

ZONG!

M. NourbeSe Philip



*As told to the author by
Setaey Adamu Boateng*

Long!

As told to the author by

SETAEY ADAMU BOATENG

OTHER BOOKS BY M. NOURBESE PHILIP

POETRY

Thorns

Salmon Courage

She Tries Her Tongue; Her Silence Softly Breaks

ESSAYS

Frontiers: Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture

A Genealogy of Resistance

Showing Grit

NOVELS

Harriet's Daughter (for young adults)

Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence

PLAYS

Coups and Calypsos

Zang!

As told to the author by

SETAEY ADAMU BOATENG

by M. NourbeSe Philip

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deserves great art.

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requirement for recycled paper.

*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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Contents

Acknowledgments	xi
Os	i
Sal	57
Ventus	77
Ratio	99
Ferrum	125
Ebora	175
Glossary: Words and Phrases Heard on Board the <i>Zong</i>	183
Manifest	185
Notanda	187
<i>Gregson v. Gilbert</i>	210

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Qx

The sea was not a mask.

WALLACE STEVENS

Zong! #1

w w w w a wa
w a w a t
er wa s
our wa
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

www w a
w wa wa t
er wa te
r wat
er wa ter
of w
ant

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! #10

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! #13

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! #19

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! #21

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

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DICTA

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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 &
slaves
not
evidence
them was

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

the *oba* sobs

water parts

there is
creed there is
fate there is
oh oh oracle
there are
oh oh
ashes
over
ifá
ifá
ifá i
fa
fá
fa
fall
ing over
&
over the crew
touching there
is fate
there is
creed
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 be being she falls
 fortunes over board rub
 and rob her
 now i lose count i am lord
 of loss visions over and over the o
ba sobs from there to here bring them
 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

ifáifáifá

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
oh oh es es oh
es s o
s s o
s s
o s
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* *ave*
 the rat the rat *ave*
 ah we 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
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 l ace for a queen
my queen
there is pus

tempt all
and i
seek the *ratio*
yo for je
the fields
it was
a falling
come to term
the noise
a discharge
zen in frenzy
all night

night ride
do you
ruth
notwithstanding we
in africa negroes
too
de men
for me for
mi flee
gun bam
oh oh
a falling
in lies
in lives
ing might
nig nig nig
nag
nag
it is the age of guns

dire visions
me *dis moi*
might you
perils
dem cam fo mi
pour moi & para
bam
my fate
& murder
grounds justice
him touch
you and i
ruth
oh the noise
there was
& nog

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 gin
 am rum make the mast
 teak men
 who can cure
 me the cur
 drag the seas seven miles

seven deep
 days
 weeks for *ius* 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

you write to of
 mortality s
 lien on l
 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 am fall
am falling
am *sum* into
of all murder
am *sum* am
ame if
if
if only *ifā*
serve the *oba*
sobs again
the tea men there was piss *cum*
let s have some bile *cum* pus
jam and bread
port too
& leaky
teats 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
urance 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 *àse*

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
 was just
 seven
de man him
cam fo mi a fez
pon his head row row row the raft
 how *orí*
orí a gin nig
 nig nig *orí ob* 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 hear*
dogs hide the gods
are gone done
for hey
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

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

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

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

ora cold
 pray for me & heave men
 heave and
 pass
 the peas ignore
 the pleas
omi
omi
l eau
 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 *owó*
 guineas
cedis too i have
 guinea negroes
 they
 shed
 tears
 for *ifá*
ósun
 &
ógún
efun for
 ask for *èsú*
ame
 from
olú
 his eyes
 rage

would
 bring me death run mi
 to if he field from de
 could he man in de bat
 she died a tide cam fo dem mi
 on of red him fun fun
 up river me ode
 we dare where efun
 desire our mortality by the
 at dawn tail on the run
 if if if only
 was ifa yak yak
 yak yak
 yam pleas
 my
 own
 she negro the
 of wonder
 it a dower
 gift you for
 in the grain
 field the sun
 overhead
 in your
 hair
 gold as
 corn first
act third 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
 to circe
 i am
 the seer
 writ in sand
 lives rent
 in eve eve
 circe
 sings a tune a sad tune
 with no no
 tes moi
 je am he
 am she
 am at last
 omi water
 l eau
 il doge wears
 a hat it is red as is
 his cape up
 and
 down up
 down the wind
 and
 rose bail
 bail & bail
 water water the
 wind
 rose is wet
 no
 help *omi*
 omi omi under
 wind & up
 wind we sail
 with every

wind create a cat s
 the sea sing *te*
 cradle on
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
 write from his lips
 come that i
 shapes why
 though my hand
 are we here dear
 write
 this
 clair i
 for
 sam
 who
 is
 by
 my
 side
 there was
 agree
 on
 board
 pus
 too dear eve
 he longs
 piet says
 dear eva
 the news
 davenport i fear
 not good is
 today at ten
 at
 at four
 six
 &
 at
 seven
 my hand
 writes
 we seal
 the deal
 the sale
 of
 negroes
 on
 board
 the
 sail
 slap
 slap
 in

the wind
 some come from the fens
 others from the dales
 and the far of
 africa i want off a
 hat of
 fur for you
 ruth shine the
 negroes for sale the wig
 w ogs the nig
 the tongs nogs get
 hot irons hot
 sing a sing son
 g of
 sin 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 there be
 no free on
 board under
 writers tire
 of writs
 writ fine
 with sin

m lord
the questions can
we within
sin the law
can the law
west
sin sail
then east
west
east
then west
in the hang
of
rope there exists
a span
of pain
such
that
the of
poet the trope
that is
troy can
not but there own
property i is
say
in
troy in in pope
rome
in in negro
in
guns
bam bam
our eyes
skim the sea for
bodie s for the law in ius in
us in in bone how
os in many

did you did
i how many did we
sir what no a
queen say you
once now
my to the crew
whore
are we but bone too
men with
out
souls seed to
the ever in
us waits the
story 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
most a 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
with fur & red cape
for my once
& nonce queen
negro make the mast my she

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

a trail of
 lies
 my truth tame
 lead to
 the rage
 dance
 dance
 i say *act*
scene my
 set
 part is
 bring me my
 cape my
 mask my past
 clap
 play
 clap i
 captain
 king i
 pope
 play &
 god
 but
 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
 we
 dare
dem cam fo me
de man in de fez

his eyes
rage
adzo
ama
esi

not his eyes a
secret
race
with a taste
for the she
negro & port pus
& ague they
faint sam has a dose
of the clap too
and fine lace
lady flip her over for his & over
board was
a red dawn
were drawn they
down
ward
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
pleas
air

