

Poetry Series

Chima Ononogbu
- poems -

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Chima Ononogbu()

A Biafran Hero

Many years ago
on those scabrous trees
on their lankiest branches, I usually sat
in the earliest rising of my voyage
staring deep, staring hard
into the heart of the leaves that thoughtfully swayed
while in my mind migrating back and forth
to the future yet in distance unknown.

In those days, when we spoke in whispers
because our voices were to them rebellions
hunted and beaten down, shot down
by heads crested by helmets of camouflaged skin
and in their hands laid shiny rods; cocked oppression guns
from whose mouths flew out orange flames
that creased our shoulders and bruised our heads
and made many souls go away and never to return
and night and day we chorused elegies to exhaustion.

Then, whereupon we scattered-
many keeled over and tumbled like aged frail stones
although the dark alleys would not take us
for fear the glib roaming lights may betray us
so across spooky ravines and ruffled rivers we pattered
but on malodorous swamps we dodged and ducked
our faces hid away under farting brushes
where our hopes despaired like never before.

On and on in silence we cuddled our cries
there in sad straits we sprawled, forlorn of comfort
wandering about for hopes which never came
and with pessimism we gawked, looked forth
for where the restoration voice would come.
Many voices came but none could stand
the breaking snaps of autumn beating rain
as broken reeds, they rose and fell
as moons came and went.

Down the twilight of injustice further we drifted

our pain more severe
our fear unencumbered, like pusillanimous vagrants
always on the go but going nowhere.
There in our tree bunkers, in the night hours
we groveled to pray the prayer of the hopeless dying
when as dawn began to break hope hove in sight
a voice, your voice, roared as a young lion
rolled through acreages
and through isthmus of fire and blood
wafted into our ears with as rushing melodies.

Then to our feet we stood with hands outstretched
to touch the face of our hope so new
up and up it grew as your voice thundered, ricocheted
shaking to a tear injustice walls, unclasping shackles
the blood-eyed government, seized by apoplexy
by crippling fear
then our unfreedom tumbled into hapless shards
and as rafts floated into their morning mourn.

Then on freedom lanes, rang loud cries of falling shackles
thereof its golden path trod the majesty of our heroes past
and marched our feet, dispelling obeisance
rising onto the glory of Biafra to unite
with our destiny, that eternally endure.

Nnamdi Kanu

When history gathers its sands
on its golden sand
shall your name be etched a Biafran hero; a bellwether.

Chima Ononogbu

A Bridge

And yes, I know, really well,
that life is a bridge between quicksand and deep sea.

I know its temperament like I know the face of the moon.
I know it because, sometimes, it blows as winter air around us,
permeating our being gently, and soothingly,
and we inhale every bit of its scents as rose, as colorful air,
and feel ensconced in the arms of effervescent stars
as if cushioned away from all reeling about a world at sea.

Other times, in alternate season, life,
like a whirlwind rips through us
as though we are of the stature of a weightless wet leaf
and we are blown into pieces,
blown away like ashes chastised and chased away,
and then flushed down by gravity into a gloomy void,
where darkness breeds and grooms its young.

In this twilight zone between a mountain and a valley floats life
flanked by molecules of dull and sparkling light. It could bark as a furious storm
with staccato thunders or whistle as cheerful wind with fingers that tickle.

So true; life is an ageless twin of medieval saga,
primitive yet endless;
in its coolest a pleasant face of innocent toddler,
while in its scariest the deathly fangs of a viper.
Always and often a fixture on the edges of chipping away time,
always present yet feels invisible as celestial empire.

Yes, life, I know your many changing faces that revolve as if on a gyre roped in
bright and dark light.

I most certainly can diagram your faceless angles
yet with piercing eyes of a summer wind that blows every which way and
disappearing into darkening cloud to fall down
as water that swims along a channel of sweet and sour,
and we are destined to drink it just as it is.

Chima Ononogbu

A Dragon-Mouthed Lunatic

Oppression everywhere; people scurrying,
scurrying away from a lunatic,
a dragon-mouthed lunatic drunk from a cocktail of blood.
No one is safe;
safety is old and abandoned;

no, crushed,
ground to a dusty pulp,
by its steel-ripping claws, terrifying
the rocks tremble and fall a splitting fall.

Soldiers hooves thudding,
raging boots with teeth as a saw,
the walls yelping cracks,
fretful horses whinnying and waking sleeping nights,
and frozen people scaling through clapping windows.

Turmoil wrecks the peace of peace,
towns beleaguered by red-eyed khakis with guns in hands,
bullets flying with lightening speed,
burning the streets;
freaking out, the rattled nocturnal air smokes smoke.

Broken flesh everywhere falling like chilled dumps,
melting cell by cell.
What a nation!
A saber-toothed bug is on the prowl,
drilling blood in the marrow of freedom;
feeding notorious fear,
shredding the flesh of voices to a broken silence.
Brutality roams the street, terror in legions.

A government - a dragon-mouthed lunatic - the dregs of humanity
in a convulsion like a dog wagged by its tail.
Oh Nigeria, when will life be life, and not terror?
When will swords be sheathed away in their scabbards?
Guns in their hosts?

Never, never, I hear;

your voice writhes life with furor of terror.
You are an unchanging terror
sewed up in oppression of them
in cottages so lowly - people so voiceless.

A government, threading thrillingly on injustice wide plains,
while stigmatizing justice as a sprawling dung.
Democracy is supposed to taste as a sweet nectar,
but this democracy swings brutality like a grim reaper.

