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Tuesday, September 21, 2010

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Bibliographic details

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Cambridge 2006

ProQuest Information and Learning

African Writers Series

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Bibliographic details for the Source Text

p'Bitek, Okot, 1931- (1931-) Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol

London

Heinemann 1985

152 p.

© The estate of Okot p'Bitek 1966, 1967

Preliminaries and Introduction omitted.

AWS series number: 266

First published: London

First published by: Heinemann

First published: 1984

Language of original publication: Acoli

First published in the African Writers Series in: 1985

ISBN: 0435902660

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SONG OF LAWINO & SONG OF OCOL

[Page]

Front matter

637 Ocol's tongue is fierce like the
638 arrow of the scorpion ...

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Main text

p' Bitek, Okot, 1931- : *Song of Lawino* [from p' Bitek, Okot, 1931-: *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol*]

I

My Husband's Tongue is Bitter

1 Husband, now you despise me
2 Now you treat me with spite
3 And say I have inherited the stupidity of my aunt;
4 Son of the Chief,
5 Now you compare me
6 With the rubbish in the rubbish pit,
7 You say you no longer want me
8 Because I am like the things left behind
9 In the deserted homestead.
10 You insult me
11 You laugh at me
12 You say I do not know the letter A
13 Because I have not been to school
14 And I have not been baptized

15 You compare me with a little dog,
16 A puppy.

17 My friend, age-mate of my brother,
18 Take care,
19 Take care of your tongue,
20 Be careful what your lips say.

21 First take a deep look, brother,
22 You are now a man
23 You are not a dead fruit!
24 To behave like a child does not befit you!

25 Listen Ocol, you are the son of a Chief,
26 Leave foolish behaviour to little children,
27 It is not right that you should be laughed at in a song!
28 Songs about you should be songs of praise!

29 Stop despising people
30 As if you were a little foolish man,
31 Stop treating me like salt-less ash ¹
32 Become barren of insults and stupidity;

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33 Who has ever uprooted the Pumpkin?

34 My clansmen, I cry
35 Listen to my voice:
36 The insults of my man
37 Are painful beyond bearing.

38 My husband abuses me together with my parents;
39 He says terrible things about my mother
40 And I am so ashamed!

41 He abuses me in English
42 And he is so arrogant.

43 He says I am rubbish,
44 He no longer wants me!
45 In cruel jokes, he laughs at me,

46 He says I am primitive
47 Because I cannot play the guitar,
48 He says my eyes are dead
49 And I cannot read,
50 He says my ears are blocked
51 And cannot hear a single foreign word,
52 That I cannot count the coins.

53 He says I am like sheep,
54 The fool.

55 Ocol treats me
56 As if I am no longer a person,
57 He says I am silly
58 Like the *ojuu* insects that sit on the beer pot.
59 My husband treats me roughly.
60 The insults!
61 Words cut more painfully than sticks!
62 He says my mother is a witch,
63 That my clansmen are fools
64 Because they eat rats,
65 He says we are all Kaffirs.
66 We do not know the ways of God,
67 We sit in deep darkness
68 And do not know the Gospel,
69 He says my mother hides her charms
70 In her necklace
71 And that we are all sorcerers.

72 My husband's tongue
73 Is bitter like the roots of the *lyonno* lily,
74 It is hot like the penis of the bee,
75 Like the sting of the *kalang* !
76 Ocol's tongue is fierce like the arrow of the scorpion,
77 Deadly like the spear of the buffalo-hornet.
78 It is ferocious
79 Like the poison of a barren woman
80 And corrosive like the juice of the gourd.

81 My husband pours scorn
82 On Black People,
83 He behaves like a hen
84 That eats its own eggs

85 A hen that should be imprisoned under a basket.

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86 His eyes grow large
87 Deep black eyes
88 Ocol's eyes resemble those of the Nile Perch!
89 He becomes fierce
90 Like a lioness with cubs,
91 He begins to behave like a mad hyena.

92 He says Black People are primitive
93 And their ways are utterly harmful,
94 Their dances are mortal sins
95 They are ignorant, poor and diseased!

96 Ocol says he is a modern man,
97 A progressive and civilized man,
98 He says he has read extensively and widely
99 And he can no longer live with a thing like me
100 Who cannot distinguish between good and bad.

101 He says I am just a village woman,
102 I am of the old type,
103 And no longer attractive.

104 He says I am blocking his progress,
105 My head, he says,
106 Is as big as that of an elephant
107 But it is only bones,
108 There is no brain in it,
109 He says I am only wasting his time.

2

The Woman With Whom I Share My Husband

110 Ocol rejects the old type.
111 He is in love with a modern woman,
112 He is in love with a beautiful girl
113 Who speaks English.

114 But only recently
115 We would sit close together, touching each other!
116 Only recently I would play
117 On my bow-harp
118 Singing praises to my beloved.
119 Only recently he promised
120 That he trusted me completely.
121 I used to admire him speaking in English.

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122 Ocol is no longer in love with the old type;
123 He is in love with a modern girl.
124 The name of the beautiful one
125 Is Clementine.

126 Brother, when you see Clementine!
127 The beautiful one aspires
128 To look like a white woman;

129 Her lips are red-hot
130 Like glowing charcoal,
131 She resembles the wild cat
132 That has dipped its mouth in blood,
133 Her mouth is like raw yaws
134 It looks like an open ulcer,
135 Like the mouth of a field!
136 Tina dusts powder on her face
137 And it looks so pale;
138 She resembles the wizard
139 Getting ready for the midnight dance.

140 She dusts the ash-dirt all over her face
141 And when little sweat
142 Begins to appear on her body
143 She looks like the guinea fowl!

144 The smell of carbolic soap
145 Makes me sick,
146 And the smell of powder

147 Provokes the ghosts in my head;
148 It is then necessary to fetch a goat
149 From my mother's brother.
150 The sacrifice over
151 The ghost-dance drum must sound
152 The ghost be laid
153 And my peace restored.

154 I do not like dusting myself with powder:
155 The thing is good on pink skin
156 Because it is already pale,
157 But when a black woman has used it
158 She looks as if she has dysentery;
159 Tina looks sickly
160 And she is slow moving,
161 She is a piteous sight.

162 Some medicine has eaten up Tina's face;
163 The skin on her face is gone
164 And it is all raw and red,
165 The face of the beautiful one
166 Is tender like the skin of a newly born baby!

167 And she believes
168 That this is beautiful
169 Because it resembles the face of a white woman!
170 Her body resembles
171 The ugly coat of the hyena;
172 Her neck and arms
173 Have real human skins!
174 She looks as if she has been struck
175 By lightning;

176 Or burnt like the kongoni
177 In a fire hunt.

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178 She dusts the ash-dirt all over her face
179 And when little sweat
180 Begins to appear on her body
181 She looks like the guinea fowl!

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182 And her lips look like bleeding,
183 Her hair is long
184 Her head is huge like that of the owl,
185 She looks like a witch,
186 Like someone who has lost her head
187 And should be taken
188 To the clan shrine!
189 Her neck is rope-like,
190 Thin, long and skinny
191 And her face sickly pale.

192 Forgive me, brother,
193 Do not think I am insulting
194 The woman with whom I share my husband!
195 Do not think my tongue
196 Is being sharpened by jealousy.
197 It is the sight of Tina
198 That provokes sympathy from my heart.

199 I do not deny
200 I am a little jealous.
201 It is no good lying,
202 We all suffer from a little jealousy.
203 It catches you unawares
204 Like the ghosts that bring fevers;
205 It surprises people
206 Like earth tremors:
207 But when you see the beautiful woman
208 With whom I share my husband
209 You feel a little pity for her!

210 Her breasts are completely shrivelled up,
211 They are all folded dry skins,
212 They have made nests of cotton wool
213 And she folds the bits of cow-hide
214 In the nests
215 And call them breasts!

216 O! my clansmen
217 How aged modern women
218 Pretend to be young girls!

219 They mould the tips of the cotton nests
220 So that they are sharp
221 And with these they prick
222 The chests of their men!
223 And the men believe
224 They are holding the waists
225 Of young girls that have just shot up!
226 The modern type sleep with their nests
227 Tied firmly on their chests.
228 How many kids
229 Has this woman sucked?
230 The empty bags on her chest
231 Are completely flattened, dried.

232 Perhaps she has aborted many!
233 Perhaps she has thrown her twins
234 In the pit latrine!
235 Is it the vengeance ghosts
236 Of the many smashed eggs
237 That have captured her head?
238 How young is this age-mate of my mother?

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239 The woman with whom I share my husband
240 Walks as if her shadow
241 Has been captured,
242 You can never hear
243 Her footsteps;

244 She looks as if
245 She has been ill for a long time!
246 Actually she is starving
247 She does not eat,
248 She says she fears getting fat,
249 That the doctor has prevented her
250 From eating,
251 She says a beautiful woman
252 Must be slim like a white woman;

253 And when she walks
254 You hear her bones rattling,
255 Her waist resembles that of the hornet.
256 The beautiful one is dead dry
257 Like a stump,
258 She is meatless
259 Like a shell
260 On a dry river bed.

261 But my husband despises me,
262 He laughs at me,
263 He says he is too good
264 To be my husband.

265 Ocol says he is not
266 The age-mate of my grandfather
267 To live with someone like me
268 Who has not been to school.

269 He speaks with arrogance,
270 Ocol is bold;
271 He says these things in broad daylight.
272 He says there is no difference
273 Between me and my grandmother
274 Who covers herself with animal skins.

275 I am not unfair to my husband,
276 I do not complain
277 Because he wants another woman
278 Whether she is young or aged!
279 Who has ever prevented men
280 From wanting women?

281 Who has discovered the medicine for thirst?
282 The medicines for hunger
283 And anger and enmity
284 Who has discovered them?
285 In the dry season the sun shines
286 And rain falls in the wet season.

287 Women hunt for men
288 And men want women!
289 When I have another woman
290 With whom I share my husband,
291 I am glad
292 A woman who is jealous
293 Of another, with whom she shares a man,
294 Is jealous because she is slow,
295 Lazy and shy,

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296 Because she is cold, weak, clumsy!
297 The competition for a man's love
298 Is fought at the cooking place
299 When he returns from the field
300 Or from the hunt,

301 You win him with a hot bath
302 And sour porridge.
303 The wife who brings her meal first
304 Whose food is good to eat,
305 Whose dish is hot
306 Whose face is bright
307 And whose heart is clean
308 And whose eyes are dark
309 Like the shadows:

310 The wife who jokes freely
311 Who eats in the open
312 Not in the bed room,
313 One who is not dull
314 Like stale beer,
315 Such is the woman who becomes
316 The headdress keeper.

317 I do not block my husband's path
318 From his new wife.
319 If he likes, let him build for her
320 An iron roofed house on the hill!
321 I do not complain,
322 My grass thatched house is enough for me.

323 I am not angry
324 With the woman with whom

325 I share my husband,
326 I do not fear to compete with her.

327 All I ask
328 Is that my husband should stop the insults,
329 My husband should refrain
330 From heaping abuses on my head.
331 He should stop being half-crazy,
332 And saying terrible things about my mother
333 Listen Ocol, my old friend,
334 The ways of your ancestors
335 Are good,
336 Their customs are solid
337 And not hollow
338 They are not thin, not easily breakable
339 They cannot be blown away
340 By the winds
341 Because their roots reach deep into the soil.

342 I do not understand
343 The ways of foreigners
344 But I do not despise their customs.
345 Why should you despise yours?

346 Listen, my husband,
347 You are the son of a Chief.
348 The pumpkin in the old homestead
349 Must not be uprooted!

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3

I Do Not Know the Dances of White People

350 It is true
351 I am ignorant of the dances of foreigners
352 And how they dress
353 I do not know.
354 Their games
355 I cannot play,
356 I only know the dances of our people.

357 I cannot dance the rumba,
358 My mother taught me
359 The beautiful dances of Acoli.
360 I do not know the dances of White People.
361 I will not deceive you,
362 I cannot dance the samba!
363 You once saw me at the *orak* dance
364 The dance for youths
365 The dance of our People.

366 When the drums are throbbing
367 And the black youths
368 Have raised much dust
369 You dance with vigour and health
370 You dance naughtily with pride
371 You dance with spirit,
372 You compete, you insult, you provoke
373 You challenge all!
374 And the eyes of the young men become red!

375 The son of a man
376 And the daughter of a man
377 Shine forth in the arena.
378 Slave boys and girls
379 Dance differently from true- borns.

380 You dance with confidence
381 And you sing
382 Provocative songs,
383 Insulting and abusive songs
384 Songs of praise
385 Sad songs of broken loves
386 Songs about shortage of cattle.
387 Most of the songs make someone angry.

388 You do not come to the arena drunk,
389 But when another youth hits you
390 You take up the challenge
391 As a man,

392 And when a girl knocks you
393 You strike back,

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394 A man's manliness is seen in the arena,
395 No one touches another's testicles.

396 A girl whose waist is stiff
397 Is a clumsy girl
398 That is the lazy girl
399 Who fears grinding the *kabir* millet.

400 You adorn yourself in Acoli costumes
401 You tie *lacucuku* rattles
402 Or bells on your legs.
403 You wear bead-skirts or string skirts
404 Or a tiny piece of cloth
405 And a ten-stringed bead
406 Around your waist;
407 Bangles on your arms,
408 And giraffe-tail necklaces on your tall neck.

409 A young man wears the *odye* and *lacomi* ,
410 He puts his lover's beads
411 On his neck,
412 Beautiful white feathers on his head,
413 He blows his horn
414 And other young men feel jealous of him.

415 It is danced in broad daylight
416 In the open,
417 You cannot hide anything,
418 Bad stomachs that have swollen up,
419 Skin diseases on the buttocks
420 Small breasts that have just emerged,
421 And large ones full of boiling milk,
422 Are clearly seen in the arena,
423 Breasts that are tired
424 And are about to fall,

425 Weak and bony chests of weaklings
426 Strong lion chests
427 Large scars on the thighs
428 Beautiful tattoos below the belly button
429 Tattoos that have become sores on the chest;

430 All parts of the body

431 Are shown in the arena!
432 Health and liveliness
433 Are shown in the arena!

434 When the daughter of the Bull
435 Enters the arena
436 She does not stand here
437 Like stale beer that does not sell,
438 She jumps here
439 She jumps there.
440 When you touch her
441 She says 'Don't touch me!'

442 The tattoos on her chest
443 Are like palm fruits,
444 The tattoos on her back
445 Are like stars on a black night;
446 Her eyes sparkle like the fireflies,

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447 Her breasts are ripe
448 Like the full moon.
449 When the age-mate of her brother sees them,
450 When, by accident,
451 The eyes of her lover
452 Fall on her breasts
453 Do you think the young man sleeps?
454 Do you know what fire eats his inside?

455 It is true, Ocol
456 I cannot dance the ballroom dance.
457 Being held so tightly
458 I feel ashamed,
459 Being held so tightly in public
460 I cannot do it,
461 It looks shameful to me!

462 They come to the dance dead drunk
463 They drink white men's drinks
464 As well as *waragi* .
465 They close their eyes,

466 And they do not sing as they dance,
467 They dance silently like wizards.

468 Each man has a woman
469 Although she is not his wife,
470 They dance inside a house
471 And there is no light.
472 Shamelessly, they hold each other
473 Tightly, tightly,
474 They cannot breathe!

475 Women lie on the chests of men
476 They prick the chests of their men
477 With their breasts
478 They prick the chests of their men
479 With the cotton nests
480 On their chests.

481 You kiss her on the cheek
482 As white people do,
483 You kiss her open-sore lips
484 As white people do,
485 You suck slimy saliva
486 From each other's mouths
487 As white people do.

488 And the lips of the men become bloody
489 With blood dripping from the red-hot lips;
490 Their teeth look
491 As if they have been boxed in the mouth.

492 Women throw their arms
493 Around the necks of their partners
494 And put their cheeks
495 On the cheeks of their men.
496 Men hold the waists of the women
497 Tightly, tightly ...

498 And as they dance
499 Knees touch knees;

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500 And when the music has stopped
501 Men put their hands in the trouser-pockets.

502 There is no respect for relatives:
503 Girls hold their fathers,
504 Boys hold their sisters close,
505 They dance even with their mothers.
506 Modern girls are fierce
507 Like Labeja, the *Jok* of *Alero*²,
508 That captures even the heads of nephews,
509 They coil around their nephews
510 And lie on the chests of their uncles
511 And prick the chests of their brothers
512 With their breasts.

513 And they dress up like white men,
514 As if they are in the white man's country.
515 At the height of the hot season
516 The progressive and civilised ones
517 Put on blanket suits
518 And woollen socks from Europe,
519 Long under-pants
520 And woollen vests,
521 White shirts;
522 They wear dark glasses
523 And neck-ties from Europe.
524 Their waterlogged suits
525 Drip like the tears
526 Of the *kituba* tree
527 After a heavy storm.

528 You smoke cigars
529 Like white men,
530 Women smoke cigarettes
531 Like white women,
532 And sip some poisons from the glasses.

533 It is hot inside the house
534 It is hot like inside a cave
535 Like inside a hyena's den!

536 And the women move like fish
537 That have been poisoned,
538 They stagger
539 They fall face upwards
540 Like fish that are dead drunk
541 With *lugoro* or *ober* ;
542 Like small fish out of water.

543 The smoke of the tobacco
544 The smoke of the cigars
545 And the cigarettes
546 And the smoke of the candles
547 Used for counting the coins,
548 The smoke in the house
549 Is like cumulus clouds.

550 The evaporating vapour
551 From the many drinks,
552 The steaming sweat
553 The hot wet breaths
554 Of the numerous people,

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555 The coughs and saliva
556 Squirted by sneezing drunken sick,
557 The many brands
558 Of winds broken,
559 Humid winds broken by men and women
560 Producing various types of smells,
561 The dust
562 The evaporating piss ...
563 The air is heavy like the hammer.

564 The stench from the urinal is thick!
565 It hits your nose
566 Like a blow,
567 Like a horn of a bull rhino!
568 You choke
569 Your throat pains sharply
570 You get out quick
571 And shout a curse!

572 You meet a big woman
573 She staggers towards you

574 And leans on the wall
575 And before she has untied her dress
576 She is already pissing;
577 She forces out the urine
578 As if she has syphilis.

579 The stench from the latrine
580 Knocks you down, from afar!
581 You enter;
582 It is as if you have entered
583 Into a lion's mouth.
584 The smell of Jeyes
585 And the smell of dung
586 Rise to the roof.

587 The entire floor
588 Is covered with human dung
589 All the tribes of human dung!
590 Dry dungs and dysentery
591 Old dungs and fresh dungs

592 Young ones that are still steaming,
593 Short thick dungs
594 Sitting like hills,
595 Snake-like dungs
596 Coiled up like pythons.
597 Little ones just squatting there,
598 Big ones lying on their sides
599 Like tree trunks.

600 Some dungs are red like ochre
601 Others are yellow
602 Like the ripe mango,
603 Like inside a ripe pawpaw.
604 Others are black like soil,
605 Like the soil we use
606 For smearing the floor.
607 Some dungs are of mixed colours!

608 Vomit and urine flow by
609 And on the walls
610 They clean their anus.

611 And there are writings
612 On the walls
613 Cut with knives.

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614 My husband laughs at me
615 Because I cannot dance white men's dances;
616 He despises Acoli dances
617 He nurses stupid ideas
618 That the dances of his People
619 Are sinful,
620 That they are mortal sins.

621 I am completely ignorant
622 Of the dances of foreigners
623 And I do not like it.
624 Holding each other
625 Tightly, tightly
626 In public,
627 I cannot.
628 I am ashamed.
629 Dancing without a song
630 Dancing silently like wizards,
631 Without respect, drunk ...

632 If someone tries
633 To force me to dance this dance
634 I feel like hanging myself
635 Feet first!

636 I wish I could become
637 A meteorite
638 And I would know
639 Where to fall!

640 I was made chief of girls
641 Because I was lively,
642 I was bright,
643 I was not clumsy or untidy
644 I was not dull,
645 I was not heavy and slow.

646 I did not grow up a fool
647 I am not cold
648 I am not shy
649 My skin is smooth
650 It still shines smoothly in the moonlight.

651 When Ocol was wooing me
652 My breasts were erect.
653 And they shook
654 As I walked briskly,
655 And as I walked
656 I threw my long neck
657 This way and that way
658 Like the flower of the *lyonno* lily
659 Waving in a gentle breeze.

660 And my brothers called me *Nya-Dyang*
661 For my breasts shook

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662 And beckoned the cattle,
663 And they sang silently:

664 *Father prepare the kraal ,*
665 *Father prepare the kraal ,*
666 *The cattle are coming .*

667 I was the Leader of the girls
668 And my name blew
669 Like a horn
670 Among the Payira.
671 And I played on my bow harp
672 And praised my love.

673 Ocol, my husband,
674 My friend,

675 What are you talking?
676 You saw me when I was young.
677 In my mother's house
678 This man crawled on the floor!
679 The son of the Bull wept
680 For me with tears,
681 Like a hungry child
682 Whose mother has stayed long
683 In the simsim field!

684 Every night he came
685 To my father's homestead,
686 He never missed one night
687 Even after he had been beaten
688 By my brothers.

689 You loved my giraffe-tail bangles,
690 My father bought them for me
691 From the Hills in the East.

692 The roof of my mother's house
693 Was beautifully laced
694 With elephant grass;
695 My father built it
696 With the skill of the Acoli.

697 You admired my sister's
698 Colourful ten-stringed lion beads;
699 My mother threaded them
700 And arranged them with care.

701 You trembled
702 When you saw the tattoos
703 On my breasts
704 And the tattoos below my belly button;
705 And you were very fond
706 Of the gap in my teeth!
707 My man, what are you talking?
708 My clansmen, I ask you:
709 What has become of my husband?
710 Is he suffering from boils?
711 Is it ripe now?
712 Should they open it
713 So that the pus may flow out?

714 I was chief of youths
715 Because of my good manners,
716 Because my waist was soft.
717 I sang sweetly
718 When I was grinding millet
719 Or on the way to the well,
720 Nobody's voice was sweeter than mine!
721 And in the arena
722 I sang the solos
723 Loud and clear
724 Like the *ogilo* bird
725 At sunset.

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726 Now, Ocol says
727 I am a mere dog
728 A puppy,
729 A little puppy
730 Suffering from skin diseases.

731 Ocol says
732 He does not love me any more
733 Because I cannot play the guitar
734 And I do not like their stupid dance,
735 Because I despise the songs
736 They play at the ballroom dance
737 And I do not follow the steps of foreign songs
738 On the gramophone records.
739 And I cannot tune the radio
740 Because I do not hear
741 Swahili or Luganda.

742 What is all this?

743 My husband refuses
744 To listen to me,
745 He refuses to give me a chance.
746 My husband has blocked up my path completely.

