

Kumina

BY KAMAU BRATHWAITE

for DreamChad on the death of her sun Mark - mark this word mark
this place + tyme - at Papine Kingston Jamaica - age 29
midnight 28/29 April 2001-1002-0210-0120-0020-0000
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WHAT CAN I SAY BUT THIS MY DARLING
WHAT CAN I DO BUT TRY TO SPEECH MY HEART YR HEART FROM
BREAKING

.

‘Kumina is the most African of the [cultural expressions] to be found in Jamaica, with negligible European or Christian influence. Linguistics evidence cites the Kongo as a specific ethnic source for the ‘language’ and possibly the music of kumina. There are varying theories as to whether it was brought with late African [arrivants] after Emancipation, or whether it was rooted in Jamaica from the 18th century, and deepened by . . . later African influence.

‘[Kumina] is to be found primarily in St Thomas and Portland and to a lesser extent in St Mary, St Catherine and Kingston. Kumina ceremonies are usually associated with wakes, entombments or memorial services but can be performed for a whole range of human experiences (births, thanksgiving, invocations for good [or] evil).

‘Kumina sessions [*some extending, as in this poem, to twenty-one days*], involve singing, dancing and drumming and are of two general types; *bailo* the more public and less sacred form of kumina, at which time songs are sung mainly in Jamaican [NL/nation-language]; and *country* - the more African, and serious form, and at which time *possession* usually occurs.

'Male and female leaders must exhibit great . . . strength in their control of zombies [zambies] or spirits and assume their positions of leadership after careful training in the feeding habits, ritual procedures, dances, rhythms, and songs of a variety of spirits, by a previous King or 'Captain' . . . Queen or 'Mother'.

'One is said to 'catch' *myal* when possessed by one of the three classes of Gods - sky, earth-bound, and ancestoal [zambies], these last being the most common form of possession. Each god can be recognized by the initiated by the particular dance style exhibited by the possessed, and by songs and drum rhythms [*bandu, plain cyas, scrap-ers, gourds, tincan rattles, catta sticks & bamboo stamping tubes*] to which it responds.

'At *bailo* dances, the spirits who are called, more often than not make their presence known by 'mounting' (i.e. possessing) a dancer; whose given dance style helps in identifying the spirit, but can span all possibilities of movement. The basic dance posture constitutes an almost erect back and propelling actions of the hips as the feet inch along the ground. The dancers move in a circular [anti-clockwise] pattern around the musicians and centre pole, either singly or with a partner. The arms, shoulders, rib-cage and hips are employed, offering the dancers ample opportunity for variations and interpretations of the counter-beats or polyrhythms. Spins, dips, and 'breaks' on the last beat are common dance variations.

'The journey of the spirits from the ethereal to the mundane world is no less ritualised than other kumina elements. Once invoked by music and other ritual paraphernalia (rum with blood, candles, leaves) the spirits are said to hover near the dancing booth [bood]. If successfully enticed they travel down the centre pole in to the ground, then through the open end of the drum to the head of the drum, where the drummer and Queen must salute its presence. The spirit then re-enters the ground, from where it will travel up the feet of the person selected to be possessed, along the whole length of the body, culminating with the full *myal* possession in the haed of the [transforming] individual.' *Anon, Jamaica journal 10: 1 (Kingston 1986) pp6,7]*

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First it is the knife
in the kitchen. the thick one w/the long bright blade
and the thick wooden handle. that knife wdn't stay
flat. each time i wash it. put it down. it drop or ramp up
on it spine w/the singing edge of the blade running thin
& straight-along like some spiteful future & horizon

Pull out the drawer w/the silvers and it still there. sharp.
prop-over & unquiet on it omen

.

The cosmology of sudden unXpecting disaster
& its unutterable grief unvomiting the world

i seem to be becoming lightning rod
for like this wreck of Time

we cope so tentative so desperate in dis kingdom
of the dread. the voices reach-
ing out. be-
traying fear & crying out for help beyonn the lyme

of reassurance. tryin to mek sense
of all de wallawallawalla as the whole
world like it topple-over menance. tryin
to regain it recompense of balm & balance hallow

>

ello! . . . ello! . . . Mummy! . . . This is Ingrid . . .

