

the stars, which tell him "where in the world, and who, he is." Above all, the ethnographer learns by shutting his mouth, stilling himself, so that he can learn "where in the world" he is, what sea he has gotten himself into.

Right numbers indeed, though not the expected ones. The Society for Humanistic Anthropology is pleased to recognize the achievements of these two fine poets and to present them with the 1995 Poetry Prize.

—Toni Flores

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Motopark Beggars

Nigerian motoparks are bustling intersections where hundreds of taxis and travelers move in and out every day. On this cluttered landscape the wealthy mix with the hungry, chiefs in indigo cloth mix with suited businessmen, and crankcase oil mixes with red dust. Motoparks are transfer points between communities—interstices of the social topos. Dwelling there are the homeless victims of war, madness, poverty, and disease—motopark beggars.

I. Holy Ghost

At Holy Ghost
 he skittered
 through debris and mud
 on his hands
 because he had no legs

When we first met
 I gave him ten naira
 the others laughed
 "you dash too much!"
 "is he a chief?"
 "only fifty kobo for beggars"

He never forgot me
 each time I transferred at Holy Ghost
 I heard him cry "onye ocha, onye ocha"
 though he was no chief
 I would dash him ten naira
 and praise him
 "jisike"

I delighted in his jubilation
 with the good fortune of me
onye ocha
 white man
 too foolish to know
 the big man from the small

II. Princess

"Brother," she said
 "do you know we have kin in common?"
 her voice startled me
 deep
 clear
 she spoke English very well
 for a beggar

Her eyes fixed on me intently
 her face—smooth, black, fine features
 had been pretty
 before madness twisted it
 her clothes soiled
 her hands trembling
 yet with confidence she told me
 she was a descendant of England's royal lineage
 even in pity I could not help but smile

When she had gone
 a vendor woman laughed carelessly and said
 "that mad one was once first in her class"
 "she went to a university in London"
 "she came back a big fine woman"
 "but then something happened"
 "she went mad"

What happened?
 did she lose her soul
 in that distant kingdom?

I worry about my own soul sometimes
 when I try to remember home
 the world of sit-coms and shopping malls
 will it seem a land of fools?
 and I a lost foreign prince?

III. Virtuoso

He looked sharp
 not a hint of groveling to him
 a flare in his stride
 as he approached our taxi

He told us a marvelous tale
 of travails
 his sick mother
 their long journey to the city
 the robbery that left them stranded
 his faith in God
 his appeal to us

But it wasn't his story that won us
it was the telling

A torrent of words
like a bugling trumpet
exquisite syncopated cadences
and counterpoint
subtle gestures of hand and eye
he enthralled us
with each new turn of phrase and fate

So perfectly executed
so well rehearsed
that not a word of it
could have possibly been true

When his performance was complete
the beautiful Aba woman with the yellow head cloth
shouted in praise
and we all laughed
and applauded
and showered him with money
he bowed triumphant
a virtuoso

IV. White Man

I'd seen no white face
except my own
when it startled me
in chance encounters
in a hotel mirror
or the rearview of the taxi
that brought me here

Until I saw his face
dirty white
bearded
draped with ropes of stringy hair
a filthy Jesus in rags
begging alongside lepers

"How came you here brother?"
my words uncomprehended
his eyes urgent
he pleaded
"onye ocha, inyerem aka"—"white man, help me"

Does he know
that he too is a white man?
he who is too poor
to have entered a hotel
or ridden in a taxi

I gave him coins
and asked my companion
"who is he?"
"he is mad," I was told
as if this were enough

Later I learned his story
when his African father died
his mother went back to England
and left her little boy behind
forever
is she haunted by him?
when she is alone
does she feel his grimy madness?

With a mirror
I could have shown him
that he is a white man

That resemblance
in the rearview of the taxi
that took me away