

# *Rainforest Reveries*

Christine Fasse

Peter Stickland

David Toop

**77**books

Copyright © 2011

Christine Fasse

Peter Stickland

David Toop

The authors have asserted their right  
under the Copyright, Designs and  
Patents Act, 1988 to be identified  
as the authors of this work.

Published December 2011 by 77 Books.

**77**books

69 Osbaldeston Road, London N16 7DL.

[www.77books.co.uk](http://www.77books.co.uk)

This work is sold subject to the condition  
that it shall not by way of trade or other-  
wise, be lent, resold, hired out, or other-  
wise circulated without the publisher's  
prior consent in any form of binding or  
cover other than that in which it is  
published and without a similar condition  
including this condition being imposed on  
the subsequent purchaser.

ISBN 978-0-9560121-8-0

A catalogue record for this title is available  
from the British Library.

Cover designed by Dennis Mariner

.

for the children of the rainforest

Sell your cleverness  
and buy bewilderment.

Jalal Uddin Rumi

The drawings on pages  
12, 16, 19, 27, 38, 45  
are by Dominique Fasse.

The drawings on pages  
13, 21, 23, 35, 42 & 52  
are illustrations used in  
*Tristes Tropiques* by  
Claude Lévi-Strauss.

All other drawings are  
from the notebooks of  
Claude Lévi-Strauss,  
*Saudades do Brasil*,  
*A Photographic Memoir*.

The healer's song was  
written in collaboration  
with Guillermo Rosenthuler

# *Rainforest Reveries*

## Part One

### Céline's arrival

Peter Stickland  
with Christine Fasse

## Part Two

### Ancestral rites

David Toop

# Contents

## **Part One** – Céline's arrival

### The earth is ringing out

When memory breathes	9
The itinerary	13
Visitors are intruders	14
The secrets of the house	16
When the sun becomes a painter	20
Masses of abundant blooms	21
The presence of dawn	25

### Involuntary understanding

The perfumes of the tropics	28
A few scraps from the void	30
Perpetually at risk	33
Every voice is hushed	35
Overhead, out of sight	37
Out of Silence and Stillness	38

## Times without a clock

A parasitical world	41
Eternal repetitions	42
From an inexhaustible sky	44
Seeking for all the words	46
Nature falls silent	48

## Who sings here?

Improbable reasons	50
Within the fever	52
The healer's song	54
With flowers in my hair	56
The dawning of light	58

## **Part Two** - Ancestral rites 61

## Part One

# Céline's arrival

# The earth is ringing out

## When memory breathes

Awakening slowly in morning shadows,  
Céline senses what might now ripen and  
grow within her. The earth is ringing out.

By obscure transitions, affirming visions in  
the girl's self-determining mind are revealing  
new depths to her evolving character.

The nameless hour has arrived, that  
mesmerizing, eternal hour, when children  
cease to look vaguely at the sky.

What was previously dreaming confusedly  
in her eyes now takes on a more determined  
glint; her resolute grin also declares it. (1)

While still half asleep, a single delightful  
odour communicates itself, returning the  
nine year old to an autumn lived long ago.

Unaware that the Madeleine returned Proust  
to his childhood, she suspects memories will  
awaken and breathe when odours are good.

The bitter, sticky fragrance of rice cakes  
cooking on the breakfast fire has returned  
Céline to her to grandmother's kitchen.

She shakes herself awake, blaming the sweet  
odour on a dream, but she has bounced off  
the intimate memory of grandmother's cakes.

Her sense of it is sleepy, but she's aware  
that this odour is beginning to introduce  
her to visions of a life she has not yet lived.

Then, unaccountably, a series of echoing  
sounds accompany the scented reverie and  
her potential universe unravels further.

It's no vague hint; it will sleep in her heart  
forever, or until she is rocking her worn,  
old body in a warm rocking chair.

Attuned to the fountain's sweet harmony,  
she imagines the multi-layered sounds are  
multiplying with endless new variations.

The gathering vision washes over her in  
soothing waves of strange calm, mixing  
a taste of knowledge with hints of mirth.

She discovers these sounds to be edible and  
having feasted on her memories, she now lifts  
her head to facilitate her feeding on the future.

She can smell all there is to know  
roasting in the sky. No words come  
but she vocalises the amiable sounds.

Breathing rhythmically, it is no surprise to  
her that life can be sensitised in this fashion;  
she has played reverie like this before.

Céline knows how to curl away, go  
deep within, sing in her head and  
rejoice in opportunities of solitude.

She bids her sleep-filled body to stir,  
re-affirm who she is and discover what  
the welcoming sounds have in store.

No answer comes, but fortified and grateful  
for the magical reveries she surrenders to a  
forest that will be wild beyond her knowing.

Drinking in the dawn like a cup of spring  
water, she prepares to enter the heart of this  
forest by vowing to stay close to her heart. (2)



## The itinerary

By forest road to Merah Camp,  
The next day to Poterra,  
A small town on a muddy bank,  
Along the Gelash River.

Trading posts or disused shacks  
Beside the Balas River.  
Plantation huts or disused boats  
To house their sleep in Timba.

Chelateh Creek, another boat  
To arrive then in Hulama.  
She sings the names like any child  
Repeating them forever.



## Visitors are intruders

It takes seconds to know the itinerary.  
It takes forever to know the territory.  
From a Jeep, Céline studies the forest  
shade, untouched by rays of sunshine.

Without any sign of illumination,  
vegetation grows at a phenomenal rate.  
Gigantic trees, huge columns, rise forty  
metres before attempting to branch out.

The lower trunks have giant buttresses  
flowing out like skirts around them.  
Exotic growths and succulent creepers  
hide these mountains of wood from sight.

Elaborate festoons spiral up, then hang  
down from overhead branches; some  
ending their journey by curling over  
the ground like colossal serpents.

New growths of every shape and size  
Sprout from creepers and climb back up.  
The network of ropes and cables end their  
upward journey far away and out of sight.

The dancing creepers twist round each other,  
knitting and weaving an impenetrable canopy.  
The unbroken covering of foliage, formed by  
the meeting of these creepers is impenetrable.

Céline contemplates these simple elements,  
these cathedral-like masses of vegetation  
overshadowing her. Will they oppress her  
as surely as they oppress the earth.

She stares at the mysterious roof, the tiny  
patches of indistinct light and faint glimmers  
of blue sky above, that twinkle through the  
outlandish web of interlacing branches.

The pin-striped shafts penetrate to the ground,  
subdued, broken into a multitude of scattered  
fragmentary sparkles. They're all that remains  
of the intense tropical sun burning overhead.

