

# Song of Lawino

p\ Bitek, Okot

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## FULL TEXT

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### Song of Lawino

I

#### *My Husband's Tongue is Bitter*

- 1 Husband, now you despise me
- 2 Now you treat me with spite
- 3 And say I have inherited the stupidity of my aunt;
- 4 Son of the Chief,
- 5 Now you compare me
- 6 With the rubbish in the rubbish pit,
- 7 You say you no longer want me
- 8 Because I am like the things left behind
- 9 In the deserted homestead.
- 10 You insult me
- 11 You laugh at me
- 12 You say I do not know the letter A
- 13 Because I have not been to school
- 14 And I have not been baptized
  
- 15 You compare me with a little dog,
- 16 A puppy.
  
- 17 My friend, age-mate of my brother,
- 18 Take care,
- 19 Take care of your tongue,
- 20 Be careful what your lips say.
  
- 21 First take a deep look, brother,
- 22 You are now a man
- 23 You are not a dead fruit!

24 To behave like a child does not befit you!

25 Listen Ocol, you are the son of a Chief,  
26 Leave foolish behaviour to little children,  
27 It is not right that you should be laughed at in a song!  
28 Songs about you should be songs of praise!

29 Stop despising people  
30 As if you were a little foolish man,  
31 Stop treating me like salt-less ash<sup>[1]</sup>  
32 Become barren of insults and stupidity;

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33 Who has ever uprooted the Pumpkin?

\*

34 My clansmen, I cry  
35 Listen to my voice:  
36 The insults of my man  
37 Are painful beyond bearing.

38 My husband abuses me together with my parents;  
39 He says terrible things about my mother  
40 And I am so ashamed!

41 He abuses me in English  
42 And he is so arrogant.

43 He says I am rubbish,  
44 He no longer wants me!  
45 In cruel jokes, he laughs at me,  
46 He says I am primitive  
47 Because I cannot play the guitar,  
48 He says my eyes are dead  
49 And I cannot read,  
50 He says my ears are blocked  
51 And cannot hear a single foreign word,  
52 That I cannot count the coins.

53 He says I am like sheep,  
54 The fool.

55 Ocol treats me  
56 As if I am no longer a person,  
57 He says I am silly  
58 Like the *ojuu* insects that sit on the beer pot.  
59 My husband treats me roughly.  
60 The insults!  
61 Words cut more painfully than sticks!  
62 He says my mother is a witch,  
63 That my clansmen are fools  
64 Because they eat rats,  
65 He says we are all Kaffirs.  
66 We do not know the ways of God,  
67 We sit in deep darkness  
68 And do not know the Gospel,  
69 He says my mother hides her charms  
70 In her necklace  
71 And that we are all sorcerers.

72 My husband's tongue  
73 Is bitter like the roots of the *lyonno* lily,  
74 It is hot like the penis of the bee,  
75 Like the sting of the *kalang*!  
76 Ocol's tongue is fierce like the arrow of the scorpion,  
77 Deadly like the spear of the buffalo-hornet.  
78 It is ferocious  
79 Like the poison of a barren woman  
80 And corrosive like the juice of the gourd.

\*

81 My husband pours scorn  
82 On Black People,  
83 He behaves like a hen  
84 That eats its own eggs  
85 A hen that should be imprisoned under a basket.

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86 His eyes grow large  
87 Deep black eyes  
88 Ocol's eyes resemble those of the Nile Perch!

89 He becomes fierce  
90 Like a lioness with cubs,  
91 He begins to behave like a mad hyena.

92 He says Black People are primitive  
93 And their ways are utterly harmful,  
94 Their dances are mortal sins  
95 They are ignorant, poor and diseased!

96 Ocol says he is a modern man,  
97 A progressive and civilized man,  
98 He says he has read extensively and widely  
99 And he can no longer live with a thing like me  
100 Who cannot distinguish between good and bad.

101 He says I am just a village woman,  
102 I am of the old type,  
103 And no longer attractive.

104 He says I am blocking his progress,  
105 My head, he says,  
106 Is as big as that of an elephant  
107 But it is only bones,  
108 There is no brain in it,  
109 He says I am only wasting his time.

## 2

### *The Woman With Whom I Share My Husband*

110 Ocol rejects the old type.  
111 He is in love with a modern woman,  
112 He is in love with a beautiful girl  
113 Who speaks English.

114 But only recently  
115 We would sit close together, touching each other!  
116 Only recently I would play  
117 On my bow-harp  
118 Singing praises to my beloved.  
119 Only recently he promised  
120 That he trusted me completely.  
121 I used to admire him speaking in English.

\*

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122 Ocol is no longer in love with the old type;  
123 He is in love with a modern girl.  
124 The name of the beautiful one  
125 Is Clementine.

126 Brother, when you see Clementine!  
127 The beautiful one aspires  
128 To look like a white woman;

129 Her lips are red-hot  
130 Like glowing charcoal,  
131 She resembles the wild cat  
132 That has dipped its mouth in blood,  
133 Her mouth is like raw yaws  
134 It looks like an open ulcer,  
135 Like the mouth of a field!  
136 Tina dusts powder on her face  
137 And it looks so pale;  
138 She resembles the wizard  
139 Getting ready for the midnight dance.

140 She dusts the ash-dirt all over her face  
141 And when little sweat  
142 Begins to appear on her body  
143 She looks like the guinea fowl!

144 The smell of carbolic soap  
145 Makes me sick,  
146 And the smell of powder  
147 Provokes the ghosts in my head;  
148 It is then necessary to fetch a goat  
149 From my mother's brother.  
150 The sacrifice over  
151 The ghost-dance drum must sound  
152 The ghost be laid  
153 And my peace restored.

154 I do not like dusting myself with powder:

155 The thing is good on pink skin

156 Because it is already pale,

157 But when a black woman has used it

158 She looks as if she has dysentery;

159 Tina looks sickly

160 And she is slow moving,

161 She is a piteous sight.

162 Some medicine has eaten up Tina's face;

163 The skin on her face is gone

164 And it is all raw and red,

165 The face of the beautiful one

166 Is tender like the skin of a newly born baby!

167 And she believes

168 That this is beautiful

169 Because it resembles the face of a white woman!

170 Her body resembles

171 The ugly coat of the hyena;

172 Her neck and arms

173 Have real human skins!

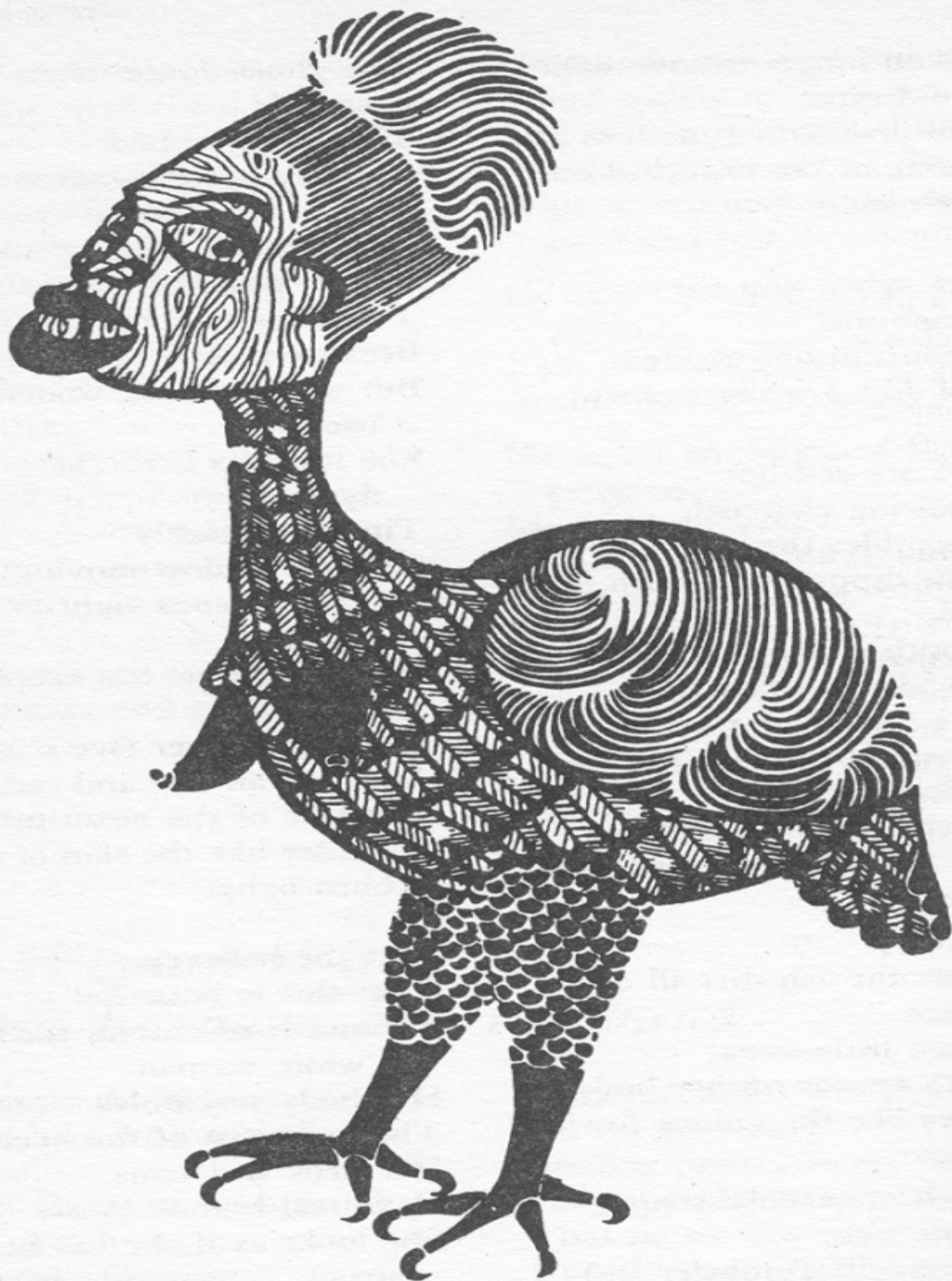
174 She looks as if she has been struck

175 By lightning;

176 Or burnt like the kongoni

177 In a fire hunt.

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She dusts the ash-dirt all over her face  
And when little sweat  
Begins to appear on her body  
She looks like the guinea fowl!

Enlarge this image.

178 She dusts the ash-dirt all over her face

179 And when little sweat

180 Begins to appear on her body  
181 She looks like the guinea fowl!

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182 And her lips look like bleeding,  
183 Her hair is long  
184 Her head is huge like that of the owl,  
185 She looks like a witch,  
186 Like someone who has lost her head  
187 And should be taken  
188 To the clan shrine!  
189 Her neck is rope-like,  
190 Thin, long and skinny  
191 And her face sickly pale.

\*

192 Forgive me, brother,  
193 Do not think I am insulting  
194 The woman with whom I share my husband!  
195 Do not think my tongue  
196 Is being sharpened by jealousy.  
197 It is the sight of Tina  
198 That provokes sympathy from my heart.

199 I do not deny  
200 I am a little jealous.  
201 It is no good lying,  
202 We all suffer from a little jealousy.  
203 It catches you unawares  
204 Like the ghosts that bring fevers;  
205 It surprises people  
206 Like earth tremors:  
207 But when you see the beautiful woman  
208 With whom I share my husband  
209 You feel a little pity for her!

210 Her breasts are completely shrivelled up,  
211 They are all folded dry skins,  
212 They have made nests of cotton wool  
213 And she folds the bits of cow-hide  
214 In the nests  
215 And call them breasts!



216 O! my clansmen  
217 How aged modern women  
218 Pretend to be young girls!

219 They mould the tips of the cotton nests  
220 So that they are sharp  
221 And with these they prick  
222 The chests of their men!  
223 And the men believe  
224 They are holding the waists  
225 Of young girls that have just shot up!  
226 The modern type sleep with their nests  
227 Tied firmly on their chests.  
228 How many kids  
229 Has this woman sucked?  
230 The empty bags on her chest  
231 Are completely flattened, dried.

232 Perhaps she has aborted many!  
233 Perhaps she has thrown her twins  
234 In the pit latrine!  
235 Is it the vengeance ghosts  
236 Of the many smashed eggs  
237 That have captured her head?  
238 How young is this age-mate of my mother?

\*

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239 The woman with whom I share my husband  
240 Walks as if her shadow  
241 Has been captured,  
242 You can never hear  
243 Her footsteps;

244 She looks as if  
245 She has been ill for a long time!  
246 Actually she is starving  
247 She does not eat,  
248 She says she fears getting fat,  
249 That the doctor has prevented her  
250 From eating,

251 She says a beautiful woman  
252 Must be slim like a white woman;

253 And when she walks  
254 You hear her bones rattling,  
255 Her waist resembles that of the hornet.  
256 The beautiful one is dead dry  
257 Like a stump,  
258 She is meatless  
259 Like a shell  
260 On a dry river bed.

\*

261 But my husband despises me,  
262 He laughs at me,  
263 He says he is too good  
264 To be my husband.

265 Ocol says he is not  
266 The age-mate of my grandfather  
267 To live with someone like me  
268 Who has not been to school.

269 He speaks with arrogance,  
270 Ocol is bold;  
271 He says these things in broad daylight.  
272 He says there is no difference  
273 Between me and my grandmother  
274 Who covers herself with animal skins.

\*

275 I am not unfair to my husband,  
276 I do not complain  
277 Because he wants another woman  
278 Whether she is young or aged!  
279 Who has ever prevented men  
280 From wanting women?

281 Who has discovered the medicine for thirst?  
282 The medicines for hunger  
283 And anger and enmity

284 Who has discovered them?  
285 In the dry season the sun shines  
286 And rain falls in the wet season.  
287 Women hunt for men  
288 And men want women!  
289 When I have another woman  
290 With whom I share my husband,  
291 I am glad  
292 A woman who is jealous  
293 Of another, with whom she shares a man,  
294 Is jealous because she is slow,  
295 Lazy and shy,

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296 Because she is cold, weak, clumsy!  
297 The competition for a man's love  
298 Is fought at the cooking place  
299 When he returns from the field  
300 Or from the hunt,

301 You win him with a hot bath  
302 And sour porridge.  
303 The wife who brings her meal first  
304 Whose food is good to eat,  
305 Whose dish is hot  
306 Whose face is bright  
307 And whose heart is clean  
308 And whose eyes are dark  
309 Like the shadows:

310 The wife who jokes freely  
311 Who eats in the open  
312 Not in the bed room,  
313 One who is not dull  
314 Like stale beer,  
315 Such is the woman who becomes  
316 The headdress keeper.

317 I do not block my husband's path  
318 From his new wife.  
319 If he likes, let him build for her  
320 An iron roofed house on the hill!  
321 I do not complain,

322 My grass thatched house is enough for me.

323 I am not angry

324 With the woman with whom

325 I share my husband,

326 I do not fear to compete with her.

327 All I ask

328 Is that my husband should stop the insults,

329 My husband should refrain

330 From heaping abuses on my head.

331 He should stop being half-crazy,

332 And saying terrible things about my mother

333 Listen Ocol, my old friend,

334 The ways of your ancestors

335 Are good,

336 Their customs are solid

337 And not hollow

338 They are not thin, not easily breakable

339 They cannot be blown away

340 By the winds

341 Because their roots reach deep into the soil.

342 I do not understand

343 The ways of foreigners

344 But I do not despise their customs.

345 Why should you despise yours?

346 Listen, my husband,

347 You are the son of a Chief.

348 The pumpkin in the old homestead

349 Must not be uprooted!

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### 3

#### *I Do Not Know the Dances of White People*

350 It is true

351 I am ignorant of the dances of foreigners

352 And how they dress

353 I do not know.

354 Their games  
355 I cannot play,  
356 I only know the dances of our people.

357 I cannot dance the rumba,  
358 My mother taught me  
359 The beautiful dances of Acoli.  
360 I do not know the dances of White People.  
361 I will not deceive you,  
362 I cannot dance the samba!  
363 You once saw me at the *orak* dance  
364 The dance for youths  
365 The dance of our People.

366 When the drums are throbbing  
367 And the black youths  
368 Have raised much dust  
369 You dance with vigour and health  
370 You dance naughtily with pride  
371 You dance with spirit,  
372 You compete, you insult, you provoke  
373 You challenge all!  
374 And the eyes of the young men become red!

375 The son of a man  
376 And the daughter of a man  
377 Shine forth in the arena.  
378 Slave boys and girls  
379 Dance differently from true- borns.

380 You dance with confidence  
381 And you sing  
382 Provocative songs,  
383 Insulting and abusive songs  
384 Songs of praise  
385 Sad songs of broken loves  
386 Songs about shortage of cattle.  
387 Most of the songs make someone angry.

388 You do not come to the arena drunk,  
389 But when another youth hits you  
390 You take up the challenge

391 As a man,

392 And when a girl knocks you

393 You strike back,

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394 A man's manliness is seen in the arena,

395 No one touches another's testicles.

396 A girl whose waist is stiff

397 Is a clumsy girl

398 That is the lazy girl

399 Who fears grinding the *kabir* millet.

400 You adorn yourself in Acoli costumes

401 You tie *lacucuku* rattles

402 Or bells on your legs.

403 You wear bead-skirts or string skirts

404 Or a tiny piece of cloth

405 And a ten-stringed bead

406 Around your waist;

407 Bangles on your arms,

408 And giraffe-tail necklaces on your tall neck.

409 A young man wears the *odye* and *lacomi*,

410 He puts his lover's beads

411 On his neck,

412 Beautiful white feathers on his head,

413 He blows his horn

414 And other young men feel jealous of him.

415 It is danced in broad daylight

416 In the open,

417 You cannot hide anything,

418 Bad stomachs that have swollen up,

419 Skin diseases on the buttocks

420 Small breasts that have just emerged,

421 And large ones full of boiling milk,

422 Are clearly seen in the arena,

423 Breasts that are tired

424 And are about to fall,

425 Weak and bony chests of weaklings  
426 Strong lion chests  
427 Large scars on the thighs  
428 Beautiful tattoos below the belly button  
429 Tattoos that have become sores on the chest;

430 All parts of the body  
431 Are shown in the arena!  
432 Health and liveliness  
433 Are shown in the arena!

434 When the daughter of the Bull  
435 Enters the arena  
436 She does not stand here  
437 Like stale beer that does not sell,  
438 She jumps here  
439 She jumps there.  
440 When you touch her  
441 She says 'Don't touch me!'

442 The tattoos on her chest  
443 Are like palm fruits,  
444 The tattoos on her back  
445 Are like stars on a black night;  
446 Her eyes sparkle like the fireflies,

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447 Her breasts are ripe  
448 Like the full moon.  
449 When the age-mate of her brother sees them,  
450 When, by accident,  
451 The eyes of her lover  
452 Fall on her breasts  
453 Do you think the young man sleeps?  
454 Do you know what fire eats his inside?

\*

455 It is true, Ocol  
456 I cannot dance the ballroom dance.  
457 Being held so tightly

458 I feel ashamed,  
459 Being held so tightly in public  
460 I cannot do it,  
461 It looks shameful to me!

462 They come to the dance dead drunk  
463 They drink white men's drinks  
464 As well as *waragi*.  
465 They close their eyes,  
466 And they do not sing as they dance,  
467 They dance silently like wizards.

468 Each man has a woman  
469 Although she is not his wife,  
470 They dance inside a house  
471 And there is no light.  
472 Shamelessly, they hold each other  
473 Tightly, tightly,  
474 They cannot breathe!

