

My mother

by Pauline Egbe 1

She was of age
Before she passed away.
Though she was gay and feeble,
Her heart had no mercy
For the ones she left behind.

On that dull morning,
She said not a word to me.
Her thin hands grew weaker,
Her love for me grew fainter,
For the only one she had in the world.

She opened her eyes and looked at me.
As she struggled to speak to me,
She bowed her head and said no word;
She clasped her hands and said a prayer
And her eyes met mine and tears dropped down.

Where her corpse was laid
I found my relatives in tears.
I thought of the days gone by,
When she carried me like an egg
And fed me like a baby.

1. Pauline Egbe is a third former in Queen of the Rosary college, Okoyong, Mamfe, West Cameroon. We highly recommend her good effort and urge her to keep it up. We also hope that other secondary school students who read this poem will be moved to emulate her example.

The Editor

My mother

(suite)

I stood and watched my creator
As she was put into a coffin.
I feared that she would suffocate,
But all was in vain;
She went to her rest.

Oh, my only mother!
Buried in this mortal soil,
As an animal thrown into an endless pit.
I thought she would come again,
But she cared less for her little child.

Oh death, how wonderful thou art!
You have taken away my only mother
And left me in the world alone,
To find everything for myself.
Oh mother, here I am, alone in the world.

The harvest

Come down, brother,
 From yon lofty mountain-height,
 Where thunder breaks and roars
 With fire and brimstone.
 Come away, for a while
 And lock the gates against devastating floods.

Come down, brother,
 From yonder cheery dream-land
 With lotus fruit galore,
 Where sirens laugh and sing;
 Come away, for a while
 And tend the seedlings in the rich green fields.

Descend, dear brother,
 From your lofty mountain-top
 Where incense burns and charms!
 Off your silk and rich taffeta!
 Come away, for a while
 And, from the refuse-heap, pick up an angel.

Sankie Maimo

Yaoundé 1966

Fortitude

Hear the grating of iron-chains;
 Above, loom the walls of despair;
 But see! How here I bleed;
 Yet, I'm not daunted by pain;
 My soul knows nothing so fair.
 Indeed! I come from a tough race
 And will go willingly thro' the furnace,
 To come forth chastened and solaced.
 In suffering, I find firm fortitude,
 And my soul is invested with beatitude.
 Forge then more irons for my limbs
 And chain me to the grind-stone;
 For sadism is your touch-stone.
 Tho' I harbour no rancour,
 Learn, brother, to have a human heart.

Sankie Maimo

The Harmattan

You need a prop, brother
 When the Harmattan blows in November.
 What a chill runs thro' my limbs
 At this time of the year.
 Seasons whirl in my head
 When we linger in this weird resort.
 What ghosts haunt our hamlets,
 At this time of the year!
 You need a prop, brother!
 When these wild winds begin to bite.
 What numbness chills my heart
 At this time of the year!

Sankie Maimo

Yaoundé 1964

Here...

Here
On the slope of Buea mountain
Despite the cold
The loneliness
The nostalgia
Despite the long tongues fond of gossip
The glances red as morsels of kolanut.

I live my life
 mouth
 eyes
 and ears sealed tight

Wrists
and feet free but handcuffed.

*Ernest Alima*¹

(April 29th, 1966)

Extract from *A Season in Buea* in preparation.

1. In *Abbia* N° 11, we published some poems by Ernest Alima and introduced him to our readers as a French-educated East Cameroonian teaching French in the B. T. T. C. Soppo. The poems published here and many others unpublished bear witness to his relentless striving to become a poet in both languages.

To my mother

I have no more voice
 To sing of you
 O Mother mine!
 My voice has grown hoarse
 For having wept for you...

I have no more voice
 To sing of the warmth of your love,
 If I test my voice
 I won't sing in tune...

I have no more voice
 To sing of your caresses
 I have lost my rhapsodist's voice
 In a litany of sobs...

I have no more voice
 To sing of you
 O Mother mine!
 My own songs are orisons
 I mumble for you,
 My own songs are bouquets
 I lay on your grave
 And the garlands of poems
 I plait for you.

Ernest Alima

(March 17th, 1966)

Extract from *A Season in Buea* in preparation.

Thought¹

The day only changes colours; for the night is also a day as well as the day itself, but it is a black day. Therefore, the day is infinite and we have been living the same day since we were born; this same day were living the ancestors of the ancestors of our ancestors in the past to-day; this same day will be living our successors in the coming to-day.

In other words, there are no centuries, no decades, no years, no months, no weeks; not even one day which separates us from our predecessors; there is neither yesterday nor to-morrow, but the past to-day and the coming to-day.

Ernest Alima

Extract from *A Season in Buea* in preparation.