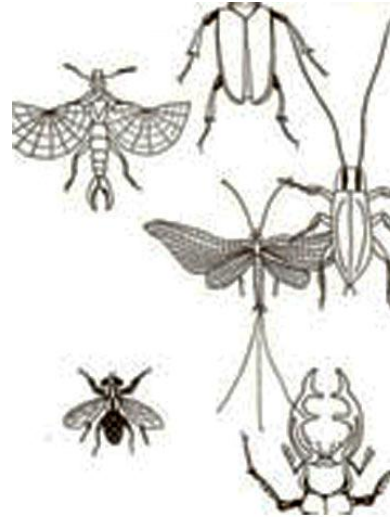
The weird gloom and solemn silence combine  
together to produce a vast, primeval infinity.  
These ever-acting forces are overwhelming.  
Any visitor here is a redundant intruder. (3)

## The secrets of the house

You can't find a place of your own  
in this vast overcrowded complexity.  
Céline thinks lovingly of her bedroom.  
Next to her bed is an old wooden table.

On the table she keeps the precious milk  
teeth of her early years. Now they are  
wrapped in a small cloth bound with  
string that she keeps in her rucksack.

What happens to the millions of infant  
teeth that children donate to the world?  
She has never received a satisfactory  
answer to this bewildering question.



Céline fights the awesome terror of the  
forest by seeking solace in memory,  
dreaming of magic caskets packed  
with mysterious dream-like promises.

The girl imagines she's an Indian  
in the myths she read about. She's  
an adventurer, travelling as far as  
the earth allows to find treasure.

She remembers the fame of those  
who returned home with pepper;  
the courtiers keeping corns in little  
boxes, to eat all day like sweets.

Fearful that in future stories will refuse  
to yield their foreign riches untarnished,  
she vows not to mourn their loss before  
knowing for certain what she has lost.

She combats her fear of the forest's  
rampant growth by repeating the address  
of her beloved Grand'Mere Aimée.  
19 rue de la Croix du Val, Meudon.

19 rue de la Croix du Val, Meudon.  
It's the house her father grew up in  
and the world's most significant place.  
None of its rooms have ever changed.

Secrets in this house were alive before  
Céline was born. Every object enjoys  
its own designated place and nothing  
acts to alter this uninterrupted continuity.

Apples picked in Le Clerimais Village last  
Autumn are always on display in the fruit  
basket. The golden colours and harmonic  
poise of these shining orbs linger all year.

Are they anticipating the girl's eventual  
return or do they wait for the quick eye  
and practiced hand of the immortal still-  
life painter to capture them for posterity?

The shining glasses in the display cabinet  
stand to attention, ready to perform,  
uncertain whether their fresh interiors and  
triumphant skills will be called into action.

The French flag, displayed outside the house  
from the balcony during the 1944 liberation,  
is still safely wrapped in one of the many  
boxes of the past that fill the dark, musty attic.

When Céline finally returns to the garret  
of dreams under the roof, she will hear the  
sea through the two huge shells an uncle  
brought back from Central America.

.



## When the sun becomes a painter

By four o'clock at Merah Camp the  
provisional theatre begins. The sun,  
in mid-career, starts to lose its outline.

The world, increasingly blurred by a  
thick golden light, takes on the onset  
of darkness with colourful perspective.

The sky proceeds by flattening out.  
In daylight the sun's a blinding architect,  
at dusk it's a flamboyant backdrop painter.

Wisps of cloud, floating in the changing air,  
pencil the sky while the moderate, luminous  
sun touches the horizon, ready to disappear.

The cosmic disc shivers as it sinks below  
distant mountains, their outline now a  
jagged leaf in a short-lived daydream.

The last rays of light are offered like alms  
from a heavenly host; it's a brilliantly coloured  
dance of intense radiance and sombre light.

Once transparent, the opaque solar orb now  
slips into a gloom filled world. In minutes,  
the complete darkness of night has set in. (4)



## Masses of abundant blooms

Céline scribbles furiously over many pages. The spectacular promise of morning and dusk's ravishing conclusions do not help her pencil capture the sun rise or its setting. Today she's been hourly at war with herself. She distrusted the sinister heart of the forest.

Her scrawled lines are a profusion of woody creepers; irate climbers twisting round slender stems, drooping in waves of pendants from above. She scribbles pencil strokes that stretch between trees, making vivid depictions of vines hanging in huge, looped festoons from the hidden but fecund boughs.



Feverishly expressing twists of tangled masses, she spreads out flat to become like the writhing, serpentine coils. She draws slender creepers and cables of immense strength, smooth and root-like, rugged and knotted. Before long, gossamer thin lines like wisps of delicate ribbon fill the page.

She draws shapes, curiously waved or indented, to divulge a truth she has often dreamt about. How they grow or where they spring from, she has no idea, but she makes them stretch in tight cordage, like the rigging of a ship flying from the top of one tree to the base of another. (5)

As if disenchanted with her mass of lines,  
believing her flowerless, shady forest an  
abomination, she uses a tube of white paint  
to make spots over the frenzied black paper.  
Quickly, her white brush dots out the dark  
chaos to create a rich abundance of blooms.

Céline, still disappointed with the artwork,  
decides that her grandiose reveries have  
produced nothing but vile images. Her solution  
is to rise up into the expansive space and  
genial influence of light and air, where the  
huge trees bloom with flowers they do not  
own, and listen to the music of the stars.

Her cosmic ambition is insubstantial stuff.  
Silent and furious she regards it as rejection.  
If the flowers are hitting back, then they are  
punishing beauty. If this place is stronger  
than she is, if it is intent on asphyxiating her  
and the forest then it's a clean sweep of agony.

The girl ceases her solitary exertion, her  
forlorn dreaming. There is no possible  
enchantment or grace in a place where  
survival is impossible. The fight against the  
growing and rotting away is misery, an  
appalling struggle, leaving dying messengers  
and none left to weep or mourn.

The trees are in misery. The birds are in misery. They're not singing, they're screaming out in pain. Céline knows that God must have been horribly enraged when he created this rainforest. There must be a curse weighing on the land for it is subjected to a continuous and collective act of cavalier murder.

In contrast to the vile articulation of the forest, Céline's drawings are gentle, articulate sentences. Compared to the voluminous articulation of growth, they are delicate traces of connection. They have beauty, if beauty can be terrifying. It is only her blighted mood that prevents her from seeing this.

In the sky, many thousands of stars sparkle. Céline wonders if they, in keeping with her hectic squiggles, could also be regarded as a horrid mess. If yes, then she must adjust her conception of harmony. Do some visitors grow to admire the hapless jungle or is admiration contrary to better judgment? <sup>(6)</sup>



## The presence of dawn

Céline, lying in cave-like darkness, listens to the cries of birds breaking the night's silence, announcing the presence of dawn in the eastern horizon.

She hears the melancholy voices of goatsuckers, croaks from a variety of frogs, the plaintive whistle of mountain thrushes and cries from unknown birds.

Light increases rapidly after five-thirty. Like the evenings, the mornings in the rainforest perform a striking and rapid dance to the changes of light and sound.

When the sun's rim appears on the horizon  
the dew-laden foliage displays glittering  
gems of dew. It takes fifteen minutes for a  
world bathed in darkness to arrive at daylight.

Monkeys chatter and bees hum. Gorgeous  
butterflies flutter lazily or sit with fully  
expanded wings in the warm invigorating  
rays of the sun; weightless, but not waiting.