475 Women lie on the chests of men  
476 They prick the chests of their men  
477 With their breasts  
478 They prick the chests of their men  
479 With the cotton nests  
480 On their chests.

\*

481 You kiss her on the cheek  
482 As white people do,  
483 You kiss her open-sore lips  
484 As white people do,  
485 You suck slimy saliva  
486 From each other's mouths  
487 As white people do.

488 And the lips of the men become bloody  
489 With blood dripping from the red-hot lips;  
490 Their teeth look  
491 As if they have been boxed in the mouth.



492 Women throw their arms  
493 Around the necks of their partners  
494 And put their cheeks  
495 On the cheeks of their men.  
496 Men hold the waists of the women  
497 Tightly, tightly ...

498 And as they dance  
499 Knees touch knees;

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500 And when the music has stopped  
501 Men put their hands in the trouser-pockets.

502 There is no respect for relatives:  
503 Girls hold their fathers,  
504 Boys hold their sisters close,  
505 They dance even with their mothers.  
506 Modern girls are fierce  
507 Like Labeja, the *Jok* of *Alero* <sup>[2]</sup>,  
508 That captures even the heads of nephews,  
509 They coil around their nephews  
510 And lie on the chests of their uncles  
511 And prick the chests of their brothers  
512 With their breasts.

513 And they dress up like white men,  
514 As if they are in the white man's country.  
515 At the height of the hot season  
516 The progressive and civilised ones  
517 Put on blanket suits  
518 And woollen socks from Europe,  
519 Long under-pants  
520 And woollen vests,  
521 White shirts;  
522 They wear dark glasses  
523 And neck-ties from Europe.  
524 Their waterlogged suits  
525 Drip like the tears  
526 Of the *kituba* tree  
527 After a heavy storm.

\*

528 You smoke cigars  
529 Like white men,  
530 Women smoke cigarettes  
531 Like white women,  
532 And sip some poisons from the glasses.

533 It is hot inside the house  
534 It is hot like inside a cave  
535 Like inside a hyena's den!  
536 And the women move like fish  
537 That have been poisoned,  
538 They stagger  
539 They fall face upwards  
540 Like fish that are dead drunk  
541 With *lugoro* or *ober*,  
542 Like small fish out of water.

543 The smoke of the tobacco  
544 The smoke of the cigars  
545 And the cigarettes  
546 And the smoke of the candles  
547 Used for counting the coins,  
548 The smoke in the house  
549 Is like cumulus clouds.

550 The evaporating vapour  
551 From the many drinks,  
552 The steaming sweat  
553 The hot wet breaths  
554 Of the numerous people,

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555 The coughs and saliva  
556 Squirted by sneezing drunken sick,  
557 The many brands  
558 Of winds broken,  
559 Humid winds broken by men and women  
560 Producing various types of smells,  
561 The dust  
562 The evaporating piss ...  
563 The air is heavy like the hammer.

564 The stench from the urinal is thick!  
565 It hits your nose  
566 Like a blow,  
567 Like a horn of a bull rhino!  
568 You choke  
569 Your throat pains sharply  
570 You get out quick  
571 And shout a curse!

572 You meet a big woman  
573 She staggers towards you  
574 And leans on the wall  
575 And before she has untied her dress  
576 She is already pissing;  
577 She forces out the urine  
578 As if she has syphilis.

\*

579 The stench from the latrine  
580 Knocks you down, from afar!  
581 You enter;  
582 It is as if you have entered  
583 Into a lion's mouth.  
584 The smell of Jeyes  
585 And the smell of dung  
586 Rise to the roof.

587 The entire floor  
588 Is covered with human dung  
589 All the tribes of human dung!  
590 Dry dungs and dysentery  
591 Old dungs and fresh dungs

592 Young ones that are still steaming,  
593 Short thick dungs  
594 Sitting like hills,  
595 Snake-like dungs  
596 Coiled up like pythons.  
597 Little ones just squatting there,  
598 Big ones lying on their sides  
599 Like tree trunks.

600 Some dungs are red like ochre  
601 Others are yellow  
602 Like the ripe mango,  
603 Like inside a ripe pawpaw.  
604 Others are black like soil,  
605 Like the soil we use  
606 For smearing the floor.  
607 Some dungs are of mixed colours!

608 Vomit and urine flow by  
609 And on the walls  
610 They clean their anus.  
611 And there are writings  
612 On the walls  
613 Cut with knives.

\*

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614 My husband laughs at me  
615 Because I cannot dance white men's dances;  
616 He despises Acoli dances  
617 He nurses stupid ideas  
618 That the dances of his People  
619 Are sinful,  
620 That they are mortal sins.

621 I am completely ignorant  
622 Of the dances of foreigners  
623 And I do not like it.  
624 Holding each other  
625 Tightly, tightly  
626 In public,  
627 I cannot.  
628 I am ashamed.  
629 Dancing without a song  
630 Dancing silently like wizards,  
631 Without respect, drunk ...

632 If someone tries  
633 To force me to dance this dance

634 I feel like hanging myself  
635 Feet first!

636 I wish I could become  
637 A meteorite  
638 And I would know  
639 Where to fall!

#### 4

#### *My Name Blew Like a Horn Among the Payira*

640 I was made chief of girls  
641 Because I was lively,  
642 I was bright,  
643 I was not clumsy or untidy  
644 I was not dull,  
645 I was not heavy and slow.

646 I did not grow up a fool  
647 I am not cold  
648 I am not shy  
649 My skin is smooth  
650 It still shines smoothly in the moonlight.

651 When Ocol was wooing me  
652 My breasts were erect.  
653 And they shook  
654 As I walked briskly,  
655 And as I walked  
656 I threw my long neck  
657 This way and that way  
658 Like the flower of the *lyonno* lily  
659 Waving in a gentle breeze.

660 And my brothers called me *Nya-Dyang*  
661 For my breasts shook

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662 And beckoned the cattle,  
663 And they sang silently:

664 *Father prepare the kraal,*

665 *Father prepare the kraal,*

666 *The cattle are coming.*

667 I was the Leader of the girls

668 And my name blew

669 Like a horn

670 Among the Payira.

671 And I played on my bow harp

672 And praised my love.

673 Ocol, my husband,

674 My friend,

675 What are you talking?

676 You saw me when I was young.

677 In my mother's house

678 This man crawled on the floor!

679 The son of the Bull wept

680 For me with tears,

681 Like a hungry child

682 Whose mother has stayed long

683 In the simsim field!

684 Every night he came

685 To my father's homestead,

686 He never missed one night

687 Even after he had been beaten

688 By my brothers.

689 You loved my giraffe-tail bangles,

690 My father bought them for me

691 From the Hills in the East.

692 The roof of my mother's house

693 Was beautifully laced

694 With elephant grass;

695 My father built it

696 With the skill of the Acoli.

697 You admired my sister's

698 Colourful ten-stringed lion beads;

699 My mother threaded them

700 And arranged them with care.

701 You trembled

702 When you saw the tattoos

703 On my breasts

704 And the tattoos below my belly button;

705 And you were very fond

706 Of the gap in my teeth!

707 My man, what are you talking?

708 My clansmen, I ask you:

709 What has become of my husband?

710 Is he suffering from boils?

711 Is it ripe now?

712 Should they open it

713 So that the pus may flow out?

\*

714 I was chief of youths

715 Because of my good manners,

716 Because my waist was soft.

717 I sang sweetly

718 When I was grinding millet

719 Or on the way to the well,

720 Nobody's voice was sweeter than mine!

721 And in the arena

722 I sang the solos

723 Loud and clear

724 Like the *ogilo* bird

725 At sunset.

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726 Now, Ocol says

727 I am a mere dog

728 A puppy,

729 A little puppy

730 Suffering from skin diseases.

731 Ocol says

732 He does not love me any more

733 Because I cannot play the guitar

734 And I do not like their stupid dance,

735 Because I despise the songs

736 They play at the ballroom dance  
737 And I do not follow the steps of foreign songs  
738 On the gramophone records.  
739 And I cannot tune the radio  
740 Because I do not hear  
741 Swahili or Luganda.

742 What is all this?

743 My husband refuses  
744 To listen to me,  
745 He refuses to give me a chance.  
746 My husband has blocked up my path completely.

747 He has put up a road block  
748 But has not told me why.  
749 He just shouts  
750 Like house-flies  
751 Settling on top of excrement  
752 When disturbed!

753 My husband says  
754 He no longer wants a woman  
755 With a gap in her teeth,  
756 He is in love  
757 With a woman  
758 Whose teeth fill her mouth completely  
759 Like the teeth of war-captives and slaves.

\*

760 Like beggars  
761 You take up white men's adornments,  
762 Like slaves or war captives  
763 You take up white men's ways.  
764 Didn't the Acoli have adornments?  
765 Didn't Black People have their ways?

766 Like drunken men  
767 You stagger to white men's games,  
768 You stagger to white men's amusements.



769 Is *lawala* not a game?  
770 Is *cooro* <sup>[3]</sup> not a game?  
771 Didn't your people have amusements?  
772 Like halfwits  
773 You turn to white men's dances,  
774 You turn to musical instruments of foreigners

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775 As if you have no dances;  
776 As if you have no instruments!

777 And you cannot sing one song  
778 You cannot sing a solo  
779 In the arena.  
780 You cannot beat rhythm on the half-gourd  
781 Or shake the rattle-gourd  
782 To the rhythm of the *orak* dance!  
783 And there is not a single *bwola* song  
784 That you can dance,  
785 You do not play the drum  
786 Or do the mock-fight;  
787 At the funeral dance  
788 Or at the war dance  
789 You cannot wield the shield!

790 And so you turn  
791 To the dances of white people,  
792 Ignorance and shame provoke you  
793 To turn to foreign things!

794 Perhaps you are covering up  
795 Your bony hips and chest  
796 And the large scar on your thigh  
797 And the scabies on your buttocks;

798 You are hiding  
799 Under the blanket suit  
800 Your sick stomach  
801 That has swollen up  
802 Like that of a pregnant goat.

803 And the dark glasses  
804 Shield the rotting skin around your eyes  
805 From the house-flies,  
806 And cover up  
807 The husks of the exploded eye balls.

## 5

### *The Graceful Giraffe Cannot Become a Monkey*

808 My husband tells me  
809 I have no ideas  
810 Of modern beauty.  
811 He says  
812 I have stuck  
813 To old fashioned hair styles.  
814 He says  
815 I am stupid and very backward,  
816 That my hair style  
817 Makes him sick  
818 Because I am dirty.

### [Page 51]

819 It is true  
820 I cannot do my hair  
821 As white women do.

822 Listen,  
823 My father comes from Payira,  
824 My mother is a woman of Koc!  
825 I am a true Acoli  
826 I am not a half-caste  
827 I am not a slave girl;  
828 My father was not brought home  
829 Be the spear  
830 My mother was not exchanged  
831 For a basket of millet.

832 Ask me what beauty is  
833 To the Acoli  
834 And I will tell you;  
835 I will show it to you  
836 If you give me a chance!

837 You once saw me,  
838 You saw my hair style  
839 And you admired it,  
840 And the boys loved it.  
841 At the arena  
842 Boys surrounded me  
843 And fought for me.

844 My mother taught me  
845 Acoli hair fashions;  
846 Which fits the kind  
847 Of hair of the Acoli,  
848 And the occasion.

849 Listen,  
850 Ostrich plumes differ  
851 From chicken feathers,  
852 A monkey's tail  
853 Is different from that of the giraffe,  
854 The crocodile's skin  
855 Is not like the guinea fowl's,  
856 And the hippo is naked, and hairless.

857 The hair of the Acoli  
858 Is different from that of the Arabs;  
859 The Indians' hair  
860 Resembles the tail of the horse;  
861 It is like sisal strings  
862 And needs to be cut  
863 With scissors.  
864 It is black,  
865 And is different from that of white women.

866 A white woman's hair  
867 Is soft like silk;  
868 It is light  
869 And brownish like  
870 That of the brown monkey,  
871 And is very different from mine.  
872 A black woman's hair  
873 Is thick and curly;  
874 It is true  
875 Ring-worm sometimes eats up

876 A little girl's hair  
877 And this is terrible;  
878 But when hot porridge  
879 Is put on the head  
880 And the dance is held  
881 Under the sausage-fruit tree  
882 And the youths have sung

883 *You, Ring-worm,*

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884 *Who is eating Duka's hair*  
885 *Here is your porridge,*

886 Then the girl's hair  
887 Begins to grow again  
888 And the girl is pleased.

\*

889 No-one, except wizards  
890 And women who poison others  
891 Leaves her hair untrimmed!  
892 And the men  
893 Do not leave their chins  
894 To grow bushy  
895 Like the lion's neck,  
896 Like the chin  
897 Of a billy goat,  
898 So that they look  
899 Like wild beasts.  
900 They put hot ash  
901 On the hair  
902 Below the belly button  
903 And pluck it up,  
904 And they pluck the hair on their face  
905 And the hair of the armpits.

906 When death has occurred  
907 Women leave their hair uncombed!  
908 They remove all beads  
909 And necklaces,  
910 Because they are mourning

911 Because of sorrows.  
912 The woman who adorns herself  
913 When others are wailing  
914 Is the killer!  
915 She comes to the funeral  
916 To congratulate herself.

917 When you go to dance  
918 You adorn yourself for the dance,  
919 If your string-skirt  
920 Is ochre-red  
921 You do your hair  
922 With ochre,  
923 And you smear your body  
924 With red oil  
925 And you are beautifully red all over!  
926 If you put on a black string-skirt  
927 You do your hair with *akuku*  
928 Your body shines with simsim oil  
929 And the tattoos on your chest  
930 And on your back  
931 Glitter in the evening sun.  
932 And the healthy sweat  
933 On your bosom  
934 Is like the glassy fruits of *ocuga*.

935 Young girls  
936 Whose breasts are just emerging  
937 Smear *shea* butter on their bodies,  
938 The beautiful oil from Labworomor.

939 The aroma is wonderful  
940 And their white teeth sparkle  
941 As they sing  
942 And dance fast  
943 Among the dancers  
944 Like small fish  
945 In a shallow stream.

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946 Butter from cows' milk  
947 Or the fat from edible rats

948 Is cooked together with *lakura*  
949 Or *atika*;  
950 You smear it on your body today  
951 And the aroma  
952 Lasts until the next day.

953 And when you balance on your head  
954 A beautiful water pot  
955 Or a new basket  
956 Or a long-necked jar  
957 Full of honey,  
958 Your long neck  
959 Resembles the *alwiri* spear.

960 And as you walk along the pathway  
961 On both sides  
962 The *obiya* grasses are flowering  
963 And the *pollok* blossoms  
964 And the wild white lilies  
965 Are shouting silently  
966 To the bees and butterflies!

967 And as the fragrance  
968 Of the ripe wild berries  
969 Hooks the insects and little birds,  
970 As the fishermen hook the fish  
971 And pull them up mercilessly,

972 The young men  
973 From the surrounding villages,  
974 And from across many streams,  
975 They come from beyond the hills  
976 And the wide plains,  
977 They surround you  
978 And bite off their ears  
979 Like jackals.

980 And when you go  
981 To the well  
982 Or into the freshly burnt woodlands  
983 To collect the red *oceyu*,  
984 Or to cut *oduggu* shrubs,

985 You find them  
986 Lurking in the shades  
987 Like the leopardess with cubs.

\*

988 Ocol tells me  
989 That I like dirt.  
990 He says  
991 *Shea* butter causes  
992 Skin diseases.

993 He says, Acoli adornments  
994 Are old fashioned and unhealthy.  
995 He says I soil his white shirt  
996 If I touch him,  
997 My husband treats me  
998 As if I am suffering from  
999 The 'Don't touch me' disease!

1000 He says that I make his bed- sheets dirty  
1001 And his bed smelly.  
1002 Ocol says  
1003 I look extremely ugly  
1004 When I am fully adorned  
1005 For the dance!

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1006 When I walk past my husband  
1007 He hisses like a wounded *ororo* snake  
1008 Choking with vengeance.  
1009 He has vowed  
1010 That he will never touch  
1011 My hands again.  
1012 My husband  
1013 Is in love with Tina  
1014 The woman with the large head;  
1015 Ocol dies for Clementine  
1016 Ocol never sleeps  
1017 For the beautiful one  
1018 Who has read!

1019 When the beautiful one  
1020 With whom I share my husband  
1021 Returns from cooking her hair  
1022 She resembles  
1023 A chicken  
1024 That has fallen into a pond;  
1025 Her hair looks  
1026 Like the python's discarded skin.

1027 They cook their hair  
1028 With hot iron  
1029 And pull it hard  
1030 So that it may grow long.  
1031 Then they rope the hair  
1032 On wooden pens  
1033 Like a billy goat  
1034 Brought for the sacrifice  
1035 Struggling to free itself.

1036 They fry their hair  
1037 In boiling oil  
1038 As if it were locusts,  
1039 And the hair sizzles  
1040 It cries aloud in sharp pain  
1041 As it is pulled and stretched.  
1042 And the vigorous and healthy hair  
1043 Curly, springy and thick  
1044 That glistens in the sunshine  
1045 Is left listless and dead  
1046 Like the elephant grass  
1047 Scorched brown by the fierce  
1048 February sun.  
1049 It lies lifeless  
1050 Like the sad and dying banana leaves  
1051 On a hot and windless afternoon.

1052 The beautiful woman  
1053 With whom I share my husband  
1054 Smears black shoe polish  
1055 On her hair  
1056 To blacken it  
1057 And to make it shine,  
1058 She washes her hair  
1059 With black ink;



1060 But the thick undergrowth  
1061 Rejects the shoe polish  
1062 And the ink  
1063 And it remains untouched  
1064 Yellowish, greyish  
1065 Like the hair of the grey monkey.

\*

1066 There is much water  
1067 In my husband's house  
1068 Cold water and hot water.  
1069 You twist a cross-like handle  
1070 And water gushes out

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1071 Hot and steaming  
1072 Like the urine  
1073 Of the elephant.

1074 You twist another cross-like handle;  
1075 It is cold water,  
1076 Clean like the cooling fresh waters  
1077 From the streams  
1078 Of Lututuru hills.

1079 But the woman  
1080 With whom I share my husband  
1081 Does not wash her head;  
1082 The head of the beautiful one  
1083 Smells like rats  
1084 That have fallen into the fireplace.

1085 And she uses  
1086 Powerful perfumes  
1087 To overcome the strange smells,  
1088 As they treat a pregnant coffin!  
1089 And the different smells  
1090 Wrestle with one another  
1091 And the smell of the shoe polish  
1092 Mingles with them.

1093 Clementine has many headkerchiefs,  
1094 Beautiful headkerchiefs of many colours.  
1095 She ties one on her head  
1096 And it covers up  
1097 The rot inside;

1098 She ties the knot  
1099 On her forehead  
1100 And arranges the edges  
1101 With much care  
1102 So that it covers  
1103 Her ears  
1104 As well as the bold forehead  
1105 That jumps sparks  
1106 When lightning has splashed,  
1107 And hurls back sunlight  
1108 More powerfully than a mirror!

1109 Sometimes she wears  
1110 The hair of some dead woman  
1111 Of some white woman  
1112 Who died long ago  
1113 And she goes with it  
1114 To the dance!  
1115 What witchcraft!

1116 Shamelessly, she dances  
1117 Holding the shoulder of my husband,  
1118 The hair of a dead woman  
1119 On her head  
1120 The body of the dead woman  
1121 Decaying in the tomb!

