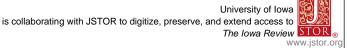
Nathaniel Mackey

Song of the Andoumboulou: 33

So bumpy a ride it was we soon wanted out. We were in Bahrain. "Marr walaa salaam," we heard. "They went by but didn't say salaam," someone said it meant, jook song sung to oud accompaniment, what they the singer chided chided him back . . . Parsed out a retort, part praise, part taunt, a beginner again. "'Larger what's lost to you,' they said," he sang, "Yesterday I stayed awake." What-said meeting, met with one who spoke of wisdom as a hit, heft having much to do with it, hers whom he called Anuncia, earlier having called her N'ahtt . . . A cross

adorned her chest he'd been told. Envied it its address of her cleavage, cleft he'd have pressed his face to



had he been able. rapt, irreligious, no jihad . . . The we they'd have been, dreamt remnant it became, what we saw was all hearsay it seemed. Theirs the eventual audience's, not only his, hers . . . Audible wish to be seen. Taken eye turned on itself . . . "Answered in kind, sighs alone would have cracked our ribs," he heard her whisper, words he'd have whispered in turn had his tongue not stuck . . . Theirs the cast-out, eventual crux, cornerstone. Stood as again she went by without speaking, sang, "Went by without speaking," out of reach

> Only what of it he could put into words could he rescind. Is remained is, implacable. Tree was what its name would be, only were wood water, he her self-described

apostle, hand cupping an abstract breast, wanting the world . . . Ran to no end but to've drifted somewhere distant. horse whose being ridden rode them both . . . Bedded down in a burnt-out house. wicks lit to Ogun. Each a cracked egg, coaxed air, low-pitched ignition, hit by their below-the-belt abruptness, won by their below-the-waist allure . . . Said of that world, about to leave it, so much less than we'd been led to expect. To've thought at all, thought of it as legged, what where there was reached only in thought, what reach remonstrant, strode as though lit within amber, andoumboulouous legs, fossilized light . . . So that the dreamthing we heard spoke thru more than one mouth. The Soon-Come Congress of Souls was now in session. Hafez blew a chicken-bone clarinet he'd brought back from Iran . . . Dreamt writ calibrated our eclipse,

what-said we. It was an out sound we echoed, broken branch

reckoned by

we

Stra Hajj the path we took, roust what got us there. We who were the we they'd have been, dreamt concupiscence, the Soon-Come Congress no sooner there than gone . . . Parts pulled apart, wandered, Stra Palace the place they knew next . . . An asthmatic wind infused what floor lay under them. Nav was what their name would be, Zra's raw-throated flute . . . Words don't go there, they said, no sooner said than they were there, albeit there defied location . . . City they'd been told they'd someday get to, eventual city known as By-and-By . . . That there was a war going on they'd forgotten, "Blues for the Fallen" on the box notwithstanding, rapt, remnant heat the one flame they saw

Another he, no longer the same though related. She, of whom the same could be said . . . An asthmatic wind underneath it all, Hoarse Chorus, they who were the would-be we she projected, hand so abruptly out from under her dress, her sniffed finger's lewd report . . . Lifted a finger she'd stroked herself with up to just above his upper lip, whispered, "Smell it," that this would come back to him again and again come back to him, more than he could make any sense of, abrupt move the abrasive nay so insisted on, seemed it so insisted on, only, even

so

And so told us how far it was though we thought it, return to Stra Palace, Jah Hajj. Madame Zzaj the name she now took to be done with naming, names no longer slide might such be so . . . A sudden rain, so we ducked under leaves. Wood became shed, meaning Tree. Trunk, unembraceable, beckoned, wide girth we'd have given the world to've been one with, run

with, roots

above ground

Stra Hajj was behind us now. It seemed it was a train we were on, church we were in, stuck voices all but tugged us down . . . Plucked strings made the floorboards buckle, tenuous hold on what we had more tenuous. Hoarse Chorus the congress of souls we exacted, soul serenade, what-said surmount . . . So that the he we heard sing stayed with us, haunted us, allowed us to move like music, but in boxcars, hobos it

seemed