Kamau & DreamChad coil in each others blood. she
tying the discomfort his tears for her dead son
while she bleeds as her sun keels from its mangle wheel .

hit off his latenight midnight bi-

cycle middlepassage ship

by a rat-racing-on-our-highways new-money quick-monkey
ill-legal-jjugs-money-traffikin cyaar -
BMW Audi the sleek black latest luxury Discord or Ellectra
or streak Ajax Mardza or Alexandria - in Papine -

Errol Hill beggarmanpoem . Slade Hopkinson & Breeze
madwoman poems

Ogou. Soyinka. Dennis Scott's Dog. Tony McNeill's Ungod. Vera Bell's
Gog -

they happen all here -
the unceremonial graveyard. thirsty & unappease -
of yout. artists. don gorgons. Caribbean

slaves. eee-
lectric politricks & politricans. big big-time robber
baroms

.

the 21 days

on the first day

of yr death it is quiet it is dormant like a doormat
no one-foot touch its welcome. its dust on the floor
is not disturb nor are the sleeping spirits of this house

i sit here in this chair trying to unravel Time so that it wouldn't
happen twine

on the second day

of yr death. i break a small

bread

i can still smell the sweet flour of yr firstborn flesh

on the third day

of yr death. the water in my urine turn to blood
i cover the waterfront of the mirror w/a blue cloth where yr face
stood

on the fourth day

yu shd be rising. knocking at the door of darkness. coming back to me

i do not hear yr call

on the fifth day

after yr death. a young white rooster. white white white feathery &
shining tail & tall
neighbour of sound from miles away in the next village
stands in the yard & from his red crown crows & crows & will not go
away

he struts round to the back-a-wall
his one eye clicking clicking as he crows

comes to the glissen of my window & he crows
loud like the overflowing voice of my Trelawny waterfall

on the sixth day

after yr death. there is this silence of flowers
their petals say their shining needs
soft water needs

sweet showers needs
sweet rain from heaven

.

i see them once again inside the chapel of my funeral

on the seventh day

after yr death. the yellow flour
in the cup-cakes in the kitchen have gone sour

there is an eye of rancid in the middle of their meal

i am unhappy like the wind & tides are restless rivers
i can't find you. i can't find you. i cannot cannot cannot be console to
dreams

the mad dogs of the pasture kill the cock & pillage
it. madwoman wind is scattering white screaming feathers' petals'
pedals over all
the brunt & burnin ochre-colour land

on the eiate day

after yr death

me do nothin. nothin. nothin . i cdn't even get yr inglish 'eighth' spelt
streight

on the nine/ff night

yu rise again from off the dead

.

i see you now & at the hour of yr o not soff not soffly dead

it is my pain it is my privilege. it is my own torn flesh torn fresh
o let me comfort us my chile. is not yr heart is broken

.

on this tenth day

i haffe go down to the Station today to find out
what they doin about yr det. about the 'accident'
dem call it. bout the black-hearted man who a-kill

yu. an whe dem hide yu body
the po. lice who dealin w/this case they cannot look me in the
lips
and No One kno

who the boy is or gone or when he will come-back
ten time dis ten dem mek me up & down & book & fourt
to fine my sun. an ten ten time dem ave no ansa for me for me for
me

in dis dry-weatha tunda
dem seh because i poor & have no book to haul-out who
inside dis station. an i inn got no song

to sing becau i colour in dis Marcus Garvey country proud an
strong
an wrong - yu sun gone out & still yu colour wrong.
inn got no i say song

i wonda who Port Royal is. when de eart goin again goig crack

my daughta Ingrid walk beside me hurt
an strong an dress in black
her face inside she face ink mekkin sport

on the tenth night after a long long distance silence

i born into this world w/nothing but my breath & my bare back
an hornets
in my chess

now i will haffe doubt if god is good & black & honesty
wha good god do fe me?
whe god dat cricket midnight criminal when Mark of god get call
like dat & kill
Mark cyaan dead so if good. if god

my breath give birt to good like god
my sun dis gold is all my riches that cannot be replace
an suddenly me cannot fine him in dis place before dis good god
face to face
wha good fe god. no god. wha good. wha god. no god
if good Mark have no face to face dis god inside dis good god
place

on the eleventh day after dead

[Silence]

on the twelfth day

after yr debt - o pickney - it is as if me cyaaan wake up
Time has been drain from all my clocks. the sky is overcyas & lock
altho it isn't rainin yet

[Silence]

this night we hold our wake. watch w/ the spirit of my sum before his
daily funeral
.people cook food bring bread & drink & there's some singing
of the old traditions by the older folks & country citizens

but they soon fall to arguing and they soon fall down to quarrellin
about the words the phrases time & tempo of these sookey tunes
if seem they isolated in the old traditions in these coffee hills

We are 3000 feet high up in the blue mountain of this Irish Town

by three o'clock is gettin cold here in the midnight dew
and all around me. even the young-ones
watch me watch the faces of their coffin spirits growin old

on the tired tireen(th) day

after im det. we tek the body of my son
& walk him from the chapel back up the hill-road
pass Mass Dixon Lane to Bedward buryingrounn & seal him up & tomb
im leave im dere