Chima Ononogbu

A Friendly Foe

In those earliest happy days,
when life at its freshest,
a spirited lad I really was; so innocent, so angelic maybe,
always in my father's loving arms cradled,
and on my mother's sturdy balmy back swaddled.

Those glory days of my babyhood,
rambunctious as a cruelly gentle leopard,
with a pair of unsullied chatoyant eyes -
deep in unstained grace,
I viewed the spherical face of the world;
So tenderly she stroked my fontanel
and my nose she nuzzled so softly.

Then at any turn of my face,
puffy as a young brown jelly,
laughter rang so loud I chuckled so hard;
pleasantly adorned with warmness of strangers
which in my eyes triggered sparks of electricity
that in seamless bluish waves
lightened up the face of the sky
dithering between gloom and cheerfulness.

The world, then, pricked my skin so softly
I thought her so gentle,
then my head I stuck further out of its socket
for more tender strokes of hers, much more than before,
but less and less they came, then vanished;
her face changed, arid with laughter,
congealing into a frown of Mephistopheles.

Then ever clear it became I was no longer a child,
the fulgurant coverlet over me, gone, far gone,
pulled off by hands of fleeting time,
and now reality besieged me; a bitter sweet reality,
flapping on and on like a neurotic thunderbird
clutching down on a stray away thunder.

The cold burning hands of the world tugged at me

to slam me face down with the fury of a nursing mother hen,
never to remember my innocent face in years gone-by.
To escape this onslaught, I no more swing the lead,
but grew up to face the world for who she is:
a friendly foe.

Chima Ononogbu

A People Abandoned

I know of a people abandoned,
whose dusk never turns to dawn,
light has refused to flush away their nights,
so their lives are lived in the hours of an owl;
under skies in midnight apparitions, they tremble and fall,
riding roughshod over them incubuses.

I know of a people gasping for life,
whose world is sorrow's cup,
whose hopes are as crushed clays
soaked in waters of despair.
They dwell and toil in burning swamps;
on slick hillsides with drifts temperament.

I know of a people chased away from food,
stung out by hunger, driven down the back alleys of kismet,
where cries wall up to a watery fortress.
Around them, eerie dungs of poverty pile up,
creaking under the tiny paws of children hawking for pittances,
whose tomorrow is immolated for the greed of today;
these children, don in rags, starve around riches.

They're the people beaten down by political oppression,
cast away by a social class with teeth like a great white shark;
they're the abused, whose faces are grim tales of despondency,
slashed and scarred daily by the whip of injustice
and, with thorny tendrils, leashed to the gates of horror.
What a people, a helpless bunch!
littered carelessly along the reeky streets of Nigeria!

They've cried themselves to fear, their voices bound by threats,
now can't talk, nor whisper,
their tongues are heavy with tragedies;
their legs from the beatings of political cudgel swollen,
and can't carry them.
Around them, vultures gather,
waiting upon their fall, upon the loss of their bid for life,
to make a feast of their soon abandoned carcasses.

A Time

It snows and snows around town,
around family dinner table where faces grin,
around the fireplace where tongues of flames, lovely and gentle,
lick up the sores of the old days and heal their wounds,
around fine trees decked with tinsels and florid ribbons,
and their foothills ringed with packages in garbs of colors,
which light up the eyes with electricity,
and blot out dark fumes that eclipse the heart,
driving out smiles from even the hardest of faces.

Libation is cast that appeases the divinity of peace.
Now the firmament gulps up peace, that fills its abode,
divides its grains among the moon, sun, and stars.
The abundant residues, it spills like showery waters,
watering the root and stem of a world with tapering hope,
yet evermore fuse its air with fragrances of juniper,
thus binding its scattered pieces with the band of grace.

What a time, so passionately enduring!
a time in the deep of divine,
in the solemnity of love and becoming kindness;
when heavenly hosts are in heavenly communion,
the earthly inhabitants uttering unearthly choruses,
so powerful, the head of the whispering wind in reverence bend,
the eyes of the cloud in frightening amazement light up,
while the lonely bells in bouts of worshipping dance swing.

Oh, a time, a healing time!
Unblemish in spirit and wrap in the soul that succors.
Although love is scarce yet abundant to bind wounded hearts.
This time, the fury of our past is the peace of our present,
and our pathways lit with sparks that shout from our future,
guiding us holistically to the place where our joy heaves in sight;
there, our eternity dwells.

Chima Ononogbu

A World A Mystery

The belfries chime oddly and always,
the alarm bells go off in endless rampage,
the town-crier rends the native air with despair,
while day and night cries roam at our elbows.

On a gyre turns the world, as a rambling rollercoaster,
spinning frequently as though in a terminal vertigo,
aggravating the heart to sing lugubrious songs,
and the eyes to bat behind their lids in melancholic silence.

The temperature rises to an outrage;
the wide firmament yelps strange air that wakes many questions,
that sends the mind on a grueling marathon of fear
and wrecks uncertainty upon flailing heart.

That is the fate of being and feeling,
of traversing the woods the lands the seas of a choppy world
that, each day life returns in the morning,
vents its frustration in mournful comic.

Indeed a mysterious arena, the world of the world,
where we are obliged to tent under sorrow's brushes,
drink from the wild jar of bitter chardonnay,
yet again obliged to adorn ourselves with drapery of euphoria.

Chima Ononogbu

Alpha Child

Greatness, my child, is your lot,
the golden dream after which for you I seek,
even before my first glance at your face,
so had I prayed.

