

POEMS IN ENGLISH AND FRENCH

By
Ernest ALIMA

IN THE BEGINNING

*In the beginning
The world was melancholy
For there was no music*

*And the Word created the word
And offered it
In love
To man*

*And man
Took the word
And set it to music*

*Since then
Man expresses
The seasons of his soul
Through music*

*He laughs in music
And cries in music
He loves in music
And sleeps in music
He works in music
And walks in music
And all his life
Goes on will he, will he,
And vanishes in music.*

A L'ORIGINE

*A l'origine
Le monde était mélancolique
Parce que sans musique*

*Et le Verbe
A créé
Le verbe
Et l'a offert
A l'homme
Par amour*

*Et l'homme
A pris le verbe
Et l'a rendu musique*

*Depuis lors
Depuis
L'homme traduit
Les saisons de son âme
En musique*

*Il rit en musique
Et pleure en musique
Il aime en musique
Et dort en musique
Il travaille en musique
Et marche en musique*

*Et toute sa vie
S'en va
Ainsi
Cahin - cahin
Et s'éteint en musique.*

(ONGOLA - EWONDO, 9/12/1977)

DO NOT SORT OUT PEOPLE

*In life,
Do not sort out people
According to their colours :
Every man is a man*

Be he

red,
yellow,
black
or white.

*Though his skin rhymes not with yours,
He is not a baboon ;
He is your other self,
Your alter ego
Moulded from the same clay as you,
Bearing an intelligence quotient like you.*

NE TRIE PAS LES GENS...

*Dans la vie
Ne trie pas les gens selon leurs couleurs :
Tout homme est un homme
qu'il soit*

rouge,
jaune,
noir
ou blanc,

*Que sa peau rime faux avec ta peau,
Ce n'est pas un hamadryas,
Mais ta réplique
A toi,
Ton alter ego
Fétri du même limon
Que toi
Et doté d'un quotient intellectuel
Comme toi.*

IF YOU MUST DIE

In life,
If you must die
For the cause of justice,
If you must die
So that others live
A saprophytic life
On your dead body,
If you must die
For the well-being of mankind,
Die
With a will,
Die.

For
It is a triumph
To quit this life
Head first
With feet following
For a good and noble cause.

S'IL FAUT MOURIR...

Dans la vie,
S'il faut mourir
Pour la cause de la justice,
S'il faut mourir
Pour que les autres vivent
En saprophytes sur ta charogne,
S'il faut mourir
Pour le bonheur de l'espèce,
Meurs
De bon cœur,
Meurs.

Car
C'est un triomphe
Que de sortir
De la vie
Les pieds derrière
La tête devant
Pour une cause belle et juste.

BEATITUDES

Blessed is the one
Who has shed his share of sweat
For the glory of his country
And who,
Under the shelter of his retirement,
Awaits,
Without remorse or dread,

The invisible vessel
Bound for the unknown.
Blessed is the one who leaves
As a bequest
To mankind,
An offspring of his mind
Through which he will live
Until the death of time.

Blessed is the one
Who,
Crushed to pulp,
Dies in the muzzle of power
For the coming generations
From death
Will redeem him.

X
X X

BEATITUDES

Bienheureux
Celui
Qui
A versé sa part de sueur
Au rayonnement de son pays
Et qui,
A l'ombre de sa retraite,
Attend, sans remords,
L'échéance de son néant.

Bienheureux
Celui
Qui
Laisse en héritage à l'humanité
Un enfant de sa pensée
Dans lequel à jamais
Il se survivra.

Bienheureux
Celui
Qui
Meurt broyé
Dans la gueule du pouvoir
Pour ses nobles idées ou son engagement,
Car l'avenir
De la mort le délivrera
Et son souvenir
Pieusement conservera.

THE VOICE OF EVIL AND THE VOICE OF GOOD

Every man has in him
A pair of voices:
The voice of evil
And the voice of good.

Often,
Most often,
The voice of evil
And the voice of good
Struggle for the throne in him.

And often,
Most often,
The voice of evil
Triumph over the voice of good
In this fight within!

That is why
On earth
Evil reigns supreme!

But you,
You who are there
Sitting before me
And hearing my voice,
Will you allow the voice of evil
Triumph over the voice of good in you?

Answer me,
Brother,
Answer me:
Will you dare allow the voice of evil
Triumph over the voice of good in you?

X
X X

LA VOIX DU MAL ET LA VOIX DU BIEN

Tout homme a en lui
Un couple de voix:
Le voix du mal
Et la voix du bien.

Souvent,
très souvent
la voix du mal
Et la voix du bien
Se disputent le trône en lui.

Et souvent,
très souvent
La voix du mal
Triomphe de la voix du bien
Dans cette lutte en lui!

C'est pourquoi
Dans la vie
Le mal règne en roi!

