

When negro teeth speak

OUOLOGUEM YAMBO

Mali

People think I'm a cannibal
but you know the way people talk

People see my red gums but who has got
white ones

Hail the tomatoes

People say that far less tourists are coming
but you know
this is not America and nobody's got
anything in his pocket these days

People think it's my fault and are scared
but look here

my teeth are white and not red
I didn't eat anybody

People are evil and claim I bolt
boiled tourist
or grilled maybe

boiled or grilled I asked
they kept silent and looked apprehensively at my gums

Hail the tomatoes

Everybody knows that an agricultural country engages in agriculture

Hail the green cabbages

Everybody claims that vegetables
don't feed their man

and that I'm too brawny for an underdeveloped character
miserable punks living on tourists
Down with my teeth.

Suddenly they were all over me
tied me up

threw me to the ground
at the feet of the Law

Cannibal or no cannibal
you have a case to answer
ah, you think you're smart
and put on airs

We'll see to that I'll fix you for good
what's your last word
before your execution

I hurled hail the tomatoes

People are evil and women curious you know
there was one in the curious crowd
who in a corn-crake voice gurgling like grease
in a broken pot
yelped

open his belly
I'm sure father's still there

Since there were no knives at hand
which is quite understandable among Western
vegetarians

they grabbed a Gillette blade
and patiently

criss
cross
plop
they opened my belly

A tomato plantation bloomed
watered by streams of palm-wine
Hail the tomatoes.

The Poet

THOMAS RAHANDRAHA

Madagascar

You whom the gods have chosen
that our springs may brim over with song
and our forests vibrate with sap
that whether drought-ridden or luscious with grass
our mountains may be mountains
that earth may be earth
fervour our breath
faith our hearts
men our men

from the bottom of your soul
from the riot of your blood
from the hallucination of your dreams
from the heart of the hurricane of your desire
from the peak of intensity of your incantations
oh, to spout the power of your faith
the cry of their deliverance

you will speak
you will speak the language of your purity
for those whose voice is walled in
and life suspended

you will speak the language of your innocence
for those crushed under the weight of calumny
until their skin exudes it
you will speak the language of your justice
for those whose sight is blinded
by bars of iron

you will speak of your love
for those they strike
for those they smother
for those they torture
for the hunted

for the condemned you will speak

for the deported you will speak

for those awaiting judgment you will speak

for the detained you will speak

for those deprived of their rights you will speak

for the defenceless you will speak

you will speak

For the thoughts of beings dead among the dead
destined to rage and hatred
in the darkness of prisons
you will speak

for you hate violence
you hate calumny
you hate lies
you hate hate
you will speak
to them, to, you will speak

you will speak till the end of night and the sea
that the day may come
that for them once again
our springs may brim over with song
our forests vibrate with sap
our mountains whether drought-ridden or
luscious with grass
may be mountains
that earth may be earth
fervour our breath
faith our hearts
men our men
your being is word which reconciles with life
speak . . .