I prayed the rivers,
I prayed the gentle dews,
I prayed the glorious sways,
of joy in your arteries to perpetually flow.

Alpha child, my heartbeat I bare,
that you climb the wind to your sky,
stand on the scalps of the mountains,
to mount the throne of your greatness.

For this, the nightingale joyfully sings,
the pines spray the night with fragrant melodies
that animate the leaves to a wavy dance.
Gladly, these foreshadow your glorious rise.

Now dream beyond my dreams,
pray prayers bigger than I pray,
'cause your destiny in fluorescent colors grins,
your light brighter than my days shines.

Be bold, be dauntless,
as a young lion roam your borderless territory,
roar till the clouds flee,
so that your greatness may ever rain.

Chima Ononogbu

But One Thing

Tell me you love me,
whisper into my yearning ears sweet nothings,
as many times as the stars blink.
Confess to me how great a mountain I worth;
how I've become the best thing you know,
'cause my pocket is bare
and my hands go in and out like a lightening.
Go on, chatter my goodness, oft as your lips can lap
to the silent admiration of the world,
so that I may grow more tender
and fall deep into your gaping hands.
Now you've got me hypnotized,
wrapped around the tiny pole sitting atop your palm,
I'm losing control of my spinning mind
and my desire of you is burning hot, and
hunger rattling in my romantic bonnet,
hunger for your luminous words
that grind me into your grounds of sweet coffee.
Even though you've gotten me there, like a swaddled baby,
where you can predict me,
toss me around as you may,
know that I've willingly giving you all, but one thing:
my heart,
which I can't give,
nor let your charm sway its pulsating abode,
for I guard it with the wings of the Cherubim,
and with eyes of the four living creatures spy its territory
to stave off romantic vandalism.

Chima Ononogbu

Creed Of Love

When my eyes beheld you that night,
You walked away in tears
That dripped down as beads, your flowy drapery drenched
As you trod down that path buried
Under a cluster of trees sleepless
In the nights they bow to August wind gust;
Then upon fragile lilies underneath litter an eyeful of dews.

On that day, summer had just shed its last skin,
The town's native doctor had clambered Orisa mountain
In purple regalia to woo the goddesses and appease the gods;
Tongues of flame roared from calabash that upon his head sat,
Said to repair the intersection between the loved and the jilted.
The town's people had gone to the valley to cheer at sunset.

I came, too, but trapped in silence.
My broken pieces sutured with a thread of loneliness
In the wild jilted wilderness.
But when again my eyes laid upon you, another night,
You looked like a star glistening
Our long flowery past leaped out of my gated silence,
Like a whooshing wind with soft pecks of a romantic bird.

My dear, you scooped me out of that path
whereupon our wounded past trotted.
Although our souls are daubed in bitemarks of many hurts,
Because we had parted ways at the rising tide of adrenaline,
But now reunited to sing the creed of love
Until we climbed up the chariot of immortality.

Chima Ononogbu

Dream Of The Mid-Day

In the moment awkward
lost in reverie,
the daylight heavy with starry sun,
the birds hovering with eyes piercing as torch.

The moment like a mint of fresh air when
under the mangrove leaned I against a tree trunk.

Sheathed away from the roily world,
calming my prickly nerves defiant silence in mangrove born.
Then, as if in a river drifted down an ocean
brimming with jetsam of gold.

Wreathed in a fluffy glee my face,
glimmering with white scented hopes my heart.
My eyes.....set on ocean of gold- -
like the gaze of a rapacious hawk
fixated on snatching away strayed chick
unhearing mother hen cuckooed.

Yet halfway gone,
bisected thy river;
down the path of the ocean channeled a lane,
and another toward a dry land as a desert
broken into smithereens of pouring emptiness
smoldered by galloping hushed silence.

Myself found in the dry land,
As I beheld the growing sand,
the rustling wind a thing like meanness oozing,
unfriendly and hostile.

But in a twinkling,
Into consciousness I stumbled,
downcast and drained,
my eyes squinted and dripping tears.

Again beaten down in dreary daydream.
Unjust and unkind the bisected river,

As I was certain,
the ocean of gold to be my destination.

Chima Ononogbu

Earth On A Melting Point

That night, in a dream,
I found myself on a hill's skull
overlooking a quiet, dimly remembered, hamlet
hemmed by untrod expanse of sprightly vegetation
inhabited by tall unbranching pines
and a thick coppice with eloquent airiness.

Toward its interior,
like a bed overlaid by a fluffy rainbow,
I moved my gaze
where several nests were designer churches,
birds' chirps melodious symphony
rising and falling in feathery cadence,
their aquiline noses pointed
toward a lively turquoise sky.

From the hill's stony scalp
roved my eyes in exchange for plushy air
into my greedy nostrils wafted
with pleasant hurriedness of a suckling chick.

Yet worry seeped into my heart,
everything was changing,
the freshness shed its skin
and wore nastiness of a fetid sort
that swept through as a rumbling desert.

The vegetation roused up by unruly wind,
flinty eye wind,
ruthless as medieval king,
instantly striking up fire, shooting up;
its fury, like heavenly part of the mythical hellfire.

For the town crier's foreboding brushed aside,
now the earth in self destruction.

The wind exhaling its hot fanning content
vexing the musing fire,
the ground cracking, spewing billows of smokes,

thick smokes as tar, as coal, as the darkest night,
trillions they seemed, smoldering the air.