Mais toi,
Excuse-moi
Si je te tutoie,
Mets toi

Qui es là assis devant moi
Et entends ma voix,
Laisseras-tu la voix du mal
Triompher de la voix du bien en toi?
Réponds-moi,
Mon frère
A moi,
Réponds-moi.

Laisseras-tu la voix du mal
Triompher de la voix du bien en toi?
Réponds-moi
Mon frère
A moi,
Réponds-moi.

(ONGOLA-EWONDO, 27 mars 1975).

TWILIGHT

How beautiful it is to watch the
sky slowly changing,
To watch God's power at work
in the heavens
And wish you were one of
the clouds
Racing across the earth's spacious
ceiling
Watched by the lovers of nature
while they ponder its mysteries.
The blood-red sun sinking on the
horizon
Like a shy bright-faced girl
covering half her face
From view, thinking she's hidden
herself

But the rays piercing through the
clouds betray
The 'hiding' gestures of the
sky girl

Then the sluggish night slowly
engulfs the earth
In its enormous cloak of
incomprehensible mystery
And nature switches on its
twinkling lights
And the ungrateful humans put
on their street lamps
As if nature, rather than God
created stars.

The insects begin chirping in tune
to nature's music
And the occurred humans disturb
peace and sweetness
With their booming nonsense, blaring
through the shop windows
And the wind carries the sound to
the peaceful suburbs,
Disturbing the serenity with an
anxious uneasy boom -
And twilight slowly turns to dark ...
SUSAN NKWENTIE - CLASS V,
LOURDES COLLEGE,

MANKON - BAMENDA.

OUR CITY LIFE

By BONGASU TANLA - KISHANI

Beyond her smiles
I believe
We can unearth living centuries
of culture.

A wayward smile, indeed
on her ebony black lips
beckons to a visiting sango
waylaying him body and soul
into those market-fumes
within our civilisation;
dynamism, growth, progress...

No
"Urbanization"
We chorus and add the refrain
"Yes Urbanization
with its evils
"Yes Urbanization"

At all costs?
"Yes Urbanization"
At all costs?
"No! A better Urbanization"

Shingongon now answers Titi.
She has become a high-class nyango
Kimbo, Bamenda and Douala no longer sell her dresses.
In her latest the blossoms out for a pilgrim sango
She is "Lodi!", "Madam", "darling", "honey"
Shingongon smiles to few and rarely too.
Around her there's always a market.

She has a boy
she has a car
Shingongon serves drinks
Shingongon sells drinks to a family of friends;
Taxi-drivers, chauffeurs, washermen, civil servants;
Shingongon is well-known
She counsels who can help you in need
There is a tacit agreement within the world around her,

"Consult Shingongon whenever in Need",
Her boy receives an extra beer wherever he is recognized
Her car cannot pass unnoticed
Her bar is one of the few in town.

Yet her father used to tap palm-wine
She had moved to K after the events
Which ended up sadly for her because
her parents were no more -
father and mother died on the same day
the one in the mornings, the other in the evening;

Shingongon, the only child of her parents

Shingongon, the only pearl of her village.

had come to K miserable, sickly and poor,
But a few years in X soon brought her
through and through as an independent somebody.

Beyond her smiles, to-day
are the memories of fate.

By BONGASU TANLA - KISHANI

Paris 1976

GROWTH IN NATURE

In this ecstasy I gaze at the rains
rooted deep in the sky
Trees shooting out from the ground
Winds germinating from the cardinal points
grow into an equilibrium;
The moon, the stars and the sun
smile from their heavenly topography
into the dazzling eyes of nature in movement:
the streams, the rivers and the sea
merge into unison to satisfy
a scientific mind rootless, homeless, bedless
where streams and rivers deep daily on their beds
and sing in procession into a common home - the sea -
with boat looting their roots in the spring.
Out of this ecstasy I find man abandoned
straggling for a home in the trees
In the seas, nay, he even now talks with the moon.
But finds himself rootless, homeless
In a space where liberty is hit.

by BONGASU TANLA - KISHANI

Paris 1973

THE HIDDEN VOICE

Its Presence:
Its tending hand
creeps everywhere
within the rising moon and sun
within the muttering rain-drops
madden - marvels of its making.

In silence
It throbs,
each creature drumming
with heels and chords
its fathomless rhythms,
where souls now pace
senseless, rootless, thoughtlessly unmooring
into a homeless home.

And still
with olive and palm-tree branches
we grace,
this silent triumph of a godless age
where to see is to avoid the sight
and to live is to vote and vote
without ever giving the heart
time to pray and bridge the banks,
time to love and knot a healthy wedlock.

The rhythms of our age
are the creaking hinges of silent beatings
heaving beyond the world of marathon grinnaces
in which money and lovers and voters
still harness our liberty.

by BONGASU TANLA - KISHANI

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