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

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

for sale
fon
ewe
san
lua *& rada*
pla
y man
p
lay
it s
an
old
tune
strum
it
for me
all
day
a
tub
of wa
ter
to
share
let us
claire
just
us
&
ius
slip
y our lips
over these
words
an other man
writes
in the
sack
of the
troy rage
of men
lives
the
poet

writes

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

to

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

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

the poet of
 the past
 it parts
 into then
 &
 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
 and shit
 liege dung my lord of
 life of death
moi ai
de mo *i aid*
e m *oi* *tbro*
 dance *odu*
 dance *fo* *me*
omi *se* *o ore*
 rk them *j ai faim* ma
 mark them mark dem *j ai*
faim j
ai soif dindin
 dong dung
 don din
 din don don don
 ding
 dong done

Ratio

No one bears witness for the witness.

PAUL CÉLAN

shave me
cant
now de
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
in clad
ring in fur the
carats how many
you ask
say ben the lad forty i dead
mi *omo*
mi *omo* dear
ruth this is a
cold an tale old told
note a tale one
for kate aria for clara clair

& etc ruth but
seal the
my tale hear
told
cold sh h
the
clarion
sounds for
me is it a detail
man
he was
of
mien hard
& the cold
the sobs sam sobs oh
was first
mate the
oba
sobs again
omi se
o ore over and over
again this greed
creed of is seeds the
new it sea s feeds the
the
lust tin for 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 & paint
 it do i
 have your
 ear i rave i
 rave i *rêve* *je*
rêve mes
rêves
les *rêves* in the e
 den
 of our gar
 den you and i ruth will
 have stag s boar s &
 deer carp in
 the river doves
 there
 will be dogs fish &
 grouse owls &
 tit s pea hen s too no pigs he
 negroes &she
 negroes *je* *rêve je*
rêve pain has
 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 *him*
big man him fun
fun hey hey
 hey here's
 an oar row row she rode
 the roar the awe of raw
 water *ba* *ba iya*
ifa one day a clear
 day it was no
 mist in the vale the dray
 cart the hay clipclopclip
 clop you and i rush
 & mud huts we
 will
 rush the huts *let*
we *rush de cap n de*
crew thud hold him
 lead her big
 with big
dat bat de fun
fun *man* this
 is a sin we will rush the
 captain the crew
 you ask
 me i beg
 dem fo *ayo fo sade*
fo *mi omo fo mi*
pic kin the sun s
 rays hot the gibes held him led her the negro rat
 a tat rat a tat rat a
 mates good men all who
 ever holds will my crew
 the globe spills the gore
 dan is just a lad *sit dem*
seb dem *eat beef* *dem*
have beer dem *lav a*
lav a the shit the piss

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 much port rest
rest rosa a hero rosa
says is ever alone
the deed must
be done rest says rosa me
want *fu* *fu omi*
water the dread deed dare
d & done drat the cat dear
ruth dear dear ruth i won her was
wont to bed her bet

told we were
 a good team sam
 and me no land no land no
 more
 for land
 the *san*
 of the sand *me*
wale me *king son run*
run save omo save
omo save omo omi
omi ob me *ob omi ob more*
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
pot is mi ju water for gin in *mi* *tête*
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 water cast lap lap lap
 wide for lies the net
 found truth in the hand to
 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
 or there the dog star
 over us i write i nod i
 write beg god drown
 my sin s in
 rum reel about the deck a raw
 deal weal s on her skin they lash
 her am spent
 now ruth can
 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*
orí mi orí mi *bead ma*
ma scene the same
sea ague gripe
 grips the gut the gun
 get the
 gun the man 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 side star board
all round port fore & aft i am
against some my tale fins sin shun crime i must re
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
mind ruth she was too thin hang
him over
board throw her him too rum
more rum time meet s truth in a pot
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
dogs run to ground not
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*
lé i *fè il é ifè il*
é ifè if only *ilé*
ifè 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*
àgbò wa àgbò
wa *àgbò* 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*
état the state against flag
 for *òsun*
 fowl *iya* *iya* m
 a ma *ema* we eat what
 is dead this
 story turns
 tail runs from the truth each
 word a stone
 to turn o
 ver & over lose find
 & lose aga in to fall from
 my lips & sink through
 the deep to the ruin &
 rune
 of bone there are
 suits there are writs 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 ifè*
 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
 fore negroes aft tap
 tap stag
 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

ame is nommo is water
is word was
a den a lair of liars on
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
africa is with me ever on
my skin my
of rose s ruth lips your scent 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 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
truth is worn thin my word
is my truth now drab
faded of no
worth we must we must i shed
my skin as does the asp am
no more who i was or am san 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*
niger from the niger
 with wings do i exist is it
 i i am ex
 man the sea is now a bod y
 pond and she the one i 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
 appears a pig sty sacks of corn
 & grain des
 troyed water gone did we care
 to spare them their fate us ours our fall
 they grow wings
des ailes las alas
 we be do *ebo*
for ori 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 bis 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 he died the lad
 ben of ague told me he had 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 you cry & a man
 of you there is now
 a lien on my
 soul
 à
se à se 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 all to king & 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 founds 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
 broad & 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 mend this i am
 god s agent here on earth our rule is
 just and we
 must but to err so far
 from reason it is a leaky tale i
 recite it holds no water with
 map and wind rose and a lamp
 to see them by we set
 sail crates of portginwinebeercider & water there were

even how long spuds live fowl pigs gone
 have we been
 too long we are lost this is
 a tale with the s
 ting of truth in its tail on her
 finger i tied a ring made
 from string for her my queen *afra*
 nigra she throws it over
 board has on her finger a red
 string for *san* *go* she says
 and dives
 once queen
 regina smiles
 and dives ruth pray for me ruth pray s
 for me i
 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
 fore they dive or fall grin
 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
rí orí 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 iya *sbe be*

queen my name is
 ted is dave is jon is tim is
 alf is piet is peter
 ishansistomisjim
 issamisroyisdonisned is mike is
esse is posse is can ah but
 it s a rum
 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*
the king i dare *appears exit* 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*
doge 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*
âme you have my *cœur* she has
 my *cœur* the raven
 soars i hear voices she has
 my soul fear
 grips me my rictus smile i hear
 voices *fa so* *la fa*

so la fa calms me don t *me so la she*
 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
pan no pain no no it can
 t be a sin overboard with you fish
 feed bit by bit turn meat
 to bone sea fans def
 end the dead *ori o*
ri gbo mi *mu* my queen she
 was but a toy the story can not stand the
 t
 ruth only *el* *son el son* my
 song long ago a tale was
 told with no begin or end where
 s the port and what
 my part come men the gin
 the rum read
 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 praereditis.
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

