

Sections of William Kentridge's

Libretto for The Great Yes, The Great No

Suzanne, Aimé and Captain - Au bout du petit Matin...

Suzanne At the end of day break...
The blue smoke from my forbidden English cigarette.
To leave.
My heart was throbbing with an insistent desire to give.
To leave

Captain Suzanne Césaire, Surrealist of desire, teacher, writer, her mind spins around the Caribbean, the warrior heart of a hummingbird against the dead-end of assimilation.

Suzanne to that country whose clay is part of my flesh:
“I have wandered far and I am coming back to the lonely ugliness of your wounds.”
I am waiting. I am no longer waiting.
“My mouth shall be the mouth of misfortunes which have no mouth,
My voice is the freedom of those freedoms which break down in the prison-cell of despair.”
“Beware of crossing your arms and assuming the sterile attitude of the spectator,
Because life is not a spectacle, because a sea of sorrows is not a spectacle,
Because a man who cries out is not a dancing bear.”

Aimé And the voice declares that for centuries

Suzanne

Aimé Europe has stuffed us with lies and crammed us with plague.

Suzanne

Aimé For it is not true that the work of man is finished.

Suzanne

Captain Aimé Césaire poet, philosopher, surrealist of dignity, socialist, politician,
with a revolutionary message for Martinique's creole self.

Aimé For it is not true that we are the parasites of the world.

Suzanne

Aimé Our job is to keep in step with the world.

Suzanne

Aimé The work of man is only just beginning.

Suzanne

Aimé As I leave Europe
to cross one more sea
to cross one more sea
oh one more sea to cross
so that I may invent my lungs
so that the queen may make love to me

As I leave Europe
the irritation of its own cries
to cross one more sea
to cross one more sea
oh one more sea to cross
so that I may invent my lungs
so that the queen may make love to me
so that my soul may shine

The radios go silent

As I leave Europe
the irritation of its own cries
to cross one more sea
to cross one more sea
oh one more sea to cross
so that I may invent my lungs
so that the queen may make love to me

so that my soul may shine

The radios go silent

**Coffee
pots** (in French) Did I or did I not tell you that you must speak French
the French of France
the French of the French
the French French

Suzanne - When is the time right?

Suzanne When is the time ripe?

In what form should it be manifested?

Freedom is at once madly desirable and quite fragile, which gives it the right to be jealous.

A literature is taking shape.

Opening upon an increasingly vast and immense 'beyond'

What we do not worry about is whether it pleases you or not.

Get over not liking poetry.

One never loves that which does not deserve to be loved.

There are people who claim that war has taught them something.

Chorus nothing but the sea

Suzanne It nourished in us an impatient strength..

Chorus nothing but the sea

Suzanne I was listening very attentively, without being able to hear your voices lost in the Caribbean symphony
Nothing but the sea and the indistinct outline of lands.
the metallic face of the sea that is no longer of water but of mercury.

Chorus No longer water

Suzanne One can only guess the easy lovemaking of fish.

Many have believed that surrealism was dead.
the forbidden zones of the human mind

... The only [thing] that can liberate humankind ...
in one magical word: freedom.

Freedom must make itself flesh and blood [...] must be reflected and
recreated in language, in the word.

And here before us are splendours and hopes.

A communion of seers.

Chorus We know where we stand

Suzanne We know where we stand.

There is my island, Martinique, and its fresh necklace of clouds buffeted by
Mount Pele.

Chorus Here are splendours and hopes

Suzanne Here the poets feel their heads capsize

Chorus Caught between staying and leaving

The radios fall silent.

Suzanne One must however dare to say that refined forms of slavery still run
rampant.

Chorus All will be recovered

Suzanne [Colonial idiocies] will be purified by the welding arc's blue flame.our
cutting edge of steel...
all will be recovered.

Do not move. Let it pass.

Suzanne - Poetry, not a bit of it

Suzanne What is the Martinican? - A plant-human.
Obstinate moreover as only a plant can be.
Open your eyes - a child is born. To which god should it be entrusted? To
the Tree god. Coconut tree or Banana tree, among whose roots the placenta
is buried.

