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# Sojourner

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*A Memorial for Leon Damas*

I.

What do I say now to my children  
That you wrote poems and made promises  
Do I hand them a book and say  
    here read and understand  
    that his life was here with us in this World  
And now Shango has received your soul  
At the end of the dawn I see  
You sitting cigarette in hand  
    Sipping a glass of wine  
Listening to the cries of island birds  
    and barefoot children  
At the tip of an archipelago in the Caribbean  
    on that rock where Frenchman  
Made hell on earth for men white and black.

II.

Now in this time of sorrow in this time, in this world  
I have traveled a little ways  
    with you,  
        knew you,  
            loved you  
Eyebrows arched, your voice  
    pot-marked with the  
Accent of a different land  
The quality of hurt and sorrow traversed through  
Years of work to preserve a peoples Culture  
To you life had not been a fair exchange  
    their clothes,  
        their speech,  
            their manners,  
                their hopes,  
                    their music,  
                        their art  
In exchange for being the child of a former slave  
    and a Citizen of France

III.

But what of it now when death finds us on every corner  
You who sang with Sanghor, Rabiminjara, and Caesar  
Who played the banjo not the guitar

The strings and tom-toms of your heart are silenced  
Only the melody will be left of a torch bearer  
Who told us we looked ridiculous in  
    their shoes,  
        their pants,  
            their coats,  
                their shirts,  
                    their top hats  
Who remembered a world where bare feet  
                    and brown earth  
Touched and danced before they came

IV.

It is at the end of the morning  
I will look for you  
At the edge of this world I will hear  
                    you singing in the cane break  
Coming home, at the end of the day  
And we will dance together embrace as brothers  
                    brown feet on brown earth  
Spirits of red clay and tin shacks rise  
                    on barren rock  
Ancient ones will greet us and  
Welcome home the Deputy,  
            the lover  
                the poet  
                    the Giuanaman

V.

Tell me now Obiaman, what do I tell my children  
How do I explain  
That you wrote poems and made promises  
And now Shango has received  
            your soul and Demballa has his son again  
I hearing you singing in the fields  
Your voice a murmuring on the warm island winds  
I see you sitting at the end of the day  
Reedy, thin, laughing,  
            telling tales to brown children