**GES 201 POEMS**

**How Can I Sing?**

I cannot blind myself

to putrefying carcasses in the market place

pulling giant vultures

from the sky.

Nor to these flywhisks:

how can I escape these mind-ripping scorpion-tails

deployed in the dark

with ignominious licence

by those who should buttress faith

in living, faith in lamplights.

And how can I sing

when they stuff cobwebs in my mouth

spit the rheum of their blank sense

of direction in my eyes

---who will open the portals of

my hope in this desultory walk?

But I cannot blunt my feelers

to cheapen my ingrained sorrow

I cannot refuse to drink from

the gourd you hold to my lips

A garland of subversive litanies

should answer these morbid landscapes

my land, my woman.

**Odia Ofeimun**

**The Spectacle of Youth**

I loved the children of the lion

When their manes were beginning to grow,

Simulating the ancient heroes.

I knew the greatness of their future

When they leapt on the tender necks of antelopes

Which so long prided themselves on their fleetness.

I praised the skillfulness of their power,

Knowing how soon they will be killing buffaloes.

**Mazisi Kunene**

**The Face of Hunger**

I counted ribs on his concertina chest

bones protruding as if chiseled

by a sculptor’s hand of famine.

He looked with glazed pupils

seeing only a bun on some sky-high shelf.

The skin was pale and taut

like a glove on a doctor’s hand.

His tongue darted in and out

like a chameleon’s

snatching a confetti of flies.

O! child,

your stomach is a den of lions

roaring day and night.

**Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali**

**Were I Clever**

Were I clever

I’d send me back

to mother’s womb

and build me new

tough placenta

and feed me more

on foetal food.

Were I clever

I’d send me back

to mother’s womb

and lay in ambush

for an ideal day

when laughter is the houseboy

and tears

mere hearsay.

Were I clever

I’d court me

an osaye princess

and dwell us there

where rainbow is the estate

and love the landlord.

Were I clever

I’d build me mansions

on the grassless sky

and install me music

platonic

and plant me choir

of parrots and pigeons

and excel the same

Oh were I clever!

**Jared Angira**

**The Harvest of Our Life**

If this is the time

To master my heart

Do so!

Do so now!

As the clouds float

Home to their rain-drenched

Caverns behind the hills.

If this is the time

To master my heart,

Let me fall an easy victim

To the pleasures that you hold to my lips

When the duiker

Lingers along the pool to drink

And the ailing leopard

Turns its dry unbelieving snout away;

When the dew-drops dry

Unnoticed on the sinews of the leaf

And the soft-paddling duck

Webs its way

Through the subtle

Entanglement of weeds,

Along the river Prah.

Oh, I remember the songs

You sang that night,

And the whirl of raffia skirts;

The speechless pulsations of living bones.

Oh I remember the songs you sang

Recounting what has gone before

And what is ours beyond

The tracks of our thoughts and feet

You sang of beautiful women

(The Kangaroo-jumps of their youthful breasts)

Flirting with sportive spirits

Red-eyed, with red-lips, hoary-red

With quaffing of frequent libations;

You sang of feasts and festivals;

The red blood-line across the necks

Of sacrificial sheep;

Of acceptance and refusal of gifts;

Of sacrifices offered and withheld;

Of good men and their lot;

Of good name and its loss; of the die cast

And the loading of the dice;

Why the barndog barked

At the moon as she sang

And why the mouse dropped the pearl-corn

From its teeth and stood forced-humble

With the soft light of fear in its eyes.

I saw a sheen of light

On the soft belly of the leaaves

Dream-worn in the night

Bright as the light

Defending day from night

And palm-wine as clear

As the path of a spirit as water,

And her hair like the dark eyes of an eagle

Over the affairs of men.

And yet the river rolled on

And passed over rocks;

White sand in the bed

Bearing the burden of rotten wood

Twigs, grass--a flower—the breath

Of the soil and the bones of thousands

Who should have lived

To fight a war for this or that

And this or that a ruse

To deceive the mover of the move

And the mover of the move

Always moved by an uncertainty.

**Kwesi Brew**

**Settlers**

**I**

Scum of shipwrecks and the enclosures of Europe, outcasts

made greedy by hunger, pitiful phantoms, how present your

absence is in me! – calm only in a legacy of displacement I can’t

shake off; the insinuation within, wherever I might turn, not to

belong to anyone.

Women and men grown weary of the commonplace of your

lives, the crumbling hamlets you were raised in; you have

arrived. What arrogance the shopkeeper and the soldier will

evoke from the accident of your first, speculative, lost footstep

on hot sand…!

How much wealth can be squandered through the years for a

dialogue of beads bickering over their brightness on a necklace?

how many cattle must be stolen for safekeeping in kraals or

forts or behind tangles of wild almond?

Each morning the calculations of profit will seep further into

the land.

**II**

You have left me with this inheritance: innuendoes of chains,

of broken promises, of children ripped from their families to

serve, of bellowed orders to reload, of wages for the hangman.

The piety of a prayer before battle. You have left me beffudled

with a language that preens upon my tongue but hides its guilty

secrets. You have left me with the vertigo of teetering on the

brink of three centuries of landfall.

Already, on this unimaginable shore, before you have sat down

To draw your first breath, you have ensured in me that there will

never more be trust.

