

M. Nourbese Philip / from *ZONG!*

Zong! # 6

question therefore

the age

eighteen weeks

and calm

but it is said...

-from the maps

and

contradicted

by the evidence...

question

therefore

the age

6. Zuka, Tuwalole, Urbi, Femi, Chiwa.

Zong! # 25

was the cause was the remedy was the record was the argument was the delay was the evidence was overboard was the not was the cause was the was was the need was the case was the perils was the want was the particular circumstance was the seas was the costs was the could was the would was the policy was the loss was the vessel was the rains was the order was the that was the this was the necessity was the mistake was the captain was the crew was the result was justified was the voyage was the water was the maps was the weeks was the winds was the calms was the captain was the seas was the rains was uncommon was the declaration was the apprehension was the voyage was destroyed was thrown was the question was the therefore was the this was the that was the negroes was the cause

Zong! # 26

justify the could

the captain &

the crew

the authorize

in captain

crew &

could

could authorize justify

captain

&

crew

the

could

or justify authorize

could

captain & crew

authorize

the crew

the captain &

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Note on the text

In 1781 a fully provisioned slave ship, *Zong*, set sail from the west coast of Africa for Jamaica with a cargo of 470 African slaves. Navigational errors on the captain's part resulted in severe delay, with some of the ship's "cargo" being lost and some 150 Africans subsequently thrown alive overboard as a strategy to avoid legal liability in an insurance claim suit in which, against all rationality, humans were transubstantiated to commodity. The decision of the appeal court ordering a new trial is the document which becomes the foundation text of Philip's serial poem, a word store against which she employs a variety of techniques including whiting or blacking out words, mutilating the text, random selection of words as well as pulling words from within other words. At least on their surface, the *Zong!* poems approximate what is more familiarly known as language poetry, although the point of departure differs, as Philip's proceduralism replicates the censorial and magical activity of the law which decides what facts should or shouldn't become evidence, what is allowed into the record and what is excluded.