Open your ears....The grass that grows on a grave is the living hair of the
dead female buried beneath, who is protesting against death.

I knew, very young, that Martinique was sensual, coiled upon itself,
stretched out, unwound in the Caribbean,

[Here we see] a stunning contradiction appear between the innermost self,
with its desires, its impulses, its unconscious forces - and life lived with its
necessities, its urgencies, its gravity.

From the time of the arrival of the conquistadors and the rise of their
know-how (beginning with firearms),

There are, melded into the isles, beautiful green waves of water and of
silence.

the lands from across the Atlantic have changed, not only in appearance but
in fear.

Fear of being surpassed by those who remained in Europe, already armed
and equipped.

Fear of competition with people of colour quickly declared inferior in
order to better beat them down.

Released onto the streets of their capitals, an insurmountable timidity fills
them with fear among their European brothers.

Is this attitude enough to explain his failure in the world?

Ashamed of their drawling accent, of their unrefined French, they sigh
longingly for the peaceful warmth of Antillean houses and the voice of the
Black "nanny" of their childhood.

[They] do not yet know that [they] [are] participating in the island's absence of equilibrium.

Enough! [Real] poetry lies elsewhere. Far from rhymes, laments, sea breezes, and parrots.

Then the radios go silent.

Our miraculous names until now lodging in the storehouse of forgetfulness.

Since three centuries the colonial adventure continues

the wars of independence are only an episode
[I believe] more in struggles than in tears

The river of grass snakes that I call my veins
the river of battlements that I call my blood

Our poetry will be cannibal or will not be at all!

Lament

Chorus I was sad when I was young

Now I'm old and sad When can I be happy - Soon - that would be good.

Who knows no way of helping
Let him be silent.

This woman is sick to her marrow bone

This woman is utterly alone.

With husband dead,
With son away in jail.

Pray for me, Pray

I carry a brick to show how beautiful my house once was.

The twenty-nine legally permitted strokes of the whip.

The branched yoke of iron

and the red-hot fleur-de-lys from the smoking brands
bleeding on the soft flesh of my shoulder

and the whip argued with the swarming flies over the sweet dew of our
wounds.

I've come back to my city.

These are my old tears.

Breton and Breton - Party

Captain André Breton and André Breton,
the pope of Surréalisme and
general misanthrope.

He hopes that cutting up the world will make it anew.

Breton We believe that the supreme task of art in our epoch is to take part actively
and consciously in the preparation of the revolution.

Breton Our aims:

The independence of art – for the revolution

The revolution for the complete liberation of art

Captain He is 40, he is 42, he hopes to be 80, but has but 10 months to live.

Breton We by no means insist on every idea put forward in this manifesto

Breton At the forefront of discovery,
a new land was in sight the moment when they set foot on the shore,

he began to measure the import of his observation.

Breton I have made an inventory of the stones,
Less time than it takes to tell, fewer tears than it takes to die

- Breton** A very delicate flame highlights or perfects life's meaning as nothing else can.
- Breton** Any philosophical, sociological, scientific or artistic discovery seems to be the fruit of a precious chance.
- Breton** Behind ourselves, we must not let the paths of desire become overgrown.
- Breton** If in a cluster of grapes there are no two alike, why do you want me to describe this grape by the other, by all the others, why do you want me to make a palatable grape?
- Breton** Nothing retains less desire in art, in science, than this will to industry, booty, possession.
- Breton** It would lose its charm if it were explained
- Breton** Still today I am only counting on what comes of my own openness, my eagerness to wander in search of everything, which, I am confident, keeps me in mysterious communication with other open beings, as if we were suddenly called to assemble.
- Breton** Let us now mince words: the marvellous is always beautiful, anything marvellous is beautiful, in fact only the marvellous is beautiful.
- Breton** We have no intention of justifying political indifference
- True art is unable not to be revolutionary
- The communist revolution is not afraid of art
- Breton** I shall be proved guilty of poetic dishonesty.

