THE BOTTLE AND THE BUSHMAN

Mohamud Siad Togane

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .................................................. i
PREFACE ............................................... ii
YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN ......................... 1
NERO FUMO ........................................... 2
CALIBAN ................................................ 4
MANHOOD MORNING ................................. 6
EROS TYRANNOUS .................................. 8
SHOES .................................................. 9
THE INFIDEL ......................................... 10
WHITE MAN'S GOD .................................. 12
A SHORT LESSON IN COMPARATIVE LANGUAGES .. 13
LOVE I LAUGH ....................................... 15
THE BOTTLE AND THE BUSHMAN ................. 18
WHITE MAN NO FOOL ................................ 19
A LETTER TO HARLEM ............................. 20
FOR LOUISE ......................................... 21
THE BOTTLE IS MY SHEPHERD ..................... 22
MALCOLM X AND BILLY GRAHAM .................. 23
GOING HOME ........................................ 24
HOME .................................................. 25
THE RETURN OF THE BUSHMAN ................... 26
DELILAH .............................................. 28
3-IN-1 ................................................ 30
BECAUSE I AM CIVILIZED NOW ................. 32
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silly Senseless Birds</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hangover Shadow</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murder in the Bedroom</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waiting for God</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drunken Sisyphus</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Black Tin God</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dirge</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I Considered</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Uhuru'Land</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Money, We Trust</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exile I</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exile II</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Landlady</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farewell, Sylvia</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God is a Stone</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Man's Burden</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lilith</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malcolm X</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Your Enemy, Give Sweet Milk</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the United Nations</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bushman's Muse</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakespeare, The Bible &amp; Bushman on Wine</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONTENTS (cont'd)

CARFAYE ........................................ 70
AFWEYNE AND TOGANE ............................. 72
BYE-BYE SIR JOHN BARLEYCORN ................ 74
IN PRAISE OF LOVE AND LOOL ................... 78
BUSHMAN, PICK UP THY PEN ....................... 79
ABSTRACT

THE BOTTLE AND THE BUSHMAN

Mohamud Siad Togane

These fifty poems chronicle the obsessions of a drunken Somali bushman - chaser of the merciless mirage called civilization - as he hobble-wobbles in Italian shoes which clamp, cut, and incarcerate his indigenous feet. They depict him in his borrowed clothes. He is in an unenviable position: he is neither of the bush nor of the West. He is a bastard of Western civilization for it is impossible for Caliban to become Prospero. He is a naked black infidel of that lost and lonely African tribe which is comforted neither by Juju, nor Jesus, nor Allah, nor any genies.
PREFACE

The first thing an African bushman who was thirsty for white civilization did when he encountered the colonizer was to learn his language and ape his manners. He became the white man's interpreter—the interpreter of the oracle. He carried the master's orders and wishes to the other natives in whose eyes the bushman now became a demi-god. They deified him because he spoke just like the Bwana. After Uhuru (freedom) the bushman assumed the colonizer's power and position.

In 1960, Somalia achieved independence from Britain and Italy. With independence appeared the phenomenon of the Anglicized, Frenchified, Italianated, and alienated bushman whose offspring were being educated in Italian, English, French, Arabic, and Russian. One spoke a foreign language to be considered educated and civilized. Until 1972, Somali was not a written language; it was "a bush language." This prompted Ali Sugule, a Somali poet, to compose a satiric poem entitled: Does Civilization Mean Speaking the Language of an Alien Tribe?

The poems depict the "civilized" Somali bushman in his borrowed clothes. He is in an unenviable position: he is neither of the bush nor of the West. He is a bastard of Western civilization for it is impossible
for Caliban to become Prospero. He is a naked black infidel of that lost and lonely African tribe which is comforted neither by Juju, nor Jesus, nor Allah, nor any genies.

Today in much of Africa the educated bushman's power and prestige have been either compromised or usurped by another type of a bushman—less educated and very dangerous—the bushman with a gun who leads an army not to fight other armies but to loot and terrorize civilian populations.

The poems are informed by this perspective.
YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN

When I was born,
before my mother could suckle me,
I choked on the holy water of the Zam-Zam well &
the creed of Islam was intoned into my ears.

I was Queequeg and Friday
before I encountered Stanley and Livingstone.
I bought the best their world peddled:
the Bible and the bottle.
Possessed with the spirits of both
I grew weary and cursed both.

Back to the ancestral cave and cannibalism;
back to the jungle and mumbo jumbo. I'd fain go home.
NERO FUMO

1

In my black world
there was no white boy
whose straight hair I wanted
to stroke to brand me 'nigger.

2

Though I was teased
I was above suspicion:
my button nose and good hair
testified to my Somaliness.

