

Montréal-New Orleans Express

par Francine Prévost

*possibilité d'éclipse,
De disparition
Et de transposition de la séductrice
Baudrillard*

Bayou days
A road trip. A Greyhound bus drive
Following the route of spring

Une expédition dans le Sud

Montreal-New Orleans-Montreal
96 hours 3500 miles

I came down with the autobiography of Benjamin Franklin
And drove back with Jack Kerouac's *On the road*
Samba music, jazz, blues in my ear
I live on a frontier in two languages
Dreams and memories are recounted in French

**as if the dream circled the whole existence
Of the subject to restore its dramatic essence in
theatrical form**

Michel Foucault

I had spent too quiet a time
It was time to get on the road.
Direction South.
It was a bus laden with winter memories that left
Montreal that night
Off and into the Adirondack's night

Deep, foreboding, not a soul in sight
 Somber mountain lines running alongside,
 Engulfing the lone bus.

In Saratoga Springs at 3 am
 A man toiled over his laundry
 In an all lit Laundromat

*Vaisseau fantôme tangué
 La nuit hostile dehors est immobile
 Le bus se fraie un chemin,
 Ecarte un instant l'obscurité des montagnes
 et des forêts
 New York surgit de ces immensités
 Comme d'un rêve
 Irréelles des lignes courent en hauteur
 Et s'arrêtent capricieuses en plein vol.
 De grands ponts de fer enjambent
 Nuages et quartiers endormis
 Des tunnels étroits nous avalent sous terre
 La ville gigantesque née de tant de solitudes
 Plus loin au Nord*

I had to wait until dawn in Grand Central Station
 For a bus
 Among travelers and luggage
 Huddled together in straight lines
 Behind the salvation gate
 A Mexican girl sitting on her suitcase
 Is putting nail polish on her finger nails
 Under the supervision of her male-gentleman
 Who surveys the scene
 Standing next to the gate, ready to go,
 A young man, dreds and wool hat on
 Earphones and an attitude

*Enfin nous émergeons de la nuit,
De l'attente et du tunnel tentaculaire
La ville s'évanouit et tyrannise
Les heures câlines du petit matin,
Plie les autos et les amants
À sa règle du jeu*

François Villon

Tonight a Villon's disciple
Gets on the move, dreds and wool hat
Abandoning winter soiled memories
For the South, all the way down to New Orleans
Radio, photos, discs, teddy bear and blanket
All the way down to get himself a new life
« So...So » they call him
Not so good, not so bad
His good resolutions went as far as Gulfport
Where he befriended a man
Who fixed him up for the evening
Into some no good adventure in the night
Of gambling, drinking and finding girls

**Au retour de dure prison
Ou j'ai laissie presque la vie
Se fortune a sur moy envie,
Jugiez s'elle fait mesprison!
Il me semble que, par raison,
Elle deust bien estre assouvie
Au retour**

François Villon, *Le Testament*

Pushed along in a straight line Montreal-New Orleans
Leaving winter memories and dialogues in the North
South bound,
Secrets all bundled up there in the snow,
The violence of your street life
In my most intimate maze

« I have never been to Paris in summer
I'd never had scotch... »

We left New York at dawn and Baltimore
By noon through a back street
In Washington, half an hour stop
To stretch, clean the bus and eat
Three Amish old folks in full costume,
A 19th century postcard
Keep close quarter to their neatly packed suitcase.
A handkerchief, starched and pressed, is taken out.
A Texan, hat proud, walks by
What was there to eat?

Philippsburg, Charlotte flashed by,
Lilac trees and orchards in bloom
Passengers come and go,
Strike a conversation,
Comments fuse back and forth above the seats

**He rises to his fate
He has to blow across bridge
Do it with such infinite feeling soul-exploratory
For the tune of the moment**

Jazz Fest in New Orleans
Hot rhythms in my blood

Quail gumbo and mango sorbet
I was in a hurry.
In Mobile,
I had my first peach cobbler
I knew I had arrived

A truck wobbles into view
Church bells rang

Miles get swallowed from underneath the bus
An invisible force pushes us forward.
We are no longer friends, Mister B
What saved us from total destruction?
Are you worried about the Law?
The river pours down from mid-America
Jazz bars late at night
Are haunted places
The air is so sweet in New Orleans

and look at the great brown father of waters
Rolling down from mid-America
Like the torrent of broken souls...logs...muds
And things that had drowned
Where the secret began in ice
Jack Kerouac

The old bus seemed to creak
A moaning guitar blues.

Suddenly, we were in the swamps.
You are an anxious man, always rooted at his table,
Reading miles and miles of philosophy
Until you implode.

