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39 POEMS FROM MALAWI

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This anthology is published by the Writers Group in the University of Malawi (Address: Box 5200 Limbe, Malawi)

It may help readers to know that Scopas Gorinwa is a Southern Sudanese living in Malawi, and also that the poems Soft Landing, The First Fire, The Merciful Maker and Man the Inventor are based on traditional Malawi myth (For further information see Fr. J. M. Schoffeleers—*Symbolic and social aspects of spirit worship among the Mang'anja*)

Thanks are due to the University of Malawi for helping with the cost of publication.

Josephine Kaphwiyo

THE SILENT MOON

Majestically,
Slowly, slowly,
In the dim of night
Stealing quietly
On the soft milkyway.
Over giant trees
Over a sleepy-moving world
Silently
She rises
In charm and style
Waited on by stars
She makes her way up
Behind wild mountains
And over wild oceans
On whose sands
Gypsies wander
Dancing... to the waves' melody
Till break of day.
She watches
Even you and me
Hiding here, from scolding eyes,
Embracing.
She is witness
To these vows
You and I make.

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A WITCH'S SONG

Are you still ignorant
That in the deadliest of night
I have shrieked with the owl
When you have in fear
Remained, pasting
Your sweat-sticky bodies to your stinky mats?
I have run on the hyenas saddle
Giggled with him—
Companions in crime—
Sucked your stray goat's blood
With razor-sharp claws,
Scratched doors of the innocent,
Slapped your pale faces
When you have dared me,
Urinated in your wells,
Carried your sucklings away
For spookies,
Flown by the black broom
On a magic flight
To places you and your kin
Have no knowledge of,
Danced the dance of darkness
In the glow of hell fire
To the shrill drums of skeletons.
I have hooted and hooted again
With the sly owl
Laughed and laughed
With the timid hyena
Till dawn.

Today
Who will be ignorant?

NANNY-GOAT

You foolish nanny goat
Your eyes are pregnant with unshed tear
How many moons and seasons
Rains and winds must pass
I sweating telling you
Don't champ green leaves,
Don't carve
Tatoos on your brittle horns
Which you have now broken.

Silly nanny goat
Didn't I say
Don't go drinking
When the hippo is relaxing
For fear he may
Wash your eyes
Even drown you
In brine water.....
Not to peep through cracked walls
For fear of what you may see.

Now you maa maa
Behind that wall of shame
In deep black horizons
Season your dance
Step ancestors
Learn the laugh of elders
Groan under weight
Of unwanted knowledge
Too early for your dream detect
The rows of the true rainbow

Other nanny goats
Are now sly foxes to you
Though yourself do appear
The swollen toad of misfortune to them
Soon to burst.
They told you once
When you danced amid them
To leave the untouched alone.
I see you will burst
Because you are full of wisdom.

Today
Who will be ignorant?

THE PLOTTING MIND

Bless the Lord
Our hearts are locked away
With piles of conspiracy
Though our lips part
In false, borrowed smiles
Our faces twist and pull
With every sneer
And sour feeling
We are all safe
Because our murder dreams
Will rot... undiscovered
Who wouldn't want
To strangle
The red rooster
Proud
In his stately tread
And share
His colourful feathers
And stop haughty crow
That keep our hearts
Thumping at dawn.

Chris F. Kamlongera

COLD WATER SHOWER

Bullets of water pierce my back
To awake the far away parts of my body;
Collectively they trickle down the groove
On top of my spinal cord.
The chord thus plucked.
A deep sweet inhale of moisture-laden air
Is taken
Followed by the deep gratifying sigh.
Then every part is tickled,
My feet want to leave the ground,
They rattle up and down
To get at the beginning
Of the scarce feeling
Evoked by the bullets of water.

Nellie C. Chirwa

REJECTED

Am I a person?
No one seems to care,
No matter how I act or speak in their presence.

Am I a person?
While strolling through the street
People rush past me without a word.

Am I a person?
If I smile at them
They return my smiles with disdain on their faces,
In carriages they let me sit on the back seat.

