

without it, the sahara would have been water
genoa would have been a finchal of the esquimos
latvium carthage tunis would have been dolphin towns
columbus would have sailed south along the congo's rivers

but being immobile here
more permanent than pope or charlemagne

it has burnt rome
but preserved europe

as it rises
chad sinks

and the green brown of africa crumbles

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and out of the ground
these men with black faces
they frighten me

they tell of coal
of gaols underground where they may follow the fathoms
of vulcan

they have discovered an ancient city of forests
older than the dinosaur or the ice age

they chip it into black blocks of lamplight
and it warms us with a sun more distant than our mother's
star

it is this that breathes from their faces: star winds:
wrinkles of inner darkness

but it is not equiano, it is not paul
robeson, it is not othello the moor

they live beyond the mountain in green apertures
where they have not yet hidden the neutron
they will worship gods that make them smile

that allow them to welcome the stranger
that will make them easily prisoner

but these are the miners of empire
they burn, they eat the land
they vomit it up
they leave lakes of desolation; plantations of dark and dead
plankton

ceaselessly ceaselessly, clocks ticking to mesh, they destroy,
they destroy
they do not care; they have cruelled their faces of fear
of the plague, of the ark, of the aardvark

fresh from the bellows
they smile seeds of colonies
they sow islands
shanty towns rise and rust in their oxides
they confound the outnumbered elders

of sarawak, of samarkand, of benin city

there is the new noise of foundries
fords, cadillacs, locomotive triumph

there are explosions of gas, rocket fire,
blitzkrieg of satellites departing through their own light

and all this benignly
all this beneficently
from the dream of the moon-
faced mountain

white oracle
white order
white ruler
white ships

the image of these ships of trade and intrusion, coming from the
"crack" of *masks*:

this was at last the last;
this was the limit of motion;
voyages ended;
time stopped where its movement began;

horizons returned inaccessible.
here at last was the limit;
the minutes of pebbles drop-
ping into the hourless pool.

hands reached into water;
gods nudged us like fish;
black bottomless whales that we worshipped.
o new world of want, who will build the new ways,

the new ships?

X

the visibility trigger

and now, finally, i'd like to take you to the poem i've been building towards; the poem which attempts to illustrate the effect of imperialism not on europe, now, but on the *victims of imperialism*: "the visibility trigger: a poem for kwame nkrumah and the leaders of the third world."

to begin i must explain certain images and concepts. in addition to the notion of equilibrium and disequilibrium, you will notice that the poems about europe "move a lot"; there are these explorators, always in motion. and i characterize that particular kind of culture, a missile culture: its symbols are the castle, spear, arrow, gothic cathedral spire; skyscraper, and now the missile itself: cape kennedy...intercontinental ballistic...moonshot, star-struck rocket...it is, you will note, very aggressive, and it *feeds*, as i said in one of those poems there, on its own light. it needs, because of the great concentration of power within it, it needs to consume its surroundings. when you see that rocket go up, you will see a vast surrounding area, constantly devastated by its blast. in the same way, when europe expands, as europe becomes powerful and

mont blanc is, to me, the centre of europe. it is their holy mountain: this hub of white around which european history revolves, the folk mythology surrounding this mass— (and don't forget that mt. blanc, as queen of the alps, is enormous) and i'm not thinking of simple spin-offs like yip-e-dee-i-dee-i-da and the legend of st. bernard...

now, as long as mt. blanc is "passive," "static," a white glacial statue, resting in its own state of equilibrium, everything else around the mountain, naturally, remains in place; also in its state of equilibrium. but when the mountain of history becomes "active," as it were; as mt. blanc "rises," as it were, and becomes "illuminated," as it were; so do the areas around it *sink* and *become* darker; shift away or lean towards; begin to slide and flow, as it were, in a counter-movement of equilibrium: the steppes running from russia, the rhone and the rhine and the danube; the caspian and the adriatic, la manche and the mediterranean; the lowland of the scheldt; even the cold blue fiords of scandinavia, the mountains of the moon and the sahara...they all move, alter, shift, change...

but this movement of reactive disequilibrium does not stop there; does not, cannot halt or stabilize itself until we reach its total opposite: the black man's mountain holy mound of africa, kilimanjaro: also the hub of histories: civilizations and plains, valleys, lakes and watercourses: the wheel of the world's animals in its shadow; but agrarian, you see, not industrial. so that metaphorically, kilimanjaro is the atomic or electrical, the cultural "opposite" or "other" of mt. blanc; so that what effects mt. blanc affects the other mountain as in a psychic mood or mirror; so that if there is equilibrium, the mountain forces remain silent in their dream of balance; if there is dis / stress, the effects begin to show in plant and animal around the holy axes; although since mt. blanc is the industrial furnace, missile-oriented, the initiative for change has (so far) usually come from that north of the world: even when hannibal crossed the alps, even when othello captured desdemona; even when shylock was demanding his pound of christian flesh. the alteration of initiative has started only in our time: *when mozambique exploded in the heart of portugal...*

but in terms of the poem, rome (MT. BLANC) is a symbol of materialism; while kilimanjaro, its opposite, is a symbol of the spirit; so that rome's disequilibrium, followed by europe's expansion (the expansion being europe's response to the disequilibrium; the attempt, that way, to restore the balance) affects kilimanjaro in that christine materialism begins to affect the spiritual resources of africa and so africa also begins to become increasingly materialistic — as discussed in *masks* — the corruption of the tribe by bribe; the corruption that became the trade in human flesh of slaves. but even wider than this, it is a poem about europe's effect of underdevelopment, as walter rodney puts it, upon the entire naked spread-out world.

