-Lazare  
Ils ont foi dans leur étoile comme les rois-mages  
Ils espèrent gagner de l'argent dans l'Argentine  
Et revenir dans leur pays après avoir fait fortune  
Une famille transporte un édredon rouge comme vous  
transportez votre cœur

Cet édredon et nos rêves sont aussi irréels  
Quelques-uns de ces émigrants restent ici et se logent  
Rue des Rosiers ou rue des Écouffes dans des bouges  
Je les ai vus souvent le soir ils prennent l'air dans la rue  
Et se déplacent rarement comme les pièces aux échecs  
Il y a surtout des Juifs leurs femmes portent perruque  
Elles restent assises exsangues au fond des boutiques

There they let their rooms in Latin cubicula locanda  
I remember I spent three days there and as many in Gouda

You are in Paris with the examining magistrate  
They clap you in gaol like a common reprobate

Grievous and joyous voyages you made  
Before you knew what falsehood was and age  
At twenty you suffered from love and at thirty again  
My life was folly and my days in vain  
You dare not look at your hands tears haunt my eyes  
For you for her I love and all the old miseries

Weeping you watch the wretched emigrants  
They believe in God they pray the women suckle their  
infants

They fill with their smell the station of Saint-Lazare  
Like the wise men from the east they have faith in their  
star

They hope to prosper in the Argentine  
And to come home having made their fortune  
A family transports a red eiderdown as you your heart  
An eiderdown as unreal as our dreams  
Some go no further doss in the stews  
Of the Rue des Rosiers or the Rue des Ecouffes  
Often in the streets I have seen them in the gloaming  
Taking the air and like chessmen seldom moving  
They are mostly Jews the wives wear wigs and in  
The depths of shadowy dens bloodless sit on and on

Tu es debout devant le zinc d'un bar crapuleux  
Tu prends un café à deux sous parmi les malheureux

Tu es la nuit dans un grand restaurant

Ces femmes ne sont pas méchantes elles ont des soucis  
cependant  
Toutes même la plus laide a fait souffrir son amant

Elle est la fille d'un sergent de ville de Jersey

Ses mains que je n'avais pas vues sont dures et gercées

J'ai une pitié immense pour les coutures de son ventre

J'humilie maintenant à une pauvre fille au rire horrible  
ma bouche

Tu es seul le matin va venir  
Les laitiers font tinter leurs bidons dans les rues

La nuit s'éloigne ainsi qu'une belle Métive  
C'est Ferdine la fausse ou Léa l'attentive

Et tu bois cet alcool brûlant comme ta vie  
Ta vie que tu bois comme une eau-de-vie

You stand at the bar of a crapulous café  
Drinking coffee at two sous a time in the midst of the  
unhappy

It is night you are in a restaurant it is superior

These women are decent enough they have their troubles  
however  
All even the ugliest one have made their lovers suffer

She is a Jersey police-constable's daughter

Her hands I had not seen are chapped and hard

The seams of her belly go to my heart

To a poor harlot horribly laughing I humble my mouth

You are alone morning is at hand  
In the streets the milkmen rattle their cans

Like a dark beauty night withdraws  
Watchful Leah or Ferdine the false

And you drink this alcohol burning like your life  
Your life that you drink like spirit of wine



Tu marches vers Auteuil tu veux aller chez toi à pied  
Dormir parmi tes fétiches d'Océanie et de Guinée  
Ils sont des Christ d'une autre forme et d'une autre  
croyance  
Ce sont les Christ inférieurs des obscures espérances

Adieu Adieu

Soleil cou coupé

1913

You walk towards Auteuil you want to walk home and  
sleep  
Among your fetishes from Guinea and the South Seas  
Christ of another creed another guise  
The lowly Christs of dim expectancies

Adieu Adieu

Sun corseless head

1950

BY CLAYTON ESHLEMAN:

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# Conductors of the Pit



MAJOR WORKS BY  
RIMBAUD, VALLEJO,  
CÉSAIRE, ARTAUD  
AND HOLAN



Translated, Edited and Introduced by  
CLAYTON ESHLEMAN  
*with co-translations by*  
*Annette Smith and Frantisek Galan*



PARAGON HOUSE  
New York

# NOTEBOOK OF A RETURN TO THE NATIVE LAND

At the end of daybreak . . .

Beat it, I said to him, you cop, you lousy pig, beat it, I detest the flunkies of order and the cockchafers of hope. Beat it, evil grigri, you bedbug of a petty monk. Then I turned toward paradises lost for him and his kin, calmer than the face of a woman telling lies, and there, rocked by the flux of a never exhausted thought I nourished the wind, I unlaced the monsters and heard rise, from the other side of disaster, a river of turtledoves and savanna clover which I carry forever in my depths height-deep as the twentieth floor of the most arrogant houses and as a guard against the putrefying force of crepuscular surroundings, surveyed night and day by a cursed venereal sun.

At the end of daybreak burgeoning with frail coves, the hungry Antilles, the Antilles pitted with smallpox, the Antilles dynamited by alcohol, stranded in the mud of this bay, in the dust of this town sinisterly stranded.

At the end of daybreak, the extreme, deceptive desolate bed sore on the wound of the waters; the martyrs who do not bear witness; the flowers of blood that fade and scatter in the empty wind like the

screeches of babbling parrots; an aged life mendaciously smiling, its lips opened by vacated agonies; an aged poverty rotting under the sun, silently; an aged silence bursting with tepid pustules, the awful futility of our *raison d'être*.

At the end of daybreak, on this very fragile earth thickness exceeded in a humiliating way by its grandiose future—the volcanoes will explode, the naked water will bear away the ripe sun stains and nothing will be left but a tepid bubbling pecked at by sea birds—the beach of dreams and the insane awakenings.

At the end of daybreak, this town sprawled-flat toppled from its common sense, inert, winded under its geometric weight of an eternally renewed cross, indocile to its fate, mute, vexed no matter what, incapable of growing with the juice of this earth, self-conscious, clipped, reduced, in breach of fauna and flora.

At the end of daybreak, this town sprawled-flat . . .

And in this inert town, this squalling throng so astonishingly detoured from its cry as this town has been from its movement, from its meaning, not even worried, detoured from its true cry, the only cry you would have wanted to hear because you feel it alone belongs to this town; because you feel it lives in it in some deep refuge and pride in this inert town, this throng detoured from its cry of hunger, of poverty, of revolt, of hatred, this throng so strangely chattering and mute.

In this inert town, this strange throng which does not pack, does not mix: clever at discovering the point of disencasement, of flight, of dodging. This throng which does not know how to throng, this throng, clearly so perfectly alone under this sun, like a woman one thought completely occupied with her lyric cadence, who abruptly challenges a hypothetical rain and enjoins it not to fall; or like a rapid sign of the cross without perceptive motive; or like the sudden grave animality of a peasant, urinating standing, her legs parted, stiff.

In this inert town, this desolate throng under the sun, not connected with anything that is expressed, asserted, released in broad earth day-

light, its own. Neither with Josephine, Empress of the French, dreaming way up there above the nigger scum. Nor with the liberator fixed in his whitewashed stone liberation. Nor with the conquistador. Nor with this contempt, with this freedom, with this audacity.

At the end of daybreak, this inert town and its beyond of lepers, of consumption, of famines, of fears squatting in the ravines, fears perched in the trees, fears dug in the ground, fears adrift in the sky, piles of fears and their fumaroles of anguish.

At the end of daybreak, the morne forgotten, forgetful of leaping.

At the end of daybreak, the morne in restless, docile hooves—its malarial blood routs the sun with its overheated pulse.

At the end of daybreak, the restrained conflagration of the morne, like a sob gagged on the verge of a bloodthirsty burst, in quest of an ignition that slips away and ignores itself.

At the end of daybreak, the morne crouching before bulimia on the lookout for tuns and mills, slowly vomiting out its human fatigue, the morne solitary and its blood shed, the morne bandaged in shadows, the morne and its ditches of fear, the morne and its great hands of wind.

At the end of daybreak, the famished morne and no one knows better than this bastard morne why the suicide choked with a little help from his hypoglossal jamming his tongue backward to swallow it; why a woman seems to float belly up on the Capot River (her chiaroscuro body submissively organized at the command of her navel) but she is only a bundle of sonorous water.