The great orb sends gleams of golden light  
into the jungle, waking up nature, predicting  
life and action. Oh the charm of equatorial  
mornings, when nature glows, refreshed.

The chill of dawn disappears, giving birth to  
invigorating warmth and light. Strengthened  
by the coolness and moisture of the night,  
birds chirp and flutter about, parrots scream.

Leaves and buds unfold, exotic shoots of  
fresh vegetation visibly lengthen and expand.  
This alluring growth now has the audacity  
to declare itself a vision of terrestrial beauty.

(7)



## Involuntary understanding

### The perfumes of the tropics

Gabrielle, Céline's mother, has an elegant, aristocratic conception of anthropology. It's a carefully wrought counterpoint to Céline's propensity for day-dreaming.

A passionate researcher and a conquistador who can ardently love a tribe at first sight, she unearths vestiges of vanished realities that will help construct new survival kits.

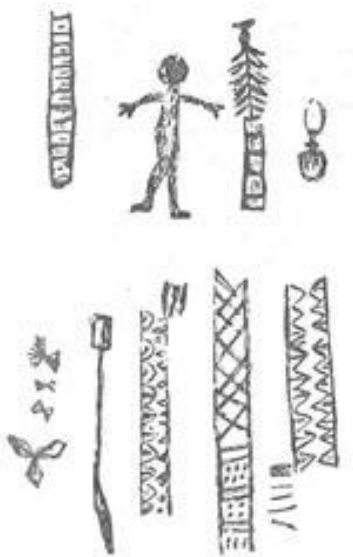
Aware that enchantment in her culture is weaker than the keen magic of those she subjects to scrutiny and sensitive to the fact that no indigenous people must be turned into powerless victims caught up in the mechanisms of cultures with over-voracious appetites, she is confident that her approach works.

She talks of the perfume of the tropics,  
the pristine freshness of its inhabitants,  
claiming they have been corrupted by  
dubious ambition, but her eagerness to  
describe everything could yet mortify her  
desires and contaminate her memory.

If her feverish need to appease the nostalgic  
cannibalism of history has the ability to  
create shadows of her past, then she  
might yet help to destroy this very history  
and live to break the silence of the jungle.

Gabrielle suffers a double infirmity;  
her life is dedicated to the analysis of  
complexity and she lives with a nagging  
suspicion she will never really understand  
enough to begin to describe the meaning  
of a seriously scientific approach to life.

Carefully, Céline has already slipped through  
her mother's fingers like quicksilver. (8)



## A few scraps from the void

At Poterra there is no light left in the sky.  
I still exist, Céline writes, before starting  
to draw a series of tall, upright columns.

She adds buttresses around flamboyant  
trunks, some cylindrical, others rising up  
out of the ground, their bases concealed.

She draws accumulations of soil to thicken  
them like spreading oaks and then adds flat,  
wing-like projections towards the base.

Her mighty trees are old and worthy with  
buttresses radiating from the main trunk.  
they fly like the wings of gothic cathedrals.

Supports of various heights, are divided as  
they approach the ground, their root-like  
protuberances twist and curve in all directions.

Céline draws a floor and a roof between two  
large buttresses. Unaccountably, she adds a  
bed and a picture of herself lying upon it. (9)

A stable, unmoving, intangible, untouched,  
almost untouchable bedroom has appeared,  
creating a deep-rooted point of reference.

This is a place of departure, a place of origin, a  
cradle of family, the room of her birth. Below  
is the garden where her father planted a tree.

The bedroom leads to her mnemonic attic. It  
doesn't exist in the way her imagination has it.  
Never hers; she had to conquer it and claim it.

Can time wear away imagination or destroy it?  
If it no longer resembles what it was, then her  
fond memories will have betrayed her.

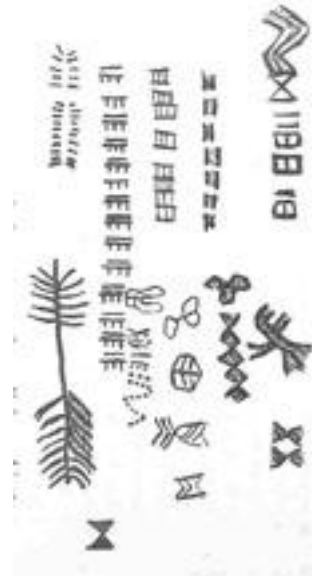
If oblivion infiltrates her reflections, she will  
never again look at the broken edges of old,  
yellowing photographs with recognition.

The loss will filter her recollections and her  
precious space for dreaming will melt like  
sand running through her tiny fingers.

If time bears reminiscence away, leaving only shapeless shreds, then she must work now to illuminate her manuscripts or fail at survival.

Céline draws another tree house, this time more clearly defined. It is an attempt to wrestle a few precious scraps from the void.

She studies her pages closely knowing she has created another marker of remembrance for future hours. Forgetfulness is no option. <sup>(10)</sup>



## Perpetually at risk

Céline, at nine, still labours over a stage in her development that prevents her from knowing who she is. At home she never escapes demands that she account for her actions, but here, in the jungle, she hopes she can reduce all adverse interest in her actions.

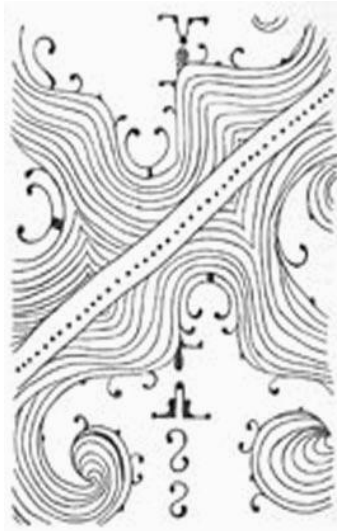
Being little more than gossamer-like material, perpetually at risk from being blown about, Céline needs solitude and a life without interruption if she's to unhitch her reveries from the tide of advice that always dictates what she must focus on.

To avoid adult expectations, the endless series  
of complaints, the many burdensome  
preconceptions and the incessant litanies of  
recent failures, Céline scribbles a reminder of  
an exotic mineral and draws something strange  
that looks like the heart of a lily.

Sniffing at the page in an attempt to capture a  
scent lying dormant there, the unmistakable  
odour awakens her to shadows behind her  
lines. Only a cosmic event like the sudden  
appearance of stars in the tropical night sky  
could have disrupted this meditative serenity.

The stars are no longer a mess. Did the defuse  
twilight alter the sky's objects just as a mirage  
alters the scenery of a desert? As the night  
expands, soft and voluptuous, the incandescent  
fairy heaven, ablaze with thousands of stars,  
becomes startling jewellery. (11)

Crediting herself with the commendable  
triumph of having been here forever, she waits  
patiently. Tonight, through some involuntary  
understanding, Céline will exchange glances  
and moments of deep connection with the  
animals, particularly the cats.



## Every voice is hushed

As a glowing sun mounts rapidly towards the zenith, the heavy dew on the foliage quickly dissipates. An old steamer rattles up the Balas River to Timba. Every voice of bird and animal is hushed. The leaves are lax and droopy. The flowers have shed their petals.