Captain and Fanon

- Captain** Frantz Fanon, surrealist of Justice, student of Suzanne and Aimé, psychiatrist, philosopher, prophet of the Algerian revolution and the end of colonies.
- Fanon** Blood - birth - ecstasy of becoming.
- The arteries of all the world convulsed, torn away, uprooted, turned towards me and feed me.

my negritude is no stone,
its deafness hurled against the noise of the day

my negritude is no drop of lifeless water
on the dead eye of the world

my negritude is neither tower nor cathedral
it thrusts into the red flesh of the soil

It thrusts into the red flesh of the sky.

Have I no purpose on earth but to avenge the black man of the 17th
century?

I am not a prisoner of history, my freedom turns me back on myself.

Chorus I put the white man back into his place, I jostled him and told him point
blank.

Get used to me.

I am not getting used to anyone. I shout my laughter to the stars.

Get used to me.

Captain: I want to know
I don't want to know

I want to know

Don't tell me.

Enough of this lukewarm whining.

Let's light the fuse that will blow up paradise!

Suzanne and Aime in the Storm

Suzanne At this moment off the coast of Puerto Rico a huge cyclone begins
to spin its way between the seas of clouds, with its beautiful
tail sweeping rhythmically the semi-circle of the Antilles.

The Atlantic takes flight toward Europe with great oceanic waves.
Our little tropical observatories begin to crackle with the news.

The boats flee, but to where?

Wait? Why wait?

Aimé We, vomit of the slave-ship

We, hunted meat of Calabar.

Plug your ears?

Suzanne We, stuffed to bursting with the swell, with squalls, with inhaled fog!

Forgive me, whirlwind!

Aimé

Suzanne I hear rising from the hold chained curses,

gasps of the dying,

Aimé

Suzanne

the sound of one who is thrown into the sea ...

Aimé

Suzanne the baying of a woman giving birth ...

the scrape of fingernails advancing on throats...

Aimé

Suzanne

Let them serve and betray and die

Aimé

Suzanne Millions of Black hands, across the raging clouds of world war, will spread
terror everywhere.

Aimé Let it be

Suzanne Come on now, real poetry lies elsewhere.

Far from rhymes, laments, sea breezes, parrots.

Aimé How to find our homes?

the monstrous sodomies of the host and the slaughterer,

the unscalable ship's prow of prejudice and stupidity,

Chorus At the old village, what happened?
At the old village we fought the war.

Please take care of my child.
She is now an orphan.

End of journey

Captain Here we are... On the other side.
Suits didn't expect that their bodies would emigrate so soon.
And you know the rest
That 2 and 2 make 5
that the forest mews like a cat
So the end has happened
You're my and I'm your friend
Once the money's safely trousered
Mostly there's a happy end.

Suzanne Now I have come.
I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, climbing;
I dream that I burst out laughing, that I span a river in one stride, or that I
am followed by a flood of motorcars which never catch up with me.

Captain Suzanne died at 50 in 1966, before she dies she destroys her writing.

Suzanne I am not dreaming of a new myth, I want it to come and I am looking for it.

Suzanne I carry with me the idea of its birth,
And I am waiting.

Captain Aimé lives to 94. He barely speaks of her again.

Captain Léon-Gontran Damas, dead in 1978
Frantz Fanon in 1961.
André Breton in 1966
Paulette Nardal in 1985
Jane Nardal in 1993

Captain From the coffin it is said,
There came a clapping.
A thousand and one useless bells.

Chorus I drink to the terrible world we inhabit,
I drink to the terrible world we inhabit,
I drink to the terrible world we inhabit,
and to God who never replied
and to God who never replied
Love no country,
countries soon disappear.

Everywhere,
Everywhere

Who shall I tell my sorrow, my horror, greener than ice?

Do not love people, people soon perish

Or they are wronged and call for your help.

unexpectedly on their feet

We shall call for the sun & it will not rise

unexpectedly on their feet

on their feet in the hold

on their feet in the cabins

on their feet in the wind

on their feet beneath the sun

on their feet

on their feet beneath the stars

These are my old tears

We go, we won't arrive.

Everything changes -

You can start afresh with your very last breath.

The world is out of kilter.

We will reset it.

The world is out of kilter, we will kilter. (The seven-times disunited
Will be united the eighth time.)