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*
d o *mi water if*
ifá can if *ifá can*
 if only *i*
fá can all that rema
 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 water arms was roar there
n pied fail him up flail limbs *un bras u*
 there a spear
 in his side thur

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

de *l'eau wa*
 ter o *mi* you say y
 ou capta in me i pa
 y master o ne cent for yo u i he
 ar the cri es a fist ag
 ainst he ad a we
 b of si n traps m e to sin
 with such e ase *wale*
 and *sad* e eat *fu*
fu den de fun *fun dem c* *am ba*
m ba *m b* *am d*
em ba *ve bi*
 g gun r un *wa* le ru
 n run s *ade ru* n see *wal*
 e run *sad* e too at ves
 per s i pr ay no har p or or
 gan *pa* *ter pat*
er j ai fa *im* will no o ne hear me
 his so n a spe
 ar in his si de thorns on his he
 ad red stain on his s
 kin can he turn s
 our water bil ge water into s weet water g
 eld him c ut cut all re
 d now her e yes two lamps in my very
 own nig ht we p
 lay at dice for the be
 gin in new tim e grows old
 so do es cir
 ce the crone t he hag the
 seer a cast in her e ye do
 le out the bil ge wat
 er they do le the water do
 le out the a le they do le out the al
 e we si p port she la
 y in ert we als on the sk
 in no gar ment to co
 ver her o r my si n we sha red her t
 he king mak es a dec la
 ration of w ar so too the p

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 y kin
 h who sit s g you al so serve rut
 and wa
 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
 g irons kin le 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 *les nègres* *sont gens pas*
 thin
 gs *pas co* *sa s pas pas*
the loan of his
pani *ola to the king*
bas gone
bad me o oni
 me be kin g me i
 as k you sp
 are *iya omo* me i pa
 y gui nea for *omo* me i sa
 ve the m *je rêve j* e *rêve i*
l rêve do you *rêve ru* th
 beg
 in where it 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 ne s
 it s a 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* *la*
mi *isola m* *on ile je rê*
vejerêvejerêvede r
 uth *the k* in *g wa*
nts to *ma* *ke*
lo *an of* *his pan*

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

to this me ss act s
cene anger
mark s the kin
g s mien bis an
have ca *ger is dan* *ge* *rous we must*
re they lie *on shel*
ves logs *tied one* *to the other oh*
the sin of i *t all hush can*
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*
the wa *ter for el* *pa*
n de vi *ta bread* *of li*
fe fo *r bo* *nes to* *e bon*
e he *el b* *one l* *eg bo*
ne hi *p bo* *ne ha* *nd b*
one a *rm bon*
e no *se bo* *ne e*
ar b *one fin* *g*
er bon *e hea*
d bo *ne bon*
e bone all *is bo* *ne wha* *t be t*
he be
at in b *one how*
say the o
racle bones eyo *ba eyo ba* *ab eab*
lo ong o *ba ka*
ka serab *fob*
la abpa serab fob
egon egon sura *sba 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* *y a 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 the m in
 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
 refore of who res who serve
 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 rica we had
 with us s lip s to gar

es of ti den with the tin
 me grip th e past w
 ill not let it go or me
 be nor will
 i o 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 on
 with so
 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
 was rs of n igs and n ogs there
 agree the re wa
 e there w as fren s grip zy th
 ere was e vil there was a
 men a nd a ve there was me he
 a & cul pa t
 re was gr ieve & wo e
 si n th ere w as
 no
 is e of neg roes oh th
 e no is e there wa
 s pro fit the re was
 loss there was ga
 in t heir loss
 do agree fo mi who ayo wh
 o ho o h oo o men o

f owl & a sp ye
ya ye
ya ye ya *ab y* *e ye ye*
ye ab ye ye i ro de the ma
 re to me et you th at da
 y on the da le fi sh sup a
 fin ger her e a le
 g there ma ke the ir ho
 me in bone o racle bones ah wo o
 ah wa ah wo wh ere is *wa*
le sa *de too a*
 nd a *de whe*
 re the hu t of ru sh ree
 d and red mud w
 here the ree d mat *sade ma*
 ke s for *wa* le who car es for a
de now & then a *ab who*
o ai ye ee wh 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
fa s *o la l* *a la m*
i fa *so r* *e re d* *o do mi*
f *a so so la* do on bo
 ard we ha d spu ds win e por
 t ru 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*
je
su pi *e jes* *u sanctus santuc* *sanctus ag*
nu s dei in *san* *ctus* there i
s san say *a sa* *nctus* for m
e a san
ctus to the s *ea a s*
anctus to the s *an san* *s san s*
san s s *anctus* i
 am we a re their e
 yes stare see thin gs we ne
 ver wil I let my s tory my tal
 e my g est gift ri
 se up in ti me to sn
 ap the sp ine of tim e *pat*
er pa *ter* say a *pie je*
su for me add a s *anctus* th
 row in an ag *nu s dei p*
ater for me a *mi*
sa una m *isa* how man
 y gu ineas for a *mis*
a pate
 r prat e the a
ve ma *ri a pra*
 y *pa* *ter* pray f or me
 for th em sa y a *san*
ctus f or the s ea but dr
 own the can t *pater* i t is do ne lots
 of *pi* *etas* to o *pa*
ter
 & *fi*
des & *sp* *es* dum d
 um de du m dum th e no
 ise the noi se th
 e drum it do es not sto
 p the o *ba* so bs a