747 He has put up a road block
748 But has not told me why.
749 He just shouts
750 Like house-flies
751 Settling on top of excrement
752 When disturbed!

753 My husband says
754 He no longer wants a woman
755 With a gap in her teeth,
756 He is in love
757 With a woman
758 Whose teeth fill her mouth completely
759 Like the teeth of war-captives and slaves.

760 Like beggars
761 You take up white men's adornments,
762 Like slaves or war captives
763 You take up white men's ways.
764 Didn't the Acoli have adornments?
765 Didn't Black People have their ways?

766 Like drunken men
767 You stagger to white men's games,
768 You stagger to white men's amusements.

769 Is *lawala* not a game?
770 Is *cooro*³ not a game?
771 Didn't your people have amusements?
772 Like halfwits
773 You turn to white men's dances,
774 You turn to musical instruments of foreigners

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775 As if you have no dances;
776 As if you have no instruments!

777 And you cannot sing one song
778 You cannot sing a solo
779 In the arena.
780 You cannot beat rhythm on the half-gourd

781 Or shake the rattle-gourd
782 To the rhythm of the *orak* dance!
783 And there is not a single *bwola* song
784 That you can dance,
785 You do not play the drum
786 Or do the mock-fight;
787 At the funeral dance
788 Or at the war dance
789 You cannot wield the shield!

790 And so you turn
791 To the dances of white people,
792 Ignorance and shame provoke you
793 To turn to foreign things!

794 Perhaps you are covering up
795 Your bony hips and chest
796 And the large scar on your thigh
797 And the scabies on your buttocks;

798 You are hiding
799 Under the blanket suit
800 Your sick stomach
801 That has swollen up
802 Like that of a pregnant goat.

803 And the dark glasses
804 Shield the rotting skin around your eyes
805 From the house-flies,
806 And cover up
807 The husks of the exploded eye balls.

5

The Graceful Giraffe Cannot Become a Monkey

808 My husband tells me
809 I have no ideas
810 Of modern beauty.
811 He says
812 I have stuck
813 To old fashioned hair styles.
814 He says
815 I am stupid and very backward,
816 That my hair style

817 Makes him sick
818 Because I am dirty.

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819 It is true
820 I cannot do my hair
821 As white women do.

822 Listen,
823 My father comes from Payira,
824 My mother is a woman of Koc!
825 I am a true Acoli
826 I am not a half-caste
827 I am not a slave girl;
828 My father was not brought home
829 Be the spear
830 My mother was not exchanged
831 For a basket of millet.

832 Ask me what beauty is
833 To the Acoli
834 And I will tell you;
835 I will show it to you
836 If you give me a chance!

837 You once saw me,
838 You saw my hair style
839 And you admired it,
840 And the boys loved it.
841 At the arena
842 Boys surrounded me
843 And fought for me.

844 My mother taught me
845 Acoli hair fashions;
846 Which fits the kind
847 Of hair of the Acoli,
848 And the occasion.

849 Listen,
850 Ostrich plumes differ
851 From chicken feathers,
852 A monkey's tail

853 Is different from that of the giraffe,
854 The crocodile's skin
855 Is not like the guinea fowl's,
856 And the hippo is naked, and hairless.

857 The hair of the Acoli
858 Is different from that of the Arabs;
859 The Indians' hair
860 Resembles the tail of the horse;
861 It is like sisal strings
862 And needs to be cut
863 With scissors.
864 It is black,
865 And is different from that of white women.

866 A white woman's hair
867 Is soft like silk;
868 It is light
869 And brownish like
870 That of the brown monkey,
871 And is very different from mine.
872 A black woman's hair
873 Is thick and curly;
874 It is true
875 Ring-worm sometimes eats up
876 A little girl's hair
877 And this is terrible;
878 But when hot porridge
879 Is put on the head
880 And the dance is held
881 Under the sausage-fruit tree
882 And the youths have sung

883 *You, Ring-worm ,*

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884 *Who is eating Duka's hair*
885 *Here is your porridge ,*

886 Then the girl's hair
887 Begins to grow again
888 And the girl is pleased.

889 No-one, except wizards
890 And women who poison others
891 Leaves her hair untrimmed!
892 And the men
893 Do not leave their chins
894 To grow bushy
895 Like the lion's neck,
896 Like the chin
897 Of a billy goat,
898 So that they look
899 Like wild beasts.
900 They put hot ash
901 On the hair
902 Below the belly button
903 And pluck it up,
904 And they pluck the hair on their face
905 And the hair of the armpits.

906 When death has occurred
907 Women leave their hair uncombed!
908 They remove all beads
909 And necklaces,
910 Because they are mourning
911 Because of sorrows.
912 The woman who adorns herself
913 When others are wailing
914 Is the killer!
915 She comes to the funeral
916 To congratulate herself.

917 When you go to dance
918 You adorn yourself for the dance,
919 If your string-skirt
920 Is ochre-red
921 You do your hair
922 With ochre,
923 And you smear your body
924 With red oil
925 And you are beautifully red all over!
926 If you put on a black string-skirt
927 You do your hair with *akuku*
928 Your body shines with simsim oil
929 And the tattoos on your chest
930 And on your back
931 Glitter in the evening sun.

932 And the healthy sweat
933 On your bosom
934 Is like the glassy fruits of *ocuga* .

935 Young girls
936 Whose breasts are just emerging
937 Smear *shea* butter on their bodies,
938 The beautiful oil from Labworomor.

939 The aroma is wonderful
940 And their white teeth sparkle
941 As they sing
942 And dance fast
943 Among the dancers
944 Like small fish
945 In a shallow stream.

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946 Butter from cows' milk
947 Or the fat from edible rats
948 Is cooked together with *lakura*
949 Or *atika* ;
950 You smear it on your body today
951 And the aroma
952 Lasts until the next day.

953 And when you balance on your head
954 A beautiful water pot
955 Or a new basket
956 Or a long-necked jar
957 Full of honey,
958 Your long neck
959 Resembles the *alwiri* spear.

960 And as you walk along the pathway
961 On both sides
962 The *obiya* grasses are flowering
963 And the *pollok* blossoms
964 And the wild white lilies
965 Are shouting silently
966 To the bees and butterflies!

967 And as the fragrance
968 Of the ripe wild berries
969 Hooks the insects and little birds,
970 As the fishermen hook the fish
971 And pull them up mercilessly,

972 The young men
973 From the surrounding villages,
974 And from across many streams,
975 They come from beyond the hills
976 And the wide plains,
977 They surround you
978 And bite off their ears
979 Like jackals.

980 And when you go
981 To the well
982 Or into the freshly burnt woodlands
983 To collect the red *oceyu* ,
984 Or to cut *oduggu* shrubs,
985 You find them
986 Lurking in the shades
987 Like the leopardess with cubs.

988 Ocol tells me
989 That I like dirt.
990 He says
991 *Shea* butter causes
992 Skin diseases.

993 He says, Acoli adornments
994 Are old fashioned and unhealthy.
995 He says I soil his white shirt
996 If I touch him,
997 My husband treats me
998 As if I am suffering from
999 The 'Don't touch me' disease!

1000 He says that I make his bed- sheets dirty
1001 And his bed smelly.
1002 Ocol says
1003 I look extremely ugly

1004 When I am fully adorned
1005 For the dance!

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1006 When I walk past my husband
1007 He hisses like a wounded *ororo* snake
1008 Choking with vengeance.
1009 He has vowed
1010 That he will never touch
1011 My hands again.
1012 My husband
1013 Is in love with Tina
1014 The woman with the large head;
1015 Ocol dies for Clementine
1016 Ocol never sleeps
1017 For the beautiful one
1018 Who has read!

1019 When the beautiful one
1020 With whom I share my husband
1021 Returns from cooking her hair
1022 She resembles
1023 A chicken
1024 That has fallen into a pond;
1025 Her hair looks
1026 Like the python's discarded skin.

1027 They cook their hair
1028 With hot iron
1029 And pull it hard
1030 So that it may grow long.
1031 Then they rope the hair
1032 On wooden pens
1033 Like a billy goat
1034 Brought for the sacrifice
1035 Struggling to free itself.

1036 They fry their hair
1037 In boiling oil
1038 As if it were locusts,
1039 And the hair sizzles
1040 It cries aloud in sharp pain
1041 As it is pulled and stretched.
1042 And the vigorous and healthy hair

1043 Curly, springy and thick
1044 That glistens in the sunshine
1045 Is left listless and dead
1046 Like the elephant grass
1047 Scorched brown by the fierce
1048 February sun.
1049 It lies lifeless
1050 Like the sad and dying banana leaves
1051 On a hot and windless afternoon.

1052 The beautiful woman
1053 With whom I share my husband
1054 Smears black shoe polish
1055 On her hair
1056 To blacken it
1057 And to make it shine,
1058 She washes her hair
1059 With black ink;

1060 But the thick undergrowth
1061 Rejects the shoe polish
1062 And the ink
1063 And it remains untouched
1064 Yellowish, greyish
1065 Like the hair of the grey monkey.

1066 There is much water
1067 In my husband's house
1068 Cold water and hot water.
1069 You twist a cross-like handle
1070 And water gushes out

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1071 Hot and steaming
1072 Like the urine
1073 Of the elephant.

1074 You twist another cross-like handle;
1075 It is cold water,
1076 Clean like the cooling fresh waters
1077 From the streams

1078 Of Lututuru hills.

1079 But the woman
1080 With whom I share my husband
1081 Does not wash her head;
1082 The head of the beautiful one
1083 Smells like rats
1084 That have fallen into the fireplace.

1085 And she uses
1086 Powerful perfumes
1087 To overcome the strange smells,
1088 As they treat a pregnant coffin!
1089 And the different smells
1090 Wrestle with one another
1091 And the smell of the shoe polish
1092 Mingles with them.

1093 Clementine has many headkerchiefs,
1094 Beautiful headkerchiefs of many colours.
1095 She ties one on her head
1096 And it covers up
1097 The rot inside;

1098 She ties the knot
1099 On her forehead
1100 And arranges the edges
1101 With much care
1102 So that it covers
1103 Her ears
1104 As well as the bold forehead
1105 That jumps sparks
1106 When lightning has splashed,
1107 And hurls back sunlight
1108 More powerfully than a mirror!

1109 Sometimes she wears
1110 The hair of some dead woman
1111 Of some white woman
1112 Who died long ago
1113 And she goes with it
1114 To the dance!
1115 What witchcraft!

1116 Shamelessly, she dances
1117 Holding the shoulder of my husband,
1118 The hair of a dead woman
1119 On her head
1120 The body of the dead woman
1121 Decaying in the tomb!

1122 One night
1123 The ghost of the dead woman
1124 Pulled away her hair
1125 From the head of the wizard

1126 And the beautiful one
1127 Fell down
1128 And shook with shame
1129 She shook
1130 As if the angry ghost
1131 Of the white woman
1132 Had entered her head.

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1133 Ocol, my friend
1134 Look at my skin
1135 It is smooth and black.
1136 And my boy friend
1137 Who plays the *nanga*
1138 Sings praises to it.

1139 I am proud of the hair
1140 With which I was born
1141 And as no white woman
1142 Wishes to do her hair
1143 Like mine,
1144 Because she is proud
1145 Of the hair with which she was born,
1146 I have no wish
1147 To look like a white woman.

1148 No leopard
1149 Would change into a hyena,

1150 And the crested crane
1151 Would hate to be changed
1152 Into the bold-headed,
1153 Dung-eating vulture,
1154 The long-necked and graceful giraffe
1155 Cannot become a monkey.

1156 Let no one
1157 Uproot the Pumpkin.

6

The Mother Stone Has a Hollow Stomach

1158 My husband says
1159 He rejects me
1160 Because I do not appreciate
1161 White men's foods,
1162 And that I do not know
1163 How to hold
1164 The spoon and the fork.

1165 He is angry with me
1166 Because I do not know
1167 How to cook
1168 As white women do
1169 And I refuse
1170 To eat chicken
1171 And to drink raw eggs
1172 As white women do

1173 He says
1174 He is ashamed of me
1175 Because when he opens
1176 The tin of lobster
1177 I feel terribly sick,
1178 Or when he relates
1179 How, when he was in the white men's country
1180 They ate frogs and shells
1181 And tortoise and snakes
1182 My stomach rebels

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1183 And throws its contents out

1184 Through my mouth.

1185 He complains endlessly,
1186 He says
1187 Has I been to school
1188 I would have learnt
1189 How to use
1190 White men's cooking stoves.

1191 I confess,
1192 I do not deny!
1193 I do not know
1194 How to cook like a white woman.

1195 I cannot use the primus stove
1196 I do not know
1197 How to light it,
1198 And when it gets blocked
1199 How can I prick it?
1200 The thing roars
1201 Like a male lion,
1202 It frightens me!

1203 They say
1204 It once burst
1205 And the flame burnt
1206 A goat to death!

1207 I really hate
1208 The charcoal stove!
1209 Your hand is always
1210 Charcoal-dirty
1211 And anything you touch
1212 Is blackened;
1213 And your finger nails
1214 Resemble those of the poison woman.
1215 It is so difficult to start:

1216 You wait for the winds
1217 To blow,
1218 But whenever you are in a hurry
1219 The winds go off to visit
1220 Their mothers-in-law.

1221 The electric fire kills people.
1222 They say
1223 It is lightning,
1224 They say
1225 The white man has trapped
1226 And caught the Rain-Cock ⁴
1227 And imprisoned it
1228 In a heavy steel house.

1229 The wonders of the white men
1230 Are many!
1231 They leave me speechless!

1232 They say
1233 When the Rain-Cock
1234 Opens its wings
1235 The blinding light
1236 And the deadly fire
1237 Flow through the wires
1238 And lighten the streets
1239 And the houses;
1240 And the fire
1241 Goes into the electric stove.

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1242 If you touch it
1243 It runs through you
1244 And cuts the heart string
1245 As they cut the umbilical cord,
1246 And you stand there, dead,
1247 A standing corpse!

1248 I am terribly afraid
1249 Of the electric stove,
1250 And I do not like using it
1251 Because you stand up
1252 When you cook.
1253 Who ever cooked standing up?
1254 And the stove
1255 Has many eyes.
1256 I do not know
1257 Which eye to prick
1258 So that the stove

1259 May vomit fire
1260 And I cannot tell
1261 Which eye to prick
1262 So that fire is vomited
1263 In one and not in another plate.

1264 And I am afraid
1265 That I may touch
1266 The deadly tongue
1267 Of the Rain-Cock.

1268 O! I do not like
1269 Using the electric stove,
1270 I cannot cook anything well
1271 When you give me
1272 The Rain-Cock stove.

1273 The white man's stoves
1274 Are good for cooking
1275 White men's food:
1276 For cooking the tasteless
1277 Bloodless meat of cows
1278 That were killed many years ago
1279 And left in the ice
1280 To rot!
1281 For frying an egg
1282 Which when ready
1283 Is slimy like mucus,

1284 For boiling hairy chicken
1285 In saltless water.
1286 You think you are chewing paper!
1287 And the bones of the leg
1288 Contain only clotted blood
1289 And when you bite
1290 It makes no crackling sound,
1291 It tastes like earth!

1292 The white man's stoves
1293 Are for boiling cabbages
1294 And for baking the light spongy thing
1295 They call bread.

1296 They are for warming up
1297 Tinned beef, tinned fish,
1298 Tinned frogs, tinned snakes,
1299 Tinned peas, tinned beans,
1300 Big broad beans
1301 Tasteless like the *cooro* !

1302 They are for preparing
1303 Foods for the toothless,
1304 For infants and invalids.
1305 It is for making tea or coffee!

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1306 You use the saucepan
1307 And the frying pan
1308 And other flat-bottomed things,
1309 Because the stoves are flat
1310 Like the face of the drum.

1311 The earthen vegetable pot
1312 Cannot sit on it,
1313 There are no stones
1314 On which to place
1315 The pot for making millet bread.

1316 Come, brother,
1317 Come into my mother's house!
1318 Pause a bit by the door,
1319 Let me show you
1320 My mother's house.

1321 Look,
1322 Straight before you
1323 Is the central pole.
1324 That shiny stool
1325 At the foot of the pole
1326 Is my father's revered stool.

1327 Further on
1328 The rows of pots
1329 Placed one on top of the other
1330 Are the stores
1331 And cupboards.
1332 Millet flour, dried carcasses
1333 Of various animals,
1334 Beans, peas,
1335 Fish, dried cucumber ...

1336 Look up to the roof,
1337 You see the hangings?
1338 The string nets
1339 Are called *cel* .
1340 The beautiful long-necked jar
1341 On your left
1342 Is full of honey.
1343 That earthen dish
1344 Contains simsim paste;
1345 And that grass pocket
1346 Just above the fireplace
1347 Contains dried white ants.

1348 Here on your left
1349 Are the grinding stones:
1350 The big one
1351 Ashen and dusty
1352 And her daughter
1353 Sitting in her belly
1354 Are the destroyers of millet
1355 Mixed with cassava
1356 And sorghum.

1357 The mother stone
1358 Has a hollow stomach,
1359 A strange woman
1360 She never gets pregnant;
1361 And her daughter
1362 Never gets fatter
1363 She gets smaller and smaller
1364 Until she is finished.

1365 Do you know
1366 Why the knees
1367 Of millet-eaters

1368 Are tough?
1369 Tougher than the knees
1370 Of the people who drink bananas!
1371 Where do you think

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1372 The stone powder
1373 From the grinding stone goes?

1374 On this stone
1375 They also grind
1376 Dried beans and peas.
1377 The sister stone,
1378 The smaller one,
1379 Clean and beautifully oiled
1380 Like a girl
1381 Ready for the *jok* dance,
1382 Is the simsim grinding stone.

1383 And when my sister
1384 Is grinding simsim
1385 Mixed with groundnuts
1386 And I am grinding
1387 Millet mixed with sorghum
1388 You hear the song of the stones
1389 You hear the song of the grains
1390 And the seeds
1391 And above all these
1392 The beautiful duet
1393 By Lawino and her sister.

1394 O how I miss my sister
1395 And how I miss the singing
1396 While grinding millet in my mother's house!

1397 On your left
1398 Above the grinding stone
1399 Stacked right to the roof
1400 Is the firewood.
1401 If you ask me
1402 About firewood
1403 I can describe them to you in detail
1404 I know their names
1405 And their leaves

1406 And seeds and barks.

1407 *Oywelo* and *lucoro* and kituba
1408 Are no use as firewood,
1409 They burn like paper
1410 They are like pawpaw
1411 Their fires are cold
1412 Like the firefly's fire.

1413 *Labwori* is alright
1414 If it is perfectly dry.
1415 But if it is still green
1416 The smoke it produces
1417 Is like a spear!
1418 It is useful for
1419 Chasing men from the hut
1420 Men who sit too close
1421 To the cooking place
1422 Their eyes fixed into the pot!
1423 *Odure*⁵ who does not
1424 Listen when others sing

1425 *Odure, come out*
1426 *From the kitchen .*
1427 *Fire from the stove*
1428 *Will burn your penis!*

1429 *Opok* is easy
1430 To split with the axe;
1431 *Yaa* burns gently
1432 It burns like oil;
1433 *Poi* is no use for firewood,

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1434 It is rock;
1435 It is useful only
1436 As a walking staff
1437 For the aged.

1438 On the far right

1439 Is the cooking place.
1440 The fireplace in my mother's house
1441 Is dug into the earth.
1442 The wife of my mother's brother
1443 Has the Lango type,
1444 Three mounds of clay
1445 Shaped like youthful breasts full of milk
1446 Stand together like
1447 Three loving sisters.

1448 I do not know
1449 How to use foreign stoves,
1450 My mother taught me
1451 Cooking on the Acoli stove
1452 And when I visited
1453 My mother's brother
1454 I cooked meals
1455 On the Lango stove.

1456 In my mother's house
1457 There are no plates:
1458 We use the half-gourd
1459 And the earthen dishes.
1460 The white man's plates
1461 Look beautiful
1462 But you put millet bread in it
1463 And cover it up
1464 For a few minutes---
1465 The plate is sweating
1466 And soon the bottom
1467 Of the bread is wet
1468 And the whole loaf cold.

1469 A loaf in a half-gourd
1470 Returns its heat
1471 And does not become wet
1472 In the bottom;
1473 And the earthen dish
1474 Keeps the gravy hot
1475 And the meat steaming;
1476 And when your husband
1477 Has returned from a hunt
1478 Or from a long day's journey
1479 Give him hot porridge

1480 In a half-gourd.

1481 And when I have
1482 Been in the garden a whole day
1483 Weeding or harvesting in the hot sun,
1484 On my return home
1485 Give me water
1486 In a large half-gourd
1487 Water from the glass
1488 Is no use.
1489 It reaches nowhere.

1490 In my mother's house
1491 We eat sitting on the earth
1492 And not on trees
1493 Like monkeys;
1494 The young men
1495 Sit cross legged
1496 And a girl sits carefully

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1497 On one leg.
1498 Father alone sits on the stool.
1499 We all sit on skins
1500 Or papyrus mats
1501 On the earth.
1502 The knives in my mother's house
1503 Are for harvesting
1504 Or for cutting up the meat
1505 Before it is cooked:
1506 But not for cutting millet bread.

1507 We wash our hands clean
1508 And attack the loaf
1509 From all sides.
1510 You mould a spoon
1511 And dip it in the gravy
1512 And eat it up.

1513 And you use your right hand
1514 Even if you are left-handed:

1515 This is good manners.
1516 Only rude fellows
1517 Use their left hands
1518 For breaking millet bread.

1519 I do not know
1520 How to cook
1521 Like white women;
1522 I do not enjoy
1523 White men's foods;
1524 And how they eat---
1525 How could I know?
1526 And why should I know it?

1527 White men's stoves
1528 Are for cooking
1529 White men's foods.
1530 They are not suitable
1531 For cooking
1532 Acoli foods
1533 And I am afraid of them.

1534 Ocol says
1535 Black people's foods are primitive,
1536 But what is backward about them?
1537 He says
1538 Black people's foods are dirty;
1539 He means,
1540 Some clumsy and dirty black women
1541 Prepare food clumsily
1542 And put them
1543 In dirty containers.

1544 He insists
1545 I must eat raw eggs
1546 Smelly, slimy yellow stuff.
1547 He says
1548 It is good for me!
1549 He says
1550 There is something in eggs
1551 Which is good for the bones

1552 But my bones are strong,
1553 I can dance all night long
1554 Listen to the song

1555 They sang about me:

1556 *The beautiful one*
1557 *Dances all night long*
1558 *Alyeker prevents me sleeping .*
1559 *I wait on the pathway*
1560 *She refuses to come to me*
1561 *The beautiful one*
1562 *Dances all night long .*

1563 What is the good thing in eggs?

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1564 Can it not be found
1565 In other foods?
1566 My husband,
1567 I do not complain
1568 That you eat
1569 White men's foods.
1570 If you enjoy them
1571 Go ahead!
1572 Shall we just agree
1573 To have freedom
1574 To eat what one likes?

