

POETRY

BEFORE THE BREAKING OF THE FAST

By Tijan M. Sallah

The disquiet in waking up, heaven subsiding.
Grace suddenly abandoned. Desires awaken.
 To the temptations of the sun.
The dreams the night before, carved out
 In my conscience, transported me
Through the radiance of beauty, showed me
 The reigns and raptures of Timbuktu.
 Mansa Kankang Musa, Sunni Ali,
 The weight of a past rich as embroidery.

The revelations on the pillow, a heaven
 Squinting through our shortness of memory
 And exaggeration of vision.
Exquisite empires, kingdoms of gold,
Iron and bronze. The goldsmiths' hands,
The blacksmiths' patience, the glow
 Of fire and dust.

Time leaves no scrolls for memory;
 The wand of the future marches
 To cover expired heavens.

Griots should rise, pluck
The fiery strings, evoke the roots,
And leave us with memory-scrolls.
 For who should forget,
 Empires, rare as mermaids,
 Profuse with Grace?

Griots should rise,
With batik-cloth worn as mantle,
And a voice fresher than honey.

Our branches, civilized comforts,
 Are only desolate cages.
We need a calabash of dreams
 To feed us into the Green Age.

UFAHAMU

O gods, the disquiet in waking up,
And be engulfed in redemptive memory.
Hunger biting my entrails,
But absorbed in meditative thirst.
My mind soars backward to Kingdoms - of - Grace
Before the Breaking of the Fast.