

Troubles

I have the memory of the quay at Kinshasa,
yes, of leaning on the blebbed rail of the steamer
as it left behind the lined-up dads
dwindling into sheds and the blind
bush of a bend. Though what we fled had

spun lint turbans, blood-spotted,
around their heads and torn some collars
they grinned, nevertheless, sliding past us,
each side mimicking
the other's waves, as if glad to be gone.

A lot of dads, and behind them the invisible
mobs with chains, fabricated *pangas*,
the Congo's soft ovals of harm.
At any rate, what I remember
is not so clear that I cannot bear

the smothered feelings of loss, nor feel
the steamer's slow pulling away
in a tremble of throbs under my feet
some thirty-four years later, fearful still
(the airport closed, the pot-holed roads

mutinous with steam, a whole country's
steering gone) of growing up
and being left behind there, waving with
my sticking-plastered hand until
everything I love is lost beyond the bend.