7

There is No Fixed Time for Breast Feeding

1575 My husband is angry
1576 Because, he says,
1577 I cannot keep time
1578 And I do not know
1579 How to count the years;

1580 He asks me
1581 How many days
1582 There are in a year,
1583 And how many weeks
1584 In four moons;
1585 But I cannot answer:
1586 The number of moons
1587 In nine weeks
1588 I cannot say!

1589 How can I tell?

1590 Ocol has brought home

1591 A large clock

1592 It goes tock-tock-tock-tock

1593 And it rings a bell.

1594 He winds it first

1595 And then it goes!

1596 But I have never touched it.

1597 I am afraid of winding it!

1598 I wonder what causes

1599 The noise inside it!

1600 And what makes it go!

1601 On the face of the clock

1602 There are writings

1603 And it's large single testicle

1604 Dangles below.

1605 It goes this way and that way

1606 Like a sausage-fruit

1607 In a windy storm.

1608 I do not know

1609 How to tell the time

1610 Because I cannot read

1611 The figures.

1612 To me the clock

1613 Is a great source of pride

1614 It is beautiful to see

1615 And when visitors come

1616 They are highly impressed!

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1617 And Ocol has strange ways

1618 Of saying what the time is.

1619 In the morning

1620 When the sun is sweet to bask in

1621 He says

1622 'It is Eight o'clock!'

1623 When the cock crows

1624 For the first time
1625 He says
1626 'It is Five!'
1627 Towards the middle of the night,
1628 When wizards are getting ready,
1629 Ocol says
1630 'It is Eleven!'
1631 And after sunset
1632 'It is Seven'.

1633 My head gets puzzled,
1634 Things look upside-down
1635 As if I have been
1636 Turning round and round
1637 And I am dizzy.

1638 If my husband insists
1639 What exact time
1640 He should have morning tea
1641 And breakfast,
1642 When exactly to have coffee
1643 And the exact time
1644 For taking the family photograph---
1645 Lunch-time, tea time,
1646 And supper time---
1647 I must first look at the sun,
1648 The cock must crow
1649 To remind me.

1650 In our village
1651 When someone is going
1652 On a long journey,
1653 When there is a hunt
1654 Or communal hoeing
1655 People wake up early,
1656 When the horizon in the East
1657 Is aflame
1658 And in the West
1659 The Buffalo Star is ripe
1660 Like a yellow and sweet mango
1661 About to fall to the earth.

1662 No one moves at midnight
1663 Except wizards covered in ashes

1664 Dancing stark naked
1665 Armed with disembowelled frogs
1666 And dead lizards:

1667 Or young thieves
1668 Looking for other men's daughters,
1669 They travel fearless
1670 Through the fiends
1671 That sow small-pox
1672 In the countryside;

1673 They split the darkness
1674 With their bare chests
1675 They smell out their loves
1676 Through the thick dew!

1677 When the sun has grown up
1678 And the poisoned tips
1679 Of its arrows painfully bite
1680 The backs of the men hoeing
1681 And of the women weeding or harvesting.
1682 This is when

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1683 When the sun has grown up
1684 And the poisoned tips
1685 Of its arrows painfully bite
1686 The backs of the men hoeing
1687 And of the women weeding or harvesting

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1688 You take drinking water
1689 To the workers.

1690 Food is taken to the fields
1691 When the men are exhausted.
1692 They crack the bones of chicken
1693 And eat much peas and beans
1694 And heaps of millet bread
1695 As big as elephant dung.

1696 Then they return home
1697 Leaving behind a large field
1698 And house-flies
1699 Fighting over bits of food
1700 And excreta that were thrown away.

1701 When the sun
1702 Has cooled off,
1703 The men and youths
1704 Visit the traps and pits,
1705 They hunt edible rats,
1706 Or hook fish
1707 From the streams.

1708 Others cut wooden dishes
1709 Out of logs
1710 Or make ropes for the cows
1711 Or weave baskets
1712 For the chicken house;
1713 They repair the roofs
1714 Of the granaries
1715 Or make patterns on half-gourds.

1716 You hear the flutes
1717 Of the herdsmen
1718 Bringing the cattle home.
1719 The flute-songs mingle
1720 With the lowing of the bulls.

1721 A man listens
1722 To the roar of his own bull
1723 And shouts praises to it.
1724 But no one praises another's bull,
1725 Not even the bull of his brother.

1726 The young boys
1727 Who tend the goats
1728 Take turns to make
1729 The outdoor fire.

1730 The fortunate mother
1731 Of a good daughter
1732 Sits outside her hut,
1733 Her back turned to
1734 The outdoor fire,
1735 Her legs fully stretched
1736 And she congratulates herself.

1737 But if your daughter
1738 Has no manners
1739 If she is so loose
1740 That men sleep with her
1741 Even in the grass,
1742 Then, even if you are ill
1743 You must go to the well
1744 To draw water
1745 And the *nanga* players
1746 Will sing you a song:

1747 *The mother of the beautiful girl*
1748 *Dies on the way to the well*
1749 *As if she has no daughter*
1750 *Her girl has no manners*
1751 *What is to be done?*
1752 *The mother of the girl*

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1753 *Dies on the grinding stone*
1754 *In the bush to collect firewood!*

1755 At the *orak* dance
1756 A good girl
1757 Whose mother is blind
1758 Dances vigorously
1759 And glances at the sun,
1760 She returns home
1761 Before sunset.
1762 A good daughter
1763 Releases her mother
1764 She sits around the evening fire
1765 And tells folk tales
1766 To her younger ones.

1767 My husband says
1768 I am useless
1769 Because I waste time,
1770 He quarrels
1771 Because, he says,
1772 I am never punctual.
1773 He says
1774 He has no time to waste.
1775 He tells me
1776 Time is money.

1777 Ocol does not chat
1778 With me,
1779 He never jokes
1780 With anybody,
1781 He says
1782 He has no time
1783 To sit around the evening fire.

1784 When my husband
1785 Is reading a new book
1786 Or when he is
1787 Sitting in his sofa,
1788 His face covered up
1789 Completely with the big newspaper
1790 So that he looks
1791 Like a corpse,
1792 Like a lone corpse
1793 In the tomb,

1794 He is so silent!
1795 His mouth begins
1796 To decay!

1797 If a child cries
1798 Or has a cough
1799 Ocol storms like a buffalo,
1800 He throws things
1801 At the child;
1802 He says
1803 He does not want
1804 To hear noises,
1805 That children's cries
1806 And coughs disturb him!

1807 Is this not the talk
1808 Of a witch?
1809 What music is sweeter
1810 Than the cries of children?

1811 A homestead in which
1812 The cries of children
1813 Are not heard,
1814 Where the short little songs
1815 Are not repeated endlessly,
1816 Where the brief sobs
1817 And brotherly accusations
1818 And false denials
1819 Are not heard!

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1820 A homestead where
1821 Children's excreta is not
1822 Scattered all over the swept compound
1823 And around the granaries,

1824 Where all the pots and earthen dishes
1825 Are safe
1826 Because there are no
1827 Silly ones to break them.
1828 No clumsy hands
1829 Trying hard to please mother
1830 And breaking half-gourds,

1831 Who but a witch
1832 Would like to live
1833 In a homestead
1834 Where all the grown-ups
1835 Are so clean after the rains,
1836 Because there are no
1837 Muddy fat kids
1838 To fall on their bosoms
1839 After dancing in the rains
1840 And playing in the mud?

1841 At the lineage shrine

1842 The prayers are for child birth!
1843 At the *ogodo* dance
1844 The woman who struts
1845 And dances proudly,
1846 That is the mother of many,
1847 That is the fortunate one;
1848 And she dances
1849 And looks at her own shadow.

1850 Time has become
1851 My husband's master
1852 It is my husband's husband.
1853 My husband runs from place to place
1854 Like a small boy,
1855 He rushes without dignity.

1856 And when visitors have arrived
1857 My husband's face darkens,
1858 He never asks you in,
1859 And for greeting
1860 He says
1861 'What can I do for you?'

1862 I do not know
1863 How to keep the white man's time.
1864 My mother taught me
1865 The way of the Acoli
1866 And nobody should
1867 Shout at me
1868 Because I know
1869 The customs of our people!
1870 When the baby cries
1871 Let him suck milk
1872 From the breast.
1873 There is no fixed time
1874 For breast feeding.

1875 When the baby cries
1876 It may be he is ill;
1877 The first medicine for a child

1878 Is the breast.
1879 Give him milk
1880 And he will stop crying,
1881 And if he is ill
1882 Let him suck the breast

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1883 While the medicine-man
1884 Is being called
1885 From the beer party.

1886 Children in our homestead
1887 Do not sleep at fixed times:
1888 When sleep comes
1889 Into their head
1890 They sleep,
1891 When sleep leaves their head
1892 They wake up.

1893 When a child is dirty
1894 Give him a wash,
1895 You do not first look at the sun!
1896 When there is no water
1897 In the house
1898 You cannot wash the child
1899 Even if it is time
1900 For his bath!
1901 Listen
1902 My husband,
1903 In the wisdom of the Acoli
1904 Time is not stupidly split up
1905 Into seconds and minutes,
1906 It does not flow
1907 Like beer in a pot
1908 That is sucked
1909 Until it is finished.

1910 It does not resemble
1911 A loaf of millet bread
1912 Surrounded by hungry youths
1913 From a hunt;
1914 It does not get finished
1915 Like vegetables in the dish.

1916 A lazy youth is rebuked,
1917 A lazy girl is slapped,
1918 A lazy wife is beaten,
1919 A lazy man is laughed at
1920 Not because they waste time
1921 But because they only destroy
1922 And do not produce.

1923 And when famine
1924 Invades your villages
1925 And women take their baskets
1926 To go and beg food
1927 In the next village
1928 Strangers will sleep with them!
1929 They will have your wives
1930 And what can you say?

1931 Ocol laughs at me
1932 Because, he says,
1933 I do not know
1934 The names of the moons,
1935 That I do not know
1936 How many moons in a year
1937 And the number of Sabbaths
1938 In one moon.

1939 The Sabbath is a day
1940 For Christians
1941 When Protestants and Catholics shout
1942 And suffer from headaches.

1943 The Acoli did not
1944 Set aside a special day
1945 For *Jok* ;
1946 When misfortune hits the homestead
1947 The clansmen gather
1948 And offer sacrifices
1949 To the ancestors:

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1950 When the rains
1951 Refuse to come
1952 The Rain-Cock ⁶ prepares a feast.
1953 A goat is speared
1954 In the wilderness
1955 And the elders offer prayers
1956 To *Jok* .

1957 We all know the moon---
1958 It elopes,
1959 Climbs the hill
1960 And falls down;

1961 It lights up the night,
1962 Youths like it,
1963 Wizards hate it,
1964 And hyenas howl
1965 When the moon
1966 Shines into their eyes.

1967 Periodically each woman
1968 Sees the moon,
1969 And when a young girl
1970 Has seen it
1971 For the first time
1972 It is a sign
1973 That the garden is ready
1974 For sowing,
1975 And when the gardener comes
1976 Carrying two bags of live seeds
1977 And a good strong hoe
1978 The rich red soil
1979 Swells with a new life.

1980 Turning your back
1981 To your husband
1982 Is a serious taboo,
1983 But when the baby
1984 Is still toothless froth,
1985 When you see the moon
1986 You turn your back
1987 To your husband.

1988 If you do not resist
1989 The great appetite
1990 Then your child becomes
1991 Sickly and thin
1992 His knees become
1993 Soft like porridge,
1994 He will become pregnant
1995 And the weight of his diseased stomach
1996 Will prevent him
1997 From standing up.

1998 I do not know
1999 The names of the moons
2000 Because the Acoli
2001 Do not name their moons.

2002 During the *Ager* period
2003 Millet is sown,
2004 Just before the rains
2005 And as they sow
2006 They raise much dust.

2007 When the rains return
2008 We say
2009 The rains have fallen
2010 The period is called
2011 *Poto-kot*
2012 Then the millet seeds germinate.

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2013 Sometimes the rains come early
2014 Sometimes they return late.
2015 When the millet
2016 Begins to flower
2017 And the time
2018 For the harvest is approaching
2019 All the granaries are empty:

2020 And hunger begins
2021 To bite peoples' tummies,
2022 This period
2023 Is called *Odunge* ,

2024 Because fierce hunger burns
2025 People's insides
2026 And they drink
2027 Vegetable soups
2028 To deaden the teeth
2029 Of the fire.

2030 And as the millet
2031 Begins to get ready for the harvest,
2032 Some women ask,
2033 Is this not my own garden?
2034 They take their harvest knives
2035 And a small basket,
2036 They cut one head here
2037 And another one there,
2038 And when someone laughs,
2039 They ask,
2040 Whose garden have I spoiled?
2041 So the period
2042 Just before the harvest
2043 Is called
2044 *Abalo-pa-nga?*

2045 The Acoli know
2046 The Wet Season
2047 And the Dry Season.

2048 Wet Season means
2049 Hard work in the fields,
2050 Sowing, weeding, harvesting.
2051 It means waking up before dawn,
2052 It means mud
2053 And thick dew.
2054 Herdboys dislike it.
2055 Lazy people hate it.

2056 Dry Season means pleasures,
2057 It means dancing,
2058 It means hunting
2059 In freshly burnt plains.

2060 You hear *otole* dance drums
2061 And funeral songs,
2062 You hear the horns and trumpets
2063 And the moonlight dance songs
2064 Floating in the air.

2065 Youths in small groups
2066 Go on the *apet* hunting expeditions.
2067 Great hunters stay alone
2068 In the wilderness
2069 Smoking the carcass of the cob
2070 Or the buffalo.

2071 Others go off to Pajule
2072 To look for bridewealth,
2073 For if you have no sister
2074 Then kill an elephant.
2075 You sell the teeth
2076 And marry a wife,
2077 Then you call your son
2078 Ocan, because you are poor!

2079 Dry Season means wooing

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2080 And eloping with girls,
2081 It means the *moko* dance
2082 When youths and girls
2083 Get stuck to one another!

2084 My husband says,
2085 My head is numb and empty
2086 Because, he says,
2087 I cannot tell
2088 When our children were born.

2089 I know that Okang
2090 My first born
2091 Was born at the beginning
2092 Of the Dry Season
2093 And my little girl
2094 In the middle of the rains.
2095 Okang was born
2096 In the middle of the famine
2097 Called *Abongo-wang-dako* .

2098 They say
2099 One night a man
2100 Was so hungry
2101 He got up
2102 And felt his wife's eyes
2103 To see if she was asleep
2104 So that he might
2105 Inspect the cooking pots.

2106 And Atoo was born
2107 After the smallpox fiends
2108 Had just left the homestead.
2109 The fiends found
2110 Many people with bad hearts
2111 There was much quarrelling
2112 And jealousy among women
2113 And so many people perished.
2114 I lost my father too,
2115 That is why
2116 The little girl was called Atoo.

2117 A person's age
2118 Is seen by looking at him or her.
2119 A girl is grown up
2120 When her breasts have come;
2121 A young man's voice breaks
2122 And hair appears
2123 On his face
2124 And below his belly button.

2125 When a girl sees the moon
2126 She is ripe,
2127 After bearing three children
2128 She begins to wither
2129 And soon she becomes
2130 A mother-in-law.
2131 Then she is deeply respected.

2132 A person's age
2133 Is shown by what he or she does
2134 It depends on what he or she is,
2135 And on what kind of person
2136 He or she is.

2137 You may be a giant
2138 Of a man,
2139 You may begin
2140 To grow grey hair
2141 You may be bold
2142 And toothless with age,
2143 But if you are unmarried
2144 You are nothing.

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2145 Ocol tells me
2146 Things I cannot understand,
2147 He talks
2148 About a certain man,
2149 Jesus.
2150 He says
2151 The man was born
2152 Long ago
2153 In the country of white men.

2154 He says
2155 When Jesus was born
2156 White men began
2157 To count years:
2158 From one, then it became ten.
2159 Then one hundred
2160 Then one thousand
2161 And now it is
2162 One thousand
2163 Nine hundred
2164 And sixty six.

2165 My husband says
2166 Before this man was born
2167 White men counted years backwards.
2168 Starting with the biggest number
2169 Then it became
2170 One thousand
2171 Then one hundred
2172 Then ten,

2173 And when it became one
2174 Then Jesus was born.

2175 I cannot understand all this
2176 I do not understand it at all!

8

I Am Ignorant of the Good Word in the Clean Book

2177 My husband
2178 Looks down upon me;
2179 He says
2180 I am a mere pagan,
2181 I do not know
2182 The way of God.
2183 He says
2184 I am ignorant
2185 Of the good word
2186 In the Clean Book
2187 And I do not have
2188 A Christian name.
2189 Ocol dislikes me
2190 Because, he says,
2191 *Jok* is in my head
2192 And I like visiting
2193 The diviner-priest
2194 Like my mother!

2195 He says
2196 He is ashamed of me
2197 Because when the *Jok*

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2198 In my head
2199 Has been provoked
2200 It throws me down
2201 As if I have fits.

2202 Ocol laughs at me
2203 Because I cannot
2204 Cross myself properly

2205 *In the name of the Father*
2206 *And of the Son*
2207 *And the Clean Ghost*

2208 And I do not understand
2209 The confession,
2210 And I fear
2211 The bushy-faced, fat-bellied padre
2212 Before whom people kneel
2213 When they pray.

2214 I refused to join
2215 The Protestant catechist class,
2216 Because I did not want
2217 To become a house-girl,
2218 I did not want
2219 To become a slave
2220 To a woman with whom
2221 I may share a man.

2222 Oh how young girls
2223 Labour to buy a name!
2224 You break your back
2225 Drawing water
2226 For the wives
2227 Of the teachers,
2228 The skin of your hand
2229 Hardens and peels off
2230 Grinding millet and simsim.
2231 You hoe their fields,
2232 Split firewood,
2233 You cut grass for thatching
2234 And for starting fires,
2235 You smear their floors
2236 With cow dung and black soil
2237 And harvest their crops.

2238 And when they are eating
2239 They send you to play games
2240 To play the board game
2241 Under the mango tree!

2242 And girls gather
2243 Wild sweet potatoes
2244 And eat them raw
2245 As if there is a famine,
2246 And they are so thin
2247 They look like
2248 Cattle that have dysentery!

2249 You work as if
2250 You are a newly eloped girl!
2251 The wives of protestant
2252 Church teachers and priests
2253 Are a happy lot.
2254 They sit with their legs stretched out
2255 And bask in the morning sun.
2256 All they know
2257 Is hatching a lot of children.

2258 My elder sister
2259 Was christened Erina,
2260 She was a Protestant

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2261 But she suffered bitterly
2262 In order to buy the name
2263 And her loin beads
2264 No longer fitted her!

2265 One Sunday
2266 I followed her
2267 Into the Protestant church:
2268 A big man stood
2269 Before the people.
2270 His hand was lifted up,
2271 My sister said
2272 He was blessing the people.
2273 The man had no rosary,
2274 He wore a long black gown
2275 And a wide white robe
2276 He held a little shiny saucer:
2277 It had small pieces of something.
2278 The name of the man

2279 Was Eliya
2280 And he was calling people
2281 To come and eat
2282 Human flesh!
2283 He put little bits
2284 In their hands
2285 And they ate it up!

2286 Then he took a cup,
2287 He said
2288 There was human blood
2289 In the cup
2290 And he gave it
2291 To the people
2292 To drink!

2293 I ran out of the Church,
2294 I was very sick!
2295 O! Protestants eat people!
2296 They are all wizards,
2297 They exhume corpses
2298 For dinner!

2299 I once joined
2300 The Catholic Evening Speakers' Class
2301 But I did not stay long
2302 I ran away,
2303 I ran away from shouting
2304 Meaninglessly in the evenings
2305 Like parrots
2306 Like the crow birds

2307 *Maria the Clean Woman*
2308 *Mother of the Hunchback*⁷
2309 *Pray for us*
2310 *Who spoil things*
2311 *Full of graciya* .

2312 The things they shout
2313 I do not understand,
2314 They shout anyhow
2315 They shout like mad people.

2316 The padre shouts words,
2317 You cannot understand,
2318 And he does not seem
2319 To care in the least
2320 Whether his hearers
2321 Understand him or not;
2322 A strange language they speak
2323 These Christian diviner-priests,
2324 And the white nuns
2325 Think the girls understand

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2326 What they are saying
2327 And are annoyed
2328 When the girls laugh.
2329 One night
2330 The moon was very bright
2331 And in the distance
2332 The 'get-stuck' dance drums
2333 Were throbbing vigorously,

2334 The teacher was very drunk
2335 His eyes were like rotting tomatoes.
2336 We guessed he was teaching
2337 Something about the Clean Ghost.

2338 He shouted words at us
2339 And we shouted back at him,
2340 Agitated and angry
2341 Like the *okwik* birds
2342 Chasing away the kite
2343 From their nest.

2344 He shouted angrily
2345 As if he uttered abuses,
2346 We repeated the same words
2347 Shouting back at him
2348 As when you shout
2349 Insults at somebody's mother!

2350 We repeated the meaningless phrases
2351 Like the yellow birds
2352 In the *lajanawara* grass.

2353 The teacher was an Acoli
2354 But he spoke the same language
2355 As the white priests.
2356 His nose was blocked
2357 And he tried
2358 To force his words
2359 Through his blocked nose.

2360 He sounded like
2361 A loosely strung drum.

2362 The teacher's name
2363 Was Bicenycio Lagucu.
2364 He was very drunk
2365 And he smiled, bemused.

2366 The drums of the 'get-stuck' dance
2367 Thundered in the distance
2368 And the songs came floating
2369 In the air.

2370 The milk
2371 In our ripe breasts boiled,
2372 And little drops of sweat
2373 Appeared on our foreheads,
2374 You think of the pleasures
2375 Of the girls
2376 Dancing before their lovers,

2377 Then you look at the teacher
2378 Barking meaninglessly
2379 Like the yellow monkey.

2380 In the arena
2381 They began to sing my song,
2382 We could hear it faintly
2383 Passing through the air
2384 Like the thin smoke
2385 From an old man's pipe:
2386 *O! Lawino!*
2387 *Come let me see you*
2388 *Daughter of Lenga-moi*

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2389 You think of the pleasures
2390 Of the girls
2391 Dancing before their lovers,
2392 Then you look at the teacher
2393 Barking meaninglessly
2394 Like the yellow monkey.

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2395 *Who has just shot up*
2396 *Young woman come home!*
2397 *O Lawino!*
2398 *Chief of the girls*
2399 *My love come*
2400 *That I may elope with you*
2401 *Daughter of the Bull*
2402 *Come that I may touch you .*

2403 The teacher drummed
2404 His meaningless phrases
2405 Through his blocked nose;
2406 He was getting more drunk.
2407 Thick white froth
2408 Formed around his mouth
2409 As if he had just fallen down
2410 With fits.

