



MAPLE LEAF RAG



KAIE KELLOUGH

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*yes. i like to go about places, hobnob with people,
gather rich epithets and proverbs in churches and taverns,
in cotton fields and dance halls, in streets and toilets.
the rhythms and imagery exorcise white magic.
the man in my ears is my jack-in-the-box.*

—melvin b. tolson



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kaie kellough meets the *québécois* reggae vampirates uptown

irate
i rate you a pirate
a cracker patwa snatcher
a *kebek-*

wha?
diction copy-
scatter. jam
downer. jah muse
sickener. yr ancestor:
a kin napper.
i incant: i d-
on't
recant. i can
never be ech-
oed
by vampyrrhic gh-
osts.
cho. to
my shad-
owy
ancestry, too anancy,
i submit dis
raaaaaaaaaassssssssss-
peshal
reeeeeeeeeeeeekkkk-
wess:
may an enc-
oded
curse curdle
duppy breath. rot a *buckra's* tung. sting his sing. ruck his cuss. fuck
& fuss him. e

rode

his vo-

chords

raze his vox. salt
his loss. hex

his hope.

vex hiss pirit

ded.

i ink

my bloody x

on dis anti
vampiracy en-

treaty to my ancy. grant me: may no piece
nor chalice pass

nor peace come to pass

tween we

& foul-fanged thee

rewind

*listening to a beat-up taj mahal record (mo' roots, 1974)
on an ancient turntable at 3 a.m.*

lost, nocturnal, rum-tossed
i blow a nebula off the needle, blow stardust off the record

swivel and fit the diamond tip
into the vinyl's delta

crackle rackle

crackle rackle

taj mahal, metallic, moans : "my grandfather..."
his voice, sharp as plucked steel : "married one fine..."

rackle rackle

rackle rackle

"st. kitts woman..." his voice slices (a razor thru skin

(as the diamond cuts concentric circles
into the spinning disc))

his voice slices through static
penetrates

deep down into this nocturnal groove
delves

rackle crackle

rackle crackle

deeper than self-reflection
plumbs

crackle rackle

crackle rackle

memory's fathoms
sounds

crackle crackle

crackle crackle

ashes, dust, ancestries
sounds

to my ancesto

to my ancesto

& sped on a searching song
weeps into bluer breaches

wearied
his voice creaks, cracks, the svelte needle skids

to my ancesto

to my ancesto

skips

to my ancesto

to my ancesto

the voice ceases to search. far
unconscious shores

reached, the song, static-wracked
crashes

to my ancesto

to my ancesto

announces arrival. found
i nudge the needle

to my ancesto

to my ancesto

i nudge the needle

to my ancesto

to my ancesto

ahead a half-millenia

between the royal mount and the river below

quartier ville-marie, montréal, fête st-jean 2005

buses sway through the gray swelter sweeping up from *rue ontario*. the *taverne* sags against the boxing gym. the african barbershop's speakers pump the rhythms of the equator. the vietnamese *épicerie*, its dead-ringer butchers in blood-spattered doctors' coats shelves palm oil, plantain, cornmeal. next door, bleached-blonde *pitounes* entrust their calluses to masked korean manicurists. on the corner, teenagers mix with fast-aging juiceheads. the city serves this steaming cocktail of youth, immigrant dreams and drunkenness.

across *ontario* squats *metro frontenac*. three circling flights deep, in the underground heat, the punishment fits the rhyme: a junky strives to hawk a hot bike for 10 bucks before *les flics* bind his wrists with iron. the metro roars, hellbound, toward opposite poles: *centre-ville's* concrete cauldron or suburbs where sirens and tobacco factory funk settle into lilac perfumed silence. but here, the *fleur-de-lys* unfurls over rotting balconies.

children tough and wiry as weeds dash down rusted walkups, kick away cans and garbage bags to clear a canvas, chalk daydreams on the sidewalk. stooped men wither into cigarette smoke. all the pawnshops on *ontario est* are packed with hagglers hawking bile and costume jewelry for petty prices – neighborhood princes seeking oblivion in bomb-shaped 1l bottles of *bière extra-forte*. once drunk, will they dream of *cartier's* voyages?

come night, that black summer gleaming through the smoke and light-pollution, the battered latina across the alley forces a serrated scream. her *hombre* vomits down three flights of spiralling steel stairs. his acid stomach-rot splats a mosaic pattern in the courtyard where african, latin-american, *québécois* children play and fight at multiculturalism.

poor artists rich in lovers, dreams, words and all things vain but pure, muse to muted horn blues blown up from the *quartier des spectacles*. these blues battle uphill, against the traffic and television babel before dying on the leaves of concrete-rupturing maples. these are the ghosts of a generation's hopes on a *fête nationale* past. be they writ to witness, be they writ to last.

coming thru slaughter

for fats domino

when slow-rolling, slow-to-anger rivers
surged & sloshed mud, debris, stray piano keys
up blueberry hill, when bloated corpses bobbed thru storyville

where sousaphones' circular bells once beamed: brass suns
where low yellows, high browns cakewalked through town
where barrelhouse boogies, tickled by professors of the ivories

tinkled the cration myth of true democracy: jazz, in whose annals
creole sports, gracile & dangerous as razors, flashed diamond grins
when floods sloshed through ol' blu orleans

life floated, treaded the mud of its origins. pharoah
hard-hearted, budged not from his white house. hollywood
sped no seraphic cavalry. marie laveau

conjured no black star liner, no great black ark, no sun-ship
outlined in molten anger against the azure
when floods sloshed through ol' new orleans

bloated corpses floated, stank, and sank
in a mud-gumbo of stray piano keys, broken steeples, history
stank, & sank into new life's brazen glitter flitting

over creation's ever-river rolling

∞ burgundy ∞

for oliver jones & rancee lee

88 streetlamps, lit & unlit, yellow & black
alternate down atwater street
black & yellow ivories
bissect little burgundy
a lily melody lilts, unsteady
atop a boozy boogie-woogie
church families bless a bitter welfare
hustlers hover over rum & cokes
lights of burgundy
bops & weeps this harsh haven to sleep
88 piano keys
be the infinite sum & seam
of our history
rancee lee intones a memory, a black blue note
oped into a rogue hope, a hounded bounty, a new canaan
creolity, a congregation to be
lieve in this sound foundation, this air beneath our feat

∞ Burgundy/Little Burgundy/Likka Burg/P'tit Bourgogne/Petite Bourgogne: West-End Montréal quarter (= *quartier*). A concrete crucible sunk under Westmount (where former Prime-Ministers & Capone-associated bootleggers reside). Historic seat of the black community. Burgundy borders the CP railway tracks. Its location was convenient for the West-Indian & American sleeping-car porters. Where the jazz scene had its throne: Rockhead's Paradise, atop which Rufus Rockhead lounged. Where the city's oldest black congregation (strong with ebon Scotians) ambles to its sandstone church every Sunday: Union United.

Lights of Burgundy: Album by jazz pianist Oliver Jones.

Rancee Lee: Mo'real jazz vocalist, drummer, tenor saxophonist (via NYC).