

Patience Agbabi

Indian Summer



PATIENCE AGBABI, born in London in 1965 to Nigerian parents, is an exceptional poet, equally at home in the world of literary poetry and in the world of spoken word. She brings to her climate change poems some beautifully structured language and a powerful poetic sense. Patience is a regular contributor on television and radio and works with the British Council as an ‘ambassador’ for British culture. *R.A.W.*, her groundbreaking debut collection of poetry, was published in 1995, and won the 1997 Excelle Literary Award. Her latest collection *Transformatrix* is published by Payback Press. She lives in Kent and recently gave birth to her first child.

Prologue

Ninety days hath September
since October and November
were deleted one by one
excepting one fine day alone
when the sky is cold and clear
enough to deconstruct the year.

October Dawn Revisited

After Ted Hughes

That glass half full of wine left out
all night – a fine chilled muscadet
with a long finish – and the print
of a lipstick longing, has of late
become half empty; and that hint
of stalagmite and stalactite,
that ice-age vision with the scent
of marigold and summer fruit
though freeze-framed as a work of art,
melted to drizzle. A glass of light
rain not wine, grey not white,
filling to meniscus height,
is mercury rising thick as hate
by Centigrade, by Fahrenheit,
till overflowing. Now forked and sheet
battle the air this day, this date
and the wine glass melting like a cut
glass tulip drowning in the heat
with twisted stem, and yellow tint
has scorched the lips that worshipped it.

Tsunami

Chennai, India

We do not have a word
for it in Tamil, she said.

When we saw the horizon rise like a god
from the sea bed

we never believed.
The beach, the trees, the beach huts, drowned.

Nobody died
here but south of here whole villages buried,
the beach a burial ground.

The children they found
were not full of water but of sand.

I'm afraid

of the two kinds of disaster in this world:
the natural ones we can't avoid,
the acts of God

and the man-made.

ECO₂nomics

*The average Briton produces
126 times more carbon dioxide
than someone living in Nepal.*

I read about freak floods in Nepal
as my London-Delhi long-haul

airbus cuts a tunnel through the air.
0°C. *It was like a wall of water.*

CO₂ , -3, up here it's Winter;
down there, December, Printemps

is early on the banks of the Seine.
It means that crop yields are going down.

The plane – *it sounded like 10,000 lorries* –
makes a constant burr, a snowdrop buries

its name, beats its estimated time of arrival.
Then all the land started moving like a river.

10,000 metres above sea level
the plane heaves like a tidal wave.

1. The info under the title about CO₂ emissions comes after a report in the Guardian, Nepal's farmers on the front line of global climate change - John Vidal, Kathmandu, December 2, 2006.

2. The italicised quotes within the poem:
Attribute all of them to Sherbahadur Tamang EXCEPT
It means that crop yields are going down - Tekmadur Majsi.



37°C

We made him out of love
and like our love he grew
inside me where I loved
and fed and watered him
until he grew too big
for love to keep him in
and so I let him out
and loved him skin to skin

and yet I was afraid
each breath would injure him,
that air was full of taint,
that he would sink not swim,
afraid each peekaboo
of sun would burn his skin,
that it was not enough
to give the earth to him.

Lullaby for a Worker Bee

Creature of black and luminous yellow,
of starless night and sunsoaked day,
why do you wish to be the belle
of the ball when skies are wintery grey?

Your song is a lullaby of buzzing
a busy buzzy bass so deep
when I hear your constant mellow *zzzzzz*
it sounds to me like the sound of sleep.

The lavender that fed you nectar,
scented my silk from the clothes moth's bite
has faded now from Summer's neglect
and waits for Spring to set it alight.

Sunflower, wild thyme, lavender-honey
that glosses the lips and sweetens the tongue
is food for sweet sweet dreams to sun
your slumber when my song is sung.

Creature of sun, all soft and furry,
of gossamer wing and Midas touch,
may Nature, your sweet manager,
grant you the night you desire so much.

*I cannot sleep for the air is too balmy
Autumn is Summer and Winter is Spring.
I can only sleep if I do you harm,
I can only sleep if I lose my sting.*