My aunt husbann tell me later dat tree
time Mark try fe mek dem put im down. de casket get so heavy
de man-dem haffe change sides all de time to ress dem hands
& many willin new ones haffe come fe help dem wid it
im get so heavy heavy going to im grave

tree

time he try fe stagger dem go left. teach

dem to veer down MasonDixonLane whe e grow up

is all too sudden. Sonny. im want to ress a while from all dis pain an
distrulation

cause when im reach down-dey. im nevva soon-come-back again

mi look back once onto the leaf. less barrem hillside where he is
cyaaan even see no grief
of flowers there

.

perhaps there are no flowers there

**on the fourteenth day after Mark gone. on the first day after him
first entomb**

the rain staat fat rat raat . i stannin by
the window like a window washin it

there in the street An do you know what even as he lie

crack. neck broken. trauma. red red red
de passerby-dem Marley sing about -
de woman son shoot down into the
street & dead ? -

Mark dem tief-off evva thing they fine pun

*So when he went down to the
policestation morgue that night
my son mange up widdout im shoes &
shocks?*

gone. on the fourteenth day after my sun
on the first day after him first entomb

i feel my womb
seal-up. de blood brek-down

inside me bellybottom

[day 15]

i wonder wha appen to im bicycle? i wonder whe um is?

[day 16]

we know 'widow' an i hear of 'widower'

i wonder what dem call a woman lose she sun?

tief too dat too me reckon

again i sit here in this chair trying to unravel Time
so that it wouldn't happen

[day 17]

*Death keep gettin-away & gettin-away & gettin in the way
coilin inside dis house like serpent(s)
into its dark corners when we turn to face*

*dem
eatin away the cupboards of our soul
above the stove an thru the drains an down in. to the cellar w/its term*

*-ites. torm
-ites tunnel & un. dermine the very grounn we walk
on. how we make love. destroye the very irie way we dance*

*they was nvr a chance really that we wd avoid
this. clingin to each others bodies. holdin hands. and climb
-in to our souls. feelin the grief like an electric wire*

*shudder thru our clothes around our ribs where Adam make
us. veins
our gutteries. our lonely bones*

*this
we have nvr plan
to be away from love like this*

*opening these doors one after one one after one
sweeping this dust these ashes from the floor of sorrow
bowed head. the one step one step sweeping*

*out today today
and down the passage of tomorrow & tomorrow & tomorrow
into the distance of what must be the future but no more no more*

*each time i turn into the kitchen. head down towards the sink
of chores. lookin a spoon fe wash. fe tea to brew. fe soup to scoup
fe bread fe fat & fry. is you is you is you. keep*

*comin back. cockroaches of these curses
flickerin up the pipes & plumbin. lickerin the wet surface
w/ they lean*

*thumb
-nail tongue. the lard
oil ori*

*-faces washin back yr
face. these grey green oil
-(y) fissures that yu cannot clean*

*as if we cover up in soares & sin. as if we do some
-body some
-thin wrong. as if we do some. body*

*in & spit out syllables like the split
stringy ends of bonavista peas spit
out the white bright taste of salt into this dry lagoon as if this is the
saviour*

*this the recompence. this is the penalty we play for 'coming from no
whe' for 'being poor'
the rat patrol keep rattin pass my door*

*and now there is this white night blind
-ness in my eyes for all the years*

that are no tears to tell. because there are no years no no more years

*fe yell for you in this - this - 'new emergency'
- the blood my heart
the broken body wringing in my belly like a ghost my baby like a bell*

*of bone
. mi wunda whe e doin now
. mi wunda whe Mark gone*

[day 18]

Sometime in the miggles of the mornin of the night i remember that this day is the day when my urban barn some undread toussann years ago <<<< an as the custom/as the kind. ness is. yu muss xpec re. spec. the day shd be acknowledge/celebrated/be re. rembered. don't? But in the miggles of this grief. all this slow daze of grease. these sleep. less nights. this fear now every sound each startle shadow nigh(t) it might be him/my love impale<<<< w/in his pain impassion wounds - *why me why me. wha mek me fraid & frighten ee?* - all I cd do is walk across the moon an kiss-im pun im broken cheek my eyes elsewhe & >>>> hiss in not for him today. mi like me cyaan help whe me travellin-mi-travellin an wish im Appy Birthday<

on the nineteen day afta my husbann gone

**- it seem so long it seem
mi fatha now altho I nvr kno no fatha
- my husbann gone back**

**to the States to finish up im work
- few nights ago he try to touch me. wake me up. yu know
as if dat comfort? dat wd help**

...

