

BIRD HEAD SON - LYRICS

All lyrics by Anthony Joseph © 2008

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CONDUCTORS OF HIS MYSTERY

for Albert Joseph

The day my father came back from the sea
he was broke and handsome
and I saw him walking across the savannah
and I knew at once it was him.
His soulful stride, the grace of his hat,
and the serifs of his name were
~ fluttering ~
in my mouth .

In his bachelor's room in El Socorro that year
he played his 8-tracks through a sawed-off speaker box.
The coil would rattle an the cone would hop
but all the women from the coconut groves
still came to hear
his traveller's tales.

In those days my daddy wore Brown suede,
8 eye high
desert boots. Beige
gabardine bells with the 2 inch folds.
He was myth. The legend of him.
Once I touched the nape of his boot
to see if my father was real.
Beyond the brown edges of photographs
and the songs we sang
to sing him back
from the sweep and sea agonies
of his distance.

Landslide scars. He sent no letters.

Shop he say he build by Goose Lane junction.
But it rough from fabricated timber string.
Picka foot jook wood
like what Datsun ship in.
Shack he say he build same cross-cut lumber.
Wood he say he stitch same Carap bush.
Roof he say he throw same galvanize. He got
ambitious with wood
in his middle ages.

And that night I spent there,

with the cicadas in that clear village sky,
even though each room was still unfinished
and each sadness was hid. I would've stayed there
with my father
if he had asked.

Ai yé Olokun!
He came back smelling of the sea.

CUTLASS

When de cutlass flash
de cutlass that cut dem
de cutlass that wound
de cutlass intend dem

When de cutlass flash
de cutlass can cleanse too
the cutlass can clear bush
the cutlass mend dem

till sparks grew from stars fallin
scrapin the road
on jouvay mornin
Or cut can pass a lash
against a man's bare throat
cut from runnin sideways fastest
from brutal blade work
It make him run out of his shadow
it make him run out of his skin
it make him run out with a tumblin blade
he pulled sharp across his throat till it brittle
cutlass when it flash so
an it cut his Achilles

It was the same cutlass that slit the pig throat
like a razor an the body shook
hang it up and let it drip its oil and ambergris umber
let oil run all down this holy tributary
where the corn stalks keep snakes and wildflowers
all long the banks of the Valencia river
where and old woman is weepin prayers in glossolalia
and inscribing a vever for Legba
and an old man is cutting sheaves of sage
scythe ways or Sundays
cleaving coconuts with a three-canal blade
And the nut well bleed
and it humble
cutlass when it flash so
an it cut his achilles

O ma Sylvia!
Your loving breast
it still with me it still with me it still with me
cause I remember

I remember that day I was cutting feet for wooden men
I was shaping their bones on the steel
and I saw the blade rise up
I saw it rise up and it hit you
with the hilt!
You was washing clothes in the side house sink
Oh ma Sylvia!

HIS HANDS

O! Buckmouth swung a black snake.
He whippeth me from arse to widow's peak.
His wicked wrist
 it hissed so swift
it left tractor wheels
 through the muddy fields of my back
- with his grip
- old nigga whip
- wrapt two times
 around his carpenter's fist.

His hands his hands

He maketh me to stand in cold showers
 with the first hair of my manhood
 exposed.
He forceth me
 to eat egg an green banana
 in cow heel soup
 his belt put plenty pressure.
- with his grip
- old nigga whip
- wrapt two times
 around his carpenter's fist.

His hands his hands

He maketh me to kneel down on a grater
and count to one hundred
 and twenty seven

... o father in heaven...his hands.

His hands, which held my breath to ransom
and learnt me how to hide my stutter
they were like brutal knots
in burnt Bajan cedar.
But then those hands
could get gentle on my shoulder
at country weddings and funerals.
And I remember,
 that the corn they harvested there that year
 was twisted and dry
 like a dead man's hand.

His hands his hands

THE CINEMA

Well in the cinema the ground built tilt
the wall shaky shaky.

Frizzle-neck chickens pick padlocks under the cinema.
Midday Saturday when it hot in the coup
an that chicken shit start to buzz from the chopping board
when man watchin Chen Sing kick-up.
An the film stock zog-up zog-up
like chicken did scratch it.
It jagged an it bruise
when man watchin Shaolin Temple.