2411 *Pray for us*
2412 *Who spoil things*
2413 *Full of graciya*

2414 And when he shouted
2415 The word 'graciya'
2416 (Whatever the word meant)
2417 Saliva squirted from his mouth
2418 And froth flew
2419 Like white ants from his mouth,
2420 The smelly drops
2421 Landed on our faces
2422 Like heavily loaded houseflies
2423 Fresh from a fresh excreta heap!

2424 And when he belched
2425 The smell of the rotting beer
2426 Hit you like a brick,
2427 And when he belched
2428 His mouth filled with hot beer
2429 From his belly
2430 And he noisily swallowed this back.

2431 The collar of the teacher's white shirt
2432 Was black with dirt,
2433 He was sweating profusely
2434 And his cheeks were rough
2435 Like the tongue of the ox.

2436 The comb never touched his head,
2437 His hair resembled the elephant grass,
2438 Tall and wiry
2439 The teacher looked like a witch.

2440 And he endlessly
2441 Drummed his meaningless words
2442 Through his blocked nose,
2443 And we shouted the words back at him,
2444 And the moonlight dance drums
2445 Thundered in the distance.
2446 And the songs came floating
2447 From beyond his hills.
2448 My comrades
2449 Are dancing in the moonlight
2450 And I
2451 Sitting before the ugly man,
2452 Before the man
2453 With the rough skin,
2454 The man
2455 Whose body smells!

2456 The girls are dancing
2457 Before their lovers,
2458 Shaking their waists

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2459 To the rhythm of the drums;

2460 And I
2461 Sitting like stale bread
2462 On the rubbish heap;

2463 My companions are gay
2464 They are dancing
2465 And singing meaningful songs,
2466 In the arena
2467 They are singing
2468 My song;

2469 And the boys
2470 Are whispering sweet words
2471 Into the girls' ears
2472 And our teacher
2473 Is drunk!

2474 Anger welled up inside me
2475 Burning my chest like bile,
2476 I stood up
2477 And two other girls stood up,
2478 We walked out,
2479 Out of that cold hall
2480 With the stone floor.
2481 We ran fast,
2482 Away from the ugly man
2483 Away from the meaningless shouts
2484 Like parrots,
2485 Like the yellow birds
2486 In the *lajanawara* grass.

2487 We crossed the stream
2488 And climbed the gentle rise
2489 Straight into the arena.
2490 We joined the line of friends
2491 And danced among our age- mates
2492 And sang songs we understood,
2493 Relevant and meaningful songs,
2494 Songs about ourselves:

2495 *O father*
2496 *Gather the bridewealth*
2497 *That I may bring a woman home ,*
2498 *O the woman of my bosom*
2499 *The beautiful one*

2500 *Prevents me from sleeping .*
2501 *The woman of my bosom .*

2502 *If anyone troubles my beloved*
2503 *I shall shed tears of blood;*
2504 *The woman of my bosom*
2505 *Prevents me from sleeping .*
2506 *O father ,*
2507 *If I die ,*
2508 *I will become a vengeance ghost ,*
2509 *The woman of my bosom*
2510 *Prevents me from sleeping .*

2511 We danced with vigour
2512 And sweat poured
2513 Down our backs,
2514 Youthful sweat
2515 From healthy bodies.

2516 Let the fool
2517 Continue to deceive himself!
2518 Who has ever prevented
2519 The cattle from the salt lick?

2520 The time when youth should meet youth
2521 Is wasted in shouting things

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2522 No one understands,
2523 Is spent in singing
2524 Meaningless songs
2525 That no one believes in.

2526 The milk in your breast
2527 Boils painfully.
2528 Your breasts must be touched,
2529 Rubbed on the cool chest of your beloved
2530 So that the pricking pains
2531 May be relieved.
2532 The heads of the young men

2533 Reject the pillows
2534 And prefer
2535 The arms of their lovers.

2536 But they lock you up
2537 Inside a cold hall
2538 As if you are sheep,
2539 And they lock up
2540 All the girls
2541 In one cold hall,
2542 And the boys
2543 In another cold hall.

2544 And the young men
2545 Sleep alone
2546 Cold, like knives
2547 Without handles.

2548 And the spears
2549 Of the lone hunters,
2550 The trusted right-hand spears
2551 Of young bulls
2552 Rust in the dewy cold
2553 Of the night.

2554 But look!
2555 Who comes with
2556 The large headed club?

2557 The teacher, still drunk.
2558 He too is coming
2559 To hunt for girls
2560 At the 'get-stuck' dance!
2561 He joined the line of youths
2562 But they pushed him away!
2563 He danced at the edge
2564 Singing properly,
2565 His large owl-head
2566 Moving this way
2567 And that way
2568 To the rhythm of the drums.

2569 Shameless
2570 The ugly man
2571 Whispered something in my ear!
2572 And touched my breast
2573 With the rough palm
2574 Of his bony hand
2575 Cutting it as if with
2576 An old rusty knife.

2577 I spat in his face.

2578 He said
2579 He would dismiss me
2580 From the Evening Speakers' Class,
2581 And if I am so stupid,
2582 I will never get
2583 Anything from the purse
2584 In his trouser pocket.

2585 Don't touch me
2586 You rough-skinned aged thing!

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2587 Who cares for your stupid shoutings
2588 In the evening?
2589 Let go my hand
2590 Syphilis man!
2591 Who can you buy
2592 To spread your death!

2593 And all the teachers
2594 Are alike,
2595 They have sharp eyes
2596 For girls' full breasts;
2597 Even the padrés
2598 Who are not allowed
2599 To marry
2600 Are troubled by health,
2601 Even the fat-stomached
2602 Who cannot see
2603 His belly button

2604 Feels better
2605 When he touches
2606 A girl's breasts,
2607 And those who listen
2608 To the confessions
2609 Peep through the port-hole
2610 And stab the breasts
2611 With their glances.

2612 My husband rejects me
2613 Because, he says
2614 I have no Christian name.

2615 He says
2616 Lawino is not enough.
2617 He says
2618 Acoli names are *Jok* names
2619 And they do not sound good.
2620 They are primitive, he insists,
2621 And he is a progressive man

2622 Ocol wanted me
2623 To be baptized 'Benedeta',
2624 He has christened
2625 One daughter 'Marta'.
2626 The other took
2627 The name of the mother of the Hunchback!

2628 *Maria the Clean Woman*
2629 *Mother of the Hunchback*

2630 His first born son is Jekcon
2631 And the second he calls Paraciko.
2632 One of his illegitimate sons is Tomcon
2633 And the other Gulyelmo Iriko.⁸

2634 My husband rejects Acoli names,
2635 Meaningful names,
2636 Names that I can pronounce.
2637 He says

2638 They are *Jok* names
2639 And he was nothing
2640 To do with *Jok* .

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2641 He says
2642 He has left behind
2643 All sinful things
2644 And all superstitions and fears.
2645 He says
2646 He has no wish
2647 To be associated any more
2648 With the devil.

2649 Pagan names, he says,
2650 Belong to sinners
2651 Who will burn
2652 In everlasting fires:
2653 Ocol insists
2654 He must be called
2655 By his Christian name!

2656 But my husband's name
2657 Is so difficult to pronounce;
2658 It sounds something like
2659 Medikijedeki Gilirigoloyo. ⁹

2660 It sounds to me like
2661 'Give the people more vegetables,
2662 Foxes make holes in the pathway',

2663 It sound like a praise name
2664 Uttered by a stammerer!
2665 What is the meaning of 'Marta'?
2666 Gulyelmo, Iriko, Jekcon,
2667 Are these names of ancestors?

2668 My Bull name is Eliya Alyeker,
2669 I ate the name

2670 Of the Chief of Payira,
2671 Eliya Alier,
2672 Son of Awic.

2673 Bull names are given
2674 To Chiefs of girls
2675 Because like bulls
2676 They lead their age-mates,
2677 Like the full moon at night
2678 They dominate the stars.

2679 They are names
2680 Of great chiefs
2681 And great men of war.

2682 Is 'Benedeta' a Bull name?
2683 Is 'Maria' a Bull name
2684 In the white man's country?

2685 Apiyo and Acen
2686 Are *Jok* names
2687 Twins are Joks,
2688 And are deeply respected.
2689 Akelo is the one
2690 Who comes after twins,
2691 Ajok and Ajara
2692 Grow extra fingers or toes,
2693 Adoc comes out
2694 Of the belly feet first.

2695 All these are *Jok*
2696 And they are feared and respected.
2697 When a girl is called Adong
2698 Her father died
2699 Just before she was born.

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2700 Akot does not mean
2701 'Born in the rains',
2702 But 'afterbirth
2703 Contained bubbles of water',
2704 And this is a sign of rain.

2705 The daughter of
2706 A woman with a black heart
2707 Who kills people with poisons
2708 Is called Akwir or Anek.

2709 Some names are names of sorrows.
2710 Aloba, Abur, Ayiko, Woko
2711 That Fate has thrown
2712 A large basket
2713 To be filled
2714 With dead children

2715 *Fate has brought troubles*
2716 *Son of my mother*
2717 *Fate has thrown me a basket ,*
2718 *It all began as a joke*
2719 *Suffering is painful*
2720 *It began before I was born .*

2721 My father's name
2722 Is Otoo Lenga-moi,
2723 He ate the title Lenga-moi
2724 In the battle in the Hills.
2725 Ocol's grandfather's title
2726 Is Lutany-moi
2727 You earn the moi
2728 With your spear
2729 Or gun or sword.

2730 Is 'Tomcon' a *Jok* name?
2731 'Paraciko', is it a battle honour?
2732 'Bicenycio' and 'Iriko'
2733 Are these praise names
2734 That white men shout
2735 When they dance their 'get- stuck' dance?
2736 Or are they mourning names?

2737 The first born
2738 May have a name
2739 But he is always called Okang,
2740 He is the first
2741 To listen to the songs

2742 Of the birds;
2743 He is proof
2744 That the woman is not barren;
2745 He is the owner of the shrine
2746 That shall be built
2747 In honour of his father,
2748 He is respected.

2749 The one who follows Okang
2750 Is called Oboi.
2751 He is always jealous,
2752 He fights with his brother
2753 And fights for his brother.
2754 The third son is called Odai
2755 And the last son is Cogo.
2756 If you hit his head
2757 With your finger
2758 His mother will throw
2759 Things at you;
2760 Because that is the child
2761 Of which a mother is most fond.

2762 Who understands
2763 The meaning of the Christian names?
2764 The names they read for

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2765 The names of white men
2766 That they give to children
2767 When they put water on their heads,
2768 What do they mean?

2769 To me
2770 They all sound
2771 Like empty tins,
2772 Old rusty tins
2773 Thrown down
2774 From the roof-top.

2775 When I was in the Evening Speakers' Class
2776 We recited the Faith of the Messengers
2777 And Our Father who is in Skyland,
2778 We sang Greetings to Maria
2779 We learnt:

2780 *Glory shine on the body of the Father*
2781 *And on the body of the Son*
2782 *And on the body of the Clean Ghost*

2783 We recited the Prayer for saying Yes
2784 And the Prayer for Love,
2785 The Prayer for Trust,
2786 The Greetings of the beautiful men
2787 With birds' wings,
2788 And the Dekalogu,
2789 The Ten Instructions of the Hunchback.

2790 But our teachers
2791 Hated questions.
2792 Protestant and Catholic priests
2793 Are all the same---
2794 They do not like questions.

2795 When they mount the rostrum
2796 To preach
2797 They shout and shout
2798 And most of what they say
2799 I do not follow.
2800 But as soon as they stop shouting
2801 They run away fast,
2802 They never stop a little while
2803 To answer even one question,

2804 Immediately
2805 They start collecting
2806 The gifts.
2807 You hear:

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2808 *Who sows a little*

2809 *Will reap a little*
2810 *Who sows much*
2811 *Will reap much*
2812 *It is not by force*
2813 *The Hunchback thanks those who give with soft hearts*
2814 Do they buy the places
2815 In Skyland with money?
2816 The stools
2817 On the right hand of the Hunchback,
2818 Are these reserved
2819 For moneyed fellows,

2820 Fat-bellied men
2821 The backs of whose necks
2822 Resemble the buttocks of the hippo,
2823 And green oils
2824 Ooze out of the lined necks?

2825 Those who will
2826 Surround the Hunchback,
2827 Will they be
2828 The three-chinned ones
2829 Who are not used to the heat
2830 And should not go
2831 To the place below
2832 Because it does not befit them
2833 And it is too warm for them?

2834 The teachers
2835 Of the Evening Speakers' Class
2836 Hate questions.
2837 If you go to the Padre
2838 You provoke a fight.
2839 You take the road
2840 And go to the Nun,
2841 The young woman
2842 Is fierce like
2843 A wounded buffalo girl,
2844 She screams
2845 As if someone has
2846 Stabbed her at the death spot.
2847 And the black teachers
2848 Are angry
2849 They say

2850 Asking too many questions
2851 Befits only Martin Luther
2852 And the stupid stubborn Protestants.
2853 They say,
2854 Asking a lot of silly questions
2855 Cannot be tolerated,
2856 And the Padre quarrels
2857 And his goatee beard
2858 Shakes furiously.

2859 We sang the Faith of the Messengers
2860 Like parrots,
2861 I did not understand it at all!
2862 I thought about it
2863 In my own head
2864 But I could get nowhere,
2865 And there was nobody
2866 To turn to.
2867 The Padre and the Nun are the same,
2868 They only quarrel
2869 They are angry with me
2870 As if it was I
2871 Who prevented them marrying.

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2872 To them
2873 The good children
2874 Are those
2875 Who ask no questions,
2876 Who accept everything
2877 Like the tomb
2878 Which does not reject
2879 Even a dead leper!
2880 Who accept everything
2881 Like the rubbish pit,
2882 Like the pit-latrine
2883 Which does not reject
2884 Even dysentery.

2885 And those good children
2886 Who ask no questions
2887 Are liked,

2888 They are given oranges
2889 And guavas and bananas
2890 They take a ride
2891 In the Padre's car.
2892 The Nun pats them on their backs
2893 And says my son you are good!

2894 We recited
2895 The Faith of the Messengers
2896 Like the yellow birds
2897 In the *lajanawara* grass

2898 The teacher shouted
2899 As if half-mad
2900 And we shouted back:

2901 *I accept the Hunchback*
2902 *The Padre who is very strong*
2903 *Moulder of Skyland and*
2904 *Earth ...*

2905 My mother
2906 Was a well-known potter,
2907 She moulded large pots,
2908 Vegetable pots,
2909 And beautiful long necked jars.
2910 She made water pots
2911 And smoking pipes
2912 And vegetable dishes.
2913 And large earthen vessels for bath.
2914 She dug the clay
2915 From the mouth of the Oyitino River.
2916 The place
2917 Was well-known among potters.

2918 I heard about it
2919 When I was a small girl,
2920 And when my breasts emerged
2921 I went with my mother
2922 And helped her carrying the clay.

2923 The Hunchback

2924 Where did he dig the clay
2925 For moulding things?
2926 Where is the pot
2927 He dug the clay
2928 For moulding Skyland,
2929 And the clay for moulding Earth?
2930 For the mouth of which River?
2931 When my mother
2932 Has brought the clay
2933 From the River
2934 She leaves it to season overnight.
2935 The next day
2936 She beats it with the wooden hammer
2937 And then she moulds

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2938 The pots and dishes
2939 And none of her works
2940 Crack when fired!

2941 When Skyland was not yet there
2942 And Earth was not yet moulded
2943 Nor the Stars
2944 Nor the Moon,
2945 When there was nothing,
2946 Where did the Hunchback live?

2947 Where did the Hunchback
2948 Dig the clay for moulding things,
2949 The clay for moulding Skyland
2950 The clay for moulding Earth
2951 The clay for moulding Moon
2952 The clay for moulding the Stars?
2953 Where is the spot
2954 Where it was dug,
2955 On the mouth of which River?

2956 And when the Hunchback
2957 Was digging the clay
2958 Where did he stand?
2959 And when he brought home
2960 The clay for moulding things
2961 Where did he put the clay
2962 To season overnight?
2963 And when he was beating it

2964 With the wooden hammer
2965 On which rock
2966 Did the Hunchback put the clay?

2967 My husband
2968 Has read at Makerere University.
2969 He has read deeply and widely,
2970 But if you ask him a question
2971 He says
2972 You are insulting him;
2973 He opens up with a quarrel
2974 He begins to look down upon you
2975 Saying
2976 You ask questions
2977 That are a waste of time!

2978 He says
2979 My questions are silly questions,
2980 Typical questions from village girls.
2981 Questions of uneducated people,
2982 Useless questions from untutored minds.

2983 My husband says
2984 I have a tiny little brain
2985 And it is not trained,
2986 I cannot see things intelligently,
2987 I cannot see things sharply.
2988 He says
2989 Even if he is tried
2990 To answer my questions
2991 I would not understand
2992 What he was saying
2993 Because the language he speaks
2994 Is different from mine
2995 So that even if he
2996 Spoke to me in Acoli
2997 I would still need an interpreter.

2998 My husband says
2999 Some of the answers
3000 Cannot be given in Acoli
3001 Which is a primitive language
3002 And is not rich enough

3003 To express his deep wisdom.
3004 He says the Acoli language
3005 Has very few words

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3006 It is not like the white man's language
3007 Which is rich and very beautiful
3008 A language fitted for discussing deep thoughts.

3009 Ocol says
3010 He has no time to waste
3011 Discussing things with a thing like me
3012 Who has not been to school.
3013 He says
3014 A university man
3015 Can only have useful talk
3016 With another university man or woman.
3017 And that it is funny,
3018 That he should stoop so low
3019 Even to listen
3020 To my questions.

3021 And when he says
3022 These things to me
3023 He does not look me in the face,
3024 He turns his back
3025 And talks casually
3026 While doing some other work.

3027 And when the Padre
3028 Hears these questions
3029 He threatens you with his beard!
3030 When a Nun
3031 Hears the questions
3032 She says,
3033 You should repeat
3034 The Prayers for Faith.

3035 I think about these questions
3036 In my head
3037 And my head begins to ache,

3038 And my neck begins to pain,
3039 But who can I ask?
3040 Where can I go?

3041 I am not a shy woman
3042 I am not afraid of anybody
3043 And I am not easily browbeaten.
3044 I know that the person who asks
3045 Has done no wrong,
3046 I will not be frightened
3047 By those who say
3048 Asking questions is mortal sin
3049 That will take a person
3050 To the Place Below.

3051 But I swallow the questions,
3052 They burn inside me
3053 Like a bee
3054 That has gone into the ear;
3055 And my eyes redden
3056 With frustration
3057 And I tremble
3058 With anger.

3059 When the Hunchback was not yet there
3060 Before he had moulded himself
3061 What things were there?

3062 When Skyland was not yet moulded
3063 And there was no Earth,
3064 No Stars
3065 No Moon

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3066 When Chief Hunchback was not yet there
3067 Before he had moulded himself,

3068 Where did he get the clay
3069 For moulding things?
3070 The clay for moulding himself

3071 Where did he get it,
3072 From the mouth of which River?
3073 When the Hunchback was not yet there
3074 And his head was not yet moulded
3075 And his eyes
3076 And his hands
3077 And his legs
3078 When his heart was not yet there,
3079 How did he find
3080 The clay for moulding things
3081 Before he had any eyes?
3082 The clay for moulding the Hunchback
3083 Where was it dug from?
3084 From the mouth of which River?

3085 How did the Hunchback
3086 Dig the clay for moulding things
3087 Before his hands were moulded?
3088 The wooden digging stick
3089 For digging the clay,
3090 The wooden hammer
3091 For beating the clay
3092 For moulding himself,
3093 How did he hold the wooden hammer
3094 And the digging stick?
3095 Whose hands did he borrow?

3096 And when he was digging
3097 The clay for moulding himself
3098 Whose legs did he use
3099 For standing up?

3100 Where did Chief Hunchback
3101 Get his head
3102 For thinking about moulding himself,
3103 For beginning to think
3104 About moulding himself
3105 And what shape and size
3106 He should be?

3107 Where did the Hunchback
3108 Find the hands,
3109 The hands for moulding himself
3110 Where did he find them?
3111 How did he mould his hands
3112 Before he had any hands?

3113 On the way to the well
3114 To draw water
3115 In the bush
3116 Collecting dry firewood
3117 I think about these questions
3118 When I am grinding millet
3119 Or on the rocks
3120 Drying the cassava mash,
3121 On the way to the garden
3122 Early in the morning
3123 Through the thick dew,
3124 In the night
3125 I cannot sleep
3126 But my head just stops
3127 Like a broken down car!

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3128 And the questions
3129 Are numerous like grass,
3130 If you begin to ask them
3131 They flow endlessly
3132 Like the Nile waters,
3133 They burn endlessly
3134 Like the red fire
3135 At the altar!
3136 You wish there was
3137 No other work
3138 So that you may sit
3139 For as long as you like;

3140 And you wish
3141 You were lucky
3142 To find someone to help you;
3143 Someone who has genuinely
3144 Read deeply and widely
3145 And not someone like my husband
3146 Whose preoccupation
3147 Is to boast in the market place

3148 Showing off to people!

3149 You wish you were lucky
3150 To find someone to assist you
3151 Who does not shout
3152 Like house-flies
3153 When disturbed
3154 From an excreta heap!
3155 Who does not shout meaninglessly
3156 Like the Padre;
3157 Who listens,
3158 And does not get annoyed
3159 So easily like the Nun:
3160 Who does not boast
3161 Like the teachers of the Evening Speakers' Class.

3162 You consider the birth of Christ:
3163 They say
3164 His mother did not know a man.
3165 They also say,
3166 The bridewealth had already been paid,

3167 Among our People
3168 When a girl has
3169 Accepted a man's proposal
3170 She gives a token,
3171 And then she visits him
3172 In his bachelor's hut
3173 To try his manhood.

3174 Before the bridewealth is paid
3175 The man puts his cheeks
3176 On the girl's bosom
3177 And if the girl is lucky
3178 She gets a stomach!

3179 And when they teach
3180 That the Mother of Christ
3181 Did not know a man
3182 I cannot understand it.

3183 But the teachers of religion

3184 Hate questions;
3185 A young tree that is bending
3186 They do not like to straighten.
3187 Whether they do it purposely,
3188 Whether they themselves
3189 Have no answers
3190 I do not know,
3191 But I know
3192 They hate questions.

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10

*The Last Safari to Pagak*¹⁰

3193 My husband quarrels bitterly.
3194 He says
3195 I do not know hygiene
3196 And I do not know
3197 How to look after the sick.
3198 He says
3199 I do not know
3200 The use of quinine,
3201 And I have not been taught
3202 How to prevent diseases.
3203 My man is ashamed of me
3204 Because my father
3205 Was a well-known diviner-priest;
3206 He says
3207 He is sick of my superstitions and fears.