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 *e je*
su our cr eed of no no
 t & new b less me *pat*
er i a m sin *o*
ri 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 op hi
 p ho p the to
 ad ho ps its pa
 te bare a r uby in its l ips it i
 s a story i cy c
 old in i ts de ep s th
 eir eyes star e at u s how m
 any s uns are there i see si

x me i h ave ten s
ons me big man me assure the r
um & the lo ss in o
s in u
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 d us
e the reed for a
ir ma re m
are all i s mare a
ll is se
a the y quit ho
ld of the ro pe fa
ll & s o qu it this li
fe par e the spu
ds a nd sp
are the ser mon s tie
the fee t se w the ey es sh
ut it i s do ne cap
tain d
rap e the tor
so the li mbs wi th li
den the nen in my e
n ow re is do ve t it and rave
of i l too th e ease
he crew i s no t sa
d nor the c apta in a to
ad by ano ther name i s un an
ge a rub y in he
c hang s r r lips the su n s dis
r us th e sa ed & ho t ove
se the sa me m me ru
ow s the f use you h ow it gr
nt eat har ear we hu 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
 e gold dun
 es rut
 h my m use i lo ng for y
 ou to hu g me to w row r
 o w row r ow r
 ow to ad and t it mo
 use in m y e den o
ri o *ri me b*
e thir *st* reams of no tes for y
 ou to so
 rt tend the m are the toa d hops o
 f f into the n ight drops its r
 uby pen the p ig pen the n
 ig sing a n o
 de to ni ght & to the s
 in un der the s kin to s
 ion nig ht s vo
 ice i swit
 hout so und the s un ve
 ers we a re out s ide of time and o
 ut of ti me dar
 e to step f rom trut
 h to wad e in de ath in d
 ying and di do flees her fat
 e to a fri
 ca finds i t their fa te o
 urs ru n to grou
 nd their f
 all our f
 all i t was a b
 ull marke t for g

uineas & gui
 es a b ear mark
 et in h
 ope nig ht fad es to da
 y da y to n
 ights her d ugs ha ng sa
 cks of d ry fe ar ho pe fad
 es to fe ar th ey eat t
 heir fea r and all roun
 d is f ear i mo
 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 *lé i* *fě* 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 igs 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
 es have ya w s the y
 aw s le ak p us
 there is n o new t
 hing here on e arth *de fun*
fun m *an come t*
ek we a way we li ve by old cr
 eed s ma de new the more to su
 it our de ed s have the r
 am tup the e we i tup & t op the q
 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
 ex aga inst her i se ek no g
 old no r tin no sap
 tin sap phire no r rub
 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

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
 r & w ill we sa il for a far is
 land for sunsh ine se a do
 gs in a wo rld of wa ter the wo
 nder of i t all in h
 ope that we le ave sin the sta
 in of ni
 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
 raise god ch arge s us w ith their we
 ll be ing will he c
 harge us with a c rime *i*
lé 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*
ow y *our s* *sin s*
 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 es the reas
 on a pin t of be
 er some por t to rin
 se my s oul of s
 in can a b at swim a s in die the
 y had mort ality by the t
 ail in did o afric
 a grafts r
 ome to her a s ecret so se
 cret the b
 ill was d ue the no
 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*
t waits for h *he ever in c* *den does not s* *ce all tha*
 and we g im fe aring f ear they
 ef of o ur st
 ory ear 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 ast we had *mis*
e en scè ne a shi
 p or v esse
 l the s ea man
 y negroes a ran
 t of rains the y ring they sin
 g they b eat u
 pon the d eck ho
 ld the e ar ring fast bo y so
me neg *oes had pil*
es leaky pile the saint of tro
 y and the de ad city ro
 me app ears to me
 at night *lang* *e de me* *r noir nig*
er afer her s ex we
 t her p aps leak p rop them u
 p *ilé* *ifè i* *lé if*
è il *é ifè se* w the lin
 en slip sh ut we ro t in this ves
 sel from s in sin
 g by rot e a stir ring son
 g their dy ing grist & g ift to u
s to se *cure a pro*
fit we u *se man* *y ruse st*
 heir swe at the sce
 nt we stu n the su
 n with o ur act it
 veers off i ts way we
 let win ter s frost fr
 om her urn no *a* *ve s or sal*
ve s only sla ves *às*
e à se so b
 e it the so und of the o
 ud on e id fa
 lls on u s on tu
 nis a st ring of n egroes on t
 he qu ay no sou nd the m
 an from f ez wa
 its to se ll to ma
 ke a de al *the sti*

ver with m c i ma ng of t he y ruth is e
 ar ru on a q th of th ift de is she re
 gro her na me is sa de i cal l se her as y
 ou w her di do u illre
 ad the poe t of t rope t
 roy & r o
 me wa le and s
 ke grist to b ade ma rew b
 eer whe re r
 iver me ets se
 a meets p ort there stand
 s a f ort of n egro
 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
 oo i mak e you a g
 ant they fa ift of hi m they p
 t a fla g for na int to plan 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* *dis* for forty
 sins *j ai* *faim j ai*
faim god of spire *spes* 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 *au* *di* 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 *mon* *coeur non est*
 we wind o ur way sub wa
 ter thro ugh bon e bed s o
 nly the bone s of the sh
 ip their e yes dart this
 way and th at soft so
 ft they ro
 am the ship their cri
 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
 gin in nil m upon a ti me at the be
 ue Nile a lin e the bl
 ill the sea groes gain t he shore w
 ad its bo give up its de nes cob s of co
 rain by gra rn sacks of g ce and by lar
 d *père* grant u s this da
 ig nig no y our n g and so
 up a rash of s in it was hang
 oard throw h him overb er never se
 en again mar ry time to t
 o me ruth the d ruth you t un horse wa
 its under the t s cede the l
 ree for u and grant us w rits *il doge* 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
 s their oh s th eir ahs ya
 weh what was s
 he worth *esta be*
 ey spent she *lo lindo* my *geld* is y ou *is op* my mon
 rs they ar gue water fle
 d water al ms and arms fo
 r the poet of t roy of the past
 that is no and now who writes o
 n water this po
 em of lo ss the shape of th
 is now b ones to sand t
 o clam s the tr ope that is tro

y is *de tro* p my limb s a
 che so to o my he
 ad i wish yo u were he
 re to sap i t with rum t
 o ease my m
 ind the crew c all them *bens*
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 boud van* u ever at the e
 nd of tim e go
 ld tun is they call on *d*
anb the rain se rpent of ti
 me they call *ai*
do we d *do bwe*
 ant fo r died n raw straw s w
 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
 the sin of s kin sing
 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
 will they c ebt ever use her as you
 ht they bra ame fall into t all his n he blue nig
 ve the wa ter sing a p
 raise son g that is a
 frica un
 der water a d aft boy sim
 ne grain of s ple in the he ad he was o
 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 ar s the t
 ruth i run fro
 m a run e a ru in of a stor
 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 ob wa *le* come s h o
 me *drisà de*
 af to their cri
 es can we m end this ma
 n this we g ive them *le m*
 ort the sea li
 fe water li ves they as
 k for wat er bread & l

