

**NOTEBOOK OF A RETURN  
TO THE NATIVE LAND ...**

*by*

**AIME CESAIRE**

*translated by*

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*for reading on Desolo Luna Vox Theatrum*

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 cock-chafers 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 eschar 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'etre.

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 as 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, so perfectly alone under the 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 perceptible 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 daylight, 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.

And the end of daybreak, this inert town and its beyond of lepers,  
of consumption, of famines, of fears crouched in the ravines,  
fears perched in the trees, fears dug in the ground,  
fears adrift in the sky, of piled up 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 outlook for tuns and mills, slowly vomiting out its human fatigue,  
the morne solitary and its shed blood,  
the morne bandaged in shade, 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 beak-head 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 cripplings, 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 balafon,

the teratical bulb of night, sprouted from our villainies and our self-denials.

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 Trinite to Grand-Riviere,  
the hysterical grand-suck of the sea.

And time passed quickly, very quickly.

After August and mango trees decked out in all their lunules,

September begetter of cyclones,            October igniter of sugarcane,

November who purrs in the distilleries, there came Christmas.

It had come in 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 carousel horses,  
to use the crowd to pinch women,  
to hurl fireworks into 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 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 cocopalms:

*Alleluia*

*Kyrie eleison ... leison ... leison,*

*Christe eleison ... leison ... leison.*

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

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

And each one starts pulling the nearest devil by the 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,  
and the liquid manure smell of the cacao trees,  
and the turkeys shelling 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 the town advances, yes it does.

It even grazes every day further beyond 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 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 minuscule 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 mouths 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 of 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 gray 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 this gar 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.

Everyone 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 croaked dogs. For the street opens onto 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,

a perfect 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 and

you earth taut earth drunk

earth great vulva raised to the sun

earth great delirium of God's mentula

savage earth arisen from the storerooms of the sea a clump of

Cecropia in your mouth

earth whose tempestuous face I can only compare to the virgin and

foolish 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 wandered 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 prison holes 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 pity,  
this death that so pathetically falls short of greatness,  
the dazzling pettiness of this death,  
this death hobbling from pettiness to pettiness;  
those shovelfuls of petty greeds over the conquistador;  
these shovelfuls of petty flunkies over the great savage;  
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 crew of Treason.

What is mine, these few thousand deathbearers who mill in

the calabash of an island and mine too,

the archipelago arched with an anguished 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 tightrope-walks toward Africa.

And my non-fence island,

its brave audacity 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 humanity and the funny 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 calcaneus 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 putrefaction of revolts  
stymied,  
marshes of putrid blood  
trumpets absurdly muted  
Land red, sanguineous, consanguineous land.

What is also mine: 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 lone man imprisoned in whiteness

a lone man defying the white screams of white death

(TOUSSAINT, TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE)

a man who mesmerizes the white sparrow 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 ship's corolla.

Beauty I call you the false claim of the stone.

But ah! My raucous laughter

snuggled in

Ah! My saltpeter 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 stokes 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 large venom 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.  
Worshiped the Zambeze.

The extent of my perversity overwhelms me!  
But why impenetrable jungle are you still hiding the total zero of  
my mendacity and from a self-conscious concern for nobility  
not celebrating 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 blood-spattered 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 the  
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 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 new steel and perennial concrete grow

torte oh torte

where the air rusts in great sheets

of evil glee

where 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 and 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 indigent solace that we are mumblers of words

Words? while we handle quarters of earth,  
while we wed delirious continents,  
while we force steaming gates, words, ah yes, words!  
but words of fresh blood,  
words that are tidal waves and erysipelas and malarias and  
lava and brush fires, and blazes of flesh,  
and blazes of cities ...

Know this:

the only game I play is the millennium  
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 through a straw  
the first drops of virginal milk!

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 shock 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 loin-cloths 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 the neon.  
I swallow batons. My dignity wallows in puke ...

