

Tares Oburumu

WINNER 2022 SILLERMAN PRIZE FOR AFRICAN POETS

18

***fragments of my love for the
eastern shores***

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For the eastern choir

Tares Oburumu

Foreword

The poet must always strive to present something new to the readers, often by helping them see the world in a different light; this is indeed what the bard Tares Oburumu has done with his chapbook – *18 Fragments of My Love for the Eastern Shores*.

I have subtly used the word bard to describe Tares because while he brilliantly employs rhetoric to make us rethink several subject matters in this work, the poet does not deprive us of the music which like wine or water is essential for better digestion of the themes explored and the metaphoric morsels.

Tares in this short collection, found a house within his soul, perhaps the carcass of a home deserted after a cataclysmic storm, and here, he transforms this shack into a labyrinth and in the company of himself, this marooned pilgrim begins to pose powerful questions about home, love, family, friendship, war, death and a God who at this moment doesn't seem to care much about the helplessness of mankind.

“How many miles more to self-destruct which is a piece of self-discovery?” the poet asks, even as he dissects the vulnerability of his country and a region after his heart – *an entire Niger entirely made of glass*.

Tares with a near sublime musicality that has now come to be his identifying mark, identifies some grave injustice within his nation's polity and how it has over the years affected the eastern shores which he has come to love; and as it is with affection, the poet finds a way beyond clichés, to glorify the resilience of a place personified as his lover, even while the thirst for light and liberation still lingers.

Most of the poems here are written at the nodal between prose and prayer, sometimes at the intersection between song and tears; but at every crossroad the poet plants a plethora of fragrant paradoxes hoping that perhaps their essence may become balms for a tortured memory, a distorted history; hoping that they may serve as nourishment for a pragmatic future beyond the utopic paradise.

That said, now it gives me great pleasure to invite you to enter this threshold of contemplations, where you too very soon will find yourself saddled with the responsibility of repainting love – especially for the eastern shores, and afterward you will pick up the telephone ringing endlessly in the empty house and cry for justice while trying to rewrite history; even as you ultimately find in it all a journey for the rediscovering of yourself.

Soonest Nathaniel

Author of “Teaching My Father How To Impregnate Women”

7. **Blasphemy:** God doesn't exist. She does, Deborah. Heaven. Life after a clean dream. Her school books shed paper tears. And my history, orphaned here, is heartbroken. Since 1960 I have no love, just preferences. How often I have chosen to love the wild. How often I have become a tattler, caught in a nest of calls, frequent and rakehelly. *Do you still remember when we were Nigerians?* When we were neither human nor animal. Neither light nor darkness. With my hand, a soft reach, on the green arc of your shoulder, and your heart, almost a butterfly bending a white flower towards an infant Holocaust, we walked past the burnt years, through the elegiac ash of the northern fields into memory; the pew never ended. The choir sang from someplace in your head, psalms and triumphant jazz. Your mother sat beside you like an angel named after ascension. Her fingers were bible verses, locked in yours. You knew you both were walking through the valley of the shadow of a curse. Yet she kissed you, and the preacher became visible. The altar surfaced and floated like fish out of water. Blessed are the bluebirds. The cherubs brought the sermon to the point where the glory of Mount Olives magnified the Cathedral. Glory be to the paintings of the dead saints on glass. Glory to reflection, that at the hour of our death we look just like those who love us. Glory be to resemblance. You both were does in the amen of the last prayer, and then you stepped out of the promise that you will live your eternal lives differently, into the matchbox which set the gospel on fire. Burnt women. Burnt roses. Burnt love. All around you was the ocean and its indefinite shape, but there was no water to love you as God loves the church. You arrived home by spirit, the path you trod burning at your back. I opened the doors I have been seeing in my dreams to let you in. The dream that someday you will be a mother and drive the chariot in your own part of a map broken into small houses; do we also call this blasphemy?

