

THREE POEMS BY COLIN STYLE

Chopper

Sitting with some good Greek food —
round plump black olives
shining in the light, staring moistly,
bathed in life-giving oil as if they were preserved
since dug with skill from the blanc eye-sockets
of statues ringing Thebes arena;
mince, pastries, ash mushrooms, apple rinds, pale emerald
cabbage leaves,
blood-red bursting tomatoes, squatted or lay
stertorously blown on plates
of dog roses, nasturtiums, grottoes and yellow vines.
The candles winked solemnly, flesh melting white,
leaking down to stunted caps.
All night the rain had softly wept and wiped down the windows
and the thunder disappeared like a hoarse drunk
in the street gone singing into the distance,
making posy-chains
with the growing choca-choca-choca,
great vanes swinging like leathery pteranedons,
hauling itself, like a tractor its cords of wood,
over the golden strips of sky.

The moon, one white breast showing,
an Amazon, drew clouds its thin faded shawl across —
and the chopper, minotaur with bleeding eye of flashing colours,
wheezing and blundering, groped like a moth
under the roof of uninterested stars, prim stones —
freezing us to stare cat-like, over the fruits and cream,
washed from wasp-tunnelling orchards, silver churns iced on
farms,
steaks with peppers, lubricated with dark chocolate gravies,
images opening their eyes, stretching
the wounded, the unblinking cadavers,
the cargo of the chopper, its foul breath blown in the sky.

Joburg Taxi

Going past the *kloofs*, being restored
at the whim of some rich yob,
into Charlston Terrace and seeing blacks lying like frozen corpses
on the grass
beside the College of Optometry;
and bristled wino in filthy clothes
on the bench at the bus stop
(sometimes the line is so fine it's a razor slicing down a hair);
seeing the red mansion site on sale for warehousing,
squatter piccanins growing out of doorways,
and dog-roses, old and scabbed,
poking through portcullises into the smoke flowered sky;
into John Vorster Square
with the odd black power salutes,
glass in pieces — a waterfall flowing over the pavement edge;
drawing up beside a van
with handcuffs being clapped together,
in the absence of triangles and tambourines,

stomping and chantings old as Soweto itself
making me look at the taxi driver,
his ashtray full of stompies,
newspaper tucked into the space by the brake with his maps,
headline margin running into limbo "chinaman . . . Hillbrow,"
and his brown eyes, pipes leaking, running into the whites.
His brothers and cousins are railway stewards, gangers, miners
in Carltonville.

He goes home to Mayfair at nights
to a house with glass swans, Gert Potgeiter records, TV,
a daughter who's passop getting in with the piepiejollers.
His unfat, unhopeful eyes express no surprise;
it runs down some psychic jugular
farther than the patchwork of Jeppe, Joubert Park, Randburg;
the bits and pieces of history —
the sleepwalker's motion, under the burning outcrops, thorn,
and stinking carcasses.

Afternoon at the Queen Victoria Museum, Salisbury, Zimbabwe

Tender afternoon in the Queen Victoria Museum,
preserved from damage, handled firmly but discretely,
a snakepark keeper milking a cobra
holding its head strongly, like bathers pushed playfully
under the surf,
so that the hollow tooth filed into a delicate cannibal's
could break the rubber cap for the sacs to drip
pale, highly charged blood, less innocent the gum tapped
from the tree.
So the episode trickled slowly down the living wet walls
of the mind,
an afternoon swung round, a cobblestone in a sling,
as long as the blood flows until it feels into the earth,
like light and shade of a house pinched in hemmed aloes
stomping an encirclement, shaped like peeled bananas
with a thorn's protective pricking, the bruise mark that
lingers;
the lion, empty of stomach as a teddy, clenched muscles dry,
glass eyes of little yellow gods, intent from emptiness,
never tumble the warthog sprightly as shadow
in the mud beyond damp, swirling and stinking of the waterhole;

nor the birds, bright crimson breasts the first blush of
apples,
carry straw for the nest. Vanderdeckens, silently screaming
and fluttering,
brittle energy encased that at the breath of a wind
on a tree would split as badly fired pots — now more stolidity
and weight;
and the bottles row on row, labelled with looping hand,
holding sarcophagi of discrete parts — bowels, toes, brains;
the yellow, lined spiral snake bellies drowning,
pressed coagulating to the glass, making stains and frost
on the inner bottle,
and embolisms from slowly fragmenting tissue
float up to lie like tired divers;
globular rooms, girded with dark ornamental wood rails
to keep a child away from the specimens on that afternoon
that sank platelets dripping from its trough of chemicals
become clotting within, killing or healing,
the moil drifting all over the years under the skin.