The vegetation rocked by fire,
flying flaming red dreadful as death,
from shore to shore,
like a burning furnace, breaking the bones of woods,
red skin pines splattering flaming daggers.

The sun, never like this frightened,
put in the crucible, burning,
dripping flood of heat comingling
with solid liquid fire swirling,
the ozone, like a balding head, receded,
while hot tears scalded the face of the environment.

Heat spilled over with relentlessness,
driving down the glacial,
and ice sheets sloping down the sea
splintered to bits and pieces,
triggering a rush of uneasy water,

Which rose up, sky high,
turning littorals into sea floors,
breaking the spines of levees;
land became intemperate seas,
submerging the hamlet, the earth.

The natives, mourning their guttered hopes,
nothing was left of their lives,
scurried hither and thither to escape the fiery flood,
shouting and pointing, asking for their future.
my spirit sobbed then weak as a whippersnapper,
their voiceless voice cried out to my wakening.

Now my heart sorrows:
A dream
yet a reality, Amazon in my mind,
hurricanes loading.

The earth hangs on uncertainty,
diggers and miners, oil barrons,

threatening to warm it to a melting point,
but to cool it, for life for continuity,
is our eternity.

Chima Ononogbu

Ever Present Power

The birds roam the air
the lions in the jungle their majesty spreads
the whales on seas' thoroughfares ply, yet
in one transparent accord march them along the sky axis.

Around the four cardinal poles in jostling bliss they amble
in solemn fortitude far beyond their straying wings and eyes
in and out of the giant wintery doors of equinoctial winds
they glide and flap in search of the great unknowable.

The principality of great adore
on whose hands cling life dearest fountain
From whence comes the air whooshing down through northern pole
and sun rising from the east with harmonious rays.

They comb the sacred linings of cloud's everglade, like three musketeers
scowl the tucked away tents of the mountains' shoulders
and in fervent devotion search the virgin boundaries of the seas
for a glint of a glance at the face of the power so ever present.

In illuminating ecstasy, deep in celestial plane
they saunter, dialoguing, whispering, although in worlds apart
but in one giant awe light up their faces, of power ever glorious
invisible, yet the air, the sea, the land wrapped up in its drapery.

Chima Ononogbu

Fragrant Love

At first, it was a grain smaller than a mustard seed,
Then we sowed it
Deep into the ground of our hearts;
It germinated, budded out,
And into the sky it towered like a ruby-colored rose.

An opiate for a brokenhearted
Pacifies hearts into which tumults are crammed.
It is a shell of light that engulf the dark.
It rains brightness where clouds run wild.

Remember, my darling one,
It found us on the sloppy valley of despond,
And with hands as tendrils pulled us out
To set us on the soft wings of betrothal,
Where, surely, it feels a dream in an endless sweet motions!

This love, our anthem to sing, threads our hearts together,
As a pair of eyes are bound by eternal unity of rotation;
As two wings conjoined at the crest of an eagle's spine
Wherefrom they flap and glide synchronously in celestial air.

Shall I speak of those lonely days away from you?
I walked down the farm path colonnaded by tall swaying trees,
Where I quelled my brokenness
Which creaked underneath my racing heart,
And reflected on all molecules of our deserted love.

As I walked, I had wished the trees that bade me goodbye
Were many faces of you.
Even the river on the east side of the old orchard,
I had always wished your voice could call my name
From its gentle wave.

Although I knew I was all alone
Among the multitude of earless brushes,
I swooned at the sight of the evening breeze
That whooshed your fragrant love to my salivating ears.

Grandmother And I

Happy days with grandmother
in the days ago long,
when simmered underneath grandmother's stout look frail,
and I with exuberance bursting, although old and young,
but we lived as hand and mouth; twins of far-off generations.

As two friendly birds, we treaded the muddy farmland paths
wherefrom we bundled home unbreathing woods to make evening fire.
Then the brushy hilly path down the old river we strolled
often as grandmother's calabash needed filling with water.

With grandmother, hunger was a stranger,
she wetted the pots with Oriental spices, even tarragons
that shattered gloom with aroma calming
as the bubbling air stirred up by roaring fragrance,
and onlooking walls, their tongues flicking off fragrance dripping.

Afterward, grandmother and I would sit
around this plate of earth's crust brimming with spicy soup
and pounded yam, which in gladness we whisked into our bellies
while grandmother rained my soul with tales of ages past.

Chima Ononogbu

Great I Am

On the throne sits He above,
Before Him, the cherubim stand,
Where in awe they prostrate and bow
To Him who sits on the throne.

Oh lord, who shines as your glory?
Who can stand the light of your presence?
There's none that can boast of these things,
For overwhelmed is the one to whom your glory is revealed.

From you, Lord, comes the wind of life
That I inhale to my soul renew,
Heartening to my heart are the words of your mouth,
And to them evermore shall I cling.

On the throne sits He above,
Before Him, the Cherubim stand,
Where in awe they prostrate and bow
To Him who sits on the throne.

Oh Lord, the mighty fortress I know,
Before you bow the twenty-four heavenly elders,
As they proclaim in one accord your goodness:
Holy, holy, holy is He who sits on the throne.

I lift my eyes in glorious delight;
I wave my hands with unrelenting zeal;
My voice I let out as the sound of trumpets,
To worship you until I transcend mortality to your glory.

I'm not ashamed to proclaim the good news
That in you, oh GREAT I AM, life abounds
And there's no other way to life-eternal but by you.
Therefore I beseech the ends of the earth to come and live.