And neither the teacher in his classroom, nor the priest at catechism will be able to get a word out of this sleepy little nigger, no matter how energetically they drum on his shorn skull, for starvation has quicksanded his voice into the swamp of hunger (a word-one-single-word and we-will-forget-about-Queen-Blanche-of-Castille, a-word-one-single-word, you-should-see-this-little-savage-who-doesn't-know-any-of-The-Ten-Commandments).

for his voice gets lost in the swamp of hunger,  
and there is nothing, really nothing to squeeze out of this little  
brat,  
other than a hunger which can no longer climb to the rigging of his  
voice  
a sluggish flabby hunger,  
a hunger buried in the depth of the Hunger of this famished morne.

At the end of daybreak, the disparate stranding, the exacerbated stench of corruption, the monstrous sodomies of the host and the sacrificing priest, the impassable beakhead frames of prejudice and stupidity, the prostitutions, the hypocrisies, the lubricities, the treasons, the lies, the frauds, the concussions—the panting of a deficient cowardice, the heave-holess enthusiasm of supernumerary sahibs, the greeds, the hysterias, the perversions, the clownings of poverty, the crippings, the itchings, the hives, the tepid hammocks of degeneracy. Right here the parade of laughable and scrofulous buboes, the forced feedings of very strange microbes, the poisons without known alexins, the sanies of really ancient sores, the unforeseeable fermentations of putrescible species.

At the end of daybreak, the great motionless night, the stars deader than a caved-in balafo,

the teratical bulb of night, sprouted from our vilenesses and our renunciations.

And our foolish and crazy stunts to revive the golden splashing of privileged moments, the umbilical cord restored to its ephemeral splendor, the bread, and the wine of complicity, the bread, the wine, the blood of honest weddings.

And this joy of former times making me aware of my present poverty, a bumpy road plunging into a hollow where it scatters a few shacks; an indefatigable road charging at full speed a morne at the top of which it brutally quicksands into a pool of clumsy houses, a road foolishly climbing, recklessly descending, and the carcass of wood, which I call “our house,” comically perched on minute cement paws, its coiffure of

corrugated iron in the sun like a skin laid out to dry, the main room, the rough floor where the nail heads gleam, the beams of pine and shadow across the ceiling, the spectral straw chairs, the grey lamp light, the glossy flash of cockroaches in a maddening buzz . . .

At the end of daybreak, this most essential land restored to my gourmandise, not in diffuse tenderness, but the tormented sensual concentration of the fat tits of the mornes with an occasional palm tree as their hardened sprout, the jerky orgasm of torrents and from Trinité to Grand-Rivière, the hysterical grandsuck of the sea.

And time passed quickly, very quickly.

After August and mango trees decked out in all their little moons, September begetter of cyclones, October igniter of sugar-cane, November who purrs in the distilleries, there came Christmas.

It had come in at first, Christmas did, with a tingling of desires, a thirst for new tenderness, a burgeoning of vague dreams, then with a purple rustle of its great joyous wings it had suddenly flown away, and then its abrupt fall out over the village that made the shack life burst like an overripe pomegranate.

Christmas was not like other holidays. It didn't like to gad about the streets, to dance on public squares, to mount the wooden horses, to use the crowd to pinch women, to hurl fireworks in the faces of the tamarind trees. It had agoraphobia, Christmas did. What it wanted was a whole day of bustling, preparing, a cooking and cleaning spree, endless jitters about-not-having-enough, about-running-short, about-getting-bored,

then at evening an unimposing little church, which would benevolently make room for the laughter, the whispers, the secrets, the love talk, the gossip and the guttural cacophony of a plucky singer and also boisterous pals and shameless hussies and shacks up to their guts in succulent goodies, and not stingy, and twenty people can crowd in, and the street is deserted, and the village turns into a bouquet of singing, and you are cozy in there, and you eat good, and you drink hearty and there are blood sausages, one kind only two fingers wide twined in coils, the other broad and stocky, the mild one tasting of wild thyme, the hot one spiced to an incandescence, and steaming coffee and sugared anise and milk

punch, and the liquid sun of rums, and all sorts of good things which drive your taste buds wild or distill them to the point of ecstasy or cocoon them with fragrances, and you laugh, and you sing, and the refrains flare on and on like coco-palms:

ALLELUIA

KYRIE ELEISON . . . LEISON . . . LEISON

CHRISTE ELEISON . . . LEISON . . . LEISON.

And not only do the mouths sing, but the hands, the feet, the buttocks, the genitals, and your entire being liquefies into sounds, voices, and rhythm.

At the peak of its ascent, joy bursts like a cloud. The songs don't stop, but now anxious and heavy roll through the valleys of fear, the tunnels of anguish and the fires of hell.

And each one starts pulling the nearest devil by his tail, until fear imperceptibly fades in the fine sand lines of dream, and you really live as in a dream, and you drink and you shout and you sing as in a dream, and doze too as in a dream, with rose petal eyelids, and the day comes velvety as a sapodilla tree, and the liquid manure smell of the cacao trees, and the turkeys which shell their red pustules in the sun, and the obsessive bells, and the rain,

the bells . . . the rain . . .

that tinkle, tinkle, tinkle . . .

At the end of daybreak, this town sprawled-flat . . .

It crawls on its hands without the slightest desire to drill the sky with a stature of protest. The backs of the houses are afraid of the sky truffled with fire, their feet of the drownings of the soil, they chose to perch shallowly between surprises and treacheries. And yet it advances, the town does. It even grazes every day further out into its tide of tiled corridors, prudish shutters, gluey courtyards, dripping paintwork. And petty hushed-up scandals, petty unvoiced guilts, petty immense hatreds knead the narrow streets into bumps and potholes where the wastewater grins longitudinally through turds . . .

At the end of daybreak, life prostrate, you don't know how to dispose of your aborted dreams, the river of life desperately torpid in its bed,

neither turgid nor low, hesitant to flow, pitifully empty, the impartial heaviness of boredom distributing shade equally on all things, the air stagnant, unbroken by the brightness of a single bird.

At the end of daybreak, another little house very bad-smelling in a very narrow street, a miniscule house which harbors in its guts of rotten wood dozens of rats and the turbulence of my six brothers and sisters, a cruel little house whose demands panic the ends of our months and my temperamental father gnawed by one persistent ache, I never knew which one, whom an unexpected sorcery could lull to melancholy tenderness or drive to towering flames of anger; and my mother whose legs pedal, pedal, night and day, for our tireless hunger, I was even awakened at night by these tireless legs which pedal the night and the bitter bite in the soft flesh of the night of a Singer that my mother pedals, pedals for our hunger and day and night.

At the end of daybreak, beyond my father, my mother, the shack chapped with blisters, like a peach tree afflicted with curl, and the thin roof patched with pieces of gasoline cans, which create swamps of rust in the stinking sordid grey straw pulp, and when the wind whistles, these odds and ends make a noise bizarre, first like the crackling of frying, then like a brand dropped into water the smoke of its twigs flying up. And the bed of boards from which my race arose, my whole entire race from this bed of boards, with its kerosene case paws, as if it had elephantiasis, that bed, and its kidskin, and its dry banana leaves, and its rags, yearning for a mattress, my grandmother's bed. (Above the bed, in a jar full of oil a dim light whose flame dances like a fat cockroach . . . on the jar in gold letters: MERCI.)

And this rue Paille, this disgrace,

an appendage repulsive as the private parts of the village which extends right and left, along the colonial highway, the grey surge of its shingled roofs. Here there are only straw roofs, spray browned and wind plucked.

Everybody despises rue Paille. It's there that the village youth go astray. It's there especially that the sea pours forth its garbage, its dead cats and its croaked dogs. For the street opens on to the beach, and the beach alone cannot satisfy the sea's foaming rage.

A blight this beach as well, with its piles of rotting muck, its furtive rumps relieving themselves, and the sand is black, funereal, you've never seen a sand so black, and the scum glides over it yelping, and the sea pummels it like a boxer, or rather the sea is a huge dog licking and biting the shins of the beach, biting them so fiercely that it will end up devouring it, the beach and rue Paille along with it.

At the end of daybreak, the wind of long ago—of betrayed trusts, of uncertain evasive duty and that other dawn in Europe—arises . . .

To go away.

As there are hyena-men and panther-men, I would be a jew-man  
a Kaffir-man  
a Hindu-man-from-Calcutta  
a Harlem-man-who-doesn't-vote

the famine-man, the insult-man, the torture-man you can grab anytime,  
beat up, kill—no joke, kill—without having to account to anyone, without having to make excuses to anyone  
a jew-man  
a pogrom-man  
a puppy  
a beggar  
but *can* one kill Remorse, perfect as the stupefied face of an English lady discovering a Hottentot skull in her soup-tureen?

