The air lay lit with a kind of dread. Expectancy’s arraignment it felt like, the oud’s outer inurement all there was, inside out.

The conundrum the backs of our heads hit was death. We thought of it the least often we could but a lot, the closer walk being what it was. “Rue not the day,” we’d been told. . . Happenstance rode us like an orisha, the unawares heaven we were in without knowing it almost to be beheld, recession a kind of rescue, not to be held on to. A kind of circling it seemed or it was we could not find a way out of. Huff and Eleanor, sudden lovers, caught unawares was only part of it, verities purveyed in a row the least part of it, the it whose we would be. . . We stared out our windows, Low Forest green a cathedral. Leafed limbs hung over us as we rode and were ridden, the green comedy said by some to be clear profusion. The dry cliffs of Bandiagara were a far cry away but we might’ve been underwater crossing Mu,
Hu√ so wanted it so. It was he who breathed life in-
to it all he’d’ve had us believe, the wobbly cap-
tain who steered our boat a god decked out in
shades dark enough to blind. One saw the passion
and
the pathos of it, Huff’s pathetic boast backed
by someone inside each of us hollering would it
were his, would he had his way, someone inside
Elea-
noir the most, the bodies they newly saw they
wouldn’t always have now newly poignant, lit
with a new appeal. . . It was all creation myth,
creation ythm, by now, Sophia said, was but hadn’t
al-
ways been. How to break free of the said she impli-
citly asked, whatsay’s world dominion, silence
long since no option, the underwater tissue of leaves
we
drove thru. She was the wise one, ever the one
we’d heard of, always our luck to hear from. She
pressed her lips together, soft wrinkly flesh nixing
talk,
nixing kissing, adjourning all surrounding sound. . .
We were on Cornwallis, passing under 15-501, the
daily for the moment immortal, preserved in amber,
what-
said lag let

Ythm was a corollary life riding with us, a concur-
rency, a wrinkle in time. Accompaniment it could
also be called and Sophia called it that, the green in
the
blue, the blue in the green. . . Not since embou-
chure met nerve-end had it been so close to see, so
wise or so conducing to wisdom we pounded the
heels
of our hands together, pressed our tongues to the backs of our teeth... It was all one to us whether we came or we went, mythic or mystic the ythmic ride was,

drained or adjoining Mu we trekked

So too with Huff and Eleanoir’s romance, the lens they slew history with or made it with history with, made history with. It was history cut down to size. “Let us never put forth anything unless it be parcel, part,” Eleanoir had said. “Breath and light beyond any before,” Huff had said, “bodily breakdown bear me thru.”

So much of it was they wanted to speak that way, so much emotion a pretext for whatsay, Sophia would’ve said had she not summarily adjourned all sound... It was a moment under the overpass, traffic noise cancelled as well as all else, more than a philosophical pause but also that, a nonsonance none but Sophia knew was there. Whatsay’s collapse into nonsay rode with us now, momentary though the muting had been, return to sonance though we did, nonsay itself the blue vessel we bore thru green in. We rode along saying nothing now. It was all a corridor of green leaves and light, the standing-pat of trees between which we once debated if God could lie. We sat now tasting our tongues... All effortlessness it was now or it seemed. Everything attested its place without call or complaint, “mu” as in mute, made clear.
too sat tasting my tongue, Nub’s descent into Nur
a kind of coating, nothing not affected by Nub’s
un-
mer-
cy

The trees were breathing in and breathing out
for us, transitory support we rode on.
The realty show was depleting Low Forest
and
we cruised even so, an ambiguous boat
amid a sea of green. “We took a real trip,”
Trane had said, “on a real ship,” imaginary
sound
more real than the wind riffling the leaves,
the hum of rubber on asphalt, the ones that
were there. . . A faint, far eastern keening had
one’s
ear, Nub’s descent into Nur a kind of croon
it prevailed against, hatesay remanding the
we we’d be, “mu” as in moot. Turned away,
we
rode our boat of longing, locked out of the hea-
ven we’d been in not knowing we were in it,
immi-
grant wish the boat we
rode

It was Huff who had called it all myth, all ythm,
a clipped or some other way compromised
rhythm. There was an imaginal sound, he said,
loud-
er than sound we could hear, boat of soul
the school of oud, oud as old as wood some said,
some said even older. With the wood’s daugh-
ter Eleanoir took issue, wood not to be said to
have
come later, she said, subsequent to the oud’s pear shape, the pear not possibly prior to the tree that bore it. Shape, she went on, was no abstraction, shape was even less possibly prior.

“Enough with the ‘some,’” she said. “What do you say?” she asked. . . It was the beginning of he-said-she-said, cosmogonic wuh rebutted by cosmic flirt, things began to come apart. “Wood was less itself before oud was,” Huff answered. “Oud is what made wood matter, oud itself more virtual than real, especially the school of it. Oud is only illusory matter, imaginal sound beyond concrete audition.” Wood’s daughter, whose dream, after all, it was we were in, her dream of the blue truck that might’ve been a bus, might’ve been a boat, said little. “Wood is wood,” Eleanoir said. Then she said no more, said nothing, not-saying saying more than saying would. “Trouble ahead,” Ahdja whispered in my ear. . . Huff himself not knowing, Eleanoir had no way of knowing eucalyptus trunks bare of their bark were a Lone Coast memory, a grove of them Huff’s dream, his blue remit. A long way away and a long way back. He spoke of wood as one who spoke of flesh, as of a grove of legs, bark stripped away showing lionlike whiteness underneath, a Greco-arboreal mytheme or ythememe, “leaves” informed of which he’d long read. Oud, she had no way of knowing, he himself not knowing, was a transposition eastward, troubadour stuff, court-
ly legs he saw, dreaming westward, an erotico-ecologi-
cal polis he saw proposed by the worry lines on her

face. . .

How Eleanoir dreamt her not knowing, how dream
could specify what she didn’t know without inform-
ing her, none of us knew. How she dreamt Huff’s not

know-
ing we could see. Her dream was to know with-
out knowing and to know more than he knew. Ahdja

whispered all this to me. . . We ambled along leav-
ing the philosophic nonsonance behind, the overpass

be-

hind, wood’s daughter’s falling silent of a piece with

it though we cruised away, blue truck, blue bus,
blue boat, whatever it was we rode on or in, heroines

and

heroes of her dreamt

récit

All hands were on deck as we exited the
nerve church. We saw there was nothing
not stained with motion. The animate

out-

cry “We’ve been had” echoed all thru
the trees. . . Eleanoir and Huff, having fallen
in, were now falling out, the pathos their

would-

be polis aroused gone against polis itself. . .

A bare limning taking place took the place

of the solid as their chances grew long,

they

and we the fools it took turning wary, more

likely

to’ve been trawling

sleep

NATHANIEL MACKEY’s most recent book of poetry is *Blue Fasa* (New Directions, 2015). Forthcoming from New Directions in 2020 is *Double Trio*, a three-book set from which the poem in this issue is taken.

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