On the throne sits He above,
Before Him, the Cherubim stand,
Where in awe they prostrate and bow
To Him who sits on the throne.

Chima Ononogbu

Introspection

I want to go, somewhere;
I want to take a journey,
make a move,
to a place, a place deep,
important.
But where?

Where could this place be
that I must go?
That I must forgo all else to go; this place,
for what it's worth,
I think I must surely go.
But again, where could this place be?

Is it an oasis, a paradise, or a place in heavenly island?
No; yet more precisely, a place soaked in turmoil,
down into the enclave of the soul;
wherefrom springs the tree bearing different fruits
in the middle of brushes of unknown parentages,
that abut at a hollow sphere.

Here, the waters dry up at the full blast of the harsh sun,
while the soil hardens as stone, always in the offseason;
in the sultry dark of its summer,
when heat waves melt all flesh,
the grounds crack up like splintered woods
wherein nocturnal birds of prey roost.

At this time, I must hasten down there,
when I get there, I shall circle the enclave.
I shall break down all fences for living waters to freely flow in
and the rivers of the ground shall rise again
to put the kibosh on the withering tree, watering its root,
that it may live and bear sweet fruits.

Yet again, I shall do battle:
I shall from their stumps uproot strange brushes,
I shall from their calamus deplume birds of prey,
I shall from the solar tone down the heat of the sun,

then shall I restore the enclave to salubriousness.

Chima Ononogbu

Life Across The Fence

Life on the other side,
across the fence,
so ease it looks green and rosy,
to those whipped down and battered
by poverty thorny whip.

Mournful as dawn grows to dusk,
in their hearts brews sunken lamentations.
Unbalanced they feel nature's measuring scale,
unfavored they feel in their share of its borderless estate,
far-fetched they feel its intention to mend the fence.

So, their imagination shrinks
into a monstrous gloom,
desperately wishing their lives are never theirs
rather the ones bubbling just across the fence
filled with bliss and horny dripping down.

But for those across the fence,
same is the sting of life,
never rosier,
but always fleeting as wind marching down the valley,
blowing in circles round the circumference rims.

Chima Ononogbu

Life Could Be Better

Someone should tell me what life really is.
Someone should tell me if
life should be what
we know it could be.

A garden where all trees dance and sway
under the equal charm of fairly blowing air.
But, the more I envision this, the stranger life becomes,
and under the spell of numbness, my mind falls over and again.

Now I'm lost
deep in the maze of uncanny perplexities,
in and out of strange-looking places
and trailed by intemperate storm daubed with cold frigid.

Could it be less than reasonable
that life should mirror at least a scintilla of my thought?
Or is my mind haunted by a wind gust of hallucination
reeking of psychosis? I don't think so!

Rather, life's shown itself to be darker than
the shadows that blur the purest of eyesights;
a roily water, in the clamps of doom and gloom; yet,
a road thick with mist, rough like a jagged edge of a saw.

How did life get here?
That reprobates lord it over the rest of the world
and whited sepulchers knighted with power and recognition.
Could this really be all that life could be? life could be better.

It could be a planet
where justice grows wings and roams the air,
and humaneness as a school of fishes
that swims freely among the sea of men.

Chima Ononogbu

Living

Living is a plaything,
a daily exercise with exception of perfection,
rather a falling and a rising
as everyday closer and closer to its end we gallop.

Living is an amusement,
a rollercoaster on mountains' circumferential highways,
a circuit of vertigo in endless spin,
that makes us laugh and cry in turning circles.

Living is a judgment,
a reminder of our sullen mortality and sacred immortality,
an umpire of fast and slow we jive and go,
and a roiling air that at dusk takes the bloom off our laughs.

Chima Ononogbu

Moonlight Story

A dull evening in my hilly hearted village,
a time when squirrels dance up the lower heavens;
Children faces ballooned in boisterous borderless smiles,
looking forward to the entrancing moonlight tales.

This time, the harmattan made a dive with squeaky breezy cold
that made our lungs quack like a choking duck
and our sleepy little noses ran like a red ferret.
All that the sky had spewed into the unwilling atmosphere with bated breath
awaited the moonlight story soon to unfurl like cocoyam leaves.

As the sun began to fade and its rays silently retreating
into its abode in clandestine sky,
and darkness faintly in the horizon roaring
to swoop down on our helpless village with a blinding cloud,
we strode down the shining meadow in cheerful arrays.

We sat down on the low headed meadow made of smiling greens
under the light of the watching moon.
Enraptured in awe of the incandescent words spilling out of the story teller's
lapping lips,
lifted from the cave of time the great exploits of our ancestors.

The exploits into our insatiable ears rhythmically wafted
cocooning our minds in blanket of caressing courage;
then our eyes glowed like stars riding the wave of tickling ocean.
As the thin air thickened, around us hovered sweeps of light circular as halo
that transported us between the transcendence and the ordinary.

The moonlight tales brought down the gods by the eyes of the sky,
as lamplights lit the way through the twists and turns of time,
as a ferry ferried us into the living mind of the presently past,
yet a rendezvous where the past and the present intertwine in a holistic union.

Chima Ononogbu

Mr. Unpresident

They call him Mr. President.

A title so dignifying

For an office so high,

and he who occupies it must be dignifying and high also.

So it had been, in years before,

The title its dignity sustained,

The bearers so fitting and their demeanors so dainty,

And in esteem more than their names held them the office.

