

MONCHOACHI
TRANSLATED BY ERIC FISHMAN

Sosthenes

Now that you are breathing,
That your flesh has released
Your body that was knotted like vinestock:
Respond.

Early one morning the dead girl
Curled in her shroud,
While the cat gave herself to
Three kittens born under the last moon
Groping for
A breast.

Receive my aggravation

Unspeakable tree, burdened by its riches
Who glistens.

The Unburdening

We can do nothing for the dead: there they are
And already they recede.

And this same compact sound
As fruit falling in an orchard.

Yet from everywhere we rush before them
Hiding, watching for their faces
Trying to catch the mystery they now possess
Fascinated
To see them so radiant, utterly unburdened.

The voices that speak far off
Are the sea.
They speak of this
“Obscure, obscure, obscure”
Of the stones
Of the laurels.
They speak far off
Rooting and *ripening*
In the wind.

Gesture / Spell

The mourners will leave their posts at dawn.
They'll go, washing their faces and rinsing their
mouths with rainwater that a barefoot child,
at the doorstep, will pour in their hands.

But night's still here, and in it speech grows.
And as she grows, all things
join, merge
and rise,
flesh and breath,
moon's eye,
crystal in black earth,
vessel's railings,
bay's lamps,
din from everywhere stranded on the shore,
delivering woman, pain, blood,
and the tutelary whip,

stone on stone, death after death,
strung in a single, endless song of life.

The mourners leave their posts at dawn.
They go, washing their faces and rinsing their mouths
with rainwater that a barefoot child, at
the doorstep ...
Even there, day waits outside.
And dreaming only of seagrapes, the child's mouth
sours.
Friends! We die from not knowing we're dying.
We've squandered words and speech.

Wolo: Nothing

"Perceive the rhythm that holds mankind"

Archilochus

I. Silence

From silence that doesn't speak, speaking utters:

Who holds the art of joining this and the art of unknotting that.
Who stands at both ends.

Or she says:

Make no mistakes.

And:

Cool thing, lustrous water.
Who has no wounds, faults, on whom no ears
or skin were fitted.

She says as well:

Indigo of shoals, mouth of the lower world
who gives breath's wind.

Then this:

Initiate's enclosure
Weaving spider, recluse in the ruins.
Diviner who throws the *hakata*, the dice.

II. Tuning fork

Open a hole in the earth and bury the seed
entrusted to the moon's twenty-eight passages
Rain falls, she covers the earth
overflows the furrows.
The wind's route asks the wind
bring cinder along, make the camel turn.
The sky's fire ripens the corn.
A small bird amuses itself among the vultures,
A falcon stretches out on the house of clouds.
The moon brightens, then another.
They bring cattle to fields to graze the morning dew,
They fish sheatfish from a little pond
and silence from the sea's vulva.
They shape sapwood from a fig tree to clothe themselves,
They dye skirts with ochre, or
with lizard's excrements,
They celebrate on the river's banks,
large flat boulders exposed at low tide
a granite bed on a saffron river.
They shake the tree to gather shea fruit.
At Cour-Paille: the horse's bare back, hair scorched
and the dogs,
pink cock the dogs
that band together and sniff the rotting fish,
white chickens with black heads,
spotted guinea fowl among sorghum leaves.
They brew beer, mold clay,
repair the altar, offer at the forge.
The old assemble under the African mahogany,
turn towards the setting sun,
and sleep on beds of bark.

III. Rhythm

Star between ram horns,

broad half-calabash turned on its head
star on its chiseled edges
broad half-calabash in water
inviting azure sky

ceaseless comin-goin
earth / sky
libéraite, spin down
saykwed transfòmation

Magnetic beauty, ecstatic

fused with the pitiless call
here
call of the great *bastrinque*.

Still and silent, untamable: be graceful

Colors and radiance, air tinted by earth all the way up,

possessed bodies, charged bodies,
tattooed, scarred, painted, modeled
modulated, furrowed, adorned—
joined, held together

Each piece, each fragment, turned from the center inside

out toward air and earth,

Body bound to gather and magnify scansions

world-rhythm
world dense on body's openwork
strung like the string of a kora,
shaped like the bow of a *bòlò*

respond,
retrieve, hold

