

The mortal soul

(Is there need to invest in permanent things in this world?)

The long merciless hand when it takes you away
 You will part with your house, car, all that you own
 All that you have sweated for, gathered day by day
 Will now be possessed by relatives once you are gone

You will take nothing with you, not a jewel not a penny
 Better then to learn to live without the good things you own
 For the soil in its selfish mode won't provide you any
 But will let you lie there, empty, naked as you were born

Or, better still, you can try and be dead in Ghana
 Where for example if you are a well-known farmer
 You can be buried in a coffin the shape of a banana
 A driver in a bus, a carpenter in a mallet or a hammer

At least that will make you feel a little worthwhile
 You won't regret a bit for having worked so hard
 And lost everything at once; your enormous verse file
 Will be there, open round you, in case you were a bard

But even those West Africans don't have any luck
 For when in the soil you won't identify the colours
 The saintly white, the ash grey, or the funeral black
 The mortal soul knows only the red on the flowers.

Don't cry

If I die, don't cry
 Because I would become a rose flower
 Grow in your flower garden
 And exude fragrance
 You will pick me during Christmas
 Display me during birthdays
 Smell me during wedding ceremonies
 I will be part of you
 So, if I die, don't cry

If I die, don't be grieved
 Because I would become a pumpkin leaf
 Grow in your vegetable garden
 Pick me for supper in the evenings
 Cook me in the kitchen at nights
 I will be at the dining table with you
 So, if I die, don't be grieved

If I die, don't moan
 Because I will become rain
 Fall down from the sky
 Gather me by the gutters
 And wash kitchen utensils with me
 I will be in your kitchen
 So, if I die, don't moan

If I die, don't scream
 Because I will become a tree
 Grow in the corner of our homestead
 Cut me occasionally for firewood
 Keep a heap of me in your kitchen
 Make fire and cook *ugali* with me
 I will be part of the household
 So, if I die, don't scream

A withering rose

I saw a rose flower at the hedgerow
 Withering, leaves stuck together
 Like skinny limbs of a human being
 Flaccid and of pallid complexion

Bedraggled in the rainy weather
 The rose had become coldly lifeless
 I became so sad and felt like crying
 Thinking that at one time in its life

It was open to hilarious joy and happiness
 With richness of colour, life and vitality
 Carried on its body the symbol of LOVE
 And swains picked it for their beloveds

Now it was wilting, life juicing out of it
 A sick person who eventually would die
 Tears gathered at the corner of my eye
 I wanted to sob and grieve for the dead

Suddenly a small bee came flitting in
 Hovered for a while above the flower
 Its hum a dirge, a solemn expression
 Of the bereavement, the inevitable loss

It couldn't get the nectar upon the fading leaves
 A Sordid mass of dark green, tasteless wetness
 The bee flew away in disappointment, as if
 From a carcass, a near-decomposed corpse

Bitter tears rolled down from my eyes
 I sobbed silently for the loss, for the fact that
 Every beautiful thing, at one time, must
 Decay and die, vanish completely from the earth

Who will then ever know we were here?
 That we once joyfully and exuberantly existed?
 Who will recall the beauty of our colours?
 Explain how we were a source of life and love?