

## Remembering Oakland, California

It is Halloween, a festival strange  
to transatlantic visitors;  
the ghosts are with us always  
here in Africa;  
residual spirits tightening the stem  
of every bush, bracing the leaves,  
and extending through the root system  
their claim to the earth's core.

But the ghosts in Oakland wear make-up,  
crossing the intersections as if  
they were subject to the same laws  
as pedestrians and motorists.  
The only plant life they claim  
is a scooped-out pumpkin skull  
in which a single candle, burning,  
subsists on a diet of wax.

Death is a cult for once a year,  
a niche to be filled when occasion  
demands. But we feed the masks  
hourly. They are lifelines, strings  
of blood linking this world  
with the next, our frames of cruelty,  
incandescences of pain  
sunk into burnt limbs and empty eyes.

HAROLD FARMER