

NATHANIEL MACKEY

from

Song of the

Andoumboulou: 122

We hung on Sophia’s every word, the
hurt look her mouth had, lips like they
were swollen, a wound all words came
thru.
Desengañada, she called it engaño, snare
we’d been caught out by... Kiss’s caliphate.
Sophic lipstick. Echo, sonic likeness,
weight given something so slight. Quick
meta-
physical wish, willed indignity, soul said
to be discontent... It was love’s hurt
mouth, jutting mouth, hurting mouth, top
lip
given to strain, bottom bursting, lower lip’s
pendency fraught. Slipped on a stair, we
lay on our backs looking at the sky, the
blues,
the bruises, lividity’s top-down hem...
A floating field, all claim let go, suspect,
Low Forest all uphill. We lay busted up look-
ing up, lay but got up, bit lips’ blood on
our
tongues... Sophic doctrine the book we
thumbed had there been one, bouche what
book there was, there was a book, andoum-
boulouous “mu” intimating what’s what...
Colla-
genated lips. Plump seraphic feet. Meter’s
winged egress. What was what was gone...
Again we stepped onto the evacuated plain
it
all took place on, beautifully available earth
irredentist, only ours to lose could it be
said to be ours at all, reticent, we knew, as
be-
fore

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The ground we soon enough scrounged
around for, we who’d have been crabs
were it a beach we were on, bees had it
only
been air, we’d be nowhere, ostriches, honey-
headed, stung... The ground engulfed
our heads and grew, our heads grew with
it,
teased by a buzz we could hear but not
see, not see but feel our way inside. Sophic
Shore we wanted it to be but it wasn’t,
wavebreak the moon’s underskirts but it
was-
n’t, Yemaya’s ledge gone out. Could word
be rescue, rescued, dangling we hung,
held on... Philosophic posse, we’d forgot-
ten who we were, world about to end
it
seemed. Sophic doctrine said sand or
sage, it was ours, flood whose mouth had a
pasted-on look, collagelike stretch it was
ours
to attach to, lipsmear’s boast and behest...
Bedouin liege, bedouin ledge, we were
under, we were on, Sufi love lounge on the
box
our heads had been, none of it was made
up now... We heard a hammering, day-
light’s chime, unlikely sound our sovereign,
Sophiabad it was we were in. A courtyard
in
California came next, tapped air pungent with
gleam, glimmer, again where we set out
from. Tapped air thick, rotting fruit at our
feet,
daylight’s thump diffuse, divvied up, sound
and Sophia’s played-up embrace, sound we
could almost hear... “A mountain out of an
ant-
hill,” Itamar warned us, chill, post-prostatic,
nonplussed. “Sophic ruse we confected,
world beneath her dress, ground all arousal,
scurry, scout, scrounge...” Itamar went on and
we

listened, a Sophia not the one we saw but cel-
ebrated, she herself intent she’d be that she and
we her cadre, kiss come down from heaven,
hair
tied up in
cloth

Nathaniel Mackey is the author of five books of poetry, the most recent of which is *Nod House* (New Directions, 2011). His sixth, *Blue Fasa*, is forthcoming from New Directions in 2015. He is also the author of an ongoing prose work, *From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate*, whose fourth and most recent volume is *Bass Cathedral* (New Directions, 2008) and whose first three volumes have been published together as *From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate: Volumes 1-3* (New Directions, 2010). He has also written two books of criticism, the most recent of which is *Paracritical Hinge: Essays, Talks, Notes, Interviews* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2005). He is the editor of the literary magazine *Hambone*; and coeditor, with Art Lange, of the anthology *Moment’s Notice: Jazz in Poetry and Prose* (Coffee House Press, 1993). He lives in Durham, North Carolina, and teaches at Duke University.