

“NO SWEETNESS HERE” AND OTHER POEMS

Mdika Nick Tembo

Catholic University of Malawi

No sweetness here

(For siblings in self-exile)

Anger prowls in the charged atmosphere
Settles on the dreamy brow,
Hopes and cherished tomorrows
Crumble and dissolve into restless sighs.

The young no longer nurse democracy
And the old ones who have seen this before
Have retreated into their shells:
Foul air colonizes their nostrils.

There is no sweetness here
Nightmares take shape
In painful yodels
Of ruling for life;
Fears of yesteryears return
Recollect themselves in these hollow breasts.

No sweetness here
Corruption, hunger, and poverty
Have become the day's menus;
While rich blasts
Continue to baptize helpless masses.

No sweetness with these hordes of earthworms
Exploiting, manipulating;
Emerge, outgrown mouth, for another skinning
Of the excised.

There is no virtue in creating ghost suspects

“It is no glory to kill and kill again” *Antigone*

Salaaming voices hover from cleft to cleft
Blocking the view of the petrified victor
They hurl rubble in confounded anger
Against the master’s protégé
Now crouched in death dispensers.

At home all is not well
Twin towers twitter and teeter
Before shards congregate into death traps;
Below, prisoners scream in pain
Through the doubled rubble of marble.

Prostrate as if on a catafalque,
A man swears by his old ancestors gone
He will hunt the rabid hyenas
In the closet behind the hills
At the entrance to the prayer hall.

In the anger of the moment he maims and kills
Behind the UN resolution to wipe out terror
At the tryst between the old and the new;
Ignoring the nervous barks from fellow sentry men,
He turns his unspent force on the neighbourhood.

The scourers promenade sedatively and leisurely
With suspect tweezers in an invaded land
Extracting confessions from renegade Catholics;
No, Creon, there's no virtue
In creating ghost suspects.

Ruminations

after David Kerr

Behind every successful home
is supposed to be a mother.

But we have been caught up in
a storm-pool of rape/injunction,
slashing/castrating, violence, greed/lust,
we know neither love nor pity
fear nor respect, age/status,
but one mordant catchword,

Or must we invoke a moratorium
on chanting the banal of PowerClassGender?

A leavetaking

For Ndugu D.A.M.

Your heart palpitates
when you see victory cavalcades
rumble into the euphoric morning,
thunder roars like a million lions
and swallows the chirping birds
present to witness your final flight
And you develop halitosis
as you plead for forgiveness
if your kinsmen winced in pain
when you sank your snow-white teeth
into their maggot-infested wounds

Embittered faces choke
in the anger of the moment
how you could say such, when
you mercilessly tossed their sweat
and dishonoured their smarting wounds.
Like a worm held before a blazing faggot,

you fidget in your stale chair

as you remember what befell your comrade

when he fell from raven's grace.

Homeward bound, you break into evensong:

"If it is possible Lord, let this measure pass from me!"

For two decades

your kinsmen also chanted that litany

when they saw your paws

suspended above their frigid carcasses.

But it came to pass, child.

Roll on!