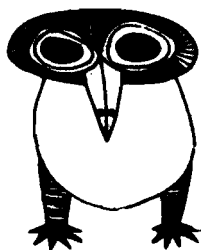


BIAFRA

REQUIEM FOR THE DEAD IN WAR

BY

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PAPUA POCKET POETS

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BIAFRA

Requiem for the Dead in War

1
Those pale autumn leaves

are falling again

for the eighth repeated time

stripping winter

to the naked beauty

of burnt forest farms

in March

speaking of home

a dream of fired water

The exile dances

on and on

his interminable dance

of desolation

homes topple with a great noise

Does the exile ever long for death?

in a pale fall world

marooned

In what myth shall we look

for consolation?

The sun that dried

your deathblood

dried all myth

and abolished joy

But the one indifference
of knowledge
no man is ever first
or last
no nation is ever first
or last
but every event repeats itself interminably
and death never comes too soon
or late
carved into the iroko's
ponderous cipher
with the silence
that governs all argument
I was an almost pacifist
when the sudden surf of blood
broke
on my head

Those discarded ideals
the empty learned phrases
did not return from the garbage heat
but woke
the courage they induced
that state of mind
when
even the timid
dares
to survive
the last
desperate
choice
of
death
or
death

Once in 1945
three or four in one
multiple nationalities
windowdressed for compromise
a cumbrous disunity

Once in 53
three times in 66
Nigerians shoot civilians

through the ears
rehearsing all known tortures
murdering all males
and raping old women
forcing teenage girls in leper clinics
hundreds butchered
like goats of Ramadan
the last and worst
the 30,000 innocents
mowed down Nazi fashion
a final solution
that failed again
as it always will

How many more
before a people will stand
and die
fighting to survive?

A man is a man
who fights
only when
he
must

and we have seen our manhood
slaughtered

bravely

we dumped the books and grabbed machine guns
my scientific colleagues invented fire
used at the front
two weeks later
the vandals burned the library
as they burned
Alexandria

send
down the
lightning
Leontyne is
singing the
sea in storm earth
flames framed
in spiral drench the mind with triumph of
death
hurl the sharp explosive point Destroyer
Leontyne sings
the world trembles
in ecstasy
thunder and
sip blood
carrion
gods

we asked for war
here
in our time

springs hum
hangover marriage
when the great replenishment shall come

Learn now that woman is neither here nor there
but everywhere
I am a strong man, like my father. And every woman
hurts sometimes somewhere, like my mother
A woman who cannot keep her husband at home
should not ask where he spent the
night

Learn now that woman is neither this nor that
but everything
The world tumbles from her guts in a slimy
chain
They say the world is rolling toward one overwhelming
allcolor. But not in our time. Not in our
time, O Lord.

2

Biafrans, all poets and exiles
Give up the borrowed metaphysical manner
And grow a native intensity
Rooted in disaster
Like astronauts blasted up to heaven
In a rush of light

Not in the lives
of the dead
sedately crossed
and trimmed

I found poetry
where the line
s p i l l s

all about the page
in patternings
of ecstasy

visions
idoscopic
of a weird
and
terrible
kale
beauty

3

And have you forgotten those lonely specters of
immortality? The pieties.

2 Have you seen vast Zimbabwe piled rock on rock?
Would you jump the height of falls of Zambesi?

3 Have you measured length or breadth with Sahara?
Can you walk it inch from inch? Will its sandfalls wait
your safety? Can you water it with your tongue?

4 Have you tested the furnace of its days? Have you
tasted the frigid solemnity of its nights?

5 Would you look a sphinx or snake cold in the eye?
Will it wink at you? Will it curl soft arms about you?

6 Have you scanned a pyramid from miles away? Did
you hear it argue with the sunset? Did you string the labyrinth
of its tombs? Did you bestride its peak?

7 Do you keep your ears open? Do you keep your ears
clean?

8 Do you hear the nine thousand languages of this endless
land clicking and chuckling in abandoned voice?

9 Have you conversed with mosquitoes horseflies tsetseflies
scorpions and adders? Can you blow the elephant's trumpet? Can
you reach your neck to the giraffe? Can you skyrace the hawk?

10 Does the wanderer take a home like the tortoise?

11 Have you scaled the mahoganies and mountains?
Have you charted the river swamps? Have you smelt the mangrove?
Have you slept with the forest?

12 Have you chewed earth? Have you tasted its gold and
coal and oil and copper?

13 Do you suffer still the brand of the hundred million sold
or shot by brothers into torment of white hells across the sea of
centuries? Have their children's faces ever pressed you with guilt?

- 14 Have you twisted the world in your mind?
Do you know yourself? Have you ever said to yourself:
My philosophy probes nothing but the soulhidden
question: how to make money?
- 15 Would you see genius break out in a rash?
- 16 Have you talked to the big drum? Have you seen
the people dance? Were you ever woven into the dance of the
vicissitudes?
- 17 Can you dance the war dance on one foot alone?
- 18 Do you remember the incredible music of the Makongo?
Do you remember the Bambara and Dogon and Ashanti?
Ife Benin Nok and the pygmy country? Can you measure
arts with them? Can you trace the mystery of the hollowed
face? Or the deep unmitigated geometry of the body?
- 19 Have you watched the women weave akwete on their
breasts?
- 20 Would you try the kente robe of kings or sit on the
sacred stool?
- 21 Have you met the skywoman studded with stars?
Dare you ride the bark of the billion years with her?
- 22 Do you dare name the spirit of the mask?
- 23 Do you dare drink from the urn of souls?
- 24 When did you visit last with Nkulunkulu?
Did he break kola with you? Did he touch the chalk of peace?
- 25 His kola is bitter red and dessicates the brain.
His chalk of peace peels the heart. His touch is a sear.

26 Do you remember the mythologies you traded for others? Your homemade stuff for their homemade stuff with exotic stamps? Your names for their names?

27 Have you deciphered the iroko yet? Have you written out the chronicle of this continent? Have you written anything?

28 Do you remember Chaka Ghana Mali Bornu Songhai? Do you remember Kanem Chikanga Shangamire Kazembe Ndongo and Manikongo? Mzilikazi Mirambo Rabeh Omar Dingiswayo? Sonni? Aloomo? Mosheshe? Askia? Mahdi? Mwata Yamvo? Sundiata? Ruin caught them all at last, every mighty one of them. Spokes in the wheel of time.

29 Have you studied the program of 1966? Have you learned it by heart? Do you see the gouged eyes lopped limbs lacerated bodies?

30 Have you thought of the leper children from the sudden harems of the north?

31 Do you remember the battered headless trunk of Onwuanaibe Anyaegbu? Did it smile at you? Did it look to you like a fantasy by Suzanne Wenger? Was it intended for your amusement?

32 Are you drunk on its horrors? Has it poisoned your blood? Will you pass it to your children? Will they learn that the world moves by strength alone?

33 Will Israel forget? Will you forget?

34 Who will command this mass continent from its sordid splendid past and shattered present and nameless future into a place where the body can live?

35 Who will engineer the metamorphosis?

36 But men and empire live and die. The earth reigns supreme.

Mafo

I mourn and tell your fortune

The dying toll your loan of time

Live fully your fractioned moment of eternity.

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edited by Ulli Beier

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