I would rediscover the secret of great communications and great combustions. I would say storm. I would say river. I would say tornado. I would say leaf. I would say tree. I would be drenched by all rains, moistened by all dews. I would roll like frenetic blood on the slow current of the eye of words turned into mad horses into fresh children into clots into curfew into vestiges of temples into precious stones remote enough to discourage miners. Whoever would not understand me would not understand any better the roaring of a tiger.

And you ghosts rise blue from alchemy from a forest of hunted beasts of twisted machines of a jujube tree of rotten flesh of a basket of oysters of eyes of a network of straps in the beautiful sisal of human skin I

would have words vast enough to contain you earth taut earth drunk  
earth great vulva raised to the sun  
earth great delirium of God's mentula  
savagely arisen from the storerooms of the sea a clump of Cecropia  
in your mouth earth whose tumultuous face I can only compare to the  
virgin and mad forest which were it in my power I would show in guise  
of a face to the undeciphering eyes of men  
all I would need is a mouthful of jiculi milk to discover in you always  
as distant as a mirage—a thousand times more native and made golden  
by a sun that no prism divides—the earth where everything is free and  
fraternal, my earth.

To go away. My heart was pounding with emphatic generousities. To  
go away . . . I would arrive sleek and young in this land of mine and  
I would say to this land whose loam is part of my flesh: "I have wan-  
dered for a long time and I am coming back to the deserted hideousness  
of your sores."

I would go to this land of mine and I would say to it: "Embrace me  
without fear . . . And if all I can do is speak, it is for you I shall speak."

And again I would say:

"My mouth shall be the mouth of those calamities that have no mouth,  
my voice the freedom of those who break down in the solitary confine-  
ment of despair."

And on the way I would say to myself:

"And above all, my body as well as my soul, beware of assuming the  
sterile attitude of a spectator, for life is not a spectacle, a sea of miseries  
is not a proscenium, a man screaming is not a dancing bear . . ."

And behold here I am!

Once again this life hobbling before me, what am I saying life, *this*  
*death*, this death without sense or piety, this death that so pathetically  
falls short of greatness, the dazzling pettiness of this death, this death  
hobbling from pettiness to pettiness; these shovelfuls of petty greeds  
over the conquistador; these shovelfuls of petty flunkies over the great  
savagely, these shovelfuls of petty souls over the three-souled Carib,  
and all these deaths futile  
absurdities under the splashing of my open conscience  
tragic futilities lit up by this single noctiluca

and I alone, sudden stage of this daybreak when the apocalypse of  
monsters cavorts then, capsized, hushes  
warm election of cinders, of ruins and collapses  
—One more thing! only one, but please make it only one: I have no right  
to measure life by my sooty finger span; to reduce myself to this little  
ellipsoidal nothing trembling four fingers above the line, I a man, to so  
overturn creation, that I include myself between latitude and longitude!

At the end of daybreak,  
the male thirst and the desire stubborn,  
here I am, severed from the cool oases of brotherhood  
this so modest nothing bristles with hard splinters  
this too safe horizon is startled like a jailer.

Your last triumph, tenacious crow of Treason.

What is mine, these few thousand deathbearers who mill in the cala-  
bash of an island and mine too, the archipelago arched with an an-  
guished desire to negate itself, as if from maternal anxiety to protect this  
impossibly delicate tenuity separating one America from another; and  
these loins which secrete for Europe the hearty liquor of a Gulf Stream,  
and one of the two slopes of incandescence between which the Equator  
tightropewalks toward Africa. And my nonfence island, its brave audac-  
ity standing at the stern of this Polynesia, before it, Guadeloupe, split  
in two down its dorsal line and equal in poverty to us, Haiti where  
negritude rose for the first time and stated that it believed in its human-  
ity and the funny little tail of Florida where the strangulation of a  
nigger is being completed, and Africa gigantically caterpillaring up to  
the Hispanic foot of Europe, its nakedness where Death scythes widely.

And I say to myself Bordeaux and Nantes and Liverpool and New  
York and San Francisco

not an inch of this world devoid of my fingerprint  
and my calcaneum on the spines of skyscrapers and my filth in the  
glitter of gems!  
Who can boast of being better off than I? Virginia.  
Tennessee. Georgia. Alabama  
monstrous putrefactions of stymied revolts

marshes of putrid blood  
trumpets absurdly muted  
land red, sanguineous, consanguineous land.

What is mine also: a little  
cell in the Jura,  
a little cell, the snow lines it with white bars  
the snow is a jailer mounting  
guard before a prison

What is mine  
a lonely man imprisoned in  
whiteness  
a lonely man defying the white  
screams of white death  
(TOUSSAINT, TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE)

a man who mesmerizes  
the white hawk of white death  
a man alone in the sterile  
sea of white sand  
a coon grown old standing up to  
the waters of the sky

Death traces a shining circle  
above this man  
death stars softly above his head  
death breathes, crazed, in the ripened  
cane field of his arms  
death gallops in the prison like  
a white horse  
death gleams in the dark like the  
eyes of a cat  
death hiccups like water under the Keys  
death is a struck bird  
death wanes  
death flickers  
death is a very shy patyura  
death expires in a white pool of silence.

Swellings of night in the four corners  
of this daybreak  
convulsions of congealed death  
tenacious fate  
screams erect from mute earth  
the splendor of this blood will it not burst open?

At the end of daybreak this land without a stele, these paths without  
memory, these winds without a tablet.

So what?

We would tell. Would sing. Would howl.

Full voice, ample voice, you would be our wealth, our spear  
pointed.

Words?

Ah yes, words!

Reason, I crown you evening wind.  
Your name voice of order?  
To me the whip's corolla.  
Beauty I call you the false claim of the stone.  
But ah! my raucous laughter  
smuggled in  
Ah! my saltpetre treasure!  
Because we hate you  
and your reason, we claim kinship  
with dementia praecox with the flaming madness  
of persistent cannibalism

Treasure, let's count:  
the madness that remembers  
the madness that howls  
the madness that sees  
the madness that is unleashed  
And you know the rest

That 2 and 2 are 5  
that the forest miaows  
that the tree plucks the maroons from the fire  
that the sky strokes its beard  
etc. etc. . . .



Who and what are we?  
A most worthy question!

From staring too long at trees I have  
become a tree and my long tree  
feet have dug in the ground big  
poison sacs high cities of bone  
from brooding too long on the Congo  
I have become a Congo resounding with  
forests and rivers  
where the whip cracks like a great banner  
the banner of a prophet  
where the water goes  
likouala-likouala  
where the angerbolt hurls its greenish  
axe forcing the boars of  
putrefaction to the lovely wild edge  
of the nostrils.

At the end of daybreak the sun which  
hacks and spits up its lungs

At the end of daybreak  
a slow gait of sand  
a slow gait of gauze  
a slow gait of corn kernels  
At the end of daybreak  
a full gallop of pollen  
a full gallop of a slow gait of little girls  
a full gallop of hummingbirds  
a full gallop of daggers to stave in  
the earth's breast

customs angels mounting guard over  
prohibitions at the gates of foam

I declare my crimes and that there is nothing  
to say in my defense.  
Dances. Idols. An apostate. I too

I have assassinated God with my laziness with  
my words with my gestures  
with my obscene songs

I have worn parrot plumes  
musk cat skins  
I have exhausted the missionaries' patience  
insulted the benefactors of mankind.  
Defied Tyre. Defied Sidon.  
Worshipped the Zambezi.  
The extent of my perversity overwhelms me!

But why impenetrable bush are you still hiding the raw zero of my  
mendacity and from a self-conscious concern for nobility not celebrat-  
ing the horrible leap of my Pahouin ugliness?

voum rooh oh  
voum rooh oh  
to charm the snakes to conjure  
the dead  
voum rooh oh  
to compel the rain to turn back  
the tidal waves  
voum rooh oh  
to keep the shade from moving  
voum rooh oh that my own skies  
may open

—me on a road, a child, chewing  
sugar cane root  
—a dragged man on a bloodspattered road  
a rope around his neck  
—standing in the center of a huge circus,  
on my black forehead a crown of daturas  
voum rooh  
to fly off  
higher than quivering higher  
than the sorceresses toward other stars  
ferocious exultation of forests and

mountains uprooted at the hour  
when no one expects it  
the islands linked for a thousand years!

voum rooh oh  
that the promised times may return  
and the bird who knew my name  
and the woman who had a thousand names  
names of fountain sun and tears  
and her hair of minnows  
and her steps my climates  
and her eyes my seasons  
and the days without injury  
and the nights without offense  
and the stars my confidence  
and the wind my accomplice

But who misleads my voice? who grates  
my voice? Stuffing my throat  
with a thousand bamboo fangs. A thousand  
sea urchin stakes. It is you dirty end  
of the world. Dirty end of daybreak.  
It is you dirty hatred. It is you weight  
of the insult and a hundred years of whip  
lashes. It is you one hundred years of my  
patience, one hundred years of my effort  
simply to stay alive

rooh oh  
we sing of venomous flowers  
flaring in fury-filled prairies;  
the skies of love cut with bloodclots;  
the epileptic mornings; the white blaze  
of abyssal sands, the sinking  
of flotsam in nights electrified  
with feline smells.

