

Beauty is in Slender Things



Duve Nakolisa

2nd Edition

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2nd Edition

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Dedication

To V.O Ngangah,
A teacher in the truest sense of the word —
He led me to the path of lyrical poetry
When he appraised my very first poem.

To Ayo Mamudu,
Poet, critic and professor of English:
From your silver webs the songs still echo,
Dye-maker of our collective dream.

And to Sesan Ajayi and Idzia Ahmad
With whom I shared a burning love for poetry.

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Preface

Duve Nakolisa: Of Poetry, Beauty and Sense

A NEW collection of poems by Duve Nakolisa, titled *Beauty is in Slender Things*, was recently picked up by this reviewer* in Abuja. The title struck one as something rather quaint in a country where modesty is virtually a sin. The average countryman is a narcissist and such question as, ‘Do you know who I am?’ is commonplace on the highways, at street-corners, citadels and holy places.

Picking up the book, one had thought that such ‘slender things’, a metaphor for moderation, have no chance against the rabid, bullish ego of the average countryman. You only need to see how a teeny porcupine of a schoolgirl instigated the thrashing of her principal under the dispensation of state-orchestrated religious bigotry to know that things have gone awry even with the supposed beauty of the soul.

Moving into the collection, however, one can feel the poet passionately navigating the ‘numinous’ ethos of a nation in abbreviated growth.

Like a questing supplicant, the persona leads us through five movements; ‘Edgeways’, ‘Crossroads’, ‘Nightsigns’, ‘Ellipses’ and ‘Ledgewalk’, each containing a number of poems with largely connected sub-themes.

‘Edgeways’ opens one’s mind’s eye to a disappointed generation ‘Where essences had failed to ooze/ The day the buds began to sprout’. The torture experienced by a growing

bud – a metaphor for youth – is palpable in the opening poem. It shows the lack of adequate nurture in core values among young people, toned tragically by love that is not fragrant, but ‘rancid’.

It is followed by a castigation of the leadership. ‘Wake up, Mr. President’, says the persona, ‘There are riots at the headland’. But the leader is held hostage by ‘the sycophant’s tongue’, sustaining visionlessness, moral indolence, deceit and credulity. The consolation, hopefully, is that eyes will see through the lies of political conmen and the ‘conned’ will behold the ‘con’.

Until then, the riots persist, ‘ensnaring dreams at Corner Lami’. Corner Lami, we learn through the author’s footnote, is a bus-stop in Kaduna, ‘a Nigerian town noted for sectarian disturbances’. At this point, the picture begins to fall into place. There is no beauty in religious extremism. The slender thing would be tolerance.

One can enjoy the piece of antithesis woven in characteristic lyricism by the poet. ‘The eye is the will of the matter/The will is the eye of the matter’, he writes, meaning that all things established on the right vision become fit for appropriate action.

Unfortunately, the moral thrust of the well-crafted antithesis is shattered by the morbid reality of free-wheelers doped on the opium of religion and caring no hoot about the sanctity of life.

Their offending assault is depicted in the images of depravity and carnage, of ‘Pigs munching a schoolboy’s innards’, of ‘body hurled from the bridge’ and ‘crocodile cracking the fisherman’s bones’.

‘Edgeways’ speaks, in most parts, of extremism driven

by irrationality. 'The different is different is different is different', says the persona, 'When you leave the rainbow to count the colours.' The repetition of the word 'different' in galloping cadence shows the distances covered by a straying mind moving from rationality to irrationality. Otherwise, if not from the rainbow, where else has nature provided a model for the fullest appreciation of colours?

The poser raised in 'Edgeways' is elaborated upon in 'Crossroads', profiling sinister trends in a wobbling polity, 'Teetering/ On the/ Brink... As kisses turn to hisses' (Crossroads I). The central figure in this drama of shame is the corrupt public officer: 'Auditors fiddling figures/ Litigants massaging judges/ Politicians reassigning votes at the umpire's chambers.' He is 'The nightsoilman so sanctimonious/ No laundryman is allowed to wash his clothes!' In turns of teasing irony, the persona pulls the veil off the political hypocrite on whose bleached conscience no truth-bearer can impact (Crossroads III).

The duplicitous leader is inveighed against in Crossroads IV. 'The Day God wept,/ Birth pangs announced you,/ Prodigal of the Niger!...Smiles the Prince' seems to come straight from a mock-heroic, quasi-philosophical testament of Nigeria's nagging historical reality. If the 'prodigal' is also the 'prince', then the drivelling, 'Let me,/ Like others,/ Praise you,/ Even though I think otherwise...' can be credited to compromised egg-heads in a body of beleaguered intelligentsia.

They engage in verbose talk shops. Drunken with the tonic from their tongues, the gods (leaders) exceed the bounds of genuine supplication. Only cheats and liars can

have their hearing. They create alliances that exacerbate tension and promote politico-economic upstarts whose posturings are largely counterproductive in the scheme of things.

There is much more in 'Crossroads'. We'd just tie it up with what appears like a lyrical allusion to Okigbo's 'going and coming that goes on forever...' ('Elegy for Alto' in *Labyrinths*). Duve writes: 'To-ing and fro-ing at this junction/ Where two roads beckon,/ We dance in circles/ Like hens bereft of tails.'

