

Ignoring the Boat-Song*

Lost, floating signifier,
the wind, speaking with vowels
of languages living and dead—
beneath Nyame's kingdom of sky;
or wading in the water with children in blue—
it moves, heavily, in a kind of yearning,
along oak branches to our window;
we heard those voices, but understood little,
and so turned in our beds
to sleep; said nothing.

*The observer John Lambert recorded that four slaves rowed “to a boat-song of their own composing. The words were given out by one of them, and the rest joined the chorus...this ditty was rather monotonous, but had a pleasing effect, as they kept time with it at every stroke of their oars.”