Am I a person?
When I come to their doorstep,
They peep through the window,
And then rush to the door,
And slam it in my face.

Am I a person?
I must find shelter for the approach of cold night.
There I will lay my body on the rough ground.

I will cover my face with my hand and shiver,
And wonder what the next day will bring.
Surely, if I meditate upon this
I will fall asleep forever.

Lupenga John Mphande

THUNDERBOLT IN THE VILLAGE

The village
Waiting to greet the rains
With a gourd of *masese* beer,
The village was besieged
By sombre thickets of clouds,
The sky gloomy and ominous;
The rain was imminent and the thunder struck
There was writing on the sky wall.

The village was austere, quiet and attentive.
The village listened to the ranting heavens
And tried to read the writing on the sky wall.

The village innocent old men and women
Surprised at the anger of the universe
Gathered in the village arena,
Consulting together and trying to
Interpret the lightning writing
On the sky wall—
A gourd of *masese* beer in their midst.

Then it came
Loud and distinct
Everybody listened and heard
But nobody understood
The talking of the heavens.

Then it was all over.
The gong was struck and the message delivered,
The woman victim lay in a sprawling mess, lifeless.
The body, charred by the lightning cock
The waist-beads pounded to dust
Like millet grains on a grinding stone.

Wailing women surrounded the hut of the deceased
To pay their last untimely respect,
Indeed, to think such a beauty
Would be heard no more
Was the cry of men and women alike.

But the village council,
The village elders,
But the village elders were still consulting.
May be it's the work of witchcraft, said one.
I'LL FIND OUT, said the chief, solemn and grieved.

THE PERIL OF COLD

At noon
After a gloomy look at books
And a glaring lunch
I sat by my window
Reflectioning the East.

The sky
Patched by the November clouds
Pale skinny and acepholous
Sledged across the blue dome
The campus was all quiet.

The breeze
Whizzled against the window pane
Bombarding eave snout spouting
Drilling the grass patch
And trees shook sway.

Far far away
Behind those misty hills I thought
I heard drum-summons
And behind me a thunder roared
Prophecying storms and peril of cold.

THE FOUR VICTIMS OF EMBANGWENI

From Embangweni journeyed four elders to Emfeni:
In summer heat they travelled all day and the next:
Grey haired with bald patches blazing like whetstones,
Slinging cotton sacks, expeditioning against the '61 famine.

One was blind and couldn't see a thing,
The other with a toothless mouth couldn't chew a thing,
The third, born legless, had to be carried,
And the last was deaf and never heard a thing.

The toothless started it all, clearing his throat said;
Please let's rest a while: we've walked all night
And must be tired now. Where we're going isn't near
So let's make fire and fry the dry maize, I'm starving.

The deaf elder wasn't paying attention to this proposal.
He was preoccupied with the distant voices he heard
But he wasn't sure where it all came from, yet gathering courage,
Warned: *Let's get going, I can hear strange voices.*

The blind elder had been particularly attentive to all this;
He was most baffled by the queer utterances of his friends
But looked up nonetheless, sure he could see distant figures.
With visible fright he shouted: *See, people trotting towards us!*

The legless victim was indeed the most helpless.
He couldn't understand what was happening to his friends,
But he was trembling all over from what they had said,
And with all seriousness exclaimed: *Let's run for our lives!*

Lawrence Soule

KAMPALA KONDOS

I hear
in the rip of machine guns,
and the chop of panga,
and the tear of clothes,
the grunts of the unaware.

For the weak
there is only the panga principle
No songs,
except of universal failure.
They cannot join us
unless it is night,
Cannot dance,
unless poverty flowers into art,
Cannot feel us,
except with panga fingers.

They are our curtain of tears
refracting light
to split the world's image
with fire.

John A. Mapanje

THE NEW PLATFORM DANCES

Haven't I danced the big dance
Compelled the rains so dust could
Soar high above like when animals
In stampede? Haven't I in animal
Skins wriggled with amulets
Rattled with anklets
Scattered nervous women
With snakes around my neck
With spears in these hands
Then enticed them back
With flywhisk's magic?
Haven't I moved with all
Concentric in the arena
To the mystic drums
Dancing the half-nude
Lomwe dance
Haven't I?

