

(making magic)
human head, dog body
Turn head!

They close their eyes, give him a breast
'til thus satisfied
feeds her baby close-eyed
Sleep, sleep
And wake only when the flies
have begun to buzz
Gent
-ly *Dousss*
-man, dousman, more dousman
Kon ioun topie k'ap dodoméya
As one top goes slumbering

Speeched Chârmz

deep-voiced chant, each word twice
a knife in hand

Thousand-leggèd words, rogue blows
skalp'd, turnt 'rownd, mowth n eyez n earz
and genital, *backsäide*

May the spirits of dead animals smite not the earth
May breaths be not thieved, may ancestors be not called
May their bones be laid in the sea's own caverns
wit' *'inntennchun*, wellbless'd
soot-blackened eyes
nostrils stuffed with hay.

Sun and moon and heather
without morning,

With light, death
With light, body unpieced by angwishh
And who is dead, the body covered in stones
fed only butterflies
(lanmò sé konsa a-a !
such is death!)

Sun and moon and heather

They multiply by three

They multiply by three the fantasies

Anatole Kreyol

Anatole mounted 'pon metal

Djèp pānyòl bo'l nan djòl

a'spañol wasp kisses on th' maw

They multiply by three

the fantasies trooly reeyally

Magyck

in'all ell'gance she'll be 'flecte d

beauteous w'men!

And all the beautiful, fantastic creatures in fur

Transported over the earth by the moon

Masked dancers, servants of joy.

And so the moon beckons close again

The child who cries and frets in the wind

“Tell me, is it really so beautiful on earth?”

And there have since been even grander fantasies

like:

Recounting the world's beginning when

We know nothing about it eh! eh! eh-eh...

(we don't know how, we don't know why);

Seeking a reason for things that have yet to occur;

Reckoning that to cross a river, one must drink all its water;

Advocating for the tearing-out of children's teeth

to stop them from eating too much (to thereby curtail

obesity's pandemic spread);

Concluding that dogs are safest

with crucifixes dangling 'round their necks;

Forbidding a man to beat his dogs

the year after his wife's death;

Lugging around dog feces as a sign of mourning;

Eating dogshit as a preventative measure against th'epidemic

(le pidémie);

Blowing air into dogs' asses rather than feeding them paté;

Advising barren women to adopt a worm
and feed it their blood;
Besmirching every “why” as an inept road to disaster;

Forbidding the raising of eyes to the sky
and the scratching of heads;
Remembering to leave a lamp lit when hanging oneself
(so as to be visible from the entryway);
Pointing out a thing with just one finger rather than name it
with a name
that might be wrong;

Calling a child (a timoun) by the name *Soprano*
(Quasitsoq)
“which is the name of a mountain spirit.”

Today, in an equivocal clarity, the people clump together
and this is how th’dough’z made
sa ka fait lapâaate.

Uniformity dissipates gifts, equality debilitates
Cattle so that
No-body-not-no-pèsōnne waits for a sorcerer’s invitation
(to be turned into fog)

To make a poetry
Not the smallest disaster!

LIBERAMERICA

I

Fanm à califouchon

À la recherche de la lumière, découvrit les ombres,
Avec la mort, la vie brève

Un passage, un passage
Sauver la vie d'un en sacrifiant celle de son chien.
« Chargea le chien de pierres » (de la main gauche)
puis le rejoignit au fond de la mer
trois femmes assises sur sa flamberge
ceintures dénouées
beaux tatouages faciaux rayonnant de suie
chevelures échevelées

Ô Reines des créatures marines !

N'aiment pas la façon dont il se frotte le museau.
Et ses os furent rejetés sur le rivage près des coquillages.