The roads they trod love overlaid,

The rays of their eyes compassion sparked,

The words from their mouths calming as friendly breeze,

And the air they exhaled with peace tinged like blood and water.

But now, in the present, the presidency indignity rapes,

Swinging as faulty pendulum backward and forward

having no point of equilibrium, therefore hanging down.

And strange wind digs wide cracks on its fortresses,

The presidency bared to foreign teeth; warring canines lurk,

As the cold hands of narcissism, hatred by the throat shake,

And its tottering bones sawed by lies, corruption, inhumanity,

While the occupier jingles war songs like unhelmeted centurion.

Oh, America, America, great America, brighter than glitters!

Although in years gone-by; but now, a stranger on your table sits

With eyes blazing of fire, and mouth with slimy tongue of smokes,

Unrepentantly spewing from your table vile;

Concoctions that ruin at the heart of your sacredness.

They call him Mr. President, for the crown is irreducible,

But Mr. 'Unpresident' he is, for the crown he drags in the mud,

He with uncanny brutality dismantles your sacred oaths,

And your peace he trades for a gift of apocalyptic doom.

Chima Ononogbu

Oh South Africa

Oh you South Africans, the black natives!
You once bled the blood of apartheid,
Drank the rage of renegades traversing your mountains,
You rebuked your humanity that you may calm their vexed eyes.
In those yesterdays you led unliving life, hoping tomorrow comes,
But today you have traded your tomorrows for your yesterdays,
In your ingratitude broken the sacred fountains of your liberation,
The Oracles that formed the sinews of your heroes.

I skimmed the pages of your yesterdays,
The days when Soweto was torched to its carcasses,
The days your tears were beads of scarlet blood
Your eyes darkly reddened and obese from swills of fear,
Your bodies wiry, dry as leaves starved and withered.
On those days that Johannesburg would not keep you,
You had prayed volcanoes to hide you away,
Before the waking of the roosters' crows

For hounded were your jugulars by flagellates of apartheid,
To scuffle you down the crooked terrain of injustice.
Your oppressors' deadening looks were
The fires that burned down your peace.
Their anger, thick flaming crudeness with jagged edges
With barbed sling puffed up with venom like viper's
That ripped your weeping elements to the bone.

Oh you South Africans, the black natives!
In the days when the hoots of owls flooded your daylight,
For your daylight was pitch dark, in fact
Darker than the least brightest of the night,
The light upon your path were the Oracles- -
The Africans whose lives you snuff out
On the streets of Johannesburg, Soweto, Pretoria.

With intrepidity tall as a lion on hind legs stood them
For your sake and against the slicing blade of apartheid.
They footed your bills, fed you fat from their lands,
Sauntering for your sake through the woods of sacrifices
As their bodies quivered to a breaking,

Yet faithful till the day your chains snapped off you,
Like the cracking of the shell that frees the young kernel.
These testimonials, Mandela's victory songs!

By which his hands freed steered the wheel of leadership.
Knitted the cities you turned to rubbles
Shook the hands of Oracles that toted you across all fires.
Oh you South Africans, the black natives,
Mandela from his grave cries; cries, anguished cries,
He knew to desecrate the Oracles, your African saviors,
Whose backs were broken for you was a thundering sacrilege,
A profanation appeased by eternal penance of ancestral gods.

But you have in your recalcitrant blindness hurt other Africans-
Nigerians, Zambians, Zimbabweans, Ghanaians, Ethiopians,
You chase them about with weapons like dragons upon preys,
Cut them down like dehydrated trees fitting for the saw,
But they were the Oracles that in your yesterdays
Bound your wounded hopes,
Weeded your lands of overgrown oppression,
Restored the diadem of your ancestors.

Chima Ononogbu

Peace At River Banks

Around this river banks
are pear trees tall as lively colonnades
whose green-yellow leaves spread as wide swaying umbrellas,
wherefrom quietness as sparkling peace springs
and moves, fleshed in Harmanttan's breezy air
that animates the celestial light roaming the wide sky,
whooshing across the warm landscapes in melodious waves.

Off my own bat, on uneasy days, down the river banks I amble,
where beauty like a rapid mystery lures my eyes
away from sands of pain that make them bat to a tear.
Here, my mind rejuvenates and be spry,
my hands to feathers transfigure and I fly as a bird
up and up to a transcendental nirvana, beyond riotous dimensions.

I hear no echoes of the world underneath my thoughts;
rather feel the pulse of butterflies that slip under my veins
and shatter my blood with calming goosebumps, soothing as lotus.
The playful rodents, in tandem with free spirited antelopes,
patter across, patter rhythmically,
while the birds chime in with rhyming songs
that dense my heart with peace worthy of the gods.

Chima Ononogbu

Questions For My Creator

I've been meaning to ask you these questions, my creator,
which I've harbored in my mind
ever since my entrance into this mortal enclave,
but over the years, toiling for days on end
under the hyperactive sun,
the questions one by one left my mind;
then I forgot them, but never lost hope of their return,
I knew they would, someday, somehow, in some electric form.

So today, just today, as the young pine and gentle rumbling wind tangled up in
romance near where my head thinkingly laid
a certain airy fingers stroked me to a quietness,
then my eyes went dreary, and thereafter cowered under their lids
for fear of defiling the purity still left of them,
but then, the knock came, clacking knock,
like adolescent keys shoving against each other for a romance with a virgin lock.

For a moment the door yapped, and cracked open
and there on my mind's door stood these runaway questions
fresh as the day they flapped away as insolent birds,
one by one they flew in and billeted.