Haven't my wives at mortars sung
Me songs of praise, of glory,
How I quaked the earth
How my skin trembled
How my neck peaked
Above all dancers
How my voice throbbed
Like the father-drum
I danced to
Haven't they?

Now, when I see my daughters writhe
Under cheating abstract
Voices of slack drums, ululate
To babble-idea-men-masks
Without amulets or anklets
Why don't I stand up
To show them how we danced
Chopa, how IT was born?
Why do I sit still
Why does my speech choke
Like I have not danced
Before? Haven't I
Danced the bigger dance?
Haven't I?

THE SOFT LANDING

Woman, hold my shoulders
We'll drift and drift until
We reach the promised Nsinja
Forest and river of life.

When our safari is done
We'll tell all animals and
Chiuta of our soft landing
Imploring them to follow suit.

Meanwhile, hold on woman
Let's glide and glide
On our pioneer project.
Hope is our only hope.

THE FIRST FIRE

The fever was on
epidemic of hustle-bustle
the screechings, brayings,
off-springs huddle
under their mothers' bellies,
herds in commotion thud
while corrosive flames devour
Nsinja forest like venom
on a nervous body:
Chiuta's abode
crackling, fizzing, blazing.
"Exodus!" deep lion voices
"Exodus!" jackal cracking echoes
packs vacant gape at man's
invention; morose, mumbling
they trek.
"I told you...oh...my puppy..."
stray puppies fumbling out of
smoke scamper under man's roof.

THE MESSAGE

The red neon light illuminated
Her loose butterfly skirt
The iron rippled hair
Her pink veneered smile.

The moist hand gripped mine
Her forefinger goring my palm
What ...? She...?—nail varnish
On my palm..."a beer, please".

Her back swirling off, me
Gassed by reeking perfumes, sitting:
Tattering curtains, doors to bathrooms,
Couples in corners, unabashed.

She comes back thick lips cigaretted
The chest jutting into the world generously
The lashes greased bluer
"... come from far ...? ... tired ch...?"

I replied a portuguese-stricken-match-laughter
As I tried to whisper her navel name
"Asawilunda your mother at Kadango greets you and..."
Oh! already floating to the next customer!

THE FIRST FIRE

The fever was on
epidemic of jungle-plague
the screeching, praying,
off-springs huddle
under their mothers' bellies
herds in connection find
while corrosive flames devour
Ninja forest like venom
on a nervous body:
China's abode
crackling, fixating, blazing.
"Exodus!" deep lion voices
"Exodus!" jackal crackling echoes
backs vacant gaps at man's
invention; moose, mummaling
they tick.
"I told you... oh my puppy..."
stay puppies tumbling out of
smoke scamper under man's roof.

THE TUSSLE

And so sonic
next time you're
on sand playing animal
play not hyena carried
away by lion rather
the lion;
if forced
carry him away
make the hyena that
killed the lion;
when he grumbles
tell him it's only
a game—animal game
you are men and
he'll lead
the chick-stealing
pig blood-tapping
party anyway;
you've seen the latest
tussle!

BEFORE CHILEMBWE TREE

Didn't you say we should trace
your foot-prints unmindful of
quagmires, thickets and rivers
until we reached your nzolo tree?

Now, here I seat my gourd of beer
on my little fire, throw my millet
flour and my smoked meat while
I await the second coming.

Ngwanji B. Makwiza

A COLD VILLAGE

Sunday, hot afternoon, you take a stroll;
You go up a hill:
Looking down over the valley,
You see as if green cattle lie with their backs towards you;
Along their back are roofs, like grey scars of flea-bitten wounds;
Lawns, bare and brown, dazzle with the blazing sunshine.

The village seems to be abandoned:
There is no wind to shake the tall grass and the leaves of the scattered trees.

You only hear birds chanting their songs,
And the repetitive, regular, hard knocks of one or two women pounding.

