

Jeremy Jacob Peretz

Wild Child / Wail Chail¹

*Mackie! Put down that rake!
You gone bore yourself boy!*

What! My child is one wild child!
Must be a Buck², or one them
Ancient Berbicians³ that does
Go, *Huhmf, huhmpf*, while working
In he yard, grass overgrowin' thyme.

Must be from when I there in
The bush⁴ pregnant with he, for
Seven months in the bush, he
Must a catch one them Buck spirit,
They there 'round we all the time.

*Mackie! Stop dig-up them eddo!
You gettin' dutty all over yourself!*

While we cooking evening eating
And sharing out, Buckman hollering
Chasing one another 'round we camp
That we put salt in the food! They can't
Eat no salt at all—it raise up one spirit in them.

And he must a catch it there in my belly, or
Else he get one them real ancient Berbician
Spirit. You understand? Them real big people
That does take out they stresses on the land,
Walk up next a old bush and say *Huhmpf!*

*Mackie! Stop play with the cow mould!
Left it right there in a pile for planting!*

Look at he! Think he gardening shoveling
Shit! And he skin black black like he one
Them Djuka there got baked dark dark in
The sun deep in Suriname bush, it's where
They belong, they make for it, like them Buck.

*Maakii! Put dong dat reek!
Yu a boor yuself bai!*

Wa! Mi chail iz wan wail chail!
Mos bii wan Bok, ar wan dem
Eenshen Borbiishan dat doz
Go, *Homf, Hompf*, wen ii a wuk
In ii yaad, gras oovagrooin taim.

Mus bii from wen Ai de in di
Bosh pregnan wit ii, fu
Sevn mont in di bosh, ii
Mos a kech wan dem Bok spirit,
De de rong wii aal di taim.

*Maakii! Staap dig op dem edoo!
Yu getin dotii aal oova yuself!*

Wail wii kukin iivnin iitin an
Sheerin out, Bokman halarin
Cheesin wan anada rong wii kyamp
Dat wii put saal in di fuud! De kyaahn
Iit no saal a taal—ii reez op wan spirit in de.

An ii mus a kech it de in mi belii, ar
Elz ii git wan dem reel eehnsen Borbiishan
Spirit. Ya andastaan? Dem reel big piipl dat
Doz tek out de stresiz on di lan, waak
Op neks som ol bosh an se *Humpf!*

*Maakii! Staap plee wit di kou mool!
Lef it rait de in di pail fu plantin!*

Luk a ii! Tink ii gyardnin shovlin
Shit! An ii skin blak blak laik ii
Wan dem juka deh ge beks dak dak
In di son diip in Surinam bush, iz we
De biilaang, de mek fu it, laik dem Bok.

Oh! what I gone do with this boy? With he
Hard ears he can't learn from licks at all!
Just get wild and want to do he own self,
Running all over my house and my yard—
I really should a get this boy Christened!

Ooh! Wa Ai gon duu wid dis bai? Wit
Ii haad eez ii kyaahn laan fram liks a taal!
Jos get wail an waahn duu ii oon self,
Ronin aal oova mi hous an mi yaad—
Ai reelii shud a git dis bai Krisn!

*Mackie! Put down that rake!
You're going to bore yourself boy!*

What! My child is a wild child!
Must be a Buck, or one of those
Ancient Berbicians that goes,
Huhmf, huhmpf, while working
In his yard, grass overgrowing thyme.

Must be from when I was there in
The bush pregnant with him, for
Seven months in the bush, he
Must have caught one of those Buck spirits,
They're there around us all the time.

*Mackie! Stop digging-up those eddoes!
You're getting dirt all over yourself!*

While we were cooking in the evening,
Eating and sharing, Buckmen were hollering
Chasing one another around our camp saying
That we put salt in the food! They can't
Eat any salt at all—it raises up a spirit in them.

And he must have caught it there in my belly, or
Else he got one of those real ancient Berbician
Spirits. You understand? Those real old people
That take out their stresses on the land, walking
Up next to an old bush and saying *Huhmpf*!

*Mackie! Stop playing with the cow mould!
Leave it right there in a pile for planting!*

Look at him! Thinks he's gardening shoveling
Shit! And his skin is so black like he's one
Of those Djuka⁵ over there that got baked really
Dark in the sun deep in Suriname's bush, it's where
They belong, they're made for it, like those Bucks.

Oh! what am I going to do with this boy? With his
Hard ears he can't learn from licks at all!
He just gets wild and wants to do his own self,
Running all over my house and my yard—
I really should have gotten this boy Christened!

Notes

1. The “Wild Child” poems are three translations of an account of a mother describing her son to me, while simultaneously reprimanding him, as we spoke in her yard in Georgetown, Guyana in winter 2017. Translation #1 is nearest the initial composition made in my field notebook after the interaction; #2 is a rendering in Guyanese Kriiyliz (Creolese) orthography; and #3 is translated to a standard form of United States English.

2. *Buck (Bok)* is a commonly heard, yet disparaging word, used to refer to indigenous Amerindian (Native American) people/s in Guyana, said to derive from the Dutch language term *bokken*, meaning “wild and/or nimble animal.”

3. A *Berbician (Borbiishan)* is a person from Berbice, former Dutch, then British, colony in South America, which today comprises the eastern portion of the independent nation of Guyana.

4. *Bush (bosh)* refers to areas of Guyana's “interior,” where a majority of the country's indigenous Amerindian people live today. Many Guyanese people who reside near the coast in and around the capital, Georgetown, find temporary work in “the interior” in extractive resource sectors like gold and diamond mining and logging, often within or nearby indigenous peoples' communities. *Bush* also refers to plants generally, and medicines deriving from plants, more specifically.

5. *Djuka (Juka or Ndyuka)* is a pejorative term used by scholars and lay people alike to refer to Okanisi (also called Aukaner in Dutch) Maroon people of Suriname, former Dutch colony, now independent nation, east of Guyana. Okanisi people comprise one of six Maroon cultural groups in Suriname and French Guiana (an overseas territory of France) whose ancestors, brought enslaved from various parts of Africa to work on South American colonial plantations, escaped enslavement to establish their own communities of resistance at a remove from coastal agro-colonies. I was told by one historically informed Okanisi person that the word *Djuka* derives from “Jew-shit,” an account which gains corroboration from the fact that Dutch Jewish colonials owned many of Suriname's estates, as well as the enslaved African people who operated these estates, including Plantation Auka, from where contemporary Okanisi Maroons remember

their ancestors once fled. Similarly, Saamaka Maroon oral histories, and supporting documentary accounts, trace the names of several of their clans back to those of their ancestors' former owners. For example, founders of the Matjaus' clan of Saamaka Maroons fled from a plantation owned by Jewish planter Imanuel Machado; Saamaka's Nasi clan comprises descendants of those who originally escaped from the Nassy family's plantation; and the Kasitu clan members' ancestors were once enslaved on the estate of Jewish planter Joseph Castilho, before rebelling and establishing their own autonomous societies in Suriname's Amazonian rainforests.