With the increasing power of the sun, the cool breeze flags. When it dies away the heat produces electric tension, making it virtually impossible to breathe. Languor seizes all life and the denizens of the forest betray their uneasiness with a complete lack of motion.

White clouds gather into cumuli, displaying  
a distinct and ominous blackness along their  
lower edges. In the eastern horizon this  
blackness spreads up, obscuring the brightness  
of the sun. It's the end of the world.  
None of the passengers expected it.

A mighty rush of wind growls through the  
forest, swaying the highest tree tops.  
Two vivid flashes of lightning, a crash of  
thunder and down streams a deluge of rain.  
The brief storm is over as swiftly as it began.  
Static, bluish-black clouds now fill the sky.  
Luckily the world has not ended. (12)

Spring, summer and autumn, each show  
their face once a day; such are the lies and  
tricks of the rainforest. The Indians call it  
the land where God did not finish his creation.  
When the humans eventually depart, God will  
return to complete his work. Tonight they will  
eat a chicken that is running about in the yard.

## Overhead, out of sight

From a slow boat Céline gazes into tree-tops that hide their crowns out of sight, among the canopy of foliage. Lianas hang from every bough, passing from tree to tree, entangling the giants in a great network of coiling cables.

It is impossible to see where the world of trees ends. Climbing ferns cling to the silent trunks and countless epiphytes perch on branches. Large arums send down long aerial roots, tough enough to be used as cordage.

Céline draws palms and magnificent tree ferns whose feathery crowns blossom twenty feet in the air. She adds broad-leaved heliconias, leathery melastomse and succulent-stemmed begonias with palmated leaves.

Cecropia trees stand up like giant candelabra. Multi- coloured petals, from invisible tree-tops, make fresh carpets of dead flowers. Delicious perfumes issue from blooms born in the overshadowing crown of verdure. (13)



## Out of silence and stillness

Céline hears the sound of many children humming. This distant echo comes from nowhere and collects into one resonant hum. The sounds she hears vibrate on her ear in an attempt to penetrate beyond mere hearing. (14)

These celebratory echoes reverberate round her bedroom; a newly discovered private realm reachable only by boat. This listening room, perched above a landing stage, is accessed by a ladder that she can pull up behind her.

On the bed, studying her drawings, she is in no doubt that she can hear sounds coming from the pencil marks. Uninterested in how the change occurred, she sways to their rhythm and invites her hand and ear to play together.

The drawings are accumulating the sounds of growth. Every tree, every leaf, every bough and every tendril of creeper and minute petal of blossom seems to be enchanted into declaring its sound for her.

The blossom in the great overshadowing crown of verdure in the tree tops gives off a very different quality of sound to the vegetation lying beneath. She hears it, but it's not a thing she can describe in words.

Lost in the immense stillness that pervades her reverie of space and sound, out of its silence, she hears water feeding the multitude of flowers she has drawn. It is this sound that nourishes her drawings and feeds her trust.

In a dream this night she swims through the  
high forest and spies a boy sitting on a branch,  
blowing on a pipe of reeds. He is partially  
hidden by creepers and magically, the eerie  
resonances from his flute are like the wind.

Then he makes rippling water sounds and the  
birds, deceived, screech adamantly. Settling on  
a branch next to the boy, Céline learns how he  
can imitate the sounds of nature, see the  
flowers grow and hear the insects walk. (15)

Waking up to the sounds of many birds, Céline  
reflects on the boy in her dream who later flew  
from her and vanished. Closing her ears, she  
gazes upon her dark pencil lines and discovers  
again the boy's uncanny sounds.

How could a boy, born to dream in the quiet  
immensity of forest flowers, imitate nature on  
his flute? For Indians, ordinary life is an  
illusion and behind this chimera lies an  
ecstatic truth and the poetry of dreams. (16)

## Times without a clock

### A parasitical world

In the heart of the forest it is too gloomy for flowers, only the ferns and other shade-loving plants grow there, but close to the river, the light makes flowers possible, even if creepers hide them in their all pervading drapery.

Every tree supports numerous forms of vegetation; some are so crowded with various growths, the forks in the horizontal branches have become gardens in their own right. Céline squints to believe in the small scale.

Studying this parasitical world at close range, she picks at various creeping ferns running up smooth trunks to play with the immense varieties of climbers that hang in tangled masses from the many branches above.

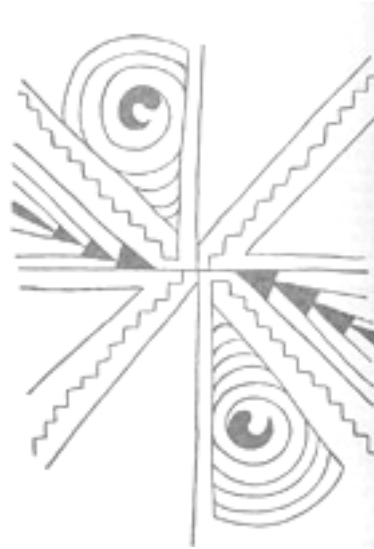
Orchids, bromelias, arums and ferns grow from every boss and crevice of the fallen and decaying trunks. Some parasites host their own parasitical growths and even small leaves can support an abundance of creeping mosses. (17)

## Eternal repetitions

In the end everything, yields,  
opens, flows like pale rain.  
The time has come to climb.  
I must not forget this.  
I have not forgotten it.  
Maybe I said this before.

The trees, alive with blossoms,  
must surely amuse the sky.

Keep going; whispering, anything.  
I shall make my own peace.  
One doesn't know what it is.  
Where now? I must not forget this.  
I have not forgotten it. Did I say  
this before since I say it now?



The trees, alive with blossoms,  
must surely amuse the sky.

The time has come to climb.  
I am listening...well, I prefer that  
I must say, I always prefer that.

But look, there are other visitors.  
One must be a young girl.  
They are fantastic visitors.

It will take time to know them.  
It takes time to know a voice.  
Do they utter recitations?  
Maybe they are improvising?  
I can barely hear them.

And you, little inquisitive one,  
do you ask about the canopy?  
There's no time to talk today.  
Tomorrow, if you come for tea,  
you can see my heavenly boat  
moored there, up the jungle.  
Yes, come at three; we will talk.  
Sadly I must leave. I know we  
were just beginning to get started.

The time has come to climb.  
Keep going on. Call that going?  
Call that on? But we keep going. (18)

## From an inexhaustible sky

The heavens open and rain falls unceasingly.

From the heights of an inexhaustible sky,  
unending sheets of rain, thick and viscous,  
pour down in buckets and flood the forest.

Soft and grey, like a great sponge, the river  
heaves in the shapeless valley. It pours all  
afternoon, all night and all the next day until  
it floods the river, water on water.

Céline can only imagine she is breathing in  
water or drinking the air. The surface of the  
river water is calm and its depths are dark and  
motionless beneath the steady rain.

