

RAW DATA

(OR: DINNER TABLE TALK IN MONTREAL *)

Daniel P. Kunene

Awakened from my world
of click clack cluck
(Whereby I refer to those fascinating clicks)
By the buzzing Babel of tongues confused
I became aware, of a sudden you might say,
Of worlds and men (and women, let me add)
Living in a state of primitiveness,
Who knew nothing of clicks and their magic charm.

Click clack cluck,
Click clack cluck,
Click clack cluck and-a
Click clack cluck

A-One two three
Four five six
Seven eight nine and-a
Ten eleven twelve

Now then I took my bags — “Goodbye, mama!
I am a-filled to my neck with missionary zeal.”
“Go, go!” said papa, “That’s my big brave boy—
Those natives will be grateful till their dying day.
Besides, you need some credits for your Ph. D.
“Go, go, my son!” “In just a moment papa!
I must a-find me a pen that writes good and clear.”

First stop, Londonia in Angloland
Among the natives of the Isles of Britannica
There they sat—can you imagine?—doing nothing
but talk!
And talk of what? (By golly, you’ll never guess!)
Of what to do on the day that followed this.
They are amazing the excuses of laziness!
I bet my hat (even though I ain’t bought it yet)
But that tomorrow they’ll be talking of the same
old thing:
What to do on the morrow
What to do on the morrow
What to do on the morrow
Till they’re six feet down!

*The dinner referred to here took place in a restaurant in Montreal on April 14, 1972 during a joint meeting of the A.S.A. Board of Directors and committee chairmen.

The total population of my “Clicking World” was, by sheer coincidence, three, namely myself, R. Gordon Collier and Mrs. Collier. In the middle of our conversation, the hum of other conversations around the table suddenly intruded itself into my consciousness. I then suggested to the Colliers that it would be interesting to go round the table and find out what each “world” was talking about. They took me seriously; I developed cold feet; they insisted. Then I went round the table writing my “findings” on the back of a used envelope.

To my consternation, as I prepared to sit down, R. Gordon Collier hit a spoon against an empty glass, and I had to give my report immediately, almost like President Nixon arriving from Russia.

Anyone tempted to identify personalities referred to in the poem with any living persons (for example the Colliers as mama and papa etc.) does so at his own risk.

And I began to long for my clicking world:
I'd have been holding forth
 to my audience's delight
About clicks and clicking, not with heels
 of murdering squads,
But with my tongue and lips
 and such harmless bodily parts.
My tourist friends like the click clack cluck
They marvel greatly at the multiples of three.
But I had to press on to avoid perishing
At the hands of papa or the university.

Bye-bye barbarians,
You were born lazy and you'll die lazy!
I'm amazed you don't know
The dignity of labour.

And now I go to Franciana across the channel
And in a manner polite I ask
 "What do you do?"
"Très bien, merci, an ow do you do?"
I said, "Dammit, I didn't say *how* do you do,
All I wanted to know was *what* do you do?
Or better still what were you talking about
 just before I came?"
"Earthquakes." "Where?" "In Los Angeles."
"O my God! Haven't you heard of my
 clicking world?
All civilized men know about it, at least!
And for heaven's sake, stop eating horse's meat!"

I must quit this place before I go native!

Italiana, here I come!
The natives were talking intellectual things:
What Panel X will do in Philadelphia.
"I thank you very much; I think
 you're wasting your time!
Why don't you put your tongue here
 and make a dental click,
And then put it there
 and make a palatal click,
Lastly put it over there
 and make a lateral click
And then you aspirate and nasalize
 and radicalize
And play little tricks like that
 to get your multiples of three.

Clicks are never-failing charmers
And they often succeed where other things
 have failed
As when a charming lady,
Lips half-parted in wonderment,
Says "Do it again" as you click click click
In multiples of three:

"O my fair ladee
Would you agree
If I wooed thee
With a multiple of three?"

(Click clack cluck
Click clack cluck
Click clack cluck and-a
Click clack cluck)

And now I'm off with my bags
to Germania
And then I find they are talking of *Nigeria*
"Telescopic philanthropy?" I ask
"Can't you see I came here to philanthropize?
Leave Nigerians alone and listen to my clicks!"