3

They were black like us
because rats could crawl through their
large-holed nostrils,
because their corn-on-the-cob hair
looked like a bunch of flies
lost in fornication
we clawed them with our contempt-
"Niggers!"
I ran into the prodigious buttocks of a Somali woman.

"Nigger! Nero fumo!" she fumed without bothering to check my button nose and good hair.

Out of her buttocks I gasped, "tuo vagino sono nero fumo."
CALIBAN

You taught me language, and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse

Caliban in The Tempest

Miss Gehman, the Mennonite missionary teacher, meowed:

HOW OLD ARE YOU?

When I mimicked what Bushman ears heard:

XAAU RAA YO: what stinks? (in Abgaaal dialect)

I shrivelled in the shaming; laughter of the class.

But now

right'

white

through the nose I babble pray & bray

for I am mad

bad'

cad

dad

fad

gad

had

lad

pad'

rad

sad

tad

yad'
bat
cat
fat
hat
kat
mat
nat
pat
sat
tat
vat
wat?

F U C K I N O  B A S T A R  B I L A A D I  F O O L!
MANHOOD MORNING

1

Like a coward I peed
that manhood morning
too many times
before the sheikh appeared.

2

Out of the watchful crowd
Jama (who had his turn last rainy season when he became
a man)
pointed
to the equally watchful vultures
hovering above:
"I am going to throw the foreskin of your one-eyed snake
to them!"

3

I sat on a stool
in the courtyard
facing the sheikh
legs apart
steeled
not to wail like a woman.
"In the name of Allah, the merciful and the compassionate...

the sheikh intoned pulling bringing down
a blinding blade.
Leaping back
I overturned the stool
half-circumcised
half infidel
half man.

I waddled away
from the hissing crowd
bleating like one of the goats slaughtered for the occasion:
"MAAA-MMEEE!
please, pour water on it!"
EROS TYRANNOUS

... if two lie together, then they have heat:
but how can one be warm alone?

(Ecclesiastes 4:11)

Driven from a cold lonesome bed
by imperious lust
fuelled by liquor.
I scour St. Denis & Crescent streets
where whores and houris huddle.
I flit ogling
warm
white
lucent
million-pleasured
ripe
quivering tits.
SHOES

My first pair of shoes
were Italian
brown pungent
pointed as stiletto
    cost more than
monthly maintenance of Somali mistress
    but gave no relief:
they pinched
they cut
they incarcerated
indigenous bushman's feet.
Heedlessly I hobble

wobbled

a street arab once
sheikh of the Indian Ocean
who bullied Indians and other assorted infidels and
stole the shoes of the faithful at prayer.
Now I stagger through white civilization
like a camel in a Fata Morgana.
THE INFIDEL

1

Every morning
on my way to school
ears still warm
with the Imam's
I scalded Mario
with my eyes:
pumpkin-bellied
infidel
red-eyed like a cannibal
seated
solemnly
sullenly
before a raging
piss-coloured
frothing drinkfried

2

The erstwhile school-boy
without his shining
morning Muslim face
fettered by fate
to Mario's uncircumcised bitchwitch
amongst a flock of drunkards
ears sodden sinsaddled
faithless
fallen
fatforgetful.
WHITE MAN'S GOD

White man showed me a picture of his god:
LOOKED just like himself:
pale skin
blond hair
Billy Graham fire blue eyes,
bullying
pleading

"Would you be white
whiter
much whiter than snow?
There's power
power
wonder-working power
in the precious blood of the Lamb."

"No. Thank you!

BWANA, I am proud to own: everybody in the village know my name.

Call me DHU-HU-LOW

'cause I am as black as CHARCOAL!"
A SHORT LESSON IN COMPARATIVE LANGUAGES

1

Bushman come from Somalia
he is a donkey thinking himself a horse.
Somalia mean milk the camels.
Bushman now drink piss milked by Molson.

2

In bushman language &
in Englishman language
a nag is a nag
a yahoo is a yahoo.
General Jaruzelski is a yahoo.
General Afweyne is a yahoo.
Bushman believe cowboy Reagan biggest yahoo.

3

In The Naked and the Dead
Mailer wrote fug
bushman word 'for fuck
'cause in America
fuck is a nigger word
'n America scared of fuck
fucking niggers too.

4

In Englishman language
a goose is a goose,
in bushman language
by his goose
you know a man is a man
'n a seal is the stamp between Juliet's quivering thighs.
Bushman prefer fat women 'cause they all seal.

5

Bushman shed laughing tears
when Miss Gehman, the missionary teacher, declared
"In the British parliament,
a bill does not become law
unless and until
Her Majesty, The Queen, puts her seal on it."
LOVE I LAUGH

Love I laugh
unlike you
I do not bluff:
shall I disrobe?
sport?
betray?
duel?
or die?