Nothing to be seen on bare ground;
Not even goats, pigs or chickens cross the dazzling lawns.
Everything else is quiet and calm, dead with silence.

Come down from the hill:
First hut to meet is shut outside,
The pounding is from the next house under the shade of a big tree
Whose twigs droop down, drowsy with fatigue.
You get a cold greeting and you proceed.
Walking along the path is a friendly looking girl who smiles broadly at you

And you feel satisfied with her hand-shake.

Two, three paces she accompanies you:
Then she awakes, suddenly aquiver,
—I can't go further she says with a shudder.
You ask her why; she cannot tell.
She even stops smiling and turns cold towards you—
She is from the quiet, desert-like landscape.

David Kerr

AMIGO

We drive through the Congo
Pedigal—mysterious, thick-forested,
upside down car hulks
stretch wheel hubs like rotting
turned turtles forgotten.

We clean-breast our marriages
with delicate anecdote bead-work
(headlamps sway through woods)
yet weaving yarns, fashion cloaks
to hide our naked manhood.

YAO VILLAGE

Banana leaf fronds
shimmer over lusty
young flirting goats,

women in pyramids
wrinkle their noses
from wind dust,

each new arrival
kneels and bends
from the waist,

claps respectful hands
and, knees tucked, settles
to shell peas

deftly twist maize
from cobs or suckle
mealie-fat babies,

men on dried hills
duck under cow-
kicked sandstorms.

I ease an alien body
into the slow
choreography.

Innocent Banda

*

LINDEDI SINGING

More than once I have heard
The lindedi singing in the night
In the valley I have heard
The owl warning sleeping folks.

And then
Amidst all quietness
I have heard
O human cry of sorrow,
And without warning
I have tasted
The salt of my twin fountains.

Stand up at daybreak
And see the beauty of the valley.
Go down
And feel the peace
Overflooding the valley.
But beneath that green
Sleep laden figures
I have seen
Clothed in sorrow
While behind the doors
I have heard men curse
Their brothers
As they squeezed
Their lives out.

The clouds shed their water
When they can't hold it,
Like a cup that overflows,
Or eyes that shed tears
When the heart is full of sorrow,
These blades of grass
With drops of dew
Bring to my memory
The tear laden lashes
That I saw
On the night she went away.
In the wind
I hear her still.

*nocturnal song bird

Now as I sit in the sun
The Lindedi sings
And the owl hoots
I see them coming
On their merciless mission
The crouching
Tigers of darkness,
Bloodthirsty
Lions of the night,
I see them
Chasing her soul;
They tore her heart
And sucked her blood.
Was it devilish?
Oh! that these very men
We eat with
May in the night
Fall upon us!
Terror has wedded horror.
In the village
These blades of grass
With drops of dew
Bring to my memory
The tear laden lashes
That I saw
On the night she went away
In the wind
I hear her cry still.

THE MERCIFUL MAKER

The Lindedi
Sings of the sorrow,
Chiuta
Turned his back on evil men.

But in the early morn
When the winds stopped wailing
I have seen
A white cloud
Rising over Msinja;
Chiuta looking at men
From the cloud,
Sailing
On the wind
Shedding tears of sympathy
At men's folly.

MAN THE INVENTOR

A
cloud
rose
from the East
the North
and West
smoke rose—
for Chiuta
fled
to the sky.
It was a flame
that caused
the smoke
and set
the world
a-spinning
on the path
to destruction.
Intellect's a load
too heavy on man
flames destroy
man's home
flames await
Man, concealed in innocent looking metals.
It was a moth I laughed at
last night; that
from the dark
discovers
a light
and in jubilation burns itself.

