

for chamberlain nelson-ebimie

(murdered at dawn)

I have seen the negatives of an unravelling
developing in the darkroom of our hearts horror
but you won't let the photographer
put the seal to his work

the shattering of wine glasses
swept from shelf and counter
the splintering of the broad mirror
fragmenting our mighty dream
how can i hear your voice
above the jarring fanfare
how can i see your face
so fresh so clear
in a glass of brandy falling to pieces

5:00 am
the dutiful cock declares
the dawn of a puking day

doors open to deal out
the fetor and fume of overcrowded rooms
reluctant rooms pour out ill-used children
muttering their misgivings

new girls in ginger damask and silk blouses
emergent queen cuckoo bees
supplanting queen bumble bees
come with carnations in their hair
to speak of sorrow and joy
new girls with blossoms on their breasts
new girls dancing on bonnets of limousines
humming-bird hawk-moths hovering in flight
probe pockets for nectar

avoidless afternoon
new girls burst into the sunshine of the funeral
to feel in their exultant throats
the firmness of grieving feet
consecrating this narrow house
without windows without doors
harmattan home of the master drone
stung to death by overworked workers

G. EBINYO OGBOWEI

*Iworoko: popular funeral dance of the Nembe sub-group of the Ijaws. Performed as the major attraction of the wake-keeping, it features mainly women in their prime. The songs, often satirical, and dances are as provocative as the feverish drummings.