1. This thought has raised a very long discussion among the students and the members of the B. T. T. C. staff.

A human's cry

Go away from me, brother!
 Don't stare at me like that,
 And worry yourself so
 Casting your eyes on one like me!

Go on with your walk.
 Waste not your time,
 Peering at me, beloved brother!
 Indeed, I'm only a human victim!

With time, the pain freezes
 Upon my aching shoulders,
 And my body grossly transgressed,
 Even by my brother, because of my darkness.

Go away from me, dear friend!
 Don't waste your time on me.
 An unbearable burden is falling upon
 My miserable and despised body!

Yes, I'm a man of pain and sorrow,
 A victim of tears, a symbol of sadness.
 I'm a joyful drudge, a happy fag,
 For, upon me, a dark sky of pain is hanging!

Don't trouble your eyes on one like me!
 I'm going joyfully towards my hard fate
 Walking among life's thorns.
 For I am a wanderer, in this world's path!

Ladislas Rehyment Oudenlou¹
 (Ndu, 19th Feb., 1966)

1. Ladislas Oudenlou is another East Cameroonian of French Education who is teaching French in the Secondary School at Ndu. His poems are a further testimony of the serious effort some Cameroonians are making towards bilingualism.

The rising sun

The shades of night
Have run away.
The eastern couches of the sky
Are breaking up already.

Through the multi-coloured clouds
Of the dazzling sky,
The charming morning spreads
The brightness of its rays.

Yes, it is the life-like sun
That announces its ascending!
A while latter, in dazzling splendour,
It rises into view.

Its orb of sweet fire
Emerges more and more
Towards my dark heart,
My dark and sorrowful heart.

That free and simple heart,
Full of grief and vengeance,
Vengeance for the injustice that bites
Into my fair dark skin.

Oh dear and adorable orb,
Symbol of the Almighty...,
What share of sorrow do you bring
To my soul to-day?

Ladislav Rehyment Oudenlou
(Ndu, 21st Feb., 1966)

Four lamso poems

by doctor Daniel Lantum

Introduction

Lamso', the language of the 100,000 or so inhabitants of Nso, in West Cameroon, has not only survived the impact of European influences, but still retains plenty of those fine and delicate turns of speech by which the Nso' express their thoughts, their sentiments and their culture. And since language is the medium of cultural exchange, a rich language must, ipso facto, belong to a community rich in culture. Such the Nso' claim to be. In the Lamso' poems presented here, the poet draws inspiration from certain social activities in the Nso Community.

"Sa' Fon" carries a litany of praises in the tone and pattern in which Nso' dignitaries praise their Fon (their chief) and strengthen his rule. In it one finds the glory of the tribal wars in which the Nsos were always victorious, the humiliation of the German conquest in which they passed into the slavery of the European powers. And the invocation of the symbols of power, like the lion, thunder, fortitude, the morning star, the eagle, reveals the inherent attachment of the Nso' to the supernatural from which all strength is derived.

"Su lir Kighin" takes us back to the early days of Christianity when the natives were made actively conscious of their nudity which from the time of Adam, had been taken for granted as dignified natural raiment. The struggle to hide it with clothes introduced economic problems and the poor received nick-names because they could not successfully keep themselves clothed all the time with a lone piece of cloth.

In the middle 1930s, a reputed wizard from Bamum introduced into Nso' a powerful cult called "Nguv" which heightened our local beliefs in Demonology, and evil spirits were said to travel by night. The common owl which flies in quest of prey by twilight was feared as the harbinger of evil, and its horrible face heightening this belief about it, the bird became a terror in our

community—an omen of misfortune striking horror in every heart. And our chiefs cursed the wicked spirit embodied in the owl. "Kifan" brings vivid memories of that age by the use of the invocations used in the "Nguv" cult to curse evil spirits. So terrible in the eyes of the adherents of this cult were the devil and the effects of devilry which took the form of epidemics, widespread famine or some such tribal catastrophe.

In modern times, the white wedding gowns of European origin have hidden the tender curves of the bride, and a man knows not his wife until after marriage. In those days before the advent of clothes, our people saw the real bride and acknowledged her beauty. "Jin" (The bride) portrays the mature girl ready for marriage. Beauty and the blessings of fertility were regarded such a part and parcel of a marriage that a wedding was never considered blessed and completed until a year later when the bride became a nursing mother.

Reading the poems

It is intended that the Lamnso' of these poems be read directly and easily, and as such every letter of the alphabet and the common combinations of letters stand for the usual sounds in the English alphabet system. However a few phonetic symbols have had to be introduced to preserve certain sounds which are peculiar to Lamnso'. These conform where possible to the orthographic symbols agreed upon by the Nso' History Society with the advice of doctor Phyllis Kaberry of the Department of Anthropology of London University. Where printing has been found impossible, some of these accentuation signs have been dropped. The author is always willing to pass on the correct and standard way of reading these Lamnso' verses to anyone who might be interested.