What can I do?

One must begin somewhere.

Begin what?

The only thing in the world  
worth beginning:  
The End of the world of course.

Torte  
oh torte of the terrifying autumn  
where the new steel and the perennial concrete  
grow  
torte oh torte  
where the air rusts in great sheets  
of evil glee  
where the sanious water scars the great  
solar cheeks  
I hate you

one still sees madras rags around the loins  
of women rings in their ears  
smiles on their lips babies  
at their nipples, these for starters:

ENOUGH OF THIS OUTRAGE!

So here is the great challenge, the satanic  
compulsion and the insolent  
nostalgic drift of April moons,  
of green fires, of yellow fevers!

Vainly in the tepidity of your throat  
you ripen for the twentieth time the same meager  
solace that we are  
numblers of words

Words? while we handle  
quarters of earth, while we wed  
continents in delirium, while  
we force steaming gates,  
words, ah yes, words! but

words of fresh blood, words that are  
tidal waves and erysipelas  
malarias and lava and brush  
fires, and blazes of flesh,  
and blazes of cities . . .

Know this:  
the only game I play is the millenium  
the only game I play is the Great  
Fear

Put up with me. I won't put up with you!

Sometimes you see me with a great display of brains  
snap up a cloud too red  
or a caress of rain, or a prelude  
of wind,  
don't fool yourself:

I am forcing the vitelline membrane that separates  
me from myself,  
I am forcing the great waters which girdle me with blood

I and I alone choose  
a seat on the last train of the last  
surge of the last tidal wave  
I and I alone  
make contact with the latest  
anguish

I and oh, only I  
secure the first  
drops of virginal milk through a straw!

And now a last boo:  
to the sun (not strong enough to inebriate  
my very tough head)  
to the mealy night with its golden

hatchings of erratic fireflies  
to the head of hair trembling at the very  
top of the cliff  
where the wind leaps in bursts of salty  
cavalries  
I clearly read in my pulse that for me  
exoticism is no provender

Leaving Europe utterly twisted with screams  
the silent currents of despair  
leaving timid Europe which  
collects and proudly overrates itself  
I summon this egotism beautiful  
and bold  
and my ploughing reminds me of an implacable cutwater.

So much blood in my memory! In my memory are lagoons. They  
are covered with death's-heads.  
They are not covered with water lilies.  
In my memory are lagoons. No women's loincloths spread out on  
their shores.  
My memory is encircled with blood. My memory has a belt of  
corpses!  
and machine gun fire of rum barrels brilliantly sprinkling  
our ignominious revolts, amorous glances swooning from having  
swigged too much ferocious freedom

(niggers-are-all-alike, I-tell-you vices-all-the-vices-believe-you-me  
nigger-smell, that's-what-makes-cane-grow  
remember-the-old-saying:  
beat-a-nigger, and you feed him)  
among "rocking chairs" contemplating the voluptuousness of quirts  
I circle about, an unappeased filly

Or else quite simply as they like to think of us!  
Cheerfully obscene, completely nuts about jazz to cover their  
extreme boredom  
I can boogie-woogie, do the Lindy-hop and tap-dance.

And for a special treat the muting of our cries muffled with wah-wah.  
Wait . . . Everything is as it should be. My good angel grazes on neon.  
I swallow batons. My dignity wallows in puke . . .

Sun, Angel Sun, curled Angel of the Sun  
for a leap beyond the sweet and greenish  
treading of the waters of abjection!

But I approached the wrong sorcerer, on this exorcised earth, cast  
adrift from its precious malignant purpose, this voice that cries,  
little by little hoarse, vainly, vainly hoarse,

and there remains only the accumulated droppings of our lies—  
and they do not respond.

What madness to dream up a marvelous caper above the baseness!  
Oh Yes the Whites are great warriors hosannah to the master and to  
the nigger-gelder!

Victory! Victory, I tell you: the defeated are content!  
Joyous stench and songs of mud!

By a sudden and beneficent inner revolution, I now ignore my  
repugnant ugliness.

On Midsummer Day, as soon as the first shadows fall on the village  
of Gros-Morne, hundreds of horse dealers gather on rue "De PROFUN-  
DIS," a name at least honest enough to announce an onrush from the  
shoals of Death. And it truly is from Death, from its thousand petty  
local forms (cravings unsatisfied by Para grass and tipsy bondage to the  
distilleries) that the astonishing cavalry of impetuous nags surges un-  
fenced toward the great-life. What a galloping! what neighing! what  
sincere urinating! what prodigious droppings! "A fine horse difficult to  
mount!"—"A proud mare sensitive to the spur!"—"A fearless foal su-  
perbly pasterned!"

And the shrewd fellow whose waistcoat displays a proud watch chain,  
palms off instead of full udders, youthful mettle and genuine contours,  
either the systematic puffiness from obliging wasps, or the obscene  
stings from ginger, or the helpful distribution of several gallons of  
sugared water.

I refuse to pass off my puffiness for authentic glory.  
And I laugh at my former childish fantasies.

No, we've never been Amazons of the king of Dahomey, nor princes  
of Ghana with eight hundred camels, nor wise men in Timbuktu under  
Askia the Great, nor the architects of Djenne, nor Madhis, nor warriors.  
We don't feel under our armpit the itch of those who in the old days  
carried a lance. And since I have sworn to leave nothing out of our  
history (I who love nothing better than a sheep grazing his own after-  
noon shadow), I may as well confess that we were at all times pretty  
mediocre dishwashers, shoeblacks without ambition, at best conscien-  
tious sorcerers and the only unquestionable record that we broke was  
that of endurance under the chicote . . .

And this land screamed for centuries that we are bestial brutes; that  
the human pulse stops at the gates of the slave compound; that we are  
walking compost hideously promising tender cane and silky cotton and  
they would brand us with red-hot irons and we would sleep in our  
excrement and they would sell us on the town square and an ell of  
English cloth and salted meat from Ireland cost less than we did, and  
this land was calm, tranquil, repeating that the spirit of the Lord was  
in its acts.

We the vomit of slave ships  
We the ventry of the Calabars  
what? Plug up our ears?  
We, so drunk on jeers, on inhaled fog, that we rode the roll to  
death!  
Forgive us fraternal whirlwind!

I hear coming up from the hold the enchained curses, the gasps of the  
dying, the noise of someone thrown into the sea . . . the baying of a  
woman in labor . . . the scrape of fingernails seeking throats . . . the flouts  
of the whip . . . the seethings of vermin amid the weariness . . .

Nothing could ever lift us toward a noble hopeless adventure.  
So be it. So be it.  
I am of no nationality recognized by the chancelleries.  
I defy the craniometer. Homo sum etc.  
Let them serve and betray and die  
So be it. So be it. It was written in the shape of their pelvis.

And I, and I,  
I was singing the hard fist  
You must know the extent of my cowardice. One evening on the streetcar facing me, a nigger.

A nigger big as a pongo trying to make himself small on the streetcar bench. He was trying to leave behind, on this grimy bench, his gigantic legs and his trembling famished boxer hands. And everything had left him, was leaving him. His nose which looked like a drifting peninsula and even his negritude discolored as a result of untiring tawing. And the tawer was Poverty. A big unexpected lop-eared bat whose claw marks in his face had scabbed over into crusty islands. Or rather, it was a tireless worker, Poverty was, working on some hideous cartouche. One could easily see how that industrious and malevolent thumb had kneaded bumps into his brow, bored two bizarre parallel tunnels in his nose, overexaggerated his lips, and in a masterpiece of caricature, planed, polished and varnished the tiniest cutest little ear in all creation.

He was a gangly nigger without rhythm or measure.