We walked to you across your discourse,
Every year wider
Your laughter across the distance is a bridge

He darted at the speed of light through the screen door

We were just rolling along,
Back roads, country roads
Into a maze of unmapped territory

Don't speak, don't remember

A mysterious haunting blues held us captive

Dumaine Street

Somewhere a guitar starts a dialogue
Die inside me
Heat inflames magnolia scent in the air,
Half-broken shutters watch a sunset
I sink them those Paris nights.

Out there in the cold of the streets and the apartment,
With a man moody as
« a sea swells, rages
And in mortal silence watches »
Paris nights resurface in the muddy waters,
The golden glow of your skin in the winter nights,
Cold shadows moving in a wall
Street life madness storming
In our most intimate territory

*Devant le tableau de Watteau : les cousines
Elles étaient sans doute parties se promener
Dans le parc avec l'amant
Le peintre les surprend un peu plus tard.
Elle est de dos et regarde sa cousine
En dialogue amoureux.
L'amour partagé
Impossible de lire le cours de ses pensées.
Le couple nous fait face sans nous voir.
La cousine est de dos,
Peut-être une certaine raideur court en elle
Les amours nés des songes et des amitiés
Irréels ?
Le feu aux joues,
Un sang de glace court à la surface de ma peau
Jours intranquilles,
Les souvenirs remontent
Étranges entre veille et réveil*

The night dawned, it was a strange land,
Lifeless
Journeying through snatched away footsteps

« day ja vu restaurant »

We didn't stop at day ja vu restaurant
in Jackson, Mississippi.
In York, home of the blind boys of Alabama
I felt such an urgency to live
As if I was to die young
To take in all the music and motion and poetry

If I am out of tune...

I drank some Southern moonshine
And relaxed and looked outside

got to get myself faithful

Buddy Bolden

Tall trees arise on each side,
Dirt road trailing dust,
Calligraphy of a night we try to decipher.
Buddy Bolden,
What spirit laid his rage in your cornet
That your soul caught fire
On a parade day?

Holz cemetery, so tenderly cared,
Has left you drifting in dark undercurrents.
On mother's day, we drove through West Alabama.
In Livingston, at the Western Inn,
We had a good food basket of corn bread
With a casserole of corn and chicken bones.
A straight two-lane highway
Without much traffic
We went straight as an arrow
Through the past

Voyageurs de quatrième classe

This dream you had about a bus,
Swept away by powerful currents,
Off their riverbed.
The bus lifted off his gravity,
Drifting along, without brakes,

Headlong into trouble

**Suddenly off the right a train fled
Dragging a long string of lighted
Windows as rapid and ephemeral as a dream
William Faulkner**

Road and train tracks run alongside.
Ten minutes stop for smoking and stretching
At « Charlie's Grill and Laundromat ».
Eutow, « Bait and Gun Shop »
Tuscaloosa, car cemetery and cornfield
Shoulder each other.

Bus stations are hidden in the very middle
Of cities on back streets

*Nous sommes des voyageurs de quatrième classe
Dans un champ à flanc de colline,
Des statues de jardin
Semblent implorer les cieux.
De près, je réalise que les nains sont
Des bouquets de fleurs en plastique,
Plantés en terre
Cimetière sans nom, sans tombe ?*

**Quiet nights of quiet stars
Sings Sarah Vaughan**

Where was I going?
In the darkness all around us,
The smell of the North rainy and cold

We passed an apparition

*A un arrêt, dans les toutes petites heures du matin,
Un homme près d'une maison miniature
Libère les chiens.
Un enclos court, fait de bric et de brac,
Un tout petit champ de trois sillons tourne court*

No passenger waiting.
We turned around the empty parking lot,
The apparition receded out of sight

*Dans l'effroi de tes yeux,
Je lis les rues de Paris,
Désertes la nuit*

**Where did the wordless
Moans come from in twilit
Rooms between hunger
And panic?
Yussef Komunyakaa**

You don't say anything?
Hard love is what you know,
Words that inflict wounds.
Your silent unsleeping footsteps
Leave traces of blood in my dreams.

We had no reason to worry,
The bus rolled over the wet hills of Virginia.
At Charlottesville, everything changed.
Two cops undercover and a dog
Jumped around two suitcases,
Proceeded to two arrests,
Handcuffed two men because of some weed.

One cop was infuriated, rolling eyes,
Sniffing the unlawful stuff...
They were removed from the bus
And unseen thereafter

**The American police are involved in
Psychology warfare against those Americans
Who don't frighten them
With imposing papers and threats.
Jack Kerouac**

In the eyes of the Law, everybody is guilty

Dusty roads, lost Greyhound stations,
Bridges, ghosts of old freighters,
Memories and murder in Congo Square.
We arrived late at Central Station from the South,
Had a cup of coffee over your battered suitcase,
Home of a well-traveled silver horn,
Purchased in an Atlanta pawnshop.
52nd Street Bebop, arrival-time