

TWO POEMS BY STEPHEN CHAN

A Day in Lusaka

Sometimes a deep melancholy seizes him.
He knows this because he becomes more gallant.
Though, what gallantry has to do with his work today —
sitting in the sun, fending off mosquitoes, still reading Sartre —
is beyond even educated guesses.

Sits, in a deck chair, of course on a deck,
a house in the Spanish style, all arches.
Street's full of them. Could be in any suburb.
Any part of the world. Irredeemably bourgeois,
he adds up his deficits, convinces himself he leads
a glad spartan life (if only it weren't for the mosquitoes).

There are pictures that have always fuelled his imagination.
Regis Debray and his Spanish wife contemplating the Seine.
Sartre assisted by Glucksman at a conference on refugees.
Another picture: Sartre greets Aron after many years.
Glucksman, younger, obscured, head bowed, wears
a beatific smile. For him, the world was reconciled.

Ah, how sentimental Africa has made him. His melancholy
stems from that. He'd like to help old partners
find each other one more time. He'd like to make love
(a mosquito coil aflame in the corner). Invite all
female visitors to his room. Discuss philosophy,
how we are changed, if not saved, and postulate,

in place of cigarettes, after each orgasm, whether angels
study in Paris, grow up in Dacca or Lusaka,
obscure questions, gallantly phrased, free, unalienated,
unreconciled.

Friend, I Also Carry Water

friend, I also carry water
I am the water-bearer's husband
and I perform the husband's duty
partnered to her spins and glides

arabesques, pirouettes, her waist
like water in its flow, impossible
sometimes to support as she arches
her back, smiles, lets grace, sinew

control, slip through my fingers
except, on her head, she carries still
her water jar, she waters seedlings

saplings in her secret dances, all
eyes upon her wrist, but she flings
out a fine mist every time she spins

misses me

her plants in a circle