

Is This the Freedom for Which We Died?

from the poem in isiZulu by the author

Whenever I stop to think deeply
during these days of violent change
I meet up with the martyrs for freedom.

I see Steve Biko again
and Achmad Timol
and David Webster,
all, all of them killed by deeds of hatred.

I also see Nelson Mandela
who was buried alive in prison
but stepped from his tomb still living
and is the Lazarus of our times.

These are the heroes I think of often,
that knock at the doors of our memory,
that travel around this country of ours
looking about them and talking
like ancestral spirits of the new South Africa.

Going into the home of a drunkard
they see him beating his wife and children.
Says one of the heroes, 'Look at that!
Is this the freedom for which we died?'

Entering the townships
they find the skies full of flames
and people running confusedly around the streets
like termites whose homes have been kicked over.
Another says, 'Oh! what a disgrace!
Is this the freedom for which we died?'

Going into a school
they see two boys stabbing each other,
the pupils over-ruling the teachers.
Says another of the heroes, 'And look at that!
Is this the freedom for which we died?'

Walking the streets at night
they find the homes locked and barred
as if the people had built their own prisons
and lived inside them huddled in fear.
Another of them says, 'I can't believe it!
Is this the freedom for which we died?'

These are the heroes I think of often,
these are the shades of the new South Africa
and this is the question they ask of the living,
'Where is the freedom for which we died?'