1122 One night  
1123 The ghost of the dead woman  
1124 Pulled away her hair  
1125 From the head of the wizard

1126 And the beautiful one  
1127 Fell down

1128 And shook with shame  
1129 She shook  
1130 As if the angry ghost  
1131 Of the white woman  
1132 Had entered her head.

\*

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1133 Ocol, my friend  
1134 Look at my skin  
1135 It is smooth and black.  
1136 And my boy friend  
1137 Who plays the *nanga*  
1138 Sings praises to it.

1139 I am proud of the hair  
1140 With which I was born  
1141 And as no white woman  
1142 Wishes to do her hair  
1143 Like mine,  
1144 Because she is proud  
1145 Of the hair with which she was born,  
1146 I have no wish  
1147 To look like a white woman.

1148 No leopard  
1149 Would change into a hyena,  
1150 And the crested crane  
1151 Would hate to be changed  
1152 Into the bold-headed,  
1153 Dung-eating vulture,  
1154 The long-necked and graceful giraffe  
1155 Cannot become a monkey.

1156 Let no one  
1157 Uproot the Pumpkin.

## 6

*The Mother Stone Has a Hollow Stomach*

1158 My husband says  
1159 He rejects me

1160 Because I do not appreciate  
1161 White men's foods,  
1162 And that I do not know  
1163 How to hold  
1164 The spoon and the fork.

1165 He is angry with me  
1166 Because I do not know  
1167 How to cook  
1168 As white women do  
1169 And I refuse  
1170 To eat chicken  
1171 And to drink raw eggs  
1172 As white women do

1173 He says  
1174 He is ashamed of me  
1175 Because when he opens  
1176 The tin of lobster  
1177 I feel terribly sick,  
1178 Or when he relates  
1179 How, when he was in the white men's country  
1180 They ate frogs and shells  
1181 And tortoise and snakes  
1182 My stomach rebels

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1183 And throws its contents out  
1184 Through my mouth.

1185 He complains endlessly,  
1186 He says  
1187 Has I been to school  
1188 I would have learnt  
1189 How to use  
1190 White men's cooking stoves.

1191 I confess,  
1192 I do not deny!  
1193 I do not know  
1194 How to cook like a white woman.

1195 I cannot use the primus stove  
1196 I do not know  
1197 How to light it,  
1198 And when it gets blocked  
1199 How can I prick it?  
1200 The thing roars  
1201 Like a male lion,  
1202 It frightens me!

1203 They say  
1204 It once burst  
1205 And the flame burnt  
1206 A goat to death!

1207 I really hate  
1208 The charcoal stove!  
1209 Your hand is always  
1210 Charcoal-dirty  
1211 And anything you touch  
1212 Is blackened;  
1213 And your finger nails  
1214 Resemble those of the poison woman.  
1215 It is so difficult to start:

1216 You wait for the winds  
1217 To blow,  
1218 But whenever you are in a hurry  
1219 The winds go off to visit  
1220 Their mothers-in-law.

1221 The electric fire kills people.  
1222 They say  
1223 It is lightning,  
1224 They say  
1225 The white man has trapped  
1226 And caught the Rain-Cock<sup>[4]</sup>  
1227 And imprisoned it  
1228 In a heavy steel house.

1229 The wonders of the white men  
1230 Are many!

1231 They leave me speechless!

1232 They say

1233 When the Rain-Cock

1234 Opens its wings

1235 The blinding light

1236 And the deadly fire

1237 Flow through the wires

1238 And lighten the streets

1239 And the houses;

1240 And the fire

1241 Goes into the electric stove.

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1242 If you touch it

1243 It runs through you

1244 And cuts the heart string

1245 As they cut the umbilical cord,

1246 And you stand there, dead,

1247 A standing corpse!

1248 I am terribly afraid

1249 Of the electric stove,

1250 And I do not like using it

1251 Because you stand up

1252 When you cook.

1253 Who ever cooked standing up?

1254 And the stove

1255 Has many eyes.

1256 I do not know

1257 Which eye to prick

1258 So that the stove

1259 May vomit fire

1260 And I cannot tell

1261 Which eye to prick

1262 So that fire is vomited

1263 In one and not in another plate.

1264 And I am afraid

1265 That I may touch

1266 The deadly tongue

1267 Of the Rain-Cock.

1268 O! I do not like  
1269 Using the electric stove,  
1270 I cannot cook anything well  
1271 When you give me  
1272 The Rain-Cock stove.

\*

1273 The white man's stoves  
1274 Are good for cooking  
1275 White men's food:  
1276 For cooking the tasteless  
1277 Bloodless meat of cows  
1278 That were killed many years ago  
1279 And left in the ice  
1280 To rot!  
1281 For frying an egg  
1282 Which when ready  
1283 Is slimy like mucus,

1284 For boiling hairy chicken  
1285 In saltless water.  
1286 You think you are chewing paper!  
1287 And the bones of the leg  
1288 Contain only clotted blood  
1289 And when you bite  
1290 It makes no crackling sound,  
1291 It tastes like earth!

1292 The white man's stoves  
1293 Are for boiling cabbages  
1294 And for baking the light spongy thing  
1295 They call bread.

1296 They are for warming up  
1297 Tinned beef, tinned fish,  
1298 Tinned frogs, tinned snakes,  
1299 Tinned peas, tinned beans,  
1300 Big broad beans  
1301 Tasteless like the *cooro!*

1302 They are for preparing  
1303 Foods for the toothless,  
1304 For infants and invalids.  
1305 It is for making tea or coffee!

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1306 You use the saucepan  
1307 And the frying pan  
1308 And other flat-bottomed things,  
1309 Because the stoves are flat  
1310 Like the face of the drum.

1311 The earthen vegetable pot  
1312 Cannot sit on it,  
1313 There are no stones  
1314 On which to place  
1315 The pot for making millet bread.

\*

1316 Come, brother,  
1317 Come into my mother's house!  
1318 Pause a bit by the door,  
1319 Let me show you  
1320 My mother's house.

1321 Look,  
1322 Straight before you  
1323 Is the central pole.  
1324 That shiny stool  
1325 At the foot of the pole  
1326 Is my father's revered stool.

1327 Further on  
1328 The rows of pots  
1329 Placed one on top of the other  
1330 Are the stores  
1331 And cupboards.  
1332 Millet flour, dried carcasses  
1333 Of various animals,  
1334 Beans, peas,  
1335 Fish, dried cucumber ...



1336 Look up to the roof,  
1337 You see the hangings?  
1338 The string nets  
1339 Are called *cel*.  
1340 The beautiful long-necked jar  
1341 On your left  
1342 Is full of honey.  
1343 That earthen dish  
1344 Contains simsim paste;  
1345 And that grass pocket  
1346 Just above the fireplace  
1347 Contains dried white ants.

1348 Here on your left  
1349 Are the grinding stones:  
1350 The big one  
1351 Ashen and dusty  
1352 And her daughter  
1353 Sitting in her belly  
1354 Are the destroyers of millet  
1355 Mixed with cassava  
1356 And sorghum.

1357 The mother stone  
1358 Has a hollow stomach,  
1359 A strange woman  
1360 She never gets pregnant;  
1361 And her daughter  
1362 Never gets fatter  
1363 She gets smaller and smaller  
1364 Until she is finished.

1365 Do you know  
1366 Why the knees  
1367 Of millet-eaters  
1368 Are tough?  
1369 Tougher than the knees  
1370 Of the people who drink bananas!  
1371 Where do you think

1372 The stone powder  
1373 From the grinding stone goes?

1374 On this stone  
1375 They also grind  
1376 Dried beans and peas.  
1377 The sister stone,  
1378 The smaller one,  
1379 Clean and beautifully oiled  
1380 Like a girl  
1381 Ready for the *jok* dance,  
1382 Is the simsim grinding stone.

1383 And when my sister  
1384 Is grinding simsim  
1385 Mixed with groundnuts  
1386 And I am grinding  
1387 Millet mixed with sorghum  
1388 You hear the song of the stones  
1389 You hear the song of the grains  
1390 And the seeds  
1391 And above all these  
1392 The beautiful duet  
1393 By Lawino and her sister.

1394 O how I miss my sister  
1395 And how I miss the singing  
1396 While grinding millet in my mother's house!

1397 On your left  
1398 Above the grinding stone  
1399 Stacked right to the roof  
1400 Is the firewood.  
1401 If you ask me  
1402 About firewood  
1403 I can describe them to you in detail  
1404 I know their names  
1405 And their leaves  
1406 And seeds and barks.

1407 *Oywelo* and *lucoro* and kituba  
1408 Are no use as firewood,

1409 They burn like paper  
1410 They are like pawpaw  
1411 Their fires are cold  
1412 Like the firefly's fire.

1413 *Labwori* is alright  
1414 If it is perfectly dry.  
1415 But if it is still green  
1416 The smoke it produces  
1417 Is like a spear!  
1418 It is useful for  
1419 Chasing men from the hut  
1420 Men who sit too close  
1421 To the cooking place  
1422 Their eyes fixed into the pot!  
1423 *Odure* <sup>[5]</sup> who does not  
1424 Listen when others sing

1425 *Odure, come out*  
1426 *From the kitchen.*  
1427 *Fire from the stove*  
1428 *Will burn your penis!*

1429 *Opok* is easy  
1430 To split with the axe;  
1431 *Yaa* burns gently  
1432 It burns like oil;  
1433 *Poi* is no use for firewood,

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1434 It is rock;  
1435 It is useful only  
1436 As a walking staff  
1437 For the aged.

\*

1438 On the far right  
1439 Is the cooking place.  
1440 The fireplace in my mother's house  
1441 Is dug into the earth.  
1442 The wife of my mother's brother  
1443 Has the Lango type,

1444 Three mounds of clay  
1445 Shaped like youthful breasts full of milk  
1446 Stand together like  
1447 Three loving sisters.

1448 I do not know  
1449 How to use foreign stoves,  
1450 My mother taught me  
1451 Cooking on the Acoli stove  
1452 And when I visited  
1453 My mother's brother  
1454 I cooked meals  
1455 On the Lango stove.

\*

1456 In my mother's house  
1457 There are no plates:  
1458 We use the half-gourd  
1459 And the earthen dishes.  
1460 The white man's plates  
1461 Look beautiful  
1462 But you put millet bread in it  
1463 And cover it up  
1464 For a few minutes—  
1465 The plate is sweating  
1466 And soon the bottom  
1467 Of the bread is wet  
1468 And the whole loaf cold.

1469 A loaf in a half-gourd  
1470 Returns its heat  
1471 And does not become wet  
1472 In the bottom;  
1473 And the earthen dish  
1474 Keeps the gravy hot  
1475 And the meat steaming;  
1476 And when your husband  
1477 Has returned from a hunt  
1478 Or from a long day's journey  
1479 Give him hot porridge  
1480 In a half-gourd.

1481 And when I have

1482 Been in the garden a whole day  
1483 Weeding or harvesting in the hot sun,  
1484 On my return home  
1485 Give me water  
1486 In a large half-gourd  
1487 Water from the glass  
1488 Is no use.  
1489 It reaches nowhere.

\*

1490 In my mother's house  
1491 We eat sitting on the earth  
1492 And not on trees  
1493 Like monkeys;  
1494 The young men  
1495 Sit cross legged  
1496 And a girl sits carefully

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1497 On one leg.  
1498 Father alone sits on the stool.  
1499 We all sit on skins  
1500 Or papyrus mats  
1501 On the earth.  
1502 The knives in my mother's house  
1503 Are for harvesting  
1504 Or for cutting up the meat  
1505 Before it is cooked:  
1506 But not for cutting millet bread.

1507 We wash our hands clean  
1508 And attack the loaf  
1509 From all sides.  
1510 You mould a spoon  
1511 And dip it in the gravy  
1512 And eat it up.

1513 And you use your right hand  
1514 Even if you are left-handed:  
1515 This is good manners.  
1516 Only rude fellows  
1517 Use their left hands  
1518 For breaking millet bread.

1519 I do not know  
1520 How to cook  
1521 Like white women;  
1522 I do not enjoy  
1523 White men's foods;  
1524 And how they eat—  
1525 How could I know?  
1526 And why should I know it?

1527 White men's stoves  
1528 Are for cooking  
1529 White men's foods.  
1530 They are not suitable  
1531 For cooking  
1532 Acoli foods  
1533 And I am afraid of them.

1534 Ocol says  
1535 Black people's foods are primitive,  
1536 But what is backward about them?  
1537 He says  
1538 Black people's foods are dirty;  
1539 He means,  
1540 Some clumsy and dirty black women  
1541 Prepare food clumsily  
1542 And put them  
1543 In dirty containers.

1544 He insists  
1545 I must eat raw eggs  
1546 Smelly, slimy yellow stuff.  
1547 He says  
1548 It is good for me!  
1549 He says  
1550 There is something in eggs  
1551 Which is good for the bones

1552 But my bones are strong,  
1553 I can dance all night long  
1554 Listen to the song  
1555 They sang about me:

1556 *The beautiful one*  
1557 *Dances all night long*  
1558 *Alyeker prevents me sleeping.*  
1559 *I wait on the pathway*  
1560 *She refuses to come to me*  
1561 *The beautiful one*  
1562 *Dances all night long.*

1563 What is the good thing in eggs?

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1564 Can it not be found  
1565 In other foods?  
1566 My husband,  
1567 I do not complain  
1568 That you eat  
1569 White men's foods.  
1570 If you enjoy them  
1571 Go ahead!  
1572 Shall we just agree  
1573 To have freedom  
1574 To eat what one likes?

## 7

### *There is No Fixed Time for Breast Feeding*

1575 My husband is angry  
1576 Because, he says,  
1577 I cannot keep time  
1578 And I do not know  
1579 How to count the years;

1580 He asks me  
1581 How many days  
1582 There are in a year,  
1583 And how many weeks  
1584 In four moons;  
1585 But I cannot answer:  
1586 The number of moons  
1587 In nine weeks  
1588 I cannot say!  
1589 How can I tell?

1590 Ocol has brought home  
1591 A large clock  
1592 It goes tock-tock-tock-tock  
1593 And it rings a bell.

1594 He winds it first  
1595 And then it goes!  
1596 But I have never touched it.  
1597 I am afraid of winding it!

1598 I wonder what causes  
1599 The noise inside it!  
1600 And what makes it go!

1601 On the face of the clock  
1602 There are writings  
1603 And it's large single testicle  
1604 Dangles below.  
1605 It goes this way and that way  
1606 Like a sausage-fruit  
1607 In a windy storm.

1608 I do not know  
1609 How to tell the time  
1610 Because I cannot read  
1611 The figures.  
1612 To me the clock  
1613 Is a great source of pride  
1614 It is beautiful to see  
1615 And when visitors come  
1616 They are highly impressed!

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1617 And Ocol has strange ways  
1618 Of saying what the time is.  
1619 In the morning  
1620 When the sun is sweet to bask in  
1621 He says  
1622 'It is Eight o'clock!'



1623 When the cock crows  
1624 For the first time  
1625 He says  
1626 'It is Five!'  
1627 Towards the middle of the night,  
1628 When wizards are getting ready,  
1629 Ocol says  
1630 'It is Eleven!'  
1631 And after sunset  
1632 'It is Seven'.

1633 My head gets puzzled,  
1634 Things look upside-down  
1635 As if I have been  
1636 Turning round and round  
1637 And I am dizzy.

\*

1638 If my husband insists  
1639 What exact time  
1640 He should have morning tea  
1641 And breakfast,  
1642 When exactly to have coffee  
1643 And the exact time  
1644 For taking the family photograph—  
1645 Lunch-time, tea time,  
1646 And supper time—  
1647 I must first look at the sun,  
1648 The cock must crow  
1649 To remind me.

1650 In our village  
1651 When someone is going  
1652 On a long journey,  
1653 When there is a hunt  
1654 Or communal hoeing  
1655 People wake up early,  
1656 When the horizon in the East  
1657 Is aflame  
1658 And in the West  
1659 The Buffalo Star is ripe  
1660 Like a yellow and sweet mango  
1661 About to fall to the earth.

1662 No one moves at midnight  
1663 Except wizards covered in ashes  
1664 Dancing stark naked  
1665 Armed with disembowelled frogs  
1666 And dead lizards:

1667 Or young thieves  
1668 Looking for other men's daughters,  
1669 They travel fearless  
1670 Through the fiends  
1671 That sow small-pox  
1672 In the countryside;

1673 They split the darkness  
1674 With their bare chests  
1675 They smell out their loves  
1676 Through the thick dew!

1677 When the sun has grown up  
1678 And the poisoned tips  
1679 Of its arrows painfully bite  
1680 The backs of the men hoeing  
1681 And of the women weeding or harvesting.  
1682 This is when

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When the sun has grown up  
And the poisoned tips  
Of its arrows painfully bite  
The backs of the men hoeing  
And of the women weeding or harvesting

Enlarge this image.

1683 When the sun has grown up

1684 And the poisoned tips

1685 Of its arrows painfully bite  
1686 The backs of the men hoeing  
1687 And of the women weeding or harvesting

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1688 You take drinking water  
1689 To the workers.

1690 Food is taken to the fields  
1691 When the men are exhausted.  
1692 They crack the bones of chicken  
1693 And eat much peas and beans  
1694 And heaps of millet bread  
1695 As big as elephant dung.

1696 Then they return home  
1697 Leaving behind a large field  
1698 And house-flies  
1699 Fighting over bits of food  
1700 And excreta that were thrown away.

1701 When the sun  
1702 Has cooled off,  
1703 The men and youths  
1704 Visit the traps and pits,  
1705 They hunt edible rats,  
1706 Or hook fish  
1707 From the streams.

1708 Others cut wooden dishes  
1709 Out of logs  
1710 Or make ropes for the cows  
1711 Or weave baskets  
1712 For the chicken house;  
1713 They repair the roofs  
1714 Of the granaries  
1715 Or make patterns on half-gourds.

1716 You hear the flutes  
1717 Of the herdsmen

1718 Bringing the cattle home.  
1719 The flute-songs mingle  
1720 With the lowing of the bulls.

1721 A man listens  
1722 To the roar of his own bull  
1723 And shouts praises to it.  
1724 But no one praises another's bull,  
1725 Not even the bull of his brother.

1726 The young boys  
1727 Who tend the goats  
1728 Take turns to make  
1729 The outdoor fire.

\*

1730 The fortunate mother  
1731 Of a good daughter  
1732 Sits outside her hut,  
1733 Her back turned to  
1734 The outdoor fire,  
1735 Her legs fully stretched  
1736 And she congratulates herself.

1737 But if your daughter  
1738 Has no manners  
1739 If she is so loose  
1740 That men sleep with her  
1741 Even in the grass,  
1742 Then, even if you are ill  
1743 You must go to the well  
1744 To draw water  
1745 And the *nanga* players  
1746 Will sing you a song:

1747 *The mother of the beautiful girl*  
1748 *Dies on the way to the well*  
1749 *As if she has no daughter*  
1750 *Her girl has no manners*  
1751 *What is to be done?*  
1752 *The mother of the girl*

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1753 *Dies on the grinding stone*

1754 *In the bush to collect firewood!*

1755 At the *orak* dance

1756 A good girl

1757 Whose mother is blind

1758 Dances vigorously

1759 And glances at the sun,

1760 She returns home

1761 Before sunset.

1762 A good daughter

1763 Releases her mother

1764 She sits around the evening fire

1765 And tells folk tales

1766 To her younger ones.

\*

1767 My husband says

1768 I am useless

1769 Because I waste time,

1770 He quarrels

1771 Because, he says,

1772 I am never punctual.

1773 He says

1774 He has no time to waste.

1775 He tells me

1776 Time is money.

1777 Ocol does not chat

1778 With me,

1779 He never jokes

1780 With anybody,

1781 He says

1782 He has no time

1783 To sit around the evening fire.

1784 When my husband

1785 Is reading a new book

1786 Or when he is

1787 Sitting in his sofa,

1788 His face covered up

1789 Completely with the big newspaper

1790 So that he looks  
1791 Like a corpse,  
1792 Like a lone corpse  
1793 In the tomb,

1794 He is so silent!  
1795 His mouth begins  
1796 To decay!

1797 If a child cries  
1798 Or has a cough  
1799 Ocol storms like a buffalo,  
1800 He throws things  
1801 At the child;  
1802 He says  
1803 He does not want  
1804 To hear noises,  
1805 That children's cries  
1806 And coughs disturb him!

