The “P” Is Silent

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Artist’s Statement:

This poem is a reflection, in personal and professional terms, on the inadequacy of the term “*Post* Traumatic Stress Disorder” to describe people’s real-life experience of trauma in the contemporary world. My own experience of walking into my home following a burglary catapulted images and sensations of trauma into my consciousness. I became aware that my living in a high-crime environment put me in a constant state of vigilance. A sort of *Pre* Traumatic Stress Disorder. In my work as a psychologist, I often feel inauthentic in working with the “post” of PTSD, realizing that a sense of traumatization has preceded and will follow the traumatic event for most South Africans. I think of how the diagnosis of PTSD, first used to describe soldiers’ responses to combat-related trauma, might be ineffectual in the context of the modern geopolitical environment. War, combat, poverty, political instability, forced global migration, and the suffering that these disruptive sociopolitical events foist on daily life and safe spaces beleaguer people as they roam the planet in search of solace and sanctuary. Trauma seems continuous and inescapable. There is no *post* trauma, no after trauma. The “P” is silent. In a cruel but poetic irony, the “p” is silent in the articulation of the words psychology, psychiatry, and psychotherapy, mutely screaming a tacit ineptitude that we have yet to acknowledge, voice, and challenge.

The “P” Is Silent

A house harshly hushed
Lights on, no one home
Restless dogs mean nothing
Decrypt alarm to gain entry
Unpack travel paraphernalia
Settle back into sacred space
Soundless glass on a bedroom floor
A rock screaming silently on porcelain tiles
The night has climbed in
Through a vast window
Accompanied by nameless panic
A package labelled “Post Traumatic Stress Disorder”
Mr. and Mrs. E. Veryone and family
One to Infinity Any Street, South Africa
PTSD
The “P” is silent
Return to sender
No “post” at this address
But someone is always home
Waiting
For the letter that will never come
Announcing
“We hereby declare
The End
To traumatic stress in South Africa”
PTSD
Post delivered, message received
No need to block your mind
To children, raped
Fathers in homes, shot
Mothers lying about
Everything being OK
Don’t give it another thought
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder,
PTSD
The “P” is silent
If no Post arrives at your address
Consult a Psychologist...maybe a Psychiatrist
Either way
The “P” is silent.

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