And the soundtrack get contaminate
with all kinda San Juan taxi horn an bicycle engine,
an the market shout an the dub wax pump,
an the heifers in the abattoir bawlin!
The pie man's slappin palm. Every coconut head that slash,
every cut an cuss an planass pass
get mix with the Sheng Fan death grip.
But the seat-back break from balcony to pit,
an the screen heng like curtain that twist,
an kick missin instep
like chicken missin neck.

Well in the cinema the ground built tilt
the wall shaking shaking
Well in the cinema the ground built tilt
the wall shaking shaking shaking...

BIRD HEAD SON

for Kamau Braithwaite

Yuh ever wake up one Sunday mornin
an walk round yuh cassava?
Inspect yuh lime tree
for aphid
yuh dasheen
yuh see how dey growin
An yuh frizzle neck cock
how it kickin dust back an crowin
You ever ask yuhself
what snake is this lord
dat leave this skin?

You ever walk out in dem Indian garden
an see a aeroplane passin
an imagine
is you in it
dat leavin?
When you never even row boat!
An you navel string tie-up tie up in dis aloes bush
An yuh see all dem crapaud an lizard dat making mischief
all a dem know your name
And all dem saga boy
see dem grinnin coins on Mt Lambert corner
an when you pass they asking
 “Ai boy, ai boy, ai, you is bird head son?
Yuh look like bird head son f’ttrue!
 I know, yuh father head
 was kinda small too”

Even these trees will die
Even the weaves of beetles and red ant gullies
and the underground streams that trickle will not
Even the sweet Julie mango tree is weeping white lice
An between this spirit bush – a see a Iguana –
a see ‘im an he sit down
an he belly breathin tender
a’know he feel he quick y’know
a’know he feel he quick
but as quick as he is he cyar escape this stick
 a’go break he back!
Until his spasm is dire
And his mouth becomes a poem with no words.

And all dem saga boys on Mt Lambert Corner
when you pass hear they asking
 “Ai boy, ai boy- you is bird head son?
Well yuh look like bird head son f’ttrue!

cause yuh father head,
yuh father head it was small too”

THE BAMBOO SAXOPHONE

This spark arcs a sediment,
describes a fluent form.

(her halo broke)
(her engine froze)

I ply

shutters loose, make my fist my horn.

Blow // till my spitty sound rose and tumbled
and my sleeping eye flickered
in the hologram — dream/

I blinked to change the scene.

(Her fever rolled)
(Her slack wound sewn)

Once from the spacecraft where we slept on,
broken bare by our journey,

and the old wooden engine
went grinding through island countryside.

And I walked behind my father, watching

the scope of his back.

In a rigid hand he holds
an ox bone trombone.

My brother and I, we in the jungle now.

We're roaming through country seeking sacred bamboo
the kind that's brown and wet when the bell end full up
with buds of fungus and ringworm.

The other end to blow.

So I took a stick and said 'Back off this!'

and lumps of old tar balm and gutty oil,
bits of wood liver - a little bitter blood came out.

And it was all these things which kept the sound holy.

And even though the wind gauge made true scale

I preferred a reed,

a fipple reed, a reed that would rattle and so
we kept on.

JUNGLE

for Kemal Mulbocus

I have an antenna in my beard
and a blood duct that keeps secrets
I have a bone flute that whistles
and an arrow headed temper
that can shave the treetops

In the jungle

There is a baptist hymn I know
that keeps my amulet shone
and I know
I know every slip of wind, I know every gust of the hurricane
that trips through this land
this land that knows my name

the jungle

I have been seeking
I have been seeking between the fire plant of my dream
for that river I used to steal fishes from
to put in a jar on the window sill
and feed them wheat and honey
till each one died
Those silver-bellied slitherings
were the hourglass
of rhyme

In the jungle

RIVER OF MASKS

I blew my flute by the river,
I blew it river side.
I blew my flute by the river,
I blew it - in the rivertime
with the krik krik krak of dusk
I say read my memory.
Blow my flute
Blow my flute
blow it down by the river side for me.