A nigger whose eyes rolled a bloodshot weariness.

A shameless nigger and his toes sneered in a rather stinking way at the bottom of the yawning lair of his shoes.

Poverty, without any question, had knocked itself out to finish him off.

It had dug the socket, had painted it with a rouge of dust mixed with rheum.

It had stretched an empty space between the solid hinge of the jaw and bone of an old tarnished cheek. Had planted over it the small shiny stakes of a two- or three-day beard. Had panicked his heart, bent his back.

And the whole thing added up perfectly to a hideous nigger, a grouchy nigger, a melancholy nigger, a slouched nigger, his hands joined in prayer on a knobby stick. A nigger shrouded in an old threadbare coat. A comical and ugly nigger, with some women behind me sneering at him.

He was COMICAL AND UGLY,  
COMICAL AND UGLY for sure.

I displayed a big complicitous smile . . .

My cowardice rediscovered!

Hail to the three centuries which uphold my civil rights and my minimized blood!

My heroism, what a farce!  
This town fits me to a t.  
And my soul is lying down. Lying down like this town in its refuse and mud.  
This town, my face of mud.  
For my face I demand the vivid homage of spit! . . .  
So, being what we are, ours the warrior thrust, the triumphant knee, the well-plowed plains of the future?  
Look, I'd rather admit to uninhibited ravings, my heart in my brain like a drunken knee.  
My star now, the funereal menfenil.

And on this former dream my cannibalistic cruelties:

(The bullets in the mouth thick saliva  
our heart from daily lowness bursts the continents break the fragile bond of isthmuses  
lands leap in accordance with the fatal division of rivers  
and the morne which for centuries kept its scream within itself, it is its turn to draw and quarter the silence and this people an ever-rebounding spirit  
and our limbs vainly disjointed by the most refined tortures  
and life even more impetuously jetting from this compost—  
unexpected as a soursop amidst the decomposition of jack tree fruit!)

On this dream so old in me my cannibalistic cruelties

I was hiding behind a stupid vanity destiny called me I was hiding behind it and suddenly there was a man on the ground, his feeble defenses scattered,  
his sacred maxims trampled underfoot, his pedantic rhetoric oozing air through each wound.  
There is a man on the ground  
and his soul is almost naked  
and destiny triumphs in watching this soul which defied its metamorphosis in the ancestral slough.

I say that this is right.  
My back will victoriously exploit the chalaza of fibers.

I will deck my natural obsequiousness with gratitude  
And the silver-braided bullshit of the postillion of Havana, lyrical  
baboon pimp for the glamour of slavery, will be more than a match  
for my enthusiasm.

I say that this is right.  
I live for the flattest part of my soul.  
For the dullest part of my flesh!

Tepid daybreak of ancestral heat and fear  
I now tremble with the collective trembling that our docile blood  
sings in the madrepora.

And these tadpoles hatched in me by my prodigious ancestry!  
Those who invented neither powder nor compass  
those who could harness neither steam nor electricity  
those who explored neither the seas nor the sky but who know  
in its most minute corners the land of suffering  
those who have known voyages only through uprootings  
those who have been lulled to sleep by so much kneeling  
those whom they domesticated and Christianized  
those whom they inoculated with degeneracy  
tom-toms of empty hands  
inane tom-toms of resounding sores  
burlesque tom-toms of tabetic treason

Tepid daybreak of ancestral heat and fears  
overboard with alien riches  
overboard with my genuine falsehoods  
But what strange pride suddenly illuminates me!  
let the hummingbird come  
let the sparrow hawk come  
the breach in the horizon  
the cynocephalus  
let the lotus bearer of the world come  
the pearly upheaval of dolphins  
cracking the shell of the sea  
let a plunge of islands come

let it come from the disappearing of days of dead  
flesh in the quicklime of birds of prey  
let the ovaries of the water come where the future stirs its testicles  
let the wolves come who feed in the untamed openings of the body  
at the hour when my moon and your sun meet at the ecliptic inn

under the reserve of my uvula there is a wallow of boars  
under the grey stone of the day there are your eyes which are a  
shimmering conglomerate of coccinella  
in the glance of disorder there is this swallow of mint and broom  
which melts always to be reborn in the tidal wave of your light  
Calm and lull oh my voice the child who does not know that the  
map of spring is always to be drawn again  
the tall grass will sway gentle ship of hope for the cattle  
the long alcoholic sweep of the swell  
the stars with the bezels of their rings never in sight will cut the  
pipes of the glass organ of evening  
zinnias  
coryanths  
will then pour into the rich extremity of my fatigue  
and you star please from your luminous foundation draw lemurian  
being—of man's unfathomable sperm the yet undared form

carried like an ore in woman's trembling belly!

oh friendly light  
oh fresh source of light  
those who have invented neither powder nor compass  
those who could harness neither steam nor electricity  
those who explored neither the seas nor the sky but those  
without whom the earth would not be the earth  
gibbosity all the more beneficent as the bare earth even more earth  
silo where that which is earthiest about earth ferments and ripens  
my negritude is not a stone, its deafness hurled against the clamor of  
the day  
my negritude is not a leukoma of dead liquid over the earth's dead  
eye  
my negritude is neither tower nor cathedral

it takes root in the red flesh of the soil  
it takes root in the ardent flesh of the sky  
it breaks through the opaque prostration with its upright patience

Eia for the royal Cailcedra!  
Eia for those who have never invented anything  
for those who never explored anything  
for those who never conquered anything

but yield, captivated, to the essence of all things  
ignorant of surfaces but captivated by the motion of all things  
indifferent to conquering, but playing the game of the world  
truly the eldest sons of the world  
porous to all the breathing of the world  
fraternal locus for all the breathing of the world  
drainless channel for all the water of the world  
spark of the sacred fire of the world  
flesh of the world's flesh pulsating with the very motion of the  
world!

Tepid daybreak of ancestral virtues

Blood! Blood! all our blood aroused by the male heart of the sun  
those who know about the femininity of the moon's oily body  
the reconciled exultation of antelope and star  
those whose survival travels in the germination of grass!  
Eia perfect circle of the world, enclosed concordance!

Hear the white world  
horribly weary from its immense efforts  
its stiff joints crack under the hard stars  
hear its blue steel rigidity pierce the mystic flesh  
its deceptive victories tout its defeats  
hear the grandiose alibis of its pitiful stumblings

Pity for our omniscient and naive conquerors!

Eia for grief and its udders of reincarnated tears  
for those who have never explored anything  
for those who have never conquered anything

Eia for joy  
Eia for love  
Eia for grief and its udders of reincarnated tears

and here at the end of this daybreak is my virile prayer that I hear  
neither the laughter nor the screams, my eyes fixed on this town  
which I prophesy, beautiful,

grant me the savage faith of the sorcerer  
grant my hands power to mold  
grant my soul the sword's temper  
I won't flinch. Make my head into a figurehead  
and as for me, my heart, do not make me into a father nor a  
brother,  
nor a son, but into the father, the brother, the son,  
nor a husband, but the lover of this unique people.

Make me resist any vanity, but espouse its genius as the fist the  
extended arm!

Make me a steward of its blood  
make me trustee of its resentment  
make me into a man for the ending  
make me into a man for the beginning  
make me into a man of meditation  
but also make me into a man of germination

make me into the executor of these lofty works  
the time has come to gird one's loins like a brave man—

But in doing so, my heart, persevere me from all hatred  
do not make me into that man of hatred for whom I feel only hatred  
for entrenched as I am in this unique race  
you still know my tyrannical love  
you know that it is not from hatred of other races  
that I demand a digger for this unique race  
that what I want  
is for universal hunger  
for universal thirst

to summon it to generate,  
free at last, from its intimate closeness  
the succulence of fruit.

And be the tree of our hands!  
it turns, for all, the wounds cut  
in its trunk  
the soil works for all  
and toward the branches a headiness of fragrant precipitation!

But before stepping on the shores of future orchards  
grant that I deserve those on their belt of sea  
grant me my heart while awaiting the earth  
grant me on the ocean sterile  
but somewhere caressed by the promise of the clew-line  
grant me on this diverse ocean  
the obstinacy of the fierce pirogue  
and its marine vigor.

See it advance rising and falling on the pulverized wave  
see it dance the sacred dance before the greyness of the village  
see it trumpet from a vertiginous conch

see the conch gallop up to the uncertainty of the morne

and see twenty times over the paddle  
vigorously  
plow the water  
the pirogue rears under the attack of the swells  
deviates for an instant  
tries to escape, but the paddle's rough caress turns it,  
then it charges, a shudder runs along the wave's spine,  
the sea slobbers and rumbles  
the pirogue like a sleigh glides onto the sand.

