

# **The Wretched Shall Inherit The Earth, The Meek Shall Inhabit Our Worth**

**Some Parables for the Third World**

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These are four parables for those seeking a new way of being, in turning toward Autonomy, anarchy, abolition, full communism, gender/sexual liberation; toward African spiritual traditions, and a “root-grasping,” revolutionary science, guided by material analysis.

There is a massive polarization within the Black community around the questions of both class and gender. And this is throughout the African world, where neocolonialism and integration rear their heads. As the destabilization of capitalism, and its health and ecological effects worsen, the phrase “socialism or barbarism” take on a unique life in our community. State capitalism has not provided an adequate alternative and neither have the reportedly “anti-revisionist” models of socialist experimentation. For, there are those who want to cling to old ways, who dig their heels into bourgeois material interests, and turn toward xenophobic nationalisms, transphobia, white Man religion, fascist conspiracy theories, and eugenicist views on science, fitness, and wellness, and clinging to authority; while there are others who seek new ways of being and a new mode of production and environmental inhabitation, turning toward Autonomy, anarchy, abolition, toward full communism, gender/sexual liberation, toward African spiritual traditions, and a “root-grasping” science guided by material analysis, disability justice, fat liberation politics, and revolutionary ideology.

Below I articulate some parables, that aim to express what I see to be core analysis among those of us in the latter camp. The first Parable is a symbol for Black trans experience of both double consciousness and gender dysphoria, as it relates to the concept of gender self-determination within decolonial struggle; the second Parable is a critique of Afropessimism and Black Optimism that aims to show the limitations of an idealist focus for explaining Black oppression in place of a materialist ecological perspective; the third Parable is a symbol for the process by which Black radical knowledge has been coopted by neofascism and neocolonialism, particularly in the wake of bourgeois civil rights/anti-racist and liberal feminist discourses; and the fourth Parable is a commentary about the ironically unscientific ways certain iterations of the Left dismiss what they see as “identity politics” or “postmodernism” in their assessment of Black radical theories, because of the latter’s deviation from their notion of the “correct line.”

## **I. The Parable of the Butterfly**

There was once a caterpillar, who thought she was a worm. She was born, and lived only around other worms. When it rained, she slithered in the mud with worms, and when it was too hot, she went into the dirt with the worms. Since all she ever saw was worms, the caterpillar thought she was also a worm. The other worms called her weird, though. Unlike them, she had many legs, and her color was different. But, since she was small and thin like they were, everyone said she must have been just a strange kind of worm, maybe even a worm who had a disease. The caterpillar believed this about herself. The other worms made her think she was a bad worm, and this made her very sad, and she never liked to be around the other worms because it reminded her of just how unlike them she was.

Now, one day, the caterpillar started to feel very different inside her. She became super hungry, so hungry, that she felt like she would need to leave the soil, and find something to eat in the outside world, maybe in the grasses and the flowers. The other worms told her that this was a bad idea, because there were big animals in the outside that liked to eat tiny bugs like them. And if she crawled out, maybe those big animals would see her, and then try to poke their beak or

their tongue into the earth, and suck all the worms out for a nice meal. The worms were worried about this, and told the caterpillar to stay where she was and just be like a normal worm, digging through the dirt. But, the caterpillar felt her belly aching and itching, and she knew somehow this meant she was supposed to go outside. So, she did leave, and with her many legs, she climbed into the grasses, and started to eat. Big animals did come, but since her color was bright, she was able to hide among the flowers, and not be seen (this is called camouflage).

The caterpillar ate and ate, and when she had gotten so full, she started to feel different again. This time, it was not her stomach feeling hungry: no, her whole body felt tired. Very very very sleepy, so sleepy that she felt like she would need to leave the grasses and flowers and climb into the trees and sleep on their branches and leaves. It was raining when this happened, so some of the worms were out, and they had seen the caterpillar eating, and now they saw her getting ready to leave again, this time to climb high up into the trees, and so one of the worms spoke to her: "Where are you about to go? I know we always said you were weird and we made fun of you for having legs, but we don't want you to leave forever. Come back with us." But the caterpillar knew she was not supposed to stay with the worms anymore. And so, the caterpillar did not listen to the worm, and she crawled toward a nice and big tree, and she inched her way onto one of its branches. Then, she swung down from one of the twigs, hanging like a leaf, and she wrapped herself in a blanket made of her skin (this is called a chrysalis).