We get an impression here of a nation in a perpetual state of becoming, whose prospects are kept comatose by a bunch of political profiteers.

It is dark in the setting so portrayed, deepened by 'Party-touts-cum-trustees vetoing votes' and 'Blood-sucking octopuses/ Stretching tentacles/ Across the common stream...' Yet there has to be a way, a slender streak of light out of the darkly state of anomie.

'Nightsigns' is the search for a way out of the dark cavern of iniquity. It is a dream-flight of the creative personage trying to find the key to a bright, new day. But the scions of the dreadful abyss and incubuses continue to haunt the dream of the innocent mediator.

'This night on the Niger,/ No lights on the roadmap!/ This night on the Niger,/ Dizzy drones in the works!', says the voice.

The noise of the over-reacher is deafening. The sensible is overawed. Providence is invoked in the form of the 'Arch-Guardian' to give the tiny pearl, the seemingly timorous gem, a chance to assert itself.

Gradually, the persona moves from contemplation to self-

realisation. He explodes in images of combustion when he sings of ‘...the magma/ Smouldering inside me.’

The night is lit with consuming fire, the impregnable will of the visioner.

Thereafter, ‘Ellipse’ carves a route into regeneration and rebirth. The being opens new vistas for new creations who ‘demystify the juggernauts’ and ‘rewrite labels stuck by midnight’.

‘Ledgewalk’, the fifth and final movement in Duve Nakolisa’s *Beauty is in Slender Things*, is literally about walking on a ridge. Without being far-fetched, it seems to metaphorically place the visioner on a vantage topography. In spite of the assailing spears, ‘The voice of the seer whispered to the sane...’ And the chorus runs in end-rhyming biblical allusion, ‘We are by the wall of Jericho/ Gathered for the seventh echo;/ We are by the wall of Jericho/ Eager for the last echo.’ (‘Ledgewalk II).

The optimist in him sees ‘a rainbow beyond the storm’ (Ledgewalk II). Satisfied, and undeterred by the equivocation of seasons, the visioner concludes, ‘I am on the road to the beautiful./ On harmony’s circuitous route’.

‘Harmony’ is personified. It is the object of the quest, a living medallion of hope.

There is, in Duve’s work, a joyous use of language, a celebration of beauty, matched effectively by profundity of thought. The prosodic, lyrical progression of the five movements bear this out. Yet, while waving the flag of his individual talent, there is a sense in which he pays homage to his literary forebears.

One can feel the flow of Okigbo’s lyrical repetition of the

word ‘Condolences’ (‘Elegy for Slit-Drum’), for instance, in ‘What more to say but commiseration... Commiseration to water-soluble voters/ whose ballots evaporated at collation square... Commiseration...’ (Crossroads X).

Duve’s anagrammatic phraseology is also captivating. Such lines as ‘Does it symbolise the head of state/ Or the state of his head?’ cannot but excite. This is what one means by his joyous use of language. Combined with effective alliteration, assonances and emphatic repetitions, it makes good music to the ear, titillates the soul and conveys loads and loads of sense.

Beauty is in Slender Things is a collection you want to read again and again.

Ben Tomoloju
Literary Critic & Playwright

* This review was published in *The Guardian*.

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Introduction

The five segments of this book collectively constitute its expressive fist. As such, no single segment encapsulates “the overall theme”. Such a unifying motif is consciously explored across all the segments. If this creates the impression of a single voice speaking through all the poems, so be it.

So be it, too, if you detect a plurality of voices. For the seemingly single voice is often the unity of two voices: the personal and the public. This duality is evident in many of the poems. However, the yearning for equilibrium constitutes the warp through which the wefts of other themes are interlaced in this volume. Embedded in the woof are sub-themes that have resonances in the socio-political landscape.

Beyond the personal and the public is a different kind of duality – the duality of opposites staring at each other from parallel lines. This duality is discussed below. What can be noted here is that because of the complex nature of these dual forces, many a poem in this book is simultaneously exclusive and yoked. Whatever sub-themes or resonances readers may explore in any of the poems are, to a large extent, up to them. After all, isn’t a poem amenable to fresh ripples of interpretation? Indeed, readers can go beyond the ripples to mine the depths of the poem, taking from it as many gourds of experience as they are able or willing to bring to it.

Beauty is in Slender Things is chiefly about the polarities mentioned above. Explored here are forces, negative and positive, that assume obtrusive weight – oppositional forces whose presence or absence (the absent expressing itself in

the void it creates) generate conflicts and impose burdens on the denizens wedged between them. In these poems, these forces sizzle between Order and Disorder, Here and There, We and Them, Love and Hate, Democracy and Dictatorship...even, between Truth and truth. Between one extreme and the other stands the beacon of balance, its light altering the poles shaded by darkness.

Opposites are the enemies of each other. Reason: opposites define and limit each other. Ironically, though they sometimes try to suppress it, opposites are attracted to each other. But in that friendly magnetic field also lie contrary emotions. The only way to be free, it appears, is to be the opposite of nothing. Yet, even nothingness stretches its hand in the direction of something-ness: for absence is presence in negation – a reality, albeit in the minus realm.

