

AGOSTINHO NETO

*Obu-uzo anya n'afu mọọ
Ọnọ-n' etiti ololo nwa
Okpe-azụ aka ịkọ*

Neto, were you no more
Than the middle child
Favored by fortune, ahead
Kwame striding to accost
Demons, behind a laggard third
As yet unnamed, of twisted fingers?

No, your secure strides
Were not given. Your feet
Mastered their fierce balance
In the slimy steeps of humiliation
Your delicate hands patiently
Trained for finest incisions
Commandeered brusquely to kill,
Your melodious voice to battle-cry.

Perhaps your family and close friends
Knew a smile cracking that gloom
I know in pictures though
I much prefer the sorrowful lore.
Half-a-millennium of white rape
And murder can stamp a smile
On the vacuous face only of the fool,
The sinister grin of Africa's idiot-kings
Who in their obscene palaces
Superintend the butchery of black children.

Neto, I sing your passing, I
Timid requisitioner of your vast
Armory's most congenial stores.
What shall I sing? A dirge
Of gloom? No, I will sing tearful songs
Of joy; I will celebrate
The Man who rode a trinity
Of awesome fates to the cause
Of our trampled race!
Thou Healer, soldier and poet!