You are unjust and cowardly
blind both to need and merit.
How many brave hearts have you hacked?
Bondheri put away his spear
prayed and fasted in your name.
The blow you dealt
hurt him into poetry
tickling death's ear.
Drunk
in Montreal
in a deep ditch
straddled by loneliness
a quivering thigh
jello buttocks
dangle
before my hungry
bushman's eyes.
"Penelope, where are you?"

Last night
naked
sliding
slipping
slithering
sluing
slurping
slobbering
smacking
smiting
smiling
squeezing
squishing
squirting
sluicing
I sank into her mossy well and
outsnored The Seven Sleepers.
THE BOTTLE AND THE BUSHMAN

The bottle is the gateway to white civilization:
I emptied it and became civilized.

I reeled and met Mailer
who mesmerized me with his message:
drinking is the business of the spiritual man.

I was accosted by civilized
Wolfe singing hymns to the bottle:
"Proud, magic liquor."

I washed down the warning of the bushman.
Don't take a strong drink! Wine mocks man:
it can make him mistake his mother for his wife.
Wait till you get to paradise
where there are no mothers
where you become as potent as twenty Othellos and
enjoy wild houris in rivers of whisky.

I hobbled on, discoursing fustian
with my shadow.
Nobody loves or pities
A drunken bushman.
WHITE MAN NO FOOL

White man no fool:
pacified the village preaching
"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth."
Meantime
took away the best land
built hisself a white house on a hill cannot be hid
only stone house
only indoor plumbing
only electric lights
only warm place to shit
wipes his red dainty blessed ass with goose-down-soft
dufted paper.

blackie poops in bushes
wipes his black meek ass with earth sand stones sticks
leaves
pieces of broken bottle shards
singing
"TAKE THE WHOLE WORLD, BUT GIMME JESUS!"
A LETTER TO HARLEM

Dear black brother and sisters in Harlem:

I am no savage.
I don't swing from trees like a monkey.
I am not afraid of Tarzan like whitey show you on TV.
I don't eat missionaries, nor chitlins.
I wear a bush 'cause I am a bushman.
I heard you used to burn Africa out of your hair
till Brother Malcolm X made you hip.

Whitey tells me I am superior to you

'cause I am exotic
'cause I am from Africa
'cause I speak Swahili
'cause I've a country
'cause my name is SHOKOLOKUBANGASHAYA.

But I don't believe him. I believe you superior

you stronger
you have to be
to live with him
to survive him & his lies.

Your brother in Africa
FOR LOUISE

1

Four years ago
outside your house
outside the city
I shook the dust off my feet:
our breaths became strangers
and the city knotted me daily
startling me with what I lost.

2

My beloved opens to me again
I will rise now
and go back to her city
on a pilgrimage
for the piece that passes all understanding.
THE BOTTLE IS MY SHEPHERD

The bottle is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
She maketh me to lie down in gutters:
She leadeth me to every bar, party, & whore.
She ruineth my soul:
She leadeth me in the paths of unrighteousness
for her name's sake.

Yea, though I 'stagger through the valley of the shadow
of death,
I will feel nothing: for thou art with me; drunkenness
and oblivion
they comfort me.
Thou holdest me tight in the presence of mine enemies: thou
fillest my head with stupor; my cup runneth over with piss.
Surely booze & blackouts shall dog me all the days of my
life:
and I will dwell in the house of John Barleycorn forever.
MALCOLM X AND BILLY GRAHAM

Jesus saves!
Jesus saves!
Honky: Jesus saves honkies.
Cracker Jesus saves Crackers.
Honky cracker Jesus hexed
Tom Knee-grow into singing
"Wash me and I will be whiter than snow."

"Just you wait and see," someone wiser said.
"Old Tom Knee-grow is gonna wake up one of these days
and find hisself as black as ever."

Malcolm X came and busted Billy Graham honky cracker Jesus
upside the head
delivering Tom Knee-grow from the hex of the honky.
GOING HOME

I am going home
home to Somalia
where the sun shines
where the land is free
only for the General:
teach me'
to live in his shadow
to call Abba, father of knowledge and wisdom
whom I used to call Afweyne: Mighty Mouth
to submit to tyranny
to flatter
to bow and scrape
to mimic like a chameleon
and
to pluck out one of my eyes
among my one-eyed people.
HOME

Welcome!
Welcome home.
Welcome to Somali Democratic Republic.
When you leaving?
When you going go back to . . .
wherever you coming from?

