

Dike Okoro

Pronouncement

In a country of blind kings
forgiveness is the mask I wear
to play the palace jester
and read indiscriminately
the hearts of conmen.

I adopt the sphinx's persona
to evade fox holes,
when the impartial judge trades
his conscience in fools' paradise
to be rewarded with a seat
in the king's assembly.

Yet, for tomorrow's sake
I sing spiritedly in outrage
so my salute to the present
will not be resigned
to the rant of the insane. And,

because the poet is a pawn
in the muse's bag of tricks,
I live the lie expected of me
to amuse the palace parrots
who reside in decorated nests free
but seldom boast of living in nests freely.
I who dare not say nor speak
to anyone
why the rag I wear proudly
compels my noble kings to tears.

Not asking too much

There is education in the cultist's misstep
If you speak to his errors, not his being.
We are troubled the moment we no longer
Recognize our troubles, and
I do not believe in love because love believes in me.
I, a journey in pretense that relies on bait
Set in water
To speak of the fishes blues.

Bring me to your gathering and
Let's drink to our accidental chagrin.
It's always the same battle
Of uneven strengths
And repopulation.
The hawk beats the hen in the flight fight,
Her chick the sacrificial bait
Cleaning the assassin's beak.
We know this song; it breaks
In the bars and buses and houses,
Where consultation with the sins of politicians
Remind the poor of the fenced quarters they reside in,
The paradise in the entangled dream.
Highlife for the songsters
Who jilt their fears in overindulgence in palm wine
To win the respect of their fair weather friends.
The book written by failed dreams
Was never their intention, we know,
Given that someone shat in the toilet
Before the incorruptible users embraced
Good manners,
The tale of innocence tolerated.

But didn't a song burst in the earth
To permit the cooing of turtledoves in the land?

Dr Dike Okoro, **Sam Walton Fellow** and finalist for the 1994 **Iliad Poetry Award**, teaches advanced reading and writing poetry and literature courses at Northwestern University, Evanston, USA. He received his PhD in English (with research specialization in African Diaspora literatures) from the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, an M.A. in African American literature and an M.F.A. in poetry, both from Chicago State University. He is the editor and author of six books, including *Speaking for the Generations: An Anthology of Contemporary African Short Stories*, *Echoes from the Mountain: New and Selected Poems by Mazisi Kunene* and *A Long Dream: Poems by Okogbule Wonodi*. His poems, essays, short stories, chapters and articles have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies.

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