Derrière le rideau de peaux, le langage sacré
pour échapper au cri h u m a i n
Dix mille ans pour échapper au cri humain
Traversèrent le pont de Bering (de Behring ?)
déplacèrent la lampe lhouile vers leur rive
Quatre mois de nuit polaire
Quatre mois cancans et rires
Fanm à califouchon dans les profondeurs de la terre
S'font nouliaquer (sauter) par des chiens
li schouitt ! Mmmm ! Mammaraai !
Ont vagin comme bague de chienne
Odeurs, couleurs, humeur de bêtes
mâles cheins k'ap fait ouanga dèyiè fimelles cheins
tête d'homme, corps de chien

Virer tête !

Elles ferment les yeux, lui donnent le sein
jusqu'à le rassasier ainsi
nourrit-elle son enfant les paupières closes
Dors, dors
Et ne te réveille que lorsque les mouches
Auront commencé à bourdonner
Dousman, dousman, pi dousman
Kon ioun topie k'ap dodoméya

Châmes parlés

èscandés à voix basse chaque mot deux fois
un couteau à la main

Mots en mille pieds, roués qué coups
èscalpés, virés lenvès, bouche zyeux zoreilles
et sexe *backsaïde*

Que l'esprit des bêtes mortes n'afflige pas la terre
Qu'il ne dérobe les souffles, qu'il n'alerte les mânes
Que leurs os soient entreposés dans les cavernes de la mer
ac *entension* grémèci
les yeux noircis de suie
narines bouchées avec du foin.

Soleil et lune et bruyère
sans matin,

Avec la lumière, la mort
Avec la lumière, le corps par langōnie fragmenté
Et qui est mort, le corps couvert de pierres
nourri seulement de papillons
(lanmò sé konsa a-a !)

Soleil et lune et bruyère

À trois se multiplient
À trois se multiplient les fantaisies
Kréyol Anatole
Anatole monté sou tôle
Djèp pānyòl bo'l nan djòl

À trois se multiplient

vrément réellement les fantaisies
magique-la
nan tout' gangance li k'ap m i r o i s é
Fanm-lan bè!!

Et toutes les belles créatures fantastiques en fourrure
Transportées sur la terre par la lune
Danseurs masqués, serviteurs de la joie.
Et cela revint que la lune appelle ainsi auprès d'elle
L'enfant qui pleure et se tourmente dans le vent
« Dis-moi, est-ce donc si beau sur terre ? »

Et il y eut depuis de bien plus grandes fantaisies
comme :
Raconter le commencement du monde quand, là-dessus,
Nous ne savons rien eh ! eh ! eh-eh...
(nous ne savons pas comment, nous ne savons pas pourquoi) ;
Chercher les raisons des choses qui ne sont pas arrivées ;
Considérer que pour traverser une rivière, il faut en boire toute
l'eau ;
Préconiser d'arracher toutes les dents aux enfants
pour les empêcher de trop manger (enrayer de la sorte
la propagation inéluctable de l'obésité) ;
Estimer que les chiens sont protégés dès lors
qu'on leur suspend des crucifix au cou ;
Interdire à un homme de battre ses chiens
l'année suivant la mort de sa femme ;
Trimballer des excréments de chien en signe de lever de deuil ;
Manger de la crotte de chien à titre préventif contre l'épidémie
(le pidémie) ;
Souffler de l'air dans le derrière des chiens plutôt que les
repaitre de pâtée ;
Recommander aux femmes sans enfants d'adopter un ver
et de le nourrir de leur sang ;
Proscrire tous les « pourquoi » comme ineptes et funestes ;
Interdire de lever les yeux au ciel ni de se gratter la tête ;

Ne pas omettre de laisser une lampe allumée quand on va pour
se pendre
(ceci, afin d'être visible dès l'entrée) ;
Montrer simplement une chose du doigt, plutôt que la nommer
d'un nom
qui ne soit approprié ;

Appeler un enfant (an timoun) du nom de *Soprano*
(Quasitsoq)
« qui est le nom d'un génie de la montagne ».

Aujourd'hui, sous une clarté équivoque, les peuples s'agglutinent
ça ka fait lapâaate.
L'uniformité dissipe les dons, l'égalité rend débile
Bétail de sorte qu'
Et plus pèsōnne n'attend d'être invité par un sorcier
(et changé en brouillard)
Pour faire une poésie
Pas le plus petit désastre !

