

Under the Sun

Barolong SEBONI

From

Images of the Sun

(University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1986)

Images of the Sun.

The sun is the dominant (and domineering) natural feature in my part of the world, Southern Africa, and has naturally become the dominant image in this selection of poetry. Included here are several poems from a larger collection entitled *Images of the Sun*, where I try to capture in each poem a certain aspect of life as illumined by the ubiquitous sun. None may be great revelations to the readers, but to the poet certainly represent several years of experiment in an effort to find an image that is both a universal experience, but can, at the same time, be particularized with creative and imaginative tempering.

The sun possesses religious qualities. Like a deity, it is always above us and everywhere, and has the elusive and illusive quality of receding as one walks in what appears to be its direction.

These are its magical qualities.

As with a deity, it is so easy to blame the sun for disasters that afflict man, when most of the human problems are man-made: famine, racism, poverty, oppression, etc.

Most of my poems germinate from the seed of real experience; what I've felt, seen, touched, and heard, lost and retained. It would hardly be poetry if the seed of experience was not nurtured by a sprinkle of the imagination. *Images of the Sun* is my attempt at saying that the sun is above us and beyond, but it is also around us and within. The sun also represents that free spirit glowing above human domination, that has sustained all oppressed people through the gloom towards the glory of a brighter day.

People will have to take control of the human situation under the sun.

September 1986

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Sunrise

Feathery shafts of the nascent sun
dust cobwebs of sleep
from spidery lashes,
carefully caressing away
the mercury heaviness of the night

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enveloping cocooned bodies
Then like metamorphosed worms
laminated in silky lightness,
We butterfly into the mulberry-fresh morning.

*

Drought

Heat is a blazing inferno of fury
A fool's gold hung up in the sky
to mock creation with scintillating laughter.

A flash of dentures snapping
into a silvery shine
Striking the subdued earth like myriads
of sharp-bladed spears from attacking *impis*.¹

Down below on unyielding velds and lands,
folks stoop low as if from the burdensome
heat are forced to bend,

Scratching and scraping the stubborn soil
Only to reap weeds from the sweat of their toil.

An old woman ambles up slowly with a strain
looks up at the brilliant bare sky, her eyes in pain
And summons the benevolent gods of the cloudless
skies,

When is it ever going to rain?

*

Gaborone Mall

The Mall
is an eye awakening
from the honey-heavy dew
of slumber that had settled
on its eye-lashes:
the brilliant rays of the golden promise
skying the horizon.

The Mall
yawns ajar;
glassy-steel dentures open
beckon you to come-in-and-browse. It is the tricky, sticky tongue of an adder.

¹ *Impi*—a battalion of Zulu warriors.

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jetting out to catch the unsuspecting fly.

Telephones tinkling
tills clinking,
with tikkie-box precision
receiving cents sinking.

The Mall is the sound of lips:
kissing lovers, kissing brothers
pursing together into whispers of gossip;
office girls with telephone tones,
hissing in switchboard frequencies.

It is the pouted lips of fat business men,
gaming on you to offer a smack on the cheek
before you turn the other...

It is the voice
of the Daily Newsense
our-one-our-only,
Radio Botswana the station of stagnation.
The shrill voice
of that old man standing by the Capital cinema
saying sooth, prophesying
to the wind, the birds,
the hustle-bustle of city Gaborone.

The Mall
is the scrawny hand
of that grandma, cracked like a disused clay-pot
or parched terrain no longer able
to support grass,
begging for *pula*².
She,
warm in the rug of poverty,
crouching against the stone-cold grey monument,
leaning on memories of forgotten regiments
who fought foreign wars.

It is the nifty hand of the urchin:

Mabialela dispossessed
Picking pockets;
Wealth repossessed
Picking noses
Pricking consciences...

The Mall is the neon twilight;
An electric eye blinking

² *Pula*—Botswana currency; also means 'rain.'

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On-off-on

Watching you,
watching me,
watching...

Gaborone, Botswana, 1978

Commodification of Starvation

The insatiate Western press feeds rapaciously on the famine of Ethiopia. The drought in Africa is fertile ground for the germination of seedy headlines that grow thicker daily on tabloids, lamenting the dramatic tragedy of “HUMAN MISERY” (in Kennedyan quotes) as the “FAMINE EATS AFRICA.” Colossal fears expressed by columnal smears of the printed word, spread graphically all over the tabloid; A platter offered in Roman orgiastic style to the indulgent reading public who gourmandize all wholesale, with undiscerning palates pecking at the print indiscriminately like chickens feeding in a fowl hatch.

Gluttonous Americans gorging themselves on the famine of the 3rd World, glut their fat consciences with fat cheques to trim fat taxes and render them bacon-lean in the morning, through the philanthropic Inter-Aid whose leading disciple obeys the Christ of Capitalism, according to the Creed of St. Greed: “He who helps the least of his brothers helps himself. And the burning sword of tax evasion shall not cut him down. He shall find capital salvation.”

The electronic eye captures malnourished babies whose lean chances to life wither before their marble-glazed eyes have a chance to see; and the vision is transported via satellite to other TV-glazed eyes across the world which may or may not see that life in famine is a foetal tumble—in mother’s belly, and echoed rumble in a bloated belly, and an instantaneous flash stolen from the telly. A Still. Then...The End.

As they lay tables for dinner, Americans eat their meals on the famine of Africa.

Under the Sun
From

WINDSONGS of the KGALGADI
(Gaborone: Macmillan, 1996)

Poems from Blue-Town Blues

This little boy
six years poor
waits
in khaki shorts
on a dusty path
for

 a
 wind
 to
 blow.

His kite,
a discolored wrapper from
Cash Bazaar “where-the-people-shop,”
loosely tied to the yellow reeds
from the sandy banks of the Shashe,
drags now as he runs,
flustering up a low trail of ash.

Hope blows
in the hesitant breeze
and the kite rises
reluctantly
as the boy’s feet stomp
faster, faster, and faster

The kite wings
and winds steadily
to fall again at the bare feet of
this little boy
in dusty despair
for

 a
 wind
 to
 blow.

*

Under the Sun

Night-Time Lady

Over the seductive laughter
of your bright eyes
in late-night revelry,
hangs a bloodshot sag
of dark and droopy eyelids
in your early morning reveille...

You, the owl that sleeps the day,
prey on the fat-rat in the darkest night.

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From

LOVESONGS: The Love Poems of Barolong Seboni
(Gaborone: Morula, 1998)

AIDS

how cruel
these modern times...

we make love
in ignorance

and in birth
a terrible

new death
is born

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Multinational

a barclay card is flicked
with cardin coolness

levi denim brush by
with cowboy brusqueness

a youth having a ball
gives an 'merican drawl

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in a multinational tone
the girl drops the phone

vw golf sixteen vee
front seat jus' you 'n he

massive alpine speakers
black 'n white jordan sneakers

two teenagers in a world above
united in benetton colours of love

*

Empty

my life is a

void

waiting

wanting

to be filled

by the fullness

of you

*

Poem

they say

that love

is what

you make

it

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and I want

to make

it

with you.
