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THE EBON MUSE AND  
OTHER POEMS ENGLISHED  
BY JOHN MYERS O'HARA FROM  
THE TEXT OF LÉON LAVIGNY



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THE EBON MUSE



# THE EBON MUSE

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

LÉON LAVIAUX

ENGLISHED

BY

JOHN MYERS O'HARA

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THE dominant note of the first volume of Léon Laviaux, the young Creole poet, is a glorification of the *fille de couleur*—a theme unique in literature. His poetry, except in so far as it pertains to an appreciation of natural beauty in the tropics, is unreservedly laudative of the dark-skinned races. This singular predilection is due, as he tells us, both to heredity and environment. He seeks to give it expression in strange and erotic songs, through whose fulgurant smoke break flashes of lyric fire. They are brief bursts of passion, like volcanic puffs, too fierce and impetuous for prolonged fervor. Even this can be noticed in the fragmentary character of "The Ebon Muse," his only attempt at sustained utterance. It would seem that the imaginative impulse, in those somnolent lands where inertia rules, was incapable of any enduring flight. This is undoubtedly the effect of climatic conditions on the mind. But Laviaux is still young. A cool whiff of more virile air, from zones alien to the eternal blue, may yet invigorate his Muse.

Then we may have something worthier than these songs that voice the ultra-emotion of youth over plastic beauty—songs that shall breathe to us, through the scent of jasmine and the lure of palm, the soul of the Creole isles.

J. M. O.

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**Y**OU will find the colors of the flesh are even more varied and surprising than the colors of fruit. Nevertheless it is only with fruit colors that many of these skin-tints can correctly be compared. There are banana-tints, lemon-tones, orange-hues, with sometimes such mingling of ruddiness as in the pink ripening of the mango. Agreeable to the eyes the darker skins certainly are, and often very remarkable—all clear tones of bronze being represented; but the brighter tints are absolutely beautiful. There is one rare race type, totally unlike the rest; the skin has a perfectly golden tone, an exquisite metallic yellow; the eyes are long and have long silky lashes; the hair is a mass of thick, rich, glossy curls that show blue lights in the sun. What mingling of races produced this beautiful type? I do not think the term olive always indicates the color of this skin, which seemed to me exactly the tint of gold; and the hair flashes with bluish lights like the plumage of certain black birds.

*Physically the fille de couleur may certainly be classed, as white Creole writers have not hesitated to class her, with the most beautiful women of the human race. She has inherited not only the finer characteristics bodily of either parent race, but something else belonging originally to neither, and created by special climatic and physical conditions — a grace, a suppleness of form, a delicacy of extremities, so that all lines described by the bending of limbs are parts of clean curves.*

. . . . .  
*Among her class there are figures to make you dream of Atalanta—and all, whether ugly or attractive as to feature, are finely shaped as to body and limb—a type of the human thoroughbred representing the true secret of grace—economy of force.*

—LAFCADIO HEARN.

*I am, by fate's decree  
And my heredity,  
Of soul a hedonist,  
Of flesh an ebonist.*





THE EBON MUSE



## THE EBON MUSE



SAW two palms, like temple columns, soar  
Into the night, and under far, the shore  
Encircle with its arms of sand the sea  
That sighed upon its bosom drowsily ;  
And all the slopes that fell in flowers to meet  
The wave receding foamless at their feet,  
As wide and gradual steps of purple seemed  
Ascending to the summit where I dreamed ;  
Above the palms that mingled crowns and made  
An arch where rustling verdure overswayed,  
Full-orbed, and like a splendid lamp, the moon  
Hung golden in the starless dusk of June ;  
The very air was odor, and the calm  
Was that of love's own sleep on sea and palm ;  
And on my lids and in my heart the spell  
With irresistible insistence fell ;  
Each drowsy sense was yielding, but before  
The ways of dream had closed the final door,  
Out of a sudden flash of lyric flame,  
And virginal for me, the vision came !

She came for me, out of a cloud of fire,  
A regal evocation of desire ;  
For me, sole dreamer of a Creole isle,  
Sole wooer of her world-forgotten smile ;  
She came from some dim haunt of spirit-peace,  
The asphodel of shadow and surcease ;  
Across the sea, as o'er the Stygian stream,  
Leaving the hidden shore of dusk and dream ;  
I saw her dimly, gazing from afar,  
As through horizon mists a sable star ;  
The banished Muse, released from that malign  
Decree that doomed her to her sister Nine ;  
In Song's far dawn they first beheld her nude,  
Abashed before a goddess ebon-hued ;  
Drooping their lids, they turned from her in shame,  
A being branded with almighty blame ;  
Swiftly repulsing her they turned away,  
Mnemosyne's white daughters of the day ;  
And left her, child of chaos, with the blight  
Born of the black abysses of the night.