3208 And he fears
3209 What the neighbours say
3210 Because my mother brought
3211 Some powerful anti-poison medicine,
3212 To counter the deadly poisons
3213 Of the childless woman
3214 In our homestead.
3215 Some had brought *agugu*
3216 Others brought *adraka*
3217 With which to kill all the children.

3218 My husband complains
3219 That I encourage visitors

3220 Who should not
3221 Come into his house,
3222 Because they bring dirt and house-flies!

3223 He says
3224 My old relatives smell horribly.
3225 And they have terrible diseases,
3226 Leprosy and tuberculosis
3227 And their bodies itch.
3228 He says
3229 These diseases will be
3230 Transmitted to the children.
3231 He has warned me
3232 That my father's sister
3233 Has lice in her hair
3234 And jiggers in her feet.
3235 She should not visit me!

3236 My husband says these things
3237 In broad daylight.
3238 He speaks aloud,

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3239 He does not care
3240 Whether my relatives
3241 Hear him or not.
3242 And when a storm is threatening,
3243 He says
3244 There are no beds
3245 In his house
3246 For villagers!

3247 My husband says
3248 Villagers soil his chairs
3249 And bed sheets,
3250 He says
3251 They ruin his nicely polished floor
3252 With the mud in their feet.

3253 He cares little
3254 About his relatives either.
3255 Of his own mother,
3256 Ocol says
3257 She smokes some nauseating tobacco

3258 And spits all over the place
3259 And she keeps bed bugs
3260 In her loin cloth.
3261 And when his mother
3262 Comes to visit him,
3263 Ocol locks the doors
3264 And says
3265 He has an important meeting
3266 In the town!

3267 My husband complains
3268 About food.
3269 You would think
3270 He earns sand!
3271 He told his mother's brother
3272 There was no food
3273 Because he had not written
3274 A letter!

3275 The son of the Bull
3276 Does not allow the children
3277 To visit my mother,
3278 He says
3279 He does not like
3280 The feeding of grandmothers
3281 Because the children
3282 Eat all the time.

3283 Ocol says
3284 The way his mother
3285 Brings up children
3286 Only leads
3287 To ignorance, poverty and disease.
3288 He swears
3289 He has no confidence
3290 In the wisdom of the Acoli.

3291 My husband despises me
3292 Because I fear
3293 The kite with the flame
3294 In its anus.

3295 He says
3296 No such things exist.
3297 It is my eyes
3298 That are sick
3299 And only foolish superstitions
3300 Make me see these things.
3301 But my husband believes
3302 Some people see
3303 The beautiful men
3304 With the wings of vultures

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3305 Flying through the air!

3306 My husband has threatened
3307 To beat me
3308 If I visit the diviner-priest again.
3309 He says
3310 The hair-poison does not exist,
3311 That it is hook-worm
3312 That troubles the people.

3313 Ocol condemns diviner-priests
3314 And Acoli herbalists.
3315 He says
3316 They are all liars
3317 Who deceive fools,
3318 And robs people's chickens,
3319 Goats, sheep, cattle and money.

3320 Their so-called medicines
3321 Are dirty mixtures
3322 Of all sorts of things
3323 Collected from the bush
3324 And mixed in beer.

3325 He says
3326 The medicine gourds are filthy,
3327 And the herbs
3328 Are drunk from unhygienic cups.

3329 My husband agrees
3330 That sometimes by accident

3331 Some of the herbs are effective.
3332 He also admits
3333 That not all who
3334 Enter the white man's hospital
3335 Walk home on their own feet,
3336 But are carried away
3337 In comfortable beds
3338 Painless, free of troubles,
3339 No more bothered by hunger or anger
3340 Or the complaints of wives!

3341 When the fiends
3342 That brings smallpox
3343 Visit the homestead,
3344 Ocol does not go
3345 To the shrine of the ancestors.
3346 He says
3347 It is foolish to do so,
3348 We should have our arms scratched
3349 And some corrosive poisons
3350 Put in the wounds.

3351 He says
3352 When we suffer misfortune
3353 We should say:

3354 *Look Mariya*
3355 *Mother of the Hunchback ...*

3356 We should pray to Joseph
3357 And Petero, and Luka
3358 And the other ancestors of white men!
3359 He says
3360 It is stupid superstition
3361 To pray to our ancestors
3362 To avert the smallpox,
3363 But we should pray
3364 To the messengers of the Hunchback
3365 To intercede for us.

3366 My husband wears
3367 A small crucifix
3368 On his neck,

3369 And all his daughters
3370 Wear rosaries.

3371 But he prohibits me
3372 From wearing the elephant tail necklace,
3373 He once beat me
3374 For wearing the toe of the edible rat
3375 And the horn of the rhinoceros
3376 And the jaw-bone of the alligator.

3377 A large snake
3378 Once fell down from the roof
3379 Of the cold hall!
3380 The Nun who was teaching
3381 The Evening Speakers' Class
3382 Grabbed her large crucifix
3383 And pressed it on her bosom,
3384 Closed her eyes
3385 And said something
3386 We could not understand.

3387 My husband says
3388 The cowry shells,
3389 The colobus-monkey hair,
3390 The dog's horn charms
3391 And all useless things.

3392 He says
3393 Only foolish backward folk
3394 Uneducated simple fellows
3395 Who live in the shadow of fear
3396 Carry these dirty things!

3397 When a bull disease
3398 Has knocked me down
3399 Or when the ghost in my head
3400 Is provoked
3401 And threatens to cause ill-health,

3402 When a child
3403 Has been cursed by his uncle
3404 Or when the Evil Eye
3405 Has attacked my daughter,

3406 My husband does not allow me
3407 To visit the diviner-priest,
3408 The goat cannot be sacrificed,
3409 And no *Jok* dances
3410 Can be danced.

3411 And when it is *Jok* Omara
3412 That has caused madness,
3413 Or Odude or Ayweya
3414 That has brought troubles,
3415 When *Jok* Rubanga ¹¹
3416 Has broken someone's back
3417 Or *Jok* Odude
3418 Has tied up a woman's womb,
3419 And the husband
3420 Cries over his lost bridewealth,
3421 Saying,
3422 What is marriage without childbirth?

3423 Ocol laughs,
3424 Ocol says,
3425 The ways of fools are dark
3426 And they are foolish beyond compare!

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3427 My husband
3428 Once smashed up the rattle gourd,
3429 Cut open the drum,
3430 And chased away the diviner-priest
3431 From his late father's homestead.
3432 The old man walked away,
3433 His headgear waving
3434 His ankle bells jangling rhythmically
3435 And the large monkey-skin bag
3436 Dangling on his neck.

3437 People whistled in amazement,
3438 They asked,

3439 What ghost has captured
3440 The head of Ocol?

3441 My husband took an axe
3442 And threatened to cut the *Okango*
3443 That grew on his father's shrine.
3444 His mother fell down under the tree,
3445 She said
3446 Cut me first
3447 Then cut the sacred tree!

3448 He threw down the axe
3449 And went to the church.
3450 Heknelt before
3451 The stone picture of Joseph
3452 And mumbled things
3453 I could not understand.

3454 I do not know
3455 The white man's names of diseases,
3456 I do not know
3457 The names of their medicines,
3458 I cannot measure
3459 The heat of the body
3460 With the white man's glass rod
3461 Because my hand trembles
3462 And I cannot read it.

3463 When my child is unwell
3464 I see it from his watering nose,
3465 The hair of his body stands up
3466 And his lips are parched,
3467 I see that he is not bright,
3468 I do not read the names of diseases from books.

3469 I hear him cry
3470 And his eyes water,
3471 I hear the noise from his stomach
3472 The worms complaining;

3473 He is pale
3474 As if he has been playing in ashes,

3475 You hear his chest crackling,
3476 He has no appetite,
3477 And he is aggressive but tired and weak;
3478 He is troublesome,
3479 He wants this thing and that thing,
3480 Then he does not want this thing
3481 And does not want that thing.

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3482 His body feels hot like fire,
3483 And he sits by the fire
3484 In the middle of a hot afternoon.

3485 When my child is ill
3486 I try the various Acoli herbs,
3487 I try the medicines
3488 My mother showed me:

3489 The roots of *bomo*
3490 For stomach aches
3491 It kills poisons
3492 As well as worms.

3493 The roots of *omwombye*
3494 Is chewed for bad throats,
3495 A drop in the eye
3496 Kills the pains
3497 And removes the Evil Eye's sting.
3498 When the eyes are bursting with pain
3499 Put some *akeyo* in a pot.
3500 Cook it for some time,
3501 Then expose the eyes
3502 To the steam from the pot;
3503 This burns up the spears
3504 That were in the eye.

3505 The shoots of *lapena*
3506 For coughs and sore throats---
3507 You put some salt in it
3508 And chew it!
3509 The shoots of *lapena* and *olim*
3510 Are chewed when they have
3511 Removed the blockage in the throat.

3512 Fresh wounds are treated
3513 With *ogali* or *pobo* ,
3514 The sticky juices
3515 Gum up the broken skins
3516 And the bitter poison
3517 Keeps the house-flies at bay.

3518 My mother showed me many medicines,
3519 Medicines for leprosy and yaws,
3520 For difficult childbirth and barrenness
3521 For men whose spears
3522 Refuse to stand up,
3523 Lazy spears
3524 That sleep on their bellies
3525 Like earthworms!
3526 Medicines for snake bites,
3527 Medicines for breasts
3528 That dry up too soon
3529 Big milkless breasts
3530 Full of fibre
3531 Like the fruit of the *barusus* palm!

3532 If my child is ill
3533 I try the various medicines
3534 That my mother showed me,
3535 If all these fail
3536 I go to the medicine woman,
3537 And when the child has improved
3538 I take a chicken to the herbalist,
3539 Or a goat or a ram.

3540 When fevers trouble my child frequently,
3541 When all the diseases
3542 Have fallen in love with him,

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3543 And all youthful diseases
3544 Run after him
3545 As if he was a beautiful girl,
3546 So that he has coughs and dysentery
3547 And throat trouble and eye sickness,

3548 And his ears have pus
3549 And his legs have ulcers
3550 And he is bony, skinny
3551 And his loin-string is loose,
3552 I know that this is not for nothing!

3553 I know that someone is behind it.
3554 I know someone has hidden
3555 The child's excreta in a tree fork,
3556 Or has buried his hair or nail paring
3557 In a river-bed
3558 I know that some jealous woman
3559 Perhaps even a close relative
3560 Has visited the shadow trapper
3561 Who has captured the child's shadow.

3562 When your child is weak and listless,
3563 When his energy fails him,
3564 When he withdraws from the fight
3565 For life, and gives up quickly,
3566 It means his head has been captured,
3567 And he is only a crawling corpse:

3568 A diviner-priest must be called.
3569 He will divine
3570 And tell the killer,
3571 The jealous one will be found out!

3572 Ten beautiful girls
3573 Are walking in single file,
3574 Along the pathway,
3575 They carry axes
3576 They are going to the bush
3577 To split firewood,
3578 In the grass lurks
3579 The black mamba,
3580 Its throat burning with venom.

3581 The first three girls walk past,
3582 Then the fourth and fifth,
3583 And all nine girls go by,
3584 And your daughter

3585 Who is at the tail of the line
3586 Is struck!

3587 She stands there,
3588 The reptile refuses to unhook its fangs,
3589 She drinks a whole cup of death,
3590 She gives a brief shriek
3591 And mumbles some farewell
3592 To her loving mother!
3593 Then she drops
3594 Dead!

3595 She lies there
3596 As if feigning death;
3597 Her ripe breasts lift up their hands
3598 And wail aloud,
3599 Saying,

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3600 *No mouths will suck us!*
3601 *Our tips will not be tickled!*
3602 *Our milk will rot in the earth!*

3603 In battle
3604 The hottest youths fight at the front,
3605 Eager, angry, proud,
3606 The youths think of their loves
3607 And say,
3608 It is the old ones
3609 Who die in bed!
3610 The spears of the foe
3611 And their arrows
3612 Rain like the hailstones,
3613 Your son is struck
3614 In the small of the back,
3615 And the spear
3616 Cuts through the liver
3617 And the heart.

3618 Other people's boys receive bruises
3619 Others get cuts,
3620 Many earn battle honours,
3621 They return home

3622 Blowing their horns, loud and clear!

3623 And while others celebrate
3624 And sing war songs,
3625 You sing songs of praise,
3626 Farewell songs to the dead!

3627 Why should lightning
3628 Seek out your husband
3629 From his bedroom?
3630 Other women's husbands
3631 Are walking in the rain!
3632 What is so sweet in your husband?
3633 What so bitter in other people's sons?

3634 Why, at the hunt,
3635 Does the wounded buffalo bull
3636 Charge your father
3637 And with its blunt horn
3638 Tear open his belly,
3639 Throwing the intestines
3640 On top of the grass?
3641 Why should you
3642 And not somebody else
3643 Be made orphan?

3644 All misfortunes have a root,
3645 The snake bite, the spear of the enemy,
3646 Lightning and the blunt buffalo horn,
3647 These are the bitter fruits
3648 Grown on the tree of Fate.
3649 They do not fall anyhow,
3650 They do not fall at random,
3651 They do not come our way by accident,
3652 We do not just run into them.
3653 When your uncle curses you
3654 You piss in your bed!
3655 And you go on pissing in your bed
3656 Until you have taken him
3657 A white cock!

3658 When your mother lifts her breast

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3659 And asks you,
3660 Did you suck this?
3661 If your father lifts his penis
3662 Towards you!
3663 Know that you are in deep trouble.

3664 No one wrestles with his father,
3665 No one looks down
3666 On his mother,
3667 You cannot abuse your mother!
3668 Because it was that woman
3669 Who hewed you out of the rock
3670 And moulded your head and body.

3671 Think of the excreta and piss
3672 The vomit and mucus
3673 With which you wetted your mother!
3674 Think of the fire
3675 That burnt her finger many times,
3676 When she cooked for you.

3677 Think of the jealousies of others,
3678 The sorcerers and shadow trappers,
3679 Poisoners and the Evil Eyes,
3680 Think of the fights
3681 They put up for you!

3682 You sucked those wrinkled breasts,
3683 And that's what made you
3684 The big man you are!

3685 And even if your father is totally blind,
3686 Even if his ears are dead,
3687 Even if the world has boxed him,
3688 Even if his legs are dry like firewood,
3689 If he is rude to you
3690 You say, 'Thank You'
3691 And never answer back
3692 Because he stands before you
3693 Like the giant *tido* tree.
3694 You are but a climber plant.

3695 A mother's anger is bitter,
3696 It is fierce like lightning
3697 And boils like thunder.
3698 If you make her angry
3699 She will strike below her belly button,
3700 If you annoy the girl
3701 She will strike the ash
3702 Then you will get
3703 Exactly what you ask for!

3704 Your vitality will go,
3705 You will behave
3706 As if you were a half-wit,
3707 Your manhood will disappear
3708 And like a castrated bullock
3709 Women will be perfectly safe with you!

3710 And to recover,
3711 A goat must be slaughtered,
3712 Your mother and her brother
3713 Must spit blessing in your hand.
3714 And then you will become a man again.
3715 There is no medicine in the hospital
3716 For a mother's curse,

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3717 None for an uncle's curse!
3718 And when your father's anger
3719 Has boiled over
3720 The white man's medicines
3721 Are irrelevant and useless
3722 Like the freak rains
3723 In the middle of the dry season.

3724 When a woman has brought
3725 Death in a bundle,
3726 With which to kill people,
3727 And Death has felt the inside of the victims
3728 And found them clean,
3729 It bounces back

3730 And destroys the bringer!
3731 It refuses to be returned,
3732 It refuses all sacrifices.
3733 It says
3734 'I was not brought
3735 To eat a goat,
3736 I do not want a ram,
3737 Not a bull.'

3738 Death in the bundle
3739 Kills the children of the bringer,
3740 Her husband,
3741 Her other relatives
3742 And then she herself
3743 Eats the dust.
3744 Which white man's medicine
3745 Can stop the hand of Death in the bundle?
3746 Which one can blunt
3747 The sharp edges of Death's sword?

3748 If in a hunt
3749 The spears of the men
3750 Strike tree trunks and earth
3751 And they return home
3752 Silent,
3753 None blowing a horn,

3754 If in the homestead
3755 Young wives stay young,
3756 Their breasts refuse to fall
3757 And their tummies are for ever
3758 Well back,
3759 Because they are hard
3760 Like the *lela* rocks
3761 Like the dry trunk of the *poi* ,
3762 And the men are soft in the knees
3763 And weak in the loin,

3764 When the rains fail
3765 And famine threatens a fierce invasion,
3766 Fiercer than the spear of the Lango,

3767 If the crops are moved down by Okwil

3768 Or the hail stones have rained
3769 And ruined all the millet,

3770 If the locust swarms
3771 That blacken the sky
3772 Stay the night in the homestead
3773 And refuse to move
3774 The next day,
3775 When there is much trouble
3776 In the homestead,
3777 It is not for nothing,
3778 It is because

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3779 The ancestors are angry,
3780 Because they are hungry,
3781 Thirsty,
3782 Neglected.

3783 So the elders gather
3784 At the clan shrine,
3785 Blood, meat and beer
3786 Are offered to the ancestors.
3787 Greetings are exchanged
3788 And the living
3789 Pray to the dead
3790 To cleanse the homestead,
3791 And they pray,
3792 Saying,

3793 *The troubles in the homestead*
3794 *Let the setting sun*
3795 *Go down with them!*

3796 And the people repeat

3797 *Let them go down*
3798 *Let them go down*
3799 *With the setting sun!*

3800 And an old woman
3801 Will bless the young men,

3802 She will spit blessing in their hands
3803 So that their spears may be sharp,
3804 Sharp and hard,
3805 So that their trusted spears
3806 Should not sleep outside
3807 In the dewy cold,
3808 But should strike the death spot
3809 Deep and painful!
3810 Then the young cobs
3811 Will scream
3812 And shed tears of sweet pains!

3813 My husband rejects me
3814 Because he says
3815 That I am a mere pagan
3816 And I believe in the devil.
3817 He says
3818 I do not know
3819 The rules of health,
3820 And I mix up
3821 Matters of health and superstitions.

3822 Ocol troubles my head,
3823 He talks too much
3824 And he heaps insults on me
3825 As well as my relatives.

3826 But most of his words are senseless,
3827 They are like the songs
3828 Of children's plays.
3829 And he treats his clansmen
3830 As if they are enemies.
3831 Ocol behaves
3832 As if he is a witch!

3833 It is true
3834 White man's medicines are strong,
3835 But Acoli medicines
3836 Are also strong.

3837 The sick gets cured
3838 Because his time has not yet come:

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3839 But when the day has dawned
3840 For the journey to Pagak
3841 No one can stop you,
3842 White man's medicines
3843 Acoli medicines,
3844 Crucifixes, rosaries,
3845 Toes of edible rats,
3846 The horn of the rhinoceros
3847 None of them can block the path
3848 That goes to Pagak!

3849 When Death comes
3850 To fetch you
3851 She comes unannounced,
3852 She comes suddenly
3853 Like the vomit of dogs,
3854 And when She comes
3855 The wind keeps blowing
3856 The birds go on singing
3857 And the flowers
3858 Do not hang their heads.
3859 The *agoga* bird is silent
3860 The *agoga* comes afterwards,
3861 He sings to tell
3862 That Death has been that way!

3863 When Mother Death comes
3864 She whispers
3865 Come,
3866 And you stand up
3867 And follow
3868 You get up immediately,
3869 And you start walking
3870 Without brushing the dust
3871 On your buttocks.

3872 You may be behind
3873 A new buffalo-hide shield,
3874 And at the mock-fight
3875 Or in battle
3876 You may be matchless;

3877 You may be hiding
3878 In the hole
3879 Of the smallest black insect,
3880 Or in the darkest place
3881 Where rats breast-feed their puppies,
3882 or behind the Agoro hills,

3883 You may be the fastest runner,
3884 A long distance runner,
3885 But when Death comes
3886 To fetch you
3887 You do not resist,
3888 You must not resist.
3889 You cannot resist!

3890 Mother Death
3891 She says to her little ones,
3892 Come!

3893 Her little ones are good children,
3894 Obedient,
3895 Loyal,
3896 And when Mother Death calls
3897 Her little ones jump,
3898 They jump gladly
3899 For she calls
3900 And offers simsim paste
3901 Mixed with honey!
3902 She says
3903 My only child
3904 Come,
3905 Come, let us go.
3906 Let us go
3907 And eat white-ants' paste

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3908 Mixed with *shea* -butter!
3909 And who can resist that?

3910 White diviner priests,
3911 Acoli herbalists,
3912 All medicine men and medicine women
3913 Are good, are brilliant
3914 When the day has not yet dawned

3915 For the great journey
3916 The last safari
3917 To Pagak.

11

The Buffalos of Poverty Knock the People Down

3918 With the coming
3919 Of the new political parties,
3920 My husband roams the countryside
3921 Like a wild goat;

3922 He is up before dawn:
3923 You think
3924 He is going to hoe
3925 The new cotton field
3926 Or to sow the millet
3927 Or to harvest the simsim
3928 All day long
3929 He is away,
3930 He does not eat at home
3931 As if I do not cook!

3932 When he comes
3933 He does not stay a moment,
3934 He says
3935 There is another meeting
3936 At the homestead of the Hoe Chief.
3937 He is away all night,
3938 And when he returns so late
3939 He says
3940 Their car got stuck
3941 In the mud.

3942 He says
3943 They are fighting for Uhuru
3944 He says
3945 They want Independence and Peace
3946 And when they meet
3947 They shout 'Uhuru! Uhuru!'
3948 But what is the meaning
3949 Of Uhuru?

3950 He says
3951 They want to unite the Acoli and Lango
3952 And the Madi and Lugbara
3953 Should live together in peace!

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3954 He says
3955 The Alur and Iteso and Baganda
3956 And the Banyankole and Banyoro
3957 Should be united together
3958 With the Jo-pa-Dhola and the Toro
3959 And all the tribes
3960 Should become one people.

3961 He says
3962 White men must return
3963 To their own homes,
3964 Because they have brought
3965 Slave conditions in the country.
3966 He says
3967 White people tell lies,
3968 That they are good
3969 At telling lies,
3970 Like men wooing women.
3971 Ocol says
3972 They reject the famine relief granaries
3973 And the forced-labour system.

3974 I do not understand
3975 The new political parties.
3976 They dress differently,
3977 They dress in robes
3978 Like the Christian diviner- priests,
3979 But Ocol treats his brother
3980 As if they are not relatives,

3981 Ocol puts on a green-and-white robe,
3982 A large flowing robe
3983 And he struts

3984 Like a bull baboon,
3985 He blows the whistle
3986 And rings the bell
3987 Calling people to gather
3988 At the marketplace.