A murky cloud of mist rises off the river,  
shrouding the houses. Then the forest gives off  
its cloud of mist which mingles with the river  
mist and makes the world disappear. (19)

Céline stops humming a Beethoven symphony  
and the rain stops. Was all the water out of the  
sky a mistake rectified by the girl's silence?

The mists evaporate and the clouds part. Great  
waves of sunlight from the sky bounce fiercely  
off the river. Children of the village come  
running from their houses to play in the water  
logged streets and sing songs to the thunder.

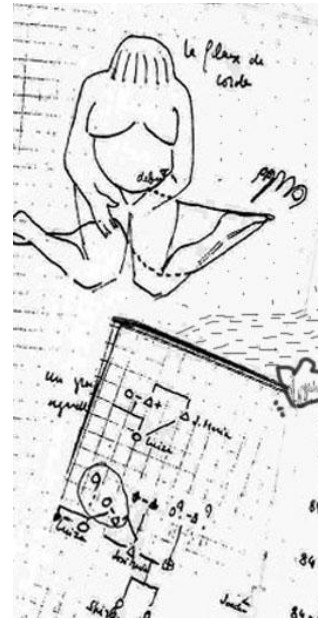


## Seeking for all the words

For ten generations the Indians in a parallel valley have been searching for a white God in a divine vessel. He will show them a land without sorrow, where all stay young forever.

Fitzcarraldo has seen this God; he has the voice of Caruso. Fitzcarraldo's boat is the divine vessel. No boat can get up their river, for the rapids are too fierce, but he will drag his boat over the mountain to reach them.

How will he achieve it? Just like the cow that jumped over the moon. When a French trapper discovered the Niagara Falls, no one believed him. His only proof was seeing it. Fitzcarraldo has seen his boat floating above the rapids.



A black object is floating on the river. The visitors stare, transfixed by the strange, murky charm that will deliver a sorcerer's portents.

It's an ominous sight, full of dark warnings. As it moves closer they laugh to discover an upturned umbrella floating towards them. (20)

This object must be both a simple umbrella and an omen. Do we learn from our fears or let our fears burn? What do our image and our usurpations matter? What we are, what we have to be, these things are enough to fill our lives and occupy our strength.

Is the sun the only reason for your shadow reflected there on the far wall? There's more. Indians look at the light behind the shadows. The strange and fleeting infamy of this jungle is too complex for only one answer to suffice.

Don't tell them they must turn this around, cast off their chain and begin to look at the world directly. No, our task, before we die, is to seek for all the words we can; all the words that will help us name these things. (21)



## Nature falls quiet

Waves of sunlight,  
Pouring from the topmost sky,  
Bounce fiercely on the river.

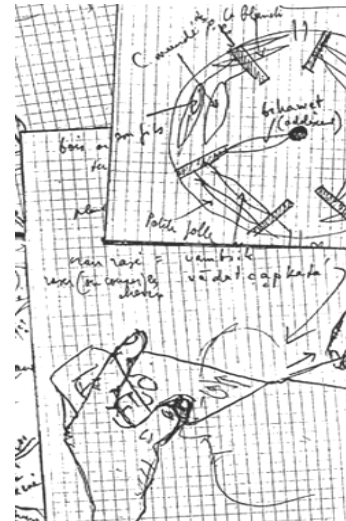
It's that time when all nature falls quiet,  
When the forest's symphonic whirlwind of  
Cacophony is replaced by a block of silence.

This calm reminds Céline  
Of the boy in the tree who  
Played his flute in her dreams.

Is this happy enigma of a boy calling to her?  
She takes flight and re-joins him  
In the topmost branches.

She sits close.  
The scent of all there is to know is  
Roasting in the sky.

Gazing at the crown of verdure  
She tries to describe it - but  
She can only hum the sounds.



## Who sing's here?

### Improbable reasons

Gabrielle, troubled by questions,  
Devises theories and invents doubts.  
Concerned for Céline and herself,  
She suspects many possible causes.

Has her daughter been inexplicably  
Haunted by improbable reasons?  
Seduced by unlikely possibilities?  
Driven to invent new successes?

Did she imagine she could fly -  
Move without limbs to live in the air?  
Did careless talk spark an ambition  
That moved her to disobedience?

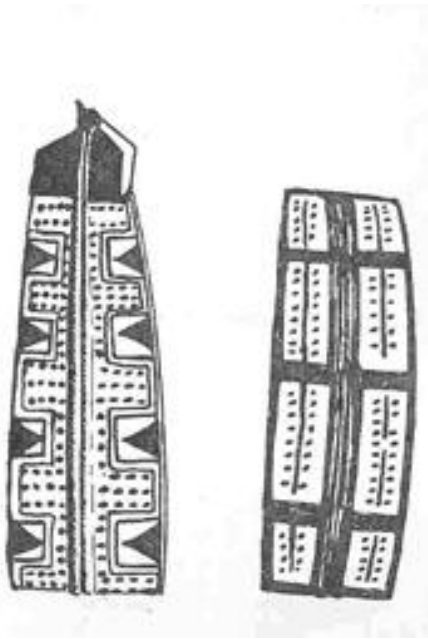
Life begins when it starts to dream.  
Something encouraged her dreaming;  
Something immutable beneath reason;  
Something immobile opened a door.

No fossilised thing, her imagination.  
Fables were her life, her fabulous world,  
She was prodigious at devising them;  
Eager to amuse her invented ancestors.

Did I leave her alone with her reveries?  
Is this to be my grief and regret?  
Was her turbulent youth also joyous?  
Is this my solitary consolation?

What do the birds dream of?  
These were the last words I had from her.  
Did a winged being, turning in the sky,  
Seduce her into taking flight?

Was it delicious perfumes born in blooms  
From the great crown of verdure above?  
Maybe she simply said, I will climb the forest  
And then she simply climbed the forest.



## Within the fever

Blood comes sobbing from her head.  
When night comes I'll sing for your girl.  
Blood sits in the corner of her eyes.  
When the moon is up I'll dance for her.

I hear by dreaming with the spirits.  
Women will bring fragrant flowers.  
I sing by dreaming with the spirits.  
Women will sing the healing chorus.

Her head-soul lives there, in the roots.  
We must not frighten the hair here.  
Her head-soul has shattered and fled.  
We must return it to her fore-head.

Her heart is weary and shaken.  
I will startle it to flutter again.  
Hearts need the breathing wind.  
I will sway the leaves in her heart.

I will blow her head to cool it,  
Then the spirit liquid will enter her.  
I will blow her heart to cool it,  
Then the spirit will strengthen her.

Her head-soul is vulnerable,  
Delicate as a new plant shoot.  
I will place my hands round  
Her little crown to re-shape it.

Like a gardener patting the  
Earth around a young plant  
I will pat her cracked head  
Where the head-soul should be. (22)

Eventually it will return  
First I must invite my spirit.

I call you here  
I call you to this girl

Is it me you want?  
No, not you, I want the strong one.  
You want me to sing in you?  
Yes you, you are the one I want.



