

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 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