Here they are:

Was I already living before I live?

If I was already living, why didn't you ask if I wanted to live another living?

What was it you thought before you thought I should live this living?

Why didn't you consult me,

seek my consent,

before shipping me down to this living? -

This dangling basin under a mortal fire.

Oh, I remember I couldn't talk then; but you never asked if I really could talk!

Is this right, being sent away against my will?

What will be my compensation if I contest it?

How will I be recompensed for the damages I've incurred as a result of this
living?

Please tell me, when will I return to the abode from which I came?

The earlier the answers the better I can think of living this living.

Remember This, Soldier Man

Remember this soldier man.

The words behind those doors you muttered
when the world sprawled out in slumber deep,
though alone you thought you were,
but not so true, not so true,
for the ears upon the walls listened in,
and their eardrums, as hairs blown by the wind, stood,
in frightening amazement, stood,
when you'd wished the world be consumed,
when you'd prayed the God of war pour pails of burning coal
and let loose exploding fires out of its barrel vault,
which with a rage of the volcano bursts.
Somewhere in the middle east, far from the homeland.

Soldier man.

You'd confided to the silent night, your hopes and aspirations,
that you may hold shoulders so high in decorated twill of a war hero
when the fiery wind blows over;
but this place,
somewhere in the middle-east, torched and desolated,
by a flood of deathly smoke roofed,
in the blood of the unborn, newly born, barely walking, dipped
yet again, many others to whom the cause of war is unknown
shall on the arch of sinking streets fall, as casualties,
as a bloody price, for the honor, the purple ropes,
along the ridges of your shoulders hang.
Remember this, soldier man.

Chima Ononogbu

Sojourners

We're mere sojourners in life's great plains,
which they say isn't a bed of roses;
therefore I surmise it's a bed of thorns,
because life is either one or the other.
So we must with closeness watch
where our legs dare to tread.

Chima Ononogbu

The Day I Lost An Old Love

A day ordinary as the days before,
the sky was blue and heavy with cloud,
the air though sultry but beside my love
caressing and healing.

On the path where a year ago our love was born
we walked with our hands locked in love.
Under the grove of trees bearing fragrant fruits
shaped like dove-eye of love
we glided down the path in love.

Midway, on the plains of my soul the bombshell
as the sound of artillery was dropped:
"I shall not continue the relationship, " said my love,
stroking the petals of a rose flower
peeping through a window of excited leaves.

In a twinkling I felt as one drenched in bitter water.
The life of the day like a wisp of air
evaporated into the horizon unknown.
My chest felt as an enemy armed with sticks and axes
cutting down the red trees that air my heart.

The path from which we came
looked overgrown with teeth of thorns;
Even the trees hanging pleasantly low,
lush and riotous with thrilling glow,
had gone quiet and downcast in face.

In my lonely walk I had longed for the days
before the day I lost my old love,
how it used to be,
a part of her, a part of me,
but deep inside I knew she would not return;
I let it go to move on with life,
now content with what my life has become.

Chima Ononogbu

The Words Of The Sage

In my search, the sage told me:
When rails sparkle their brightest,
The stars in my abode shall descend,
And pleasant air the sacred oak shall blow,

Then shall I meet her.
Then shall I unlock my gated artery of love
And allow her in to sit on the elevated place,
Wherefrom with me, she deals softly.

From then forward I gazed to the stars
Every night, deep nights, even days,
Kneeling like mantis to pray the stars to descend,
But unheard was my prayer.

Then, down the street,
where rails crisscross towns,
I walked to catch the brightest of their sparkles,
but in vain were my feet beat against stones.

Further down,
In the gathering of oaks, I sat,
That the sacred oak might blow its air,
But not one oak twinkle a leaf.

Then I let up, for the words of the sage were as water upon a stone.
But as the daylight slumbered, through town,
Darkness in riotous revel swept,
And echoes of fear rose like owls' hoots.

Suddenly, water of sparkles lifted around me,
My abode became as starry heaven,
While the gentle wind of a sacred oak blew mints of rose.
Then I looked around, there you were, my love.

Your face lit with sparkles of smiles,
Your eyes in the radiation of glowing stars,
And your embrace, a rapture of refreshing air,
Quickly I realized the words of the sage to be true.

Chima Ononogbu

Thin Line Between Rich And Poor

On this canvas,
I wish to paint a life -
the thin line between rich and poor -
which wakes up in rope purple,
hurries up the escalator
flanked by butter and bread
yet to sink mid-way up,
into a gaping abyss
roamed by dread toothed like American tarantula
that clips life of its wings
and left to rot under blasting dearth.

Chima Ononogbu

Tunnel To Hell

There in bed I lied to sail through the night
when suddenly stood I, my spirit, on a spire
over what seemed a vast emptiness with wan face of a desert,
everything including my legs quaked to a near fall
but steadily roved my eyes in a gyre
and shortly downward, in curiosity inwrought with fright,
to a tunnel; a long, narrow tunnel
that stretched down into the earth's bowel
and seemed as though it could run beyond its boundaries
to an interminable space deep into the unknown.

In what was a second, or maybe a minute, or perhaps more,
the tunnel welled up with smokes like unthinking flood;
pitch smoke of a touchable meanness
leaping up noisily like the mutterings of a volcano, and the air
draped in blackness; limitless blackness; coal blackness
twirling in lugubrious circles, over and again.
I stood still, down to my toes frozen, with a fear-struck mind
wondering a lurid kind of smoke with unforgiving spirit this was.