Most opposites, however, can come to terms with each other in equilibrium, the way capitalism, to a significant extent, has come to terms with socialism in the welfare state. If the move towards equilibrium results in the elimination of the darkest force, so be it. Each plural situation demands as well as defines its own kind of equilibrium. The important thing is to achieve acceptable balance at any given time – to eliminate or, at least, curtail the obesity of intolerance and locate beauty in slender things thriving peacefully side by side. Otherwise, plurality, in itself desirable, may lead to unprofitable explosion or implosion.

Meanwhile, I see slenderness where love and tolerance brighten her smile. She is a beauty to behold in her delicate balance.

Slenderness, in the context of this volume, is a metaphor for equilibrium or balance. It is a symbol of that idyllic

social order which is not bogged down by extremism, especially religious, cultural, economic or political extremism. In other words, it is a symbol of moderation, control, accountability, decency, and transparency in the conduct of public affairs. Slenderness symbolizes humankind's need to trim off its conflict-generating excesses, especially in those flashpoints where despair abysmally mingles with fear.

These poems are collectively burdened with the quest for equilibrium – for slenderness – even as each one specifically addresses some aspect of the human condition. Whatever its obvious thematic strain – the doctrine of dictatorial loyalty/the sit-tight syndrome of some political leaders (“Crossroads XIII/XIV”), the December 2004 “tsunami” disaster (“Crossroads IX”), religious intolerance (“Edgeways III-IV”) or the search for a way out of the dark (*Nightsigns*) – every poem or set of poems remotely carries this burden.

So, come with me to the nodal zone where many, oppressed and depressed, cling to fading dreams, praying for the rupture of bloated barriers. When we free ourselves from the shackles of fear, hate, and greed, the arch-demon of extremism would see no heart to hide in. Come with me, through these poems, to the rainbow realm where beauty rests on slender things.

Duve Nakolisa

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Edgeways

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Edgeways

1

Lesions festering
On the barks of the rear
Where essences had failed to ooze
The day the buds began to sprout...

Equivocations of the vanguard
Echoing across the deep,
Gnawing at the innards,
& sweat, like Victoria,
 rolling at edge-rock...

Under the knotted burden,
Like a well-vexed pee
Impatient for length,
Being nags seeing.

To the crackling in the fire –
We return, again and again,
To the way to the little way
Where the head first wept
 for love's stench.

II

Vision cones at the quiet cove
Lie waste at the ruler's feet,
And shadows lengthen across the cliff
Like antlers of disembodied hope.

Wake up, Mr. President,
There are rioters on the headland!
Wake up, Mr. President,
The blindfold is translucent!

Must rip ears, must rip ears
Detained by the sycophant's tongue –
This troop must rip ears
Snubbing the civil grouse!

& so shall endure this song of rebirth
Till the conned behold the con.

III

By the wreath beyond the cove

Sucking bay songs from twittering birds –
Under the nesting birds' tree stand I.

*The eye is the will of the matter,
The will is the eye of the matter.*

Beyond the visceral and the absurd,
The unfair and the imperfect –
This will is on board where all things fit.

Take notice, ITEX,
Witness to the prelude –*

Anchored by the watery motion of his feet,
His belly pivoted on calabash impervious,
The fisherman's hands beneath the water

Probe the fishnet.

*& the miscreants ensnare dreams
At Corner Lami!**
& the miscreants ensnare dreams
At Corner Lami!*

* Nickname of a schoolmate of mine with whom I shared the experience of the calabash-transported fisherman.

** A bus-stop in Kaduna, a Nigerian town noted for its sectarian disturbances.

IV

From hunter to hunter –
Between the hawks and the dogs –
Where next, hunchback?

To Corner Lami,
To my besieged shanty;
To Corner Lami,
Where the thunder awaits my son!

Over the matchet-mute man,
Over the dagger waylaid by the arrow
Galloped the humped antelope

To Corner Lami,
Where the fetishist bowed to the extremist,
Where the hunchback lost his hunch!

At the railway line,
Pigs munching a schoolboy's innards
Reversed the feast...
By the headless corpse near the willows –
By the body hurled from the bridge –
Wept the crocodile cracking the fisherman's bones.

V

Like a moon on unknown sea,
Like a moon on unknown sea –
I'm like a moon on unknown sea
 where no ships pass!

Lumped with boot-stamped *interimists*
Horned for breeze-rooted accolade,
 I demur,
Like a song tarried by an impudent cough.

VI

...is both particle and wave,
...is both particle and wave.
Light is both particle and wave,
Let the moment leap
 in binary quantum!

When the shrieks echo from space
Into Big Ben's skull,
Take me to the time-told touch,
To the touch-felt time,
To where the Einsteinian don summons lights to dance.

& the relative begot quasars, begot pulsars,
& we're banging in the circuit ever after.

VII

Now must pulse yield to impulse,
Now that the ferryman is set
Between the deal and the dream!
Should this blush bar the dimple
Between the word and the way?

Though flowery dust insects call,
Pollens for equity hire the breeze.
Between the combing and the coming,
Songs astride the ferryman's feast.

