

*John Agard was born in British Guyana (West Indies) in 1949. He moved to England in 1977.*

### **Remember the Ship**

As citizen  
of the English tongue

I say remember  
the ship  
5 in citizenship

for language  
is the baggage  
we bring -

a weight  
10 of words to ground  
and give us wing –

as millennial waters  
beckon wide

and love's anchor  
15 waiting to be cast  
will the ghost of race  
become the albatross  
we shoot at our cost?

I'm here to navigate –  
20 not flagellate  
with a whip of the past

but again I say remember  
the ship  
in citizenship  
25 for is not each member  
of the human race –  
a ship on two legs

charting life's tidal  
rise and fall

30 as the ship  
of the sun  
unloads its light  
and the ship  
of night

35 its cargo of stars  
again I say remember  
the ship  
in citizenship

and diversity

40 shall sound its trumpet  
outside the bigot's wall

and citizenship shall be  
a call  
to kinship

45 that knows  
no boundary  
of skin

and the heart  
offer its wide harbours

50 for Europe's new voyage

to begin

**Annotations:**

<sup>12</sup> **millennial** – the poem was written in 1998 and published two years later

<sup>17</sup> **albatross** – here allusion to S. Coleridge's poem Rime of the Ancient Mariner (1798): a mariner shoots the albatross that has shown his ship the way out of dangerous waters; the other sailors on board think this leads to a curse that will kill all of them

<sup>40f.</sup> **sound its trumpet outside the bigot's wall** – here allusion to the biblical story where the Hebrews destroy the walls of the city of Jericho only with the sound of trumpets

<sup>49</sup> **offer** – here shall offer

**Source:**

John Agard, "Remember the Ship", in: Writing black Britain 1948 – 1998.  
Hrsg. James Procter. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000, S. 258. f.