



PROJECT MUSE®

Music Is Made out of Smoke

Tanya Shirley

Small Axe, Number 9 (Volume 5, Number 1), March 2001, pp. 159-160
(Article)

Published by Duke University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/smx.2001.0010>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/31825>

Music Is Made out of Smoke

(for Lee “Scratch” Perry)

Tanya Shirley

In this cold country
thoughts float freely back
to backs bent under the sun.
The work is never good enough
for a master who seeks blood:
it is said to sweeten the soil.
Am I the slaughtered lamb who poured
kerosene over her body and lit the match
or the burning spear
that began a mystic revolution?
You stand there between my fingers,
sweet reminder of mortality
and in the slanted light between blinds
you diminish into smooth lines
that float like shadows
up to the sky god who reads smoke as sacrifice.

**SMALL
AXE**

Someone must have had a cigarette in hand,
pulled in
the breath that went searching down corridors of memory
till the whole body
started to heave and convulse.
Blew out

the wail of the ranting reggae man,
suffocating Babylon
on a night like this
when the moon is a black arc too black
for the scattered syncopations
of a back room melody.
This blue smoke rising in rhythmic curls
crisp and corrugated,
carrying the sound of prophets calling,
the smell of canefields burning,
is the revolt of memory.