Dissonance! Otherwise, dissonance,
Negated signs' cacophonous coda –
Breath draws breath draws breath,
Without sickle or scapel,
From anther to stigma.

Come, then,
Over seas and scenes!
Dreams sail well on strange waters:
The different is different is different is different
When you leave the rainbow to count the colours.

When wrecked angles melt to curves,
Breathing liquid breaths,
Who is there to preach hygiene?
& what walls can stop
The drive of a dimpled heart?

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Crossroads

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Crossroads

I

Fallout of the new emergency:

Teetering
On the
Brink

Where
Body
Stops time,

The seed
Rises
To the scent of dew,
Throbbing between two lips,
Sharp with elongated promises.

& by sundown,
As kisses turn to hisses,
The seed, choked with amputated facts,
wilts.

II

Fallout of the new emergency:

Confluence waters
draw back
& all, like fish
on caked river-bed,
gasp for breath.

The crucible has cracked!
Prayer-patterned molecules
Scamper to umbilical points
Criss-crossing breathlessly,
Raising walls on carnival square.

*Let not the cracked crucible
Become a melted pot!*

The deal-makers are frolicking at the summit
As swords salute neighbourly throats
Near the infinite gorge between two trees
Defoliated by orthopterous swarms.
Do they hear the squeal of the unconscious prey,
Do they see the vultures shedding carcass-tears
Over prayers riddled by rabid rage?

III

Sorcerers of the partition
Knocking the kneecaps of irony
Won't douse this wild fire inaugurated as beacon –

Auditors fiddling figures,
Litigants massaging judges,
Politicians reassigning votes
at the umpire's chamber ...

Should I with the litany bore you?

*Name the major malady,
Simply the major malady!*

He looks like a pillar of salt,
Immaculate and germ-free!
Speechifying at the pro-hygiene rally,
He looks like a pillar of salt,
This nightsoilman so sanctimonious
No laundryman is allowed to wash his clothes!

IV

This ostrich state
On the eve of the limit
Woos the thunder straggling to the beach.

Laments the Priest –

The day God wept,
Birth pangs announced you,
Prodigal of the Niger!

Smiles the Prince –

Let me,
Like others,
Praise you,
Even though I think otherwise.

Writes the Scribe –

Though with sweat and blood I write,
Shouldn't I forever praise the king?

Concurs the Acolyte –

Such is permanence made:
Now buckling and unbuckling,
Now packing and unpacking,
Then sitting and sticking.

Sneers the Poet –

The star is held aloft
By balanced energy:

inward energy = outward energy.

Control is a gravitational duty –
Cannibalism can be brilliant
When flesh is not the meat.

V

Hot airs in halls seminal with frustration...
Call the bees to the anger feast,
Buzz through the meadows, marshes and playas
Right to the high streets of camouflage!

Squeezing solvents from aromatic weights,
Teasing song-wine with bile and pepper...
Handless, can one slip on this complex sock?
Aggregates of heads talking talks
May make no change where no hands move.

When the gods overreach themselves,
Who shall come to the sundown carnival...
When the gods overreach themselves,
Who shall extend the frontiers of the
lateral?

When the gods overreach themselves,
Who shall come to the sundown carnival...
When the gods overreach themselves,
Who shall challenge the feet-grip of the
vertical?

They that cut the upas* tree,
They that see stars in daylight.

* Reputed for poisoning the ground for miles around.

VI

Images intersect
At centrefold
Of alliances,
Splitting concord.

Fresh questions
hopped
to the passage
When I saw the rear of the saint.

Show me the centre
Where knowing is seeing,
Show me the centre
In the mind of matter.

From mice to men
The genes are thawing
In new neighbourhoods,
Reproducing proteins
Unfingered by nature.

VII

Two friends met
 & danced their dance
till wine spilled
 & soiled their clothes.

Enter the man, enter his tackler...
Enter two friends
Who spilled their drinks,
Giving the club a febrile kick,
Making announcers obstreperous gongs.
Enter them to Arena-No,
To the left-right arrow pull-pushing the peg.

To-ing and fro-ing at this junction
Where two roads beckon,
We dance in circles
Like hens bereft of tails.

VIII

Grains of lies in circles go
Till we chew and spit them out,
& tunes and times in circles roll
Till fresh stories take the stage.

Ebony queen, well-begotten,
Two short queries before the toss:

Would you potentially great remain
Or actually great become?

With greedy foxes playing the flute,
Will old songs ever be made new?

IX

Wailing waters and screaming swarms
Announce the anarchy.

Anger is creasing the flaming sky,
The stream is steamy with blood
Where the vultures like to wait.

The law is a whisper overruled by chaos:
The judge is only mighty on calm waters.

Stupefied folks
Run like decapitated fowls
From the tremor and the deluge
Surging towards the horizon
Till the epicentre wobble their feet...

Man and metal disgorge tears
As the city centre contorts
With the failure of the mental grid
& from the fire and the fury
Spewing from nature's gash.

*Failure abounds but none astounds
Like man's failure to rule himself.*

X

What more to say but commiserations!

