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Poems

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Poems

Abstract

Revolution in progress, Lines from the French, Senegal: Before independence, Flinders: Ile De France,

Peter E. Lugg

REVOLUTION IN PROGRESS

Bald car tyres — massive turds
heaped at the edge of the airfield.
A torn windsock droops from its pole.
Chickens peck the tarmac for loose change.
Near a half-completed hangar
porridgy beer brews in rusted drums.
In a silted irrigation ditch
a butchered buffalo stiffens,
telling a flyblown history
to urchins who hack its flesh
& boil it with cassava in tins.
They sift the litter of paper and plastic
and tread the eggshells of revolution.
From mountains near Kasungu
the loose teeth of a machine gun chatter.
Perhaps they shoot at banana trees
or rebels are being lopped into stillness.
Dark clouds slink in from Mozambique
past customs, where nothing is declared.
Near the airfield a supply plane banks,
disgorging bright blossoms of silk.
Other planes land with government troops.
They eat chicken and yam fufu
and point compasses at the mountains.
They'll march towards the gunfire
with sunburnt men in green fatigues
who dream baseball & Michelob beer
as they plan the rebel's destruction.

LINES FROM THE FRENCH

Stupor is the drug of this dominion.
Ambition wilts on trees in drear lay-bys,
dries on stone walls that stumble to the sea.
Employment is some folly from another's dream:
prosperity is nudged to the next small town.
Fishing boats bob and ponder on a sluggish tide:
seabirds fish for trash that's rarely there.
Empty bars claim half the town.
In one John Wayne, with French subtitles,
acts at a room of empty chairs.
Cowboy gunfire clatters on cobbled streets.
Walled in by wintry sun, Basque hills,
the town's a prop from the age of poetry
when poems sailed into harbour,
stanzas taut in the midday breeze.

SENEGAL: BEFORE INDEPENDENCE

Crossing the river, you enter another century:
nose-picking border barons guard the colony
from contraband & the leprosy of ideology.
Humidity sails on waves of heat —
the brash gods of French culture and negritude
walk streets where time loiters, intending crime.

In St. Louis clerks in bars await the millennium:
in squat villas from Montpellier or Bourges
officials yawn over ledgers, palming half the take.
History seen by the myopic eye of domination
is taught to blacks in run-down schools. In every
class the French are watched, present stalking past.

FLINDERS: ILE DE FRANCE

St Elmo's fire dances crazily
over the headland
where Flinders waits for liberty
and the redirection of his mail.

A prisoner of the French
& King George's satanic ambition
this sailor confined to land
is nervous, tetchy, earth-bound.

He chews the skin of metaphysics
from drug-deprived hands,
fingers itching for a sextant
and a quick fix of stars.

At sea slight needs are met —
his heaven stretched before him,
an open hand of cards. Ashore,
limbs crave a pitching deck.

Each day the sea taunts him —
below its implacable waves
the depths ring with sonar
& the amiable chatter of whales.