



TUUMBA 12

THE  
GOSPEL  
OF  
CELINE ARNAULD

by Clayton Eshleman





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**THE  
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CELINE ARNAULD**

Bird of dawn, your fabulous  
nails have raked my diamonds  
once again,  
The diamonds I keep in my powder,  
Slowly I sniff the sugar of dawn, O  
my parrots,  
Slowly there is a caravan of monkeys  
approaching me,  
An eagle dismounts,

There are spoons and scythes whirling  
through the end of the world,  
O plasma, O piece of the negro  
bank of the Seine,  
Ramparts that shudder under  
The loves of before!

Again, no more! Latumba  
    never again will you approach me  
With your New Guinea cream-stick,  
With your hair of the fire of muddy charred sticks,  
With your icicles of the neon of Paris  
— I see beyond my time,  
    I see the new universe coming,  
There are Latumbas and there are birds,  
O fabulous dawn of sparrows  
    stolen from Zeus,  
O terrible spate of aliases,  
    my profound urge to occur!

Mailed armor in the hall of this  
ancient mansion, O grandfather  
    everytime I see the sun flash  
in your windows I also see  
    cabbages exchange roots,  
the sun flashes into these meadows O  
ghost of his old rose beard  
    how lovely the lowing stream crosses  
    my feet as I stand

upon these shores of new anatomies  
of my time — Dada? Hardly  
my father you are too much a joke  
for my art ever to seek your heart!

*Ivry-sur-Seine*  
1921

Slowly Carmen

we will come to see all  
the snows, your leggins  
will be stolen from your  
old grandmother and we  
will gleefully strip  
in the snow and build  
snow women!

My heart is a fabric speckled with resin  
My hands are tied by the silk of love  
My eyes blinded by a lucid dust

In my scarlet cloak I walk  
Paris nights, many voices many pigeons  
and dwarfs along quay d'Orsay,  
pictures of heaven are diving about Notre Dame,  
I see angels over a famous bistro  
How hungry I am for the soul!

But more, how hungry I am for  
you Carmen, how tiny your precious split  
apricot burns through this Paris night!  
How I approach you as a toreador approaches  
a bull whose eyes gleam with vermilion lights!  
Shadows of the spirit

pass across my veils, many doves are crying  
in the dovecote I lost in my grandfather's vault!

Chalk white my legs seeking  
your black hosed legs, sweet  
sister of my violet sin,  
who I adore to be next to,  
whose soul struggles out  
to bite the buds off the stars!

Latumba, you must allow  
us to love; do not break again  
into this holy temple! Latumba,  
no more! Return to your native land  
where rocky animals promenaded their majesty,  
where parades of savage children,  
    their lips flaming from the maternal mold,  
enslave the sapped European Cherubim!  
Caravans of ant and taba-root are drying on a handkerchief  
    you Latumba have lost in Paris!  
I see you before a missionary's barbershop,  
he is reading you the Bible while he shaves your head,  
O poor Latumba where wilt thou wander?  
O that Carmen could rock her dead child  
    in all six of our arms!  
    Then we would be Hindu!  
    Then we would lift  
  
our ballerina toe and do the Shiva  
our three heads each  
a reverberation through each other!

## WHITE POWDER

Like a sponge made of angel tissue  
I drink these marbelized veins,  
in the bar the jazz-band evokes an aurora of breezes,  
the piano divines Pandora's box which ruptures the perfumes,  
I live at the surface of the soul!  
A powder breaks down my cords,  
the train of my passion derailed and unlinked roots  
    in the swamp until cobras crawl from my icy drink!  
White powder! Strange sugar mixed with taba-root from  
    your island!  
White powder stitched through swaying hoods which dilate  
    like Japanese fans over the body of one too early departed!  
    Your eyes Latumba that I would have banished,  
    that I would have petted with salt,  
    that I would have steamed and betrothed to the ants,  
    your eyes Latumba  
    buried like two tongues in the night  
    lit and crawling with dragon-flies,  
    the kermisite!  
  
and yet the death-sweat under my palm  
as I peel your scales from my body  
7 a. m.



O look into this prize!  
O illness I feared, it is not my body  
but the dead child rocked in an amber cradle,  
I have come back to the beginning,  
like vaulted bats they kneel about me  
grandfathers no longer of my lineage  
but pyramids of sewage,  
they drain and reek in the sun,  
they pray as they drain,  
Step carefully Celine I hear them whisper,  
do not drop what the sacred beetles bequeathed you!

To return in life  
to the wet floor of the cathedral  
and cross others, cross myself,  
knowing other,

the cross is engrained in this clay  
dark brown steps down into its center

Something in me still brings me to Notre Dame  
I walk in on the flagstone  
under the signs taught me by Latumba

I now know the steps descend  
directly down, but my body  
walks on flagstones,

in the tomb of the saints  
Carmen squats  
defecating a monkey head.

## THE SWAMP MAGICIAN

My eyes no longer stare straight forward  
My whites are in another service  
My blacks belong to my sister  
Our bitches have given up their teats

The perfect form of art is  
eyeballs floating free of eggwhite  
The perfect form of art  
walks woman in woman free

I was weaned on the canker  
stormsets of Rimbaud  
When I love  
all the ashtrays are filled with flies!

O many years Carmen my scarlet  
cloak to yours! One ceremony  
we sucked from Latumba's stone,  
now he is toothless somewhere, and mad!

In the end I love to place the wrinkled chart  
of my anatomy in your muscles,  
O sweet one! Only the right horizontal  
of the cross can be seen —

a crow draws out from it the last of the suffering  
like a thread of pus towards the horizon  
Within decades this thread will vanish  
The swamp will have decomposed this magician

When we come together in heaven  
will the kermisite unite with your name?  
It will, when men of this earth  
understand the meaning of our liaison.