Over the flight-bound funds,
Over the electrified darkness,
the wind wheezes, screaming, commiserations!

Commiserations to water-soluble voters
whose ballots evaporated at collation square!

Commiserations to accord contrivers
silent on weapons waiting for thunder!

Commiserations to the truth-shy country
corrupted by errors nurtured by Mammon!

Commiserations to the dazed and dumb
split by mistrust for the rapist's thrust!

Commiserations to geo-politicians
calibrating justice by cardinal points!

Commiserations to the families of many
throat-slashed by vanishing vandals!

Let all that reign by the knowledge rein
Commiserate with the Niger dream –
With the sky-bound arrow tethered to oil rigs!

XI

When the sky greets the abyss
The master chefs won't wait
 To salt the broth.

To the red-call tent,
To the red-call tent...
Across the sea to dumb-blind nests!
To the red-call tent
Too distant for bullet cough!

Or to sky-celluloid,
To eavesdroppers and law-enforcers
 Perforating the griot's lips –

They interject, they interject!
 They gave Father Aristide justice
 *Unknown to Aristeides.**
They interject by chips and ships,
They interject by sighs and signs.

And suddenly,
Amidst the consternation,
I see the dance in the dancer's skin
& I know not which is which.

* Father Aristide – Jean-Bertrand Aristide, former embattled President of Haiti. Aristeides (530 - 488 BC), also known as “the Just” – an Athenian statesman who helped stamp out tyranny in Athens.

XII

The-word-in-transit, the zig-zag word,
Has swallowed its last echo.

*A word is a word is a word is a word
Until only one person knows its meaning.*

The-word-in-transit has dealt the cards,
Snatching the jokers to upset the rule;
The-word-in-transit has swallowed the bride!

Tongues are spewing fire
At the man of sly bonhomie:
“If you’re Doe-deaf, General,
We’ll Mobutu-mob you!”

Come, Pheidippides,
Take me to the fifty-chamber sphinx;
Let Ernest* play earnest
With the horns of dilemma.

Who can a word reverse,
A word already volleyed
To the gills of the echo?

* Ernest Shonekan, installed civilian head of Nigeria’s Interim National Government by “step-aside” ruler, Gen. I. B. Babangida, after June 12 (1993) presidential election was annulled. That annulment, which resulted to a feverish political stalemate, was the culmination of an unduly prolonged political transition programme that had many twists and turns.

XIII

Being is held hostage by hope,
Says the lizard nodding
By the block beyond my scope.

Denizens of the anthill by my window
Carry out their morning duties –
Hope surrenders to a lizard, ant by soldier ant.

Sundown by the block beside my garden:
Being pauses, contracts its muscles,
Raises its tail, and opens its slit –
The soldiers of fortune manure my garden.

Twilight, next day:
A rat's tail behind the window twitches,
A lightning surge by the limbless one –
Being descends into oblivion.

Sunrise, one more time:
The mother hen across the yard wails,
A peep – and two snakes are gulping
The oval hopes of the hen.

From one snake to another this field tip:
Prefer the loyal to the loud –
The rat I swallowed was truly committed,
This hen, which left its eggs to keep its neck,
And now fretting across the yard, is only concerned.

XIV

You that carry this State like a weight –
With millions of wishes stabbing your peace –
Shouldn't you to another give the baton?

Courtiers: All dummies that missed the boat
Should let our ordained ruler be!
For he alone should rule the State
Till he becomes the late.

Critics assailed by quivers menacing,
Vampires parleying over the contract
To extend the supremo's rule...

Courtiers: See you not his acres of influence,
And the foreign affluence of his wit?
Watch the evening news
Where the economy does well by cameras.

Fabians: Give us elections free and fair
And the king will lose his fang!

XV

Let me love what I hated
On the other side of the fence.
To dodge the bullet, to double the votes –
Aren't generals fitter for this than gents?

Senators tiger-dancing about bans,
See you not the pilgrims journeying to the hill?
See you not the smile wooing the snake?
To dodge the bullet, to double the votes –
Aren't generals fitter for this than gents?

*Diarrhoea is when two viruses fail to agree;
Diarchy,* when they pretend to agree.*

* Coinage used by some African political scientists in propounding a system of government run jointly by the military and civilians.

XVI

Your hair
Recedes like a deferred promise
Each time the slave remembers.

Order
 is anarchy
Hedged in by hope.

Detour
 to detour —
It's the details that detain.

Step out
Beyond the threshold,
Get seated outside your skin.

Matter matters less
Outside the bracket of resonances.

XVII

Beauty is in slender things,
In streamlined forms,
In measures managed for balance.

Bring trimmer,
Bring trimmer!

Beauty is in slender things
Arresting liberties before the brink.

These games you play erode my dreams:
What rules are there to judge their end?
This score of yours excite my eyes:
Where's the orchestra to point the dance?

*May the watery rays that slim
Douse suffer-rays dissolving bodies
Surviving on pin-head miracles!*

Song-killing phalanx
At the counter-cadence meridian,
Gatekeepers rejecting passes at the foyer.

Hold it,
Hold it!

These doves taking off
Presage the missiles' arrival.

XVIII

They scanned my insides
At the odious abyss,
Byte by virus byte.