trod the grou nd of tro
 y a king in rom e too he stro
 de we hunt fo wl at the for
 t eat sip beer from gourd s farts
 and other sounds from mouth
 and ass boast s
 of gold and guineas ten guinea negroes for
 one sapphire for you rose *j ai*
faim for ruth for t ruth
ius is just
 us the yams were
 bad they sail
 on a red tide o n a die
 t of bad y am and s
 our water so me fish co
 me be me for one day *lève*
lève rise *te* *k mi ju*
ju bold it sa *fe for i i*
 t is *ius* & just *how i m*
iss the ci
ty the s he negro ent
 ices me wit
 h her scent traps my lust my ho pe for you
 can a b at how about a ra
 t the scen
 t of you ru th wafts across
 s oceans *dans ma c* *bambre le code*
noire how i pet h er *ifá i*
fa ifá the r am tie i
 t to the ma st *le san* *g le sang*
 they sang i sang of grace he longs for gra
 ce were w e *ewe lu* a or *fon* could
 we come be m e this my bo d y my *sa*
 ng my bon e a rose bu sh in the gar
 den a sun r ose in my ede
 n *iyé i* *ye iyé* the rose is now
 sere *dis my ju* *ju* you no
 tek me o *bi* round go
 urds *gate fo* *ju ju and ob* *i* they fart p

iss they shi t in the ed dy of time *le*
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
 more we des troy the evi
 dence but the dust end ures now he
 s got the c lap *me lua*
you no lua to voy age thro
 ugh the age *sin* *deo* without g
 od or gold s in or sap
 phire come be me it was all
dicta their li ve s they soap the negroes rin
 se them lance their bo ils
 then o il them the rap
 e of tr oy ro
 me & af rica is eve
 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 *dic*
ta in g
 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 *âme* cu
 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 at no s 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 *wa*
le and *sa* *de* run from the
 field the river t he raft *ny*
ame me i be g you bring
 the lamp ma
 n let s see w hat we have
 here *bim d*
ead ob il *est mort bim* *dead* find
 the river run
wale ru n run s
ade run i dif
 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 *n*
yame ny *ame* we give be
 er to *nya*
me mea cul *pa mea c*
ulpa mea we 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 *va* *nona va*
ti revesa do 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 do not
read this ruth it will destroy you s
 am my lad jot these no
 tes these tunes fa la s
 o fa la m i so fa la i
 t is not a fit j ob for a la
 d his first ta ste of s in once only
 a tas te of mu
 rder leads to a taste *this is me*
our eyes ri ant only for y ma all is ri
 ma gin and be
 er gin and bee r the crew cri
 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
 why th em not u
 s why u s why no t them so
 rt the negro es one by o
 ne all creatio
 n mourn s this a
 ct they are pen
 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
le sang le song *le s*
on el s on there was a gue so
 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
 y dead and a nother & anot
 her they a ll lay d
why d ead *i hate the s* *in ruth so*
a i sif
 t the ne
 groes one from the o
 ther & stru

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

roes she ne iled so man y man neg
 t her if she res groes yam negroes hi
 ruth y our li ists i mis s the city
 rear and sad and we are b ps it grow s d
 ut slav es to sin our pi
 t the di g got go t our pig in a po
 n of negroes re of wa
 the lu ter and the lu
 st for war fins find the fu
 n in frenzy in s
 cent of le sang in n
 egro me 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
e 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
 took negr oes for s
 laves sla ves for ne
 groes i rid e my mar
 es of night hard alm
 s for the poet of t roy we
 beg *new scene* *il doge sno*
res a vase of as *ter s and rose*
s near
 by my soul
 flag s some di
 ve others a
 re throw n others th
 row them
 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 *it was a c ase of m*
 at insta *urder i te ll you in th*
 nce of s in he sees al
 I 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 la fa s*
o la mi m i fa so la am ra
 m am s am i a m am *am*
 e am ha m h am w
 e am h am a m h
 am *you we re so wa n the day i to*
ld you my sh ip was ab out to sa
 idum d um de du 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
pes & grin s a rict
 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 *will you sh un me r uth as the t*
ruth of my wo rds finds y
 au i ron for òg *in water for ò*
sun sang for s ango i seek the sk
 i n in kin they the k
 in in sk in we rend
 er them in to n
 negroes into b
 one s and & wat

er su ch wit he
ods we hid had the ne gro the wo
e & li e on m
oss *wal* e *sade & a* de hide i
n the woo ds no res
pite fro m o ver with her o
ver with hi m they se
t traps fo r *wa* le *sad*
e & a de i serve h
im they se rve me sit
rapt at my wo rds such an 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 saint s he
ar my p lea s such a fe at from k
in to s kin we tra
verse the se as let us in
vest in ne groes a bull ma rket bring b
ell brin g drum & tars
bring *do* n *don & go* n *gon* the op
era over we d rop her o
ver we eat e 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 ge lord they r
an and ra
n too la te for *w*
le for s *ade & ade* par se the t
ruth in m urder in s

in we are t heir bane ene mies to their lif
 e and we a re of f to me
 et our fat e their fa
 te a date i da re not mi
 ss foo d for fi
 sh for eel fea ring the truth t hey fret an
 d fret we eat ham and spu
 ds with port
 we rou se the su
 n with our a cts they with t
 heir cries the po et writes in sa
 nd a pra ise song for t
 roy & r rome for f
 ez & for the cit y for gold tin
 gis for all pla ces at the e nd of t
 ime & out of ti me for a
 fer the ter
 ra afra for y ou & all that i
 s lost first we bream the shi
 p of sea we eds be fo re we set sa
 il they pee r into ti
 me drug of a ll who li ve on bo
 ard there were d rum s & b
 ells so all co uld dan
 ce at eden the re is bre
 am & carp in ou r pond they fi
 sh for do ry up the run
 gs to the to p of the ma
 st lad wha t do you s ee *mi*
 se en sce *ne il doge we*
 ars a red tog *a the goat ru* ns so we can li
 ve in ease so you can li
 ve in great e ase figs and or ange s hot bu
 ns tea a se cret ra ce so a
 lien to all we hold dear *the*
 n she shows u
 s her bare a *rse and fall*
 s at night ba t s come out t
 o play how ju st is this on
 e bag of sp uds with grub

s the gib es the cur se s they cu
 rse us in t heir own words the most fou
 I 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 and s 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 omi ojú ye ye lantic 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 sbo ala o mi o
 o dò o fa un sbo ca ri be eb sbo 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 a la o fa un ma abu ob
 ob ye ye gari be eb ob ye ye ob mi
 sbo sob a bwa 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 dún 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 iyè we be ebora àkì ash
 es and sa It 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

