

APOCALYPTIC MANIFESTO

Rodney Saint-Éloi

This text was created for the exhibition In the No Longer Not Yet

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An apocalyptic manifesto in thirteen brief texts founded in the experience of those suffering under what has been called the apocalypse.

Other sites

Other lives

Other routes

Other looks

Other languages

A decolonial perspective to put an end to colonial history and dominant discourses.

I GOUDOUGOUDOU

I take a plane. Destination Port-au-Prince. I remember it every time I travel to Haiti. It was January 12, 2010. Landing in the afternoon, I was soothed by the melody of the small orchestra playing “Ayiti cheri” at Toussaint Louverture Airport. On the road, I took in the landscapes, colours, sun, turning my back on winter. Arriving at the hotel, I dropped off my bags in my room. Then met my friend Dany Laferrière at a restaurant. We barely had time to order, coarse salt fish for me and lobster for Dany. Suddenly, an insane noise rose up from the earth. A hellish, thundering noise. A voodoo *loray kale* noise. A noise that pounds the tam-tams. Darkness prevailed. I didn’t know what was happening. I didn’t see anything. No one knew anything. Everyone hit the ground. The concrete of the courtyard opened as though to swallow us up. The trees gave way. The houses too. Dust covered the sky. The radio stations kept repeating the word *earthquake*. A dizzying tragedy. A cacophony of hardship. The dogs didn’t bark. The experts assessed the damage. They counted the dead. 300 000.

*Dance of the dead. Playing dead. As though the dead
were more alive than the living.*

II Bill Clinton

A magnitude 7.3 earthquake. Bill Clinton asks for donations: “Send even one or two dollars.” Préval, the country’s president, cries, powerless. Clinton takes the lead through his foundation. He says reconstruction. He repeats it and everyone repeats it after him: *Country open for business*. The marines land. Striped flags flutter all over the country. They call it *humanitarian aid*. NGOs mushroom on the sidewalks. They call it *co-operation*. They. Buried their dead. They. The people of the small nation of sunless days don’t say a word. They. Stay silent. Don’t have time to cry or point a finger at tragedy. Desperate times call for desperate times. No voices to soothe the tremors. Their houses vanish in the clouds. Their dreams collapse with the ground. The only word that escapes their mouths is GOUDOUGOUDOU. Clinton pontificates, promises, and legislates. He ends up repackaging the dough. Billions, they say, in the backrooms. Ten years later, no one knows where the money went. The people of the small nation pray, beg the sky for mercy. The others bust a gut. Bill busts the TV.

Captain, the wreck calls out to you. Do you have any last words?

III

The poor bury their dreams in their hearts like dogs. *Rév chen rete nan ké chyen*. They don't ask, how are you? Has the season kept its promises? The poor are afraid that you'll steal their questions. Say no when it's yes. Yes when it's no. Neither yes or no, but... Because there's something profoundly irreparable in words. Tragedy should protect itself from tragedy. The poor are afraid of words. They become runaways. They invented the word runaway. The poor are rocks that obey the sun and rain. The rocks roll and vanish TOUP TOUP in the river. GOUDOUGOUDOU. The body resists without resisting. Body turned to stone. Body that says absence. The absence of all absence. Here, things have no name. The body is blind.

I have a memory for forgetting.

IV Georges Castera

Gout pa gout

Lavi yon nonm prale

Drop by drop

A human life disappears

My poet friend Georges has died

I think of him on this last day of January

Port-au-Prince loses some of its temerity

Port-au-Prince liquidates its epics

Georges says FUCK in Creole

His tongue thirsts for justice

His tongue hungers for music

The earth spins in his worn-out hands.

Borders: Donald Trump puts up walls and more walls. Does this mean that the Earth is no longer round?

V

Where are my eyes?

M pa wè. I cannot see.

Where are my feet?

M pa wè devan m.

I cannot see ahead.

A translator reinvents history

Says within their tongue

I've no eyes to see

The voice trembles and says the opposite of truth

the utterance stripped of its echo

Ah yes, I have eyes that see

Ahead *devan* the horizon is blocked

The earth is no longer the earth

The sea lines up its chimaeras

And protests its retreat

Period

I am the slave. It's never my mouth that speaks for me.

