

Long!

M. NourbeSe Philip

As told to the author by

SETAEY ADAMU BOATENG

WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY PRESS
MIDDLETOWN, CONNECTICUT

Published by Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, CT 06459
www.wesleyan.edu/wespress

© 2008 by M. NourbeSe Philip

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Philip, Marlene NourbeSe, 1947-

Zong! / M. NourbeSe Philip as told to the author by Setaey Adamu Boateng.

p. cm.

ISBN-13: 978-0-8195-6876-2 (alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-8195-6876-7 (alk. paper)

I. Title.

PR 9199.3.P456z66 2008

811'.54—dc22 2007052378



Wesleyan University Press is a member of the Green Press Initiative. The paper used in this book meets their minimum requirement for recycled paper.

*For Lord Yeates,
Ti Miss Maam, & the many, many others.
Also for Kudakwasbe.*

*Though they go mad they shall be sane,
Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again . . .*

DYLAN THOMAS, *And Death Shall Have No Dominion*

*The time is out of joint. O cursèd spite
That ever I was born to set it right!*

SHAKESPEARE, *Hamlet*

Contents

Acknowledgments	xi
Os	i
Sal	57
Ventus	77
Ratio	99
Ferrum	125
Ebora	175
Glossary: Words and Phrases Heard on Board the <i>Zong</i>	183
Manifest	185
Notanda	187
<i>Gregson v. Gilbert</i>	210

Acknowledgments

A work like *Zong!*, although apparently authored by one person, only comes into being and to fruition with the assistance and support of many others. It is with great joy, therefore, I embrace this opportunity to recognize, acknowledge, and thank the many individuals who have, in one way or another, walked with, or helped, me along the seven-year journey that was the making of *Zong!* My deepest appreciation and thanks to all of them.

More specifically, I would like to thank Paul Chamberlain who has offered continued and generous support over the years, without which this work would not have been possible. He has been particularly helpful in computer matters, and his contribution to the conceptualization of the cover has been invaluable.

I first found reference to the Zong incident in James Walvin's *Black Ivory*, published in 1990. This was the inspiration for *Zong!* Diane Roberts recognized the worth of *Zong!* from its inception, and her support has been steadfast. Ian Baucom very kindly shared his archival research on the Zong massacre with me. Suzanna Tammimen's interest in, and support of, my work, as well as her patience over the years I have been working on *Zong!*, have been indispensable to the completion of the work. Cristanne Miller has always brought an informed and critical eye to my work; she offered sound advice on the manuscript at a time when it was greatly needed. Sue Houchins offered a forum for me to read from and talk about *Zong!* Her engagement with the formal issues of *Zong!* in conversation with me has helped, over the years, to clarify the theoretical foundations of *Zong!* Tonya Foster generously read the manuscript and offered skilled and helpful suggestions. Robin Pacific's long-standing support of my work has been significant. Her comments on, and responses to, the manuscript have been invaluable. Joss McLennan's ideas and graphic skills were vital to the final resolution of the cover image. Marc Walker generously let me have the use of his farm at various times so that I could work on the manuscript. Hardie Philip-Chamberlain provided invaluable advice on graphics and design issues particularly with respect to the cover design. Hesper Philip-

Chamberlain's responses to *Zong!* have been extremely helpful in clarifying many of my ideas around the work. Bruce King has always kept it real. Kofi Anyidoho guided and assisted me in obtaining spiritual permission for this work. Rainos Mutamba generously mined the text to find words and expressions from the Shona language. The Grip Group, including Natalie, Kike and Avril, provided a cultural framework and foundation that allowed me greater insight into the nature of the work that is *Zong!* Margaret Christakos reminded me of my presence and through her pathbreaking series, *Influency*, provided me a venue for a critical response to *Zong!* Brent Edwards' and Pat Saunders' critical interest in *Zong!* and support of my work have been significant contributions to the process of writing this work. One does not often thank an author for his or her work, but Modupe Oduyoye's *Yoruba's Names* was vital to my understanding Yoruba and helped me to construct many of the phrases and names that float through the text.

I would also like to thank the Canada Council, the Ontario Arts Council, The Chalmers Fellowship Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation (Bellagio Residency), for their support. Over the years the following journals have published excerpts from *Zong!*: *Fracture*, *boundary 2*, *Mangrove*, *Hambone*, and *The Capilano Review*.

Finally, I thank the Ancestors for bestowing the responsibility of this work on me. Àse.

Ox

The sea was not a mask.