Roistering agents!
Bull-terriers petrifying road-users,
Secret subverters dogging the pilgrim's path!
This avenue overtaken by siren, glitz and trepidation,
Does it symbolize the head of state
Or the state of his head?

We're in a bad-*Baba* state,
Fated to journeys and no returnings!
We're in a bad-*Baba* state,
Hounded at every street and creek
By cannibals shooting at non-uniformed notions!
We're in a bad-*Baba* state,
Tettered to tanks of closed rehearsals!

Shredded and cast into diverse winds,
Like earthworm splintered for the angler's hook,
I seek the self of my selves,
The selves of myself,
 from alley
 to alley,
At byways breezy with baits,
At the highways of inchoate choices.

XIX

Dollar-beaked birds
Eulogising saints
Canonized by Mammon...

Languorous sweet air
Waiting for temperature right
To unravel the odour...

Enthusiasts parroting cant
Pummelling perceived contrary conscience
At dark corners of the matrix...

Wily Prospero
Of the Pygmalion-like urge
Creating consent from captured wishes...

Party touts-cum-trustees vetoing votes
And orchestrating violence and rifts
To install their conduit-stooges...

Blood-sucking octopuses
Stretching tentacles
Across the common stream...

Brushstrokes of the present,
We-testimonies from the Niger.



Nightsigns

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Nightsigns

I

Night:

quantum leap
from knotted contours.

*Come, great dream,
Free me from this broad stream.*

Night:

seed-resurrection theme
before the morning dew.

*Life is a stream of memory-shifts;
Otherwise, a pond of unmitigated woes.*

Night:

cross-stream hurdler
undeterred by fluvial dump.

*Day by design counts the cost;
Night by default takes the plunge.*

II

To the night sky, then...
The subtle song awakes my dream –

To the night sky, then...

on trim bridges, on flaming palms,
on the smooth curves of the boulder –

To the night sky, then...

the outcrop scorpion is poised to sting,
the creeper's thorns perforate my sole
where the canines keep the gate –

To the night sky, then –

there to track down the harvest forbidden,
there to defuse the sneaky mines,
there to mine the downside of hope,
there to hope for day-shy mantles –

So then to the night sky...

To the base of quick alerts,
To alerts wrapped in faith,
To hope's soothing shores,
To counterbalanced poles,
To the dream's coral reef.

III

I'm back to the night
Where mirrors see no illusions,
Where parallel voices
Criss-cross and fade.

Unbridgeable differences
Stand on common ground
When danger equally pulls.

Welcome to the borderline,
Single eye of the night...

I look for new eyes
Where old ones fail;
New sights, new patterns
Where voices launch retreat.

IV

Wrecked angles
Curve best
In callipygian dreams.

The here-to-have
Awakes the there-to-get
When eyes on singular feast feed fat.

Deep-sea desires
Call gems
From moon-peak stores.

There are two stars that matter —
The pull dream-star
& the push do-star:
These can't meet without emitting s-rays.*

* A play on "x-rays": here, the "s" stands for "success".

V

The signpost
Of eye-contact says we can.

Silent dances,
Dancing shadows,
Speak not what hearts
Emit as symbols.

Squeak, squeak,
Dance definers!

If bees to the hive must return
To dance to fellow-feeling,
Press those thoraxes
Against the comb.

VI

Your large eyes
Drink light from the depths
Where the word and the way
Sign the pact in the dark.

This night on the Niger,
No lights on the roadmap!
This night on the Niger,
Dizzy drones in the works!

Can I but play...
Can I but play it...
Can I but play it by the ear?

Arch-Guardian of the choral train,
Steer me across this foggy zone,
Across this clueless whimper
And fisticuffs of voices
Kicking up a din to drown your whisper.

When next the gods call,
Echo the light chorus,
& this nugget
Shall step out of the fire unhurt.

VII

Should borderline hopes
Take the quantum leap...
Should the turn-around
Ignore the pulse-point...
Should I,
Caught in this state of flux,
Fire the harpoons
At the heedless, headless beast?

Arch-Guardian of the Realm
Your cadenza says I should.

Should the nameless
Challenge the things we call by name...
Should the impasse
Overrule the novel jump of the frog...
Should I,
Wearing the ritual mask
Of Guerrero, eat Galileo's apple —
Spring against gravity to sky-dreams?

Arch-Guardian of the Realm
Your cadenza says I should.

Should stars that loan their light
Shine not on the left-right arrow...
Should the stirrings of the test-tube
Interpose between the thing sent and the thing sensed...
Should I,
Emerging from the interstices of hope
Across burnt bridges
Lumber by, regardless... lumber by, regardless?

*V.O Ngangah,
Let's read this poem again.*

VIII

Now that the last heat has called the rain
Who's there to shackle the thunder?

Ooze, flowing will!
Roll, oozing heart!
Night accompanies you.

The slipstream
Leads me to the fingertip,
And to the magma
Smouldering within me.

I'm a river
Of no fickle currents –
I'm Desire, fiery one,
Going for my set apple!
Nobody can stop me
Because I won't stop myself!

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Ellipses

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Ellipses

I

The beat is back,
Strip the patina off the gong!

