

The Guttural Muse in the Sky

Chris Man

Aaaaaaah wena ka-Heaney!
Wena Gqabi eliluhlaza laselreland,
Mbongi oneenwele ezimhlophe okwamafu afana noboya,
Selifikile ixesha lakho lokubuyela emuva
Usishiya sodwa sikukhumbula eRhini.

Greetings to you, son of Heaney!
Green branch of a tree of Ireland,
Poet with woolly white hair like the clouds,
Your time among us has come to an end,
You leave us remembering you in Grahamstown.

Thina lapha kwamanye amaqesha siswela ithemba,
Sifana nezinyamazane ezizacile
Sikhathazwa ngezinkinga nangobuhlungu base-Afrika.
Sivumele ndoda ukuthi sivekule amasondo siyiyize
Izibhelu zethu zithi pheshe zithi pheshe
Njengoba sesicozulazule utshani obonomsoco,
Oluyizinkondlo zakho namazwi akho.

We who live here lack hope at times,
We are like buck that have become thin
Troubled by the problems and suffering of Africa.
But let us kick up our heels and celebrate a while,
Our tails whisking from side to side,
Now that we've nibbled a little on your words
And the wholesome grass of your poems.

Geagte Heer, u weet wat ons almal hier weet,
Klein volke kry swaar in die wereld.
Aanvallende krygsmagte, vryheidsoorloë,
Bloed en bakleiery, bitter herinneringe,
Armoede, dronklappe, digters, drome –
Ierland en Suid Afrika ken mekaar.
Het julle nie ons voorouers gesteun nie
toe ons ook met die leeu geworstel het?

Sir, you know what people know here,
Minorities have it hard in the world.
Invading armies, freedom struggles,
Bloody fighting, bitter memories,

Poverty, drunks, poets and dreams –
Ireland and South Africa know each other.
Didn't your people support our forebears
When we also wrestled with the lion?

Ungabi nomona, Shakespeare no-Yeats!
Nisazohlala nobabili emfulweni amadlozi
Kanti izinkondlo zalomfana ka-Heaney
Ziconsaconsa ezinhlizweni zethu ezomileyo.

Don't be envious, Shakespeare and Yeats!
You won't be disturbed in the river of the shades
While the poems of this youngster Heaney
Seep quietly into our dried-up hearts.

Wena sambane esibucayi senqondo
Eshangashanga ebusuku obumnyama,
Sifuna izindawo ezintsha zokuzihlalela,
Uyasishiya sinethemba nesibindi esivuselelwa.

You subtle Antbear-of-the-mind
Who wanders about in the dark of the night
Seeking new places to build its home,
You leave us with hope and courage renewed.

Ithongo lakho elincane lokubhala kulelizwe
lilijuba kuphela elithi 'ku-kurru, ku-kurru' na?
Ithongo lakho elincane lokubhala kulelizwe
Linguphezukomkhono ozulazulayo
Omemeza 'piet-my-vrou, piet-my-vrou' na?

Is the muse you'd choose in this country
The dove with its soothing 'ku-kurru, ku-kurru'
Or the herald of spring that comes and goes
Shouting, 'Piet-my-vrou, Piet-my-vrou'?

Hhayi, Makhi-kaxolo, ngithi uzongivumela,
Yinkankane enemisiba empunga eraraza phezulu
Ithi, 'hahdedah, hadedah, hadehah,'
Njengengelosi enolaka ethetha phezulu ithi,
'Vukani ziphukuphuku, ningaxabani,
Nenze okuhle, nenze okuhle!'

No, Peace-builder, I think you'd agree
Our muse is also the grey-coloured ibis,

The hadedah that calls with its guttural voice
Like a bad-tempered angel from the sky,
'Wake up, you fools, stop quarrelling!
Do-the-right-thing, do-the-right-thing!'

*With thanks to Peter Mtuze and Lynette Paterson for their assistance.

Chris Mann is honorary professor of Poetry at Rhodes University.