Poems

Stephen Gray

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Poems

Abstract
SEASON OF VIOLENCE, TYRANNY OF KNIVES, PROPOSITION

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On the television, squaddies lug water
From landrovers to the blinding sand.
A helicopter lets out a general
Who holds his hat and salutes the dunes.
At New Brighton a trash of plastic
Lolls at the tide's edge.

In the corner the men glance up:
Someone swears, the barman laughs,
The dominoes go over, one by one.

Stephen Gray

SEASON OF VIOLENCE

has not ended; was due to close;
termination was fully announced –
prayer-day now throughout the nations –

the air is cluttered with silent words –
can't breathe for ascending petitions;
not over yet; only begun

a derailment at Mariannhill;
Sunday is another killer in South Africa;
take a philosophical view:

'O Lord afford me detachment
from those who want to but don't know how;
bullets through flesh fly easily'

As Archbishop Tutu said Martin Luther
King said: 'those who live an eye
for an eye end up blind people'

will not end; for ever and ever;
help out now; Amen.
TYRANNY OF KNIVES

for cutting bread not bodies
tomatoes, not sunk into my heart

having escaped knives narrowly
I am not fond of them
the damage they may do
out of the kitchen rack
pressed against my skin

take your weapons and throw them in the sea,
said the sage of disarmament

take this blade from my artery
if now my neck is slit
how do you intend to use me?
I shall not be able to assist
in your vandalous activity

there are other voices I would hear
a while longer of those I love:
not shut-up, give me –
no, you give me my life,
it’s at the point of your knife
do not press.

PROPOSITION

In those former days to say I loved you
meant I depended on you to alter my life

this did not happen: disturbance there was
but no matter how we tried no break occurred

I must thank you for trying to change me
God knows it cost you, before you left
somehow over time that difference took place
call it molecular arrangements their own code

there was no straight trajectory I have grown
apart from what I was destined to be

now love as an active agent is gone
I find I love you all the more

without conditions or expectations without
promises even or intentions, but: firmly.

Therefore I propose we try this new bond
see this time about your deeper structure.

WHAT DO THESE WRITERS HAVE IN COMMON?

Chinua Achebe, Ama Ata Aidoo, Thea Astley, E. Kamau Brathwaite,
Erna Brodber, J.M. Coetzee, David Dabydeen, Nadine Gordimer, Wilson
Harris, Marion Halligan, Jack Hodgins, Chris Koch, Bob Marley, Frank
Moorhouse, Alice Munro, Les A. Murray, Caryl Phillips, Olive Senior,
Wole Soyinka, Randolph Stow, Aritha van Herk, Derek Walcott, Rudy
Wiebe.

KUNAPIPI!