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National Museum of African American History and Culture

The Literary Corner: Introduction to African English Poetry with Brooks Robinson (side a)

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WEBVTT

00:04:18.000 --> 00:04:22.000

<i>Dennis Brutus</i>: addressed to my sister-in-law, my brother's wife, Martha.

00:04:22.000 --> 00:04:26.000

And they deal mainly with my prison experiences.

00:04:26.000 --> 00:04:29.000

<i>Brooks B. Robinson</i>: Why did you write directly to her?

00:04:29.000 --> 00:04:36.000

<i>Dennis Brutus</i>: Um... I didn't in fact write directly to her, but they were-- the letters were intended for her.

00:04:36.000 --> 00:04:43.000

And I call them letters because it had become a crime for me to write poems.

00:04:43.000 --> 00:04:46.000

It was criminal for me to write poetry.

00:04:46.000 --> 00:04:49.000

But by calling it letters, I could get away with it.

<i>Brooks B. Robinson</i>: Mhm.

00:04:49.000 --> 00:04:57.000

<i>Dennis Brutus</i>: And subsequently, these were collected together with the poems I wrote after I came out of South Africa.

00:04:57.000 --> 00:05:05.000

--I was exiled which means I can come out but I can't go back except to go to prison.

00:05:05.000 --> 00:05:15.000

And many of those such as poems from Algiers and Strains were collected together in a book called The Simple Last.

00:05:15.000 --> 00:05:24.000

Since then I haven't written a great deal, although I have a new book coming out called Stubborn Hope.

00:05:24.000 --> 00:05:36.000

But the poems I'm going to read are poems written subsequent to those and they deal very much with the contemporary South African experience.

00:05:36.000 --> 00:05:49.000

The first one I might read is a very short one, written after the massacre of the students in Soweto in June 1976.

00:05:49.000 --> 00:06:03.000

When the South African Police machine-gunned the students in the streets of the ghettos, cape town, Port Elizabeth, Durban, East London, and especially Johannesburg. Particularly Soweto.

00:06:03.000 --> 00:06:10.000

This is a short piece for the children who died in Soweto.

00:06:10.000 --> 00:06:22.000

[[music plays]]

00:06:22.000 --> 00:06:22.649

Sorrow--



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