

HEARING JAMES BROWN AT THE CAFE DES NATTES
Sidi-Bou-Said, Tunisia

Yes, brother your word had come
Don't want nobody
Give me nuthin
Crowning this hilltop, long ago's lighthouse
Open up the do'
Git it myself
Your word comes, thanks to God and Marconi
To this eyrie where I sit
Mint tea before, serenaded by caged birds
And the undulating arias of Arabia,
Her last vestige of empire.

In waves, over the waves it comes
Don't want nobody
Mingling with birdsong and arabesques
Give me nuthin
Floating over an Andalusian mise-en-scene
(I remember Cordova)
Open up the do'
It pierces the blanched housetops, the waiting sea
Git it myself

You moan, Dido plunges into the flames
You groan, Hannibal embarks
You shriek, Cato's vow is fulfilled
You sigh, the sea roars beside a silent shore

Flairing into this moment
Your voice, snatched from beyond Sahara's sands
Crosses the western sea, enters familiarly
This concatenation of Africa's time
Flavoring mint, infusing birdsong, merging into the endless
vocalise.

— *Richard A. Long*
critic, playwright, archivist, educator,
anthologist is author of the collection
Ascending and Other Poems.