.....  
Like a bronze statue, in the softer glow,  
She stood immobile, near to me, and lo !  
Where well a laureled throng might bend to her,  
I was alone, her poet-worshipper ;

Her lids, unlifted still, were thrall to sleep,  
Sweet where the underworld is poppy-deep;  
Unravished still the lips that parted mute,  
Riper and moister than a luscious fruit;  
One hand was raised while one was pressed to feel,  
Against her heart, its passionate appeal;  
The surging thrill of life in every vein,  
Glowing and potent for delight and pain;  
Erect and tense, lifting their pointed pride,  
Inviolate her breasts in fervor vied;  
Between her shoulders shone a glossy track,  
The dented slope of her imperial back;  
The contour of her torso seemed to me  
A polished buckler of black ivory;  
Her loins' curves like a lyre's whose symmetries  
Dipped faultless to the dimples of the knees;  
Her arms with darkling sheen were sleek and fair,  
Her throat blue-shadowed where the lustrous hair  
Clung as the crater's smoke that densely drifts  
When the far cloud below it breaks and lifts;  
And fruits and flowers, upon her burning mouth,  
Bruised juice and drenched the perfume of the South;  
The mystery of the heavens was in her eyes,  
Creation's vast and fathomless surmise;  
Elusive vision of immortal love

Falling through shadow from the dome above ;  
She seemed the incarnation of the night,  
The glorious antithesis of light ;  
As darkness deepened all her beauty shone  
Fairer than any underneath the sun ;  
And leaping upward, a triumphal span  
Of sudden stars from wave to zenith ran ;  
The lustre of the moon, a paling power,  
Lingered as for a god's own bridal hour ;  
And up the purple steps she came to me,  
The last between the summit and the sea.

. . . . .  
She came with passion in her eyes that were  
Dewy with languor, and with lips of myrrh ;  
Beneath her lashes lurked volcanic fire,  
Her breath was fragrance and her glance desire ;  
Fervor and flame of song were in her face,  
All memory of beauty in her grace ;  
Promise of swift fruition and the fair  
Largess of virile years to live and share ;  
Fresh flowers to hide the faded ones below,  
An aureole to crown the waning glow ;  
Rapture for torture, smiles for futile tears,  
And satiation for the pang that sears ;  
Illusion upon illusion, and the arts

Of great dead lovers, earth's memorial hearts ;  
All this and more my soul was conscious of,  
Delirious with her beauty and her love ;  
She came and stood before me, and delight  
Half stifled speech and almost blinded sight ;  
I dared not look, so stirred by all I felt,  
But every sense was conscious that she knelt.

. . . . .

She leaned to me and laid her lips on mine,  
Imperiously bending but benign ;  
I drank the lyric fervor of her mouth,  
The soul to sing the glamor of the South ;  
High inspiration and the will to make  
A vital strain to which the world would wake ;  
Leaving the beaten paths of Song to blow  
Strange music where a fameless people go ;  
The equal glory of the night and day,  
Wresting from light its long unchallenged sway ;  
A hymn of racial beauty, rare and new,  
The rival lure beneath the ebon hue ;  
The radiance of the suns that triumph in  
The finer lustre of the golden skin ;  
Burnished as bronze or sable as the rise,  
Velvet and deep, of moonless midnight skies.

. . . . .

This was the gift, my heritage, that she  
Gave with the kiss whose fire is memory ;  
Whose freshness is of Heliconian dews,  
The consecration of the Ebon Muse.



CREOLE IDYLS



L IKE slave and slave  
With mighty plumes,  
Great palm trees wave  
Their clustered blooms ;  
Along the shores  
A curving mile  
Of blackamoors  
In giant file.

Their trunks that show  
An ebon gleam,  
A shining row  
Of torsos seem ;  
Each crest of green  
As madras wound  
In silken sheen  
Their brows around.

And unelate,  
This pageantry  
A potentate  
Has made of me ;

The yellow sand  
Is my divan  
That perfume-fanned  
I bask upon.

Red rifts above  
The waves that break,  
A circle of  
Flamingos make;  
My slaves I mark  
With listless eye,  
And near me dark  
Sultanas lie.

DARK on the seaward dawn,  
    Into the roseate fire,  
The palms aspire ;

Into the void they yawn,  
    Summit to summit wed,  
Green-helmeted.

A FOAMING line  
Of waves define  
The outer bar  
Of shores afar;

Beneath the beat  
Of blinding heat,  
The ocean's hue  
Is molten blue;

Where shoreward wide  
The surges ride,  
Two buzzards stand  
Upon the sand;

And high in air,  
Against the glare,  
Two others fly  
And blot the sky;

Between the sun  
And soar of one  
Colossal palm  
That lords the calm.