At the end of this daybreak, my virile prayer:

grant me pirogue muscles on this raging sea  
and the irresistible gaiety of the conch of good tidings!

Look, now I am only a man, no degradation, no spit perturbs him,  
now I am only a man who accepts emptied of anger  
(nothing left in his heart but immense love, which burns)

I accept . . . I accept . . . totally, without reservation . . .  
my race that no ablution of hyssop mixed with lilies could purify  
my race pitted with blemishes  
my race a ripe grape for drunken feet  
my queen of spittle and leprosy  
my queen of whips and scrofula  
my queen of squasma and chloasma (oh those queens I once loved in  
the remote gardens of spring against the illumination of all the  
candles of the chestnut trees!)

I accept. I accept.  
and the flogged nigger saying: "Forgive me master"  
and the twenty-nine legal blows of the whip  
and the four-feet-high cell  
and the spiked iron-collar  
and the hamstringing of my runaway audacity  
and the fleur de lys flowing from the red iron into the fat of my  
shoulder  
and Monsieur VAULTIER MAYENCOURT'S dog house where I  
barked six poodle months  
and Monsieur BRAFIN  
and Monsieur FOURNIOL  
and Monsieur de la MAHAUDIÈRE  
and the yaws  
the mastiff  
the suicide  
the promiscuity  
the bootkin  
the shackles  
the rack  
the cippus  
the head screw

Look, am I humble enough? Have I enough calluses on my knees?  
Muscles on my loins?

Grovel in mud. Brace yourself in the thick of the mud. Carry.



Soil of mud. Horizon of mud. Sky of mud.  
Dead of the mud, oh names to thaw in the palm of a feverish  
breathing!

Siméon Piquine, who never knew his father or mother; unheard of in  
any town hall and who wandered his whole life—seeking a new name.

Grandvorka—of him I only know that he died, crushed one harvest  
evening, it was his job, apparently, to throw sand under the wheels of  
the running locomotive, to help it across bad spots.

Michel who used to write me signing a strange name. Lucky Michel  
address *Condemned District* and you their living brothers Exélie Vêté  
Congo Lemké Boussolongo what healer with his thick lips would suck  
from the depths of the gaping wound the tenacious secret of venom?

what cautious sorcerer would undo from your ankles the viscous  
tepidity of mortal rings?

Presences it is not on your back that I will make my peace with the  
world

Islands scars of the water  
Islands evidence of wounds  
Islands crumbs  
Islands unformed

Islands cheap paper shredded upon the water  
Islands stumps skewered side by side on the flaming sword of the Sun  
Mulish reason you will not stop me from casting on the waters at  
the mercy of the currents of my thirst  
your form, deformed islands,  
your end, my defiance.

Annulose islands, single beautiful hull  
And I caress you with my oceanic hands. And I turn you  
around with the tradewinds of my speech. And I lick you with my  
seaweed tongues.  
And I sail you unfreebootable!

O death your mushy marsh!  
Shipwreck your hellish debris! I accept!

At the end of daybreak, lost puddles, wandering scents, beached hur-  
ricanes, demasted hulls, old sores, rotted bones, vapors, shackled vol-  
canoes, shallow-rooted dead, bitter cry. I accept!

And my special geography too; the world map made for my own use,  
not tinted with the arbitrary colors of scholars, but with the geometry  
of my spilled blood, I accept both the determination of my biology, not  
a prisoner to a facial angle, to a type of hair, to a well-flattened nose, to  
a clearly Melanian coloring, and negritude, no longer a cephalic index,  
or plasma, or soma, but measured by the compass of suffering  
and the Negro every day more base, more cowardly, more sterile, less  
profound, more spilled out of himself, more separated from himself,  
more wily with himself, less immediate to himself,

I accept, I accept it all

and far from the palatial sea that foams beneath the suppurating syzygy  
of blisters, miraculously lying in the despair of my arms the body of my  
country, its bones shocked and, in its veins, the blood hesitating like a  
drop of vegetal milk at the injured point of the bulb . . .

Suddenly now strength and life assail me like a bull and the water of  
life overwhelms the papilla of the morne, now all the veins and veinlets  
are bustling with new blood and the enormous breathing lung of cy-  
clones and the fire hoarded in volcanoes and the gigantic seismic pulse  
which now beats the measure of a living body in my firm conflagration.

And we are standing now, my country and I, hair in the wind, my hand  
puny in its enormous fist and now the strength is not in us but above  
us, in a voice that drills the night and the hearing like the penetrance  
of an apocalyptic wasp. And the voice proclaims that for centuries  
Europe has force-fed us with lies and bloated us with pestilence,

for it is not true that the work of man is done  
that we have no business being on earth  
that we parasite the world

that it is enough for us to heel to the world  
whereas the work has only begun  
and man still must overcome all the interdiction wedged in the  
recesses of his fervor and no race has a monopoly on beauty, on  
intelligence, on strength

and there is room for everyone at the convocation of conquest and we  
know now that the sun turns around our earth lighting the parcel  
designated by our will alone and that every star falls from sky to earth  
at our omnipotent command.

I now see the meaning of this trial by the sword: my country is the  
"lance of night" of my Bambara ancestors. It shrivels and its point  
desperately retreats toward the haft when it is sprinkled with chicken  
blood and it says that its nature requires the blood of man, his fat, his  
liver, his heart, not chicken blood.

And I seek for my country not date hearts, but men's hearts which,  
in order to enter the silver cities through the great trapezoidal gate, beat  
with warrior blood, and as my eyes sweep my kilometers of paternal  
earth I number its sores almost joyfully and I pile one on top of the other  
like rare species, and my total is ever lengthened by unexpected mint-  
ings of baseness.

And there are those who will never get over not being made in the  
likeness of God but of the devil, those who believe that being a nigger  
is like being a second-class clerk; waiting for a better deal and upward  
mobility; those who beat the drum of compromise in front of them-  
selves, those who live in their own dungeon pit; those who drape them-  
selves in proud pseudomorphosis; those who say to Europe: "You see,  
I *can* bow and scrape, like you I pay my respects, in short, I am no  
different from you; pay no attention to my black skin: the sun did it."

And there is the nigger pimp, the nigger askari, and all the zebras  
shaking themselves in various ways to get rid of their stripes in a dew  
of fresh milk. And in the midst of all that I say right on! my grandfather  
dies, I say right on! the old negritude progressively cadavers itself.

No question about it: he was a good nigger. The Whites say he was a  
good nigger, a really good nigger, massa's good ole darky. I say right on!

He was a good nigger, indeed,  
poverty had wounded his chest and back and they had stuffed into his  
poor brain that a fatality impossible to trap weighed on him; that he had  
no control over his own fate; that an evil Lord had for all eternity  
inscribed Thou Shall Not in his pelvic constitution; that he must be a  
good nigger; must sincerely believe in his worthlessness, without any  
perverse curiosity to check out the fatidic hieroglyphs.

He was a very good nigger

and it never occurred to him that he could hoe, burrow, cut anything,  
anything else really than insipid cane

He was a very good nigger.

And they threw stones at him, bits of scrap iron, broken bottles, but  
neither these stones, nor this scrap iron, nor these bottles . . . O peaceful  
years of God on this terraqueous clod!

and the whip argued with the bombilation of the flies over the sugary  
dew of our sores.

I say right on! The old negritude  
progressively cadavers itself  
the horizon breaks, recoils and expands  
and through the shredding of clouds the flashing of a sign  
the slave ship cracks everywhere . . . Its belly convulses and  
resounds . . . The ghastly tapeworm of its cargo gnaws the fetid guts  
of the strange suckling of the sea!

And neither the joy of sails filled like a pocket stuffed with doubloons,  
nor the tricks played on the dangerous stupidity of the frigates of order  
prevent it from hearing the threat of its intestinal rumblings

In vain to ignore them the captain hangs the biggest loudmouth nigger  
from the main yard or throws him into the sea, or feeds him to his  
mastiffs

Reeking of fried onions the nigger scum rediscovers the bitter taste of  
freedom in its spilled blood

And the nigger scum is on its feet

the seated nigger scum  
unexpectedly standing  
standing in the hold  
standing in the cabins  
standing on deck  
standing in the wind  
standing under the sun  
standing in the blood

standing  
and  
free

standing and no longer a poor madwoman in her maritime freedom  
and destitution gyrating in perfect drift  
and there she is:

most unexpectedly standing  
standing in the rigging  
standing at the tiller  
standing at the compass  
standing at the map  
standing under the stars

standing  
and  
free

and the lustral ship fearlessly advances on the crumbling water.