3989 His brother wears a red-and- black robe,
3990 He looks like the judge
3991 Who condemns people to death
3992 He looks like the male *aribe* bird
3993 And shouts like the train.
3994 He walks majestically
3995 Like a bull elephant.

3996 My husband is the leader
3997 Of the Democratic Party.
3998 When they greet each other
3999 They shake their fists.

4000 Ocol does not enter
4001 His brother's house.
4002 You would think
4003 There was homicide between them
4004 That has not been settled,
4005 You would think
4006 That the *oput* -drinking peace- making ceremony
4007 Has not yet taken place
4008 And they fear the deadly *ojebu* taboo!

4009 Ocol dislikes his brother fiercely,
4010 His mother's son's hatred
4011 Resembles boiling oil!
4012 The new parties have split the homestead
4013 As the battle axe splits the skull!

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4014 My husband has sternly warned me
4015 Never to joke
4016 With my husband-in-law:
4017 Not that joking may cause pregnancy,
4018 Not that I am a loose woman,
4019 But that the strong gum of the joke
4020 Will reconnect the snapped string

4021 Of brotherhood
4022 Between him and his brother!

4023 Is this the unity of Uhuru?
4024 Is this the Peace
4025 That Independence brings?

4026 When my husband
4027 Opens a quarrel
4028 With his brother
4029 I am frightened!
4030 You would think
4031 They have not slept
4032 In the same womb,
4033 You would think
4034 They have not shared
4035 The same breasts!
4036 And they say
4037 When the two were boys
4038 Looking after the goats
4039 They were as close to each other
4040 As the eye and the nose,
4041 They were like twins,
4042 And they shared everything
4043 Even a single white ant.

4044 Ocol says
4045 His brother is a liar
4046 And a big fool.
4047 He says
4048 There is something wrong
4049 With his brother's head
4050 Nobody should trust such a beast.

4051 He says
4052 His brother wants to kill him,
4053 He calls his mother's son That Man!
4054 He says
4055 His brother is dangerously jealous of him
4056 And has smuggled a pistol,
4057 And has collected money
4058 And hired a man
4059 To bump him off!

4060 When Ocol says these things
4061 His eyes bulge in his head
4062 Like ripe papayas
4063 And threaten to fall off!

4064 He shouts
4065 His brother will bring Communism!
4066 I do not know
4067 What this animal is!

4068 He says
4069 The Congress Party
4070 Will remove all Catholics
4071 From their jobs
4072 And they will take away
4073 All the land and schools
4074 And will take people's wives
4075 And goats, and chickens and bicycles,

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4076 And will become the property
4077 Of the Congress people.

4078 How terrible that would be
4079 If it were true!
4080 But I know
4081 That if Ocol dies
4082 His mother's son
4083 Whom he now hates so much
4084 Will inherit all Ocol's properties,
4085 The goats, the chickens and the bicycles,
4086 And I will become his wife
4087 And my children will become his children!

4088 Where will he take the land
4089 And the schools?
4090 And if they remove
4091 All Catholics from their jobs,
4092 Who will do the jobs?
4093 Where will they get the people
4094 To do these jobs?

4095 When Ocol's brother replies,
4096 He sound like the dance-drums
4097 In the late evening.
4098 He says
4099 The Democratic Party
4100 Is the Party for Padrés
4101 The Party for fools and blockheads.
4102 He says
4103 Catholics have numb heads
4104 They hear everything from the Italian Fathers!

4105 He says
4106 The Democratic Party
4107 Will sell the land
4108 To poor white men
4109 Refugees, who came to this country
4110 Saying they have come to teach
4111 The white man's religion
4112 When they have no teaching certificates.

4113 He says
4114 Ocol and the other fools
4115 Allow their heads to be numbed
4116 By foolish prayers
4117 And by kneeling
4118 Before white men!

4119 I have never seen
4120 A white padre
4121 In the Democratic Party!
4122 At the market place meetings
4123 There are many Catholics
4124 But I have not heard an Italian
4125 Shout 'D---P! D---P! Uhuru!'
4126 Do they teach the leaders
4127 In the dead of night
4128 In the Bishop's house?

4129 And if the white men are poor
4130 Where will they get the money
4131 With which to buy the land?

4132 I have seen
4133 Many leaders of the D.P.

4134 They come to my house
4135 And eat and drink there,
4136 Some have really numbed heads
4137 Like the head of my husband;

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4138 But others have heads like lightning
4139 Quick and powerful,
4140 Some are real men
4141 Not women dressed in dark suits.

4142 I have met
4143 Many leaders of Congress
4144 They go to Ocol's brother's house
4145 They eat and drink there.
4146 Some have heads like the sun
4147 Bright, burning and brilliant,
4148 Others carry pieces of stone
4149 On their necks
4150 And call them heads!

4151 Where is the Peace of Uhuru?
4152 Where the unity of Independence?
4153 Must it not begin at home?
4154 And the Acoli and Lango
4155 And the Madi and Lugbara,
4156 How can they unite?
4157 And all the tribes of Uganda
4158 How can they become one?

4159 I do not understand
4160 The meaning of Uhuru!
4161 I do not understand
4162 Why all the bitterness
4163 And the cruelty
4164 And the cowardice,
4165 The fear,
4166 The deadly fear that
4167 Eats the hearts
4168 Of the political leaders!

4169 Is it the money?
4170 Is it the competition for position?

4171 Someone said
4172 Independence falls like a bull buffalo
4173 And the hunters
4174 Rush to it with drawn knives,
4175 Sharp shining knives
4176 For carving the carcass.
4177 And if your chest
4178 Is small, bony and weak
4179 They push you off,
4180 And if your knife is blunt
4181 You get the dung on your elbow,
4182 You come home empty-handed
4183 And the dogs bark at you!

4184 If you are not a man
4185 They frighten you with noise
4186 But you return home,
4187 You walk like a chicken
4188 Beaten by the rain
4189 And the women hiss at you
4190 And your children run away from you!
4191 You are silent
4192 Like a woman who has broken a taboo!

4193 And the other men
4194 Carry large pieces of fatty beef,
4195 You hear their horns loud and proud!

4196 And you eat green vegetables

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4197 Without the *simsim* paste
4198 And your thin children
4199 Collect the *odir* and *ocenne* insects
4200 And they roast the *odir* and *ocenne*
4201 And eat them
4202 And the children of others
4203 Are fat,
4204 And their wives grow larger buttocks,
4205 They eat meat from the chest of bulls
4206 And the skin of their legs

4207 Shines with health!

4208 The stomach seems to be
4209 A powerful force
4210 For joining political parties,
4211 Especially when the purse
4212 In the trouser pocket
4213 Carries only the coins
4214 With holes in their middle,
4215 And no purple notes
4216 Have ever been folded in it;

4217 And especially for those who
4218 Have never tasted honey from childhood,
4219 And those who grew up
4220 Fatherless or motherless!
4221 And those with no sure jobs!

4222 Men with soft hearts,
4223 Men with soft blunt eyes
4224 Who are shy to tell the biggest lies,
4225 Who are afraid
4226 To repeat them in the presence
4227 Of their mothers and children,
4228 To repeat empty lies
4229 Before their wives
4230 And before their wives' mothers,
4231 Such soft-necked men
4232 Should stay at home!

4233 And when the Party leaders
4234 Come from Kampala,
4235 My husband jumps,
4236 He is like a newly eloped girl,

4237 He is all over the place
4238 He is quick to win a good name,
4239 And when he talks,
4240 He explodes like the dry pods of *cooro* !
4241 He is like a woman
4242 Who has just buried
4243 The other woman

4244 With whom she shares a husband.

4245 He says to the bosses
4246 'O chief you kill me with laughter!'
4247 His shallow laugh and put up smiles
4248 Drown the frowns of the chiefs!
4249 They probably think he is wonderful!

4250 My husband accuses other party leaders.
4251 Everybody else is useless,
4252 He alone
4253 Is the most hard working,

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4254 The most loyal,
4255 The man with the most reliable information.
4256 All that others say
4257 Is lies,
4258 Lies intended only to win favours!
4259 To buy position
4260 To buy jobs
4261 And places in conferences
4262 In Kampala and abroad!

4263 My husband says
4264 The masses of the people
4265 In the villages
4266 Listen only to him.
4267 He says
4268 The other party leaders
4269 Have formed a new party,
4270 A new party for fools,
4271 That they are rebels
4272 And should be expelled!
4273 He says
4274 The rebels are a minority
4275 The masses of the people
4276 Are solidly behind him
4277 And the Party Leaders,
4278 And they talk about him
4279 At all beer parties.

4280 When my husband
4281 Climbs onto the platform,
4282 You hear the bell
4283 You hear the drums!
4284 There is a big crowd,
4285 Some people stand on hillocks!
4286 The crowd resembles
4287 The Palaro gathered to
4288 Celebrate Lapul, their chiefdom *Jok* .

4289 My husband
4290 Reads his speech from a book,
4291 He says a few words
4292 And shakes his fly whisk,
4293 The women yodel
4294 And make ululation!

4295 They yodel and make ululation
4296 Not because they understand,
4297 They yodel so that their voices may be heard
4298 So that their secret lovers may hear them,
4299 They shout and make ululations
4300 Because they are tired
4301 Tired of the useless talk
4302 Tired of the insults
4303 And the lies of
4304 The speakers.

4305 They shout and raise their hands
4306 Not because they understand
4307 But because they do not understand
4308 The many foreign words.
4309 Uhuru! Congress! Freedom!
4310 Democratic! Independence!
4311 Minister! ...

4312 The women make ululations
4313 Because they are irritated
4314 Because they are excited
4315 Because they want to dance.
4316 They want the talks to end

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4317 So that they can dance.
4318 And when he is in the market place,
4319 He talks endlessly
4320 Like a bird's mother-in-law.
4321 His words are itchy like scabies,
4322 Itchy like scabies on the buttocks.

4323 He talks endlessly,
4324 And some of the things he says
4325 Are painful and hurtful,
4326 Like an unripe boil.

4327 He shouts and shouts
4328 And loses his voice.
4329 He says
4330 We must all unite
4331 And fight for Independence and Peace.

4332 He says
4333 They fight with diseases,
4334 Poverty and ignorance.
4335 They want peace and friendship,
4336 They fight black-heartedness and quarrels!

4337 And if you are ignorant
4338 Of the death of the homestead
4339 Of my husband,
4340 The death of the homestead
4341 Caused by the parties
4342 You would think
4343 My husband was the best leader.

4344 And while those inside
4345 Eat thick honey
4346 And ghee and butter,
4347 Those in the countryside
4348 Die with the smell,
4349 They re-eat the bones
4350 That were thrown away
4351 For the dogs.

4352 And those who have
4353 Fallen into things
4354 Throw themselves into soft beds,
4355 But the hip bones of the voters
4356 Grow painful
4357 Sleeping on the same earth
4358 They slept
4359 Before Uhuru!
4360 And they cover the ulcers
4361 On their legs
4362 With animal skins.

4363 And when they have
4364 Fallen into things
4365 They become rare,
4366 Like the python
4367 With a bull water buck
4368 In its tummy,
4369 They hibernate and stay away
4370 And eat!

4371 They return
4372 To the countryside
4373 For the next elections
4374 Like the kite
4375 That returns during the Dry Season

4376 *When the kites have returned*
4377 *The Dry Season has come!*

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4378 The Democratic Party
4379 How does it differ
4380 From the Congress?

4381 Ocol says
4382 They want Uhuru,
4383 His brother says
4384 They want Uhuru and Peace,
4385 Both of them say

4386 They fight ignorance and disease!

4387 Then why do they not join hands,
4388 Why do they split up the army
4389 Into two hostile groups?
4390 The spears of the young men
4391 And their shields,
4392 Why are the weapons
4393 And the men and women
4394 Dispersed so uselessly?

4395 And while the pythons of sickness
4396 Swallow the children
4397 And the buffaloes of poverty
4398 Knock the people down
4399 And ignorance stands there
4400 Like an elephant,

4401 The war leaders
4402 Are tightly locked in bloody feuds,
4403 Eating each other's liver
4404 As if the D.P. was leprosy
4405 And the Congress yaws;
4406 If only the parties
4407 Would fight poverty
4408 With the fury
4409 With which they fight each other,
4410 If diseases and ignorance
4411 Were assaulted
4412 With the deadly vengeance
4413 With which Ocol assaults his mother's son,
4414 The enemies would have been
4415 Greatly reduced by now.

4416 I am concerned
4417 About the well-being of our homestead!
4418 The women there
4419 Wear mourning clothes
4420 The homestead is surely dead
4421 The enmity, the black-heartedness,
4422 The quarrels, the jealousies ...

4423 When the fiends
4424 That sow smallpox
4425 Go through our homestead
4426 That people will be finished,
4427 Because the insides of the people are bad!
4428 This will be the gift
4429 That the political parties have brought!

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4430 And while the pythons of sickness
4431 Swallow the children
4432 And the buffaloes of poverty
4433 Knock the people down
4434 And ignorance stands there
4435 Like an elephant,/The warleaders
4436 Are tightly locked in bloody feuds,
4437 Eating each other's liver ...

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12

My Husband's House is a Dark Forest of Books

4438 Listen, my clansmen,
4439 I cry over my husband
4440 Whose head is lost.
4441 Ocol has lost his head
4442 In the forest of books.

4443 When my husband
4444 Was still wooing me
4445 His eyes were still alive,
4446 His ears were still unblocked,
4447 Ocol had not yet become a fool
4448 My friend was a man then!

4449 He had not yet become a woman,
4450 He was still a free man,
4451 His heart was still his chief.

4452 My husband was still a Black man
4453 The son of the Bull
4454 The son of Agik
4455 The woman from Okol
4456 Was still a man,
4457 An Acoli.

4458 My husband has read much,
4459 He has read extensively and deeply,
4460 He was read among white men
4461 And he is clever like white men

4462 And the reading
4463 Has killed my man,
4464 In the ways of his people
4465 He has become
4466 A stump.

4467 He abuses all things Acoli,
4468 He says
4469 The ways of black people
4470 Are black
4471 Because his eyeballs have exploded,
4472 And he wears dark glasses,
4473 My husband's house
4474 Is a dark forest of books.
4475 Some stand there
4476 Tall and huge
4477 Like the *tido* tree

4478 Some are old
4479 Their barks are peeling off
4480 And they smell strongly.
4481 Some are thin and soft.

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4482 The backs of some books
4483 Are hard like the rocky stem of the *poi* tree,
4484 Some are green
4485 Others red as blood

4486 Some books are black and oily,
4487 Their backs shine like
4488 The dangerous *ororo* snake
4489 Coiled on a tree top.

4490 Some have pictures on their backs,
4491 Dead faces of witch-looking men and women,
4492 Unshaven, bold, fat-stomached
4493 Bony-cheeked, angry revengeful-looking people,
4494 Pictures of men and women
4495 Who died long ago.

4496 The papers on my husband's desk
4497 Coil threateningly
4498 Like the giant forest climbers,
4499 Like the *kituba* tree
4500 That squeezes other trees to death;
4501 Some stand up,
4502 Others lie on their backs,
4503 They are interlocked
4504 Like the legs of youths
4505 At the *orak* dance,
4506 Like the legs of the planks
4507 Of the *goggo* fence,
4508 They are tightly interlocked
4509 Like the legs of the giant forest climbers
4510 In the impenetrable forest

4511 My husband's house
4512 Is a mighty forest of books,
4513 Dark it is and very damp,
4514 The steam rising from the ground
4515 Hot thick and poisonous
4516 Mingles with the corrosive dew
4517 And the rain drops
4518 That have collected in the leaves.

4519 They choke you
4520 If you stay there long,
4521 They ruin your nose and tongue
4522 So that you can no longer
4523 Enjoy the fresh smell of simsim oil
4524 Or the taste of *malakwang* ;

4525 And the boiling darkness
4526 Bursts your eye balls.
4527 And the sticky juices
4528 That drop from the gum trees
4529 Block the holes of your ears,
4530 And when ten girls
4531 Standing on the hillock
4532 In the moonlight
4533 Sing *oyele* songs,
4534 Throwing stones of abuse
4535 At the rough-skinned ugly old men
4536 Chosen for them as husbands
4537 By their money-loving fathers,

4538 Or when your daughter
4539 Sings a lovely lullaby
4540 To her baby brother
4541 Strapped on her back,

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4542 And she sways forwards and backwards
4543 As she sings

4544 *O baby*
4545 *Why do you cry?*
4546 *Are you ill?*
4547 *O baby stop crying*
4548 *Your mother has fried the aluru birds*
4549 *In ghee!*

4550 When the girls sing *cycle* songs
4551 And the nurse sings her lullaby
4552 You hear only noises,
4553 Noises that disturb you
4554 Like a brick
4555 Thrown on top of the iron roof.

4556 If you stay
4557 In my husband's house long,

4558 The ghosts of the dead men
4559 That people this dark forest,
4560 The ghosts of the many white men
4561 And white women
4562 That scream whenever you touch any book,
4563 The deadly vengeance ghosts
4564 Of the writers
4565 Will capture your head,
4566 And like my husband
4567 You will become
4568 A walking corpse.

4569 My husband's ears are numb,
4570 He hears the crackling sounds
4571 Of the gums within the holes of his ears
4572 And thinks this is the music
4573 Of his people;
4574 He cannot hear
4575 The insults of foreigners
4576 Who say
4577 The songs of black men are rubbish!

4578 Listen, my husband,
4579 Hear my cry!
4580 You may not know this
4581 You may not feel so,
4582 But you behave like
4583 A dog of the white man!
4584 A good dog pleases its master,
4585 It barks at night
4586 And hunts in the salt lick
4587 It chases away wild cats
4588 That come to steal the chicken!
4589 And when the master calls
4590 It folds its tail between the legs.

4591 The dogs of white men
4592 Are well trained
4593 And they understand English!

4594 When the master is eating
4595 They lie by the door
4596 And keep guard

4597 While waiting for left-overs.

4598 But oh! Ocol

4599 You are my master and my husband,

4600 You are the father of these children

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4601 You are a man,

4602 You are you!

4603 Do you not feel ashamed

4604 Behaving like another man's dog

4605 Before your own wife and children?

4606 My husband, Ocol

4607 You are a Prince

4608 Of an ancient chiefdom,

4609 Look,

4610 There in the middle of the homestead

4611 Stands your grandfather's Shrine,

4612 Your grandfather was a Bull among men

4613 And although he died long ago

4614 His name still blows like a horn,

4615 His name is still heard

4616 Throughout the land.

4617 When he died

4618 Your father proudly

4619 Built him that Shrine!

4620 A true son of his father

4621 He carried out all the duties

4622 Of a first-born son.

4623 He himself was a great chief

4624 Well beloved by his people.

4625 At the *otole* dance

4626 He was right in the middle

4627 Completely surrounded by his host

4628 Like the termite queen mother,

4629 But you could spot him

4630 By his huge head-gear

4631 Waving like a field of flowering sugar-cane.

4632 In battle he fought at the front
4633 Fierce like a wounded buffalo-girl,
4634 When his men struck the enemy
4635 The heaven shook from its base;

4636 Has the Fire produced Ash?
4637 Has the Bull died without a Head?
4638 Aaa! A certain man
4639 Has no millet field,
4640 He lives on borrowed foods.
4641 He borrows the clothes he wears
4642 And the ideas in his head
4643 And his actions and behaviour
4644 Are to please somebody else.
4645 Like a woman trying to please her husband!
4646 My husband has become a woman!

4647 Then why do you wear a shirt?
4648 Why do you not tie
4649 A sheet round your waist
4650 As other women do?
4651 Put on the string skirt
4652 And some beads on your loins!

4653 O, my clansmen,
4654 Let us all cry together!
4655 Come,
4656 Let us mourn the death of my husband,
4657 The death of a Prince
4658 The Ash that was produced

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4659 By a great Fire!
4660 O, this homestead is utterly dead,
4661 Close the gates
4662 With *lacari* thorns,
4663 For the Prince
4664 The heir to the Stool is lost!
4665 And all the young men
4666 Have perished in the wilderness!

4667 And the fame of this homestead
4668 That once blazed like a wild fire
4669 In a moonless night
4670 Is now like the last breaths
4671 Of a dying old man!

4672 There is not one single true son left,
4673 The entire village
4674 Has fallen into the hands
4675 Of war captives and slaves!
4676 Perhaps one of our boys
4677 Escaped with his life!
4678 Perhaps he is hiding in the bush
4679 Waiting for the sun to set!

4680 But will he come
4681 Before the next mourning?
4682 Will he arrive in time?

4683 Bile burns my inside!
4684 I feel like vomiting!

4685 For all our young men
4686 Were finished in the forest,
4687 Their manhood was finished
4688 In the class-rooms,
4689 Their testicles
4690 Were smashed
4691 With large books!

13

Let Them Prepare the Malakwang Dish

4692 But Ocol, my husband,
4693 If you are not yet utterly dead
4694 And fit only for the stomach of the earth,
4695 If your heart-string
4696 Is not yet completely cut,
4697 If your ghost
4698 Has not yet escaped and got completely lost,
4699 If some blood is still flowing
4700 However faintly,
4701 Take courage,
4702 Take a small amount of millet porridge,

4703 Let them prop you up,
4704 Drink some fish soup
4705 Slowly, slowly
4706 You will recover.

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4707 Chew the roots of *omwombye* .
4708 It is very bitter
4709 But it will clear your throat.

4710 Let them prepare the *malakwang* dish
4711 Eat the roots of *lurono*
4712 And the roots of your tongue
4713 Will be loosened.
4714 When they have prepared *lukut* ,
4715 Eat it,
4716 It will strengthen your knee!

4717 Let them drop simsim oil
4718 Into the holes of your ear,
4719 Let them scoop out the gum
4720 That has filled your ears for so long,
4721 The thick dust you collected
4722 From the altar
4723 And the chaff
4724 From the books
4725 And the useless things
4726 From the magazines and newspapers,
4727 And the radio and television!
4728 Here is some water.
4729 It is luke-warm,
4730 It will not burn you,
4731 Let me pour it for you
4732 So that you may wash your face!

4733 But first
4734 Remove those dark glasses,
4735 Throw them away,
4736 Then remove the scales
4737 That have formed on your eyes
4738 During daylight
4739 When you closed your eyes
4740 In prayer.

4741 Bring the ripe seeds of *labikka*
4742 And scratch Ocol's eyeballs
4743 And remove the blood
4744 That has clotted there,
4745 Put the rhino-horn powder
4746 In his eyes,
4747 Let it stab away
4748 The pus that blocks his eyes!