Meantime
to survive:
sing hosanna to General Afweyne
seal your mouth
or sink into black Gehenna.
THE RETURN OF THE BUSHMAN

Among the hunger-pinched Somalis
I stand out like the red behind of a baboon,
I, the second fattest man in the city of Mogadishu,
fatter even than Mighty Mouth,
the hyena who swallowed the whole country.
Like them I was once
a skeleton keen on kosher
before I made a prodigal journey to U.S.A.
before I pilgrimaged to Babylon
where my maw gobbling
hot dogs
hamburgers
hams
"pigs in the blanket"
pigs' feet
bloodwursts
smoked butts
chitlings
balls of hogs
frog legs
oysters
cotton wool bread
shoo-fly pies
banana splits
washed down with oceans of
beer
wine
cutty sark
bloody marys
high balls
martinis
manhattans
moscow mules
became a prostitute.
DELLAH

1

You pursued me
landed me
peeled me
sucked me
topped me
pushpushed me
mortared me
fygged me
stoked me
fired me
watered me
until sleep escorted me out of you

2

For friendship friends voyaged in vain
pleading
against love
against lust
against niggerlike thirdleg reasoning
against deep ditches
against uncircumcised bitchwitches
against ploughing with a stray heifer of friendbrother.
against Delilah who drowned friend brother

in a lie called liquor.
The earth: a kind of vast spiritual kindergarden where millions of people are trying to spell God with the wrong blocks.

E.A. Robinson

In the village of Mahadey Weyn I heard an oily kaffir expatiate on his three-headed god:
"I know for simple bush folks like you the trinity is a tricky business.
On this Sabbath morning I asked the Lord to help me keep it simple.
Here in my hand I hold a common can of oil found in every household in the U.S.A.
It's ONE can called THREE-IN-ONE

Because three things it does: It lubricates.
It cleans.
It polishes.

LIKEWISE

the blessed trinity is three-in-one:
God the Father creates.
God the Son saves.
God the Holy Ghost sanctifies.

All glory to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost:

3-in-1
1-in-3
ever 3
ever 1

to thee, O Blessed Trinity, be praised throughout eternity! Amen."

Last Sunday the kaffir's god was a lamb.
Now he is an oily mechanic like himself,
but I still wonder
which god lubricates
which god cleans
which god polishes.
BECAUSE I AM CIVILIZED NOW

I forgot how humans smell.
My armpits and crotch don't get funky anymore.
Because I am deodorized now.

Women! What a conundrum!
But I do what's important:
I fornicate as regularly as I read the daily paper.
Because I am civilized now.

I feel desolate.
I've outgrown many myths which were once comfortable creeds
because I am civilized now.

I perform ablutions with booze and
prostrate towards Babylon
because I am civilized now.
Any black who would defend an African military dictatorship is as much a fascist as J.Edgar Hoover.

George Jackson

African military dictators made Presidents for life by the death of their opponents far more putrid and painful than South Africa: the white boil on the bottom of black Africa. Silly senseless birds—those legendary birds of Somalia that once borrowed fire only to burn down their own nests.
HANGOVER SHADOW

Chomping at the tyranny of General Afweyne
feeling homeless at home
from the bottle I sought succor and
sat down with kat-chewers.
The noise of Afweyne is heard in our land.
Poweł blares its boasts and brays on his side.
We have no comforter.
Every morning fear saddles us.
From the prison of the bottle
hear my lamentations!
Woe unto me
I am undone
I am no more!
The bottle swallowed me up.
I am swallowed up.
Jonah ain't swallowed up!
I am the hangover shadow,
holding the bottle
that swallowed the bushman up.
MURDER IN THE BEDROOM

Sex is not only a divine and beautiful activity: it's a murderous activity. People kill each other in bed. Some of the greatest crimes ever committed were committed in bed. And no weapons were used.

Norman Mailer.

Off
you turned the lights
lit a candle
the wine was red
and gave its colour to the bed.
We grew mellow with the reefers
willing
naked
vulnerable
you stoked me
your sex drooled
it moved itself aright
ready to ram
my chief joy I preferred.
above all the shikses
my pestle dipped dripped davened
for your fat juicy Jewish kosher cunt
suddenly
coldly
maliciously
murderously

you turned your back
pretended sleep
bleeding my desire to death.
WAITING FOR GOD

Waiting   Waiting   Waiting
the people resigned themselves to waiting:
"... that day and that hour knoweth no man,
no, not the angels which are in heaven,
neither the Son, but the Father."

Waiting   Waiting   Waiting
the people wondered & wandered in their waiting.
"I am that I am."

Waiting   Waiting   Waiting
the people's buttocks grew sore and tired.
"I am a jealous God."

Waiting   Waiting   Waiting
the people yawned murmuration in their waiting:
"At least we heard it said
He has once appeared in a burning bush."
DRUNKEN SISYPHUS

I drink
because
I was drunk
to my daily rounds
of the bars
I stagger
murdering
cowardly ambition
and nagging memory.
THE BLACK TIN GOD

And he (... the South African writer) sees and understands for the first time that, given equal opportunity, the black tin God a few thousands miles north of him would degrade and dehumanise his victim as capably as Vorster...