Sun, Angel Sun, curly 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 horse,

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 honor 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 Profundis,"

a name at least honest enough to announce on 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  
unfenced 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 superbly 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 afternoon shadow),  
I may as well confess that we were  
at all times pretty mediocre dishwashers,  
shoeblocks without ambition,  
at best conscientious 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 barracoon;  
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 vengery of the Calabars  
what? Plug up our ears?  
We, so drunk on jeers and 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 seething 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 street-car 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, Poverty was, like a tireless worker,  
laboring 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,  
over-exaggerated 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 in 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 live  
    even more impetuously springing up from this compost ---  
    unexpected as a soursop amidst the decomposition of breadfruit!)

On this dream so old in my 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 would.  
there was 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 dawn of ancestral heat and fear I now tremble with the collective  
trembling that our docile blood sings in the madrepore.

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 dawn 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  
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 gray 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  
coryanthas will then be poured into the rich extremity of my  
    fatigue and your 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 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 opaque prostration with its upright patience.

Eia for the royal Cailcedra!  
Eia for those who never invented anything  
for those who never explored anything  
for those who never conquered anything  
but yield, captivated, to the essence of 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 dawn 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  
its blue steel rigidities pierce the mystic flesh  
bear its deceptive victories tout its defeats  
hear the grandiose alibis of its pitiful stumbling

Pity for our omniscient and naive conquerors!

Eia for those who never invented anything  
for those who never explored anything  
for those who 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 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 the 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 a 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, preserve 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 of myself to become a hoer 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 reaching 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 grayness of the village  
see it trumpet from a vertiginous conch  
see the conch gallop up to the uncertainty of the mornes

and see twenty times over the paddles 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 ripe grapes for drunken feet  
my queen of spittle and leprosy  
my queen of whips and scrofula  
my queen of squamae 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 foot high cell  
and the spiked carcan  
and the hamstringing of my runaway audacity  
and the fluer 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 Fournoil  
and Monsieur de la Mahaudiere  
and the yaws  
the mastiff  
the suicide  
the promiscuity  
the bootikin  
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 the mud. Brace yourself in the thick of the mud. Carry.

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

Simeon Piquine, who never knew his father or mother,

unheard of in any town hall and who wandered his entire life ---  
searching for his 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 singing a strange name. Unlucky

Michel address *Condemned District* and you their living brothers

Exelie Vete Congolo Lemke 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 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

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

At the end of daybreak, lost puddles, wandering scents,  
beached hurricanes, demasted hulls, old sores,  
rotted bones, vapors, shackled volcanoes,  
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

and 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 a 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 cyclones and the fire  
horded 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 complains 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  
of man has only begun  
and man still must overcome all the interdictions 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 another like rare species,  
and my total is ever lengthened by  
unexpected mintings 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 themselves,  
those who live in their own oubliette;  
those who say to Europe:  
"You see, I *can* bow and scrape, like you I pay my respects,  
in short I am not different from you;  
pay no attention to my black skin: the sun did it."

And there is the nigger pimp, the nigger Makarios,  
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 of that I say: right on!  
my grandfather dies, I say right on!  
the old negritude progressively cadavers itself.

No bones about it: he was a good nigger.  
The Whites say he was a good nigger, a really good nigger,  
Lassa's good sole darkly.  
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, chunks 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 loud-mouth  
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 the deck

standing in the wind

standing under the sun

standing in the blood

standing

and

free

standing and no longer a poor madwoman in its maritime

freedom and destitution gyrating in perfect drift

and there it 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 clinking noon sea  
by the burgeoning midnight sun  
listen sparrow hawk that 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 !!

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  
to my side my 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 non-tourist of the triangular circuit  
devour wind  
to you I surrender my abrupt words  
devour and encoil yourself  
and self-enciling embrace me with a more ample shudder  
embrace me unto furious us  
embrace, embrace us  
but have also bitten us  
to the blood of our blood bitten us!  
embrace, my purity mingles only with yours  
so then embrace  
like a field of even filaos  
at dusk

our multicolored purities  
and bind, bind me without remorse  
bind me with your vast arms of 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 motionless veerition!