

# Death in the Dawn (1967)

## By Wole Soyinka (Nigeria)

*Driving to Lagos one morning a white cockerel flew out of the dusk and smashed itself against my windscreen. A mile further I came across a motor accident and a freshly dead man in the smash.*

Traveller, you must set out  
At dawn. And wipe your feet upon  
The dog-nose wetness of earth.

5 Let sunrise quench your lamps, and watch  
Faint brush pricklings in the sky light  
Cottoned feet to break the early earthworm  
On the hoe. Now shadows stretch with sap  
Not twilight's death and sad prostration

10 This soft kindling, soft receding breeds  
Racing joys and apprehensions for  
A naked day, burdened hulks retract,  
Stoop to the mist in faceless throng  
To wake the silent markets-- swift, mute  
Processions on grey byways...

15                               On this  
Counterpane, it was--  
Sudden winter at the death  
Of dawn's lone trumpeter, cascades  
Of white feather-flakes, but it proved  
A futile rite. Propitiation sped  
20 Grimly on, before.

The right foot for joy, the left, dread  
And the mother prayed, Child  
May you never walk  
When the road waits, famished.  
Traveller you must set forth  
25 At dawn.

I promise marvels of the holy hour  
Presages as the white cock's flapped  
Perverse impalement-- as who would dare  
The wrathful wings of man's Progression...

30 But such another Wraith! Brother,  
Silenced in the startled hug of  
Your invention-- is this mocked grimace  
This closed contortion-- I?



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born 1934