1807 Is this not the talk  
1808 Of a witch?  
1809 What music is sweeter  
1810 Than the cries of children?

1811 A homestead in which  
1812 The cries of children  
1813 Are not heard,  
1814 Where the short little songs  
1815 Are not repeated endlessly,  
1816 Where the brief sobs  
1817 And brotherly accusations  
1818 And false denials  
1819 Are not heard!

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1820 A homestead where  
1821 Children's exreta is not  
1822 Scattered all over the swept compound  
1823 And around the granaries,

1824 Where all the pots and earthen dishes  
1825 Are safe  
1826 Because there are no  
1827 Silly ones to break them.  
1828 No clumsy hands  
1829 Trying hard to please mother  
1830 And breaking half-gourds,

1831 Who but a witch  
1832 Would like to live  
1833 In a homestead  
1834 Where all the grown-ups  
1835 Are so clean after the rains,  
1836 Because there are no  
1837 Muddy fat kids  
1838 To fall on their bosoms  
1839 After dancing in the rains  
1840 And playing in the mud?

1841 At the lineage shrine  
1842 The prayers are for child birth!  
1843 At the *ogodo* dance  
1844 The woman who struts  
1845 And dances proudly,  
1846 That is the mother of many,  
1847 That is the fortunate one;  
1848 And she dances  
1849 And looks at her own shadow.

\*

1850 Time has become  
1851 My husband's master  
1852 It is my husband's husband.  
1853 My husband runs from place to place  
1854 Like a small boy,  
1855 He rushes without dignity.

1856 And when visitors have arrived  
1857 My husband's face darkens,  
1858 He never asks you in,  
1859 And for greeting  
1860 He says



1861 'What can I do for you?'

\*

1862 I do not know

1863 How to keep the white man's time.

1864 My mother taught me

1865 The way of the Acoli

1866 And nobody should

1867 Shout at me

1868 Because I know

1869 The customs of our people!

1870 When the baby cries

1871 Let him suck milk

1872 From the breast.

1873 There is no fixed time

1874 For breast feeding.

1875 When the baby cries

1876 It may be he is ill;

1877 The first medicine for a child

1878 Is the breast.

1879 Give him milk

1880 And he will stop crying,

1881 And if he is ill

1882 Let him suck the breast

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1883 While the medicine-man

1884 Is being called

1885 From the beer party.

1886 Children in our homestead

1887 Do not sleep at fixed times:

1888 When sleep comes

1889 Into their head

1890 They sleep,

1891 When sleep leaves their head

1892 They wake up.

1893 When a child is dirty

1894 Give him a wash,

1895 You do not first look at the sun!

1896 When there is no water  
1897 In the house  
1898 You cannot wash the child  
1899 Even if it is time  
1900 For his bath!  
1901 Listen  
1902 My husband,  
1903 In the wisdom of the Acoli  
1904 Time is not stupidly split up  
1905 Into seconds and minutes,  
1906 It does not flow  
1907 Like beer in a pot  
1908 That is sucked  
1909 Until it is finished.

1910 It does not resemble  
1911 A loaf of millet bread  
1912 Surrounded by hungry youths  
1913 From a hunt;  
1914 It does not get finished  
1915 Like vegetables in the dish.

1916 A lazy youth is rebuked,  
1917 A lazy girl is slapped,  
1918 A lazy wife is beaten,  
1919 A lazy man is laughed at  
1920 Not because they waste time  
1921 But because they only destroy  
1922 And do not produce.

1923 And when famine  
1924 Invades your villages  
1925 And women take their baskets  
1926 To go and beg food  
1927 In the next village  
1928 Strangers will sleep with them!  
1929 They will have your wives  
1930 And what can you say?

\*

1931 Ocol laughs at me  
1932 Because, he says,  
1933 I do not know

1934 The names of the moons,  
1935 That I do not know  
1936 How many moons in a year  
1937 And the number of Sabbaths  
1938 In one moon.

1939 The Sabbath is a day  
1940 For Christians  
1941 When Protestants and Catholics shout  
1942 And suffer from headaches.

1943 The Acoli did not  
1944 Set aside a special day  
1945 For *Jok*;  
1946 When misfortune hits the homestead  
1947 The clansmen gather  
1948 And offer sacrifices  
1949 To the ancestors:

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1950 When the rains  
1951 Refuse to come  
1952 The Rain-Cock<sup>[6]</sup> prepares a feast.  
1953 A goat is speared  
1954 In the wilderness  
1955 And the elders offer prayers  
1956 To *Jok*.

\*

1957 We all know the moon—  
1958 It elopes,  
1959 Climbs the hill  
1960 And falls down;

1961 It lights up the night,  
1962 Youths like it,  
1963 Wizards hate it,  
1964 And hyenas howl  
1965 When the moon  
1966 Shines into their eyes.

1967 Periodically each woman  
1968 Sees the moon,  
1969 And when a young girl  
1970 Has seen it  
1971 For the first time  
1972 It is a sign  
1973 That the garden is ready  
1974 For sowing,  
1975 And when the gardener comes  
1976 Carrying two bags of live seeds  
1977 And a good strong hoe  
1978 The rich red soil  
1979 Swells with a new life.

1980 Turning your back  
1981 To your husband  
1982 Is a serious taboo,  
1983 But when the baby  
1984 Is still toothless froth,  
1985 When you see the moon  
1986 You turn your back  
1987 To your husband.

1988 If you do not resist  
1989 The great appetite  
1990 Then your child becomes  
1991 Sickly and thin  
1992 His knees become  
1993 Soft like porridge,  
1994 He will become pregnant  
1995 And the weight of his diseased stomach  
1996 Will prevent him  
1997 From standing up.

1998 I do not know  
1999 The names of the moons  
2000 Because the Acoli  
2001 Do not name their moons.

2002 During the *Ager* period  
2003 Millet is sown,  
2004 Just before the rains

2005 And as they sow  
2006 They raise much dust.

2007 When the rains return  
2008 We say  
2009 The rains have fallen  
2010 The period is called  
2011 *Poto-kot*  
2012 Then the millet seeds germinate.

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2013 Sometimes the rains come early  
2014 Sometimes they return late.  
2015 When the millet  
2016 Begins to flower  
2017 And the time  
2018 For the harvest is approaching  
2019 All the granaries are empty:

2020 And hunger begins  
2021 To bite peoples' tummies,  
2022 This period  
2023 Is called *Odunge*,  
2024 Because fierce hunger burns  
2025 People's insides  
2026 And they drink  
2027 Vegetable soups  
2028 To deaden the teeth  
2029 Of the fire.

2030 And as the millet  
2031 Begins to get ready for the harvest,  
2032 Some women ask,  
2033 Is this not my own garden?  
2034 They take their harvest knives  
2035 And a small basket,  
2036 They cut one head here  
2037 And another one there,  
2038 And when someone laughs,  
2039 They ask,  
2040 Whose garden have I spoiled?  
2041 So the period

2042 Just before the harvest

2043 Is called

2044 *Abalo-pa-nga?*

2045 The Acoli know

2046 The Wet Season

2047 And the Dry Season.

2048 Wet Season means

2049 Hard work in the fields,

2050 Sowing, weeding, harvesting.

2051 It means waking up before dawn,

2052 It means mud

2053 And thick dew.

2054 Herdboys dislike it.

2055 Lazy people hate it.

2056 Dry Season means pleasures,

2057 It means dancing,

2058 It means hunting

2059 In freshly burnt plains.

2060 You hear *otole* dance drums

2061 And funeral songs,

2062 You hear the horns and trumpets

2063 And the moonlight dance songs

2064 Floating in the air.

2065 Youths in small groups

2066 Go on the *apet* hunting expeditions.

2067 Great hunters stay alone

2068 In the wilderness

2069 Smoking the carcass of the cob

2070 Or the buffalo.

2071 Others go off to Pajule

2072 To look for bridewealth,

2073 For if you have no sister

2074 Then kill an elephant.

2075 You sell the teeth

2076 And marry a wife,

2077 Then you call your son

2078 Ocan, because you are poor!

2079 Dry Season means wooing

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2080 And eloping with girls,

2081 It means the *moko* dance

2082 When youths and girls

2083 Get stuck to one another!

\*

2084 My husband says,

2085 My head is numb and empty

2086 Because, he says,

2087 I cannot tell

2088 When our children were born.

2089 I know that Okang

2090 My first born

2091 Was born at the beginning

2092 Of the Dry Season

2093 And my little girl

2094 In the middle of the rains.

2095 Okang was born

2096 In the middle of the famine

2097 Called *Abongo-wang-dako*.

2098 They say

2099 One night a man

2100 Was so hungry

2101 He got up

2102 And felt his wife's eyes

2103 To see if she was asleep

2104 So that he might

2105 Inspect the cooking pots.

2106 And Atoo was born

2107 After the smallpox fiends

2108 Had just left the homestead.

2109 The fiends found

2110 Many people with bad hearts

2111 There was much quarrelling

2112 And jealousy among women

2113 And so many people perished.  
2114 I lost my father too,  
2115 That is why  
2116 The little girl was called Atoo.

\*

2117 A person's age  
2118 Is seen by looking at him or her.  
2119 A girl is grown up  
2120 When her breasts have come;  
2121 A young man's voice breaks  
2122 And hair appears  
2123 On his face  
2124 And below his belly button.

2125 When a girl sees the moon  
2126 She is ripe,  
2127 After bearing three children  
2128 She begins to wither  
2129 And soon she becomes  
2130 A mother-in-law.  
2131 Then she is deeply respected.

2132 A person's age  
2133 Is shown by what he or she does  
2134 It depends on what he or she is,  
2135 And on what kind of person  
2136 He or she is.

2137 You may be a giant  
2138 Of a man,  
2139 You may begin  
2140 To grow grey hair  
2141 You may be bold  
2142 And toothless with age,  
2143 But if you are unmarried  
2144 You are nothing.

\*

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2145 Ocol tells me



2146 Things I cannot understand,  
2147 He talks  
2148 About a certain man,  
2149 Jesus.  
2150 He says  
2151 The man was born  
2152 Long ago  
2153 In the country of white men.

2154 He says  
2155 When Jesus was born  
2156 White men began  
2157 To count years:  
2158 From one, then it became ten.  
2159 Then one hundred  
2160 Then one thousand  
2161 And now it is  
2162 One thousand  
2163 Nine hundred  
2164 And sixty six.

2165 My husband says  
2166 Before this man was born  
2167 White men counted years backwards.  
2168 Starting with the biggest number  
2169 Then it became  
2170 One thousand  
2171 Then one hundred  
2172 Then ten,  
2173 And when it became one  
2174 Then Jesus was born.

2175 I cannot understand all this  
2176 I do not understand it at all!

## 8

### *I Am Ignorant of the Good Word in the Clean Book*

2177 My husband  
2178 Looks down upon me;  
2179 He says  
2180 I am a mere pagan,  
2181 I do not know  
2182 The way of God.

2183 He says  
2184 I am ignorant  
2185 Of the good word  
2186 In the Clean Book  
2187 And I do not have  
2188 A Christian name.  
2189 Ocol dislikes me  
2190 Because, he says,  
2191 *Jok* is in my head  
2192 And I like visiting  
2193 The diviner-priest  
2194 Like my mother!

2195 He says  
2196 He is ashamed of me  
2197 Because when the *Jok*

[Page 74]

2198 In my head  
2199 Has been provoked  
2200 It throws me down  
2201 As if I have fits.

2202 Ocol laughs at me  
2203 Because I cannot  
2204 Cross myself properly

2205 *In the name of the Father*  
2206 *And of the Son*  
2207 *And the Clean Ghost*

2208 And I do not understand  
2209 The confession,  
2210 And I fear  
2211 The bushy-faced, fat-bellied *padré*  
2212 Before whom people kneel  
2213 When they pray.

\*

2214 I refused to join  
2215 The Protestant catechist class,

2216 Because I did not want  
2217 To become a house-girl,  
2218 I did not want  
2219 To become a slave  
2220 To a woman with whom  
2221 I may share a man.

2222 Oh how young girls  
2223 Labour to buy a name!  
2224 You break your back  
2225 Drawing water  
2226 For the wives  
2227 Of the teachers,  
2228 The skin of your hand  
2229 Hardens and peels off  
2230 Grinding millet and simsim.  
2231 You hoe their fields,  
2232 Split firewood,  
2233 You cut grass for thatching  
2234 And for starting fires,  
2235 You smear their floors  
2236 With cow dung and black soil  
2237 And harvest their crops.

2238 And when they are eating  
2239 They send you to play games  
2240 To play the board game  
2241 Under the mango tree!

2242 And girls gather  
2243 Wild sweet potatoes  
2244 And eat them raw  
2245 As if there is a famine,  
2246 And they are so thin  
2247 They look like  
2248 Cattle that have dysentery!

2249 You work as if  
2250 You are a newly eloped girl!  
2251 The wives of protestant  
2252 Church teachers and priests  
2253 Are a happy lot.  
2254 They sit with their legs stretched out

2255 And bask in the morning sun.  
2256 All they know  
2257 Is hatching a lot of children.

\*

2258 My elder sister  
2259 Was christened Erina,  
2260 She was a Protestant

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2261 But she suffered bitterly  
2262 In order to buy the name  
2263 And her loin beads  
2264 No longer fitted her!

2265 One Sunday  
2266 I followed her  
2267 Into the Protestant church:  
2268 A big man stood  
2269 Before the people.  
2270 His hand was lifted up,  
2271 My sister said  
2272 He was blessing the people.  
2273 The man had no rosary,  
2274 He wore a long black gown  
2275 And a wide white robe  
2276 He held a little shiny saucer:  
2277 It had small pieces of something.  
2278 The name of the man  
2279 Was Eliya  
2280 And he was calling people  
2281 To come and eat  
2282 Human flesh!  
2283 He put little bits  
2284 In their hands  
2285 And they ate it up!

2286 Then he took a cup,  
2287 He said  
2288 There was human blood  
2289 In the cup  
2290 And he gave it  
2291 To the people

2292 To drink!

2293 I ran out of the Church,

2294 I was very sick!

2295 O! Protestants eat people!

2296 They are all wizards,

2297 They exhume corpses

2298 For dinner!

\*

2299 I once joined

2300 The Catholic Evening Speakers' Class

2301 But I did not stay long

2302 I ran away,

2303 I ran away from shouting

2304 Meaninglessly in the evenings

2305 Like parrots

2306 Like the crow birds

2307 *Maria the Clean Woman*

2308 *Mother of the Hunchback* <sup>[7]</sup>

2309 *Pray for us*

2310 *Who spoil things*

2311 *Full of graciya.*

2312 The things they shout

2313 I do not understand,

2314 They shout anyhow

2315 They shout like mad people.

2316 The padre shouts words,

2317 You cannot understand,

2318 And he does not seem

2319 To care in the least

2320 Whether his hearers

2321 Understand him or not;

2322 A strange language they speak

2323 These Christian diviner-priests,

2324 And the white nuns

2325 Think the girls understand

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2326 What they are saying

2327 And are annoyed  
2328 When the girls laugh.  
2329 One night  
2330 The moon was very bright  
2331 And in the distance  
2332 The 'get-stuck' dance drums  
2333 Were throbbing vigorously,

2334 The teacher was very drunk  
2335 His eyes were like rotting tomatoes.  
2336 We guessed he was teaching  
2337 Something about the Clean Ghost.

2338 He shouted words at us  
2339 And we shouted back at him,  
2340 Agitated and angry  
2341 Like the *okwik* birds  
2342 Chasing away the kite  
2343 From their nest.

2344 He shouted angrily  
2345 As if he uttered abuses,  
2346 We repeated the same words  
2347 Shouting back at him  
2348 As when you shout  
2349 Insults at somebody's mother!

2350 We repeated the meaningless phrases  
2351 Like the yellow birds  
2352 In the *lajanawara* grass.

2353 The teacher was an Acoli  
2354 But he spoke the same language  
2355 As the white priests.  
2356 His nose was blocked  
2357 And he tried  
2358 To force his words  
2359 Through his blocked nose.

2360 He sounded like  
2361 A loosely strung drum.

2362 The teacher's name  
2363 Was Bicenycio Lagucu.  
2364 He was very drunk  
2365 And he smiled, bemused.

2366 The drums of the 'get-stuck' dance  
2367 Thundered in the distance  
2368 And the songs came floating  
2369 In the air.

2370 The milk  
2371 In our ripe breasts boiled,  
2372 And little drops of sweat  
2373 Appeared on our foreheads,  
2374 You think of the pleasures  
2375 Of the girls  
2376 Dancing before their lovers,

2377 Then you look at the teacher  
2378 Barking meaninglessly  
2379 Like the yellow monkey.

2380 In the arena  
2381 They began to sing my song,  
2382 We could hear it faintly  
2383 Passing through the air  
2384 Like the thin smoke  
2385 From an old man's pipe:  
2386 *O! Lawino!*  
2387 *Come let me see you*  
2388 *Daughter of Lenga-moi*

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You think of the pleasures  
Of the girls  
Dancing before their lovers,  
Then you look at the teacher  
Barking meaninglessly  
Like the yellow monkey.

Enlarge this image.

2389 You think of the pleasures

2390 Of the girls



2391 Dancing before their lovers,  
2392 Then you look at the teacher  
2393 Barking meaninglessly  
2394 Like the yellow monkey.

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2395 *Who has just shot up*  
2396 *Young woman come home!*  
2397 *O Lawino!*  
2398 *Chief of the girls*  
2399 *My love come*  
2400 *That I may elope with you*  
2401 *Daughter of the Bull*  
2402 *Come that I may touch you.*

2403 The teacher drummed  
2404 His meaningless phrases  
2405 Through his blocked nose;  
2406 He was getting more drunk.  
2407 Thick white froth  
2408 Formed around his mouth  
2409 As if he had just fallen down  
2410 With fits.

2411 *Pray for us*  
2412 *Who spoil things*  
2413 *Full of graciya*

2414 And when he shouted  
2415 The word 'graciya'  
2416 (Whatever the word meant)  
2417 Saliva squirted from his mouth  
2418 And froth flew  
2419 Like white ants from his mouth,  
2420 The smelly drops  
2421 Landed on our faces  
2422 Like heavily loaded houseflies  
2423 Fresh from a fresh excreta heap!

2424 And when he belched  
2425 The smell of the rotting beer

2426 Hit you like a brick,  
2427 And when he belched  
2428 His mouth filled with hot beer  
2429 From his belly  
2430 And he noisily swallowed this back.

2431 The collar of the teacher's white shirt  
2432 Was black with dirt,  
2433 He was sweating profusely  
2434 And his cheeks were rough  
2435 Like the tongue of the ox.