**Kelwyn Sole**

**My country is bereaved**

we have just survived

another lap of war.

the chivalrous killers

are waiting outside

sharing their spoils.

they make jest of my people

the ones who live

from dust to mouth every day.

it is a war

addressed to the wretched

by those we gave our votes freely

forgetting the fears

they will become dictators.

now is the season of blood

children and old women

maimed by fresh bullets

borrowed from foreign lands.

the blood continues to flow

a new smokescreen of vipers

playing the violins for us to dance

by force by force by force.

we who are serial casualties say,

the last drop of the last man

will speak for us

for we are washed beyond

the cabal crookedness in the air.

the tribal marks of war are here

the subterfuge season is here.

we who feed now

from the howling winds

we exhale and say,

we shall survive the tyrant poison.

We shall survive the ammonia of hate.

**Remi Raji**

**Holy Sonnet 6**

DEATH, be not proud, though some have called thee

Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;

Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.

From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,

Much pleasure-then, from thee much more must flow

And soonest our best men with thee do go,

Rest of their bones and soul’s delivery.

Thou’rt slave to fate, chance, kings and desperate men,

And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell;

And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well,

And better than thy stroke, why swell’st thou then?

One short sleep past, we wake eternally

And death shall be no more. Death, thou shalt die.

**John Donne**

**The World Is Too Much with Us**

The world is too much with us; late and soon,

Getting and spending, we lay waste or powers:

Little we see in Nature that is ours;

We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

This sea that bares her bosom to the moon;

The winds that will be howling at all hours,

And are upgathered now like sleeping flowers;

For this, for everything, we are out of tune;

It moves us not, --Great God! I’d rather be

A pagan suckled in creed outworn;

So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,

Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;

Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;

Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

**Williams Wordsworth**

**PARADES, PARADES**

There’s the wide desert, but no one

marches

except in the pads of old caravans,

there is the ocean, but the keels incise

the precise, old parallels,

there’s the blue sea above the moun-

tains

but they scratch the same lines

in the jet trails,

so the politicians plod

without imagination, circling

the same somber gardens

with its fountain dry in the forecourt,

the gri-gri palms desiccating

dung pods like goats,

the same lines rule the White Papers,

the same steps ascend Whitehall,

and only the name of the fool changes

under the plumed white cork-hat

for the independence parades

revolving around, in calypso,

to the brazen joy of the tubas.

Why are the eyes of the beautiful

and unmarked children

in the uniforms of the country

bewildered and shy,

why do they widen in terror

of the pride drummed into their

minds?

Were they truer, the old songs,

when the law lived far away,

when the veiled queen, her girth

as comfortable as cushions,

upheld the orb with its stern admoni-

tions?

We wait for the changing of statues,

for the change of parades.

Here he comes now, here he comes!

Papa! Papa! With his crowd,

the sleek, waddling seals of his cab-

inet,

trundling up to the dais,

as the wind puts its tail between

the cleft of the mountains, and a wave

coughs once, abruptly.

Who will name this silence

respect? Those forced, hoarse hosan-

nas

awe? That tin-ringing tune

from the pumping, circling horns

the New World? Find a name

for that look on the faces

of the electorate. Tell me

how it all happened, and why

I said nothing.

**Derek Walcott**

**To His Coy Mistress**

Had we but world enough, and Time,

This coyness Lady were no crime.

We would sit down, and think which way

To walk, and pass our long Loves Day.

Thou by the Indian Ganges side.

Should’st Rubies find: I by the Tide

Of Humber would complain. I would

Love you ten years before the Flood:

And you should if you please refuse

Till the Conversion of the Jews.

My vegetable Love should grow

Vaster then Empires, and more slow.

An hundred years should go to praise

Thine Eyes, and on thy Forehead Gaze.

Two hundred to adore each Breast.

But thirty thousand to the rest.

An Age at least to every part,

And the last Age should show your Heart.

For Lady you deserve this State;

Nor would I love at lower rate.

But at my back I alwaies hear

Times winged Charriot hurrying near:

And yonder all before us Iye

Desarts of vast Eternity.

Thy Beauty shall no more be found;

Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound

My echoing Song: then Worms shall try

That long preserv’d Virginity;

And your quaint Honour turn to durst;

And into ashes all my Lust.

The Grave’s a fine and private place,

But none I think do there embrace.

Now therefore, while the youthful hew

Sits on thy skin like morning glew,

And while thy willing Soul transpires

At every pore with instant Fires,

Now let us sport us while we may;

Andnow, like am’rous birds of prey,

Rather at once our Time devour,

Than languish in his slow-chapt pow’r.

Let us roll all our Strength, and all

Our sweetness, up into one Ball:

And tear our Pleasures with rough strife,

Thorough the Iron gates of Life.

Thus, though we cannot make our Sun

Stand still, yet we will make him run.

**Andrew Marvell**

**The Road Not Taken**

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,

And sorry I could not travel both

And be one traveler, long I stood

And looked down one as far as I could

To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,

And having perhaps the better claim

Because it was grassy and wanted wear,

Though as for that the passing there

Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay

In leaves no step had trodden black.

Oh, I kept the first for another day!

Yet knowing how way leads on to way

I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.

**Robert Frost**

**Do not go gentle into that good night**

Do not go gentle into that good night,

Old age should burn and rave at close of day;

Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise man at their end know dark is right,

Because their words had forked no lightning they

Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright

Their frail deeds might have danced in a green

bay,

Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,

And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,

Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding

sight

Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,

Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,

Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I

pray.

Do not go gentle into that good night.

Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

**Dylan Thomas**

**If We Must Die**

If we must die—let it not be like hogs

Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,

While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,

Making their mock at our accursed lot.

If we must die—oh, let us nobly die,

So that our precious blood may not be shed

In vain; then even the monsters we defy

Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!

Oh, Kinsmen! We must meet the common foe;

Though far outnumbered, let us show us brave,

And for their thousand blows deal one

deathblow!

What though before us lies the open grave?

Like men we’ll face the murderous, cowardly

pack,

pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

**Claude McKay**