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

leg *ba leg* give th
 em the se
 a to pro ve to kin
 g nation & f lag lend your e
 ar to their cri es mine
 too they giv e them selves li
 fe we gi ve them the li fe of bone n
 ow the sea gi ves up the se
 cret of bo ne es oh
 es es oh es os o s they ask fo
 r water we g ive them s
 ea they as k for bread we
 give them se
 a they ask for lif e we give them o
 nly the sea *was* *that a fair*
trade ruth i *ask you i*
am a fair man by b ell and go
 ng the crew dance a re
 el on board the negroes play the d
 rums to the de
 ep s with them they sin
 g as they fa ll bles s me *pater*
 i am all sin by wo
 rd and d eed bless him *pa*
ter give him this d ay his b
 read his wat er his profit s a
 bove blue oce an of sky
 waits cal m no clo
 ud under us bl ue sea the ear
 th groans it w as the dri
 ve for pro fit *douce do*
uce mi amo *r we be i*
bo we be sho na ban tu we b
e fa *n te edo & ra*
da that da *y at the man*
se we at *e were sa*
al and wine bet *ween us there we*
re no wil *es did I du* *je you ther*

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 solute in g od goo
 n for a t roy ou
 nce of go ld a ba
 r of s alt we be at our h
 eads *ob ye ye*
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 wri te a
ll ti
me me wa le you wr ite for m
 e such an un common man *me i s*
ay you writ e on pap er i wri
 te de ar sade you k
e my queen e ver me i mi ss you and a
de al l my lif ei a
 m do ne he ta ke s the pa
 per e ats it the n he fa
 ll s on his li ps sa
fá if de fé mi i
 á if á if o
 nly *ifá* he fa lls to the we
 ight & wa it in w
 ater i ca ll his na
 me & f
 all too t o my on

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Ehora

seas there is o
 this ~~to~~ murder my lord oh oh
 oracle within over my liege lord
 my ~~font~~ ~~less~~ time within loss
 there are my us
 oh oh a sin *ora* my we
ora ashes *video* my fate
 my god *ora* over *video*
ora pro ifa video
~~if~~ under crew from
 am captain *ifa i*
ford this is but an oration of loss own from
 fa time sands the ~~loss~~ ~~with~~ ~~ay~~ slave
~~fa~~ rose for Ruth ~~falling~~ from
 and i am writer
 over for truth from
 visions & mortality
 over and over over ~~suppose~~ truth
 the ~~crew~~ ~~to~~ ~~king~~ a sobs then
 no provisions ~~in~~ finding a way there is fate
le p'tit mort found there is creed
 from is scent of mortality there is
 to was a rule oh oh
 ought evidence she water parts
 falls the *oba* sobs again
 fa fa fa suppose ~~the~~ ~~other~~ ~~sails~~
~~falling~~ *ifa ifa ifa* with she
 truth a rose to negroes
 there is creed the port man
 there is ~~even~~ over negroes

dear Lisa
 Dave ask/s that i
 when did we decide you
 thought he had secret
 these words come from his lips
 my hand shapes them
 she
 sh/h
 apes all lips
 of dead
 of died
 not so loud
 sing sing again
 they sang
 a sad tune
 oh oh
 didn't the bell ring
 I come from the north
 with notes
 the dates
 sing again
 el song
 my ass
 land of mist
 of hoar-frost
 am
 am
 palm with
 the time and date of sin
 hoar-frost
 they
 sow the seven seas
 with ash
 with ave/s
 of dying
 the died
 the dead
 the dead
 live rent
 sing i say
 i come from
 i come from the north
 the north
 dales the
 land
 hey hey ho
 dales of mist land
 of hoar frost
 there is rise in
 the time and date of hoar frost
 of sin
 the time and date
 of sin
 he had an ace
 i a sequence of
 queens
 king
 Sam
 the rum
 dear Ruth can a tale be
 mortality by the tail
 north the by the tail
 if told
 ever
 cold
 a secret race
 calm/s
 lives
 of writ/s &
 rent/s
 calm/s
 calm/s
 the truth
 to the right
 to be sure
 writ in sand
 writ in sand
 lives life
 rent life
 when did we decide
 as sin
 is new

the seas
 there is with she
 creed there is fate there negroes
 is oh man there is negroes oracle
 my lie lord there are fate there
 ashes there are oh oh my deus oh oracle
 my we ashes ifa plus over my fate
 my god ifa over
 fa fa captain ifa i
 own from slave over falling ifa i
 fa fa writer under from fall &
 ing from over mortality touching there &
 the crew mortality touching there water parts
 is fate the crew there the oba sobs in there
 le p'tis there is fate mort there is creedh
 oh there the sobs mortality oh ifa ifa ifa i
 is again oh the
 she falls ifa ifa ifa i
 seas ifa ifa ifa i the ora
 seven falling time ora to
 within ora seas port ora
 ora ora pro over time
 this time within ora oration
 this is but an over within my fortunes time sands the loss
 with a sin you say time in i am
 video video video this is lord who says ration of loss but an o
 i say visions the loss a rose
 a rose for Ruth with over and over in i am
 and lord of the oba sobs
 no provisions for loss this from is o
 ver and o to was the seas then sows pose truth ver
 finding a way ba so the seas then the o water parts
 found visions from is with she the oba sobs no pro
 to was man a port sow