2. **Love**, is the city still there in the heart where we kept it? All I see now in the east is a new Heaven and a new Earth, for the old house and Mary Adaobi had passed away, and all things have become visible: half of a sun in the form of a flag bruised like breadfruits, baby tombs growing as flowers the green hills till – half elegy, half eulogy in the name of their fathers, the newly damned and the holy sons of the 1970 ghosts. Take, she says, here’s a cup of the afterlife. Drink. Become the vision you have always wanted to be. The etherealness. That otherness. Their simple colors. Say prism: rainbow day, dragonfly on piano keys, playing *black freedom*. Look yourself in the complex mirrors; Anambra, the brittle sheep, the briefcased Jesus. Something is always in the future – the past and present. Something you will become, the eternal garden. God, I am drunk now with what the flowers have offered me: fate, pertinence, petals, lilt, dreams, an entire Niger entirely made of glass. Rivers break upon the rocks thrown at their deeps. I have drunk of my resilience. Like the sea, it is so vast. So vast, I am endless. Dear Country, do you know why I carry telescopes on my eyebrows. There’s a yellow future for me in a burnt planet: Wasted seductions. Water Lily. Primrose. Hummingbirds, industrious perch on branch of olive. Under these, the violent orchard blooms. It is the things you live for, the birds you love most, the stars, that with all brilliance and mastery, want you dead at the other side of the war, the lost sides of the garden: history, new curiosities, exodus, the half-finished story. How many miles more to self-destruct which is a piece of self-discovery, you do not think so? I have long lived in loneliness to know an island surrounded by unclean flames; the Northern children who have chosen to carry God in their private hands. They set the foxgloves on fire, love too. Mary says, I am tender. Glassy. I am highly subjective more in places than in people; a credo to survival. I have learnt how to tread the word, brother, well enough to know how much of the land is needed to make me a self-governing bird flowing the sky past civilizations, post-colonial buildings, languages through cities; the conscious love after the things that blossom. They say it takes a lifetime for the bird to perch on my place of birth, my mother’s hands thirsting for light. Her love, the dark lines. The city, a fine example of a crushed moth.

14. **A Photo Of Sylvia Plath, Originally Included In Paradise: Warren Kay/College Archives, University Of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State.** First, her hairs flutter, the smile on her face dies, and resurrects a canto filled with the ink of her gloom and smoke. She wears her verses with such familiar grace, the mercy of her lords who have become young poets flirting with flowers shaped after the noose. Then her eyes: a pair of lights that made the room dark; self-portrait of a young woman as a sad mother, groping on the cliff of her future, facing the boy, her gorgeous magic and act, who sits on the shoreline, and takes all of the ocean's beauty. This is the ocean: Facebook post - *I have drowned* in the water I have *been* written on – the currents below– there's still time to breathe, do not die yet, go see Jesus riding a donkey – you will triumph, you will make an angel of the east, we hold a certain inbox brightness for you, fall into it. You do not believe in God, where you are dying? If God is a seabed. If. If the ocean-floor was not this casket I have swam into like a jellyfish. If I have not been sea-blue coloring an aquarium. If. If this country was not the Catholic Cathedral, glass orchestra. If. If the music listens to itself, what would it hear? what terrifies it? The country is not yet terrified. The therapist says, it is merely Plathian. On Instagram, the ships arrive, the photographers swarm the dead. The honey that death carries, does it sweeten the art gallery? Breath by breath, one click after another, the boy let himself down the beehive into the deepest part of his prognosis. Essays come in multiple states of matter. Corpses can be beautiful, too. Tell the news, how does the tomb feel, a house made of recovery? Or admiration? Who doesn't hallow the afterlife that builds a writer with tinsels and windows? From one of the southern doors, kept open by shaming, I could see Nketiah, practicing her depression, eggshells, and bloodguilt, as I set myself up to the thrum of the others who are about to die as young as a candle blown out at midnight. I have known Sylvia for many years. I do not know why I have to die looking at her, painting me in the way she holds my heart in the brush strokes, in the way Nsukka chooses her. I still do not know how to include paradise in the watercolors, but I know it is hard to live in a Nigerian body that changes year after year, while I remain constant.