2436 The comb never touched his head,  
2437 His hair resembled the elephant grass,  
2438 Tall and wiry  
2439 The teacher looked like a witch.

2440 And he endlessly  
2441 Drummed his meaningless words  
2442 Through his blocked nose,  
2443 And we shouted the words back at him,  
2444 And the moonlight dance drums  
2445 Thundered in the distance.  
2446 And the songs came floating  
2447 From beyond his hills.  
2448 My comrades  
2449 Are dancing in the moonlight  
2450 And I  
2451 Sitting before the ugly man,  
2452 Before the man  
2453 With the rough skin,  
2454 The man  
2455 Whose body smells!

2456 The girls are dancing  
2457 Before their lovers,  
2458 Shaking their waists

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2459 To the rhythm of the drums;  
2460 And I  
2461 Sitting like stale bread

2462 On the rubbish heap;

2463 My companions are gay

2464 They are dancing

2465 And singing meaningful songs,

2466 In the arena

2467 They are singing

2468 My song;

2469 And the boys

2470 Are whispering sweet words

2471 Into the girls' ears

2472 And our teacher

2473 Is drunk!

2474 Anger welled up inside me

2475 Burning my chest like bile,

2476 I stood up

2477 And two other girls stood up,

2478 We walked out,

2479 Out of that cold hall

2480 With the stone floor.

2481 We ran fast,

2482 Away from the ugly man

2483 Away from the meaningless shouts

2484 Like parrots,

2485 Like the yellow birds

2486 In the *lajanawara* grass.

2487 We crossed the stream

2488 And climbed the gentle rise

2489 Straight into the arena.

2490 We joined the line of friends

2491 And danced among our age- mates

2492 And sang songs we understood,

2493 Relevant and meaningful songs,

2494 Songs about ourselves:

2495 *O father*

2496 *Gather the bridewealth*

2497 *That I may bring a woman home,*

2498 *O the woman of my bosom*

2499 *The beautiful one*  
2500 *Prevents me from sleeping.*  
2501 *The woman of my bosom.*

2502 *If anyone troubles my beloved*  
2503 *I shall shed tears of blood;*  
2504 *The woman of my bosom*  
2505 *Prevents me from sleeping.*  
2506 *O father,*  
2507 *If I die,*  
2508 *I will become a vengeance ghost,*  
2509 *The woman of my bosom*  
2510 *Prevents me from sleeping.*

2511 We danced with vigour  
2512 And sweat poured  
2513 Down our backs,  
2514 Youthful sweat  
2515 From healthy bodies.

\*

2516 Let the fool  
2517 Continue to deceive himself!  
2518 Who has ever prevented  
2519 The cattle from the salt lick?

2520 The time when youth should meet youth  
2521 Is wasted in shouting things

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2522 No one understands,  
2523 Is spent in singing  
2524 Meaningless songs  
2525 That no one believes in.

2526 The milk in your breast  
2527 Boils painfully.  
2528 Your breasts must be touched,  
2529 Rubbed on the cool chest of your beloved  
2530 So that the pricking pains  
2531 May be relieved.

2532 The heads of the young men  
2533 Reject the pillows  
2534 And prefer  
2535 The arms of their lovers.

2536 But they lock you up  
2537 Inside a cold hall  
2538 As if you are sheep,  
2539 And they lock up  
2540 All the girls  
2541 In one cold hall,  
2542 And the boys  
2543 In another cold hall.

2544 And the young men  
2545 Sleep alone  
2546 Cold, like knives  
2547 Without handles.

2548 And the spears  
2549 Of the lone hunters,  
2550 The trusted right-hand spears  
2551 Of young bulls  
2552 Rust in the dewy cold  
2553 Of the night.

\*2554 But look!  
2555 Who comes with  
2556 The large headed club?

2557 The teacher, still drunk.  
2558 He too is coming  
2559 To hunt for girls  
2560 At the 'get-stuck' dance!  
2561 He joined the line of youths  
2562 But they pushed him away!  
2563 He danced at the edge  
2564 Singing properly,  
2565 His large owl-head  
2566 Moving this way  
2567 And that way  
2568 To the rhythm of the drums.

2569 Shameless  
2570 The ugly man  
2571 Whispered something in my ear!  
2572 And touched my breast  
2573 With the rough palm  
2574 Of his bony hand  
2575 Cutting it as if with  
2576 An old rusty knife.

2577 I spat in his face.

2578 He said  
2579 He would dismiss me  
2580 From the Evening Speakers' Class,  
2581 And if I am so stupid,  
2582 I will never get  
2583 Anything from the purse  
2584 In his trouser pocket.

2585 Don't touch me  
2586 You rough-skinned aged thing!

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2587 Who cares for your stupid shoutings  
2588 In the evening?  
2589 Let go my hand  
2590 Syphilis man!  
2591 Who can you buy  
2592 To spread your death!

\*

2593 And all the teachers  
2594 Are alike,  
2595 They have sharp eyes  
2596 For girls' full breasts;  
2597 Even the padrés  
2598 Who are not allowed  
2599 To marry  
2600 Are troubled by health,  
2601 Even the fat-stomached

2602 Who cannot see  
2603 His belly button  
2604 Feels better  
2605 When he touches  
2606 A girl's breasts,  
2607 And those who listen  
2608 To the confessions  
2609 Peep through the port-hole  
2610 And stab the breasts  
2611 With their glances.

\*

2612 My husband rejects me  
2613 Because, he says  
2614 I have no Christian name.

2615 He says  
2616 Lawino is not enough.  
2617 He says  
2618 Acoli names are *Jok* names  
2619 And they do not sound good.  
2620 They are primitive, he insists,  
2621 And he is a progressive man

2622 Ocol wanted me  
2623 To be baptized 'Benedeta',  
2624 He has christened  
2625 One daughter 'Marta'.  
2626 The other took  
2627 The name of the mother of the Hunchback!

2628 *Maria the Clean Woman*  
2629 *Mother of the Hunchback*

2630 His first born son is Jekcon  
2631 And the second he calls Paraciko.  
2632 One of his illegitimate sons is Tomcon  
2633 And the other Gulyelmo Iriko.<sup>[8]</sup>

2634 My husband rejects Acoli names,  
2635 Meaningful names,  
2636 Names that I can pronounce.

2637 He says

2638 They are *Jok* names

2639 And he was nothing

2640 To do with *Jok*.

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2641 He says

2642 He has left behind

2643 All sinful things

2644 And all superstitions and fears.

2645 He says

2646 He has no wish

2647 To be associated any more

2648 With the devil.

2649 Pagan names, he says,

2650 Belong to sinners

2651 Who will burn

2652 In everlasting fires:

2653 Ocol insists

2654 He must be called

2655 By his Christian name!

2656 But my husband's name

2657 Is so difficult to pronounce;

2658 It sounds something like

2659 Medikijedeki Gilirigoloyo.<sup>[9]</sup>

2660 It sounds to me like

2661 'Give the people more vegetables,

2662 Foxes make holes in the pathway',

2663 It sound like a praise name

2664 Uttered by a stammerer!

2665 What is the meaning of 'Marta'?

2666 Gulyelmo, Iriko, Jekcon,

2667 Are these names of ancestors?



\*

2668 My Bull name is Eliya Alyeker,  
2669 I ate the name  
2670 Of the Chief of Payira,  
2671 Eliya Alikar,  
2672 Son of Awic.

2673 Bull names are given  
2674 To Chiefs of girls  
2675 Because like bulls  
2676 They lead their age-mates,  
2677 Like the full moon at night  
2678 They dominate the stars.

2679 They are names  
2680 Of great chiefs  
2681 And great men of war.

2682 Is 'Benedeta' a Bull name?  
2683 Is 'Maria' a Bull name  
2684 In the white man's country?

2685 Apiyo and Acen  
2686 Are *Jok* names  
2687 Twins are Joks,  
2688 And are deeply respected.  
2689 Akelo is the one  
2690 Who comes after twins,  
2691 Ajok and Ajara  
2692 Grow extra fingers or toes,  
2693 Adoc comes out  
2694 Of the belly feet first.

2695 All these are *Jok*  
2696 And they are feared and respected.  
2697 When a girl is called Adong  
2698 Her father died  
2699 Just before she was born.

2700 Akot does not mean  
2701 'Born in the rains',  
2702 But 'afterbirth  
2703 Contained bubbles of water',  
2704 And this is a sign of rain.  
2705 The daughter of  
2706 A woman with a black heart  
2707 Who kills people with poisons  
2708 Is called Akwir or Anek.

2709 Some names are names of sorrows.

2710 Alobo, Abur, Ayiko, Woko  
2711 That Fate has thrown  
2712 A large basket  
2713 To be filled  
2714 With dead children

2715 *Fate has brought troubles*  
2716 *Son of my mother*  
2717 *Fate has thrown me a basket,*  
2718 *It all began as a joke*  
2719 *Suffering is painful*  
2720 *It began before I was born.*

\*

2721 My father's name  
2722 Is Otoo Lenga-moi,  
2723 He ate the title Lenga-moi  
2724 In the battle in the Hills.  
2725 Ocol's grandfather's title  
2726 Is Lutany-moi  
2727 You earn the moi  
2728 With your spear  
2729 Or gun or sword.

2730 Is 'Tomcon' a *Jok* name?  
2731 'Paraciko', is it a battle honour?  
2732 'Bicenycio' and 'Iriko'  
2733 Are these praise names  
2734 That white men shout  
2735 When they dance their 'get- stuck' dance?  
2736 Or are they mourning names?

2737 The first born  
2738 May have a name  
2739 But he is always called Okang,  
2740 He is the first  
2741 To listen to the songs  
2742 Of the birds;  
2743 He is proof  
2744 That the woman is not barren;  
2745 He is the owner of the shrine  
2746 That shall be built  
2747 In honour of his father,  
2748 He is respected.

2749 The one who follows Okang  
2750 Is called Oboi.  
2751 He is always jealous,  
2752 He fights with his brother  
2753 And fights for his brother.  
2754 The third son is called Odai  
2755 And the last son is Cogo.  
2756 If you hit his head  
2757 With your finger  
2758 His mother will throw  
2759 Things at you;  
2760 Because that is the child  
2761 Of which a mother is most fond.

\*

2762 Who understands  
2763 The meaning of the Christian names?  
2764 The names they read for

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2765 The names of white men  
2766 That they give to children  
2767 When they put water on their heads,  
2768 What do they mean?

2769 To me  
2770 They all sound  
2771 Like empty tins,  
2772 Old rusty tins  
2773 Thrown down

2774 From the roof-top.

## 9

### *From the Mouth of Which River?*

2775 When I was in the Evening Speakers' Class

2776 We recited the Faith of the Messengers

2777 And Our Father who is in Skyland,

2778 We sang Greetings to Maria

2779 We learnt:

2780 *Glory shine on the body of the Father*

2781 *And on the body of the Son*

2782 *And on the body of the Clean Ghost*

2783 We recited the Prayer for saying Yes

2784 And the Prayer for Love,

2785 The Prayer for Trust,

2786 The Greetings of the beautiful men

2787 With birds' wings,

2788 And the Dekalogu,

2789 The Ten Instructions of the Hunchback.

2790 But our teachers

2791 Hated questions.

2792 Protestant and Catholic priests

2793 Are all the same—

2794 They do not like questions.

2795 When they mount the rostrum

2796 To preach

2797 They shout and shout

2798 And most of what they say

2799 I do not follow.

2800 But as soon as they stop shouting

2801 They run away fast,

2802 They never stop a little while

2803 To answer even one question,

2804 Immediately

2805 They start collecting

2806 The gifts.

2807 You hear:

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2808 *Who sows a little*

2809 *Will reap a little*

2810 *Who sows much*

2811 *Will reap much*

2812 *It is not by force*

2813 *The Hunchback thanks those who give with soft hearts*

2814 Do they buy the places

2815 In Skyland with money?

2816 The stools

2817 On the right hand of the Hunchback,

2818 Are these reserved

2819 For moneyed fellows,

2820 Fat-bellied men

2821 The backs of whose necks

2822 Resemble the buttocks of the hippo,

2823 And green oils

2824 Ooze out of the lined necks?

2825 Those who will

2826 Surround the Hunchback,

2827 Will they be

2828 The three-chinned ones

2829 Who are not used to the heat

2830 And should not go

2831 To the place below

2832 Because it does not befit them

2833 And it is too warm for them?

\*

2834 The teachers

2835 Of the Evening Speakers' Class

2836 Hate questions.

2837 If you go to the Padré

2838 You provoke a fight.

2839 You take the road

2840 And go to the Nun,

2841 The young woman

2842 Is fierce like

2843 A wounded buffalo girl,  
2844 She screams  
2845 As if someone has  
2846 Stabbed her at the death spot.  
2847 And the black teachers  
2848 Are angry  
2849 They say  
2850 Asking too many questions  
2851 Befits only Martin Luther  
2852 And the stupid stubborn Protestants.  
2853 They say,  
2854 Asking a lot of silly questions  
2855 Cannot be tolerated,  
2856 And the Padré quarrels  
2857 And his goatee beard  
2858 Shakes furiously.

\*

2859 We sang the Faith of the Messengers  
2860 Like parrots,  
2861 I did not understand it at all!  
2862 I thought about it  
2863 In my own head  
2864 But I could get nowhere,  
2865 And there was nobody  
2866 To turn to.  
2867 The Padré and the Nun are the same,  
2868 They only quarrel  
2869 They are angry with me  
2870 As if it was I  
2871 Who prevented them marrying.

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2872 To them  
2873 The good children  
2874 Are those  
2875 Who ask no questions,  
2876 Who accept everything  
2877 Like the tomb  
2878 Which does not reject  
2879 Even a dead leper!  
2880 Who accept everything  
2881 Like the rubbish pit,  
2882 Like the pit-latrine

2883 Which does not reject

2884 Even dysentery.

2885 And those good children

2886 Who ask no questions

2887 Are liked,

2888 They are given oranges

2889 And guavas and bananas

2890 They take a ride

2891 In the Padre's car.

2892 The Nun pats them on their backs

2893 And says my son you are good!

\*

2894 We recited

2895 The Faith of the Messengers

2896 Like the yellow birds

2897 In the *lajanawara* grass

2898 The teacher shouted

2899 As if half-mad

2900 And we shouted back:

2901 *I accept the Hunchback*

2902 *The Padre who is very strong*

2903 *Moulder of Skyland and*

2904 *Earth ...*

2905 My mother

2906 Was a well-known potter,

2907 She moulded large pots,

2908 Vegetable pots,

2909 And beautiful long necked jars.

2910 She made water pots

2911 And smoking pipes

2912 And vegetable dishes.

2913 And large earthen vessels for bath.

2914 She dug the clay

2915 From the mouth of the Oytino River.

2916 The place

2917 Was well-known among potters.

2918 I heard about it  
2919 When I was a small girl,  
2920 And when my breasts emerged  
2921 I went with my mother  
2922 And helped her carrying the clay.

2923 The Hunchback  
2924 Where did he dig the clay  
2925 For moulding things?  
2926 Where is the pot  
2927 He dug the clay  
2928 For moulding Skyland,  
2929 And the clay for moulding Earth?  
2930 For the mouth of which River?  
2931 When my mother  
2932 Has brought the clay  
2933 From the River  
2934 She leaves it to season overnight.  
2935 The next day  
2936 She beats it with the wooden hammer  
2937 And then she moulds

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2938 The pots and dishes  
2939 And none of her works  
2940 Crack when fired!

2941 When Skyland was not yet there  
2942 And Earth was not yet moulded  
2943 Nor the Stars  
2944 Nor the Moon,  
2945 When there was nothing,  
2946 Where did the Hunchback live?

2947 Where did the Hunchback  
2948 Dig the clay for moulding things,  
2949 The clay for moulding Skyland  
2950 The clay for moulding Earth  
2951 The clay for moulding Moon  
2952 The clay for moulding the Stars?  
2953 Where is the spot  
2954 Where it was dug,  
2955 On the mouth of which River?



2956 And when the Hunchback  
2957 Was digging the clay  
2958 Where did he stand?  
2959 And when he brought home  
2960 The clay for moulding things  
2961 Where did he put the clay  
2962 To season overnight?  
2963 And when he was beating it  
2964 With the wooden hammer  
2965 On which rock  
2966 Did the Hunchback put the clay?

\*

2967 My husband  
2968 Has read at Makerere University.  
2969 He has read deeply and widely,  
2970 But if you ask him a question  
2971 He says  
2972 You are insulting him;  
2973 He opens up with a quarrel  
2974 He begins to look down upon you  
2975 Saying  
2976 You ask questions  
2977 That are a waste of time!

2978 He says  
2979 My questions are silly questions,  
2980 Typical questions from village girls.  
2981 Questions of uneducated people,  
2982 Useless questions from untutored minds.

2983 My husband says  
2984 I have a tiny little brain  
2985 And it is not trained,  
2986 I cannot see things intelligently,  
2987 I cannot see things sharply.  
2988 He says  
2989 Even if he is tried  
2990 To answer my questions  
2991 I would not understand  
2992 What he was saying  
2993 Because the language he speaks

2994 Is different from mine  
2995 So that even if he  
2996 Spoke to me in Acoli  
2997 I would still need an interpreter.

2998 My husband says  
2999 Some of the answers  
3000 Cannot be given in Acoli  
3001 Which is a primitive language  
3002 And is not rich enough  
3003 To express his deep wisdom.  
3004 He says the Acoli language  
3005 Has very few words

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3006 It is not like the white man's language  
3007 Which is rich and very beautiful  
3008 A language fitted for discussing deep thoughts.

3009 Ocol says  
3010 He has no time to waste  
3011 Discussing things with a thing like me  
3012 Who has not been to school.  
3013 He says  
3014 A university man  
3015 Can only have useful talk  
3016 With another university man or woman.  
3017 And that it is funny,  
3018 That he should stoop so low  
3019 Even to listen  
3020 To my questions.

3021 And when he says  
3022 These things to me  
3023 He does not look me in the face,  
3024 He turns his back  
3025 And talks casually  
3026 While doing some other work.

3027 And when the Padre  
3028 Hears these questions  
3029 He threatens you with his beard!

3030 When a Nun  
3031 Hears the questions  
3032 She says,  
3033 You should repeat  
3034 The Prayers for Faith.

\*

3035 I think about these questions  
3036 In my head  
3037 And my head begins to ache,  
3038 And my neck begins to pain,  
3039 But who can I ask?  
3040 Where can I go?

3041 I am not a shy woman  
3042 I am not afraid of anybody  
3043 And I am not easily browbeaten.  
3044 I know that the person who asks  
3045 Has done no wrong,  
3046 I will not be frightened  
3047 By those who say  
3048 Asking questions is mortal sin  
3049 That will take a person  
3050 To the Place Below.

3051 But I swallow the questions,  
3052 They burn inside me  
3053 Like a bee  
3054 That has gone into the ear;  
3055 And my eyes redden  
3056 With frustration  
3057 And I tremble  
3058 With anger.