Well by the time we got to Caura Village
the water was cold
because the sun was goin down
and the ragged eyelets of the masks that he wore
were frowning.
But when I saw him lean back
I saw my brother lean back on that stone
that splits the river in two
- river running under -
I saw my brother bare the bare
the soft trumpet bone of his throat.

Blow my flute...

It kinda make me what to dip myself in the water,
kinda wade in that water.

Maman.

Maman tell me again why I should leave this island.

Tell me again that those cities exist.

All I know about the ocean
is that a river
starts here.

And I remember we were in the backseat
going to the airport
and I turned to my brother and I asked him
'Who's it bro?'
and he said 'It's you!'

blow my flute...

TWO INCH LIMBO

Snail messengers
 from tobacco gardens
 bring thunder to the land of the south
 Legba
in his palanquin
 with ten thousand earthquakes
and a plague of ants
 with the drum of moon
and Ethiopian harps
 with the grace of grass cloth
and baobab fibre
 orchilla
 sees the leopard in
 the drum texts
and eyes in the euphorbia tree

The merchant marine
 of the lower south
blind in churches
 and religious schools
outside of the temples
 of fashion
 and philosophy
asleep in the ghettos of
 courage

 The church went down....
the church went down down down
 and Chicago
 could not reach them...
 Chicago, could not teach them...

The whales and the fish
circle back from tenderness
to Memphis where Lester leaps in to the apparition of Jazz
and physical chanting
of the black blues breath of the body is blues
and black roots and alcoholic sutras
of dreaming
in articulate and spontaneous transmission of stanza and margin

Chicago....Chicago

ROBBERMAN

(Inspired by Sewe Wangala, a 19th century kalenda or stickfighting song)

Robber man don't get me
don't blow me down
town
down shantytown ravine
where they beat silver fish an wabeen
on the riverbank...

We come like ripe guava
when it season
full it ripe
an sling it shot like a 12 gauge shot
that shatter the wings of our mountain gods.

The young blood seep up on the sea an float foam.
It make the young blood seep up on the sea an float foam
An he reel so reel that the paddle broke
and he tumble down
cliff an crocus bound.
Better just hide the magic for me
hide the magic for me.

Robber boy
Don't make mud clog the tracks I cross riverbank
don't sell my eyes for sand puppet teeth
don't seed my seppy for ransom
don't brug my neck with fisherman's twine
don't scope my ruse with barbed river time
don't fix my suffer with jumbie symposium
don't grief my root with rumors of wounds!
Come on an just hide the magic for me
hide the magic for me.

comecomecomecomecomecomecomecome
leh we pounce on wild Quenk an Agouti,
like we used to
make we shuffle in the jungles
of Port of Spain,
leh we stop all this war an ting,
leh we lime
like we used to,
leh we love.
lets love
lets love
lets love

VERO

This is a story about a woman called Vero
Now Vero was what you'd call a la diablesse.
She's one of them women if you meet her in the middle of the night
she gonna look real beautiful, but when you look
she got one cow foot and one real human foot.

Now, Vero had a man called Savage, he was a bus mechanic.
But he had to limp to work ever since Vero jook him with a pickaxe blade.
So he had to go Tobago, chillout, relax heself lil bit.
And one day Vero saw my brother,
she saw him unfold his secrets on the river bank
-silver fishes and the ripple so haunting-
and her blood take him one time.
And she become determined to cross him
between the cross-cut saw of her thighs.
She wanted to fold him.
And was the rancid pluvia of her sex that she drained to rice.
(what we call sweat rice)
Is that she give my brother to drink and to eat
and it make my brother weak for she rockin bed speed –
tempo straight from the holiness church
and is that went straight to my brother's head
(and to his seed of course)

So when my brother came back to Kandahar
the first thing he did was start to look for Vero
but he couldn't see Vero no where no how

Vero in the mangrove no she in the gully
no she in the rooftop no she in the singing bush
that bury him down
to the ground

and is then my brother really begin to feel that burn
and he start to twist up an bend up like if
dengue fever did make up he dyin bed.

Vero in the rooftop no she in the gulley
no she in the rooftop no she in the mango
no she in the singing bush...