And now our ignominious plops are rotting away!  
by the clanking noon sea  
by the burgeoning midnight sun  
listen sparrow hawk who holds the keys to the orient  
by the disarmed day  
by the stony spurt of the rain

listen dogfish that watches over the occident

listen white dog of the north, black serpent of the south that cinches  
the sky girdle  
There still remains one sea to cross

oh still one sea to cross  
that I may invent my lungs  
that the prince may hold his tongue  
that the queen may lay me  
still one old man to murder  
one madman to deliver  
that my soul may shine bark shine  
bark bark bark  
and the owl my beautiful inquisitive angel may hoot.  
The master of laughter?  
The master of ominous silence?  
The master of hope and despair?  
The master of laziness? Master of the dance?

It is I!  
and for this reason, Lord,  
the frail-necked men  
receive and perceive deadly triangular calm

Rally to my side my dances  
you bad nigger dances  
the carcan-cracker dance  
the prison-break dance  
the it-is-beautiful-good-and-legitimate-to-be-a-nigger-dance  
Rally to my side my dances and let the sun bounce on the racket of  
my hands

but no the unequal sun is not enough for me  
coil, wind, around my new growth  
light on my cadenced fingers  
to you I surrender my conscience and its fleshy rhythm  
to you I surrender the fire in which my weakness smolders  
to you I surrender the "chain-gang"  
to you the swamps  
to you the nontourist of the triangular circuit  
devour wind  
to you I surrender my abrupt words  
devour and encoil yourself  
and self-encoiling embrace me with a more ample shudder  
embrace me unto furious us

embrace, embrace US  
but after having drawn from us blood  
drawn by our own blood!  
embrace, my purity mingles only with yours  
so then embrace  
like a field of even filagos  
at dusk  
our multicolored purities  
and bind, bind me without remorse  
bind me with your vast arms to the luminous clay  
bind my black vibration to the very navel of the world  
bind, bind me, bitter brotherhood  
then, strangling me with your lasso of stars  
rise,  
Dove  
rise  
rise  
rise  
I follow you who are imprinted on my ancestral white cornea.  
Rise sky licker  
and the great black hole where a moon ago I wanted to drown it is  
there I will now fish the malevolent tongue of the night in its  
immobile veerition!

◆

## ODE: SALUTE TO THE FRENCH NEGRO POETS

From near the sea, like Whitman my great predecessor, I call  
to the spirits of other lands to make fecund my existence  
do not spare your wrath upon our shores, that trees may grow  
upon the sea, mirror of our total mankind in the weather  
one who no longer remembers dancing in the heat of the moon may call  
across the shifting sands, trying to live in the terrible western world  
here where to love at all's to be a politician, as to love a poem  
is pretentious, this may sound tendentious but it's lyrical  
which shows what lyricism has been brought to by our fabled times  
where cowards are shibboleths and one specific love's traduced  
by shame for what you love more generally and never would avoid  
where reticence is paid for by a poet in his blood or ceasing to be  
blood! blood that we have mountains in our veins to stand off jackals  
in the pillaging of our desires and allegiances, Aimé Césaire  
for if there is fortuity it's in the love we bear each other's differences  
in race which is the poetic ground on which we rear our smiles  
standing in the sun of marshes as we wade slowly toward the culmination  
of a gift which is categorically the most difficult relationship  
and should be sought as such because it is our nature, nothing  
inspires us but the love we want upon the frozen face of the earth  
and utter disparagement turns into praise as generations read the message  
of our hearts in adolescent closets who once shot at us in doorways  
or kept us from living freely because they were too young then to know  
what they would ultimately need from a barren and heart-sore life  
the beauty of America, neither cool jazz nor devoured Egyptian heroes, lies in  
lives in the darkness I inhabit in the midst of sterile millions  
the only truth is face to face, the poem whose words become your mouth  
and dying in black and white we fight for what we love, not are

Source: *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, ed. Donald Allen (Berkeley:  
U of California P, 1995): 305.

## THE DAY LADY DIED

It is 12:20 in New York a Friday  
three days after Bastille day, yes  
it is 1959 and I go get a shoeshine  
because I will get off the 4:19 in Easthampton  
at 7:15 and then go straight to dinner  
and I don't know the people who will feed me

I walk up the muggy street beginning to sun  
and have a hamburger and a malted and buy  
an ugly NEW WORLD WRITING to see what the poets  
in Ghana are doing these days

I go on to the bank

and Miss Stillwagon (first name Linda I once heard)  
doesn't even look up my balance for once in her life  
and in the GOLDEN GRIFFIN I get a little Verlaine  
for Patsy with drawings by Bonnard although I do  
think of Hesiod, trans. Richmond Lattimore or  
Brendan Behan's new play or *Le Balcon* or *Les Nègres*  
of Genet, but I don't, I stick with Verlaine  
after practically going to sleep with quandariness

and for Mike I just stroll into the PARK LANE  
Liquor Store and ask for a bottle of Strega and  
then I go back where I came from to 6th Avenue  
and the tobacconist in the Ziegfeld Theatre and  
casually ask for a carton of Gauloises and a carton  
of Picayunes, and a NEW YORK POST with her face on it

and I am sweating a lot by now and thinking of  
leaning on the john door in the 5 SPOT  
while she whispered a song along the keyboard  
to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing

Originally published in *Lunch Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1964). Source: *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, ed. Donald Allen (Berkeley: U of California P, 1995) 325.

Elizabeth Bishop

The Complete Poems

1927-1979



Farrar · Straus · Giroux

N E W · Y O R K

## Questions of Travel

There are too many waterfalls here; the crowded streams hurry too rapidly down to the sea, and the pressure of so many clouds on the mountaintops makes them spill over the sides in soft slow-motion, turning to waterfalls under our very eyes.

—For if those streaks, those mile-long, shiny, tearstains, aren't waterfalls yet, in a quick age or so, as ages go here, they probably will be. But if the streams and clouds keep travelling, travelling, the mountains look like the hulls of capsized ships, slime-hung and barnacled.

Think of the long trip home.  
Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?  
Where should we be today?  
Is it right to be watching strangers in a play  
in this strangest of theatres?  
What childishness is it that while there's a breath of life  
in our bodies, we are determined to rush  
to see the sun the other way around?  
The tiniest green hummingbird in the world?  
To stare at some inexplicable old stonework,  
inexplicable and impenetrable,  
at any view,  
instantly seen and always, always delightful?  
Oh, must we dream our dreams  
and have them, too?  
And have we room  
for one more folded sunset, still quite warm?

But surely it would have been a pity  
not to have seen the trees along this road,  
really exaggerated in their beauty,  
not to have seen them gesturing

like noble pantomimists, robed in pink.

—Not to have had to stop for gas and heard  
the sad, two-noted, wooden tune  
of disparate wooden clogs  
carelessly clacking over  
a grease-stained filling-station floor.

(In another country the clogs would all be tested.  
Each pair there would have identical pitch.)

—A pity not to have heard  
the other, less primitive music of the fat brown bird  
who sings above the broken gasoline pump  
in a bamboo church of Jesuit baroque:  
three towers, five silver crosses.

—Yes, a pity not to have pondered,  
blurr'dly and inconclusively,  
on what connection can exist for centuries  
between the crudest wooden footwear  
and, careful and finicky,  
the whittled fantasies of wooden cages.

—Never to have studied history in  
the weak calligraphy of songbirds' cages.