Wole Soyinka

It is astounding what outrages a black bully with guns can perpetrate in Africa.

He can exalt himself above God, Allah, and Juju & force a whole nation to worship him.

He can prove his baboonery and outbaboon white colonialists and castrate a whole nation by plunging it into abject servility:

he can fancy himself a Napoleon and crown himself Emperor;

he can style himself a teacher, a prophet, a savior, a revolutionary philosopher equal to Mao, Marx, and Lenin and teach the nation ad nauseam;

he can seize the attention of the whole world by personally beating up foreign journalists, like Bokassa beat up Michael Goldsmith;

he can piss on Uhuru, embrace tribalism and clanism and call them Scientific Socialism;
he can loot the land and declare himself
PRESIDENT FOR LIFE;

he can appropriate any name, any land,
any title, any degree, any medal—
why he can even call himself
like General Mobutu did:
"THE PEPPERY ALL-CONQUERING WARRIOR,
THE COCK WHO LEAVES NO HEN INTACT."
And rape every chick in sight.
DIRGE

1

It is now the false dawn
Sleep has fled
our once happy sheets
colder than a shroud.
Where are you, love?

2

Outside
it is dark
it is dreary.
it is dreadful
and the rain is beating
beating a dirge
upon my window
upon my soul—
Where are you, love?
WHEN I CONSIDERED

When I considered
in lucid drunken anger
the freaks of Africa
I hollered: UHURU, a whore!
A shout shook me shuddering the shack bar:
Come back! Come back, white man! Come back to Africa!
EVERYTHING FORGIVEN!
"You out of your cotton picking head," Malcolm corrected.
"Booze-poison messing up your head, Bushman.
Whitey ain't never left Africa; he ain't even absent.
These uncle tom knee-grow African freaks fronting for him
minding the store.
Every shut eye ain't sleep,
Every good-bye ain't gone.
IN UHURU LAND

And you, traitors to your people,
Where will you run to
When the brave of the lands gather?
For Kenya is black people's country.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o

A black man is not safe at home; a black man is not safe abroad.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o

1

I hid
in "stable" Kenya
in uhuru land
I hid
in front of a wicket
behind a white woman
I hid
behind my wife
I hid
from a black man
I hid

2

He looked at her passport
smiled

no visas necessary

open sesame

because

she from Canada.

3

As if

a mamba snake

were about to strike him

he recoiled

because

underneath her passport

hid

like me

my Somali passport.

4

"He is my husband"
Without hiding
his contempt
he opened it.
Before you could say
J. Robinson!
He closed it
clasped it to his heart

5

beamed
pocketed the single fifty (U.S.) dollar note
beamed again
bowed:
"Bon voyage!"
IN MONEY WE TRUST

Bushman, you wanna be civilized?
Go get money!
It don't matter how
get it honestly
if you can
get it dishonestly
if you must
but by all means
get money.
Bushman, put money in thy loincloth!
In God we trust
in money we must.
Money is defence:
money makes an hedge about you.
Money is the sixth sense
without which the other five are useless!
Bushman without money you don't make no sense period.

Without money you can't get
tight pussy
loose shoes
or warm place to shit.
Without money
rich man's shoes better than you.
Without money
you dirt
nigger dirt
without money
you really unhappy lonesome nigger
lonelier than Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane
before they crucified him.
Without money
you without pappa
without mamma
without descent--
you born orphan.
Money makes the oil of gladness shine on your face.
Money makes everything possible and permissible.
Blond blue-eyed pale-skinned Billy Graham Jee-sus
failed to make you white as snow
but money will make coal black nigger like you
white right
even in South Africa
where Japs are white because they got money
where your kind are called kaffirs and sacrificed to
Mammon because they ain't got no money.
Money makes friends who make you laugh
who laugh with you and for you
but if you poor
you separated even
from yourself and from society.
Oh. God! Don't make me poor
lest I steal and take your goddamn name in vain.
Brother, can you spare a dime?
Chinese Japanese money please.
I heard a brother in Harlem holler:

Catch that motherfucker honky by'the throat.
if he's got money, don't let him go!"