Dan Lantum

20/7/65

Sa' fon

CHE-A MUFO !

Che-a Mufo !

Bi' fe a dze-en kitu ke Nso'.

Bvere !

A tar ver i yii tumsin bam,

La yo' kfen la shinse kong.

E-e-SHUIY Nso !

A kum fe yuv a ver ku yu wo ;

A la Bara Kam Mbilam

Bo yii ya-ai la Bui

Kfen i kitu kfe ki ?

Wiy fe Rifem !

Ku dze wuwin wo kfee mo-on,

A bo wu yo' wiy tinnin.

A-ai ! Kishev Nso' !

A yii ke' jii tim tim,

Nso bimi Nunkang ;

Win ko-oi jii tam tam

Ring Ring King Bum !

A yu kileng-leng Chisong, yu Shimbam.

O ka-ai fe kov !

Fe Bara nyam i mengin nbuni ;

Ver ku tir ye nja-a ndzem wo,

Nyoori kinjosi kev wai Banyong.

Vitavi Ve Nso' !

Nso' dze Nso' bi fon,

A Fon dze Fon bi' Nso'.

Awful THUNDER, fulminating in the clouds !
Whenever you roar
Your people answer in reverberation ;
And resounding in Bamenda and Fumban
The echoes announce your greatness.

GREAT DESCENDANT of the Abandoned SETTLEMENT !
There the Fulbe gave us not a moments' respite,
Yet we levelled the weighted spear at them
And followed up the last of them right to Banyo.

THOU, the strength of NSO' !
The Nso' state exists in your rule
And your rule derives its greatness from the NSO' STATE.

GREAT KING !
Bestir a little, and shed your warmth around.
Whenever there is scarcity at the sub-chief's,
In the palace, there is abundance.

Resplendent MORNING STAR !
There is a mammoth crowd in the court-yard.
Even the most distant villager is there.
Let your decrees fly upon their tongues,
O, Great King.

Great EAGLE !
It was in the secret council of war,
That you planned it all with the chief of your hosts
And Kpunkeri gained the nick-name "BIRD of Misfortune"
Upon the tree of the Fon of Bamum,
MIGHTY Monarch !

Dan N. Lantum
15th October, 1964
Ibadan

Su-lir-kighin

A tsem She'la jii "Su lir Kighin",
 Bi' fe wa'bin si te' viyeng i vibabar vi.
 A ve dzee kur se nyoiy mo wiynto,
 Waa sham la wumo' fe viche'!
 Ver kuu yii sha'ti jii "Ma sha'ti",
 A mina tooshi viyon.
 Bang-a-checher i ko' wong,
 A wonle-ngon i si ker bii viyeng.
 Liy kuu jumri viche',
 Mo Kileysia kii mengin bii.
 Mbu-u kiwo i sho' won ver i bam,
 A min kfen a-Su-lir-kighin.
 A yii ma' jii ;
 "Kitan kii shem a mbiy vinsum',
 Mo ve kuu ma-ayini sang ko mvey ;
 Ngaa koi saminya min kfén jii Su-lir-Kighin.
 A fen kwa-a ben jii m du fe !
 Mo wo lawan ?
 Wong Nso', la mini !
 A tete' si ji kifa ke yooni'
 A tar ni taanin a yaya-wo-ngai sho,
 Wontse-e min jo'-si jii a-Su-lir-Kighin.
 Aba-ai Shuu-mo' !
 Woso-o du fe shu Nso'-o.
 A yo' bii wo,
 A yong wo jii pegen.
 A te' te' wo nya-ang,
 A kwa-a wo jii wir ngu'.
 A nying du Bamenda,
 A be-emi wo jii Vifu mbe'.
 A jo'-si yar wo mo-on,
 A bavitir wo jii : Su-LIR-KIGHIN.

Dan N. Lantum
 8/10/64 — Ibadan

Girl in hiding

They deride She' la—"poor girl",
 Because this generation now goes in clothes.
 In the days when vests were natural skin
 Who would scorn the other for rags?
 Whenever we greeted a lady,
 She recoiled and hurried past in reverence.
 Before the beautiful red cloth came,
 Camwood adornment was in vogue for the girls.
 Insult followed clothing
 Because the Church frowned upon the nude.
 This new change brought destitution,
 And our daughters became ashamed of themselves.
 We often say in our proverb :
 "Poverty stood in the way of display ;"
 Because "we preferred the chaff to the grain,"
 The destitute who could afford but one lone piece of cloth
 Resorted to hiding.
 As they are so derided, and scorned
 Where shall we go, we, the childless?
 In our country steeped in poverty
 Innocent nudity is now a story of yesteryear.
 In this generation, even the grandmother must be clothed,
 And our daughters become ashamed of themselves.
 And you loud-mouthed critics of Nso!
 Where shall we go to escape your scorn!
 You adorn yourself with camwood,
 They style you heathen!
 You wear the simple front cloth
 They say you belong to the stone age.
 You flee to the big city
 You are called a prostitute.
 You go in peace wearing your lone piece of cloth
 They baptise you HIDER
 Because after washing it
 You must hide nude in the grass
 till it is dry.