5. *House whey I build on solid rock, water carry am go* – Safari. And the chandeliers are endless. Horses running wild. Egrets flying low, cautious of the air, as if their own feathers will break them. *House whey carry many butterflies, remain even after the storm hit glass* – Tares Oburumu. The islands appear. Someone is missing in the simple chaos of a street piano. The Grand Hammers fall in silent. No one seems able to replay the origin. *It is our expectation that usually becomes our disappointment.* – Bhawna Guatam. Somewhere in Batam, a man drowns in the fire that shaped the war. A child dying from its wound is placed beside a bullet. Rhinestones dress the day, yet opaque. Wilfred Owen, even in death, climbs the wooden stage. The audience is funerary. The purple microphone, broken too, finds its fix, and it is offered with a caught hand. Dylan, **you too, should say something.** Howl + red pines. How do I survive the surrender? My heart the happiest planet, is shaped after you, Shane Koyczan or resilience – the tamarind forest. I am the one who had you broken and yet the one who bleeds. I had known the consequences to be glass. So the God you create doesn't hint a spur. Piece me. Everything else comes undone. Each fragment bears a mark. A scar floats above my smile. Forgive me, I am not sad, I am only dreaming. Far into the earth, the future stretches me. But home is a mother. Her headspace is a corrugated roof, bent as wings of the white albatross, over me. Love is a color and I paint it exceptionally yellow, utterly inflammable. In the evening walk by the green field, your hands shut soft in mine, we, furred in that romance, suddenly become visible under the eclipse, the sun slice pouring in more pieces to have our small love talks emblazoned. Then a field resumes its greenness, a black and red rose holds up the lull of the gutty conversations – *war baby, what loves me, should love me, love me endlessly.* Oh, how I regard the eastern birds. The kind of kenspeckle happiness they publicize in spite of the assault the flight orchestrates, in spite of the apocalypse, in spite of Nigeria. So glorious, like they are translated from the Spanish word, Cielo. The tone and honor, the French and British definition of a licitly shared affection. Or war? The Colonialism is so new, I neatly trimmed my misanthropy to mean a person having a love affair with impermanence. Chimamanda's book of yellow overprints. Hands on the halo. Linked here and there to sex. Rape. Rage. To the sunflowers that extinguish the day.

11. **The Rape.** I walk past my mind, dappled year after dappled year, into the history of my rage built with charisma, fictions and dissonance, standing solid by a green lake. The water reflects the unhappy birds happy above the barcarolle – *believe in the girls, the baby soldiers*. Here, my heart opens, the blood closes. One window broken by the sun pours in the silhouettes; am I not this telescope with which you look at what plays the eastern inferno? I see you, Chinua, are drunk with the white roads: dark history, unfinished colony, black British penthouses. she says, let us pray; I love you but I do not mean the idyll, I do not mean have sex with me. I want us to go back to when the room began, to the first worlds when we were friends and fragments. Scission is light, so let there be light. But the house is the unlit church, the grace of conquest. From the country that never was, I could see the tribune orbiting the filly where the sermons come in glass cases. He breaks his sin into venery, or the old testaments, and raises one heavy foot after another, aiming at the pew where the angel sits next to abstinence, ascending and descending from rosary to rosary the hymenal future covered with books. Sing to the news, who am I, that I should die loving heaven in the way Anna loves her country. I know of a happiness that doesn't include me in its typical home. So I create one and rub it on my body. Does it smell? Am I the scent only my mirror understands? States of Reflections; glass works of memories, the dreams I fail to love through landscapes, solitude and loneliness, are hunting me down the slope of an idle year, the half of a lost finger dipped in the deluge of a biographical regret. How I missed the morning sun greening the first of the mottled hills. How I miss the train to Umutu, to see the self-governing birds flying in pairs around their own trees. How I miss you, sonny. How, with your young uniform, you picked up a bomb and died in its beauty to save the eastern flowers. I want to be the one who loves you, who writes you on water, and get drunk with that love riding the wind like the flag you once held in your hands, cut off the fingers that lifted the yellow anthem, the yellow music still rising from the piano in black and white. White playing the pieces of you.

6. **Seasons/Sepia.** First picture: history seen at the end of memory. Fireflies filling the half of a moon cut with a sickle. I watch the paintings as the violin drops its fiddles like feathers, as the birds take off from work, sweet freedom impersonators. Like a cluster of petals from among some illuminated hibiscus, carried by an eastern wind into the deepest blue the sky holds as color and hope. Heaven must be a branch of philosophy. Or olive. Peace be unto you, brunet. *Dear God, we won't be existing, if it wasn't for unbelief.* I do not believe in colonies. I believe in my skin, the backdrop spirit. I have come to my own invention, full in the vision of the month of October, like a halo around the sun when a city blacks out its habitués. How do I become self-sufficient? Brown star, still trying to sort dream from sleep, bed from illusion. The houses say, I have been a happy maniac in a sad century, but here I am, put to use in the conqueror's music, my altos and sopranos eternally pitched. Cries and critics mother time. I want to destroy the music and build an audience, a chart, an atelier, a euphony where we can sing a rainbow and forgather the parts of a saxophone broken in its conical places. The encore runs. I touch the instrument. The will collapses.