## The healer's song

Who sings here?  
It's not me;  
It's the essence  
Vibrating in my bones,  
Vibrating in the spaces  
That grow when I connect with  
With the emptiness.

Who sings here?  
It's not me;  
It's the Earth  
Supporting the gifts,  
Supporting the love  
I embrace when I invite  
The healing breath.

Who sings here?  
It's not me;  
It's the silence  
Remembering me,  
Remembering in me  
The many vast sounds  
Of this voice.

This voice does not  
Belong to me;  
It surrenders in me.  
I invite it now,  
Invite it through me  
To flow and breathe in this girl;  
To help her heart sing. (23)

## With flowers in my hair

I speak; not a whisper escapes my lips.  
Are you laying a trap or punishing me?  
This harsh, cruel voice of yours, it hurts.  
I should never have taken up climbing.

Indulge my years; I am doing all I can.  
Why does my weariness hang about?  
That smell, like incense, it's so tiring.  
Am I pale? I feel pale. My blood's gone.

Can song doctors mend cracked heads?  
I'm ashamed to tell you about the boy.  
He's sitting by the door. I can hear him.  
I told him I'm asleep, so he waits for me.

I've been lingering in this place too long.  
This dreaming can't possibly be sleep.  
I get the shivers; my fingers are weary.  
Maybe my illness was caused by poison.

Are you singing these songs to save me?  
Can you hear my cry? I'm very frail.  
Am I suffering the penalty of deceit?  
I will try not to confound your prayers.

Stop anyone from knocking at the door.  
You will not need that kind of anguish.  
When you bring me back, place flowers  
In my hair and weave gold into my dress.



## The dawning of light

And while Céline remained in an unconscious state, an explorer came and read the Popol Vuh to her.

“And it is told how the earth once swayed in deep quiet, swayed in deep silence, rested in stillness, softly rocking, and lay there, lonely and void.

This was the first testimony, the first word.

There was no man, nor beast, fowl, fish, crab, tree, stone, cave, tuft of grass, nor bush. Only heavens were there. Invisible was the face of the earth. Only the seas gathered under the firmament. That was all.

Nothing was there to take form or become audible, nothing to move, trickle, or rush under the firmament. There was only nothingness. Only the waters gathered together, only the sea laid calmly there, one single singing sea.

Truly nothing was there which might otherwise have existed. Only the creation was there. Only the creator and the Mighty and the Cucumatz were there.

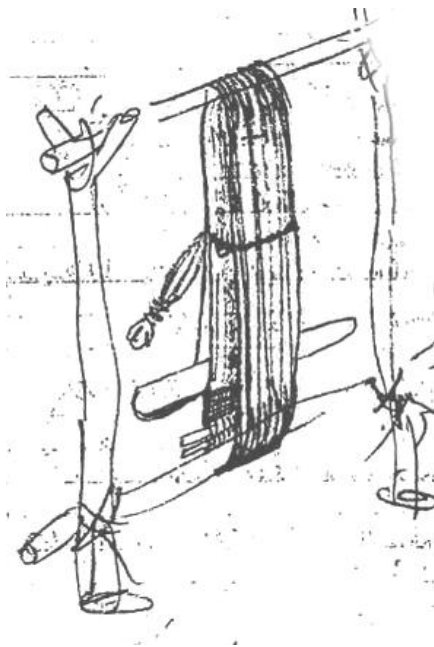
She, the begetter of sons, escorted by her children, was there upon the unfathomable waters and she was ready.

Only quiet was there and stillness and darkness and night. And likewise there truly was Heaven and also the Heart of Heaven. This is the name of the God. This is how He is named. And His word came thither into the Mighty and the Cucumatz, where there was darkness and night, and He talked to the Mighty and the Cucumatz.

They talked, bethought themselves and considered carefully. They took counsel among themselves, bringing their words and considerations into accord. There emerged from their plan the dawning of light and the conception of Man.

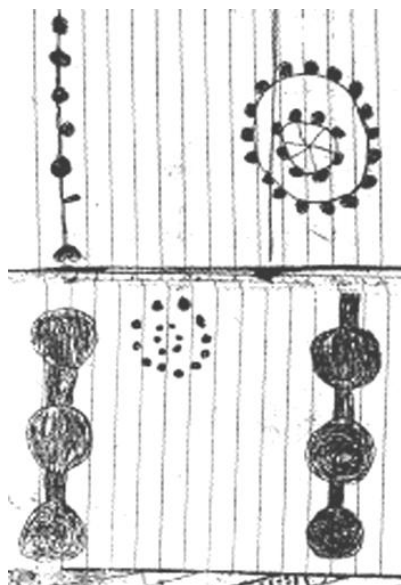
And then they pondered the sprouting, the growing of trees and creepers and the creation of Mankind. They did this in darkness and night on the strength of Him, who is the Heart of Heaven and whose name is Huracan.” (24)

Céline heard all this through her bones.



# Part Two

## Ancestral rites



## Ancestral rites

There was fever and within the fever a door  
through which she passed. The door's closing  
was silent but at the moment of passing  
through she lost all sense of what was outside  
of herself and what was born of the heat that  
soaked her bedclothes and lined the faces of  
those keeping watch through the dark hours of  
danger.

Stepping through the door she fell into night, a  
plunging upward flight into the well of stars.

I will live in the cloud forest, she decided.

Time relaxed, let slip, drifted in the uncertain  
stillness of tropical night. She stepped away  
from the time she had known and from her

vantage saw a world invisible before the onset  
of this fever that held her life in the balance  
even as it revealed secrets from the forest  
floor.

Birds poured in a smoking cloud  
from one corner of the sky,  
to choke the fading  
sun

Dispassionate yet frightened, she looked down  
at the creatures assembling below her: dogs or  
men?  
edges rubbed smooth by fallen night  
fogged, beaten  
running crooked on three legs,

tripping up on reptile strands and tree roots.  
There was no moon this first night but she  
could make out their forms by an eerie light  
emanating from the saucer eyes of nocturnal  
loris and potto.

She watched men-creatures lick stones, chew  
on skin flakes, green dust rising in clouds as  
they paired up to blow powdered tree-bark into  
each other's nostrils.

Some nights later she was visited in her sky  
perch.

Opening her eyes after a drowsy spell she  
found an old man sitting in the crook of a  
branch.

If I sit still he may go away.

He spoke and the sounds meant nothing to her  
but her intuition translated:

Because you are sick and innocent we have  
left you alone.

You are the only female child to hear this, to  
see this.

These are the rites of our ancestors.

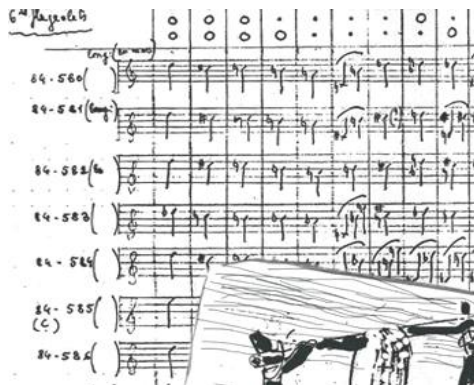
The world has a piece missing.