Dan N. Lantum
 15 october, 1964
 Ibadan

Kifan

E-e-e ! — njo yer — ei !
 Ven meng yiwin du jo'-si ;
 Meng win moo kibam ke fiy ki.

Yi wa' ji wu',
 Ven liy ji ga',
 Ma'-a kong nje'-e.

Yi kfen ku ji kwa'
 Ven sa' kwa' moo bun',
 Yi rém fe rong,
 Ven churi ji cherei yei-yo.

Ven be-emi win mbo-mbong —
 Be-emi a mo yengwev kwakir sim.
 Ven le' fo bam wo,
 Tin kichi ma-ai kindzemri bam.

Yi tong ji wu-uy,
 Ven nyai-si mbo-mbong ;
 Nyaisi mo shwa-a nyaisi koi.

Vitse vi ku'u,
 A shongri dji : Nga-a Nkwa'ri !
 Yi sa lo fo fe a ? Nga-a kigheng !
 Yi ku lai ya fo yi fe-en, Nga-a Ndoti !

Ven du jii a chu a-nyoiy,
 Ven lon jii yi sha-a dze-dzee ;
 Ya-ai won ver ya-ai yin.
 Ma'ti wong wor nyaang.

Dan N. Lantum

16/9/64

The evil spirit

E—e! Our misfortune!
 Shun him to the last!
 Disown him like an article without a label.

When he stirs,
 Leap like a tiger,
 And hurl a weighted spear at him.

Should he make any move,
 Take to your heels like a dormouse.
 Should you sense him from a distance,
 Disown him completely.

Let all denounce him thoroughly,
 Just like the mother-hen squeaks and cackles at a fox.
 Let all flee at his appearance
 And sever all connections with him.

Should he utter another sound,
 You should all shout him down,
 As when noisy birds scream at a predacious kite.

At dead of night
 Denounce him in scornful names:
 Rogue! Where is your origin, jealous devil!
 Off with you to whence you came, evil creature!

And when you sacrifice to the gods,
 Pray that this evil should quit this town,
 Away from our children,
 And leave our country alone in peace.

Dan N. Lantum
 5th October, 1964
 Ibadan

Zin

E-e Nso' !
 Ven yen wan-wo-fai,
 Wu nja-am mo kifi' ke shu-san ;
 Ghiysi mo kisho' ke rookov ;
 A sibang i nja-am i kilong-o mo sang wo yuv.

A ba-ai ! Nso' !
 Wu kar mo mbacha' ;
 Shem mo siru' ye fiyi ;
 Biy nywiv mo mbang winto' ;
 Lerir mo kison.

A-a Wanle ngon !
 A fen bvenri kitu mo joo bey'
 A seni Chinko'.
 A Nso' ku bati i nkumir kishiy
 Ma wiy yov kovan i wo bam.

Bo Tambom yo' yii kuvsin lim re
 Kii dze le yo-oni ?
 Ba-a ki' je-ei kibveshi
 Nso' yii ma jii "mangaan o",
 A ku koi jii "ndze ngo-on".

Lan dze shu kima'-sar
 A Nso' shiy sa'ka - i nkumir
 Boi fe njo ei !
 Lo wan dzee wan ei !
 A wai kifam ke ba-ar ki.

Dan N. Lantum
 5th October, 1964
 Ibadan

The bride

Ye people of Nso' !
 Come and see the daughter of the sub-chief.
 She beams bright like the morning sun.
 She glows red like the ripe fruit from the depths of the forest.
 And her necklace glitters like the morning star.

Admirable ! Marvellous ! People of Nso'
 She wriggles to rhythm like the cha-cha instrument,
 She drips like palm-wine from a new raffia bush,
 She shines like the annointed walking-stick of the chief's wife,
 Smooth and slippery like the newt.

Ah, damsel in prime !
 You droop in coyness like a withering weed,
 Yet you never recoiled from the love bait !
 The people are preparing a week to-day,
 To chant in procession a bridal tune.

As Nature forever repeats itself,
 As it was yesterday,
 So must it be tomorrow ;
 Whenever the Nso' say "manga-an"
 The answer is always "ndze ngo-on".

This is early spring,
 And we await good tidings by this time next year !
 A child has fled from trouble !
 A child has been doubled !
 And taboo ! you are a nursing mother !

Dan N. Lantum
 5th October, 1964
 Ibadan

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