The caterpillar slept and slept, and as she slept, she had the most amazing dreams. She felt so good, so beautiful in these dreams. She was cozy and warm, and she felt loved and accepted in her dreams. Nobody called her weird or different because everyone thought she was special, in her dreams, because she looked different. In her dreams, she was bigger, and brighter. And in her dreams she saw the sky and the sun, in a way she had never seen them before, up close, and that is because in her dreams, somehow she was being lifted up into the air, soaring in the wind. When it rained again, the worms were peeking out from the mud, and they watched the caterpillar asleep in her chrysalis, and they saw something that the caterpillar was too deep into her sleep to notice. They saw her changing. They saw her growing. They saw her body becoming something even more different than they had ever seen. They did not know what it was but she was transforming. And some of the worms were scared, because they thought a big animal would see her and come to eat her. Other worms began to say among themselves that the caterpillar was being weird, and so they laughed at her. The caterpillar could hear the worms, but she was so focused on sleeping in her warm chrysalis, and she was so focused on enjoying her dreams, that she ignored what they said (this is called contentment).

Finally, when it was time, the caterpillar woke up. She shook the chrysalis off. Only this time, the caterpillar was no longer a caterpillar. She was a butterfly now. Her legs were much much bigger now. And she had huge eyes and a long mouth. And, she had wings: bold, blossoming, bright colored wings. Her wings shimmered and shone, and the worms who were watching saw this and many of them were surprised. How did this strange worm become something completely new? Some of the worms got scared for the Butterfly, because she was so much more colorful now, they thought perhaps a big animal could see her more easily, and come to get her. Other worms got jealous of the Butterfly, because they knew that unlike them, she could use her wings to get far far away if a big animal tried to eat her. The Butterfly heard them saying these things, and so she spoke: "Do not worry about me. And do not be mad at me. I am okay, and I will be fine. This is who I am now. This is who I was always supposed to be. I am a Butterfly, not a worm.

I do not belong in the mud, I belong in the sky.” And that is when the Butterfly flapped her wings, and shook herself off the branch, and hopped into the wind.

## II. The Parable of the Glass

Man was thirsty, and had the enslaved fieldworkers fetch water from a well, and told the enslaved houseworkers to pour him and his mistress a glass of water, so he could drink. Then, Man dismissed the fieldworkers, and called the houseworkers together, pointing them to the glass, and asked them, “Is the glass half empty or is the glass half full?”

Man had guests in the house, other slavemasters, and thought it would be entertaining for them to watch the enslaved try to answer a philosophical question. So, half the group of enslaved houseworkers answered Man, saying, “The glass is half empty.” The Man, his mistress, and his guests laughed then, saying “these ones are the pessimists. They are probably still sad about having been taken from their precious mother Africa.” The other half of the group of enslaved houseworkers then answered Man, saying, “The glass is half full.” Again, the Man, his mistress, and his guests burst into laughter, saying “now these are the optimists. They are probably at least appreciative of the spiritual songs and dances they brought with them from their precious mother Africa.”

Now, as this discussion was happening, some of the enslaved fieldworkers had overheard the philosophical question while listening at the window. And so, at night, when the guests had left, and all the work was done, these went off to the edge of the plantation, to where the witchdoctor lived, and they relayed a story to the witchdoctor. “Master made us pour him some water. Then, he drank from it. Afterwards he asked the house workers: is the glass half empty or the glass half full. Upon each answer, master and his guests laughed, and they called some of the slaves pessimists, and the other optimists. They mocked them too, for their love of our mother Africa and of our culture.”

The witchdoctor listened closely, before inquiring, “And to me you bring this news. Why?” And the curious field slaves who had overheard the original philosophical question being asked in the master’s house replied, “For you are wise. You hold knowledge of the elements. Surely you must understand the mystery of the glass and the master’s laugh.”