Stocker O. Hara

STOP BACK-BITING ME

i have ears all right
you cannot backbite me.
i know why you are jealous
but know that you have also
at one time or another
committed fornication.
when you stopped going
to the moon for nine months
you know who blocked your way;
you cannot accuse me
about my child.
you say you cannot be sure
of the first born child,
well, i am sure.
it was my first sin
and He is the father.
the child is ours...
he is such a lovely boy!

we love him and
he is the rainbow of our love.
yes, he was born outside marriage
but that is a mere social blind—
i know the process is the same,
i did not lie on top of my husband.
you women
i know why you are jealous
my husband did not come to you;
yes, you were together
through primary education to university
i have not been to university...
so you are just frustrated.
well, you do not appeal to him
and there is no return.
but please do not backbite me
because of my child
it upsets my conscience.

we wanted kennedy to have
 a better education than his father,
 and go to united nations
 as the most educated
 man of the people.
 but he ran through the window
 when he was in class four.
 now he is away to the city
 we hear of him at one time
 a second-hand-ware vendor
 at another a bartender.
 this is not our fault
 it is the fault of you women,
 why raise the dust
 that he is a bastard?
 we love him dearest
 and he lived in plenty
 but you drove him away.
 you come to my husband
 and tell him that i am backward,
 in what way?
 we have been married ten years
 and you persist on;
 you have not been to our bedroom.
 It is you who frequent our house
 when we arrange cocktail parties.
 yes, do not say he married me
 because of the accident.
 the child took us six months
 to make and is that an accident?
 he loves me
 we love the child
 if that is the case,
 do not come to our house
 you want to steal my husband;
 and stop backbiting me
 i have ears all right.

LOVE LETTERS

In the old days it was easy
 For us to take pen and paper
 To put on emotions and flow our feelings
 Like a charged brooklet
 Sweeping vigorously over dells
 To groove to a period
 At the red sign of the shower.

In the old days it was easy
 But today how do we begin?
 Do I say *Dearest Sweet Flora?*
 Do you write *Wapa Mutima Wane?*¹
 No, I say *Mace Tina*,²
 And dive down the pond
 Straight to the fish.

In the old days it was easy
 To ride the clouds
 Building heavenly castles in France.
 We did in our love letters
 Idealise the world of our own;
 But Flora, have we arrived
 In our dream-land of old?

For today here we do lie
 You and me, like mother and child,
 Locked in each others arms.
 Quietly for three years—
 Night sleeps with us peacefully
 As we listen to the throbbing tom-toms,
 The minstrels of many voices
 Counting our days.

1=My Sweetheart

2=Tina's Mother.

SICK BAY

Two beautiful lizards
Playing merrily on the ceiling,
Chasing each other they run—
Ignorant of sorrow
As I lay on bed to a splitting headache;
Suddenly one falls to the floor.

Surprised he quickly runs
Scrambling on the wall—
He finds a cleft, a sanctuary,
Between the door and the frame
When the wind swings the door
And guillotines him "pad-lock!"

I cry "O God!"
His tail writhes up and down with
My splitting head aching to its sad tune—
Opening my mind's eye
To the knowledge of the sad world,
Their beautiful world.

1—My sweetheart
2—Tina's Mother.

G. R. E. K. Chimwaza

I CANNOT REMAIN DETACHED

There is an abundant growth of grass
And there are trees
Bursting and turbulent with new life;
The soil is wet.
There is a maize crop in the fields,
The green mamba is sliding slothfully,
The sky is clear,
And the sun is caressing me lovingly
And evaporating the water in the soil.
Mother, let me for one moment forget myself,
Don't let thoughts of my beard overwhelm you
Nor thoughts of my ripening thoughts,
Nor thoughts of my being a culture-hybrid among you.
Let me call Naomi from her husband's house
That we may run to that green grass
To play hide and seek.
Let me call out uncle from his house
That we may go into the tall grass
To look for nests
And hear the chirruping of the birds;
Let me throw a stone at them.
Mother, these thoughts run in my mind.
The child is still in me,
And when I look at the grass, the trees, the wet soil,
I cannot remain detached.