dear Lisa
 Dave ask/s
 that i to the right write Clara
 he sure these words the tune
 this in from his lips tears but hand shapes the air
 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 not so loud
 they pray for death the bell ring new isn't where are
 not *le p'tit mort* we since oh oh
 they shout *lisa* the crone dance *el* song
 we act the party has hit on *lisa* dance
 the facts a/gape hot dance sing again what does it mean
 Dear Ruth captain pain my goal a bag of
 the tale palm wine sad tune they no
 be told they lie they
 Dear Ruth sow the seeds notes th groan ma ma
 with ash if a tale a fortune in forts he sing am she mai
 danger point of gin had told and him o ba am
 ora my own to my & for me
 ora they love obs again fro groans the din of writ in
 ora the tale is old when did we decide once the dead the
 old as sin there is ruse indie sand
 Circe income from insure score lives rent life
 the crone the hag the seer the north the land dies
 she of the stars date Sam the rum of sin chu
 her lips gape wind strum/s the air sings a tune there is us dear Ruth &
 he strums the oud can a tale be os
 with no notes the ship cradled there is bone moi
 why does the shine shine so me rains
 our lust a secret race piss underwriters
 our loss all that is old lives & of writ/s am
 & rent/s in this new age bile cede he
 the truth ran pus am

ba/ba cold told sh/h
 iya the have your
 ifa clarion ear i shave me
 osu daly rave i revnow for je do you
 me A clear day it was it hear a detail him
 reves the no mist in the valport and an pass
 les the dray cart reves in the the he was peas
 the hay in the cart pleas of
 of mial ropidlopigalop hard slap
 & den you could der and i Ruth will slap
 the sail the robs Sam deer slave stag/s sobs oh boar/s &
 only mate the the river doves carpush & mud hwas fast
 we will rush the huts there the river doves when
 will be dogs sobs & fish aghes let we rush de &ap/n
 to seal grouse omi se thisowls &e cract
 tit/sopea/ten/s too woskinthud over pigs and of over
 hold him negroes &sheagain sin this
 negroes je lead hered of of rev what greed
 a deal reveipain has my
 elation abig with mes new rarit seeds the
 erase this riot that hat my the seal
 on erase me sea/s drasin/ra man deal feeds the
 ave well lust done for
 ave i see you tin this tea sin for gold
 ave comes clad we will rest
 slave in in fur restush the captain
 ring save the ave/reshowmy the pet many
 caratsave the salve/s my she
 negro how do the vale/s too you ask me I beg dem fo Ayo
 FortStro the slaves forty we parse i
 fanyi omo Ben the lad the deed is lay dead it one mi omo
 fo mi pic/kin or mi bidgewatearwith
 Ruth this many hows a scum for tea
 bite him dalle sun's rays told we
 him big could an hot praise old the
 him fun/fun dead the gibale itone
 note a is held him lesbher a an job well
 thyanbgre aria done for the Clair
 heyfain Kate for Galasay the
 hey & pain the Ruth &rat a tat for
 pain le pain le painetpan pant here's arata tat
 Dan Jon & Will parted the paint row row
 the revofinas waty & it shheard the roar i
 tale

found a n e g h e e s t h a v a s g i n m y u s i n a f r i c ?
 y / o u r e a r a r o s t a p i g g r o t t h a y a e r u m m y f a i t h n e g r o e s
 t h e g o d e r a s t e r / s o h o h o u t m i g r a t e m c a m f o m f o u n d a f r i c a t h e m a s t m u s t b e t e a k m e n
 w h a t i n t h e d e e d u n d e r w h o c a n c u r e m e s u n d r e s a p f a i n o p a i n
 w e d a i c s & w a t e c a p t a i n o v e r f o r y o t h e c u r t h a t t h a t p r o v e d
 j u s t i c e l a g t h e s e f r o m s a n g e r o m i e f o r j e i f a t h a t h a t
 t h e v e r t t h e l a w m y l i e g l a r d d e e p p o u r n i f a i l e c u t t h e c a r d s
 d a y s p a r a m a e * n f i r i n g d i g a n d e r f r o m i f a i I w o n t h e t h r o w
 w e e k s m y p l e a i s n e g l i g a n c e f i l t e r t h e f i e l d s e r s o s s o s s o f a t a g a s o f a t i n g l u c e
 f a m o n t h e f r o m u s i s a y o f w h a t s e n e y d o g e
 c o m e s f a t e a m o f o r o s m o r t a l i t y l a b i l i t y m a n o v a c e s s h e s m i l e s
 c u t h e r o p e n i n l i v e l l b e f r e n d s j n s t i c e s t a r s a n b e b o m i l e
 t h e n o i s e m i t e r c o r t i e r e t h e s u i c i d e I i n l i v e s & a m a d i s c h a r g e
 i n t i d e t h e m o r t a s t h e i m i s o v e a m s a v e t o s u c k i n g t h r o w f a t i n g
 l e p ' t i t m t h e c r e w t o u g h t l y o u s a l t i d e n t a m i s s y R u t h t h r o w t h e m
 o f s a l t o f m o r t a l i t y i n r a t i o n s m u n d e r s t a i s e i s f a t e c r u s t s
 b u t w h y R u t h t h e n a i n e s u m a m t o n e & t i m e t h e s e e r t h e r e i s c r e e d
 t h a r h o n e s s h e d o t h e s t a r s a p p e a r i n g n i g i f s h i n e t h e r e i s u n d e r i f o n l y
 & f a l l s i n m u r d e r m i d e u s & y o u g w a t e r b y s n a p a i d e o h o h
 h e r s h a p e f a i f a i f a s a l v e o u r s o u l s t h e f o b a s o b s a g a i n
 w i t h r a p e a n f a t i n g e i f o n l y i f a n a g t a u s o t h e n s e n s e i f a i f a i f a i
 s e r v e r o u n d b b n a s o m a i s a l l w r o n g p o r t t h e t h e o b a s o b s a g a i n
 a n d f i t t e r c o r m e n r u m r a i n n i g h t o v e r t h e r e w a s p i s s c u m
 s e a s m o r e r u m & m a i f e t a u t h e g a n g a p p l e n R u t h
 s e r p e n t e v e s t h i n t i l e t s f a v a s o m e r a s a l v e t h e s l a v e t h e y s a n g &
 w i t h h a f a n t u m j e m a n d a n d m y d o n t a d e s s a n g e w a s e d w i t h s i n w e m a p
 u n c o m m e n d e d e x p o i n t o s a l v e o r a p r o y o u s t h a l u s i g h t e r a w a t e r / s l e a k t i m e
 v i d s h e v i t a g r o s s e o w i t h i n e a s e a n d t o s i t e b e a k i n g p u t a i d e s o n t h e h i s t h
 m e a r k t h i s i s a r k t e a v e r a g r o u n d t i n d a p s i s a n g a v e o r d s u c h
 t h e t r a p t h i f i n g s h e r i s a y g r o a n s e a r o s e i p e n t h i s t e p o r d s h o l d s f i n g t h e t e r c o s t h e r
 j u p s e r t h e r o a t f o r R u t f a t n i g d u g s h e r e a t h e r t e a t h e s e r a x t h e v e r s e e y h i f a k e t
 i l a r g a t g o j u t h a z z s y t u t h e r e w a d l o t s o f e a t a i s o n a l l l o r d p a y m e n t
 n a t h G o d n o w e w e r e w r i t e f o r t i m t o y o f a g o d y o u a l a c e c a p f o r m y w h a t f o r
 y u G n d s t h e a r m a f c a n d l e s t h e c o m i t a b i l i t y s o f l i a r e o n l i f e a n t s i p s a p p o s e t r u p l y t h e n e g r o e s w i t h
 t o y s o v e r t a p h i n e t o t h e n t h e r a d o y o u h e a r t h e l u t e
 f i n d i n g l a d y g o l d f o s a o u l d c u t t h e c o r d o f t h i s s t o r y s o u n d t o r a i s e o b a s o b s
 t a k e e v e r y t h i n g i n b i s i t i o n s a p p e n o n f r o n t i s t m y c a s e
 c u m g r a n t h e p i e d n a s o t h e g o s e a t h e n t i s a p p o r t s o w i n n e g l i g e n c e
 w i t h a g r a i n o f s a l t d i r e v i s i o n s a t v e t h e s e h e a r t o u t t e l l / s m y p i l l e i g h t l y n i g h t s w a t e r p a r t s
 t h e b e l i n g o u g h t e v i d e n c e t h e t i n g a p p e a r i n g t h e o b a d i s t n e c e s s i t y
 t h e r e R u t h t r e e d t h e n v e d i c m u n d i s i o n s n e g r o a s a v e t d a y o u
 t h e r e i s e f a t e s u g r o a n g s a i t s t s u n a n t h a r o s e p r o m i g h t s o u t o i l e i f e
 t o l d c o l d a t t h e k i r o n i g a r s u g r o e s s o w t h e s e a n p e r d e r m y l o r d
 h o m e t o u n G l i m m y l i e g e t o r d u m s o t h i l l s t a n d i n g
 h i m h i n g s u m a r a v i t h s o s d e a r i d e a n R u t h o s w a y s d e l e s &
 h i e k o o u s I d m l s h e f a t s a t i o B e n r e a s o n