At the time when my optic bulbs seemed flickering out, ebbing,
inconsolably retreating into its orbit,
from the smoke to my ears came a shrill cry of a woman:
"Forgive me Lord, forgive me Lord, forgive me Lord."
So it continued as a singsong of an anguished soul, and although
enclasped by chains of smoke her cries echoed in that valley of darkness
on and on like roaring baritone of a grieving lion.

Now I realized what a pail of endless terror my eyes beheld,
the imagination of her pain entered into my mind,
and my flesh scraped by that flaming whip,
a well of fear emptied into my frail substance,
my dreaded suspicion turned to a rasping reality:
it was a tunnel to eternal hell;
the smoke - the hideously human tormentor in corybantic temper,
a paroxysm of eternal rage,
a barracoon of unholy saints,
a suffering of frenzied sort,
rose up and up in hellish intensity.

I woke up tearing to the scalding of my tender cheeks.

Chima Ononogbu

Where Blood Was Flood

Black South Africans,
You have become tactless
although history rebukes you
but with yarn tinged with blood
are your ears sutured;
deaf to hear as a whimsical grasshopper
loitering about the nest of a dull eyed Mockingbird,
Unaware of the danger that lurks in the shadow.

Now your end seems nigh,
as cloud of death with the fury of apocalypse
it comes to you.
Like a goat bleating in agony wrestling ancient ghost
shall your cities cry out when recompense
as a whiff of flying gloom
grips them by their throats.

In your season of destruction,
lives and properties,
none was safe.
Your fellow Africans, in their moments of melancholy,
their lives you snuffed out in blood cold,
smashing their heads and breaking their bones,
turning your sewers into gluttonous arteries
where their blood flowed.

While at the intersection between life and death,
With cudgels in hand,
your heads bowed
toward their dying body
casting mischievous smiles.

Your hands are soaked in innocent sobbing blood
that screams scream that bends the air
and swirls smoke of vengeance way above the cloud
into the heaven of heavens
where the gods terribly dwell.

Your fate is settled for your unrepentance is high.

Johannesburg and Soweto, where blood was flood,
shall lay fallow as the ruins of Babylon
swarmed by forest of endangered ants,
Where the lizards of the tribe of dragons,
the four legged reptilian,
in twin rows migrate to claim the tents
pitched by ants native to your abandoned cities.

Chima Ononogbu

Why Death

Why should anyone die?

Why, therefore, death? Leaving this life and going
to the abode whereby souls grow deaf, more deaf
than a tree that runs not, even when a saw yells death from afar.

Then, a curious 9, my little yearning mind fumed with thoughts,
a fusillade of questions, which in circles span until vertigo seized
my head, and then imagination grew frail, untamed frail,
which became a morass I, a child, along dragged.

In my mind recesses billeted, as I treaded mountains and valleys,
swam in rivers gentle, even ones ramping and raging,
wondering in silence as in unquietness what a gut death had.
Then asking, what was in there for him to kill?

All answers that floated, to my mind compounded mathematics,
for brittle was its bones and fragile its blood, but to understand
I knew to trudge in motions of growth until it hardens
as tree trunk able to throw up into handless air boughs and leaves.

The moment came, then I realized life is a giving and is for a taking,
that time spins life to eternal exhaustion,
that pilgrims and sojourners one and the same
must set off at dawn and at dusk must return home.

Chima Ononogbu

Wintery Touchdown

As the winter makes a touchdown,
raving along the paths, the brushes, the rivulets,
it arouses rigid trees to a dancing sway,
which quickens musing air to breezy fare.

With each passing day, more and more the winter breeds its cold,
very likely to bring along buckets of wind
which will roam earth's perimeter in windy colors,
transfixing faces with awe of chill.

The sun in hibernation drowsed, in realms above and above,
but too distant from the firmament's reach,
in this season the poles are overrun by clouds
that twine with the wind in nature's call so solemn.

Oh winter, have you come to mock? !
Have you come that summer may quit and go?
You know with your intrusion this will surely be,
when sheets of cold cascade down to the feet of the earth,

the sunlight to shimmering smithereens breaks,
emboldening darkness to sift through the sunny cracks
to smear the day with cold color black,
sending us to bed while the day is still young.

Chima Ononogbu

You Think Wrong Of Me

I'm a dove with a face of a hulk,
But you think wrong of me!

You think of me a little too cocky, contumacious;
A little too full of ego pinions, which you say
flap around my footprints strewn across
spaces, landscapes, I once had occupied.

You say of my voice thundering as your fear,
You say of my gait breaking the grounds and quaking your gaiety,
My name trots byways of your imagination as a buggy of horror,
But you think wrong of me!

Your frightened perception of me springs from your demur
To see those cues from whence arises my peculiarity.
Cues wreathed in pearls and flowers
Of humanity, of humility, of compassion.

You blame me for my piquant masculinity.
I'm of a piece with my wide shoulders; my taut ambitions,
which rock as a sea of gentle spirit,
Yet hard as they're soft to tote and lull a baby.

But you think wrong of me!

You croak at my blackness as grotesquely beautiful,
Which you say eats you up as devouring critters,
And to behold it, to you a Sisyphean striving,
Yet reminds you of a tree cut down for its twig is giant;
And of a star cast of shrouds to dent its fulgurant light.

But you think wrong of me!
But you think wrong of me!

Chima Ononogbu