

1986

## Poems

Jack Mapanje

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### Recommended Citation

Mapanje, Jack, Poems, *Kunapipi*, 8(1), 1986.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol8/iss1/11>

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## Poems

### Abstract

Baobab fruit picking, and Burning the Witch for rains

# Jack Mapanje

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## BAOBAB FRUIT PICKING (OR DEVELOPMENT IN MONKEY BAY)

(for Mary and David Kerr)

'We've fought before, but this is worse than rape!'  
In the semi-Sahara October haze, the raw jokes

Of Balamanja women are remarkable. The vision  
We revel in has sent their husbands to the mines

Of Jo'burg, to buy us large farms, she insists.  
But here, the wives survive by their wits & sweat:

Shoving dead cassava stalks into rocks, catching  
Fish in tired *chitenje* cloths with kids, picking

Baobab fruit & whoring. The bark from the baobab  
They strip into strings for their reed wattle,

The fruit they crack, scoop out the white, mix with  
Goat milk, 'there's porridge for today, children!'

The shell is drinking gourd or firewood split  
(They used to grate the hard cores into girls'

Initiation oil once). 'But you imported the Boers,  
Who visited our Chief at dawn, promising boreholes!'

These pine cottages on the beach shot up instead, some  
With barbed wire fences fifty yards into the lake!

(What cheek!) Now each week-end, the 'blighted-tomato-  
thighs in reeking loin-cloths' come, boating, grinning

At them baobab fruit picking. 'My house was right  
Here!' Whoever dares check these Balamanja dreamers?

## BURNING THE WITCH FOR RAINS (THE DARK CASE)

Is this perhaps the last of our old sluts  
This witch frowning vacantly, condemned only

By her snuff-black gums & the stark veins?  
When did matriarchal bones living in rotten

Thatch hatchback become a menace, people?  
& does she muse upon her grimy shroud or

The bane of our brittle existence? Malignant  
Village vigilantes stack up dry acacia twigs

& brambles, smarting for the witch's fire  
After our cheek flaying, head shaving ritual.

The stern, omnipotent hand uncovers official  
Evidence: exhibit one, an amorphous dark case

She's supposed to have locked up lightning  
& thunder so the rains don't come. When one

Zealot opened it at the station, the box's  
Bowels growled like bloodhounds, blinding him.

(The curious jury of kids bends with laughter)  
Exhibit two, the bag of fertilizer she stole.

The malcontent apparently still believes in her  
Mixed-planting with ashes & compost manures; how

Dare the rebellious dreadlocks resist as barking  
Youth-leagers dive for their bloody antic rites...?