Bushman, I ain't interested in
how long you been in America
how many degrees you got
how many black oaks you split
how many blonds you balled
how many times you got drunk and stoned
out of your bushy head in Reggie's
I wanna know
how big your bank account?
Bushman, if you were born in a civilized country and
were properly toilet-trained instead of
pooping anywhere in the bush,
by now you'd have big bucks in the bank.
Bushman, if you have the gift of prophecy
and understand all mysteries
and all knowledge
and if you have all faith
so you could remove mountains—but have no money, you ain't shit!
EXILE I

Now it is
the seventh season of sorrow
since I ran away
from home
from my kingdom by the sea
from Somalia
from Mighty Mouth's cruel laughter
like a latter-day slave
to Canada
to a land kinder than home
which I believed
belonged,
to John F. Kennedy
when a Mennonite missionary
driven
from his fat farm
in Markham, Ontario
by "Go ye
therefore and preach the gospel
to every creature ..."
hounded me
in the benighted bush
for Heaven.
EXILE II

Oh, to be in Somalia
now that it is
that time of year
here in Montreal.
when the marrow freezes in my bones
when my ebon skin looks ashy white
dried for death
when alien ailments.
blow in
from Hong Kong
Bangkok
and Oryx's asshole,
To be home in Mogadishu
where there is no
wet
white
cold
snow
falling
from the heavens
numbing everything below.
Home
where I'd dive
hidden
from the sun and
in the cool depths
of the Indian Ocean and
startle the flying stingrays.
THE LANDLADY (with apologies to Margaret Atwood)

1
This is the lair of the landlady
whose friendly phone voice
freed me not from funk:
"Are you Scottish by any chance?
You sound so Scottish."

2
Accompanied by ten of her
fish-belly-white tribesmen
I tried to blend into her mansion.

3
Lulled by her honeyed donkeydom
for a while I forgot
like my donkey
that often grazes with horses
forgets his donkeydom
that I looked like that Moor who loved
not wisely but too well.
She finally fished me out
and framed me with:
"God made the beast of the earth
after his kind,
and cattle after their kind,
and every thing that creepeth
upon the earth
after his kind:
why don't you go
and lair with your kind?"
FAREWELL, SYLVIA

The prophecy your husband spat on me
proved as inexorable as the will of Allah:
"Look to her, fool, if you have eyes to see.
she has deceived her husband, and may thee."

Your thrall
for a season
we rolled.
Farewell, Sylvia, for I startled myself
in the silent chambers of my heart
boning a dagger
unlike the one you oiled
unlike the one you sheathed many a night.
GOD IS A STONE

Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

(Matthew 7:9-10)

I thought I heard a meow
but turning I saw
a beggar behind an outstretched hand.

Sneering at the god
in whose name he accosted me
I handed him a coin
letting my left hand know
what my right hand was doing.

God is a stone
an obsession I am trying to dissolve in drink.
TIME

1

With mermaids I came
riding on a wave
which mothered me into time.
In our turnings time
held me safe stroking my hair
dandling me on her knee
singing me a song far more
soothing than the sigh of the sea
never doubting her
embrace.

2

Time now hurries
past my hobbled self
stopping scornfully
only to plant in my beard
grey flowers of shame
reminding me of her grave.
far more cruel
than the bottle and the bush.
I cannot take a walk
in downtown Montreal
without a white naked need
accosting me.

On St. Denis Street
a white girl sashays to me:
"Brown sugar, can you lay some fine weed on me?
I ain't got the bread,
but I got pussy.
I wanna get high bad.
Brown sugar, you interested?"

On Sherbrooke and Durocher
an ofay puts his arm
around my shoulders:
"Hey, man!
where can I get laid?
I'm from out of town."
On my way home
on rue Napoleon
the same need
this time
drunk and dressed in French:
"Cherchez-moi une femme;
ma femme m'a laissé!"

At Chez Demos restaurant
the owner pulls me and my date
out of the tail of the line
past the staring
unbelieving
envious white folks
sits us down
at the best table
brings forth
food and wine
all on the house because he enjoyed
how I played
the saxophone
the night before
at the Rising Sun!
We ate and drank
with a vengeance.
If the fool
only knew:
the only instrument
I know how to play
is the jukebox.
I guess
there is no sense
telling white folks
I am neither a pusher
nor a pimp
nor another Louis Armstrong.
LILITH

It was Lilith, the wife of Adam.
Not a drop of her blood was human,
But she was made like a soft sweet woman.

D. S. Rossetti, "Eden Bower".

I left father and mother
and for seven years clung to Lamia
Lilith
a woman averse to being wived
a rival far from a foil
a virago
a viper
a devil's dam
a screech-owl
who scratched my soul with contention and anger
who spiced my food with wormwood
who sank me into the slough of despair and dissipation.

And yet I am condemned
for putting away Desdemona
a soft sweet woman
and compared to that base Indian
who threw a pearl away
far richer than all his tribe.
MALCOLM X

1

Malcolm!

As an old farm boy you know
chickens always roost at home.
Reagan, sheriff of Wild West show
loaded with guns
too old to duck
is gunned down
in "the land
of the free
and the brave"
in the land
that farms violence.

