

Gold Coast Thesis

The ghost train moves in
during the blackest phase of night —
on some battlement in Cyprus,
in the days of Othello, a sentry
would have called it the second watch.
Black visages gaze at me, eyeless;
a chain clanks somewhere.
As I lunge out of bed
I find no chains, of course.

The night's distemper which I have to face,
night after night, started
even as I wrote my thesis,
A harmless piece it was:
"The History of Cocoa in Ghana."
Who would've thought
it could land me in this soup?
In this city of spires and shabby scholars
in worn out tweeds,
squeaking away on worn out bicycles,
guys don't know where Ghana is!
You've got to say "Gold Coast, now Ghana" —
that's what tradition means to the Brits.

Friends suddenly became vocal:
"There should be ships
making slave-runs
between the lines here
and between the coasts,
as they crisscross the Atlantic.
There should be slave stations
on this brown cocoa coloured page of yours,
stations, perched somewhere on coastal margins
with names like Elmina and Ouidah,
Komenda and Akwida."

“The word ‘slavery’ doesn’t figure in your paper!
Gold Coast slaves were preferred,
because the ones from Biafra
were stubborn and prone to suicide.
You know all this! You belong to the bloody place!
Bash them! This is one chance
the black ram will have to tup the white ewe.”

I shook my head. I wanted
that doctorate from Oxford real bad.
Now this: apparitions
surfacing from nightscapes —
black visages with bloodstains
where the eyes should have been.

K. N. DARUWALLA