

Ol' Higue

Matthew Williams • English Literature • March 18, 2026

Ol' Higue

You think I like all this stupidity
gallivanting all night without skin
burning myself out like cane-fire
To frighten the foolish?

Analysis: The simile "like cane-fire" emphasizes intensity and rapid consumption, suggesting that her existence is exhausting and destructive. The rhetorical question conveys frustration and establishes a defensive tone.

And for what? A few drops of baby blood?

Analysis: The rhetorical question minimizes the reward, highlighting how irrational and burdensome her actions are, reinforcing her resentment.

You think I wouldn't rather
take my blood seasoned in fat
black-pudding, like everyone else?

Analysis: This reflects her desire to be normal. The contrast between raw blood and cooked food emphasizes her alienation from human society.

And don't even talk 'bout the pain of salt
And having to bend these old bones down
To count a thousand grains of rice!

Analysis: References to salt and rice act as folkloric constraints, showing how she is constantly obstructed. The exaggeration emphasizes her physical suffering and frustration.

If only babies didn't smell so nice!
And if I could only stop
Hearing the soft, soft call
Of that pure blood running in new veins,

Analysis: The repetition functions as repetition "soft, soft", emphasizing the irresistible lure of the babies. The metaphor "pure blood running in new veins" represents vitality and youth, which she is drawn to.

Singing the sweet song of life
Tempting an old, dry-up woman who been
Holding her final note for years,

Afraid of the dying hum...

Analysis: The metaphor "sweet song of life" presents life as something musical and alluring. The metaphor "holding her final note" suggests she is prolonging her existence unnaturally, resisting death.

Then again, if I didn't fly and come

to that fresh pulse in the middle of the night,

Analysis: The metaphor "fresh pulse" represents living vitality, reinforcing the contrast between youth and decay.

how would you, mother,

name your ancient dread,

Analysis: The rhetorical question shifts focus, suggesting her role extends beyond personal compulsion to societal function.

And who to blame

for the murder inside your head...?

Analysis: The metaphor "murder inside your head" implies suppressed violent thoughts or guilt within mothers, suggesting the Ol' Higue serves as a scapegoat.

Believe me –

As long as it have women giving birth

A poor ol' higue like me can never dead.

Analysis: The statement reflects inevitability. Her existence is sustained by human fear and guilt, making her effectively immortal.

About the poem

Author: Mark McWatt (1938–)

Context: Caribbean folklore; explores the Ol' Higue (soucouyant) as both myth and psychological construct

Core idea: The Ol' Higue is not just a supernatural figure but a symbol of human fear, guilt, and suppressed impulses, existing because society needs something to blame.

- **Main themes**
- Supernatural belief and folklore
- Temptation and compulsion
- Fear and guilt
- Mortality and survival
- Blame and scapegoating
- Human nature and hidden impulses

- **Mood:** Irritable and tense, with underlying bitterness
- **Tone:** Defensive, argumentative, and ultimately resigned

 **Remember**

- Ol' Higue is both **real and symbolic**
- She represents **compulsion**, not pure evil
- Mothers' fear creates her as much as folklore does
- "Murder inside your head" is key. It shifts blame from her to humans
- Final line shows she is sustained by human fear, not just myth

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