2

Dead

cant. & cums.
consider you
no longer dangerous
call you out of name
couple you with
Evers, Kennedy, King
declaring you
deader than Booker T. Washington.

Truth angers Man.
You angered America.
"Call me free and accessible,"
commanded America,
"You ain't nothing but
a bitch of a prison
begotten upon violence,"
you countered.

You shamed
Kentucky chicken-eating
colored
cog dor
kne-grow
turn-the-other-cheek
chicken shit
preachers
hawking
peace.
in the belly of violence
humility
in Babylon.

5

In your name
black panthers
picked up the gun
offing
piggish
wolfish
ofays.

6

Malcolm!
You ain't dead!
Truth
still hurts the man.
Chickens
still roost at home.
Black children
still murdered.
in Atlanta
which ain't too busy to hate
donkeys that farm violence
still harvest violence.
Malcolm!
You ain't dead.
"Every shut-eye ain't sleep,
Every good-bye ain't gone."
TO YOUR ENEMY, GIVE SWEET MILK

1

Spare him whom you want to slay
your anger and black looks.
Bare your fangs in a friendly smile:
ever allow the face to steal from the heart.
Spread a feast out for him:
for one that has fed on such a banquet
has already placed his neck on the chopping block.

2

To kill a ninny

to undo a nitwit

to noose a nincompoop

seem what you are not
lest the fool flee in a funk.

3

I thank God that I am not like other men:
many a time have I given the place of honour
to one who wished me ill;
many a time have I killed the fatted calf
for one who is plotting my downfall;
many a time have I regaled one
whom my soul abhors;
many a time have I rejoiced—
watching him writhe in my trap.

After Ugas Nur (Freely translated from the Somali).
AT THE UNITED NATIONS

You were right, Mr. Adlai Stevenson.

Diplomacy beats donkey-driving
or camel-herding.

All that General Afweyne's diplomats do at the U.N.
besides bray occasionally against South Africa and Israel

is

drink alcohol
play protocol
act theatrical
try to slim down on Metralcal
and cheat on their infibulated clitless wives.
BUSHMAN'S MUSE

Bushman,
your muse has two balls and
knee-grow-id middle third leg.
Why you call woman out of name:
uncircumcised bitchwitch
deep ditch
Delilah
devil's dam
Lilith
Lami
screech-owl
adder of problems
substracter of energy
multiplier of enemies and
divider of friendbrothers?

Don't you know
a woman bore you
is born like you and
will bear for you?
SHAKESPEARE, THE BIBLE & BUSHMAN ON WINE

Who hath woe?
Who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions?
Who hath babbling? Who hath wounds within?
Thou cause?
Who hath redness of eyes?
They that tarry long at the wine;
they that go to seek mishshed wine. Look not thou up
on the wine when it is red,
when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright.
At the last it biteth like a serpent,
and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt not; when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again. Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of the flesh. For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty; and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags. They shall not drink wine with a song; and a strong drink shall be bitter to them that drink it. There is a crying for wine in the streets; all joy is darkened, the mirth of the land is gone. Drunk and speak parrot? and squabble? swagger? swear? and discourse fustian with one's own shadow? O thou invisible spirit of wine, if thou hast no name, let me call thee devil. Every inordinate cup is unblest, and the ingredient is a devil.
CARFAYE

A man without a nickname is like a goat without horns.

(a Somali proverb)

Carfaye: the sweet-smelling one,
fattest Somali in the city of Mogadishu,

Everybody knows his nickname and the irony
that sweetens the truth. Nobody knows his real name.

I can see him now in my mind’s eye
in the middle of Main Street
in the frying sun
melting away
about to drown in his sweaty khaki uniform,

flinging sweat away from his eyes

trying to direct a traffic of stubborn donkeys,

skittish camels (impatient drivers poking their behinds)

hauling grass and milk;
donkey-carts driven by heedless drivers

who claim the city belongs to their tribe and donkeys;
goats, sheep, and cattle on their way to the slaughterhouse;

jay walkers, paraplegic beggars scuttling on all fours
(an American nicknamed them spidermen);

beeping Fiats and thunder-farting ancient trucks
without mufflers.
Out of this medley sometimes a relief would appear:
quivering ripe breasts of a careless bushwoman
or some undulating steatopygous behind
then Carfaye would pause, tilt his head in worshipful wonder,
flash a smile, and throw darts of desire.
AFWEYNE AND TOGANE

To comprehend the tyranny, the tragedy, and the baboonery of present day Africa, it is hard to surpass Shakespeare.

Dr. Said Sheikh Samatar

Sheikhzapor!
Sheakespeare!
You who have heard the tyrant's cruel laughter,
come to the aid of this unlettered spluttering bushman.
Lend thine eloquent tongue to these limping lines.
Why have I fled to cold Canada from such a thing as myself?