NOON!  
Silence and heat ;  
A Creole tune  
On the lips of old Fadette!

Noon!  
Drowsy and sweet  
The *patois* croon  
On the lips of old Fadette!

**M**YRIAD murmurs hush  
A haunt of sloth,  
Heavy with heat and lush  
With giant growth ;

Masses of cyclic mold  
Impede the way,  
Pungent with scent of old  
And vast decay ;

Under the leaves that dome  
Profundity,  
Yellow lianas roam  
From tree to tree ;

Ever the endless green,  
The endless shade ;  
Riot of plants that screen  
The forest glade ;

Brilliant with flowers that surge  
From tangled strife,  
Breathing creative urge  
Of tropic life ;



Potence of earth elate  
And savage grown,  
Under the suns that sate  
Its belting zone.

-

*ZOMOQUÉ!*

Ecstatic bird,  
Sing on, thy heart to ease;  
While the glad trees  
Toss a white cloud of blossoms to the breeze!

*Zomoqué!*

I have not heard  
The nightingale, but these  
Mad melodies  
Are more to me than songs of other seas!

THE shield a god  
Might bear who trod  
Along the world;

Or disk of fire  
Immortal ire  
From heaven hurled;

The sea-line's rim  
Is purple dim  
Beneath its glow;

It leaves a scar  
Of cinnabar,  
And sinks below.

O CARIBBEAN wind !  
Freshen afar and bend  
The trees that are to thee  
Thy twilight litany ;

Stir in their tops and send  
Through palm and tamarind,  
Blown from a shadowed sea,  
Thy vesper prayer to me.

O VER the hill  
Of stunted palms  
Faint rumbles come ;

Breaking the still  
Night with its calms,  
The voodoo drum !

Odor of leaves,  
Flowers of the vine,  
Odor of flesh ;

Riot that weaves,  
Bodies that shine,  
Dances that mesh ;

Black satyrs steal,  
Like jaguars,  
On nymphs as black ;

And whirl and reel,  
Beneath the stars,  
Demonic ;

Powdered with dust,  
Panting they writhe  
In fierce embrace ;

Burning with lust,  
Humid and lithe  
Their limbs enlace !

. . . . .

Over the hill  
Of stunted palms  
Faint rumbles come ;

Breaking the still  
Night with its calms,  
The voodoo drum !

NIGHT, would that I,  
God of the sky,  
Heaped gems on thy dark  
Bare breasts that I mark;  
Mine for delight,  
Amorous Night!

Night, ere we part,  
Take from thy heart  
One jewel to be  
Cast earthward for me;  
. . . . .  
Swiftly a star  
Falls from afar!





**O**F my loves there are four  
That my song would endear ;  
Golden Luore !  
Ebon Zaire !

*And with lyric caress  
Laurel each, as a queen ;  
Bronze-hued Tanesse !  
Amber Fafine !*



LUORE



THE orange flare  
Is wide on the west, Luore!  
And verdured palms in the lucent air  
Tower by the shore.

The jasmine scent  
Swoons heavy and sweet, Luore!  
Where blossom-thick is the vine's ascent  
Over the door.

Your languid eyes  
Are dim with desire, Luore!  
And in your heart is the heat that skies  
At noon can pour.

Your body cleaves  
In ardor to mine, Luore!  
Close as the vine, with its fragrant leaves,  
The palm upbore.

As sweet as fruit  
And poignant your kiss, Luore!  
Our lips, with ravishing fire, embrate  
At rapture's core.

Soul of the South,  
I could, O my queen, Luore!  
Yield all my life on your luscious mouth  
And be no more.

TWO golden doves  
That fill their scented nest ;  
Haunt of the Loves,  
Twin treasures of her breast ;

Fairer than throat  
Or shoulder garment-free,  
My glances gloat  
Upon their luxury.

THE sapphire tide,  
Foam-fringed and inlet-wide,  
Creeps to the beach ;  
And the long ripples reach  
Like silver lips o'erlapping each on each ;

And eager o'er  
The body of Luore,  
That lies supine,  
They melt away as wine  
Poured lavish by some lover on a shrine ;

Linger and kiss  
With lips of liquid bliss  
Each charm, and trace  
The way of their embrace,  
Until they vanish in some secret grace ;

And then, at last,  
Their fluid lure is passed ;  
And blithely she  
Comes dripping from the sea,  
And gives herself, a golden nymph, to me.



MY passion for golden flesh  
Seeks a honied mesh  
(Like a bird that would soar  
From its nest no more)  
In thy beautiful bosom, Luore!

