a light heart,
its black thoughts

By Gnoetry & Eric Scovel

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For Kay,
without whom this work
would not have been
Preface

This project began as a simple experiment. The chosen text had no particular significance to me at the time, nor had I even read *Heart of Darkness* when I started; I chose it primarily out of its central place in the Western canon. Working through these early attempts at using the Gnoetry 0.2 program, I found that, curiously, this text yielded more consistently engaging results than others. Also, as the series progressed it became increasingly serious and historically aware, turning from expressions of personal failure in love to postcolonial scenes of violence and sexual domination.

My choice of a loose sonnet form—fourteen line poems of (usually) between 7 and 11 syllables per line—was due mostly to the discovery that the variety of regenerated output increased at this syllabic range. I cannot ignore, though, the influence that such classic sonnet sequences as John Donne’s *Holy Sonnets* and Ted Berrigan’s *The Sonnets* had upon the user-side half of this collaboration. I became more and more pleased with the shapeliness of the form and the sense of wholeness that it brought to even the most erratically assembled lines.

I do not think that this work has avoided what Slavoj Žižek has called, referring to the schizoid extremes of Western fantasies of the Other, “the split attitude of the West itself, combining violent penetration and respectful sacralization.” However, I hope that it succeeds in capturing and exposing this failure of the Western imagination rather than merely perpetuating it. The series is at its core intensely concerned with love, failure to understand and, ultimately, reconciliation—with how this might happen on the personal level as well between fallen empires, their former colonies, and those ghosts of the past that still haunt us all.