Patrick Clarke

BAR GIRL

I sat on a stool in the smoky room
here where we had corrupted
and cheapened them.
We had tried to take away their dignity
but we had failed as we so often fail.
Margaret, Annette and Mary
stood, their dark eyes watching
the entrance,
while Suzy sat with a fat American
caressing her round brown knees.
"Darring you buy me whitecap
give me themuni for music"
Silence.
Then Nancy Sinatra singing Boots.
"These boots are made for walking"
"Darling you take me to Suzannah"
Talking and talking the noise increases,
girls grow restless as time passes.
Hip waggling, pastel make up shining—
bandana ready for the night.
And Congo music sets them dancing.
Men sit, some in silence, others
like peacocks throw their money
on the bar counter, arms round
willing waists.
Beyond, the wind rustles
dustbins in the street.
And the town laughs
at the end of another day.

Aubrey Dolozi

BEAUTY OF SIN

Always in the mist,
floats this sin of stealing
even a button; it doesn't matter.
Or from beggars, so what?
People have stolen lives
and built castles with them.
But now this spider:
keeps coming again and again.
building this screen, clogging my brain.
shifting my ear to the feet,
planting the legs on top my head;
my thumb to the nose
and my one eye to the buttocks;
my ear to the mouth
and my thought to hello, my Lord!
I'm left an octopus of fusion.
I wonder if the cleaners will come today.

Scopas Gorinwa.

HIJRA

Days of exodus
are hard to remember
but waiting is harder
to endure.

Like succulent fruits
we exploded,
scattered
east to west, north to south.

Now transplanted
on alien territories
we feed like orphans
on charity foods.

When shall we reconstruct
the fallen granaries
and lie in their shade
to uncover the past?

When shall we remould
tombs of our martyrs
and sing the anthem
of nation building?

When shall we smile
at the young siblings
and whisper to their ears
the age long history?

When shall we tell the story
of explorations we have made
on ridges of life
where visions are painful?

Days of exodus
are hard to remember
but waiting is harder
to endure.

THE REPUBLIC ORDER NO. 4.

"In the name of Unity
We set you free
From the bondage of freedom;"

.....Amen

"In the name of Progress
May the mortars
Demolish your homes;"

.....Amen

"In the name of Peace
Let your skulls
Be heaped to ashes;"

.....Amen

"In the name of Socialism
May your worshippers
Equal the dust."

.....Salaam.

NOSTALGIA

Day in day out
in profound thought
about widows,
parents yearning
for their children
in the iron care of
the Revolutionary Council.

These pot-bellied
smiling children
here, remind me
of our own; tears
blind my eyes
their breadwinner
in exile.

MY SONGS OF EXILE

*Sleep no more the sleep of fools
Who know not what comes.
The clamour, the wailing, the beating,
All come from the East.*

The night freezes with howling;
And the wind blows blood.
The rampaging soldiers call at the doors
And the thundering guns point at your heads.
All is set for the enemy revenge.
But are not these soldiers black?

*Oh! Oh! brothers-in-law,
This is your depressed sister-in-law;
Open the door you twin brothers
And listen to these dreadful songs.*

Up at Katoro you see the red sky;
The blazing houses of your kindreds
Set alight by the enemy guns.
Thousands and thousands have fallen dead;
And a dozen thousand are wounded.
But is this the meaning of brotherhood?

*Follow me to the world of melancholy.
To Africa we shall meander
Like hunted gazelles
To find no peace in our graves.*

The dream of my beloved Juba Town;
Its ashes that stood like anthills;
The destruction of my people;
And the eviction from my country
To an alien society;
Are my songs of exile.

LOVERS LAMENT

Four black dancers
Shaking their youthful breasts
Singing ancient melodies
Under the shade of a soothing tree
Dance mournfully holding one another.
—The nonentity of their lovers
Whose living souls stumble in exile!

Al Munthali

THE SUN AND THE FLOWER (A LOVE POEM)

The flower beams
But with clenched petals
At the sun.
The sepals flap
But no sound.

With fiery lust
The sun gazes below,
Darkening the feeling,
Settling a cloud;
And the monsoon blows.

The monsoon blows,
The flower recoils
From the outcome.

The sun glows,
The cloud does not melt.
And the flower hopes for tomorrow
As back to back
They retreat.