1. **Lekki.** How I turn the word, apostate, into to a bird. How like freedom, it passes through me as wind through the traffic, opening the city. A piano borders the hollow spaces and connects the dilettanti. Among the choirboys practicing survival are artists falling in love with time, flags, and the revolutionary streets. What do the signposts point to, gravestones facing the east? When I think of butterflies, veterans above the eastern flock and flowers, I think of the ocean and the schools swimming in its subconscious underwater. Everyone is here: jellyfish, orchid, architects and dreamers. Reflections burden the caskets. I take my lover by her name, away from living, which sounds as does the hyperbole when it takes the shape of a gun. I love you from where the angels begin, to when death ends, she says. Lagos appears from its gridlock to satisfy Bach sonata; a hundred cicadas lifts up the white microphone, I turn off, completely, the green noise inside me. It is not ready for war but wine. Fill my cups. Let the music elevate Trish Lorenz caught in a net of cameras. Some war babies have to click the trigger to save her from the stain on the white images. Disruption: I will keep my flag down so they wouldn't know who to shoot. The bullets pass, and my life couldn't have been more beautiful than a rose.

18. **Obi.** when I say, let there be light, I mean “ love me.” Love me with one photograph and half a vision, the dream, washed with warmth and nexus – cornus florida. The season wouldn’t be anything close to a rose surrounded by clinical practices. Or promises? I could tell the flower from its florescence. Petals couldn’t tell the golden age growing on a field shaped after you from a garden built with the sins of the flag, green except the red stain it acquires, hour after hour – with lanterns kept in private frames where money becomes the ocean. Wouldn’t be anything else, just blue water? The salt in it tastes as as endless as a habit. Have you ever paddled a dreamboat to the end of Frank Chipasula’s universe? The beginning is so short it is only the end. Aubade now to postcolonial bruises, cool against the color of the human heart, but mostly I would say, it is where the angels had once been lifted and murdered. There are ants loved for their labor. They march ahead of the journey, step after step until the stairs reveal the day; a sunflower day painted bright with sleep. My body is this wild clock, it hardly stops. Reaches for its breath, to wake the room full of lengths stretching the dream crocks with one hand deep in the pillow. I try to put up my fingers, but my eyes have become invisible, seeing how blind I have been looking through the country, the camera obscura. Be focused, says the eastern choir. I continue to sing off the keys, losing my hold-on to music, my voice reaching for the piano, hoping it will be the orchestra, the beauty the violins build. Unheard as it goes on and on straining the light.

9. **The Music Of The Ordinary Things.** Hello, eastern birds, heaven is the trauma and the blessing, the tree between you and the slingshots, the hillsides the sunlight brings to view, where a boy dressed in a woman's wild colors picks up his own gravestones. His mother moves within his corpse. Tell a ghost story; everything he touches, touches me. My outlines blur. My heart fades, beating inside one of the stones he's lifting. I do not believe in the dead. Am I not that child? The picture of a coffin floats on my tears. No funeral. Mourners coming from a hundred places. My body drowns in the east, pushes me down the war, remembered in flights of names drizzling like rain, here and there, on solid ground, depending on the weight of the call. I am calling the name Chiedoziem. A plane keeps to its thunder. A telephone in an empty house rings endlessly.

15. **Harry Truman's Death.** Maybe this isn't paradise; a glass house with windows for happiness. Maybe this isn't you, Anowe. This is Harry I see in the bombed cameras I have made a portrait from. Art resurrects the dead. The meaning of the photograph I, after the war, did not cover with languages. Not to keep it away from you, which makes me conclude that the butterflies entrust their colors to the flowers after their death. I tell you; what makes a man dead is the same as his need to be eternal. The refrains are endless. The grave too. This is how one becomes happy in times of war; stand before yourself. Say cheese. Cheese. Take the shot.

