In this installment, we’re happy to share a new selection of poems by Sylvie Kandé, an award-winning French poet and scholar, translated by the accomplished poet and translator Alexander Dickow, winner of the 2018 PEN/Heim Translation Grant. We loved the richness of language and imagery in these unforgettable poems, and we hope they’ll become your new favorites.

Speaking of favorites, our favorite thing to do in September is celebrate translations. There are thousands of ways to celebrate #NTM2019. We’ve developed this list of [30 ways to celebrate NTM](#) to get you started, but we’re open to suggestions and encourage you to find your own way to celebrate. You don’t need our permission to celebrate, just as you don’t need anyone’s permission to celebrate Black History Month, or National Ice Cream Month in July.

**We’d love to hear from you!** If you think of a way to celebrate National Translation Month in 2018, email us at [info@nationaltranslationmonth.org](mailto:info@nationaltranslationmonth.org). We’re always open to any collaboration ideas. Find us on Twitter [@TranslateMonth](https://twitter.com/TranslateMonth), tag us using #NTM2019 and #TranslateMonth2019, join our mailing list, submit a translation month event, or like our [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com) page. And, most importantly, celebrate your favorite authors in translation this September and all year round.

—Claudia Serea and Loren Kleinman
From *The Neverending Quest for the Other Shore*
By Sylvie Kandé
Translated by Alexander Dickow

Excerpt from *La Quête infinie de l’autre rive* by Sylvie Kandé © Editions Gallimard, Paris, 2011
Published by permission

[A counselor of Abubakar II, emperor of Mali, also called Mansa or Manden here, recounts the preparations for the king’s great voyage westward to the ends of the oceans. The ships are gathered on the shore, where recruits and gawkers gather:]

All begged to be chosen by you for this mighty strange adventure: one made use of spells another his influence and the rich hired more numerous griots to recite in the public arena their signal virtues The merchants were already piling up bales upon bundles and the warriors were polishing their weapons There could be no deserting the king for your parents invalid uncircumcised would go and answer for you and the nagging rumor of your defection would dog your every step A few of those called off imitated Tiramakhan when that intrepid hero offered in vain in Šunjata’s stead for honor in his name to fight the Wolof king his neighbor – who had neglected to deliver the thirty-three stallions due: they dug a swift ditch and all enshrouded they laid themselves down The women of course demanded inclusion arguing that in courage and appearance they had always been well worthy of Manden Those who were sent back to the hearth railed against the glowing sea threatening to throw into its heart their loveliest jewels Shameless rival taking our men put these on disturbing our conjugal turns and leaving us without hope for children Thus to put it simply in a word: over us your ascendancy Mansa was total

Sire recall the sandy esplanade which had to be bargained for at the river mouth to build and caulk our almadies amass our provisions lodge our squads Recall the crowd that gathered on the shore: first came blacksmiths fishermen woodworkers who all season long would work themselves sore
Then upstream there were trees taken down
to float their enormous trunks down
-- but only those whose brown veins ripple
those whose purple sap tastes like seaweed and salt
and whose leaves like a sail embrace the wind
(For what is a tree pray tell whose green desire
for open seas does not storm the sky...)
Received upon arrival by the ax-masters
their hearts were hollowed out to beating drums
And the rough shape of each hull
was clamped in a vise and put to the flame
-- the prows for their part were finished with an adze
Meanwhile ropemakers potters and weavers
toting their several talents had arrived
And coarse bark was stripped from baobabs
to make ropes and moorings of them
The seeds were taken from the shea trees
and from the kapoks their fine silk-cotton
to seal the slightest breach between the planks
Since some pitch was also needed
saps and oils were blended in jugs
Pigments of all kinds were ground
to paint above the quickwork prettily
and to trace withal signs and oaths
Cages and creels and fyke nets were made
anchors spare oars shifting boards
coffers duckboards plumes
and the gods only know what else
With all your help then let the scene be set
with a few formulas a refrain an epithet
till I’m back on my feet and catch my breath
Boss why
why ruin this fine soliloquy
by adding untimely stuffing...
This clutter this baroque ruckus
undivided now belong to you

So be it. Saga and festival garb were woven
and fine mats of palm or raffia
that were attached tight to the masts
For intendants for sutlers and for ovates
for healers and for witch-hunters
it was time to establish quarters upon the beach
Some were drying fish without stopping
quatering game and pounded the cured meat
others were preparing ointments and runes
philters formulae and medicines
Peanuts and yams were stored away
sundry panniers were filled with dates and tamarind
Chili paste galore was made
In the coolness of the storehouses there was water
palm-wine and millet beer to no end
Meanwhile galley stoves were put together
at the bow of the pirogues in order to prepare
along the way some warm meals

The twelve gates of Mali sent in abundance
and without wavering tributes and emissaries
to the point that the flower of every clan
was soon gathered at the shore
Under the conduct of their princes were found there
argoulets and marabouts artisans sages
not to mention the spiritual leaders and their
formidable bolis
Even a conclave of lepers had withdrawn
behind a clump of trees from which they set out at
night
to urge one or another of your lieutenants
to save them if nothing else at least a felucca
Rejected each time they returned to their camp
chanting an irritating refrain
Don’t castigate those afflicted by the great malady:
an envious man an ungrateful woman inflicted it upon us
Don’t castigate us: jealousy is everywhere
and your turn is not far enough away

And to pass the time regattas were organized
farces recitations and chorales
entertaining tam-tams and wrestling matches
All things were bought and sold while conversing gaily
and whorls of incense rose in the guard huts

Gawkers then by the zillion
and clumps of children rejoicing
were there for the simple delight
of wishing you welcome
and to catch a glimpse of the eagle eye
of your august countenance made up with antimony
of its aquiline nose and the high cheekbones
Greetings in exhaustion epiphanic vulture
dreaded bird of prey none can call in
Well met and long life to you
lord of the rain-tipped wings:
you land everywhere that suits you
but only luck sits upon your head
To speak clearly and in short
your ascendancy over us
Mansa was total
About the author

Sylvie Kandé is an award-winning poet and a scholar. Gestuaire (poèmes), published in 2016 by Gallimard in the Collection Blanche was short-listed for the Prix Kowalski des Lycéens, and received the Prix Louise Labé in 2017. La Quête infinie de l'autre rive. Épopée en trois chants (Gallimard, Continents Noirs, 2011), short-listed for the Prix Mahogany and the Prix des Découvreurs, received the Prix Lucienne Gracia-Vincent 2017 under the auspices of Fondation Saint-John Perse. Poet Alexander Dickow received a 2018 PEN/Heim grant to complete the English translation of this collection. Lagon, lagunes. Tableau de mémoire (Gallimard, Continents noirs, 2000) is a collection of poetic prose with a postface signed by Édouard Glissant. Having launched the program of Francophone studies at NYU, she now teaches as an Africanist in the SUNY system.

About the translator

Alexander Dickow is a bilingual poet, scholar, and translator. His poetic works in French and English include Caramboles (Argol Editions, 2008), Rhapsodie curieuse (Louise Bottu, 2017), and Appetites (MadHat Press, 2018). He has translated works by Apollinaire, Henri Droguet, Max Jacob, Christian Prigent and others, and a full-length translation of the work of Swiss poet Gustave Roud is forthcoming in Fall 2019 from Seagull Press (cotranslated with Sean T. Reynolds). Dickow is an associate professor of French at Virginia Tech.