

BANTU COMBINATIONS

1.

I am still carving an ironwood stick.
I am still thinking about it.

2.

The lake dries up at the edges.
The elephant is killed by a small arrow.

3.

The little hut falls down.
Tomorrow, debts.

4.

The sound of a cracked elephant tusk.
The anger of a hungry man.

5.

Is there someone on the shore?
The crab has caught me by one finger.

6.

We are the fire which burns the country.
The Calf of the Elephant is exposed on the plain.

(Africa)

THE DAYBREAK

Day breaks: the first rays of the rising Sun,
stretching her arms.
Daylight breaking, as the Sun rises to her feet.
Sun rising, scattering the darkness;
lighting up the land . . .
With disc shining, bringing daylight,
as the birds whistle and call . . .
People are moving about, talking, feeling the warmth.
Burning through the Gorge, she rises,
walking westwards,
Wearing her waist-band of human hair.
She shines on the blossoming coolibah tree,
with its sprawling roots,
Its shady branches spreading . . .

(Australia: Mudbara)

THE WAVES

Waves coming up: high waves coming up
 against the rocks,
 Breaking, shi! shi!
 When the moon is high with light upon the
 waters:
 Spring tide; tide flowing to the grass,
 Breaking, shi! shi!
 In its rough waters, the young girls bathe.
 Hear the sound they make with their hands
 as they play!

(Australia: Laragia)

THE LIGHTNING SNAKES

(A Love Poem)

The tongues of the Lightning Snakes flicker and twist, one to the
 other . . .
 They flash across the foliage of the cabbage palms . . .
 Lightning flashes through the clouds, with the flickering tongue
 of the Snake . . .
 It is always there, at the wide expanse of water, at the place of
 the sacred tree . . .
 All over the sky, their tongues flicker: above the place of the
 Rising Clouds, the place of the Standing Clouds . . .
 All over the sky, tongues flickering and twisting . . .
 They are always there, at the camp by the wide expanse of
 water . . .
 All over the sky, their tongues flicker: at the place of the Two
 Sisters, the place of the Wauwalak . . .
 Lightning flashes through the clouds, flash of the Lightning
 Snake . . .
 Its blinding flash lights up the cabbage palm foliage . . .
 Gleams on the cabbage palms and on the shining leaves . . .

(Australia: Arnhem Land)

TO THE GOD OF FIRE AS A HORSE

Your eyes do not make mistakes.
 Your eyes have the sun's seeing.
 Your thought marches terribly in the night
 blazing with light & the fire
 breaks from your throat as you whinny in battle.

This fire was born in a pleasant forest
 This fire lives in ecstasy somewhere in the night.

His march is a dagger of fire
 His body is enormous
 His mouth opens & closes as he champs on the world
 He swings the axe-edge of his tongue
 smelting & refining the raw wood he chops down.

He gets ready to shoot & fits arrow to bowstring
 He hones his light to a fine edge on the steel
 He travels through night with rapid & various movements
 His thighs are rich with movement.
 He is a bird that settles on a tree.

(India)

TO THE GOD OF FIRE

He hides himself like a thief in the hidden cave
 in darkness with the cow of vision.

It is to him we always surrender:
 he carries our surrender with him.

His movements are the law of the working of truth
 He circles the world & the sea swells him up with its song:
 the flame of truth burns in the heart of water.

He is earth & the wide fields we grow festive in,
 The pleasure of running water, the hill we climb,
 The clean air at its peak from which we watch
 Invincible horses gallop along unbroken rivers that he runs
 beside.

And he eats the forests of earth:
 The wind breathes him out & he perches in the branches
 And he scorches the hair of earth's body with his flame.
 And he breathes on the water like a gull in the trough of
 the wave,
 And he wakes at daybreak to begin the recitation of the word,
 And he is like a god of wine & like a white cow with her calf,
 And he spreads out over the world,
 and his light can be seen very far.

(India)