WALLACE STEVENS

Zong! #1

w w w w a wa
w a w a t
er wa s
our wa
te r gg g g go
o oo goo d
waa wa wa
w w waa
ter o oh
on o ne w one
w o n d d d
ey d a
dey a ah ay
s one day s
wa wa

www w

a

w wa

wa

t

er

wa

te

r

wat

er

wa ter

of

w

ant

Zong! #2

the throw in circumstance

the weight in want

in sustenance

for underwriters

the loss

the order in destroy

the that fact

the it was

the were

negroes

the after rains

Zong! #3

the some of negroes

over

board

the rest in lives

drowned

exist did not

in themselves

preservation

obliged

frenzy

thirst for forty others

etc

Zong! #4

not was
this is
or
should be
this be
not
should be
this
should
not
be

is

Zong! #5

of
water
rains &
dead
the more
of
the more
of
negroes
of
water
&
weeks
(three less than)
rains

Shard
fragment

&

water

(three butts good)

of

sea and

perils

of water

(one day)

water—

day one ...

of months

of

weeks

of

days

of

sustenance

lying

dead

~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

of

days

of

sour water

enemies &

for suste

want

of

died

(seven out of seventeen)

of

good

(the more of)

of

(eighteen instead of six)

dead

of rains

(eleven days)

one ...

one day

one ...

sour

one ...

three b

of

weeks

(thirty not three)

of

water

day one ...

for sustenance

water

day

one ...

one day's

water

day

one ...

sour

water

day

one ...

three butts good

of voyage

(a month's)

how's this to be read -
a score neither vertical nor
horizontal in linearity
Seem adequate

of necessity

sufficient

and

last

the more

of

exist

want &

less than

of did not

&

the more of

of suffered

did not

exist

sustenance

water &

want

of

dead

the more of

of negroes

the more

of

instead

of

Zong! #6

question therefore

the age

eighteen weeks

and calm

but it is said ...

—from the maps

and

contradicted

by the evidence ...

question

therefore

the age

Zong! #7

first:

the when

the which

the who

the were

the throwing

overboard

the be

come apprehended

exist did not

Zong! #8

Zong!

the good of overboard

justified a throwing

of property

fellow

creatures

become

our portion

of

mortality

provision

a bad market

negroes

want

for dying

Zong! #9

slaves
to the order in
destroyed
the circumstance in
fact
the property in
subject
the subject in
creature
the loss in
underwriter
to the fellow in
negro
the sustenance
in want

the arrived
in vessel
the weight
in provisions
the suffered in
die
the me in
become

Zong! #10

Zong! #10

should have

was reduced

retarded

rendered

could

found

given

sailed

bring to

occurred

throwing

arose

to be

was

were

passed

justify

appeared

authorize

made might

Zong! #II

suppose the law

is

not

does

not

would

not

be

not

suppose the law not

— a crime

suppose the law a loss

suppose the law

suppose

Zong! #12

it

is said

has been decided

was justified

appeared impossible

is not necessary

is another ground

need not be proved

it

was a throwing overboard

it

is a particular circumstance

need not be proved

is another ground

is not necessary

appeared impossible

was justified

has been decided

is said

it

was

Zo

Zong! #13

the rest of

the more of

the half of

out of

fifty of

instead of

negroes

the necessity of

Zong! #14

the truth was

the ship sailed

the rains came

the loss arose

the truth is

the ship sailed

the rains came

the loss arose

the negroes is

the truth was

Zong!

Zong! #15

defend the dead

weight of circumstance

ground

to usual &

etc

where the ratio of just

in less than

is necessary

to murder

the subject in property

the save in underwriter

where etc tunes justice

and the *ratio* of murder

is

the usual in occurred

the just in ration

the suffer in loss

defend the dead

the weight

in

circumstance

ached in necessary

the ration in just

age the act in the *ave* to justice

Zong! #16

sh

fo

(E

sh

fc

(E

sl

n

Zong! #16

should they have

found being

sufficient

a necessity

(portion that question)

should they have

found the justify

for exist

a rule for new

the policy within the loss

(portion that question etc)

should they –

might they have

found

the of and during & wherefore

the preserving

the insurance of water

the within loss

the terms of exist

a negro of wit

should they have found

water

&

being

sufficient

Zong! #17

ther

on b

no r

Zong! #17

there was

the this

the that

the frenzy

leaky seas &

casks

negroes of no belonging

on board

no rest

came the rains

came the negroes

came the perils

came the owners

master and mariners

Zong! #18

the this

the that

the frenzy

came the insurance of water

water of good only

came water sufficient

that was truth

& seas of mortality

question the now

the this

the that

the frenzy

not unwisely