Lan White

IN THE VILLAGE

In the village
A deep debate:

The chief's daughter has a transistor;
She is dancing to the Beatles
Gaily outside her hut.

But the tape-recorder man
On his codification project wants
"Your own music", he demands,
"Marimba! Bangwe!"

The chief is bemused
By this pressure from Europe
Not to attend to Europe:

Is he "himself"
With the radio on or off?

AT TETE, MOCAMBIQUE

Marooned between two rivers,
A ferry sunk, a causeway flooded,
I spend evenings sipping Mateus
Under lights on the promenade,
And violins: why not,
As the moon snaps the Zambesi?

Portuguese un-Africa:
Beyond the rivers you will rattle
Mile upon empty miles to the next bar,
The car in front a dust storm.
Here, marooned,
Time is four unreal centuries.

The rebel leader: "areas
No one had heard of the Portuguese
Required special attention":
Such mirrors! such negatives!
Engineered cruelties
For nationalism to mount on.

Marooned indeed. When the rivers
Slacken, roads lie bare across
That khaki void, what then
For metaphors? On the sidewalk
A tortoise shutters
While soldiers lurch barrackwards.

Frank Chipasula

WHEN YOU NEEDED ME

When you needed me
Mother, to rid the house
Of the unwelcome mice
I was away
Fulfilling
The thirst for our future salt
That's for me today bitter pepper.

When they broke up my uncle's Nyanga,
You appealed helplessly
To the men
Feminised by the muzzle of a gun—
I was away
When they killed my father's fortune serpent.
Now, convicted I stand
In the dock of shame,
Spangled in western dress
Drained of masculinity.

A LION

Henry M. Newa

A lion looks like
An earth-brown
Eight-cylinder police car
Driven by Sergeant Pike
Who can park anywhere in town
And drink in any bar.
His face inspires awe and fear
The "Big-Brother" way
And his eyes
Have the blank stare
Of those big, big red buttons
You see on ladies' coats
On a cold day.
Where a leaf drops on him
His tail can lash out
Like Emperor Nero's whip
Just to satisfy his whim.
After all rabbits don't question lions.

A lion thinks about his next kill
Which may be a giraffe, a wildebeest
But more likely
He will decide upon a cow
Which is a better fill.
Then he wonders whether
His roar is fearsome
And thundering like the rain god
During November's bad wather;
He is satisfied -
"I am still the king" he thinks
Intoxicated with smug self-contentment
On seeing other animals
Scamper away terrified
From the water hole,
And satellites
Of Stalinistic and altruistic ideas
Orbit around his mind.

Interviewed by our reporter
He says "If the Vietnam war
Were ours, it could've ended
Within a year's quarter,
You see it's become such a bore
Yet the quarrel can be mended
By the Law of the Jungle"
And giving an impatient roar:
"In our world
We observe no truces
New Year, Christmas, Lunar Year
Not withstanding. And no border line
Or demilitarised zone
Has power over out Law".
He continues talking
Of the survival of the fittest
Brute force, the art of stalking
Enemies and creating fear
In others, through the ear
And the eye.

Perhaps the lion is the sage
Which taught Hitler's hand
How to alter the history page.

Geoff Mwanja

THE ALBINO

He is white
From head to toe.
He walks along the dusty,
Hot, village road.

His face slanted,
His eyes narrowed to slits
Against the harsh glare of the afternoon sun
He shuffles on like a half blind man.
He drags on like a sick man.

He has perpetual sores all over his body,
And as a result provides a feast
For the hungry, pestilent flies.
And when you look at him,
When you realise that he is unhealthy,
That he is unhappy—
You begin blaming nature.

Without realising that
He also loves sweet life
You start thinking:
Why do the tentacles
Of death not take him?
The tentacles which are always amongst us,
Seeking to relieve the weak,
The weak who hate the world.

He is lonely,
He feels at home with
His parents only;
For they love him.
He might look welcomed among his friends,
But their eyes bear repulsion.
It is clear to him that they are just pretending,
And the mere realisation,
Pains him profoundly.
He inwardly says:
Is it really my fault?