I was born free as General Afweyne;
so were all the Somalis. In the bush
we have all drunk camel's milk and
have endured the hot Somali sun as well as he.
When Egal, our erstwhile Prime Minister,
suspected Afweyne of perfidy, he mustered him out of the army to Russia "to study."
Afweyne ran to his influential tribesmen pleading:
"Help me, please! I will freeze in cold Russia.
I am too old and too senile to study anything!"
And this man has now become a god.

Togane, a wretched creature, must now bend his body if Afweyne carelessly but nod on him;
and Somalis must mark him and copy his speeches in their books.

He collaborated with Mussolini and his fascist army when they occupied Somalia. Ye gods, it doth amaze me that a man so base should get the start of the majestic world and bear the palm alone. He doth bestride Somalia like Colossus and we petty Somalis live from his Mighty Mouth and look to find ourselves dishonourable graves or exile. What is in Afweyne that is not in Togane? Was he not born of a travelling woman as I? Why should his name be sounded more than mine?

Write them together; mine is as fair a name as his; sound them, mine doth become the mouth as well; weigh them, it is as heavy; conjure with them, "Togane" will start a spirit as soon as "Afweyne."

Upon what magic camel meat doth our Afweyne feed that he is grown so great? On Somali cowardice. Age, thou art ashamed! Somalia, thou hast lost the breed of noble bloods!
BYE BYE SIR JOHN BARLEYCORN

Inspiring bold John Barleycorn,
What dangers thou canst make us scorn!

Burns: Tam o' Shanter

First time we met
you were babysitting Mario:
pumpkin-bellied
red-eyed as a cannibal.

Second time
you were riding hunger-pinched wet-assed
Somali Hargeisa bushman
staggering under you.
A gang of street arabs stoning him in chorus:
"Umbriacho! Baraculo! Farrobuto! Figlio di cane!"

May I ask you, Sir,
why you ride us natives so hard?
Why you exact such a staggering price
from us for enjoying your company?
Is it because we haven't known you long enough?
Because we haven't been out of the bush long enough?
Because you don't agree with our kind?

I suppose if Mario and his kind drank
what they weren't wont to:
camel milk or Masai milkshake (cow blood, piss, and milk mixed)
they too would piss and poop in their pants
in the streets at high noon.

In our second meeting
I chose you; you didn't choose me.
When I saw your faithful wet-assed drunken
Somali Hargeisa bushman being stoned for your sake
I didn't say, "There, but for the grace of God, go I."
I said "There, for the grace of Sir John Barleycorn,
will I go."

We been together for a long time.
I have travelled much in your fabulous frenzied realms
in many varied moods:
the mood jocose
the mood morose
the mood amorous
the mood bellicose
the mood lachrymose
the mood comatose
scorning dangers
risking all for your ephemeral revelations.

I have mourned much the drunken bushman within me.
Many a time has he risen
to forswear drunkenness
pledging himself to disciplined dissipation
yet always he returned to you
as a dog returns to his vomit.

Bye-Bye, Sir John Barleycorn
'I've found
you more totalitarian than General Afweyne
more jealous than God
more murderous than that Jewish kosher cunt
my hand too short to box with you.
your price too high: "suicide,
quick or slow, a sudden spill or gradual
oozing away through the years"
in the ubiquitous urinals of civilization.

Without you
I am quiet
as quiet as a child weaned of his mother:
even my soul is a weaned child.
IN PRAISE OF LOVE AND LOOL

Legman
kneeman
neckman
thighman
titsman-
what manner man am I?
I am a bushman,
bucked by Lool's buttocks
steatopygous
vibrant
undulant
nostrils flaring in her
pungent.
piquant
bushy
uncivilized
undeodorized armpit
fighting floundering furrowing
fuming flailing
gurgling we converged
stuttering in strange tongues.
BUSHMAN, PICK UP THY PEN

"It (writing) is hell. It takes it all out of you. It nearly-kills you; but you can do it — anybody can."

Ernest Hemingway

Yes, writing is hell,
especially if you are a bushman.
Every time I try to write
either Sir John Barleycorn beckons
or I get a peremptory knee-grow-id hard-on.

No, I don't want to write.
I can't write.
How can I write
    of life's song
    its sorrow
    its beauty
    its beastliness
    its passion
    its vanity
    in the language of an alien tribe?
But I can talk.
My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.
Oh that these words were
now written!
Oh that they were printed in a book!
I have wanted to write ever since
mother celebrated me
because I smattered in missionary's language:
"All those who used to pen books
are in panic now because of bushman."
That was donkey years ago.
Indolence and cowardice
proved meaner than General Afweyne
    than Sir John Barleycorn
    than any bitchwitch!
Bushman, pick up thy pen!