**Black Ore (1956), René Depestre**

**Translated by Norman R. Shapiro**

When all of a sudden the stream of Indian sweat was

dried up by the sun

When the gold-fever drained out the final drop of Indian

blood in the marketplace

And every last Indian vanished from around the mines

It was time to look to Africa's river of muscle

For a changing of the guard of misery

And so began the rush to that rich and limitless

Storehouse of black flesh

And so began the breathless dash

To the noonday splendor of the black-skinned body

Then all the earth rang out with the clatter of the picks

Digging deep in the thick black ore

How many a chemist all but turned his mind

To making some new precious allow formed

With this black mineral how many a lady almost

Set her heart on finding pots and pans

Of black Sengalese or a fine tea-service

Of stocky Caribbean pickaninny

Who knows what parish padre somewhere

Almost gave his solemn word

To get a churchbell cast in the sonority of black blood

Or what nice Santa Claus almost dreamed

Of little black tin soldiers

For his yearly rounds

Or what valiant man at arms

Would have gladly hewn his blade from his ebony metal

The earth rang out with the shake and shatter of the drills

Deep in the entrails of my people

Deep in the black man's muscled mineral bed

From centuries now they have dug from the depths

The wonders of this race

O mines of ore that are my people

Limitless vein of human dew

How many pirates have plunged their weapon deep

To probe the recess of your flesh

How many plunderers have hacked themselves a path

Through the lushed illumined vegetation of your body

Strewing over your passing days dead stalks

And pools of tears

O pillaged people dug up from top to bottom

Like land beneath the plough

People harrowed to enrich

The great markets of the world

Store up your firedamp deep in your body's secret dark of night

Then none will dare to cast more cannons and more golden coins

From that black metal of your fury's rising flood.