

The Empowering Bequest of AAA – 1940–2023

Vincent O. Odamtten 

How does one compile a dossier on someone whose abilities as a writer transcend multiple genres, whose activities involve multiple disciplines, and whose personhood embodies so many roles, someone who has touched so many lives and spoken to countless people? One can only attempt to follow her lead, and so...

Awestruck about Her Who Said Yes to the Gloaming of a Closing Night

A stone's throw from the crash of the sea
where houses made of blood and rock
painted white to show our dark shadow-play,
a child was born in the village of Kyeakor
some say there were two born that day a girl
child and a boy child, but he arriving late, so
late, chose not to stay

They say the girl child heard sweet and bitter songs she heard
songs of our ancestors, and those yet to be born Ama Ata
Aidoo was a gifted child, others say a strange one, born
before her time or out of time, hearing the rhythms beneath
forgotten memories, she heard and danced to the buried
drumbeat of dreams yet to come for she knew *The Dilemma
of a Ghost*, or ghosts the desires and hopes of other girl
children like Anowa lost in madness or second vision,
warrior women struggling alone who knew why their twin
refused to stay in the darkened world because there was *No
Sweetness Here*

As some stumbled in the darkness, our Yaa Asantewaa, Amina, Nzinga
knew her journeys were not into hearts of darkness or illusions of power

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but with the steady gaze of *Our Sister Killjoy* whose black-eyed squint set the sharp yet comforting words flowing from her lips and fingers hushed the gossip and babble of the market crowd, so we might hear *Someone Talking to Sometime* to learn the simple wisdom of *The Eagle, and the Chickens*, or *The Birds and Other Poems*, or *The Days*

Spent in exile, demonstrate your pan-Africanism, your love of our beautiful Black selves, a variety of shapes and styles, no matter where you go, know

An Angry Letter in January can still convey the complexity of these feelings a cautionary tale

for women if not men, stories of courtship, marriage, family all bring *Changes: a love story*, and

even that ends in death. The only thing they say which does not end, and we are left with the hope that

the solution lies in *The Girl Who Can And Other Stories* of struggles and negotiations about

Diplomatic Pounds and Other Stories trusting that politicians and those in office know that they

are powerless, even after all the pomp and glitter

After the Ceremonies: new and selected poems for the next generation

After the rituals, the tears, the keening, and mourning, we wake, we awake to the new morning for we cannot mourn for she took us through this neocolonial night, she who stayed beyond the “Images of Africa at Century’s End” to assure us that

despite *Rejection* gossip, or depression on our way to, or from this or that funeral

we can, and we will make time enough this time to celebrate you, your sisters, and your brothers who have gone, as you slipped first into this world, so you have

closed your gold-tipped eyelashes one last time, as I bent to kiss your cheek, to join the ancestors, your other self who said, “No to the Glare of the Open Day,” to

lead the way for your sister who fought with *The Heart of Her Mind*, to leave us to say “Yes” loudly and clearly, as you did, so say all of us:

say “Yes!” “Yes!”

This poem was

written for Ama

Ata Aidoo, for

inclusion in her

funeral brochure,

as a tribute to her

and in response to

her own poetic

acknowledgement

to her twin
 brother who was
 stillborn. This
 latter point may
 come as a surprise
 to some, but Ama
 Ata Aidoo
 discloses as much
 in the epigraph to
 the poem, “Who
 Said No to the
 Glare of the Open
 Day” from the
 collection
*Someone Talking
 to Sometime*. The
 choice seemed an
 appropriate text to
 be in conversation
 with as I grappled
 with the shock
 and grief of no
 longer being able
 to speak with,
 share a meal or
 drink tea together.
 Someone I had
 known for over a
 half century, with
 whom I had done
 all those human
 things, now I
 carry her smile,
 her laugh, the
 taste of her
 cooking in my mind. I have
 only the
 memories now,
 and I suddenly
 was shaken by the
 loneliness she
 must have felt to
 write, “Who Said
 No to the Glare of
 the Open Day.”
 As I returned to
 that poem, it
 struck me that she
 had done a

wonderful thing,
 and “We No
 more Fear These
 images of Hell”
 she brought a
 feeling of
 connectedness,
 not just with her
 stillborn brother,
 with her own
 personal sense of
 loss, of
 detachment from
 others, the *other*
 she could
 not know, her
 words bridged
 that gap,
 embracing the
 anguish of the
 mother who has
 had too many
 babies, too few,
 the ones who cry
 for joy, for pain,
 for the lost
 phrase, that
 eloquent turn that
 describes this
 world with

Aching groins
 where they say
 lie all other
 million tales for
 the telling of
 which even

that eternity
 shall not give me
 time enough.

No, not time
 enough.

So even as her words suggest, seem to insist on the impossibility of an embrace across this lacuna of mortality, she reaches me, reaches us with her bequest of words, this Bird of the Wayside, my Sister Killjoy whose Black-Eyed Squint

belies the warmth and compassion beneath. It is only then that I open my laptop and begin to tap, tap, tap the words she wishes to hear, the words others need to hear, to write, to speak.

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