The beat is back
Where it first thrilled the pulse,
Where the sun reorders shadows.

The beat is back
From the seamless abyss
To the triangular wedlock.

The beat is back
To remake the matrix,
To give breath to clay,
To charge flesh to live.

Ushers of the new dawn,
Disrobe me at the alter:
This vessel shall unveil vessels,
For the beat is back,
Yeah, the beat is back!

II

Flamingos, Antelopes, Silence ...

Walking up sand dunes,
Like journey-bound Hamlet
Denied visa by his mind's embassy,
The beachcomber falters at the beachhead.
A gun coughs after a cracky order
And the battalion swells into view...

To the muse of extraction,
To molars wobbled for exit;
Take me to the first option
Where the knotted rays sign the message...

Flamingo flight! Antelope run!
The sun ascends! The shadows form!

We'd fretted and fainted in the night –
Now, the hills must show our light.

III

At the greening
of the dream
on the marbled plinth...

after the multiple shards,
after the necklace of tears,

comes the caress,
comes the splash –
comes the gush of tickling rays;

after the fragments of charred hopes,
after the pendulum trips,

comes the caress,
comes the splash –
comes the gush of tickling rays.

O Ariadne!*

caress the wobbly rope:
the Minotaur is doped,
the mantle is come.

*Daughter of Minos, in Greek mythology, who sent Theseus with a ball of string to enable him trace his way out of the labyrinth after slaying the Minotaur.

IV

Just when the melody
Outpaced the harmony
I heard the Cajun yell.

Fiddler Balfa,*
Touch me on the instep,
Embalm these feet
Gliding on banana skin
In this garden of pollen
Teeming with wings.

Cross-homilies
Simultaneously delivered
Frustrate the flutist.

Again, the half-moan...
Fiddler Balfa!
Again, the half-moan:
All songs threatening the poet
Hard yells must vomit!
Between the head and the heart
Should be no sludge.

*Fiddler Dewey Balfa, the US master of Cajun, a dance-oriented country music distinguished in melody and harmony by the use of twin fiddles and by frequent yells from some band members.

V

The tungstenic bit seeks water
Beneath the rocky road,
Dry throats weakly await
As tensed hands engage stones
at the aquifer.

From the coroner's root-tongue
A song's loose notes call me;
Under the surveillance of enzymes
The hawfinch whistles alarm
above the aquifer.

Willow warbler, untie the song!
Beckon to the penumbra
The angler's coated hook,
Untie the knot timely appraised
at the aquifer.

VI

To the ellipses through the eclipse
To the ellipses through the eclipse...

Thunder-showers swirl the veld
Springing night at noon feast –

To the ellipses through the eclipse
To the ellipses through the eclipse...

Rain ribs in open air overflow the earthenware
By the brook wiggling to tale-fair –

To the ellipses through the eclipse
To the ellipses through the eclipse...

From the rot in the rut
Trekking towards the bull's-eye –

To the ellipses through the eclipse
To the ellipses through the eclipse...

From the dwindling dew
In hope-scented snare-chambers –

To the ellipses through the eclipse
To the ellipses through the eclipse...

VII

Strange creatures across my insides
Entwine like parabolic curves.
The snare that noosed amiss
Stares at the beach.
Spirit-ordered sound
Filters from my drum-room.
Upon the question a pert maiden spits
As light flickers upon the cadaver.

I'm like an egg in search of its shell,
I'm like a shell in search of its egg.
I'm dismembered among realms –
Present in part, absent in part –
I touch the hem of new thoughts,
I feel the tingle of new things:
Thoughts and things cohabiting in parts,
Things and thoughts flirting across time,
Thoughts within things within thoughts,
Things within thoughts within things,
Thoughts and things stabbed by queries,
Like lumps perforated by needles.

Can I from this captive freedom –
Can I... Can I...
Can I from this complex a wholesome essence forge?

*Arch-Guardian of the Realm,
Your cadenza says I can.*

VIII

We dwelt among stinging tentacles,
A loose canon before us,
When we followed the marks of the ellipses
On this inscrutable distance.

Now from the ellipses towards the full stop –
Bring back the code decoded by bats,
Bring back the flock herding across realms,
Running from the miseries of rearward regimes!

*The public in the matter private
Seeks out the private in the matter public.*

The puzzle is stripping itself bare
As darkness recedes.
The beast seductive is washed ashore,
Snake-like with beguiling skin.

Vanguard waves lap against pebbles
Where the consequence should address the cause
& the beach-keeper blocks the dune's secret,
Dissolving questions in crafty agreements.

*In silence is the distillation,
In voicing out the freedom.*

Lyricist by the floodgate,
Send the children to school
& cloth them in doubt,
That they may by queries fresh answers grab,

And demystify the juggernaut,
And rewrite labels stuck by midnight,
The juggernaut dictating the tune,
The labels misnaming the matter.

*It's free speech that signs
The certificate of democracy.*

IX

Swaddled in contemplation towards the full stop:

As with the griot's song,
so with the liar's gong;
As with pilgrim's that pray,
so with the zealot's prey;
As with the bright and brainy,
so with the dull and brawny;
As with the star with funds,
so with the starved of funds;
As with the hands that bless,
so with the shoulder blessed;
As with the ones that wed,
so with the lonely in bed –

We all are encircled by quests and queries.