—And never to have had to listen to rain  
so much like politicians' speeches:  
two hours of unrelenting oratory  
and then a sudden golden silence  
in which the traveller takes a notebook, writes:

*"Is it lack of imagination that makes us come  
to imagined places, not just stay at home?  
Or could Pascal have been not entirely right  
about just sitting quietly in one's room?"*

*Continent, city, country, society:  
the choice is never wide and never free.  
And here, or there . . . No. Should we have stayed at home,  
wherever that may be?"*



Also by Kamau Brathwaite

P O E T R Y

*The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* (Oxford University Press, 1973),  
comprising:

*Rights of Passage* (OUP, 1967)

*Masks* (OUP, 1968)

*Islands* (OUP, 1969)

The second (Bajan) trilogy comprising:

*Mother Poem* (OUP, 1977)

*Sun Poem* (OUP, 1982)

*X/Self* (OUP, 1987)

*Other Exiles* (OUP, 1975)

*Days & Nights* (Caldwell Press, Mona, Jamaica, 1975)

*Black + Blues* (Casa de las Americas, Havana, Cuba, 1976)

*Soweto* (Savacou, Mona, Jamaica, 1979)

*Word Making Man* (Savacou, Mona, Jamaica, 1979)

*Third World Poems* (Longman, 1983)

*Jah Music* (Savacou, Mona, Jamaica, 1986)

*Sappho Sakyi's Meditations* (Savacou, Mona, Jamaica, 1990)

*Shar/Hurricane Poem* (Savacou, Mona, Jamaica, 1990)

*Middle Passages* (Bloodaxe Books, 1992)

P L A Y S

*Four Plays for Primary Schools* (Longman, 1964)

*Odale's Choice* (Evans, 1967)

O T H E R B O O K S

*The People Who Come 1-3* (Longman, 1968-72; new edition 1990-92)

*Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica* (New Beacon, 1970)

*The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820* (Clarendon Press, 1971)

*Contradictory Omens* (Savacou, Mona, Jamaica, 1974)

*Our Ancestral Heritage* (Carifesta, Kingston, Jamaica, 1976)

*Wars of Respect* (API, Kingston, Jamaica, 1977)

*Jamaica Poetry: A Checklist 1686-1978* (Jamaica Library Service, Kingston, 1979)

*Barbados Poetry: A Checklist* (Savacou, Jamaica, 1979)

*The Colonial Encounter: Language* (University of Mysore, India, 1984)

*History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone  
Caribbean Poetry* (New Beacon, 1984)

*Roots: essays in Caribbean literature* (Casa de las Americas, Havana, Cuba,  
1986; new edition, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1993)

*The Zea Mexican Diary* (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1993)

# KAMAU BRATHWAITE

# MIDDLE PASSAGES



A NEW DIRECTIONS BOOK

Letter  
**Sycorax**

*forest Nzinga*

1

*Dear mamma*

*i writin yu dis letter/wha?  
guess what! pun a computer o/kay?  
like i jine de mercantilists!*

*well not quite!*

*i mean de same way dem tieflin gun  
power from sheena & taken we blues &*

*gone*

*. . .*

*say  
wha? get on wid de same ole*

*story?*

*okay  
okay  
okay  
okay*

*if yu cyaan beat prospero  
whistle*

*No mamma!*

*is not one a dem pensive tings like ibm or  
bang & ovid  
nor anyting glori, ous like dat!*

*but is one a de bess tings since cicero o  
kay?*

*it have key  
board &*

*evva*

*ting. like dat ole  
reminton yu have pun top de war. drobe up  
there ketchin duss*

*only wid dis one yu na ave to benn dung over  
to out out  
de mistake dem wid white liquid paper. de  
papyrus*

*ribbid & soff*

*before it drei up flakey &  
crink. like yu was paintin yu house*

*um doan even nuse no paper yu does have to  
roll  
pun dat blk rollin pin like yu rollin dough pun  
a flatten*

*& does go off ping pun de right hann wing a  
de paper  
when de clatterin words start to fly & fling  
like a ping. wing*

*wid dis X now  
long before yu cud say jackie robb  
inson or rt-d2 or shout*

*wre X*

*dis ya obeah blo X  
get a whole whole para  
graph write up &*

*blink  
pun a black  
bird*

*like dat indonesian fella in star  
trek  
where dem is wear dem permanent wrinkle up  
grey*

*& white flannel cost  
ume like dem gettin ready to  
jogg*

*but dem sittin dung dere in such silence a  
rome*

*it not turn  
in a hair pun dem wig/wam &*

*hack/in out hack/in hack/in all sorta back  
up & read  
out & fail*

*out & think &  
it even have trash  
can for garbage from all particles a de gal.*

*a Xy*

*&  
mamma*

*a doan really know how pascal & co.  
balt & apple & cogito ergo sum  
come to h/invent all these tings since*

*de rice & fall a de roman empire  
& how capitalism & slaveley like it putt  
christianity  
on ice*

*so dem cd always open dat cole  
smokin door a hell when dem ready for ash or  
a psalm  
sangridge or*

*choke*

*Why i cyaan nuse me hann & crawl  
up de white like i use  
to?*

*since when i kin  
type?*

*dats wat i tryin to tell  
ya!*

*yu know me cyaan  
neither flat  
foot pun de key*

*boards like  
say  
charlie chap dance/in*

*far  
less touch  
tapp/in like bo.*

*jangles*

*walk/in down chauncery  
lane*

*yu hear/in me mwa?*

*but i  
mwangles!*

■

*a mean  
a nat farwardin wid star  
wars*

*nor sing  
songin no bionicle  
songs or like sputnik &*

*chips  
goin bleep bleep bleep bleep bleep bleep bleep  
into de peloponnesian wars*

*but i  
mwangles*

X?

*a doan write.  
ly know  
but yes.  
taday when a was tell.*

*in a ceratin girl  
frenn about*

*it/she kinda look at i funn.  
y like if*

*she tink i has ~~Xer~~Xes or aids*

*so she soffly soffly silk.  
in i off like if i is sick.*

*ly or sorrow or  
souse*

2

*Why a callin it*



*but is like what i try.  
in to sen/seh &*

*seh about muse.  
in computer*

*& mouse &  
learn.*

*in prospero ling.  
go*

*&  
ting*

*not fe dem/not fe dem  
de way caliban*

*done*

*but fe we  
fe a-we*

*for nat one a we shd response if prospero get  
curse  
wid im own  
curser*

*though um not like when covetous ride miss  
praedial  
mule*

*but is like we still start  
where we start/in out start/in out start/in  
out start/in*

*out  
since menelek was a bwoy  
& why is dat &*

*what is de bess way to say so/so it doan sounn  
like*

*brigg  
flatts or her. vokitz nor de*

*π.  
san cantos nor de souf sea bible*

*nor like ink. le & yarico & de anglo sarXon  
chronicles*

*&  
mamma!*

*a fine  
a cyaan get nutten*

*write  
a cyaan get nutten really*

*rite  
while a stannin up hey in me years & like me  
inside a me shadow*

*like de mahn still mekkin mwe walk up de  
slope dat e slide  
in black down de whole long curve a de arch*

*i*

*pell*

*a*

*go*

*some  
times smile.  
in nice*

*some  
times like e really laughin after we &  
some  
times like e helpin we up while e push.*

*in we black dung  
again*

*like when yu rumbellin  
dung  
into de under*

*grounn*

*on one a dem move.  
in stair  
crace &*

*like yu fuh.  
get like yu wallet or some  
ting like*

*dat  
& yu cyaan nevva turn  
back*

*nor  
walk back up  
nor*

*even run back  
up*

*outta there*

■

*cause de stair.  
crace  
crazy &*

*creak.  
in & snake  
skinn. in*

*it*

*down  
down  
down*

*&*

*how. ever  
yu*

*runnin up runnin up runnin up runnin up*

*it still*

*goin down  
goin down  
goin down  
goin down*

*like sa.  
hell*

*like sy.  
phyllis*

*like  
the edges of the desert*

*&*

*guess who down dey at de top  
a de line wid dante & dodo & julie &*

*nappo & nix & adolph  
kaisermann be. havin like one a de boys*

*but idi & splash & pol  
pot*

*&*

*a whole rash a economists pullin we up by we  
boot*

*straps & smo. kin  
pot  
bellied ha/ha/ha/ha/havana cigars*

*& grand master sergeant doe &  
brand new imperial corporals smilin of*

*cordite &  
leather*

*strap & vd & vid.  
eo*

*&*

*the  
striped eyes of nigerian tigritude  
& like what yu say happ.*

*enin inna  
libraria*

*all a dem brooks of the dead  
&*

**mamma**

*a know yu can plant lettice & nice but yu  
cyaaann eat ikebana*

*Yet a sittin dung here in front a dis stone  
face*

*eeee  
lectrical mallet into me*

*fist*

*chipp/in dis poem onta dis tab.  
let*

*chiss. ellin dark.  
ness writin in light*

*like i is a some. is a some. is a some  
body.*

# **Irae**

for Jere

a **X**  
*pert or some*

*thing like mooses or aaron or one a dem  
dyaam isra  
light*

&  
**mamma!**

Dies irae dreadful day  
when the world shall pass away  
so the priests & showmen say