

The Train to Ìdògò

Adémólá Àráoyè

The old minstrel popped

The last of the three staccatos

Lashing his coiled tongue

Against the rooftop of his old palate

Clicking in echoes resounding on long islands

Drawing the curtains of mist and star dust

To the long nights

That has burnt into black soot

The crescent birth of old moons

As the night train journeys

Down south with the children

To the kingdoms of old.

So long Ó dì'gbà 'ó se,

To the night conclaves

Awash in the tenderness of the sturdy shadows of the *Ìrókò*

So long,

To the honey tongued poet

Bestriding the moonlit nights of the old land

Peddling the wisdom of antiquity

To strange and native ears alike.

So long, *Ó dì'gbà 'ó se*.

Their eyes have seen the *Òkun*

And the pier at *Etí-òsà*

Nothing like the wintry withering dawns

Waking to the sonorous lamentations

Of the forlorn *aláwo* on long forgotten isles

His long bony skeletal limbs

Ministering from famished groves

Draped in cactus

Munching on the broken cotyledons of red kola

That is dried to the silence

Embalming the ingresses to the bewildered *òrìsàs*.

The thorn bush lacerates the soles of the etiolated returnees.

The faithfuls who went away

Return bewildered

Tired from the harsh ministrations of the road

Chanting the canticles of their tales

To the emptiness of dilapidated cathedrals

That wear the incenses of old talismans

In the stench of trenches

Far away from the tinsels of Ìbarà

Further away from the oil lamps of the merchants of Láfénwá

Waving their headgears to their sons on night boats

That face up and downstream

To the great Ògùn cleansing the land

To the final portals to the long long road.

You can hear their fleeting refrains in the air

The train to Ìdògò sings of its affliction

Grinding its metal rails on the long road from Ojà Èjìgbò.

Its sides brimming

With a flock deflowered all over the land

The train to Ìdògò puffs its black soot

In black clouds trailing its affliction of waywardness

In eternal renditions of its refrain

Of its affliction of waywardness.

Yonder, the gray and lonesome minstrel

Stirs the morning

With the song to the old trainmaster

Sequestered along the old shores of home

In sonorous pleas to Akiwowo

For a return trip to the ancestral grove

But the train from these broken shores is too slow

The train is always too slow

And the trainmaster has grown cold and old

Grinding the metal rails

In creaky cabins forever full of new initiates

Old fools

In the ever changing choir

Lost in their mourning

Celebrating the waywardness

At their new temples

Burning away the hearts of the dawn.

But the train to Ìdògò puffs its black soot

In timeless expiation of its waywardness

In eternal renditions of its refrain

Of its affliction of waywardness.

Yonder, the old lonesome minstrel

Stirs the new morning akin to the old

In frantic chorus at the famished groves

In rueful incantations

Longing for the surging waves

That continue to break the dawn

Along the shores of home

Akìwowo, the old trainmaster

Please take me home,

Please take me to the land of my fathers

Akìwowo, the old, old trainmaster.

Glossary

Ó dì'gbà 'ó se - So long.

Ìrókò - Hardwood tree, one of the largest in tropical Africa, often up to 160 ft. tall. Sometimes referred to as white mahogany.

Òkun - the sea.

Etí-òsà - the shores of the lagoon.

Òrìsàs - Yorùbá deities.

Ìbarà - Neighborhood in Abeokuta, a Yorùbá town in Ògùn State.

Láfénwá - Neighborhood in Abeokuta, a Yorùbá town in Ògùn State.

Ògùn - A major river in Nigeria.

Ìdògò - Yorùbá town in Ògùn State on the railroad line that goes from Lagos to Ìdògò to Lagos. Connected to the railroad line in 1930. Also the birthplace of Ebenezer Obey, one of Nigeria's juju musicians.

Ojà Èjìgbò - Èjìgbò market. Èjìgbò is a Yorùbá town in Òsun State. It is also a local government area in the same state, and the headquarters of the local government area, as well as a neighborhood in Lagos mainland, the location of a Nigerian National Petroleum Company fuel depot, and the location of a canal close to the Nigerian Army cantonment in Ìkejà that was the site of a fatal explosion where hundreds of people died in 2002. Finally, according to Àráoyè, Ojà Èjìgbò is also deployed in the poem as an abstract representation of an unceasing dynamism and the train, whatever its "black and sooty" downside, as an instrument of the compelling centripetal/fugal transactions that keep pushing us along its trail.

Akìwowo - Yorùbá name

Adémólá Àráoyè lives in Southern California.