VI

Mireille is sick. How to say the word *sick* in Port-au-Prince when all seem to be suffering from a strange epidemic. Since we don't heal anything, there are no sick people. Everyone says *pa pi mal* do deny being sick, *pa pi mal*, that means *get off my back*, you have to force the pain to be patient, so-so, everyone says *nap boule*, we burn. We'll never know from what sickness the country is suffering. Everyone has the miracle cure. Everyone knows that change is a hyperbole. Go ahead, say it to the women walking in the morning, mouths pinched with hunger. Look at those boys going to school in tight rows, a hymn on their tongues to fool the rising day. Mireille is sick. I hug her as usual to take some of her pain upon myself. Some of her memories. Some of her wisdom. To give her something of my travels and reminiscences. I look at Mireille. Everything resumes more beautifully when the end is near.

Christopher Columbus discovered America. The part that the lie has played in history cannot be measured.

VII Wagane

I'm in Dakar. And here, I am Serer. My brother Felwine calls me Wagane. Wagane means invincible. That's not exactly right. Wagane means someone who hasn't been conquered yet. I should learn all

the languages in the world to say sea. Sky. Tree. Fire. Air. The end of all these things. It seems that I am the daughter of the burned baobab tree.¹ I spend my time looking for my face.

I am a cannibal. I'm not the one who says so.

VIII

And who will be the Archivist of these forgotten people?

Not the rivers' water, not the sated condor, not the wind of childhood (Khiredine Mourad)

Kay kraze nimer o eface. The houses were razed. The numbers erased. No trace left. No memories. The childhood story doesn't describe childhood. We don't have the right. We still wait for the storm. We've been waiting for years for some unknown collapse that hasn't come. Here, childhood cracks. Time cracks. Childhood doesn't exist in our languages. Nor in our memories.

History peddles triumphant stories. Since kings no longer exist, the valets will have freedom of the city.

IX

For my Indigenous friends, I changed my shirt. I also changed my name. I walk on the tundra. I sleep under the sky. I have become a big big cat in their language. I have a new name. The red Negro from America, I've been adopted. I have to stand up to feed the heating rocks. I hear the drums. I speak to the river. The shaman calls me. I see the moon again. The eagle. Enchanting Labrador. I fix my eyes on the horizon. I say kwei kwei. At dawn, I burn tobacco to honour the Ancestors.

Decolonial. Resume the history.

X

They say, life is a circle. It turns once. It breaks. Everything resumes and so it continues without end. Life is a circle until the circle snaps. Then, nothing. A misunderstanding like a sudden rain.

Telling our stories without words by vomiting codes, protocols and other colonial debris.

XI

¹ *Je suis la fille du baobab brûlé* is the title of a book of poetry by Rodney Saint-Éloi, published by Mémoire d'encrier in 2015 (Translator).

A prayer to God

Unmasked

Shameless

It's to God we speak

Direct-direct

It's God we insult

Without soap

Goddamn shit scrutinizing all our misery

Goddamn shit telling us to turn the other cheek

Get lost!

I have a thousand names and a thousand faces. And all the suffering inside me.

XII

One day, the time will come when we'll have to close the windows to mourn the dead.

Take sabbaticals to feign hope or count the past in despair. The birds are not birds. They no longer have branches. Where are the trees? Where is the life about which I feel nostalgic? Where is the sea? Is this blue the colour of the sea or a grimace, a memory that turns to blood in the disarmed hours of early morning?

Settler, piss off! This is how we tell colonial history.

XIII

I'm not in the habit of checking the weather.

It's raining or the sun is shining brightly.

We don't ask how's the weather?

We focus on bread and water

To tighten our belts

To wait for tomorrow

To defy the hurricane

To welcome death

Wordless

The earth engulfs us

We should take time to speak to our dead

Rodney Saint-Éloi

(Translated by Oana Avasilichioaei)

Bio

Poet, writer, essayist, publisher, born in Cavaillon, Haiti, Rodney Saint-Éloi is the author of fifteen books of poetry, among them *Je suis la fille du baobab brûlé* (2015, shortlisted for Le prix des Libraires and the Governor General's Award), *Jacques Roche, je t'écris cette lettre* (2013, shortlisted for the Governor General's Award). He has edited numerous anthologies. He published *Haïti Kenbe la!* in 2010 with Michel Lafon Publishing (preface by Yasmina Khadra) and *Passion Haïti* in 2016 with Septentrion (Québec) and 2019 with Grandvaux (Paris). He has realized numerous events, including *Les Bruits du monde*, *Les Cabarets Roumain*, and *Senghor, Césaire, Frankétienne*. He was awarded the prestigious Prix Charles-Biddle in 2012, appointed to the Académie des lettres du Québec in 2015, and named Compagnon des arts et des lettres du Conseil des Arts du Québec in 2019. He is the director of the publishing house *Mémoire d'encrier*, which he founded in 2003 in Montreal.