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THE FIRST DAY*

by Édouard Glissant

The teller measures his word in immeasurable radiance. He goes, through solitude itself, to sing the earth, and those who suffer it. He offers the word not to those whom it delights, who are elated by it: but to the bodies burned by time: thickets, people compelled, bare villages, the many on the shore.

When this wise sailor, this speaker of measure, is ended by his song, it gives him a fresh beginning. He comes, just a child, in the early morning. He sees the original foam, the first sweat of salt. History, waiting.

—translated by Mary Ann Caws

* "The First Day" was originally published in French in *Sel noir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983). The poems "X," "XI," and "XII" that follow are the last three poems in the section entitled "The First Day." The English translation is published with permission from Gallimard.