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## Ngwatilo Mawiyoo

### **Found: Portrait Of Umau's Early Days**

With Tom Mboya's *Freedom And After*

My father knew in his own mind that we were Africans, eyesores to the Europeans. My mother later decided I was born to go to school. With complete power over us, the missionaries insisted we must be Christians to learn to read and write. What my father wanted for his children: payment for the way they punished us. So I was sent to a local mission school to be converted, fully accepted as one of them. I still remember how dry it was in the reserve where farmers could own land: it was scrub and thorn trees, soldiers. Evenings we merely ate and slept. There was no education. The missionaries lived very simply and very tribally. I came to know their language and tribal customs, to behave very much like them. By the age of twenty-eight I was known to be good, enlightened. When I became a teacher at a mission school, with a wife and family, I determined to have a better standard of life, not a mud-and-wattle hut with no sanitary facilities and no piped water. Only traveling helped me remember how we were bought, made into investments against Europe's old age. The passionate hopes of my father haunted me in those early years, those sacraments between parents and children.

### **Found: Eulogy For My Father**

With J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship Of The Ring*

It may seem magical, the world:  
full, hard and perilous,  
fond of estrangement,  
the mountains rich and peculiar.

He brought back from his travels  
something exceptional:  
rumour of the coming event –

(perfect truth isn't natural.)

The talk did not die down  
in the hills or run off the mountains,  
and ancient people love peace.

He had never seen his dreams,  
the dark past in the heart  
of fireside-tales, children  
walking in ways difficult to tell  
until one is far away.

Money was running out.  
It was well known,  
a matter of fact.

At the end of June  
he went off at dawn  
forgot his troubles.

The morning refreshed a string  
of banished questions:  
Am I content to go out,  
to fly below the trees?

### **Night Swim**

This black Pacific, a universe.  
In its playfield, I am the silver  
Pinball sphere; child  
god driving a glimmer train  
of bioluminescence.

See plankton glow in praise  
when I draw near,  
see me splash that water up  
like fireworks. Perhaps this

creation in rapture will meet  
my Father, after, tell him I am  
almost naked, neither cold  
nor ashamed.

### **Ngwatilo Mawiyoo**

Ngwatilo Mawiyoo's recent poems appear, or are forthcoming, in *The Malabat Review*, *Room*, *Wasafiri* and *Pidgeonholes*. The author of two chapbooks – *Dagoretti Corner* and *Blue Mothertongue* – received her MFA from the University of British Columbia. Ngwatilo makes her writing/directing debut in 2021 with her short film, *Joy's Garden*.

“Found: Portrait Of Umuau's Early Days” first appeared in *Poetry Is Dead*.

“Night Swim” first appeared in *Dagoretti Corner*.