Eric Scovel
Dec. 23, 2008
Imagine the feelings of a whole continent, I said. A sheer blank space of delightful mystery, its black thoughts, its body at rest in the middle of blessings. If such is the meaning of a French steamer, and it was, were we who had pronounced a judgment upon the whole population cleared into the heart of an unknown planet? We could for a while, of massacres, of craven terror, of burning noble words. It was very grave, were we who had gone mad, completely.
It was like this. I must say it was sinister. We had plates that would shake the air. We had plates that pleasure. We had plates that would provoke the most dangerous thing in every detail of life. Black shapes crouched, they leaped, they faced the company, very hot and everything. Yes, and would you believe, massive, naked breasts, legs, waving long black arms, heads, and men going to, glaring eyes, and how they got on, almost no restraint, no man does, by heavens! Not in the jungles, in the mold of primeval earth. We were kings!
You were discolored just below
the ribs; the dusk fell on the upper
reaches, became more somber every minute,
as if sorry for suffering. There is
a way of resisting without moving a
limb, without clamor, without even
taking the trouble to keep them off. We are all
done for, what shall I say, sometimes. The sun was
low, the sky... but it is the speech of a
rainbow. You were discolored, but you have
in you something that is really mine, the
old river in its unceasing service, crowded
with memories of men taking possession of
this blazing sky, overcast one another.
I cried with wild crowd of my heart for the climate under a woman. I was lying flat on the hillside. Yes, my mouth wide, and down, oh down, she carried her down and let things slide. Yes, and I lapped out of scruple. She was shaking; the administration was sincere. Growled the equator, inviting, red, good to see. The pilgrims looked up. She came upon me, and all that wild mob took in the sea of blessings. I thumbed the wide opening, glaring at the outlines of red round the still bends, the pulsating stream of longing, absorbed in the pose of contorted collapse, as long as I may live.
I could not see the glitter of blessings. I sat generally on the earth, the woods went out such a little. How I used to have such a false idea of the unknown, the most exalted and peculiar, which is of the fog lifted, and more blinding than the shadow of a heart, its body at rest in the bush. I am a simple man, but in that bush, man, who can tell? I was lost, but this was not a raid into the fog. The bushes shook, swayed their scarlet bodies, they shook towards the river. I saw my mistake. The current thickly, and becoming expansive, the gift of the unknown, a question.
It was possible to have any image with it, no doubt it was dangerous to inquire too much. It was very clear, a dark blue, a kind of blind, white cases, piled up, crested, ready to work with an air of taking an immense snake uncoiled, with dark gleams on the untouched expanse of their wars going on. A narrow white line of absurdity, a lake too, not at all surprising. A tiny projectile would give it up, over the image of desire, following the shoulders of the native women.
He wasn’t rich enough or something. Everything belonged to him. He was just robbery with violence, and sorrow, dishonor, and varnished boots. So he comes here, you know, to the profound darkness of his heart. The flies buzzed in a lofty portico. I was only a thing. He thumbed the messenger, invited me over. “It’s really profitable, and rather less pretty in shape, but you never forget the uncle.” Afterwards I came upon him alone. A continuous noise of the drum, regular and muffled like the closed door of darkness, claimed him forever.
What was to know? You know, nobody seemed to have a body and rest, don’t you think? We live and shall not wait, as a ripple on an earth that wears the interests of conquest, of trade, their words, that such details would be done. We exchanged a few lumps of some sort of purpose, an act of bodies, it was not very clear. This strange world. Not a blank space of delightful mystery, a light heart, its black thoughts, its body at rest. Were we men enough to affirm the whole universe? No one knew.
I was just as the men in her, the 
wild crowd of men, men who come back, like a 
running blaze on board, in a 
haze. Horrors! I saw the horned shapes stirring 
at her, all smiles. I said to myself, what 
can be done? They were written in her, white flames, 
white men, heavy, white cuffs, a 
mass of them in the passion of empires. 
I saw her weeping; she had taken 
a caravan of bodies. They shouted, as 
their bodies streamed with perspiration; they 
shouted, leaning on the tip of her sorrow, as 
big as a desert, and there was nothing 
but a white fog and the hate of the wilderness.
I had a hankering after. I had failed her, like a stick of love in a heap of embers glowing fiercely, I nearly burst into a cemetery, bearing the sword, and did, with an air of being afraid, I admit, I would be shot down in the midst of the white men rushing out of the long grass, with its wheels in the moonlight, the foreign faces, so to speak of, but rather too late, and I withdrew quietly. But I didn’t do badly either, trying to excuse or club.
The manager appeared silently in the air. His face was falling, a steady droning sound of many voices issued from the recesses of the earth, more than voices, all the gnawing devils of the damp earth on the wind. I wished him a harmless fool. Now I can’t help asking what I meant by going there at all, if only it was to see whether this man suffered so much, that swayed and drove men under his bare feet. I did not want to stop him. He is chief of this pitiful Jupiter.
I had to affirm the village was deserted. The sun hung over it, all of it forever. A blinding sunlight drowned all the earth. I saw a smile, a head that had been a couple of years already out there. A narrow and deserted street in deep shadow, high houses, hollow, with sounds, incomprehensible, serene, something like the speech of a rainbow. A whole minute passed, and I did not move. It was impossible to know all about them and about me. I did not seem capable of insight.
These parts, I had no learning, and no fear, and I was wasted, and no desire. It had ceased, and in its right proportion, like a ruled line, far away, vibrating, not because it could be seen, inexplicable, but let us say men who come out here should have no great thoughts. I sweated and fired up. Perhaps she was not so impossible. I did not want to know either. I felt as though we had to drive a distance that was the greatest possible tenderness, repeating the phrases we pronounced, then still less in their curved and imperceptible fall, the signs of hesitation, of resting.
They said hang, bearers of the new forces at work, no doubt like a whiff from some corpse. Imagine the opportunity. But with every word spoken the tide seemed to me the shadow of the new forces, which seemed unearthly. The north pole was awake. It seemed to settle, a butcher round one corner, waiting. All that had swept by us on the whole, the reality, for belief, for something, it is like a wink, like a match, an ax, something like an empty stream, and in every man’s life, a butcher in a whirl of black feathers, a fool as I would be an ax.
It is not what I had judged.
It is the gift of desire absorbed in itself. I want you, you so dark, so quiet, as the awakening of a deity, and the whisper of contact, hotly, the smell of the first time, the tall grass and the starred darkness. A door opened, closed. And we crept on, and looked about. In the interior, a light heart, the smell of mud, inviting, the faint sounds of a river to drink. We live in the moonlight, and in the water, in the ripple of the barges drifting up with the tide.
It made you creepy all over,
the empty land. I thought we would look
for ivory. We looked on, towards the
margin, my goodness! We had made out there,
with bows, with gleams of ivory,
jerked the hillside. Joy, silly, I don’t want
any harm to happen to
myself. Perhaps it was borne upon me
in the work of exploration, the
consciousness of death; it is
amazing, I said. She looked at me out there,
land in silence. It was as natural
and true as everything to her,
the interminable miles of partnership.
I had the idea, almost black, thick, choking, startled. A wilderness, a rolling wave of drums, an exuberant and entangled mass of naked, breathing, quivering bronze bodies. Yes, it seemed to shape itself without human lips in the opaque air. Two youths with foolish and cheery countenances were being laid, to treat the white men, with a large shining map marked with all the hearts that beat in the rush of thieving. My dear boys, what I wanted was frightful, to be almost black, oiled, smiling and in harness, hugging the white men with the ships whose names are like lunatics.
ERIC SCOVEL is originally from Polo, Illinois, a small town of about 2600 in the Northwest corner of that state. He is currently completing his thesis, *Five Chapbooks*, for fulfillment of an M.F.A. degree in poetry at Purdue University, where he also teaches Google-sculpting to his creative writing students and post-colonial theory to his composition students. This chapbook is his first published work. He blogs semi-regularly at *what light already light* (wlal.wordpress.com).