



**TCHICAYA
U TAM'SI**

THERE IS NO better key to
dreams than my name sang the bird
on the blood-colored stream as
the sea danced beside her in
bluejeans blowing the squalling
stars to pieces

You must be
from my country I can tell
by the twitch of your eyelids
and the way you always dance
when you're sad

What if I want
to cure myself of the sea's
black drone and hear only the
rustle of teeth in the wind

THE BOATMAN tells his new name
to the bird as the sun pricks
his side

I was a maker
of dawns I was a maker
of xylophones and rattles

See how the vegetable
kingdom gathers her forces
to hold out against the moon

The grass bares its claws

The wind
grates

What good are a thousand
falling stars in broad daylight
or the nineteen-fifties

I
left the noiseless lake and walked

I LEFT CINDERS behind and
took up with nettles and wine

Water would not pool in my
cupped hands any longer

Moths
danced in ellipses about
my head

Scientists cast me
into the sea and listened
to the dark murmurs of a
conch's belly for rumors of
my soul

I owe a kilo
of salt to the black ant who
gave me this

My first sorrow

BEHOLD ME in Europe no
cane in my hand

Expansive

Lips bunched up in a trumpet

Spitting into the Seine like
all the honest poets
before me

What memories
I'll owe to my absent head
whenever someone finds it

I RETRACED my steps without
meeting a single tree

I
found myself once more
on a fashionable beach
a huge anemone in
the place where my head should be
the sickness of my country
growing inside me

Which country

The Congo

Which Congo

THE BIRD SAYS from a certain
wood a certain door is made

Once I was a blade of fire
or the churning sea

Greasy
words leave a stinging in my
mouth and a trace of ash on
your brow

We are like trees which
carry one another's fruit

Thankfully when poets die
they fall on their backs with their
bellies pointed to the stars

IN GREENEST night we were men
who bore our congenital
pasts

Brotherhood was a word
we made into a bone and
added to our skeletons

Trees spring from between our cheeks

Now that we smile the same smile
as the living the day is
no more narrow

At last I
realize I have a laugh that
kills people

But not until
they remember it

[Tchicaya U Tam'si](#) (1931-1988) was a Congolese poet. Words and phrases throughout TCHICAYA U TAM'SI are translated from his work.

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