mont blanc

rome burns
and our slavery begins

in the alps
oven of europe
glacier of god
chad's opposite

industry was envisioned here in the indomitable glitter

it out proportions the parthenon
the colosseum is not to be compared with it
nor dome, nor london bridge, bernini bronze nor marble
there is more wealth here than with the bankers of
amsterdam
more power than in any boulder dam of heaven

volt, crackle and electricity it has invented
buchenwald, nagasaki and napalm

it is the frozen first atomic bomb

its factories blaze forth bergs and avalanches
its unships sail down rhine, down rhone, down po, down
danube
to the black sea dead to the world; to the red sea of isaias

imperialist, she has to feed that power; feed herself on that power; and to obtain enough fuel for this, she has to burn / consume an increasingly wide area; first in its own neighborhood (wars in europe) then increasingly further and further afield: exploration into colonialism: into our black space

now these areas — of exploited black space — are also the areas of what is commonly called subsistence culture: where they are concerned — and by choice, certainly not necessarily by *need* (greed) — with stability / equilibrium rather than with progressive disequilibrium. so that just as the symbol of the expansionist is the missile, so the symbol of the subsistence exploited cultures become the circle, hole or target: so that there is this obscure but fatal built-in attraction between the two fields or forces: shot and shot at; arrow to its target; mt. blanc and kilimanjaro. and so the main problem for such subsistence cultures is naturally defence: how to develop armours and strategies against aggression: the quite natural problem of the vulnerability of the target. and what i'm saying here doesn't only apply to whole vast continental complexes such as africa or parts of amerindia; but to small particular units such as our own contemporary folk culture. here people say, for instance, that the "problem" of caribbean folk is that it has been discovered by intellectuals, commercialized and so destroyed; and they blame the "intellectuals" for both the discovery and the "destruction." *leave the culture alone*, is their sooth saying: at least this was their grito until recently. suddenly there has been this change; this sudden pride in roots: roots, rasta, reggae, etc. but that's only because these forms have suddenly become internationally and fashionably "successful" and denotes a change in our national status. but the "problem" of protection still remains; that very international success contains its own danger; the danger of absorption and appropriation; unless we can move from being shell-less snail to cultural (national) hedgehog or armadillo

but this is the form and nature of the culture: and its subsistence symbol is the circle: with africa its chief subsistence source and model. the drums are round, its dancers dance a circle; the villages and their houses: also round, though this shape is changing (superficially?); though the compound, don't you see, remains; and the elders sit in their circle and the farms surround the villages in

dispositions like wheels; and time is a wheel: ancestor, spirit, child...

in the poem, you will find that the images that have to do with the intruder, the invader man from the north, suggest the missile; and that these missile images (prow, put-put, landing) slowly insinuate themselves—rather, sharply insert themselves—into the complex of the circle: bowl calabash cycle of elders: until there is clash, confusion, shape loss and finally destruction—or possibly these. for the poem also goes on to celebrate the circle's subsistence survival...

the visibility trigger
a poem for kwame nkrumah and the leaders of the third world

and so they came up over the reefs
up the creeks and rivers
oar prong put-put
hack tramp silence

and i was dreaming near morning
i offered you a kola nut
your fingers huge and smooth and red
and you took it
your dress makola blue

and you broke it into gunfire

the metal was hot and jagged
it was as if the master of bronze
had poured anger into his cauldron
and let it spit spit sputter
till it was red blue black in my face

it was as if a maggot
had slapped me in the belly
and i had gone soft like the knead of my wife's bread

i could hear salt leaking out of the black hole of kaneshie
i could hear grass growing around the edges of the green
lake
i could hear stalactites ringing in my cave of vision
bats batting my eyes shut
their own eyes howling like owls in the dead dark

and they marched into the village
and our five unready virginal elders met them

bowl calabash oil carafe of fire silence

and unprepared and venerable
i was dreaming mighty wind in trees
our circles talismans: round hut round village cooking pots

the world was round and we the spices in it
time wheeled around our memories like stars;
yam cassava groundnut sweetpea bush

and then it was yams again

birth child hunter warrior
and the breath which is no more

which is birth which is child which is hunter which is
warrior which is
breath that is no more

and they brought sticks rods roads bullets straight objects

birth was not breath
but gaping wound

hunter was not animal
but market sale

warrior was child
that is no more

and i beheld the cotton tree: guardian of graves rise
upward from its monument of grass
crying aloud in its vertical hull
calling for crashes of branches vibrations of leaves

there was a lull of silver

and then the great grandfather, gnashing upwards from its
teeth of roots
split down its central thunder
the stripped violated wood crying aloud its murder, the
leaves' frontier signals alive with lamentations

and our great odoum
triggered at last by the ancestors into your visibility
crashed into history