**One Sack for Sigele:** *Malawi in a Famine*

Richard Lister

Edged with a murmur

of fishermen, the lake burns

with fragments of sun.

Nearby, maize plants tilt,

blanched and bereft of cobs.

The staple crop has failed.

We bring four sacks of maize

to this, our guard Chiso’s village.

The huts are smartly thatched,

smooth walls daubed with black

flowers, a boat, red waves.

Here they can fish the lake,

are close to market, better off

than most. The women ululate

till the flour is out, then their hands writhe,

fast as snakes, to scoop, grasp and live.

Three more jumbled hours by pickup

take us to the village of Yakobe,

our other guard. The stone-stumbled

track runs out on a mountain slope.

His people sweat life with a few knobbly goats

painted umber by the dust.

The sunlight has the kiss

of molten metal on my skin.

They welcome us with gentle smiles.

Our four sacks of maize

are softly parceled out. Boys in shorts

scatter with cupfulls along the paths.

They leave one whole sack for Sigele,

a widow with a twisted foot.

The sack is left, lent on a hut.

Priceless and unguarded.