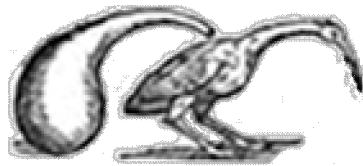


Segue

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MARTIN WILLITTS JR.



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Managing Editor: Michelle Lawrence

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Where Did The Children Go?

They were driven into the coffin-nail rain
taken by night birds.

Don't you hear their mothers calling?
Their voices are empty pots.

Don't you hear them chanting
the names of the missing, stolen, lost?

They bury the names.
I lock the door & turn away

wondering: *am I next?*
A child has only so many options.

I hear my name.
Where is my child? Where is my child?

Why Do They Always Come During The Rainy Season?

Nothing grows anymore. Our bellies swell like yams.
The flies eat at us. We are too tired to swish them away.

We can tell they are coming by the dust approaching.
We cannot hide fast enough. There are never enough trees.

They are buzzards. They devour whatever is left behind.
They come after us with machetes and vicious smiles.

They uproot us. We are small animals flushed out by hunters.
They kill us at random, at leisure, for sport.

They toss some carcasses on a car hood and pose for a camera.
They wear protective gloves to avoid diseases.

They refuse to touch us, unless they are raping our girls.
They call this re-education. But we do not learn anything.

We return like drought. We return in spite of the killing.
We return too tired to run and we have nowhere to go.

They return with the rainy season.
They return drenching the ground with blood.

About the Work

“Where Did The Children Go?” is from a collection of poems all on the same theme about war/peace. I am concerned about the effects of war on the land and the survivors. This particular poem is about a generalized imagined war in no particular time period but I was thinking about Darfur. I think by aiming towards a general war it makes this poem more universal and you can relate it to any vicious war that involve the displacement of children.

Three things are needed for this poem: Tempo, the unrelenting tempo, like a drum beat; the two line structure; and, voice (is this one speaker, or many speakers?). If the poem is successful you feel the lament and it should haunt you.

Any poem is like a bonsai plant. It can grow real erratic. You can try to prune it and shape it, but sometimes it is better to just leave it alone to see what interesting shape it can take. I work in both extremes. Sometimes I snip at the tiniest words, and remove them completely or struggle to find a better word. Sometimes I write one time and do no revisions. But I let the poem grow in my head before I write anything.

At one point I did the poem at a slam reading with drumming on a stool while reciting it to see if the poem worked with sound that I wanted in the words. A writer would call this iambic beats. I am almost 60 so I tend to stick out at a slam.

I want two people to look at the same poem and see two different things, or a reader to look at my poem twice and see something they have not seen before. This is the same effect many painters try to accomplish.

About the Author

Martin Willitts, Jr. is co-editor of hotmetalphess.net where he was judge of their first chapbook contest and co-judge of their current contest. He has two chapbooks by Pudding House Press, *Falling In and Out of Love* (2005), and *Lowering Nets of Light* (2007). Two online chapbooks appear online: *Farewell—the journey now begins* (LanguageandCulture.net, 2006), and *News from the Front* ([Slow Trains](http://SlowTrains), 2007). Willitts also edited a poetry anthology about cancer, *Alternatives to Surrender* (Plain View Press, 2007), and a full length book of poems with his artwork called *The Secret Language of the Universe* (March Street Press, 2006).

Martin Willitts Jr. on the Web:

www.mindfirereneew.com/fireweedaug2006/interviewaug06.html

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