\*

3059 When the Hunchback was not yet there  
3060 Before he had moulded himself  
3061 What things were there?

3062 When Skyland was not yet moulded  
3063 And there was no Earth,  
3064 No Stars

3065 No Moon

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3066 When Chief Hunchback was not yet there

3067 Before he had moulded himself,

3068 Where did he get the clay

3069 For moulding things?

3070 The clay for moulding himself

3071 Where did he get it,

3072 From the mouth of which River?

3073 When the Hunchback was not yet there

3074 And his head was not yet moulded

3075 And his eyes

3076 And his hands

3077 And his legs

3078 When his heart was not yet there,

3079 How did he find

3080 The clay for moulding things

3081 Before he had any eyes?

3082 The clay for moulding the Hunchback

3083 Where was it dug from?

3084 From the mouth of which River?

3085 How did the Hunchback

3086 Dig the clay for moulding things

3087 Before his hands were moulded?

3088 The wooden digging stick

3089 For digging the clay,

3090 The wooden hammer

3091 For beating the clay

3092 For moulding himself,

3093 How did he hold the wooden hammer

3094 And the digging stick?

3095 Whose hands did he borrow?

3096 And when he was digging

3097 The clay for moulding himself

3098 Whose legs did he use

3099 For standing up?

3100 Where did Chief Hunchback

3101 Get his head  
3102 For thinking about moulding himself,  
3103 For beginning to think  
3104 About moulding himself  
3105 And what shape and size  
3106 He should be?

3107 Where did the Hunchback  
3108 Find the hands,  
3109 The hands for moulding himself  
3110 Where did he find them?  
3111 How did he mould his hands  
3112 Before he had any hands?

\*

3113 On the way to the well  
3114 To draw water  
3115 In the bush  
3116 Collecting dry firewood  
3117 I think about these questions  
3118 When I am grinding millet  
3119 Or on the rocks  
3120 Drying the cassava mash,  
3121 On the way to the garden  
3122 Early in the morning  
3123 Through the thick dew,  
3124 In the night  
3125 I cannot sleep  
3126 But my head just stops  
3127 Like a broken down car!

\*

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3128 And the questions  
3129 Are numerous like grass,  
3130 If you begin to ask them  
3131 They flow endlessly  
3132 Like the Nile waters,  
3133 They burn endlessly  
3134 Like the red fire  
3135 At the altar!  
3136 You wish there was  
3137 No other work

3138 So that you may sit  
3139 For as long as you like;

3140 And you wish  
3141 You were lucky  
3142 To find someone to help you;  
3143 Someone who has genuinely  
3144 Read deeply and widely  
3145 And not someone like my husband  
3146 Whose preoccupation  
3147 Is to boast in the market place  
3148 Showing off to people!

3149 You wish you were lucky  
3150 To find someone to assist you  
3151 Who does not shout  
3152 Like house-flies  
3153 When disturbed  
3154 From an excreta heap!  
3155 Who does not shout meaninglessly  
3156 Like the Padre;  
3157 Who listens,  
3158 And does not get annoyed  
3159 So easily like the Nun:  
3160 Who does not boast  
3161 Like the teachers of the Evening Speakers' Class.

\*3162 You consider the birth of Christ:  
3163 They say  
3164 His mother did not know a man.  
3165 They also say,  
3166 The bridewealth had already been paid,

3167 Among our People  
3168 When a girl has  
3169 Accepted a man's proposal  
3170 She gives a token,  
3171 And then she visits him  
3172 In his bachelor's hut  
3173 To try his manhood.

3174 Before the bridewealth is paid

3175 The man puts his cheeks  
3176 On the girl's bosom  
3177 And if the girl is lucky  
3178 She gets a stomach!

3179 And when they teach  
3180 That the Mother of Christ  
3181 Did not know a man  
3182 I cannot understand it.

3183 But the teachers of religion  
3184 Hate questions;  
3185 A young tree that is bending  
3186 They do not like to straighten.  
3187 Whether they do it purposely,  
3188 Whether they themselves  
3189 Have no answers  
3190 I do not know,  
3191 But I know  
3192 They hate questions.

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## 10

### *The Last Safari to Pagak*<sup>[10]</sup>

3193 My husband quarrels bitterly.  
3194 He says  
3195 I do not know hygiene  
3196 And I do not know  
3197 How to look after the sick.  
3198 He says  
3199 I do not know  
3200 The use of quinine,  
3201 And I have not been taught  
3202 How to prevent diseases.  
3203 My man is ashamed of me  
3204 Because my father  
3205 Was a well-known diviner-priest;  
3206 He says  
3207 He is sick of my superstitions and fears.

3208 And he fears

3209 What the neighbours say  
3210 Because my mother brought  
3211 Some powerful anti-poison medicine,  
3212 To counter the deadly poisons  
3213 Of the childless woman  
3214 In our homestead.  
3215 Some had brought *agugu*  
3216 Others brought *adraka*  
3217 With which to kill all the children.

3218 My husband complains  
3219 That I encourage visitors  
3220 Who should not  
3221 Come into his house,  
3222 Because they bring dirt and house-flies!

3223 He says  
3224 My old relatives smell horribly.  
3225 And they have terrible diseases,  
3226 Leprosy and tuberculosis  
3227 And their bodies itch.  
3228 He says  
3229 These diseases will be  
3230 Transmitted to the children.  
3231 He has warned me  
3232 That my father's sister  
3233 Has lice in her hair  
3234 And jiggers in her feet.  
3235 She should not visit me!

3236 My husband says these things  
3237 In broad daylight.  
3238 He speaks aloud,

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3239 He does not care  
3240 Whether my relatives  
3241 Hear him or not.  
3242 And when a storm is threatening,  
3243 He says  
3244 There are no beds  
3245 In his house  
3246 For villagers!



3247 My husband says  
3248 Villagers soil his chairs  
3249 And bed sheets,  
3250 He says  
3251 They ruin his nicely polished floor  
3252 With the mud in their feet.

3253 He cares little  
3254 About his relatives either.  
3255 Of his own mother,  
3256 Ocol says  
3257 She smokes some nauseating tobacco  
3258 And spits all over the place  
3259 And she keeps bed bugs  
3260 In her loin cloth.  
3261 And when his mother  
3262 Comes to visit him,  
3263 Ocol locks the doors  
3264 And says  
3265 He has an important meeting  
3266 In the town!

3267 My husband complains  
3268 About food.  
3269 You would think  
3270 He earns sand!  
3271 He told his mother's brother  
3272 There was no food  
3273 Because he had not written  
3274 A letter!

3275 The son of the Bull  
3276 Does not allow the children  
3277 To visit my mother,  
3278 He says  
3279 He does not like  
3280 The feeding of grandmothers  
3281 Because the children  
3282 Eat all the time.

3283 Ocol says

3284 The way his mother  
3285 Brings up children  
3286 Only leads  
3287 To ignorance, poverty and disease.  
3288 He swears  
3289 He has no confidence  
3290 In the wisdom of the Acoli.

\*

3291 My husband despises me  
3292 Because I fear  
3293 The kite with the flame  
3294 In its anus.

3295 He says  
3296 No such things exist.  
3297 It is my eyes  
3298 That are sick  
3299 And only foolish superstitions  
3300 Make me see these things.  
3301 But my husband believes  
3302 Some people see  
3303 The beautiful men  
3304 With the wings of vultures

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3305 Flying through the air!

3306 My husband has threatened  
3307 To beat me  
3308 If I visit the diviner-priest again.  
3309 He says  
3310 The hair-poison does not exist,  
3311 That it is hook-worm  
3312 That troubles the people.

3313 Ocol condemns diviner-priests  
3314 And Acoli herbalists.  
3315 He says  
3316 They are all liars  
3317 Who deceive fools,  
3318 And robs people's chickens,

3319 Goats, sheep, cattle and money.

3320 Their so-called medicines

3321 Are dirty mixtures

3322 Of all sorts of things

3323 Collected from the bush

3324 And mixed in beer.

3325 He says

3326 The medicine gourds are filthy,

3327 And the herbs

3328 Are drunk from unhygienic cups.

3329 My husband agrees

3330 That sometimes by accident

3331 Some of the herbs are effective.

3332 He also admits

3333 That not all who

3334 Enter the white man's hospital

3335 Walk home on their own feet,

3336 But are carried away

3337 In comfortable beds

3338 Painless, free of troubles,

3339 No more bothered by hunger or anger

3340 Or the complaints of wives!

3341 When the fiends

3342 That brings smallpox

3343 Visit the homestead,

3344 Ocol does not go

3345 To the shrine of the ancestors.

3346 He says

3347 It is foolish to do so,

3348 We should have our arms scratched

3349 And some corrosive poisons

3350 Put in the wounds.

3351 He says

3352 When we suffer misfortune

3353 We should say:

3354 *Look Mariya*

3355 *Mother of the Hunchback ...*

3356 We should pray to Joseph

3357 And Petero, and Luka

3358 And the other ancestors of white men!

3359 He says

3360 It is stupid superstition

3361 To pray to our ancestors

3362 To avert the smallpox,

3363 But we should pray

3364 To the messengers of the Hunchback

3365 To intercede for us.

3366 My husband wears

3367 A small crucifix

3368 On his neck,

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3369 And all his daughters

3370 Wear rosaries.

3371 But he prohibits me

3372 From wearing the elephant tail necklace,

3373 He once beat me

3374 For wearing the toe of the edible rat

3375 And the horn of the rhinoceros

3376 And the jaw-bone of the alligator.

3377 A large snake

3378 Once fell down from the roof

3379 Of the cold hall!

3380 The Nun who was teaching

3381 The Evening Speakers' Class

3382 Grabbed her large crucifix

3383 And pressed it on her bosom,

3384 Closed her eyes

3385 And said something

3386 We could not understand.

3387 My husband says  
3388 The cowry shells,  
3389 The colobus-monkey hair,  
3390 The dog's horn charms  
3391 And all useless things.

3392 He says  
3393 Only foolish backward folk  
3394 Uneducated simple fellows  
3395 Who live in the shadow of fear  
3396 Carry these dirty things!

\*3397 When a bull disease  
3398 Has knocked me down  
3399 Or when the ghost in my head  
3400 Is provoked  
3401 And threatens to cause ill-health,

3402 When a child  
3403 Has been cursed by his uncle  
3404 Or when the Evil Eye  
3405 Has attacked my daughter,

3406 My husband does not allow me  
3407 To visit the diviner-priest,  
3408 The goat cannot be sacrificed,  
3409 And no *Jok* dances  
3410 Can be danced.

3411 And when it is *Jok Omara*  
3412 That has caused madness,  
3413 Or *Odude* or *Ayweya*  
3414 That has brought troubles,  
3415 When *Jok Rubanga*<sup>[11]</sup>  
3416 Has broken someone's back  
3417 Or *Jok Odude*  
3418 Has tied up a woman's womb,  
3419 And the husband  
3420 Cries over his lost bridewealth,  
3421 Saying,  
3422 What is marriage without childbirth?

3423 Ocol laughs,  
3424 Ocol says,  
3425 The ways of fools are dark  
3426 And they are foolish beyond compare!

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3427 My husband  
3428 Once smashed up the rattle gourd,  
3429 Cut open the drum,  
3430 And chased away the diviner-priest  
3431 From his late father's homestead.  
3432 The old man walked away,  
3433 His headgear waving  
3434 His ankle bells jangling rhythmically  
3435 And the large monkey-skin bag  
3436 Dangling on his neck.

3437 People whistled in amazement,  
3438 They asked,  
3439 What ghost has captured  
3440 The head of Ocol?

3441 My husband took an axe  
3442 And threatened to cut the *Okango*  
3443 That grew on his father's shrine.  
3444 His mother fell down under the tree,  
3445 She said  
3446 Cut me first  
3447 Then cut the sacred tree!

3448 He threw down the axe  
3449 And went to the church.  
3450 Heknelt before  
3451 The stone picture of Joseph  
3452 And mumbled things  
3453 I could not understand.

\*3454 I do not know  
3455 The white man's names of diseases,  
3456 I do not know

3457 The names of their medicines,  
3458 I cannot measure  
3459 The heat of the body  
3460 With the white man's glass rod  
3461 Because my hand trembles  
3462 And I cannot read it.

3463 When my child is unwell  
3464 I see it from his watering nose,  
3465 The hair of his body stands up  
3466 And his lips are parched,  
3467 I see that he is not bright,  
3468 I do not read the names of diseases from books.

3469 I hear him cry  
3470 And his eyes water,  
3471 I hear the noise from his stomach  
3472 The worms complaining;

3473 He is pale  
3474 As if he has been playing in ashes,  
3475 You hear his chest crackling,  
3476 He has no appetite,  
3477 And he is aggressive but tired and weak;  
3478 He is troublesome,  
3479 He wants this thing and that thing,  
3480 Then he does not want this thing  
3481 And does not want that thing.

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3482 His body feels hot like fire,  
3483 And he sits by the fire  
3484 In the middle of a hot afternoon.

3485 When my child is ill  
3486 I try the various Acoli herbs,  
3487 I try the medicines  
3488 My mother showed me:

3489 The roots of *bomo*  
3490 For stomach aches

3491 It kills poisons  
3492 As well as worms.

3493 The roots of *omwombye*  
3494 Is chewed for bad throats,  
3495 A drop in the eye  
3496 Kills the pains  
3497 And removes the Evil Eye's sting.  
3498 When the eyes are bursting with pain  
3499 Put some *akeyo* in a pot.  
3500 Cook it for some time,  
3501 Then expose the eyes  
3502 To the steam from the pot;  
3503 This burns up the spears  
3504 That were in the eye.

3505 The shoots of *lapena*  
3506 For coughs and sore throats—  
3507 You put some salt in it  
3508 And chew it!  
3509 The shoots of *lapena* and *olim*  
3510 Are chewed when they have  
3511 Removed the blockage in the throat.

3512 Fresh wounds are treated  
3513 With *ogali* or *pobo*,  
3514 The sticky juices  
3515 Gum up the broken skins  
3516 And the bitter poison  
3517 Keeps the house-flies at bay.

3518 My mother showed me many medicines,  
3519 Medicines for leprosy and yaws,  
3520 For difficult childbirth and barrenness  
3521 For men whose spears  
3522 Refuse to stand up,  
3523 Lazy spears  
3524 That sleep on their bellies  
3525 Like earthworms!  
3526 Medicines for snake bites,  
3527 Medicines for breasts  
3528 That dry up too soon  
3529 Big milkless breasts



3530 Full of fibre  
3531 Like the fruit of the *barusus* palm!

3532 If my child is ill  
3533 I try the various medicines  
3534 That my mother showed me,  
3535 If all these fail  
3536 I go to the medicine woman,  
3537 And when the child has improved  
3538 I take a chicken to the herbalist,  
3539 Or a goat or a ram.

\*

3540 When fevers trouble my child frequently,  
3541 When all the diseases  
3542 Have fallen in love with him,

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3543 And all youthful diseases  
3544 Run after him  
3545 As if he was a beautiful girl,  
3546 So that he has coughs and dysentery  
3547 And throat trouble and eye sickness,  
3548 And his ears have pus  
3549 And his legs have ulcers  
3550 And he is bony, skinny  
3551 And his loin-string is loose,  
3552 I know that this is not for nothing!

3553 I know that someone is behind it.  
3554 I know someone has hidden  
3555 The child's excreta in a tree fork,  
3556 Or has buried his hair or nail paring  
3557 In a river-bed  
3558 I know that some jealous woman  
3559 Perhaps even a close relative  
3560 Has visited the shadow trapper  
3561 Who has captured the child's shadow.

3562 When your child is weak and listless,  
3563 When his energy fails him,  
3564 When he withdraws from the fight

3565 For life, and gives up quickly,  
3566 It means his head has been captured,  
3567 And he is only a crawling corpse:

3568 A diviner-priest must be called.  
3569 He will divine  
3570 And tell the killer,  
3571 The jealous one will be found out!

\*

3572 Ten beautiful girls  
3573 Are walking in single file,  
3574 Along the pathway,  
3575 They carry axes  
3576 They are going to the bush  
3577 To split firewood,  
3578 In the grass lurks  
3579 The black mamba,  
3580 Its throat burning with venom.

3581 The first three girls walk past,  
3582 Then the fourth and fifth,  
3583 And all nine girls go by,  
3584 And your daughter  
3585 Who is at the tail of the line  
3586 Is struck!

3587 She stands there,  
3588 The reptile refuses to unhook its fangs,  
3589 She drinks a whole cup of death,  
3590 She gives a brief shriek  
3591 And mumbles some farewell  
3592 To her loving mother!  
3593 Then she drops  
3594 Dead!

3595 She lies there  
3596 As if feigning death;  
3597 Her ripe breasts lift up their hands  
3598 And wail aloud,  
3599 Saying,

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3600 *No mouths will suck us!*

3601 *Our tips will not be tickled!*

3602 *Our milk will rot in the earth!*

3603 In battle

3604 The hottest youths fight at the front,

3605 Eager, angry, proud,

3606 The youths think of their loves

3607 And say,

3608 It is the old ones

3609 Who die in bed!

3610 The spears of the foe

3611 And their arrows

3612 Rain like the hailstones,

3613 Your son is struck

3614 In the small of the back,

3615 And the spear

3616 Cuts through the liver

3617 And the heart.

3618 Other people's boys receive bruises

3619 Others get cuts,

3620 Many earn battle honours,

3621 They return home

3622 Blowing their horns, loud and clear!

3623 And while others ecelebrate

3624 And sing war songs,

3625 You sing songs of praise,

3626 Farewell songs to the dead!

3627 Why should lightning

3628 Seek out your husband

3629 From his bedroom?

3630 Other women's husbands

3631 Are walking in the rain!

3632 What is so sweet in your husband?

3633 What so bitter in other people's sons?

3634 Why, at the hunt,  
3635 Does the wounded buffalo bull  
3636 Charge your father  
3637 And with its blunt horn  
3638 Tear open his belly,  
3639 Throwing the intestines  
3640 On top of the grass?  
3641 Why should you  
3642 And not somebody else  
3643 Be made orphan?

\*

3644 All misfortunes have a root,  
3645 The snake bite, the spear of the enemy,  
3646 Lightning and the blunt buffalo horn,  
3647 These are the bitter fruits  
3648 Grown on the tree of Fate.  
3649 They do not fall anyhow,  
3650 They do not fall at random,  
3651 They do not come our way by accident,  
3652 We do not just run into them.  
3653 When your uncle curses you  
3654 You piss in your bed!  
3655 And you go on pissing in your bed  
3656 Until you have taken him  
3657 A white cock!

3658 When your mother lifts her breast

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3659 And asks you,  
3660 Did you suck this?  
3661 If your father lifts his penis  
3662 Towards you!  
3663 Know that you are in deep trouble.

3664 No one wrestles with his father,  
3665 No one looks down  
3666 On his mother,  
3667 You cannot abuse your mother!  
3668 Because it was that woman  
3669 Who hewed you out of the rock  
3670 And moulded your head and body.

3671 Think of the excreta and piss  
3672 The vomit and mucus  
3673 With which you wetted your mother!  
3674 Think of the fire  
3675 That burnt her finger many times,  
3676 When she cooked for you.

3677 Think of the jealousies of others,  
3678 The sorcerers and shadow trappers,  
3679 Poisoners and the Evil Eyes,  
3680 Think of the fights  
3681 They put up for you!

3682 You sucked those wrinkled breasts,  
3683 And that's what made you  
3684 The big man you are!

3685 And even if your father is totally blind,  
3686 Even if his ears are dead,  
3687 Even if the world has boxed him,  
3688 Even if his legs are dry like firewood,  
3689 If he is rude to you  
3690 You say, 'Thank You'  
3691 And never answer back  
3692 Because he stands before you  
3693 Like the giant *tido* tree.  
3694 You are but a climber plant.