Like a puzzle, she said.

You make the missing piece with singing and  
music.

Please, tell me the words.

From the beginning.



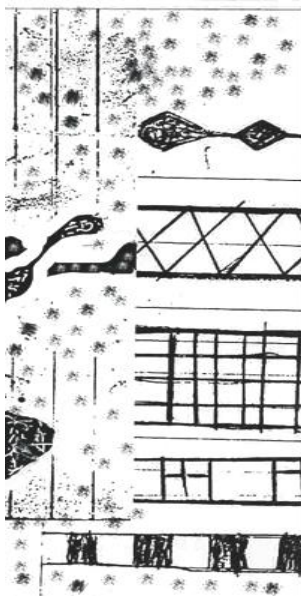
And then she was unsure if all that she heard and all that she saw was enacted in front of her in the past or present, mixed up with her fevered dreams or simply the sound of his patient explication and elaborations, a chant filling her thoughts with the flicker of movement between two worlds as the dead passed across small fragments of the incomplete universe in exchange for rites and songs of rectitude and honouring.



Led by a young boy, two men running into the clearing, both playing long flutes, deep notes alternating like the duet of songbirds. Then came the vibration of the tongue between the lips, the indrawn snoring, the panting contrapuntal to the rattle of the shaker, something far beyond language and still far from song. Sounds hesitating and vague floated in the air, shaped themselves slowly into words and at last flowed on gently in a murmuring stream of soft and monotonous sentences:

My water won't listen  
My water sings like a secret  
My water is a deaf man.  
People tell me  
that the sounds  
are insects,  
Frantic in dark  
earth  
thick damp.

I listen to the rational clamour of the leaves in the woods.  
It was this day I believed that if there is no noise of a creature in a bush or if a bush is too quiet there would be fear without seeing.



He explained and named the sound that the chest makes when it prepares to accept spirits, the sound of something big and heavy falling to the ground, or of the shot of a cannon reverberating. As he spoke, he repeated the name over and over, pronouncing it with decreasing volume, like an echo gradually dying away.

They wake you.

Those who are not truly shamans do not hear them.

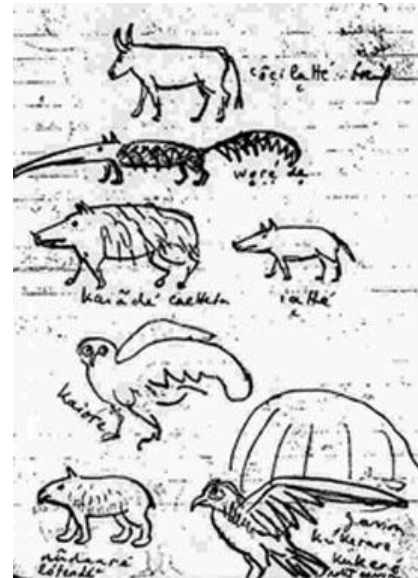
He who is really a shaman hears a kind of buzzing:

bouuu . . .

during his sleep, and this song echoes, rebounding off the celestial vault. He opens his eyes and says to himself: I am going to see them now.

In the preparations for this cycle of rites, they had cut down trees and hollowed them out from one end. The inside of the resulting barrel was then coated with a mixture of sticky tree resin and honey. For many hours they waited in silence until monkeys passed overhead. Soon enough the monkeys would scream and chatter as conflict broke out. They hoped to capture the sound in the barrels, to cover the open end and then release this shrieking during the ceremony.

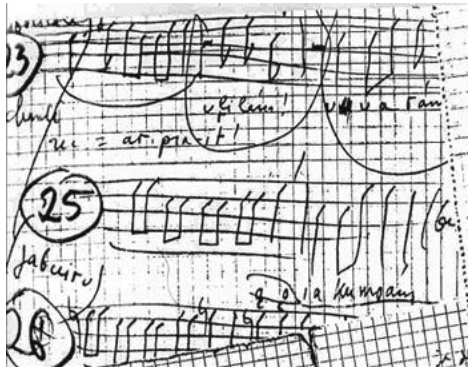
Cavity beetles had been collected. More than fifty of these rare and unusual insects had to be collected. Their mating song was unique. They would burrow backwards into the ground until vertical, then open their abnormally wide mouths and wait for the wind to catch the edge of their jaws. For those few travellers who had heard it, the sound was said to be as haunting as a wolf howl. She was reminded of the potoo bird, whose eerie cries were said to be the carriers of criminal souls.



For the ancestral rites, the cavity beetles were mounted in fishbone glue, upright and separated according to sex. Hidden behind a screen, their melancholy singing was interpreted by non-initiates as the sound of those ancestors who nobody wished to see again, caught in carefully laid song-traps as they tried to break back into the world of humans.

Many years ago, the old man told her, explorers came from France. These men carried a gramophone into the forest. They were not so surprised by the machine itself. After all, some of them had travelled to a distant city where they heard the noises made

by the local juke-box, the American mechanical player to be found in all the cafés of South America. It was the music that had impressed them. One of the records they heard on that occasion was an aria - O Isis und Osiris – from Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*. All that they had heard – the winding of the gramophone handle, the crackle of the stylus on the record, the unfamiliar voices and instruments, and then the repeated knocking as the record came to an end – was imitated with rattles, bundles of leaves, a jar full of bees, wooden drums, flutes, bark trumpets and their heterophonic voices. The effect was haphazard, of course, but spirited.



Another instrument was brought into the clearing, a clay vase painted with esoteric designs. In the bottom lay a rock crystal. This was played by inserting two flutes, one of dark wood and the other of light wood, and then playing them. The vase served as a sounding box and modified the tone of the flutes.

The variations on this simple sound modifier became increasingly strange to her eyes: the complete skin of a jaguar which had been stiffened, opened along the spine and filled with water, so that it stood like a noble statue in order to provide mysterious resonance to the flutes. During the nights that followed, wooden carvings representing other animals –

tapir, cayman and ant-eater – were used similarly as resonators or percussion. Some of these instruments were so large that they could only be lifted by a group of men.

Finally, as the cycle of ancestral rites drew to a close, she saw men blowing into life-size wood sculptures carved in the resemblance of dead ancestors. Animal skins had been stretched over the ends of tall columnar drums. These were sufficiently narrow to allow a thin man to squeeze inside to his full length, knowing he had no chance of coming out. His cries of claustrophobic panic were modified by a tube stuffed into his mouth. The end of the tube would be covered with the membrane of a bat's wing or the tissue of a spider's egg case

cemented on with bees' wax, and the ensuing noise - buzzing, muffled and of course hidden - combined with the groaning anthropomorphic trumpets to make a music that was considered to be the most powerful incentive for the ancestors to ignore any temptation to come creeping back into the world of humans. Music is not, perhaps, the correct term.

Bitter sacrificial medicine is better, an admonition for them to continue their lives of contentment in the spirit world.

