

Song of the Andoumboulou: 23

Nathaniel Mackey

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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 sihg, 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