3695 A mother's anger is bitter,  
3696 It is fierce like lightning  
3697 And boils like thunder.  
3698 If you make her angry  
3699 She will strike below her belly button,  
3700 If you annoy the girl  
3701 She will strike the ash  
3702 Then you will get  
3703 Exactly what you ask for!

3704 Your vitality will go,  
3705 You will behave

3706 As if you were a half-wit,  
3707 Your manhood will disappear  
3708 And like a castrated bullock  
3709 Women will be perfectly safe with you!

3710 And to recover,  
3711 A goat must be slaughtered,  
3712 Your mother and her brother  
3713 Must spit blessing in your hand.  
3714 And then you will become a man again.  
3715 There is no medicine in the hospital  
3716 For a mother's curse,

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3717 None for an uncle's curse!  
3718 And when your father's anger  
3719 Has boiled over  
3720 The white man's medicines  
3721 Are irrelevant and useless  
3722 Like the freak rains  
3723 In the middle of the dry season.

\*

3724 When a woman has brought  
3725 Death in a bundle,  
3726 With which to kill people,  
3727 And Death has felt the inside of the victims  
3728 And found them clean,  
3729 It bounces back  
3730 And destroys the bringer!  
3731 It refuses to be returned,  
3732 It refuses all sacrifices.  
3733 It says  
3734 'I was not brought  
3735 To eat a goat,  
3736 I do not want a ram,  
3737 Not a bull.'

3738 Death in the bundle  
3739 Kills the children of the bringer,  
3740 Her husband,  
3741 Her other relatives  
3742 And then she herself

3743 Eats the dust.  
3744 Which white man's medicine  
3745 Can stop the hand of Death in the bundle?  
3746 Which one can blunt  
3747 The sharp edges of Death's sword?

\*3748 If in a hunt  
3749 The spears of the men  
3750 Strike tree trunks and earth  
3751 And they return home  
3752 Silent,  
3753 None blowing a horn,

3754 If in the homestead  
3755 Young wives stay young,  
3756 Their breasts refuse to fall  
3757 And their tummies are for ever  
3758 Well back,  
3759 Because they are hard  
3760 Like the *lela* rocks  
3761 Like the dry trunk of the *poi*,  
3762 And the men are soft in the knees  
3763 And weak in the loin,

3764 When the rains fail  
3765 And famine threatens a fierce invasion,  
3766 Fiercer than the spear of the Lango,

3767 If the crops are moved down by Okwil  
3768 Or the hail stones have rained  
3769 And ruined all the millet,

3770 If the locust swarms  
3771 That blacken the sky  
3772 Stay the night in the homestead  
3773 And refuse to move  
3774 The next day,  
3775 When there is much trouble  
3776 In the homestead,  
3777 It is not for nothing,  
3778 It is because

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3779 The ancestors are angry,  
3780 Because they are hungry,  
3781 Thirsty,  
3782 Neglected.

3783 So the elders gather  
3784 At the clan shrine,  
3785 Blood, meat and beer  
3786 Are offered to the ancestors.  
3787 Greetings are exchanged  
3788 And the living  
3789 Pray to the dead  
3790 To cleanse the homestead,  
3791 And they pray,  
3792 Saying,

3793 *The troubles in the homestead*  
3794 *Let the setting sun*  
3795 *Go down with them!*

3796 And the people repeat

3797 *Let them go down*  
3798 *Let them go down*  
3799 *With the setting sun!*

3800 And an old woman  
3801 Will bless the young men,  
3802 She will spit blessing in their hands  
3803 So that their spears may be sharp,  
3804 Sharp and hard,  
3805 So that their trusted spears  
3806 Should not sleep outside  
3807 In the dewy cold,  
3808 But should strike the death spot  
3809 Deep and painful!  
3810 Then the young cobs  
3811 Will scream  
3812 And shed tears of sweet pains!



\*

3813 My husband rejects me  
3814 Because he says  
3815 That I am a mere pagan  
3816 And I believe in the devil.  
3817 He says  
3818 I do not know  
3819 The rules of health,  
3820 And I mix up  
3821 Matters of health and superstitions.

3822 Ocol troubles my head,  
3823 He talks too much  
3824 And he heaps insults on me  
3825 As well as my relatives.

3826 But most of his words are senseless,  
3827 They are like the songs  
3828 Of children's plays.  
3829 And he treats his clansmen  
3830 As if they are enemies.  
3831 Ocol behaves  
3832 As if he is a witch!

3833 It is true  
3834 White man's medicines are strong,  
3835 But Acoli medicines  
3836 Are also strong.

3837 The sick gets cured  
3838 Because his time has not yet come:

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3839 But when the day has dawned  
3840 For the journey to Pagak  
3841 No one can stop you,  
3842 White man's medicines  
3843 Acoli medicines,  
3844 Crucifixes, rosaries,  
3845 Toes of edible rats,  
3846 The horn of the rhinoceros

3847 None of them can block the path

3848 That goes to Pagak!

3849 When Death comes

3850 To fetch you

3851 She comes unannounced,

3852 She comes suddenly

3853 Like the vomit of dogs,

3854 And when She comes

3855 The wind keeps blowing

3856 The birds go on singing

3857 And the flowers

3858 Do not hang their heads.

3859 The *agoga* bird is silent

3860 The *agoga* comes afterwards,

3861 He sings to tell

3862 That Death has been that way!

3863 When Mother Death comes

3864 She whispers

3865 Come,

3866 And you stand up

3867 And follow

3868 You get up immediately,

3869 And you start walking

3870 Without brushing the dust

3871 On your buttocks.

3872 You may be behind

3873 A new buffalo-hide shield,

3874 And at the mock-fight

3875 Or in battle

3876 You may be matchless;

3877 You may be hiding

3878 In the hole

3879 Of the smallest black insect,

3880 Or in the darkest place

3881 Where rats breast-feed their puppies,

3882 or behind the Agoro hills,

3883 You may be the fastest runner,

3884 A long distance runner,  
3885 But when Death comes  
3886 To fetch you  
3887 You do not resist,  
3888 You must not resist.  
3889 You cannot resist!

3890 Mother Death  
3891 She says to her little ones,  
3892 Come!

3893 Her little ones are good children,  
3894 Obedient,  
3895 Loyal,  
3896 And when Mother Death calls  
3897 Her little ones jump,  
3898 They jump gladly  
3899 For she calls  
3900 And offers simsim paste  
3901 Mixed with honey!  
3902 She says  
3903 My only child  
3904 Come,  
3905 Come, let us go.  
3906 Let us go  
3907 And eat white-ants' paste

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3908 Mixed with *shea*-butter!  
3909 And who can resist that?

3910 White diviner priests,  
3911 Acoli herbalists,  
3912 All medicine men and medicine women  
3913 Are good, are brilliant  
3914 When the day has not yet dawned  
3915 For the great journey  
3916 The last safari  
3917 To Pagak.

3918 With the coming  
3919 Of the new political parties,  
3920 My husband roams the countryside  
3921 Like a wild goat;

3922 He is up before dawn:  
3923 You think  
3924 He is going to hoe  
3925 The new cotton field  
3926 Or to sow the millet  
3927 Or to harvest the simsim  
3928 All day long  
3929 He is away,  
3930 He does not eat at home  
3931 As if I do not cook!

3932 When he comes  
3933 He does not stay a moment,  
3934 He says  
3935 There is another meeting  
3936 At the homestead of the Hoe Chief.  
3937 He is away all night,  
3938 And when he returns so late  
3939 He says  
3940 Their car got stuck  
3941 In the mud.

\*

3942 He says  
3943 They are fighting for Uhuru  
3944 He says  
3945 They want Independence and Peace  
3946 And when they meet  
3947 They shout 'Uhuru! Uhuru!'  
3948 But what is the meaning  
3949 Of Uhuru?

3950 He says  
3951 They want to unite the Acoli and Lango  
3952 And the Madi and Lugbara  
3953 Should live together in peace!

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3954 He says  
3955 The Alur and Iteso and Baganda  
3956 And the Banyankole and Banyoro  
3957 Should be united together  
3958 With the Jo-pa-Dhola and the Toro  
3959 And all the tribes  
3960 Should become one people.

3961 He says  
3962 White men must return  
3963 To their own homes,  
3964 Because they have brought  
3965 Slave conditions in the country.  
3966 He says  
3967 White people tell lies,  
3968 That they are good  
3969 At telling lies,  
3970 Like men wooing women.  
3971 Ocol says  
3972 They reject the famine relief granaries  
3973 And the forced-labour system.

\*

3974 I do not understand  
3975 The new political parties.  
3976 They dress differently,  
3977 They dress in robes  
3978 Like the Christian diviner- priests,  
3979 But Ocol treats his brother  
3980 As if they are not relatives,

3981 Ocol puts on a green-and-white robe,  
3982 A large flowing robe  
3983 And he struts  
3984 Like a bull baboon,  
3985 He blows the whistle  
3986 And rings the bell  
3987 Calling people to gather  
3988 At the marketplace.

3989 His brother wears a red-and- black robe,

3990 He looks like the judge  
3991 Who condemns people to death  
3992 He looks like the male *aribe* bird  
3993 And shouts like the train.  
3994 He walks majestically  
3995 Like a bull elephant.

3996 My husband is the leader  
3997 Of the Democratic Party.  
3998 When they greet each other  
3999 They shake their fists.

4000 Ocol does not enter  
4001 His brother's house.  
4002 You would think  
4003 There was homicide between them  
4004 That has not been settled,  
4005 You would think  
4006 That the *opot*-drinking peace- making ceremony  
4007 Has not yet taken place  
4008 And they fear the deadly *ojebu* taboo!

4009 Ocol dislikes his brother fiercely,  
4010 His mother's son's hatred  
4011 Resembles boiling oil!  
4012 The new parties have split the homestead  
4013 As the battle axe splits the skull!

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4014 My husband has sternly warned me  
4015 Never to joke  
4016 With my husband-in-law:  
4017 Not that joking may cause pregnancy,  
4018 Not that I am a loose woman,  
4019 But that the strong gum of the joke  
4020 Will reconnect the snapped string  
4021 Of brotherhood  
4022 Between him and his brother!

4023 Is this the unity of Uhuru?  
4024 Is this the Peace

4025 That Independence brings?

4026 When my husband

4027 Opens a quarrel

4028 With his brother

4029 I am frightened!

4030 You would think

4031 They have not slept

4032 In the same womb,

4033 You would think

4034 They have not shared

4035 The same breasts!

4036 And they say

4037 When the two were boys

4038 Looking after the goats

4039 They were as close to each other

4040 As the eye and the nose,

4041 They were like twins,

4042 And they shared everything

4043 Even a single white ant.

\*

4044 Ocol says

4045 His brother is a liar

4046 And a big fool.

4047 He says

4048 There is something wrong

4049 With his brother's head

4050 Nobody should trust such a beast.

4051 He says

4052 His brother wants to kill him,

4053 He calls his mother's son That Man!

4054 He says

4055 His brother is dangerously jealous of him

4056 And has smuggled a pistol,

4057 And has collected money

4058 And hired a man

4059 To bump him off!

4060 When Ocol says these things

4061 His eyes bulge in his head

4062 Like ripe papayas

4063 And threaten to fall off!

4064 He shouts  
4065 His brother will bring Communism!  
4066 I do not know  
4067 What this animal is!

4068 He says  
4069 The Congress Party  
4070 Will remove all Catholics  
4071 From their jobs  
4072 And they will take away  
4073 All the land and schools  
4074 And will take people's wives  
4075 And goats, and chickens and bicycles,

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4076 And will become the property  
4077 Of the Congress people.

4078 How terrible that would be  
4079 If it were true!  
4080 But I know  
4081 That if Ocol dies  
4082 His mother's son  
4083 Whom he now hates so much  
4084 Will inherit all Ocol's properties,  
4085 The goats, the chickens and the bicycles,  
4086 And I will become his wife  
4087 And my children will become his children!

4088 Where will he take the land  
4089 And the schools?  
4090 And if they remove  
4091 All Catholics from their jobs,  
4092 Who will do the jobs?  
4093 Where will they get the people  
4094 To do these jobs?

\*

4095 When Ocol's brother replies,  
4096 He sound like the dance-drums  
4097 In the late evening.



4098 He says  
4099 The Democratic Party  
4100 Is the Party for Padrés  
4101 The Party for fools and blockheads.  
4102 He says  
4103 Catholics have numb heads  
4104 They hear everything from the Italian Fathers!

4105 He says  
4106 The Democratic Party  
4107 Will sell the land  
4108 To poor white men  
4109 Refugees, who came to this country  
4110 Saying they have come to teach  
4111 The white man's religion  
4112 When they have no teaching certificates.

4113 He says  
4114 Ocol and the other fools  
4115 Allow their heads to be numbed  
4116 By foolish prayers  
4117 And by kneeling  
4118 Before white men!

4119 I have never seen  
4120 A white padre  
4121 In the Democratic Party!  
4122 At the market place meetings  
4123 There are many Catholics  
4124 But I have not heard an Italian  
4125 Shout 'D—P! D—P! Uhuru!'  
4126 Do they teach the leaders  
4127 In the dead of night  
4128 In the Bishop's house?

4129 And if the white men are poor  
4130 Where will they get the money  
4131 With which to buy the land?

4132 I have seen  
4133 Many leaders of the D.P.  
4134 They come to my house  
4135 And eat and drink there,

4136 Some have really numbed heads  
4137 Like the head of my husband;

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4138 But others have heads like lightning  
4139 Quick and powerful,  
4140 Some are real men  
4141 Not women dressed in dark suits.

4142 I have met  
4143 Many leaders of Congress  
4144 They go to Ocol's brother's house  
4145 They eat and drink there.  
4146 Some have heads like the sun  
4147 Bright, burning and brilliant,  
4148 Others carry pieces of stone  
4149 On their necks  
4150 And call them heads!

\*

4151 Where is the Peace of Uhuru?  
4152 Where the unity of Independence?  
4153 Must it not begin at home?  
4154 And the Acoli and Lango  
4155 And the Madi and Lugbara,  
4156 How can they unite?  
4157 And all the tribes of Uganda  
4158 How can they become one?

4159 I do not understand  
4160 The meaning of Uhuru!  
4161 I do not understand  
4162 Why all the bitterness  
4163 And the cruelty  
4164 And the cowardice,  
4165 The fear,  
4166 The deadly fear that  
4167 Eats the hearts  
4168 Of the political leaders!

4169 Is it the money?  
4170 Is it the competition for position?

4171 Someone said  
4172 Independence falls like a bull buffalo  
4173 And the hunters  
4174 Rush to it with drawn knives,  
4175 Sharp shining knives  
4176 For carving the carcass.  
4177 And if your chest  
4178 Is small, bony and weak  
4179 They push you off,  
4180 And if your knife is blunt  
4181 You get the dung on your elbow,  
4182 You come home empty-handed  
4183 And the dogs bark at you!

4184 If you are not a man  
4185 They frighten you with noise  
4186 But you return home,  
4187 You walk like a chicken  
4188 Beaten by the rain  
4189 And the women hiss at you  
4190 And your children run away from you!  
4191 You are silent  
4192 Like a woman who has broken a taboo!

4193 And the other men  
4194 Carry large pieces of fatty beef,  
4195 You hear their horns loud and proud!

4196 And you eat green vegetables

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4197 Without the simsim paste  
4198 And your thin children  
4199 Collect the *odir* and *ocenne* insects  
4200 And they roast the *odir* and *ocenne*  
4201 And eat them  
4202 And the children of others  
4203 Are fat,  
4204 And their wives grow larger buttocks,  
4205 They eat meat from the chest of bulls  
4206 And the skin of their legs

4207 Shines with health!

4208 The stomach seems to be  
4209 A powerful force  
4210 For joining political parties,  
4211 Especially when the purse  
4212 In the trouser pocket  
4213 Carries only the coins  
4214 With holes in their middle,  
4215 And no purple notes  
4216 Have ever been folded in it;

4217 And especially for those who  
4218 Have never tasted honey from childhood,  
4219 And those who grew up  
4220 Fatherless or motherless!  
4221 And those with no sure jobs!

4222 Men with soft hearts,  
4223 Men with soft blunt eyes  
4224 Who are shy to tell the biggest lies,  
4225 Who are afraid  
4226 To repeat them in the presence  
4227 Of their mothers and children,  
4228 To repeat empty lies  
4229 Before their wives  
4230 And before their wives' mothers,  
4231 Such soft-necked men  
4232 Should stay at home!

\*

4233 And when the Party leaders  
4234 Come from Kampala,  
4235 My husband jumps,  
4236 He is like a newly eloped girl,

4237 He is all over the place  
4238 He is quick to win a good name,  
4239 And when he talks,  
4240 He explodes like the dry pods of *cooro!*  
4241 He is like a woman  
4242 Who has just buried

4243 The other woman  
4244 With whom she shares a husband.

4245 He says to the bosses  
4246 'O chief you kill me with laughter!'  
4247 His shallow laugh and put up smiles  
4248 Drown the frowns of the chiefs!  
4249 They probably think he is wonderful!

4250 My husband accuses other party leaders.  
4251 Everybody else is useless,  
4252 He alone  
4253 Is the most hard working,

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4254 The most loyal,  
4255 The man with the most reliable information.  
4256 All that others say  
4257 Is lies,  
4258 Lies intended only to win favours!  
4259 To buy position  
4260 To buy jobs  
4261 And places in conferences  
4262 In Kampala and abroad!

4263 My husband says  
4264 The masses of the people  
4265 In the villages  
4266 Listen only to him.  
4267 He says  
4268 The other party leaders  
4269 Have formed a new party,  
4270 A new party for fools,  
4271 That they are rebels  
4272 And should be expelled!  
4273 He says  
4274 The rebels are a minority  
4275 The masses of the people  
4276 Are solidly behind him  
4277 And the Party Leaders,  
4278 And they talk about him  
4279 At all beer parties.

\*

4280 When my husband  
4281 Climbs onto the platform,  
4282 You hear the bell  
4283 You hear the drums!  
4284 There is a big crowd,  
4285 Some people stand on hillocks!  
4286 The crowd resembles  
4287 The Palaro gathered to  
4288 Celebrate Lapul, their chiefdom *Jok*.

4289 My husband  
4290 Reads his speech from a book,  
4291 He says a few words  
4292 And shakes his fly whisk,  
4293 The women yodel  
4294 And make ululation!

4295 They yodel and make ululation  
4296 Not because they understand,  
4297 They yodel so that their voices may be heard  
4298 So that their secret lovers may hear them,  
4299 They shout and make ululations  
4300 Because they are tired  
4301 Tired of the useless talk  
4302 Tired of the insults  
4303 And the lies of  
4304 The speakers.

4305 They shout and raise their hands  
4306 Not because they understand  
4307 But because they do not understand  
4308 The many foreign words.  
4309 Uhuru! Congress! Freedom!  
4310 Democratic! Independence!  
4311 Minister! ...

4312 The women make ululations  
4313 Because they are irritated  
4314 Because they are excited  
4315 Because they want to dance.  
4316 They want the talks to end

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4317 So that they can dance.  
4318 And when he is in the market place,  
4319 He talks endlessly  
4320 Like a bird's mother-in-law.  
4321 His words are itchy like scabies,  
4322 Itchy like scabies on the buttocks.

4323 He talks endlessly,  
4324 And some of the things he says  
4325 Are painful and hurtful,  
4326 Like an unripe boil.

4327 He shouts and shouts  
4328 And loses his voice.  
4329 He says  
4330 We must all unite  
4331 And fight for Independence and Peace.