Translator's Note

How to mark down what is contained in the voice;
how to mark the voice, at once cut and cutting;
transgressed, transgressing.

What arises from the throat does so in an inherent defiance of unnatural borders. The voice itself is pluricosmic, expansive, and unmitigated by law. From the voice—and gesture, its ineffable kin—sprouts the phenomenon of languaging; that is, communication as a life-action. Ignited utterance.

In translation I linger here in the primordiality of expression, the moment before expression is arbitrarily parceled off by the hierarchical structures of any colonizing machine. Here, too, I reckon with the insufficiency of language names and the naming to which its users become unagented subjects; its insufficiency as my lived experience; the unusefulness of “English” as a catachresis, meant to represent a non-existent standard. After all, any subject said to be using English (or any other named + capitalized language) will necessarily have their own socially-informed and ever-changing idiomatic variety.

I begin with these albeit esoteric (if not self-evident) rambles to contextualize how I engage with translation as both a conception and conceiving act. Translation as a metaphor. And as a reckoning with the dissonant friction between expression and language. It is process-oriented and reader-reliant. Translating, I hope to coax the reader into our shared language newly, and toward the original with curiosity. Translation as process, reading as process. And invariably, this process opens language itself, the written word, toward generativity, conceives of a hyperlocal diction unique to the space it conjures for itself in relation to the original; a poetics of relation à la Édouard Glissant.

Found here with this small clutch of poems—of polyglossic chant-songs—from Monchoachi's *Liberamerica*, my Anglo-oriented reversioning marks its own living process, my own languaging as it meets and interacts with that of Monchoachi; creative process as a call-and-response (sometimes literally). I play with orthography to make visible for the reader the space between speech and text; a space Monchoachi, too, renders not just visible, but teeming. It is also in this liminal space

where the politics of standardization must answer to the languaging-subject herself. Through the visibilizing mark of orthography, readers are invited to see the twisting of a tongue which makes + breaks into newness. To begin, the first word of the first poem's title we see: w'men. The apostrophe digs into the ground of the word, unsettling the silt of it. What once seemed whole, smooth, determined, is gouged by irresolution, becomes a porous microcosm of possibility. It marks a transgression upon/against the original's fanm: a Kreyol word sonically close enough to its French counterpart to speak itself into visibility without gloss. And so in my versioning, the apostrophe's work becomes imbued with new particularity, new insinuation.

Bringing these poems into an Anglo context, I-as-translator can't help but relate English to French, to see their relation as—though not interchangeable—hegemonically parallel vis-à-vis Martinican Kreyol. While this note is too brief to expound on Antillean histories and colonizer abuses, the translations here sometimes make practical use of this parallel, privileging proximity to Kreyol over French when it feels possible without losing the reader. In one small moment, a line which meta-enacts an approximizing of proximities in “L'enfant à la mère rendu” (Icite, côté-cite, bòd'-côté-cite, ici-a) subtly re-orientes in “Child, returned to its mother” (Isit, koté-cite, bòd'-côté-cite, isiya). And as an inherently multi-textual experience, the reader is free to re-fract between the two.

Describing Monchoachi's poetics and effect on Kreyol as a language, fellow Martinican writer Patrick Chamoiseau once said, “[h]e has completely renewed our vision of the Creole language—the way we read it, practice it, defend it. He has reshaped the relationship of this language to French, and has explored the blossoming of an unheard speech, its explosion into life, which we become witness to[...].” Approaching the rupture of language as a site of generativity, of resistance, and of play, Monchoachi's *Liberamerica* is a hypertextual codex of the great mysterious, *Lémistè*, of the voice as it transcends both what is as universal as death and what is as deliriously specific as a Mesoamerican-rooted, Antillean experience—all invoked with balanced unmeasure. The poems represent a sample of Monchoachi's invocative poetics of [ch]orality, woven into the world through memory-as-ritual for the living and the elsewhere.

— Patricia Hartland, August 2020