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Poems

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It Comes to This

I

A friend approached me with
A very singular fish,
More like a bird in shape,
With dorsal fins
Like immense
Wings...

Across the street I see a farmer sweat,
Winnowing sorghum grain with a paddle,
Threshing wheat with oxen...
Shepherds tending
Donkeys, chickens, and goats.

Across the stream I see a trader
With a sack on his shoulder...
Over hills two women carrying kindling
From the thick woods...
I hear the loud vibrations of a flute
Played by a deacon sitting on a rock.

And here I kneel
Skinning a camel leg, tugging
And pulling in the process.

The womb of the sky moans
Pregnant with rain and thunder
And human eyes
Shed tears in pain.

II

I have seen pus
oozing out of a leper's eyes
You have fathomed the magnitude
of everyday crimes
You have watched worms
gnaw the green to dust
You have sympathized when Dorzees
rend their clothes in grief—
I have watched my friend
guillotine himself with a train
neck on the rail

I have seen spirits fly
on the desolate plain...
ravens, vultures, hyenas hold
orgies on the dead;

I have seen an old
man die in comfort on his bed.

III

My father always said,
"My son, there's a meaning to life:"
wonders of flying fish
the running child
headless torso
the violence of the thunderstorm
earth-men toiling...

Now remembering his words,
I feel like a leper
Whose every joint is rotten.

Girma Wubishet Tessema
Howard University

More Than Just a Game

10 men
weaving, streaming,
across a glossy wood-grained floor.
Eyes fixed on a bouncing brown orb.
From elevated perches 1000's roar
 pleasure:
as dueling duets dance to the rhythm of a
 24 second beat,
as agile giants gracefully pirouette,
as swooping jumpers soar majestically,
and as slamming dunkers unload
 frustrations.
Suddenly, shrill whistles. Silences falls
 and action freezes.
Zebra striped guardians briskly stride
 forth
announcing crimes amidst loudly voiced
 protests.
Finally, with penalties paid, "Play"
 resumes.
Sideline generals, elegantly attired,
 anxiously scream commands.
Pumas and Ditas and Cons squeak in
 chorus.
Fleet-footed warriors
dart and dash.
Liquid, supple bodies, defy gravity
to stretch and test limits.
All the while, time ticks down.
Too soon, too late, the final buzzer.
The battle is over. One win. One loss.
Exuberant victors and exhausted victims
 file
past young faces filled with fantasies of
 games yet played
past old faces lined by memories of games
 long since gone.
Inside locker-room sanctuaries
sheening hot bodies radiate fatigue.
Boastful uniforms lay quiet
and aching bulging muscles gently spasm.
Slowly, souls real and rubber cool.
Steaming showers, scented lotions and
 silky shirts
complete the transformation of stern
 faced gladiators
into men of smiling easy grace.

Lastly, parting predictions and quick
 slapped palms
send weary but satisfied warriors
striding down darkened exit ramps
away from tonight's transitory
 tribulations and accomplishments
towards those of tomorrow.

William L. Hazelwood
Oakland, CA

Black America

Noise.
Speeches, chants
Talking, yelling, praying
Victories, losses, gains, happiness
Fighting, marching, bombing
Gunshots, footsteps
Silence . . .
Loss.
Prayers, moans
crying, praying, wishing.
Surprise, enthusiasm, courage, strength
Singing, laughing, shouting
New laws, achievements
Victory . . .
And yet . . .
Still fighting,
Still hoping,
Still praying,
Still sad,
Still Black.
Shantel Blakely
Silver Spring, MD

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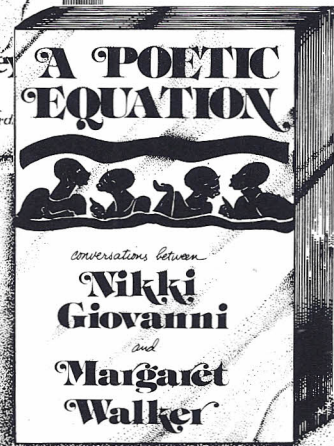
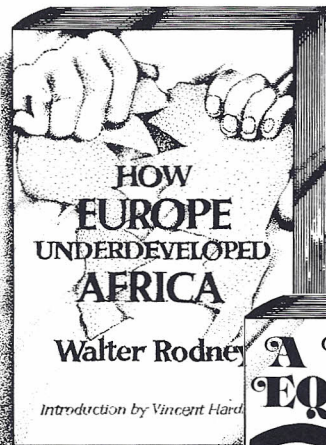
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