4332 He says  
4333 They fight with diseases,  
4334 Poverty and ignorance.  
4335 They want peace and friendship,  
4336 They fight black-heartedness and quarrels!

\*

4337 And if you are ignorant  
4338 Of the death of the homestead  
4339 Of my husband,  
4340 The death of the homestead  
4341 Caused by the parties  
4342 You would think  
4343 My husband was the best leader.

4344 And while those inside  
4345 Eat thick honey  
4346 And ghee and butter,  
4347 Those in the countryside  
4348 Die with the smell,  
4349 They re-eat the bones

4350 That were thrown away

4351 For the dogs.

4352 And those who have

4353 Fallen into things

4354 Throw themselves into soft beds,

4355 But the hip bones of the voters

4356 Grow painful

4357 Sleeping on the same earth

4358 They slept

4359 Before Uhuru!

4360 And they cover the ulcers

4361 On their legs

4362 With animal skins.

4363 And when they have

4364 Fallen into things

4365 They become rare,

4366 Like the python

4367 With a bull water buck

4368 In its tummy,

4369 They hibernate and stay away

4370 And eat!

4371 They return

4372 To the countryside

4373 For the next elections

4374 Like the kite

4375 That returns during the Dry Season

4376 *When the kites have returned*

4377 *The Dry Season has come!*

\*

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4378 The Democratic Party

4379 How does it differ

4380 From the Congress?

4381 Ocol says



4382 They want Uhuru,  
4383 His brother says  
4384 They want Uhuru and Peace,  
4385 Both of them say  
4386 They fight ignorance and disease!

4387 Then why do they not join hands,  
4388 Why do they split up the army  
4389 Into two hostile groups?  
4390 The spears of the young men  
4391 And their shields,  
4392 Why are the weapons  
4393 And the men and women  
4394 Dispersed so uselessly?

4395 And while the pythons of sickness  
4396 Swallow the children  
4397 And the buffaloes of poverty  
4398 Knock the people down  
4399 And ignorance stands there  
4400 Like an elephant,

4401 The war leaders  
4402 Are tightly locked in bloody feuds,  
4403 Eating each other's liver  
4404 As if the D.P. was leprosy  
4405 And the Congress yaws;  
4406 If only the parties  
4407 Would fight poverty  
4408 With the fury  
4409 With which they fight each other,  
4410 If diseases and ignorance  
4411 Were assaulted  
4412 With the deadly vengeance  
4413 With which Ocol assaults his mother's son,  
4414 The enemies would have been  
4415 Greatly reduced by now.

\*

4416 I am concerned  
4417 About the well-being of our homestead!  
4418 The women there  
4419 Wear mourning clothes

4420 The homestead is surely dead  
4421 The enmity, the black-heartedness,  
4422 The quarrels, the jealousies ...

4423 When the fiends  
4424 That sow smallpox  
4425 Go through our homestead  
4426 That people will be finished,  
4427 Because the insides of the people are bad!  
4428 This will be the gift  
4429 That the political parties have brought!

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And while the pythons of sickness  
Swallow the children  
And the buffaloes of poverty  
Knock the people down

And ignorance stands there  
Like an elephant, / The warleaders  
Are tightly locked in bloody feuds,  
Eating each other's liver . . .

Enlarge this image.

4430 And while the pythons of sickness

4431 Swallow the children

4432 And the buffaloes of poverty  
4433 Knock the people down  
4434 And ignorance stands there  
4435 Like an elephant,/The warleaders  
4436 Are tightly locked in bloody feuds,  
4437 Eating each other's liver ...

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## 12

### *My Husband's House is a Dark Forest of Books*

4438 Listen, my clansmen,  
4439 I cry over my husband  
4440 Whose head is lost.  
4441 Ocol has lost his head  
4442 In the forest of books.

4443 When my husband  
4444 Was still wooing me  
4445 His eyes were still alive,  
4446 His ears were still unblocked,  
4447 Ocol had not yet become a fool  
4448 My friend was a man then!

4449 He had not yet become a woman,  
4450 He was still a free man,  
4451 His heart was still his chief.

4452 My husband was still a Black man  
4453 The son of the Bull  
4454 The son of Agik  
4455 The woman from Okol  
4456 Was still a man,  
4457 An Acoli.

\*

4458 My husband has read much,  
4459 He has read extensively and deeply,  
4460 He was read among white men  
4461 And he is clever like white men

4462 And the reading  
4463 Has killed my man,  
4464 In the ways of his people  
4465 He has become  
4466 A stump.

4467 He abuses all things Acoli,  
4468 He says  
4469 The ways of black people  
4470 Are black  
4471 Because his eyeballs have exploded,  
4472 And he wears dark glasses,  
4473 My husband's house  
4474 Is a dark forest of books.  
4475 Some stand there  
4476 Tall and huge  
4477 Like the *tido* tree

4478 Some are old  
4479 Their barks are peeling off  
4480 And they smell strongly.  
4481 Some are thin and soft.

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4482 The backs of some books  
4483 Are hard like the rocky stem of the *poi* tree,  
4484 Some are green  
4485 Others red as blood  
4486 Some books are black and oily,  
4487 Their backs shine like  
4488 The dangerous *ororo* snake  
4489 Coiled on a tree top.

4490 Some have pictures on their backs,  
4491 Dead faces of witch-looking men and women,  
4492 Unshaven, bold, fat-stomached  
4493 Bony-cheeked, angry revengeful-looking people,  
4494 Pictures of men and women  
4495 Who died long ago.

\*

4496 The papers on my husband's desk  
4497 Coil threateningly  
4498 Like the giant forest climbers,  
4499 Like the *kituba* tree  
4500 That squeezes other trees to death;  
4501 Some stand up,  
4502 Others lie on their backs,  
4503 They are interlocked  
4504 Like the legs of youths  
4505 At the *orak* dance,  
4506 Like the legs of the planks  
4507 Of the *goggo* fence,  
4508 They are tightly interlocked  
4509 Like the legs of the giant forest climbers  
4510 In the impenetrable forest

4511 My husband's house  
4512 Is a mighty forest of books,  
4513 Dark it is and very damp,  
4514 The steam rising from the ground  
4515 Hot thick and poisonous  
4516 Mingles with the corrosive dew  
4517 And the rain drops  
4518 That have collected in the leaves.

4519 They choke you  
4520 If you stay there long,  
4521 They ruin your nose and tongue  
4522 So that you can no longer  
4523 Enjoy the fresh smell of simsim oil  
4524 Or the taste of *malakwang*;

4525 And the boiling darkness  
4526 Bursts your eye balls.  
4527 And the sticky juices  
4528 That drop from the gum trees  
4529 Block the holes of your ears,  
4530 And when ten girls  
4531 Standing on the hillock  
4532 In the moonlight  
4533 Sing *oyele* songs,  
4534 Throwing stones of abuse  
4535 At the rough-skinned ugly old men

4536 Chosen for them as husbands

4537 By their money-loving fathers,

4538 Or when your daughter

4539 Sings a lovely lullaby

4540 To her baby brother

4541 Strapped on her back,

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4542 And she sways forwards and backwards

4543 As she sings

4544 *O baby*

4545 *Why do you cry?*

4546 *Are you ill?*

4547 *O baby stop crying*

4548 *Your mother has fried the aluru birds*

4549 *In ghee!*

4550 When the girls sing *cycle* songs

4551 And the nurse sings her lullaby

4552 You hear only noises,

4553 Noises that disturb you

4554 Like a brick

4555 Thrown on top of the iron roof.

\*

4556 If you stay

4557 In my husband's house long,

4558 The ghosts of the dead men

4559 That people this dark forest,

4560 The ghosts of the many white men

4561 And white women

4562 That scream whenever you touch any book,

4563 The deadly vengeance ghosts

4564 Of the writers

4565 Will capture your head,

4566 And like my husband

4567 You will become

4568 A walking corpse.

4569 My husband's ears are numb,  
4570 He hears the crackling sounds  
4571 Of the gums within the holes of his ears  
4572 And thinks this is the music  
4573 Of his people;  
4574 He cannot hear  
4575 The insults of foreigners  
4576 Who say  
4577 The songs of black men are rubbish!

\*

4578 Listen, my husband,  
4579 Hear my cry!  
4580 You may not know this  
4581 You may not feel so,  
4582 But you behave like  
4583 A dog of the white man!  
4584 A good dog pleases its master,  
4585 It barks at night  
4586 And hunts in the salt lick  
4587 It chases away wild cats  
4588 That come to steal the chicken!  
4589 And when the master calls  
4590 It folds its tail between the legs.

4591 The dogs of white men  
4592 Are well trained  
4593 And they understand English!

4594 When the master is eating  
4595 They lie by the door  
4596 And keep guard  
4597 While waiting for left-overs.

4598 But oh! Ocol  
4599 You are my master and my husband,  
4600 You are the father of these children

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4601 You are a man,  
4602 You are you!



4603 Do you not feel ashamed  
4604 Behaving like another man's dog  
4605 Before your own wife and children?

4606 My husband, Ocol  
4607 You are a Prince  
4608 Of an ancient chiefdom,  
4609 Look,  
4610 There in the middle of the homestead  
4611 Stands your grandfather's Shrine,  
4612 Your grandfather was a Bull among men  
4613 And although he died long ago  
4614 His name still blows like a horn,  
4615 His name is still heard  
4616 Throughout the land.

4617 When he died  
4618 Your father proudly  
4619 Built him that Shrine!  
4620 A true son of his father  
4621 He carried out all the duties  
4622 Of a first-born son.

4623 He himself was a great chief  
4624 Well beloved by his people.  
4625 At the *otole* dance  
4626 He was right in the middle  
4627 Completely surrounded by his host  
4628 Like the termite queen mother,  
4629 But you could spot him  
4630 By his huge head-gear  
4631 Waving like a field of flowering sugar-cane.

4632 In battle he fought at the front  
4633 Fierce like a wounded buffalo-girl,  
4634 When his men struck the enemy  
4635 The heaven shook from its base;

4636 Has the Fire produced Ash?  
4637 Has the Bull died without a Head?

4638 Aaa! A certain man  
4639 Has no millet field,  
4640 He lives on borrowed foods.  
4641 He borrows the clothes he wears  
4642 And the ideas in his head  
4643 And his actions and behaviour  
4644 Are to please somebody else.  
4645 Like a woman trying to please her husband!  
4646 My husband has become a woman!

4647 Then why do you wear a shirt?  
4648 Why do you not tie  
4649 A sheet round your waist  
4650 As other women do?  
4651 Put on the string skirt  
4652 And some beads on your loins!

\*

4653 O, my clansmen,  
4654 Let us all cry together!  
4655 Come,  
4656 Let us mourn the death of my husband,  
4657 The death of a Prince  
4658 The Ash that was produced

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4659 By a great Fire!  
4660 O, this homestead is utterly dead,  
4661 Close the gates  
4662 With *lacari* thorns,  
4663 For the Prince  
4664 The heir to the Stool is lost!  
4665 And all the young men  
4666 Have perished in the wilderness!  
4667 And the fame of this homestead  
4668 That once blazed like a wild fire  
4669 In a moonless night  
4670 Is now like the last breaths  
4671 Of a dying old man!

4672 There is not one single true son left,  
4673 The entire village  
4674 Has fallen into the hands

4675 Of war captives and slaves!  
4676 Perhaps one of our boys  
4677 Escaped with his life!  
4678 Perhaps he is hiding in the bush  
4679 Waiting for the sun to set!

4680 But will he come  
4681 Before the next mourning?  
4682 Will he arrive in time?

4683 Bile burns my inside!  
4684 I feel like vomiting!

4685 For all our young men  
4686 Were finished in the forest,  
4687 Their manhood was finished  
4688 In the class-rooms,  
4689 Their testicles  
4690 Were smashed  
4691 With large books!

### 13

#### *Let Them Prepare the Malakwang Dish*

4692 But Ocol, my husband,  
4693 If you are not yet utterly dead  
4694 And fit only for the stomach of the earth,  
4695 If your heart-string  
4696 Is not yet completely cut,  
4697 If your ghost  
4698 Has not yet escaped and got completely lost,  
4699 If some blood is still flowing  
4700 However faintly,  
4701 Take courage,  
4702 Take a small amount of millet porridge,  
4703 Let them prop you up,  
4704 Drink some fish soup  
4705 Slowly, slowly  
4706 You will recover.

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4707 Chew the roots of *omwombye*.  
4708 It is very bitter

4709 But it will clear your throat.

4710 Let them prepare the *malakwang* dish

4711 Eat the roots of *lurono*

4712 And the roots of your tongue

4713 Will be loosened.

4714 When they have prepared *lukut*,

4715 Eat it,

4716 It will strengthen your knee!

4717 Let them drop simsim oil

4718 Into the holes of your ear,

4719 Let them scoop out the gum

4720 That has filled your ears for so long,

4721 The thick dust you collected

4722 From the altar

4723 And the chaff

4724 From the books

4725 And the useless things

4726 From the magazines and newspapers,

4727 And the radio and television!

4728 Here is some water.

4729 It is luke-warm,

4730 It will not burn you,

4731 Let me pour it for you

4732 So that you may wash your face!

4733 But first

4734 Remove those dark glasses,

4735 Throw them away,

4736 Then remove the scales

4737 That have formed on your eyes

4738 During daylight

4739 When you closed your eyes

4740 In prayer.

4741 Bring the ripe seeds of *labikka*

4742 And scratch Ocol's eyeballs

4743 And remove the blood

4744 That has clotted there,

4745 Put the rhino-horn powder

4746 In his eyes,

4747 Let it stab away

4748 The pus that blocks his eyes!

4749 The blindness that you got in the library

4750 Will be removed by the diviner!

4751 The swelling that has blocked your throat

4752 Will be treated with the shoots of *lapena*

4753 Chew the shoots of *lapena* and *olim*,

4754 Put some salt in the shoots

4755 And swallow the bitter green juice!

4756 You must vomit

4757 The shyness you ate in the church.

4758 Drink raw eggs mixed in millet flour; and if this does not make you feel sick

4759 Put one finger

4760 Deep down your throat!

4761 Clean your teeth with sand,

4762 I will prepare the sand for you

4763 White like the sand

4764 Vomited by the frog!

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4765 Brush your tongue

4766 So thickly coated with bitter insults;

4767 Here is warm water

4768 There is some salt in it,

4769 Gargle it,

4770 Clean your mouth,

4771 Spit out the insults with the water!

4772 The abuses you learnt

4773 From your white masters

4774 And the stupid stubbornness

4775 Spit them down with the water.

\*

4776 And, son of the Bull

4777 When you are completely cured

4778 When you have gained your full strength

4779 Go to the shrine of your fathers,

4780 Prepare a feast,

4781 Give blood to your ancestors,

4782 Give them beer, meat and millet bread,

4783 Let the elders  
4784 Spit blessing on you  
4785 Let them intercede for you  
4786 And pray to the ancestors  
4787 Who sleep in their tombs  
4788 Face upwards.

4789 Beg forgiveness from them  
4790 And ask them to give you  
4791 A new spear  
4792 A new spear with a sharp and hard point.  
4793 A spear that will crack the rock.  
4794 Ask for a spear that you will trust  
4795 One that does not bend easily  
4796 Like the earth-worm.  
4797 Ask them to restore your manhood!  
4798 For I am sick  
4799 Of sharing a bed with a woman!

4800 Ask them to forgive  
4801 Your past stupidity,  
4802 Pray that the setting sun  
4803 May take away all your shyness  
4804 Deceit, childish pride, and sharp tongue!

4805 For when you insulted me,  
4806 Saying  
4807 I was a mere village girl,  
4808 You were insulting your grandfathers  
4809 And grandmothers, your father and mother!  
4810 When you compared me  
4811 With the silly *ojuu* insects  
4812 That sit on the beer pot,  
4813 You were abusing your entire people.  
4814 You were saying  
4815 The customs of your people  
4816 Are like the useless things  
4817 Left in the old homestead.

4818 When you took the axe  
4819 And threatened to cut the *Okango*  
4820 That grows on the ancestral shrine  
4821 You were threatening

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4822 To cut yourself loose,  
4823 To be tossed by the winds  
4824 This way and that way  
4825 Like the dead dry leaves  
4826 Of the *olam* tree  
4827 In the dry season.

4828 When you have recovered properly,  
4829 Go to your old mother  
4830 And ask forgiveness from her;  
4831 Let her spit blessing in your hands;  
4832 And rub the saliva  
4833 On your chest  
4834 And on your forehead!

\*

4835 And I as your first wife,  
4836 Mother of your first-born,  
4837 Mother of your son and daughter,  
4838 I have only one request.  
4839 I do not ask for money  
4840 Although I have need of it,  
4841 I do not ask for meat,  
4842 I can live on green vegetables  
4843 For a while yet.  
4844 Buy clothes for the woman  
4845 With whom I share you,  
4846 Buy beads for her, and perfume;  
4847 And shoes and necklaces, and ear-rings!

4848 When you have gained your full strength  
4849 I have only one request,  
4850 And all I ask is  
4851 That you remove the road block  
4852 From my path.

4853 Here is my bow-harp  
4854 Let me sing greetings to you,  
4855 Let me play for you one song only  
4856 Let me play and sing

4857 The song of my youth:

4858 *She has taken the road to Nimule*

4859 *She will come back tomorrow*

4860 *His eyes are fixed on the road*

4861 *Saying, Bring Alyeka to me*

4862 *That I may see her*

4863 *The daughter of the Bull*

4864 *Has stayed away too long*

4865 *His eyes are fixed on the road*

4866 All I ask

4867 Is that you give me one chance,

4868 Let me praise you

4869 Son of the chief!

4870 Tie ankle bells on my legs

4871 Bring *lacucuku* rattles

4872 And tie them on my legs,

4873 Call the *nanga* players

4874 And let them play

4875 And let them sing,

4876 Let me dance before you,

4877 My love,

4878 Let me show you

4879 The wealth in your house,

4880 Ocol my husband,

4881 Son of the Bull,

4882 Let no one uproot the Pumpkin.

## NOTES

[1] Salt is extracted from the ash of certain plants, and also from the ash of the dung of domestic animals. The ash is put in a container with small holes in its bottom, water is then poured on the ash, and the salty water is collected in another container placed below. The useless saltless ash is then thrown on the pathway and people tread on it.

[2] A chiefdom divinity. Other chiefdom divinities possess only persons within the chiefdom. But Labeja possesses even outsiders, e.g. a mother's brother.

[3] *Lawala* is a hunting game. *Cooro* is a board game.

[4] It is believed that lightning and thunder are caused by a giant reddish-brown bird that is almost identical with the domestic fowl. When it opens its wings lightning flashes and thunder is caused when it strikes with its powerful bolt.

[5] *Odure* is the nickname for small boys who are fond of sitting in the house when mother is cooking. It was derived from a small boy of that name whose penis was burnt by the fire from the stove.

[6] The priest of rain, who presides during the ceremony for rain.



[7] The name of the Christian God in Lwo is *Rubanga*. This is also the name of the ghost that causes tuberculosis of the spine, hence Hunchback.

[8]

<i>Jekcon</i> : Jackson
<i>Paraciko</i> : Francis
<i>Tomcon</i> : Thompson
<i>Gulyelmo</i> : William
<i>Iriko</i> : Erik

[9]

<i>Medikijedeki</i> : Milchizedek
<i>Gilirigoloyo</i> : Gregory

[10] Pagak is the place of no return, Death's homestead.

[11] The name of the Christian God in Lwo is *Rubanga*. This is also the name of the ghost that causes tuberculosis of the spine, hence Hunchback.

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