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Brazilian Happiness

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HERBERT MORRIS

BRAZILIAN HAPPINESS

Stars of the South Atlantic, as with women
sweet in the hair and dark I sleep with you,
white nights of sugar ports and moon-lapped beaches
worn to their salts beneath surf's stunning questions
endlessly repeated briny asking,
long on the Trades prevailing, salutation's
probing and thrust here, waves begging the headland
answers, or one coast staying their solution
rather than sundered, nightly the withdrawal
but a few grains before it, continent
awaiting, like great fruit's quite acid genius,
being addressed, the falling to that rhythm
tears from the breakers' throat, lives in the blood.

Time, like the tin medallion of Our Lady
Blackened by Light and Blesséd of Pure Crossings
beaten out by the sea and string-suspended,
how long is it we wear you at our necks
or, with that grace so Latin, have you wear us.
Yes, it is very long: time as the ocean
asking what it must ask, but still unanswered;
time as the routes from Africa and Europe
plied by my father or my father's father,
slaves from the Gold Coast or those Lisbon sailors
mad on the quince and mango skipped their ships;
time as the light that battered and the weather
wizened and stained me into recognition
out of a mix not lashed enough for bread;
and time the way of coming to a man,
learning the nets, the sails, the breath, the body,
ready for tasks, for life, taking a woman,
my own young ones, in time, some coastal shanty
crumbled and poor but waiting in my name,
if I shall have a name, and I can read it.

And continent: America, I swear it,
south of the Gulf of Mexico, breaks landfall
fiercer than most and sweetest of those hells
dazzle the littoral and fever held to
all the white nights we lay dreaming white havens,
home as the place we started from still youths,
unturned by what the sun wrought and the voyage,
the heathen coasts, raw salt, the passion islands.

Continent, it is you we wear this evening,
still with the day's heat trapped against the chest,
snaring the moon and by a breath suspended
worn by the sea beyond a string's clean semblance,
Our Lady Sheer of Hemisphere and Losses.
And joy, I tell you: earth from which are wrested
flowering jacaranda, should we will it
(even to have its name within the mouth,
somewhere a language fitting bougainvillea,
pride and astonishment of the Brazilian);
jasmine, acacia, all the wild-blooming, breath
in the lungs at the day's end enough to lie here
stricken with our Latinity and dreaming
(or do they fall here) stars like a tropic snowplum
strewn its seed and essence on our heads
where the nights end and where the capes go down
infinite, vexed with question, Lady, gifted.

ALAN GROSS

LANCELOT

He, wholly a lover, half a friend,
Defeated now, turns back to Camelot,
Where, indolent with rain, a lonely king
Mounts his storm-dark stallion and sinks into the wind.