If/Shall

if either
if either of the parties
if any goods
if the commander of a ship of war
if either of the parties
if either
if any gun
if any moor
if any vessel
if any vessel of the united states
if any american vessel
if any vessel of either of the parties
if we
if any ship of war
if a ship of war

if there shall
merchants shall
all goods shall
no examination shall
unless it shall
goods on board shall
no other person whatever shall
no vessel shall
who shall

if any american citizen shall
no will shall
the consul shall
and if there shall
the effects shall
the party shall
the property shall

if a will shall

the consuls of the united states of america shall
they shall
they shall

if any citizens of the united states shall
the consul shall
unless he shall
any redress shall

if any difference shall

peace and harmony shall
a friendly application shall
that application shall
no appeal shall
no appeal shall

and if a war shall
nine months shall
otherwise shall
the citizens of the united states shall
the treaty shall
it shall

M. NOURBESE PHILIP
if/once we were

any moor any of us with our heads in our laps & seemingly deliciously over
& seemingly deliciously over
dry mounds in piles & piles of skin
& sometimes grey flakes
in a heap in piles & piles mounds even on the carpeted floor beneath his right leg

once & only once
once & once again
once & once again
with
his carvenous voice over
once again again
ever

h
& ev eryone once ev eryone ever

we were are we are we are people

J. OTOK BITEK
Note from M. Nourbese Philip

In 2015 I collaborated with the scholar Omar Berrada at the annual Tamaas workshop in Paris, France. We were exploring issues of racism in Morocco, particularly in the wake of sub-Saharan Africans attempting to cross to Europe from Morocco. As part of our exploration Omar brought to my attention The Treaty of Peace and Friendship With Morocco, signed in 1787, between the United States of America and Morocco. If/Shall is based on this Treaty. I presented the first draft of this poem at our presentation at the end of the workshop. The treaty has been in existence for 232 years and remains the “longest unbroken treaty relationship in United States history.”