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
ail: 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

afēr: 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

Sbona

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
vati: they said
vene: owners
vese: all of them
viga: hide

Ṭwi

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
ẹ̀bọ̀ra: underwater spirits
ebo ori: sacrificial food
for Ori
Efun: Yoruba deity

Èsù: Yoruba deity
fun fun: white
gbo mi mu: drink water
Ífà: divination
Ilé Ifè: 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
iyè: mother
ju ju: an item which is be-
lieved to have protective
qualities
ní mi ní 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
Ògún: Yoruba deity of iron
Olú: God
olú femi: god loves me
olú sèyí: god did this
omi: water
omi didùn: sweet water
omi ebòra: water in which
spirits reside
omi mí mó: 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
Òsun: river goddess
owó: money
owó mi: my money
wa àgbò: look for the ram

Manifest

AFRICAN GROUPS & LANGUAGES

Bantu
Edo
Ewe
Fante
Fon
Ibo
Lua
Rada
San
Shona
Twi

ANIMALS

ant
asp
ass
bat
bee
boar
bream
carp
cat
clam
cod
deer
dog
dory
dove
eel
fish
fowl
grouse
hare
hen
hog
lion
mare
nits
owl
pig
pup
rat
raven
sole
sow
stag
tit mouse
toad
wolf

BODY PARTS

arm
bras
cunt
ear
eye
feet
finger
fist
hand
head
heel
hip
leg
lips
mano
nail
nose
ongle
paps
perma
pied
tak
teat
tit
toe
tong
torso

CREW

Alf
Dan
Dave
Don
Ed
Hamz
Hans
Jesus
Jim
Jon
Mike
Ned
Peter
Piet
Roy
Sam
Ted
Tim
Tom

FOOD & DRINK

ale
beer
bread
carp
cider
cod
corn
dates
éclairs
egg
gin
ham
herb
hops
jam
kale
meat
oranges
pea
pear
pie
port
rice
roe
rose water
rum
scone
sion (water parsley)
soup (egg drop)
spud
tea
veal
water
whey
wine

NATURE

asters
bog
cairn
corn
dale
fen
field
garden
glen
hay
mist
moss
ocean
peat
rose
sea
sky
stone
stook
sun
tares
vale
yew

WOMEN WHO

WAIT
Ans
Clara
Clair
Eva
Eve
Grace
Mary
Miss Circe
Rosa
Rose
Ruth
Sue
Tara
Um

Notanda

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There is no telling this story; it must be told.

In 1781 a fully provisioned ship, the *Zong*,¹ captained by one Luke Collingwood, leaves the West Coast² 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."³

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."⁴ 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.⁵ 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.⁶ 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."⁷ 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.”⁸ 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).”⁹ 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.”¹⁰ 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,”¹¹ 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.¹²

*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 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,¹³ 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,¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

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*¹⁶: 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*

There 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*¹⁷ 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.”¹⁸ 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,¹⁹ 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 questions 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.”²⁰ 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;"²¹ 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.²² 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"²³ 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.²⁴ 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”?²⁵ 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 subaquatic 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 subaquatic 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,²⁶ becoming a haunting, becoming spectral in its nature.

Haunted by “generations of skulls and spirits,”²⁷ 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.²⁸

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.²⁹ 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,”³⁰ 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 “exaqua” 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 Schnappes 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”³¹ 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”³² 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.”³³ 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.³⁴

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.³⁵ 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*³⁶ — 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.³⁷ 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.”³⁸ 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.”³⁹ 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.”⁴⁰

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,”⁴¹ 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”⁴² 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 Schamas' *Rough Crossings*,⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ 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 — crumped, 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*⁴⁵ 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.”⁴⁶ 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*⁴⁷

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.”⁴⁸ *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 Dougl. 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*, Pouli 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, Typhoon [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.
29. M. NourbeSe Philip, In the Matter of Memory . . . , *Fertile Ground: Memories & Visions*, Kalamuya Salaam and Kysha N. Brown, eds., Runngate 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. *Percyscapes* (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.now.toronto.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 Hisaniola 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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