The witchdoctor nodded. Then, the witchdoctor responded, “By whose hands was the glass fashioned?” And the enslaved fieldworkers said, “one of our own. We had to make it in the fire from the minerals of the ground.” Then, the witchdoctor asked, “And by whose hands dost the water find its way into the glass altogether?” The enslaved fieldworkers answered, “One of our own. We brought it in buckets from the well near the big house.” The witchdoctor nodded. Then the witchdoctor asked, “And how does the water get to the well near the big house, if water is a gift from heaven, free for the fish to swim in, the grasses to exude in the morning as dew, flowing through rivers and streams for all life of the land to drink when thirsty, although we as laborers cannot touch it save to deliver it unto the master?”

The enslaved fieldworkers then grew angry at the master, for the witchdoctor was helping them understand why the master had used the philosophical question to make mockery of the houseworkers. He had been, quite simply, just trying to demonstrate his power over the enslaved as his property, to make them meet his whims and needs, be they entertainment or a thirst for water.

Thus the curious fieldhands said, “The mystery of whether the glass is half empty or half full is vanity, and trying to discover it is like grasping for the wind.” And the witchdoctor nodded, saying, “Indeed. The question is folly, and for that the master should reap a whirlwind.” That is when the enslaved fieldworkers left the witchdoctor, with a renewed hatred for and spirit of vengeance toward the master in their hearts.

### **III. The Parable of the Display Case**

In the beginning, there was night, and the people had fire to help them see and stay warm in the darkness, but they also connected in other ways, with other senses, and with spirit. They came to know the world and the stars, animals, plants, themselves, each other, in this manner, sensuously. Then, a Man came, with his God, saying “let there be light” and set upon us a display case, with glass walls, bounds, lit up with artificial light, where we were trapped and made a spectacle, and treated like animals to be gawked at in a zoo, or stolen objects to be stared upon in a museum. We were disconnected from nature and the heavens, forced into a cage.

And we could not peer beyond the glass walls of the display case. Meaning, we could be perceived but we could not perceive the world outside it. So, we did not know we were being watched for someone’s entertainment. And some of us forgot there was a world beyond the glass walls altogether, and soon we forgot about the previous world too, our life before being caged, our connection to nature and the heavens.

But some could hear the outside world, the noises and laughs of the onlookers, and others could feel the outside world, the feet rumbling and vibrations from the spectators hitting or tossing things at the glass walls. And this brought about a great curiosity, and some of us banded together to try and break out the display case, to find out what was out there. The Man, of course, could not have this, because how else would he and his mistress make money if our people broke out the enclosure and made the whole operation come crashing down? So a compromise was made: “Let us help them see beyond the veil,” said the Man.

Therefore we were given shades to look upon the world outside the display case with. Some of us were handed red shades, others yellow, others blue, others green, all different colors. The shades enabled us to see beyond the glass walls finally, but we each could only see the world outside as it appeared in the allotted color of our shades. Meaning, if, objectively speaking, a certain thing reflected a different color with the naked eye than the lenses of one’s shades, you could not see it at all. Thus, those with green shades could see only green things of the world beyond the glass; and those with blue shades could only see blue things of the world beyond the glass; those with yellow shades, yellow things; red shades, red things; and so on and so forth.

Then, we were told that the things we could see were things from God, that these were visions, and that they were special. We fell into a spell of curiosity now, gazing at the walls of the display case within which we were trapped, into an outside world we had never seen, and taking in only the things we were allowed see. We admired what we thought were sacred visions. But soon, this frustrated our people even more, because we still heard and could feel that there was a spectacle being made of us. Some of us grew bored and tired of what were seeing, and began to think that it may not have been divine after all, but that there was people watching us, having enjoyment and amusement at our plight.

That is when some of us took the shades we were given and traded them with each other, so that we could perceive this outside world in the other colors, not just the ones each had been accustomed to with the shades we were given. So those with blue shades traded their shades with the others that these may now see in blue for the first time; those with green did the same; those with purple, as well; and so on and so forth, until each had had a turn seeing the world beyond the glass in a different color. As we helped each other see other things we once could not, and learn about other things, from trading our shades among ourselves, we became angrier at the whole situation behind these glass walls. And together we grew more conscious of our plight, and began to bash up against the walls of the display case once more, this time more vigorously than before. The Man, of course, could not have this, because how else would he and his mistress make money if our people broke out the enclosure and made the whole operation come crashing down? So another compromise was made, and again it was said: "Let us help them see beyond the veil."

