Sojourner
Karl Carter

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 Guianaman

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 Dembala 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