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Poems

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Poems

Abstract

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Tolu Ogunlesi

ON THE EVE OF A NEW YEAR

The streets are empty and full of longing.

Between occupants
potholes take deep breaths,
and wardens and traffic booths lean kindly
against each other, sharing
silent solace.

On these famished roads
traffic lights blink in disbelief,
tempted to scream. These
are streets that mourn,
and billboards reduced
to philosophical placards:

*Is this city the space,
Or the people?
Which came first — the road?
Or the journey?*

Tonight's journey will end in the house
of God, where the pews will pant beneath
the mounting weight of expectant celebrants

for whom the coming year is another new road,
hidden from sight by a treacherous bend.

All the surviving minutes of this dying year
are like cars piling up on that road,
bathed in the hopeful glow of a million headlights.

There is a checkpoint ahead. It is on the other side of midnight.

THESE DAYS

At least once a day we pile the blame
on the hapless whoevers out there
whose job it is to stay up late
keeping the earth cold & warm
& breathing & forgiving (& maybe smiling),
forgetting that it's also their duty to,
without fear or favour, find the time
to fix odd jobs like ensuring that planted bombs
go off as planned,
and carelessly made ones don't.

But it's getting easier to tell
that there's nothing much wrong
with the world as it is,
and that the news is not as fucked-up
as people say it is, and that there's nothing
that can't be fixed as easily as
pushing a button or two.
For example, in the moments just after a blast,
what we shall do is touch rewind
to see it happen again, perhaps differently

and to learn
just what
do we need
to do right
next time?

Which leaves only one question:
what really matters,
and what is merely fluff
in this slushpile
of quibbling, self-important news.

MATHEMATICS

We are therefore forced, each one of us,
to find our own units for marking
the time, for making it count-
able.

I have chosen as mine things I salvaged
from death's unfinished dinner

Disch's Blood
creeping drop-by-drop from a still-smoking gun
against a backdrop of all surviving July mornings
filing out to pay their last respects

Shepherd's Food Poems
fated to sate (for all eternity) starving Septembers
to be taken turn by turn from an infinite slideshow of Time

Wallace's unfinished Final Sentence,
broken on the cusp of all the Octobers
from there to here, but intact enough
to be useful if we ever need to carbon-date
or psycho analyse.

Time, no longer what it used to be,
is now what it was never meant to be,
the only fallen tombstone in the cemetery

graffitied face of a mass grave
bustling with the irredeem-
able children of Talent.

POETRY IN A TIME OF RECESSION

and there are the poems, running
backwards

in baggy shorts across the earth,
but keeping straight, simple lines

in a way nothing else can.
Time, tickled, soars

off the earth without clearance,
to dance with the Piper-poet.

The dark numbers scramble too, off
the smudged pages of newsprint.

They do not look back to see
the hooded feet that drum this earth.

Today we will start
by filling in the gaps.

Tomorrow, we will colour them
with the poet's newest, most insistent song.

Kate Llewellyn

THE BIG FISH

Nothing is happening
So I wind the clock
And watch birds alight on wires
Like notes the clouds composed.

The agaves sit immobile as stones
Catching dew which they turn to mercury.

It's like this almost every day
The huge old strelitzia must widen
Imperceptibly stretching its suzerain
Towards the cumquat hedge
And still nothing happens
Yet birds disappear
And in their place the numinous arrives
Huge and invisible quiet as dew
The great fish that I am after
Which slides from my hook
Shy as night.

THE PERSIAN GARDEN

I can't go to the Persian gardens with you
Even years ago it wouldn't have been possible —
We did though visit some gardens of the Moguls.

And now lying under these stars listening to jazz
Because there are no carpets left
And these stairs are rough
You've given me your jacket to rest on.

Here is our bed
The only one we will have now.
The shape of the mosque is etched
In pink against the sky.

Our bodies side by side
Like notes of music falling
From the trumpet
And the drum beats on.

The warm night air is our sheet.
This is where our lives meet
On these ancient stairs
Surrounded by dark gardens.

THE RENCORET GARDEN SANTIAGO

The garden is the mind of the house
Music is playing
So the garden is humming
A little tune.

The floor of the verandah
Is of petrified polished wood
So that the garden can remember
Its history.

A square of white roses
On a green line of box
Is the garden's flag
Which it flies for peace.

I was walking in the garden
When the unicorn joined me
Wearing a collar of shards of crystal,
Silver and pearls.

The unicorn blinked once or twice
Then drifted away
Into some dappled shade —
Its complexion was very pale.

Two gardeners stood bowing
And smiling — Pierros,
Who, let's not forget,
Made it all happen.

I sat in a big cane chair
On the verandah and Mrs Rencoret,
Wearing shoes like the Queen
Shook my hand
Hers, soft as a horse's muzzle.

The maids were the garden's
Pink butterflies
Serving us tea.

Juan Grimm stood at the axis
Of the garden's world
The King of Spades who had

To give in to the Queen
Who like every girl wanted
roses
In her old age as well as her youth —
Hard perhaps for a King to understand.

Finally we left
And the unicorn appeared from the shade,
Climbed into our bus
And we drove away.

SWEET PEAS

Lots of them today
Blooming against the fence
Offering their lilac, purple, magenta and pink clouds
Of scent. Also the floral skirt I bought today
Lying on the bed in its tissues like a tiger.
All these frivolous things
While serious matters are awry
With the economy.

The air here is full of the flowers' perfume
Even though rain is just a memory
Yet, a vast rainbow appeared over the rooftops.
Sweet peas mean summer's almost here
And this arrhythmia makes me grateful
As my slow pulse blooms like sweet peas
On the fence of my wrist with glorious irregularity
Boom, boom.....boom.