4749 The blindness that you got in the library
4750 Will be removed by the diviner!

4751 The swelling that has blocked your throat
4752 Will be treated with the shoots of *lapena*
4753 Chew the shoots of *lapena* and *olim* ,
4754 Put some salt in the shoots
4755 And swallow the bitter green juice!
4756 You must vomit
4757 The shyness you ate in the church.
4758 Drink raw eggs mixed in millet flour; and if this does not make you feel sick
4759 Put one finger
4760 Deep down your throat!

4761 Clean your teeth with sand,
4762 I will prepare the sand for you
4763 White like the sand
4764 Vomited by the frog!

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4765 Brush your tongue
4766 So thickly coated with bitter insults;
4767 Here is warm water
4768 There is some salt in it,
4769 Gargle it,
4770 Clean your mouth,
4771 Spit out the insults with the water!
4772 The abuses you learnt
4773 From your white masters
4774 And the stupid stubbornness
4775 Spit them down with the water.

4776 And, son of the Bull
4777 When you are completely cured
4778 When you have gained your full strength
4779 Go to the shrine of your fathers,
4780 Prepare a feast,
4781 Give blood to your ancestors,
4782 Give them beer, meat and millet bread,
4783 Let the elders
4784 Spit blessing on you
4785 Let them intercede for you
4786 And pray to the ancestors
4787 Who sleep in their tombs
4788 Face upwards.

4789 Beg forgiveness from them
4790 And ask them to give you
4791 A new spear
4792 A new spear with a sharp and hard point.
4793 A spear that will crack the rock.
4794 Ask for a spear that you will trust
4795 One that does not bend easily
4796 Like the earth-worm.
4797 Ask them to restore your manhood!
4798 For I am sick
4799 Of sharing a bed with a woman!

4800 Ask them to forgive
4801 Your past stupidity,
4802 Pray that the setting sun
4803 May take away all your shyness
4804 Deceit, childish pride, and sharp tongue!

4805 For when you insulted me,
4806 Saying
4807 I was a mere village girl,
4808 You were insulting your grandfathers
4809 And grandmothers, your father and mother!
4810 When you compared me
4811 With the silly *ojuu* insects
4812 That sit on the beer pot,
4813 You were abusing your entire people.
4814 You were saying
4815 The customs of your people
4816 Are like the useless things
4817 Left in the old homestead.

4818 When you took the axe
4819 And threatened to cut the *Okango*
4820 That grows on the ancestral shrine
4821 You were threatening

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4822 To cut yourself loose,
4823 To be tossed by the winds
4824 This way and that way
4825 Like the dead dry leaves
4826 Of the *olam* tree
4827 In the dry season.

4828 When you have recovered properly,
4829 Go to your old mother
4830 And ask forgiveness from her;
4831 Let her spit blessing in your hands;
4832 And rub the saliva
4833 On your chest
4834 And on your forehead!

4835 And I as your first wife,
4836 Mother of your first-born,
4837 Mother of your son and daughter,
4838 I have only one request.
4839 I do not ask for money
4840 Although I have need of it,
4841 I do not ask for meat,
4842 I can live on green vegetables
4843 For a while yet.
4844 Buy clothes for the woman
4845 With whom I share you,
4846 Buy beads for her, and perfume;
4847 And shoes and necklaces, and ear-rings!

4848 When you have gained your full strength
4849 I have only one request,
4850 And all I ask is
4851 That you remove the road block
4852 From my path.

4853 Here is my bow-harp
4854 Let me sing greetings to you,
4855 Let me play for you one song only
4856 Let me play and sing
4857 The song of my youth:

4858 *She has taken the road to Nimule*
4859 *She will come back tomorrow*
4860 *His eyes are fixed on the road*
4861 *Saying, Bring Alyeka to me*
4862 *That I may see her*
4863 *The daughter of the Bull*
4864 *Has stayed away too long*
4865 *His eyes are fixed on the road*

4866 All I ask
4867 Is that you give me one chance,
4868 Let me praise you
4869 Son of the chief!
4870 Tie ankle bells on my legs
4871 Bring *lacucuku* rattles
4872 And tie them on my legs,
4873 Call the *nanga* players
4874 And let them play
4875 And let them sing,

4876 Let me dance before you,
4877 My love,
4878 Let me show you
4879 The wealth in your house,
4880 Ocol my husband,
4881 Son of the Bull,
4882 Let no one uproot the Pumpkin.

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p' Bitek, Okot, 1931- : *Song of Ocol* [from p' Bitek, Okot, 1931-: Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol]

1 Woman,
2 Shut up!
3 Pack your things
4 Go!

5 Take all the clothes
6 I bought you
7 The beads, necklaces
8 And the remains
9 Of the utensils,
10 I need no second-hand things.

11 There is a large sack
12 In the boot
13 Of the car,
14 Take it
15 Put all your things in it
16 And go!

17 Song of the woman
18 Is the confused noise
19 Made by the ram
20 After the butcher's knife
21 Has sunk past
22 The wind pipe,
23 Red paint spraying
24 On the grasses;
25 It is a song all alone
26 A solo fragment
27 With no chorus
28 No accompaniment,
29 A strange melody
30 Impossible to orchestrate;

31 As if in echo
32 Of women's wailing
33 At yesterday's funeral,
34 Song of the dead
35 Out of an old tomb,
36 Stealthy cracking
37 Of dry bones,
38 Falling in of skulls
39 Under the weight
40 Of earth;

41 It's the dull thud
42 Of the wooden arrow
43 As it strikes the concrete
44 Of a wall
45 And falls to earth,
46 Extinguished
47 Without life
48 Like a bird
49 Hit by stone
50 From a boy's catapult.

51 Have you heard
52 The sigh of a monarch
53 In exile?

54 He squats on a log

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55 In the shadow
56 Of a disused hut,
57 It is cold
58 The keen wind
59 Knives through his
60 Torn trousers
61 Licking his bruised knee
62 With rough fenile tongue,

63 Yesternight!
64 Yesternight ah!

65 The smallest toe
66 On the left foot
67 Slowly weeps blood,
68 A fat house-fly
69 Drones away;

70 Under the arm-pit
71 It is sticky,
72 The remains of a shirt
73 Sticks to his back,

74 Yesternight ah!
75 The hot bath
76 The thick purple carpet,
77 The red slippers ...

78 His dry lips taste salty,
79 A ball of thirst
80 Is climbing up his throat
81 He is forcing down
82 Some saliva,

83 Yesternight
84 The waiter on his knees,
85 The woman whispering,
86 'My Lord, My husband',
87 The red wine
88 The soft lights,
89 Woman's smile
90 Inviting man to bed,
91 The hot lips
92 Of her younger sister
93 Firm breasts
94 The embrace ...

95 He looks at his hands
96 At the black finger nails,
97 Cold sweat ...
98 He is choking,
99 He keeps asking himself,
100 'But why? Why? Why?'

101 Song of the woman
102 Is the mad bragging
103 Of a defeated General,
104 Ten thousand men
105 Dead, dying,
106 The others scattered;

107 It is the pointless defiance
108 Of the condemned,

109 He is blindfolded,
110 The rough hand
111 Of the noose
112 Round his neck.

113 Woman
114 Your song
115 Is rotting buffalo
116 Left behind by
117 Fleeing poachers,
118 Its nose blocked

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119 Woman
120 Your song
121 Is rotting buffalo
122 Left behind by
123 Fleeing poachers

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124 With house-flies
125 Sucking bloody mucus,
126 The eyes
127 Two lumps of green-flies
128 Feasting on crusts
129 Of salty tears,
130 Maggots wallowing
131 In the pus
132 In the spear wounds;

133 Skinny-necked
134 Bald headed vultures
135 Hover above,
136 While aged stiff-jointed lions
137 And limping-hipped hyenas
138 Snarl over bones;

139 Song of the woman

140 Is sour sweet,
141 It is pork gone rancid,
142 It is the honeyed
143 Bloodied sour milk
144 In the stinking
145 Maasai gourd.

146 I see an Old Homestead
147 In the valley below
148 Huts, granaries ...
149 All in ruins;

150 I see a large Pumpkin
151 Rotting
152 A thousand beetles
153 In it;
154 We will plough up
155 All the valley,
156 Make compost of the Pumpkins
157 And the other native vegetables,
158 The fence dividing
159 Family holdings
160 Will be torn down,
161 We will uproot
162 The treets demarcating
163 The land of clan from clan,

164 We will obliterate
165 Tribal boundaries
166 And throttle native tongues
167 To dumb death.

168 Houseboy,
169 Listen
170 Call the *ayah*
171 Help the woman
172 Pack her things,
173 Then sweep the house clean
174 And wash the floor,
175 I am off to Town
176 To fetch the painter.

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2

177 What is Africa
178 To me?

179 Blackness,
180 Deep, deep fathomless
181 Darkness;

182 Africa,
183 Idle giant
184 Basking in the sun,
185 Sleeping, snoring,
186 Twitching in dreams;

187 Diseased with a chronic illness,
188 Choking with black ignorance,
189 Chained to the rock
190 Of poverty,

191 And yet laughing,
192 Always laughing and dancing,
193 The chains on his legs
194 Jangling;

195 Displaying his white teeth
196 In bright pink gum,
197 Loose white teeth
198 That cannot bite,
199 Joking, giggling, dancing ...

200 Stuck in the stagnant mud
201 Of superstitions,
202 Frightened by the spirits
203 Of the bush, the stream,
204 The rock,
205 Scared of corpses ...

206 He hears eerie noises
207 From the lakeside
208 And from the mountain top,
209 Sees snakes
210 In the whirlwind
211 And at both ends
212 Of the rainbow;

213 The caves house his gods
214 Or he carries them
215 On his head
216 Or on his shoulder
217 As he roams the wilderness,
218 Led by his cattle,
219 Or following the spoor
220 Of the elephant
221 That he has speared
222 But could not kill;

223 Child,
224 Lover of toys,
225 Look at his toy weapons,
226 His utensils, his hut ...
227 Toy garden, toy chickens,
228 Toy cattle,
229 Toy children ...

230 Timid,
231 Unadventurous,
232 Scared of the unbeaten track,

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233 Unweaned,
234 Clinging to mother's milkless breasts
235 Clinging to brother,
236 To uncle, to clan,
237 To tribe

238 To blackness,

239 To Africa,

240 Africa
241 This rich granary
242 Of taboos, customs,
243 Traditions ...

244 Mother, mother,
245 Why,
246 Why was I born
247 Black?

3

248 To hell
249 With your Pumpkins
250 And your Old Homesteads,
251 To hell
252 With the husks
253 Of old traditions
254 And meaningless customs,

255 We will smash
256 The taboos
257 One by one,
258 Explode the basis
259 Of every superstition,
260 We will uproot
261 Every sacred tree
262 And demolish every ancestral shrine.

263 We will not just
264 Breach the wall
265 Of your mud hut
266 To let in the air,
267 Do you think
268 We plan merely
269 To bring light
270 Into the hut?
271 We will set it ablaze
272 Let fire consume it all
273 This liar of backwardness;

274 We will uproot granaries
275 Break up the cooking pots
276 And water pots,
277 We'll grind
278 The grinding stones
279 To powder;

280 That obsolete toy
281 With which you scratch the soil
282 And the other rusty toys
283 In the hut,

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284 The dried fish
285 Riddled with cockroaches,
286 The piece of carcass
287 Hung above the cooking place
288 Black with soot ...
289 We'll make a big heap
290 Of all the rubbish
291 From the hut
292 And set the heap
293 Aflame.

294 Look at that woman
295 Shaking the rattle gourd
296 And talking to herself,

297 Mad creature,
298 Her hair
299 A burnt out forest,
300 Her eyes
301 A pair of rockets
302 Shooting out from the head,
303 Serpent tongue
304 Spitting poisons
305 Lashing crocodile tail;

306 Do you see
307 The fools

308 Sitting around her?
309 Terror infested faces
310 Eyes closed
311 Gummed with tears,
312 Lips cracked, bleeding,
313 Throats
314 Parched deserts of drought;

315 That child lying
316 On the earth
317 Numb
318 Bombs exploding in his head,
319 Blood boiling
320 Heavy with malarial parasites
321 Raging through his veins,

322 The mad woman
323 Spits on the palms
324 Of his hands
325 And on his feet,
326 Squirts beer
327 On his face
328 To cool him,
329 Spills chicken blood
330 On his chest,
331 A gift to Death!

332 The child's mother
333 Smiles,
334 The diviner pleads
335 With dread malaria,

336 I give you blood,
337 Let this child live;
338 Here's your beer
339 Take your beer,
340 Leave us this child;
341 Take your food. ...

342 We will round up
343 All these priests
344 And priestesses of darkness,
345 All the rain-makers
346 And herbalists,
347 The men and women

348 Who sacrifice at chieftdom
349 Or clan shrines,

350 We will arrest all the witches,

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351 Serpent tongue
352 Spitting poisons
353 Lashing crocodile tails

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354 Wizards, evil-eyes,
355 Sellers of fetish bundles,
356 Bones and claws,
357 Dealers in poisons
358 Extracted from plants
359 And venoms from snakes;

360 We will put all these
361 Pillars of fear
362 In a lake steamer,
363 Take them to the deepest part
364 And cast them into the void;

365 We will arrest
366 All the village poets
367 Musicians and tribal dancers,
368 Put in detention
369 Folk-story tellers
370 And myth makers,
371 The sustainers of
372 Village morality;

373 We'll disband
374 The nest of court historians
375 Glorifiers of the past,
376 We will ban

377 The stupid village anthem of
378 'Backwards ever
379 Forwards never.'

380 To the gallows
381 With all the Professors
382 Of Anthropology
383 And teachers of African History,
384 A bonfire
385 We'll make of their works,
386 We'll destroy all the anthologies
387 Of African literature
388 And close down
389 All the schools
390 Of African Studies.

391 Where is Aimé Césaire?
392 Where Leopold Senghor?
393 Arrest Janheinz Jahn
394 And Father Placide Temples,
395 Put in detention
396 All the preachers
397 Of Negritude;

398 The balloon of
399 The African Personality
400 Exploded long ago,
401 DuBois is dead
402 We will erect
403 No memorial for him;
404 Why should I care
405 Who built the citadel
406 Of Zimbabwe?
407 Of what relevance is it
408 Whether black men
409 Architected the Pyramid?

410 Smash all these mirrors
411 That I may not see
412 The blackness of the past

413 From which I came
414 Reflected in them.

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415 Noises come
416 From within a dark hut,
417 A foul smell seeps
418 Of crude *waragi*
419 And stale *kwete* beer,
420 Chickens are fighting
421 Over fresh dung of child;

422 It is Adok Too
423 The blind poet from Lamogi
424 Playing the *nanga*
425 And singing praises
426 To a newly wed bride;
427 Footsteps of men and women
428 Are stamping the earth,
429 Puffs of dust
430 Mingled with smoke,
431 Smell of burnt meat;

432 A woman makes ululations
433 A man blows
434 A long wooden horn,
435 It sounds like a sneezing hippo,
436 Adok Too sings softly ...

437 Ten stacks of newly split firewood,
438 Leaning against the old tree
439 In the middle of
440 The Homestead,
441 Five stacks of grass
442 For starting fire,
443 Five stacks of grass
444 For thatching a new hut,

445 The hut of the newly-wed:

446 Do you know the slave
447 Who split the firewood?
448 Show me the tractor
449 They used for cutting the grass
450 And the cart
451 That brought the firewood
452 And the grass home;

453 I see a young woman
454 Returning home from the well,
455 Balancing a large pot
456 On her head,
457 Some water spilling
458 Her face slimes wet
459 Beads of water
460 On her bare breasts,
461 Long yellow and red
462 Beams from the setting sun
463 Darting over her youthful breasts
464 Like dragon flies;

465 Her naked feet
466 Digging the pathway,
467 Nibbling away the earth,
468 Her soles are thick

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469 Cracked like the earth
470 In the dry season,
471 The skin of her hands
472 Are rough like concrete wall,
473 There are stones
474 Embedded in the skin,
475 Her palms are worn out
476 Like the soles
477 Of old shoes;

478 The blind poet's voice
479 Is piercing the thatch,
480 The arrow of his song
481 Strikes the woman
482 Like lightning:

483 O! daughter of Bull
484 Wild lily of the hills
485 You are fit for son of Chief,
486 O! my brother
487 A dream deceived me,
488 What an envious dream?
489 When I woke
490 I was wet ...

491 Sister
492 Woman of Acoliland
493 Throw down that pot
494 With its water,
495 Let it break into pieces
496 Let the water cool
497 The thirsty earth;

498 It is taboo
499 To throw down water pots
500 With water in them,
501 But taboos must be broken,
502 Taboos are chains
503 Around the neck,
504 Chains of slavery;

505 Shatter that pot,
506 Shatter taboos, customs,
507 Traditions ...

508 Listen not
509 To the song of the poet
510 The blind musician
511 Plays for his bread,
512 The bread owners
513 Are your slavers;

514 Listen not to Adok Too's praises,
515 They are spurs
516 For the tired horses,
517 Blinkers for donkeys;

518 You woman from Kikuyuland
519 Let that burden slide,
520 Fall from your back
521 You are no mere
522 Donkey cart;
523 Cut that *mukwa* cord
524 Cutting a valley in your head,
525 Burn the *kyondo* sacks
526 That bow you down
527 To see only my dusty boots,

528 Lift up your head
529 Walk erect
530 My love,

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531 The blind poet's voice
532 Is piercing the thatch,
533 The arrow of his song
534 Strikes the woman
535 Like lightning

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536 Let me see
537 Your beautiful eyes,
538 Let me caress
539 Your sultry neck,
540 Let me kiss your dimples ...

541 Shut up you
542 Bush poet from Kiambu
543 And you from Nyeri,
544 Cease insulting my wife

545 With your stupid song
546 My girl is not
547 A camel;

548 Listen
549 My sister from Ankole
550 And you from Ruanda
551 And Burundi,

552 Here's a hammer,
553 Smash those pots
554 Of rotten milk
555 Burst open the door
556 Come forth into daylight,

557 Beat up that old woman
558 Who pumps you full of milk,

559 Are you a caterpillar
560 For wasps
561 To lay their eggs in?
562 Who told you
563 That your fertility
564 Will be enhanced
565 By excessive fatness?

566 Who says you are beautiful
567 When you cannot even walk?
568 You stagger into the sunlight
569 Melting, dripping, wet,
570 A pregnant hippo;
571 Soft, flabby, weak,
572 Bursting buttocks,
573 Your breasts are two drums,
574 Can you see your belly button?
575 I hear the lowing of cattle
576 A forest of long white horns
577 Approaching home.

578 I hear the wild song
579 Of the herdsman

580 He is singing praises
581 To your ugliness!

582 Woman of Africa
583 Sweeper
584 Smearing floors and walls
585 With cow dung and black soil,
586 Cook, *ayah* , the baby tied on your back,
587 Vomiting,
588 Washer of dishes,
589 Planting, weeding, harvesting,
590 Store-keeper, builder,
591 Runner of errands,
592 Cart, lorry,
593 Donkey. ...

594 Woman of Africa
595 What are you not?

596 In *buibui*
597 Your face is covered
598 In black cloth
599 Like a bat's leather wing,

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600 Harem
601 Private collection
602 Of tasty flesh,
603 Do you hear the bell
604 Of the leading cow?
605 The dust you see
606 Is not caused by a hurricane,
607 It's the herds
608 Of the Jo-Lango;

609 We will destroy
610 All these *shenzi* cattle
611 The root of their savagery,
612 The cause of their misery
613 And death;

614 I see you husband
615 He's had a little drink
616 His mouth drooling:

617 Asha before lunch
618 Chausiku after dinner
619 Young Akelo after midnight ...

620 In Buganda
621 They buy you
622 With two pots
623 Of beer,
624 The Luo trade you
625 For seven cows,

626 And what is that Madi hoe
627 The Acoli men give your father?
628 He cannot even use it
629 For digging!
630 They purchase you
631 On hire purchase even,
632 Like bicycles,

633 You are furniture,
634 Mattress for man
635 Your arm
636 A pillow
637 For his head!

638 Woman of Africa
639 Whatever you call yourself,
640 Whatever the bush poets
641 Call you
642 You are not

643 A wife!

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644 You Karamojong elder
645 Etched with the scars
646 Of spear,
647 You young raiders
648 Skimming across the plains
649 Ostrich feathers dancing on your heads
650 Blown back like papyrus tufts
651 By the Nile,
652 I see blood
653 On the shafts
654 Of your spears;

655 You Maasai warrior
656 Honing your spear
657 And polishing it with ghee,
658 You naked Jie
659 Studying the sick cow,
660 You Turkana scout
661 Perched on the termite mound
662 Ijakait from Toposa,
663 You Dodos General
664 Presiding over the war council;

665 You Suk youth
666 I hear you singing
667 Praises to your black ox,
668 Your hands raised
669 In imitation of its horns;

670 You men on Nandi hills
671 Tending cattle in the rocky pastures
672 Always suspecting an impending raid,
673 You Pokot hordes
674 Driving home the stolen cattle;

675 Kipsigis men

676 I see colourful shields
677 Surrounding a thick bush
678 In which I see
679 A lion's tufted tail ...

680 You proud Kalenjin
681 Chiefless, free,
682 Each man the chief
683 Of his hut.

684 When your spears
685 Appeared on the horizon
686 Beyond the Bahr el Ghazal
687 The Nilotes scattered
688 Like flying debris
689 From a bombed house,
690 The Luo ran
691 A thousand miles
692 Were stopped by the big Lake,
693 Had you given chase
694 They might have perished
695 In the water
696 Like the Egyptians
697 In the Red Sea;

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698 When you swept Southwards
699 Towards the Rift Valley
700 Other men fled
701 Like antelopes
702 Chased by the leopard,

703 Like grass-hoppers
704 Escaping from a wild fire;

705 You taught Kikuyus
706 Circumcision,
707 Spread the chiefless democracy
708 Of the Age-Sets system ...

709 Kalenjin,
710 You Jo-Lango---
711 Spirit haunted,
712 Survey your booty,
713 Study your empire,
714 Your gains:

715 A large arc
716 Of semi desert land
717 Strewn with human skeletons
718 Barely covered by the
719 Hostile thorn bushes
720 And the flowering cactus,
721 A monument to five hundred years
722 Of cattle theft!
723 Wallowing in the mud
724 Of poverty and ignorance
725 You recited poems
726 About the beauty of your beasts,
727 Sang songs about the might
728 Of your spears
729 And your thieving exploits;

730 Believing you were
731 The richest of the earth,
732 Drunk with the illusion
733 Of real power
734 You continued to jump
735 Up and down
736 Up and down
737 As you dance,
738 Firmly holding to the spear,
739 The symbol of your backwardness;

740 You barren empire
741 Remained 'closed' to progress,
742 A vast natural animal reserve
743 In which wild men
744 And wild beasts roamed,
745 Students of primitive man
746 Big game hunters
747 And tourists flocked in
748 From all corners of the world,

749 White woman came to discover,
750 To see with their naked eyes
751 What manhood could be!

752 You mountain dwelling Sebei
753 Do you hear me?
754 You Kumam
755 Digging lung-fish
756 From the marshes,
757 You Iteso
758 Fighting at the beer party,
759 You Lutuko ...