Clicks are like bees
and where they most abound
Much fruit of sense beneath
is really found

Some converts here, a few converts there,
And so I write it down in my diaree.

And now I turn a little north to Swedania:
"We are talking 'bout *sex*,"
even before I asked
"It is a *continuing conversation*
in our part of the globe!
Will you join us, sir? It is a beautiful thing!"
"Just for a while, I guess, as long as you understand
That all I need are credits for my Ph. D."
"Plenty credits here, sir."

I tarried for a while as you can
well imagine
And what I wrote within my diary
is not for mama's eyes!
Nor for papa's, for that matter,
though men have stronger hearts.

Being refreshed by my experience
in Swedania
I went to many other countries
And all the natives were doing
was talk talk talk:
Food habits of West Africa (yams)
*The British and their peculiar attitude
towards their history (?)*
*How does American policy on the Congo
get fabricated*
*History of Africa—military regime in
Ghana's hinterland*
Something about jobs for graduate students
Food and separatism in Canada;
*Montreal as a city; a bit about
African research.*

Not very exciting, especially after Swedania.

But then I came into the land of Norwegenia.
"Welcome, lonely stranger, we talk of many things:
Oxford and Cambridge and bumper stickers.
But our staple is *sex and Norwegian omelette.*"
"Yes, O yes, I will stay for a little while.
But please take note - - -"
"All you need are credits for your Ph. D."

“How did you know?”
“Plenty credits here. Many others
have come before you.
Relax!”

* * * * *

Now that I'm back in my home
of click clack cluck,
I can recount with laughter
some frustrating experiences,
Some of them frightening, during my field trip:
Sometimes the natives would refuse
to come and talk.
Then I'd try cajoling — something like this:
“Come o-o-n my picanniny natives,
Come to your Uncle Jasper
(Or whatever name I might think).
But sometimes threats worked better,
And in my roaringest voice I'd say:
“He-e-y! Come here, you bastards,
If you know what's good for you!”

Sometimes the natives would be
in an ugly mood;
The males, especially, would be after me
With their assegais
Before I'd put my pants back on
in a proper decent way

Then I'd flee like a leaping roe
Or as pants the hart
With my pants over my shoulder
And the breeze blew them up
into a strange balloon.

And I'd run run run
With my swollen pantaloons
As if to burn an effigy
Of my precious lower half!

Yet I never did mind
As long as I'd left
behind
The seed of civilization
In the rich dark soil

* * * * *

In concluding, a little history
of my clicking world:

Once upon a time (even the historians know it)
A missionary came
To preach among the San
In the southernmost part of Afrika.
Having heard the San talk
(As he had to sooner or later)
He told his diaree
And the diary told the world:
“They make harsh sounds
With gutturals and the like;
One really ought to say that
rather than talk
They cluck like turkeys in a Turkeystan!”

Turkey, turkey everywhere
And all the hills did click;
Turkey, turkey everywhere
Nor any - - -

The San knew by now
It was a foolish turkey
That stayed around at Christmas time,
And they were scared;
But having nowhere to go, they pleaded for their lives:

“O Reverend Father,
We’re worried about that look in your eye.
Believe us, sir, though we may talk like turkeys,
But in fact we are *people*, just plain *people*.”
(Click clack cluck,
Click clack cluck,
Click clack cluck and-a
Click clack cluck)

“Fear not, my clicking
 clacking
 clucking friends,
I’ve better things to eat!”

So the hills continued to click unchecked,
And the Xhosa heard the clicks,
And the Zulu heard the clicks
And the Sotho heard the clicks,
And the clicking civilization spread far and wide.

* * * * *

Now I am back and papa calls me
 “big brave boy”
My mama sheds a tear in a little handkerchief
My university at first said “Give him a C”,
But when I told them of the diet
 of Norwegenia
They said, “Give the bastard an A
 if he will take us there.”

* * * * *

Now I’m happy I’ve got my Ph. D.
And have taught the natives a thing or two.
The university’s built a branch
 in Norwegenia
And mama and papa are comfortably retired.

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