

Lumumba's Gold Tooth

Salawu Olajide
August 9, 2022



*And in the casket came a tooth,
Burden of four pallbearers*

There is a heavy weight to this tooth
Extracted in cruel colonial jest from the jaw
Of an assassinated patriot, like priceless coltan
From Katanga's bleeding bowels
Belgium's burden
Congo's catastrophe
Sixty years, memento of the King's colonial guard
Now glittering trophy in the age of calculated diplomacy

Once member of the parliament
Of a mouth that dared to speak
When silence was safe (and profitable)
And the King owned the natives

And all they owned, this tell-tale tooth
Invokes the ghosts of
Murdered millions, stubborn scars
And other blessings of the Civilizing Mission
There is a heavy weight to this tooth
Its lavishly upholstered casket
Its fit-and-proper pallbearers
Their mock-heroic enactments

Erie requiem in a city
Once named for Leopold
When the Cold War was hot
The Warriors blind with murderous impunity
Drumrolls, triumphal trumpets
Thunderous anthems
A flotilla of flags
From the visiting King, a proclamation of "profound regret". . .

Will Mrs Lumumba now open this casket
And kiss her loving husband?

Niyi Osundare is a leading African poet, dramatist, critic, essayist, and media columnist. He has authored 18 books of poetry, two books of selected poems with several literary laurels to his credits.