My kisses, that flow as fire  
O'er a fane, expire  
(Like a flambeau of yore  
At the bridal door)  
In thy beautiful bosom, Luore!



ZAÏRE



OUT of thy large fruit-luscious mouth, Zaire!  
As music fell,  
With velvet iteration on my ear,  
That syllable;

As soft as flowers that *patois* of the French  
From musky lips  
That slur the guttural, O comely wench,  
Caressful slips;

Its murmur woos the sense with fervor of  
Some drowsy wine;—  
O language of the Creole isle of love,  
Thou, too, art mine!

THE grace of the white and brute of the black  
Were mixed in thee ;  
A simian face — the slope of thy back,  
Callipyge !

Dark lustre of lines that are sculpture-sleek,  
The vapid leer ;  
A whim for the monstrous did Nature wreak  
In tall Zaire !

STRANGE frenzies fill  
Thy black and shining bosom's rise and fall ;  
Wild passion's primal thrill,  
Its brutal rapture immolating all ;

The gust that sweeps  
The unrelenting flame along the blood ;  
The tidal throe that keeps  
Writhing the crest of its voluptuous flood ;

The slime and fire  
That overboil the crater of thy soul ;  
The ruin of desire  
That tears, like the tornado, to its goal.

A SORCERY

Is thine intense ;  
The odor of thy bosom is to me  
A potent redolence ;

Poignant yet sweet,  
It breathes thy race ;  
Enters my veins, a fierce and virile heat,  
Burning for thy embrace.



TANESSE



THOU art fair as the palm  
By the shore, in the calm  
Of the night, Tanesse!

Thou art regal to me  
As that loveliest tree  
Of the south, Tanesse!

S LUGGISH as some palm-fringed and placid flood  
Of current slow,  
The hidden fervor blended in thy blood  
Must ever flow ;

A tropic fire that slumbers in thy veins,  
My bronze *capresse* ;  
Languor of isles of indolence that reigns  
In thee, Tanesse !

YOUR flesh has the scent  
Of an exquisite musk,  
From the amorous dusk  
Of the orient ;

But the ankle-bells,  
That tinkle and fret  
Like a silver jet,  
Are a ring of shells ;

And the madras green,  
As thy crowning gem,  
Is the diadem  
On thy tresses seen ;

And the girdled whisk  
Of a garment loose  
Is the passion-noose  
Of an odalisque ;

And the jasmine gates,  
With their attar-jar,  
Is the dim bazaar  
Where thy lover waits.

UNDO the scarf that hides  
Thy breast whose bronze divides  
In turgent loveliness  
Of hue, Tanesse!

For charms of fairer tint  
Bare throat and shoulder hint;  
Sleek slopes that my caress  
Descends, Tanesse!

FAFINE





THY parroquets, Fafine,  
With plumage green,  
Doze in the mango tree ;

Only the insect-sound  
Strident around ;  
Life is a revery.

Broad on the sleeping town  
The sun beats down ;  
White the deserted street ;

Hot is the hillward noon,  
My octoroon ;  
Dream in the shadow, Sweet !

Curl on the woven mat  
Lithe as a cat,  
Lissome of limb and arm ;

Slumber will soon relax,  
Supple as wax,  
All of thy body's charm.

NUDE in the cool  
Palm-shaded pool ;

The ripples gloat  
Around your throat ;

Your amber limbs  
Seem lotus stems ;

Your hair the blue  
Weed's floating hue ;

Your face a far  
Strange nenuphar.

. . . . .

Hot humid dusk  
Of moon and musk ;

Great stars that light  
The languid night ;

A couch of moss  
To dream across ;

And near to me —  
Oh, ecstasy !

The moon's soft sheen  
On you, Fafine.

THOUGH fair, O North, thy nymphs  
    And half divine ;  
Colder to me the glimpse  
    Than snow of thine ;

Fair with the statue's grace,  
    Its frozen dream ;  
Whose faultless curves no trace  
    Of tint redeem ;

Thral to the law within,  
    To Nature true ;  
Give me the golden skin  
    Or darker hue.

Futile, O lure of white,  
    Thy pale appeal !  
Mine is an Afric blight  
    That few may feel.

MY amber dove,  
My Creole queen,  
O leave me not, my love!

The Northern skies  
Are grey, and lean  
Above a land of sighs;

And none will care  
Of all, Fafine,  
For beauty deemed less fair;

Their hearts are cold,  
Their ways are mean,  
Their only god is gold;

When you forsake  
These slopes of green,  
Your heart, Fafine, will break;

My southland rose,  
Abide between  
My arms that fold you close;

Ah, tears! they tell,  
My Creole queen,  
That this is not farewell!



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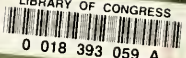
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