

*The Penguin Book of* **Modern African Poetry**

---

*Edited by* GERALD MOORE *and* ULLI BEIER



PENGUIN BOOKS

PENGUIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Books Ltd, 27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ, England

Penguin Putnam Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA

Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia

Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 10 Alcorn Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4V 3B2

Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd, 182-190 Wairau Road, Auckland 10, New Zealand

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England

*Modern Poetry from Africa* first published 1963

Second edition published 1968

Third edition published as *The Penguin Book of Modern African Poetry* 1984

Fourth edition first published 1998

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This collection copyright © Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier, 1963, 1968, 1984, 1998

Introduction copyright © Gerald Moore, 1998

All rights reserved

The Acknowledgements on pages 435-437 constitute an extension of this copyright page

The moral right of the editors has been asserted

Set in Monotype Garamond and Monotype Gill Sans

Typeset by Rowland Phototypesetting Ltd, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk

Printed in Great Britain by Antony Rowe Ltd, Chippenham, Wiltshire

Except in the United States of America, this book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser

Felix Mnthali

172 MALAWI

*The Stranglehold of English Lit.*  
(for Molaro Ogundipe-Leslie)

Those questions, sister,  
those questions

stand

stab

jab

and gore

too close to the centre!

For if we had asked  
why Jane Austen's people  
carouse all day  
and do no work

would Europe in Africa  
have stood  
the test of time?  
and would she still maul  
the flower of our youth  
in the south?  
Would she?

Your elegance of deceit,  
Jane Austen,  
lulled the sons and daughters  
of the dispossessed  
into a calf-love  
with irony and satire  
around imaginary people.

While history went on mocking  
the victims of branding irons  
and sugar-plantations  
that made Jane Austen's people  
wealthy beyond compare!

Eng. Lit., my sister,  
was more than a cruel joke –  
it was the heart  
of alien conquest.

How could questions be asked  
at Makerere and Ibadan,  
Dakar and Fort Hare –  
with Jane Austen  
at the centre?  
How could they be answered?

### *The Celebration*

Before bulging eyes  
a cocoon breaks  
and its worm spits  
the venom of vipers!

Gliding kingfishers  
muster  
the fury of a hawk;  
saplings and ferns brood  
like baobabs in the Rift Valley;  
from the back of nowhere  
waifs prophesy  
the day of judgement.

We have bedecked with flowers  
gun-carriers, guns and bayonets;  
filled gourds with honey  
from mountains belching fire –

It is while it lasts,  
the hour of revelation,  
the well-spring of love and hate,  
a celebration!