ah well . . . he had his 10 years time of salt already an he went thru hell and now he marréd me the poor man like he have to wear my bell he nevva try to rush me. dough . . . e mean me mean me well

...

on the twentieff day after ee tief and the seventh after de burial

i go lookin for my sun in all his glory
Somethin inside my shake & rackkle heart. along my ripple spine

agroin/agroan my nipple guts. w/in the bleedin womb whe he did
born
whe he intomb

something inside here tell me there will be no rest no rest no rest no
rest no rest no rest
- can be no rest - until I find him - these rock dry-rivva courses - an
bring im justice back
w/me

in true
becau im nvva born to blue nor no slow horses

21

*SpaceTime stann still As still as if it didn't happen Tho it is 21 days now & she Nkuuyu is still travellin still travellin in the underworld To find her sun & bring him back kalunga on this earth. That's where she is That's why she is so far away That's why you know she can't leave Kingston at this time to go back w/her husbann to the U nighted States Valhalla & the kingdooms of this world whe they in love might live who knows for. ever For she must find him She will find him They will talk Might take a long long time. but she will come to understand if she can find him find him find him She will accept Perhaps Because she see him like alive again Whole Fit & Beautiful again and he will find her eyes & call her Name again - Beverley Miss Mama Bev Miss Bev And she at last begins to Terrible & bleedin troubleous in pain Such blessed water after such long drought & shining silence after such long doubt And call him back im name & call him Mark again & Light & Love & take him back & born him - **O Mama - Mark - O Mama** - This xchanging is the healing nvr ever healing But she try He try. **Name on Name on Mama. Mark on Mark.** So she can hold him now w/in her arms again Protect that neck that nvr shd*

*be broken. That head that nvr shd be crush. so Hush she will rock him
Hush she will rock him to sleep And it is almost over*

*Now she will try to bring him back
back to the world up
-inside down. down inside black
to the world they have lost of the sun
-light & 'real' Rock
in her cradle of arms of all she can give
to the world. beyond all these harms
& their fissures & failures Sleeping
for all ages*

*is when they almost there - door corridor crossroad gateway threshold -
the light becoming stronger - less stranger less stranger - almost sounds
almost taking shape. the street. the trees. a building. stone. a chirping
bird. turtledoves of green . . . That he awake into this his second sudden
terror His visor of this otherWorld. mask off. the new faces on. eras from
like beginning coming to this end. Skull of his breath. Wind colouring itself
the long way wrong way wrong way wrong way wrong. the soundless
horror of his wounds like the wild white of my eyes first seeing it. then
something in side in. side me going red & swimming i in black. the uttar
lamentation of this broken blank Look he transforms before her by the
doorway into broken fish & pisces. torn from his roots & gender. into this
common sound. from all he almost is into what suddenly can nvr be. this
stripp & vivid unconstructed verb. constricted. In all his cinnamon & dis.
assemble parts. His black crown crush. recrush. Th(e) vase neck break.
rebroeken. The cruel eye of his assassin in trauma in his lockets*

Jesus my Revelator *Injustice as e dead hit from behine to this
afflictuated future. an nvr even kno it. Each bless of him the salted water
i now drink. His white flesh broken to this flesh my red i cannot eat* **No No
No No in carne criminate I do not want to see it!**

*there is a howling she can hear she does not understand is here is hers.
like she is hearing in her own ears howling wolf long canine knives &
clanking richter rackets Like all his blood is floating down her cistern of
his wounds are blessed rain this sound w/in her falling*

*ears this taste w/in her mouth like she is givin birth to menance memory
- his past somehow his tirelesslessness & somehow now - his future some.
where in this past where they are bound in what is almost sound in what
is almost light & outline - w/in the shadows near the door where they shd
pass so they might live - together - as it was before - as it will be. be.fore -
is what the sound is saying - giving birth to light - her sun - her son - her
cinema - the death that is in him is him becoming death that was-in-him
was him. un. coming him - the death that will be him becoming bourne &
being born now in this nommonation of these howls so near the 'real' &
stranger raiding world now gettin louder gettin clearer gettin warmer so
blinding her now so she can't see him anymore tho she still has the
howling in her - and somewhere deep inside her bowels now the sleepin
rock. im cradle her familiar spirit arms - the womb of his death now safely
wounded in her - sun become father - genitor - an almost newborn born
& burn. ing in her - one is one & so always w/in him w/in her in her
- learning himself again to live w/in in her wounds*

*So that at last possibl - even if unbearable to bear - but bearing - still
bearing and at
least & at last no(w) possibl - what yesterday was impossibl - a pathway
no possibl -
no(w) possibl - she leaving him new at this door at this threshold this
light of forever w/in
her. bearing down*

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