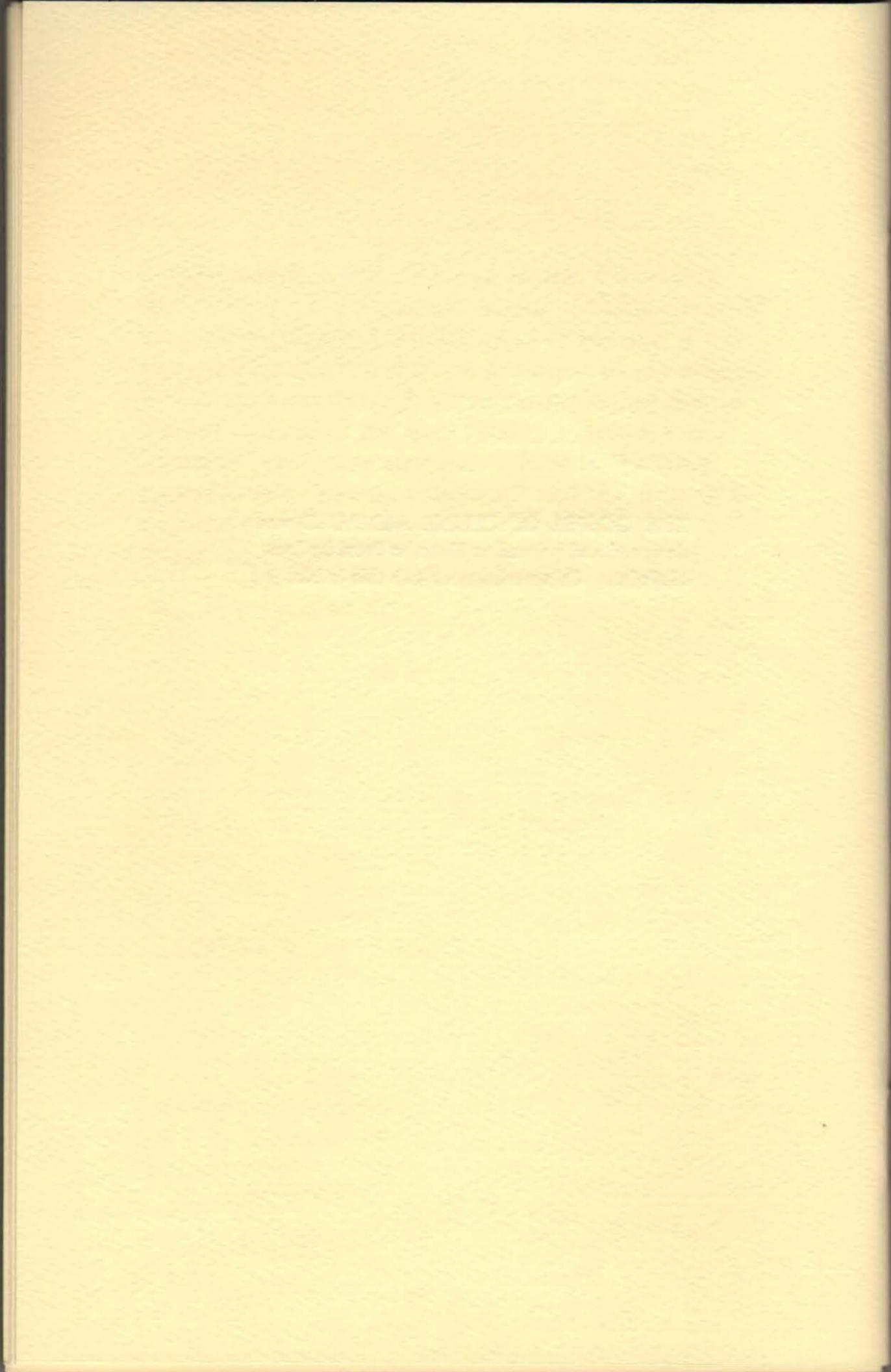
*Paris*  
1920 - 1933

## A NOTE ON THE TEXT

“The Gospel of Celine Arnould” came out of a reading of some poems by the French poet Celine Arnould who published a dozen or so books of poetry in the 20’s and 30’s and lived in Paris. John Martin had given me Arnould material to look at for a possible translation project, but in my opinion it didn’t seem strong enough to warrant translating. It was run-of-the-mill French poetry, worn-out language, superficial emotion, nothing new in short. Yet a few days after reading Arnould’s poems I became fascinated with the idea of making up some poems like hers in spirit, I guess just to see if it would lead anywhere. It didn’t seem to, so I forgot about my imitations for a couple of weeks, then one day got interested in them again and in a kind of trance began to copy them out of my notebook onto a typescript. When I started to type out the second poem I saw Celine become involved with a figure from New Guinea whose name was Latumba, a dream figure who was also a bohemian magician who was transmitting an obscure doctrine of sexual magic to her, whom she feared but who was teaching her something important. I thus rewrote the second poem, then typed the third poem as it was in my notebook, and when I got to the fourth one, another figure appeared, a Carmen who immediately was Celine’s lover and also involved with Latumba. At this point the work began to generate its own narrative and all of the rest of the notebook

poems were discarded. I found myself discovering the "gospel" of the gradual release of Celine Arnauld from the bourgeois Catholic mind of her era. I was intrigued by the fact that the gushiness in my original imitations went through a transformation, so that in the last sections of the final version a complex and liberated personality emerges. Christ in the work appeared as a "swamp magician" and the cross sinking into the swamp signaled Celine's release from the forces the original Celine was under the sway of.

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