760 Listen,

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761 We will not simply
762 Put the Maasai in trousers
763 To end twenty five thousand years
764 Of human nakedness,
765 Dynamiting the ochre quarries
766 Is only the starting gun,

767 We will arrest
768 All the elders
769 The tutors of the young
770 During circumcisions,
771 The gathering of youths
772 In the wilderness for initiations
773 Will be banned,
774 The council of elders
775 Will be abolished;
776 The war dance ...
777 The blowing of war horns
778 Will be punished
779 With twelve strokes
780 Of the cane
781 For each blast;

782 All the men with *moi* names
783 And those with 'killer' marks

784 On their backs
785 And on their arms
786 Will be hanged for murder;

787 You will be disarmed,
788 If need be, by force,
789 All your spears
790 And colourful shields,
791 All your bows
792 And poisoned arrows
793 Will be destroyed,
794 Not one will be left
795 Even for the museums,

796 Spearmakers and blacksmiths
797 Will be jailed;
798 Ah!
799 What a colourful heap
800 We'll make
801 Of the ostrich feathers
802 And all the other head gears,
803 We'll reduce the heap to ashes;

804 We will rip off
805 The smelly goatskin skirts
806 From the women
807 And burn them,
808 Cut all the giraffe hair necklaces
809 And elephant hair bangles,
810 Break the ivory amulets
811 Cutting deep in the flesh
812 Of the upper arms,
813 Remove all the chains,
814 Ear rings, nose rings,
815 Lip-stops ...

816 Each head will be shaved ...

817 Spearing black billy goats

818 In the dry river bed,
819 Sacrifices to cool
820 The blood of the murdered man,
821 All superstitious activities
822 Will be stamped out,
823 They will not be allowed
824 Even on the stage;

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825 Tell me
826 You young man
827 From Maasailand,
828 They call you *morán* ,
829 I see your brother's spear
830 Planted at the door
831 Of your hut,
832 You know he is inside
833 Sleeping with your wife!

834 Would you let a man
835 'Borrow' your wife
836 Yet kill him
837 For taking your *shuka* ?

838 We shall burn down
839 The *manyattas* ,
840 Destroy each one of them
841 Together with all stupid customs
842 That are observed in them.

843 Ijakait,
844 Come brother,
845 You are tall and athletic
846 You are handsome,
847 Walk into your City
848 With your head up;

849 Do you see
850 The eyes of the girls
851 Glued on you?
852 Here you do not have
853 To kill a man or a lion first.

854 Take that girl
855 She wants you.

856 You sister
857 From Pokot
858 Who grew in the open air,
859 You are fresh ...
860 Ah!
861 Come,
862 Walk with me
863 In the City gardens,
864 Hold my hand ...
865 My woman
866 Here's a rose bud,
867 Keep it,
868 Guard it,
869 Don't lose it,
870 Do you hear?

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871 Do I hear you whisper
872 Who is that man?
873 What is his name?
874 Do you not know me
875 And my brothers-in-power?
876 All the time
877 I was reading Econ.
878 At Makerere,
879 And my friend the Resident Magistrate

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880 Was sweating and cramming for the Bar,
881 You were busy
882 Performing the get-stuck dance,

883 Spending weeks at funeral parties,
884 Or in the bush
885 Chasing wild animals
886 Or collecting wild honey,
887 Thoughtless and carefree
888 Like children dancing around the hut
889 After a meal;
890 We spent years
891 In detention
892 Suffering without bitterness
893 And planning for the revolution;

894 Tell me
895 My friend and comrade,
896 Answer me simply and frankly,

897 Apart from the two shillings fee
898 For Party membership,
899 And the dances you performed
900 When the Party chiefs
901 Visited your village,
902 And the slogans you shouted
903 That you did not understand,

904 What was your contribution
905 In the struggle for uhuru?

906 Comrade,
907 Do you not agree
908 That without your present leaders
909 Uhuru could never have come?

910 And, surely,
911 You are not so mean
912 As to grudge them
913 Some token reward,
914 Are you?

915 I have a nice house
916 In the Town,
917 My spacious garden
918 Explodes with jacaranda and roses,
919 I have lilies, bougainvillea, canna ...

920 Do you appreciate the beauty
921 Of my roses?
922 Or would you rather turn
923 My flower garden
924 Into a maize shamba?

925 What did you reap
926 When uhuru ripened
927 And was harvested?

928 Is it my fault
929 That you sleep
930 In a hut
931 With a leaking thatch?

932 Do you blame me
933 Because your sickly children

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934 Do you appreciate the beauty
935 Of my roses?
936 Or would you rather turn
937 My flower garden
938 Into a maize shamba?

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939 Sleep on the earth
940 Sharing the filthy floor
941 With sheep and goats?
942 Who says
943 I am responsible

944 For the poverty of the peasantry?
945 Am I the cause of unemployment
946 And landlessness?

947 Did you ever see me
948 Touring the countryside
949 Recruiting people's daughters
950 Into prostitution?

951 How did I make men ignorant?
952 Was it not I
953 Who asked the Minister
954 To build a school
955 In your village?
956 And did I prevent
957 Children from other villages
958 From going to school?

959 I have other properties
960 In the Town,
961 But,
962 Come,
963 Beat the dust off your feet
964 And jump into my Merc.,
965 Let me take you for a ride
966 And show you around my farm ...

967 When the tractor first snorted
968 On these hunting grounds
969 The natives scuttled into the earth
970 Like squirrels,
971 Like the edible rat
972 Pursued by the hunter's dog,

973 Behold,
974 Africa's wildest bush
975 Is now a garden green
976 With wheat, barley, coffee ...

977 Look at that prize bull,
978 Black, hornless and without a hump ...

979 Don't touch the udder of my cow
980 With your unsterilized hands,
981 Don't touch the milking utensils ...

982 Do you see
983 That golden carpet
984 Covering the hillside?
985 Those are my sheep ...
986 Wool, mutton;

987 O!
988 How refreshing it is
989 To watch the plants germinate,
990 Grow, flower and ripen,
991 And the young healthy animals
992 Playing!

993 I come to my farm
994 Every week-end,
995 It's wonderful to get out
996 Of the Town
997 Into the fresh air

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998 Of the country,
999 I enjoy the smell
1000 Of the earth,
1001 The aroma of the coffee blossoms
1002 Intoxicates me!

1003 Tell me
1004 My friend and comrade,
1005 Do you remember
1006 The night of uhuru
1007 When the celebration drums throbbed
1008 And men and women wept with joy
1009 As they danced,
1010 Hands raised in salute
1011 To the national flag?

1012 Did someone tell you
1013 That on the morning of uhuru
1014 The dew on the grass
1015 Along the village pathways
1016 Would turn into gold,

1017 To be collected by the women
1018 Going to the well
1019 To fetch water,
1020 Or by the early morning hunters
1021 Laying traps for the duikers
1022 At the water holes?

1023 And the leaves
1024 Of the *olam* tree
1025 That fall off
1026 At the start of the droughts,
1027 Did you dream
1028 That the leaves
1029 Would become banknotes
1030 And be scattered by the wind
1031 Among the villagers?

1032 We have property

1033 And wealth,
1034 We are in power;

1035 Trespassers must be jailed
1036 For life,
1037 Thieves and robbers
1038 Must be hanged,
1039 Disloyal elements
1040 Must be detained without trial ...

1041 Have lions
1042 Begun to eat grass,

1043 To lie down with lambs
1044 And to play games with antelopes?
1045 Can a leopardess
1046 Suckle a piglet?

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1047 What do you mutter there
1048 Idiot?
1049 I hear you whimper
1050 Like a sick puppy,
1051 Your penis shrivelled up
1052 With fear;

1053 Listen to the beggar's song,
1054 The song of a cripple
1055 At sunset:

1056 We sowed,
1057 We watered
1058 Acres of Cynicism,
1059 Planted forests of Laughter
1060 Bitter Laughter
1061 Corrosive venom,
1062 Men shed tears
1063 As they rocked
1064 Held their sides
1065 Laughed, laughed,
1066 Floods of tears
1067 Turned red;

1068 We manured the Land
1069 Frustrations sprouted
1070 Bursting the soil
1071 Like young banana trees,
1072 Fat Frustrations

1073 Flourished fast
1074 Yielding fruits
1075 Green as gall;

1076 On the hillsides
1077 We planted Fear,
1078 It's blood-red blossoms
1079 Covered the hills
1080 Like February fires,
1081 Prickly leaves
1082 Hard and yellow
1083 Pricked men's skins
1084 Causing festering wounds;

1085 In the valley
1086 A streamlet trickled,
1087 Its water sluggish, slimy,
1088 Beside the streamlet
1089 The lamb
1090 Uhuru
1091 Dead as stone,
1092 The shimmering flies
1093 Giving false life
1094 To its open eyes!

1095 A herdsboy
1096 Sat on the bank above,
1097 Threw small stones
1098 Hit the carcass,
1099 The flies rose
1100 Like white ants,
1101 The boy sobbed
1102 Eyes smarting with pepper;

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1103 The lamb
1104 Uhuru
1105 Dead as Stone,
1106 The shimmering flies
1107 Giving false life
1108 To its open eyes?

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1109 Two men stood
1110 On the other side
1111 Roared like thunder,
1112 Peals of Laughter
1113 Dipped in poison
1114 Pierced the boy
1115 Like daggers of steel,
1116 Blood gushed from his heart
1117 Anointing the Land!
1118 We reaped Cynicism

1119 Stored it
1120 In a concrete granary
1121 Wider, deeper
1122 Than Mwitanzige ¹² ,
1123 We distilled Anger
1124 From the Laughter
1125 Ten thousand tons
1126 Of venom;
1127 Stored it in a tank
1128 Underground,
1129 Acrid steam rose
1130 Like lazy smoke,
1131 Trees and grasses died;
1132 A smouldering mound we made
1133 Of Frustrations and Fear
1134 Higher than Kirinyaga ¹³
1135 Its fiery lips
1136 Licked the clouds,
1137 Heaven wept;

1138 A hunter
1139 Sat in the shadow
1140 Of a rock,
1141 Rubbed two sticks
1142 A flash,
1143 Thunder roared,
1144 Flames
1145 Purified the Land!

1146 Out of my way
1147 You cowardly fool

1148 Creep back and hide
1149 In your mother's womb;
1150 Vex me no more
1151 With your hollow wailings
1152 And crocodile tears
1153 Over uhuru!

1154 You Pigmy men
1155 Skinning the elephant
1156 With rusty knives,
1157 I see your children
1158 Happy, dancing,
1159 Swinging from branch to branch
1160 Like naked hairless
1161 Black apes,

1162 You dwarf
1163 Rubbing two sticks
1164 To make fire,
1165 Which is the plant
1166 From which you extract
1167 Poison for the arrows?

1168 You *mukopi*
1169 Carrying water
1170 For your landlord's wife,
1171 You squatter ...

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1172 What is uhuru to you?

1173 You Indian dukawallah
1174 Coughing spittle onto the floor,
1175 Your citizenship card
1176 Nailed on the wall,
1177 You prostitute
1178 Sowing syphilis in the nightclubs
1179 You unemployed ...

1180 You loyal Muganda
1181 Dressed in white *kanzu* ,
1182 I see you kneeling

1183 Before another man,
1184 Trailing your *kanzu*
1185 In the mud,
1186 Like a priest
1187 But serving an altar of man
1188 Not God;

1189 You man from Bunyoro
1190 And you from Toro
1191 What's wrong with your knees
1192 That you lie on your bellies
1193 Eating dust?
1194 Are you earthworms?

1195 When the naked Luo,
1196 Through trickery,
1197 Established their rule
1198 Over you,
1199 And stole your cattle,
1200 Your women, your land
1201 And made you serfs,
1202 For five hundred years
1203 You continued to show
1204 Your 'loyalties'
1205 By performing acts of servitude;
1206 What is uhuru to you?
1207 You Bairu from Ankole
1208 You slaves in Ruanda and Burundi,
1209 Do I see you
1210 Holding a beer pot
1211 While your lofty master
1212 Sucks the beer
1213 Through the sucking tube?

1214 Let that pot fall
1215 Beer and all
1216 Shatter and splash
1217 Over the chief's head;

1218 We will uproot
1219 Each tree
1220 From the Ituri forest
1221 And blow up

1222 Mount Kilimanjaro,
1223 The rubble from Ruwenzori
1224 Will fill the Valleys
1225 Of the Rift,
1226 We will divert
1227 The mighty waters
1228 Of the Nile
1229 Into the Indian Ocean.

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1230 Woman
1231 I see cups of tears
1232 Streaming down your cheeks,
1233 Your body shaking
1234 With anger and despair
1235 Like a mother
1236 Sitting by her dead son;

1237 Let them raise the alarm,
1238 Sound the war drums
1239 And blow the war horns,
1240 Let the women make ululations,
1241 Call all the tribesmen
1242 And all the tribeswomen,
1243 Let them gather together
1244 For the last time;
1245 Let them put ash
1246 On their heads
1247 And on their bodies
1248 Let the women cry aloud
1249 And beat their chests with stones,
1250 Let them throw themselves
1251 On the ground
1252 And roll in the dust
1253 And tear their hair
1254 In mourning!
1255 Let the men
1256 Polish their weapons
1257 And arm themselves with spears,
1258 Shields, bows, arrows
1259 And battle axes,
1260 Let them wear ostrich feathers

1261 On their heads
1262 And swishes
1263 On their arms,

1264 Let them blow their horns
1265 And their wooden trumpets,
1266 Let the youths
1267 Perform the mock fight
1268 And the women shout
1269 The praise names of their men
1270 And of their clans
1271 And of the clans of their husbands;

1272 Let the drummers
1273 Play the rhythms
1274 Of the funeral dance,
1275 And let the people sing and dance
1276 And celebrate the passing of
1277 The Old Homestead!

1278 Weep long,
1279 For the village world
1280 That you know
1281 And love so well,
1282 Is gone,
1283 Swept away
1284 By the fierce fires
1285 Of progress and civilization!

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1286 That walk to the well
1287 Before sunrise,
1288 The cool bath in the stream,
1289 The gathering of the family
1290 Around the evening fire ...

1291 That shady evergreen *byeyo* tree
1292 Under which I first met you
1293 And told you
1294 I wanted you,

1295 Do you remember
1296 The song of the *ogilo* bird
1297 And the chorus
1298 Of the grey monkeys
1299 In the trees nearby?

1300 Let the people drink
1301 *Kwete* beer and *waragi* ,
1302 Let them suck *laco*i beer
1303 With the sucking tubes
1304 As they mourn
1305 The death of
1306 The Old Homestead!

1307 You village chief
1308 Sitting on the stool
1309 And leaning on the central pole
1310 Of your hut,
1311 Mount the rostrum
1312 At the drum post,
1313 Let the people draw near
1314 And keep silence,

1315 Deliver your farewell speech;
1316 Farewell to your friends
1317 And your age-mates,
1318 To your sons and daughters
1319 And to your grandchildren,
1320 Let them bid farewell to you
1321 And to each other,
1322 For tomorrow morning
1323 As the cock crows
1324 For the first time,
1325 The people will disperse,
1326 Each following his or her own route:
1327 Pilgrims to the New City,
1328 And once they depart
1329 They will never meet again!

1330 Say Goodbye
1331 For you will never
1332 Hunt together again,
1333 Nor dance the war dance

1334 Or the *bwola* dance. ...

1335 Bid farewell
1336 To your ancestral spirits
1337 Fleeing from the demolished Homestead,
1338 With their backs to you
1339 They can no longer hear
1340 Your prayers,
1341 Waste no more chicken or goat or sheep
1342 As sacrifices to them,
1343 They are gone with the wind,
1344 Blown away with the smoke
1345 Of the burnt Homestead!
1346 Stop crying
1347 You woman,
1348 Do you think those tears
1349 Can quench the flames
1350 Of civilization?

1351 Wash your face with cold water,

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1352 Here's soap and towel ...
1353 Take some aspirin
1354 It'll clear your headache ...

1355 I see the great gate
1356 Of the City flung open,
1357 I see men and women
1358 Walking in ...

1359 And what are you doing there
1360 Under the tree
1361 Why don't you walk in
1362 With the others?
1363 Are you feeling homesick
1364 For the deserted Homestead?
1365 Or are you frightened
1366 Of the new City?

1367 You have only two alternatives
1368 My sister,
1369 Either you come in
1370 Through the City Gate,
1371 Or take the rope
1372 And hang yourself!

9

1373 Your Excellency
1374 Bwana President
1375 I salute you,
1376 And you Honourable Ministers
1377 Discussing the White Paper;
1378 Mister Speaker, Sir,
1379 You Backbenchers
1380 And Opposition chiefs,
1381 Greetings to you!

1382 I rise
1383 For your Lordship,
1384 Robed, bespectacled,
1385 I see the learned attorney
1386 Addressing the jury,
1387 And his brother advocate
1388 Consulting a volume
1389 Of the *Law Reports*
1390 A House of Lord's judgement;
1391 Amen!
1392 The black Bishop
1393 At the altar
1394 Is blessing the people
1395 In Latin,
1396 Do you see his golden crown
1397 And scarlet robe?

1398 Tell me
1399 You worshipful Mayors,
1400 Aldermen, Councillors,
1401 You Town Clerks in wigs,
1402 You trade union leader
1403 Organising the strike,
1404 You fat black capitalist

1405 In the dark suit,
1406 You sipping the Scotch,

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1407 Bank manager computerising overdrafts,
1408 You surgeons and physicians
1409 At Mulago and Kenyatta Hospitals,
1410 Surveyors, architects, engineers,
1411 Accountants, broadcasters ...
1412 You artists, novelists,
1413 Dramatists, poets,

1414 Military men
1415 And you Police chiefs,
1416 I see you
1417 Studying the situation
1418 And plotting the next move;

1419 You Permanent Secretary
1420 Composing the Minister's speech,
1421 You Party leader
1422 Standing on top of the Land-Rover
1423 Addressing the market crowd,

1424 You African Ambassador
1425 At the United Nations,
1426 Your Excellency
1427 Speak,

1428 Tell the world
1429 In English or in French,
1430 Talk about
1431 The African foundation
1432 On which we are
1433 Building the new nations
1434 Of Africa.

1435 You scholar seeking after truth
1436 I see the top
1437 Of your bald head
1438 Between mountains of books
1439 Gleaming with sweat,
1440 Can you explain

1441 The African philosophy
1442 On which we are reconstructing
1443 Our new societies?

1444 I hear a faint flute
1445 Playing in the moonlight,
1446 It is Leopold Senghor's tune
1447 Of African Socialism,
1448 Do you hear
1449 That distant drum?
1450 Is that not Mwalimu
1451 Nyerere's *Ujamaa* ?

1452 The Osagyefo
1453 Is silent,
1454 The anthem of
1455 United Africa
1456 Is drowned by
1457 The sound of guns!
1458 Tell me
1459 You student of communism,
1460 And you Professor of History
1461 Did Senegalese blood
1462 Flow in the veins
1463 Of Karl Marx?
1464 And Lenin,
1465 Was he born
1466 At Arusha?

1467 We shall build
1468 A new City on the hill

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1469 Overlooking the Lake,
1470 Concrete, steel, stone ...
1471 The termite queen-mother
1472 Will starve to death ...
1473 Broad avenues, spacious gardens,
1474 Parks, swimming pools ...

1475 We will erect monuments
1476 To the founders
1477 Of modern Africa:
1478 Leopold 11 of Belgium,
1479 Bismarck ...

1480 Streets will be named
1481 After the great discoverers,
1482 David Livingstone,
1483 Henry Stanley, Speke ...
1484 We will not forget
1485 Karl Peters ...

1486 'Hannington Park'
1487 To commemorate the Bishop
1488 Murdered by Mwanga's men,
1489 If we can trace them
1490 We'll hang them
1491 For the crime.

1492 You young soldier
1493 Guarding the border post,
1494 Do you know
1495 When that sacred boundary
1496 Was drawn?
1497 Which of your ancestors
1498 Established the area
1499 Of your beloved
1500 Country?
1501 No street
1502 Will be named
1503 After Mansa Sulayman
1504 Of ancient Mali,

1505 He is as irrelevant
1506 As the Greek goddess Artemmis,
1507 A miserly king
1508 He passed nothing on
1509 To us;

1510 Mohammed Askia
1511 Great monarch of Songai,

1512 What a hollow sounding name?
 1513 The Nilotic chiefs
 1514 Labongo and Gipir
 1515 Were famous for their quarrels
 1516 Over a spear
 1517 And for splitting open
 1518 A baby's belly
 1519 To retrieve a bead!

1520 Let the kings of Ghana
 1521 Rot in the earth,
 1522 We'll forget
 1523 The rulers of Monomatapa ...

1524 As for Shaka
 1525 The Zulu General,
 1526 How can we praise him
 1527 When he was utterly defeated
 1528 And killed by his own brothers?

1529 What proud poem
 1530 Can we write
 1531 For the vanquished?

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NOTES

^ [Footnote 1

Salt is extracted from the ash of certain plants, and also from the ash of the dung of domestic animals. The ash is put in a container with small holes in its bottom, water is then poured on the ash, and the salty water is collected in another container placed below. The useless saltless ash is then thrown on the pathway and people tread on it.

^ [Footnote 2

A chiefdom divinity. Other chiefdom divinities possess only persons within the chiefdom. But Labeja possesses even outsiders, e.g. a mother's brother.

^ [Footnote 3

Lawala is a hunting game. *Cooro* is a board game.

^ [Footnote 4

It is believed that lightning and thunder are caused by a giant reddish-brown bird that is almost identical with the domestic fowl. When it opens its wings lightning flashes and thunder is caused

when its strikes with its powerful bolt.

^ [Footnote 5

Odure is the nickname for small boys who are fond of sitting in the house when mother is cooking. It was derived from a small boy of that name whose penis was burnt by the fire from the stove.

^ [Footnote 6

The priest of rain, who presides during the ceremony for rain.

^ [Footnote 7

The name of the Christian God in Lwo is *Rubanga* . This is also the name of the ghost that causes tuberculosis of the spine, hence Hunchback.

^ [Footnote 8

Jekcon : Jackson

Paraciko : Francis

Tomcon : Thompson

Gulyelmo : William

Iriko : Erik

^ [Footnote 9

Medikijedeki : Milchizedek

Gilirigoloyo : Gregory

^ [Footnote 10

Pagak is the place of no return, Death's homestead.

^ [Footnote 11

The name of the Christian God in Lwo is *Rubanga* . This is also the name of the ghost that causes tuberculosis of the spine, hence Hunchback.

^ [Note 12

'Killer of locusts', Lake Albert in Uganda

^ [Footnote 13

Mount Kenya

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