Song of the Andoumboulou: 23

Nathaniel Mackey

© 1995
PMC 5.3

This poem originally appeared in SULFUR 34 (Spring 1994).

Audio clips are provided here in .au format and .wav format. Sound players are available from the Institute’s FTP site for AIX 3.25, Windows 3.1 and Macintosh.

--rail band--

Another cut was on the box as we pulled in. Fall back though we did once it ended, "Wings of a Dove" sung so sweetly we flew...
The Station Hotel came into view. We were in Bamako. The same scene glimpsed again and again said to be a sign...
As of a life sought beyond the letter, preached of among those who knew nothing but, at yet another "Not yet" Cerno Bokar came aboard, the elevens and the twelves locked in jihad at each other's throats, bracketed light lately revealed, otherwise out...
Eleven men covered with mud he said he saw. A pond filled with water white as milk. Three chanting clouds that were crowds of winged men and behind the third a veiled rider, Shaykh Hamallah...
For this put under house arrest
the atavistic band at the
station reminded us, mediumistic
squall we'd have maybe made
good on
had the rails we rode been
Ogun's...
Souls in motion, conducive
to motion, too loosely
connected to be called a
band, yet "if souls converse"
vowed results from a dusty
record
ages old

Toothed chorus. Tight-jawed
singer... Sophic strain,
strewn voice, sophic stretch...
Cerno Bokar came aboard,
called
war the male ruse,
muttered
it under his breath, made sure
all within
earshot heard...
Not that the
hoarse Nyamakala flutes were
not enough, not that enough
meant something exact
anymore...
Bled by the effort but sang
even so, Keita's voice,
Kante's
voice, boast and belittlement
tossed back and forth...
Gassire's
lute was Djelimady Tounkara's
guitar,
Soundiata, Soumagoro, at each other's
throat... Tenuous Kin we called
our would-be band, Atthic Ensemble,
run
with as if it was a mistake we made
good on, gone soon as we'd
gotten
there

Neither having gone nor not having
gone, hovered, book, if it
was a
book, thought wicked with wing-stir, imminent sting... It was the book of having once been there we thumbed, all wish to go back let go, the what-sayer, farther north, insisting a story lay behind the story he complained he couldn't begin to infer... What made him think there was one we wondered, albeit our what almost immediately dissolved as we came to a tunnel, the train we took ourselves to be on gone up in smoke, people ever about to get ready, unready, run between what, not-what.

And were there one its name was Ever After, a story not behind but in front of where this was, obstinate "were," were obstinate so susceptible, thin etic itch, inextricable demur.

Beginningless book thought to've unrolled endlessly, more scroll than book, talismanic strum. As if all want were in his holding a note only a half-beat longer, another he was now calling love a big rope, sing less what he did than sigh, anagrammic sigh, from war the male ruse to "were" the new ruse, the what-sayer, sophic stir... Sophic slide of a cloud across tangency, torque, no book of a wished else the where we thumbed.

Performers: Royal Hartigan (drums), Nathaniel Mackey (vocals), Hafez Modirzadeh (tenor saxophone).

Talk Back