Therefore we were given kaleidoscopes to look upon the world outside the display case with. With the kaleidoscope, now the people could see many colors, all at once. And we were told that what we were seeing was not malicious. The Man admitted that it was not Divine, though. We were told that it was a simulation, it was virtual, an experiment, and that we had signed up for life in the display case, because it was beneficial: we wouldn't have to worry about the dangers of the outside, trying to provide ourselves food, water, or anything, because it was given to us. And it was said that the kaleidoscopes would only enhance the fun of a life on display; that the laughter on the outside was there for our enjoyment. We were told we could now see the outside world in multiple colors with the kaleidoscopes, and wouldn't need to borrow each others' shades anymore; the shades were outdated, we were told.

So now we had the kaleidoscopes and we could see in many colors. But we were now seeing in shards. Shards that all ran up against each other. Shards that were multiplied and even magnified. Thus, despite now seeing in multiple colors, the vision of the people was fragmented and distorted. We now understood that we were on display after all, as had been suspected but not fully apprehended when we had been wearing shades. But this did not mean we could clearly perceive the world that had been imposed. Especially since we were being tricked into believing that the simulation was something we wanted, that a life on display was beneficial, coming from good intent. We weren't even aware that a profit was being made off our suffering. And we had long since forgotten our past, when we weren't trapped, when we could see and hear and feel fully, and more, in the outside world, in connection with the heavens and nature.

#### **IV. The Parable of the Tides**

There was a great wide River that emptied into the Sea. It was a brackish body of water, a mix of fresh water further inland, and saltwater as you got closer to the mouth of the River that went to the Ocean. Every day, the River would ebb and flood: the tide would fall and then rise, as water left and returned.

One day, the tide is rising because the River is beginning to flood. But, a wind is blowing in the opposite direction of the tide, because there is a storm brewing. Now, there are two boats on the River at this time: one is going in a direction with the tide, as they are headed inland to the port. And this vessel has a crew of African freepersons, who have jobs on the land, and

who pride themselves for their work in getting slaves manumitted (freed legally). But the other boat is going in a direction against the tide, as they have decided they must follow the wind and the storm. These were recent fugitive slaves, and they were headed to the Ocean despite the rainclouds and tide because they wanted to get to the land of their ancestors' bones.

Now, those following the tide had a fundamentally easier time in their boats, because of going with the flow, having only minor difficulties because of the wind going against them. But those going against the tide had a fundamentally harder time, because of going against the flow. They receive a slight assist from the wind that is blowing in the same direction to which they are going.

As the two crews are navigating the River in their different directions, behold, someone fires a cannon, and the weaponry falls into the river, disturbing the water greatly. Ripples and waves emerge; they emanate in all directions. This shakes up the boats that have already been dealing with the wind and tide respectively. Those following the tide but with only slight inconvenience from the wind look at those going against the tide but with slight assist from the wind and scoff. Both parties are now nearly capsizing because of the waves stirred up by the cannons fired at the River, but the tide-following party is concerned with the other party, for they believed themselves better off and on the way to safety on land.

So, as they both struggle to keep their boats balanced, the tide-following party says to the party going against the tide, "Maybe if you had been following the tide, and not the wind, then you would not be nearly about to sink because of the disturbance caused by the cannon fired into the river. Out in the elements you struggle unmoored, though you are at risk of capture." But the one who shot the cannon never receives any criticism from the tide-followers. And so the vessel going against the tide says, "We know that we are indeed at risk of capture. And we know that wave disturbances eventually thin away and the surface of the water will calm. And we can depend upon the wind and clouds to change course, so that a storm shall not beat down at us forever. We also have the stars to guide us to our destination, for humanity has made these like a map dotted against the air; and we can be certain that hours from now, the earth and the moon will send the tide towards the mouth of the River, in a direction towards which we are headed, and aid us in our journey of escape. And we can see that the army who shot the cannons now awaits you at the port, perfectly willing to substitute you for the bounty upon our heads, as you are no less Negroes than we are."

And the clouds cleared, revealing a rainbow, and the fugitive crew kept going towards the mouth, against the tide, while those following the tide found themselves being ushered ever closer to slave-catchers awaiting them at the dock.



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