Heat lost = Heat gained.

We moan for lost heat, for gained heat:
However the matter goes, we moan for balance
In this slope of polar encounters.

Microbes run from mummified time,
From equations untroubled by change;
The journey floats towards the balance,
After the journey comes the balance.

Ledgewalk

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Ledgewalk

1

I see the skeleton of my present
Talking to the skeleton of my past
 & here, in between,
I hear a voice say,
Talk to them
 & order flesh for the future.

We roll
 On the back of dreams
 We let loose,

Re-inventing goals,
Renewing visions.

I am dancing
 with one leg
The dance of a trimmed-down coin
Whose sides have gathered mud
In a head-nor-tail circus,
I and the dew-lickers of the morning.

II

Querulous opposites assail memories
Stored behind mob-square.
On the day of collective amnesia,
As hope-slayers slit the throat of amity,
The voice of the seer whispered to the sane:

*We are by the wall of Jericho
Gathered for the seventh echo;
We are by the wall of Jericho
Eager for the last echo.*

And around the world in centres atrocious,
Where many chose their skin, chose their tongue,
And chose their God before their birth,
Zealots endanger others who do things differently.

Over and over again the spears assail
Forward-lookers posting testimonies edgeways.
Yet, I see a rainbow beyond the storm –
Hope is stubborn where life insists.

Walking on the ledge towards the rainbow leap –
To plumb the fuzzy depths of the realm
And make everyone's right their might –
I hear the drummer ask, when shall the pollens stick?

III

The rain has fallen
On the thoughts I thought last,
But no buds have sprouted to lift my faith
& my heart, bereft of seed,
Must await the earth's resurgence.

I yearn for steel on this sandstone
Eroding to elongate the chimera
& dwindle the figures foreshortened by drought.

I yearn for steel
Where the elements have roughened the glaze,
Where the promise has faded to debts
And weeds have grown on shackled love.

Stir up! Steely will,
Stir up to wed the licence and the lesson,
The mind and the matter.

This residue of dead seeds
And shrivelled shoots
Can yet in illimitable hope,
After the rain's further kiss, live.

& then would these tears over a broken egg
Be wiped with the feathers of the emergent chick.

IV

On the road to the beautiful –
Present in part, absent in part –
On the road to the beautiful,
Laden with plus-minus matter!
I'm on the road to the beautiful,
On harmony's circuitous course.

On the road to the beautiful,
Circling the matrix to underscore the complex,
Isolating the squares in this grid of thought –
These quantities hurting the nerve in matter invariable...

On the road to the beautiful,
Free from the circuitry of the squares in circle secundum,
Hate and hurt diminish.

V

The ship goes
from goodbye to welcome.

Cackler
of the latest breath,

Roll this poem
from the climax
through the ellipses
back to the first query.

Echoes of the marimba
lead us to departures,
departures urge us to arrivals,
arrivals lock us in tunnels
of mind and matter.

About the Author

Duve Nakolisa, writer, speaker and entrepreneur, is the leader and coach of the transformation team at <https://www.successmover.com/> and the CEO at <https://www.snappywebhosting.com/>.

He teaches courses on the subjects of success, vision, beliefs, values and habits as well as on innovative thinking and human resource management. His personal-development books include *The 3 Most Powerful Success Determinants*, *Signs Formula for Generating Creative Solutions*, *Stepping from Vision to Reality*, and *Ten Key Qualities of Highly Successful People*.

In addition to his works in the area of creative writing, notably *Beauty is in Slender Things* (poetry that “makes good music to the ear, titillates the soul and conveys loads and loads of sense” – *The Guardian*) and *Uncover the Sun* (novel), he has co-authored two philosophy textbooks, *Logic: An Introduction* and *Introduction to Philosophy of Language*.

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Literature / Poetry

Beauty is in Slender Things is a volume of poems in five movements written by Duve Nakolisa, the highly-engaging poet noted for his lyricism, apposite imagery and profundity of thought. Nakolisa's poems, with melodious depth, explore the disintegrative aspects of the human condition.

Duve Nakolisa's style has been praised by notable poets and literary scholars. According to Satya Dev Jaggi, the Indian English poet, Nakolisa's poems "have the complexity of rich musical tunes as parts of a poetical musical utterance...an organized pattern of sounds echoing the impulses of meaning".

Reviewing *Beauty is in Slender Things* in *The Guardian*, Ben Tomoloju asserts: "There is, in Duve Nakolisa's work, a joyous use of language, a celebration of beauty, matched effectively by profundity of thought. The prosodic, lyrical progression of the five movements bears this out... Duve's anagrammatic phraseology is also captivating. Such lines as 'Does it symbolise the head of state/ Or the state of his head?' cannot but excite. This is what one means by his joyous use of language. Combined with effective alliteration, assonances and emphatic repetitions, it makes good music to the ear, titillates the soul and conveys loads and loads of sense. *Beauty is in Slender Things* is a collection you want to read again and again."



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