Isn't the space of a listening body just such a hollow column over which a skin is stretched, but also from which the opening of a mouth can resume and revive resonance?

a whistled language  
the trumpet is 'made to shout'  
the flute is 'allowed to speak'  
these ancestral voices

A silence would fall. The only sound was the whine of mosquitoes and the rattling wing cases of big insects moving around in the grass.



act like a crazy dog  
sing crazy dog songs  
all these heads these ears those eyes  
around me  
how long will the ears hear me?

One phase of the rites was given over to initiation. Small boys were taken to the river and forced to eat emetic plants. After vomiting several times they were instructed to drum on the water, striking the surface with rhythmic beats using both hands to produce a noise loud enough to be heard a considerable distance off.

Cupping hands together, they blow through them, producing a sound similar to a trumpet. These were two distinct sounds with a special meaning, one male, the other female.

One night, bullroarers swinging from dusk to dawn.

Stinking of decayed corpses, the monster has come, dragging itself out of the river to eat men.

hollow tube making rattling sounds  
empty headed person  
become a hollow tube  
faint, forget

In the darkest night, rattles whirling, emitting showers of sparks. Through rapid rotation and shaking, pebbles within the calabash shaved off a fine meal from the highly combustible wood of the central shaft. These particles ignite in the heat generated by the whirling crystals and fly out a glowing spark through the rattle's four mouths. Fire is both purifier and healer.

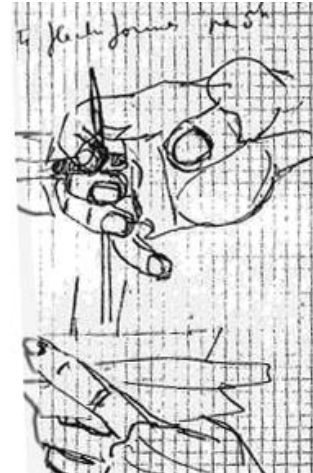
Nature and miracles worked in collusion. The gentle deer lemur, extinct for two thousand years, comes forward through the roots . . . somehow the black monkey creature is in front

of him, and he looks into its eyes, completely black. It is singing a black song, a harsh melody of a blackness too pure to survive in time.

A delirious witness, breaking taboo, she experienced no sight that could be committed to memory. Perhaps just the trace memory of an odour of skin scorch. Then there was only the fugitive sound that she heard when a room was still, like a needle tracing patterns on a textured surface, like a heron beak slicing its thin gash through the skin of a lake.

Amplified, this faint scratch could become the knocking of poltergeists, the harsh scrape of a fingernail breaking through the walls shielding us all from the other side.

Mysterious knocking will always invite questions of meaning.  
But meaning seemed too dark a box  
In which to trap such dying light.



## Ancestral rites

## References and sources

Professor Henry Balfour,

Ritual and Secular Uses of Vibrating  
Membranes as Voice Disguisers, 1948

William Bascom, Ifa Divination, 1969.

Edited by Anne Trueblood Brodzky,

Rose Danesewich and Nick Johnson

Stones, Bones and Skin, 1977

Alejo Carpentier, The Lost Steps, 1956

Aimé Césaire, The Collected Poetry, 1983

Joseph Conrad, The Lagoon, 1997

Marlene Dobkin de Rios, Visionary Vine, 1972

Alain Gheerbrant,

The Impossible Adventure, 1955

Michel Leiris, Aurora, 1990

Claude Lévi-Strauss,

From Honey to Ashes, 1973

Jacques Lizot, Tales of the Yanomami, 1985

Jean-Luc Nancy, Listening, 2007

Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff,  
    Amazonian Cosmos, 1971  
Jerome Rothenberg, Shaking the Pumpkin, 1972  
David Toop, Exotica, 1999.  
Amos Tutuola,  
    My Life in the Bush of Ghosts, 1964  
William S. Burroughs, Ghost of Chance, 1991

## References for Part One

1. *Isis*, Count of Villiers de L'Isle-Adam (p. 85)  
Quoted in *The poetics of reverie*, Gaston Bachelard (p.103)
2. *The poetics of reverie*, Gaston Bachelard (p.137, 141)
3. *Tropical Nature and other Essays*, Alfred Wallace (p 30)
4. *Tropical Nature and other Essays*, Alfred Wallace (p 22 & 23)
5. *Tropical Nature and other Essays*, Alfred Wallace (p 37)
6. Interview with Werner Herzog.
7. *Tropical Nature and other Essays*, Alfred Wallace (p 23 - 25)
8. *Tristes Tropiques*, Claude Lévi-Strauss (p.3 -7, 506 & 507)
9. *Tropical Nature and other Essays*, Alfred Wallace (p 31)
10. *Species of spaces*, Georges Perec (p 91-92)
11. *Tristes Tropiques*, Claude Lévi-Strauss (p.3, 4, 6, 7, 34, 61, 506, 507)
12. *Tropical Nature and other Essays*, Alfred Wallace (p 24 – 26) Also quoting *Naturalist on the Amazons*.

13. *Tropical Nature and other Essays*, Alfred Wallace (p 62)
14. *Sinister Resonance*, David Toop. (p 8) Quoting, *The Castle*, Franz Kafka.
15. *Sinister Resonance*, David Toop. (p 13, 31, 197,199) Also quoting, *The heart of darkness*, Josef Conrad.
16. Werner Herzog; a text about ecstatic truth.
17. *Tropical Nature and other Essays*, Alfred Wallace (p 66 & 67)
18. Text by Composer, Luciano Berio, for Symphonia.
19. *Selected Essays and Notebooks*, Albert Camus, (Return to Tipasa, p. 147)
20. Extracts from *Fitzcarraldo*, a film by Werner Herzog.
21. *Selected Essays and Notebooks*, Albert Camus, (The Enigma p. 146)
22. *Healing Sounds from the Malaysian Rainforest*, Marina Roseman,
23. In collaboration with Guillermo Rosenthuler.
24. Mayan creation myth adapted by Werner Herzog.

## Bibliography for Part One

*The poetics of reverie*, Gaston Bachelard,  
Beacon Press, Boston, 1971 also quoting *Isis*,  
Count of Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, Paris,  
Librairie Internationale, 1862.

*Selected Essays and Notebooks*, Albert Camus,  
edited and translated by Philip Thody, Penguin  
Books, 1970.

Werner Herzog:  
Fitzcaraldo, dialogue with Herzog and extracts  
from the film.  
Mayan creation myth – the Popol Vuh -  
adapted by Werner Herzog for the voice over  
text in his film Fata Morgana.

*Tristes Tropiques*, Claude Lévi-Strauss,  
translated by John & Doreen Weightman, The  
Modern Library, New York, 1997

*Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*,  
Georges Perec, Penguin Books 1997

*Tropical Nature and other Essays*, Alfred  
Wallace, London, Macmillan and Co. 1878.  
(*Tropical Nature*, Part II Equatorial  
Vegetation)

*Healing Sounds from the Malaysian  
Rainforest*,  
Marina Roseman, University of California  
Press, 1993

*Sinister Resonance*, David Toop, Continuum,  
London and New York, 2010.