8. **Lakeside.** Here, indoors begins with a macaw, a lonely beauty on a branchlet the gum arabic stretches over water, then love. How I keep to my mirrors to understand my own secret life, what it reflects, that gentle lure, a resolve muffled, the excessive profile as well as a biographical statement, a charm practicing its texture. I often consider the bird as a bifurcated flower on a brittle painting, on a triptych tracing certain faults, insecure colors, a blend of half yellows cut into pieces. Each is a riot, a heart, frames of red made to spill until they become one with the lake. I adore the order the bird brings. Some art that turns me into the child I was, the man I carry from temper to temper. A sadness that holds my days in a stein of beer. There's no hope, a more therapeutic light that holds the brief history I radiate in place, than the one I see through this window I habitually invent on Mondays; work hours brightening my hand quiet on the piano, discordant on paper; the rare abundance of belief calling the music to worship, bringing the stern memory I have of the baby soldiers, dead, to leaf through me. I have listened to the epiphany once, the notes divine but non had the power to make peace with me, with all that I have been watching, while playing the universe on a phonograph long forgotten on the corner I once shared with you, Nnorom. Everything I touch becomes you: the portrait of our father on the green wall I create out of this yellow emptiness I write about, the broken effigies meditating the cost of living in a sculpted existence, the television broadcasting the distances, the cities burning in the evening news, the shelf and the glass doors. And the feathers? Oh, I love how they turn the ripples into realms, how they assemble and disperse. How beautiful it is to be the isolate and the extrovert, transfigured by the knowledge of flight. So much is done for you, this territory, this colony that surrounds me, this choral nest, that like the shorelines I have stepped on, sings of my privations. I ask, what are the designs you have for me, what is the purpose of my life if not a world on a flyway? I am here with you yet in a future I have been promised. Some place that looks like it's imagined. Some Houses I have built inside my head. Some years I have lived for a day. I walk through the mirrors to get to the bird. It prims itself and opens its wings to such colors it doesn't know, as if by unlocking them, it lay open the depth of the lake. And in that moment of glory, I wish I had exchanged places with it.

12. **The Baptist Church.** Inside St. Thomas' basement, is heaven born. Outside the afterlife, the wild angels become too visible to name, sensitive to lamplights. Something always moves within the network of songs, something not seen; a prayer for the altricial country, a hope almost the color of deferral, a psalm, a denial as deep as what is thrown into the abyss, *you are my refuge, a strong tower against my enemy*. The heart, too, is a flower, the anemone, it grows by tending, sunlight, when it is loved. Red is beautiful, it can be danger, too, like the roses gorgeous in-between spines. Everyone cannot be the idol. Someone must follow a saint to the grave. Someone must, in spells sit a disciple, not knowing where the path leads to the light. The sermon is brief about emigration, the art, or science of government, the police, maps and the war, two miles, maybe a little too close to the holy doors, open, to keep things out, but not the dead, the suicidal. The enemy is pronounced "bomb" as it detonates the small pieces of Jesus. Here, candles are as high as the dollar, but each must carry its own flame, if the little girl shot in her dead father's arms, the lover cut off the long wedding kiss into the pool of the pulpit's blood, burn the mind or touch an eye; what is made invisible. The news finds the funeral. Someone who wears the right wrinkle on her face, the black shawl in the shape of loss, asks, where have you been, God? I do not know where to go, the river or a country. forgive me, Safia Elhillo, I have been to church.

4. **Frugal Things.** Beautyberries, be fruitful
to the nomads, to the memory carrying the sky
in its own light, to the syntax of mothers feeding the
hillside boys with the love that will make them baby soldiers,
to the trip wire the need to hold hands across a field of
nations, lessons and a widening patience, to what is
not touched emptying out what is touched,
to the cloudland the simple allure of skeins, to Aris
Theotokato painting the young Sudanese poetry on
the music of the white breasted nuthatches, to
the loneliest people at home with gravity, to the horses
bigger than their own gallops, to the boats of Tobruk
flyways on water floating on the obdurate tendency
to drown, to Moloch, to the storm the blessing of rain,
to the sunflower imitating the sun, to love: the broken
parenthesis, to oils and legends the saltwater blues,
to you, Harmon. The only thing I could remember today
is the beautyberry I have not been seeing for a while now,
the beautyberries I am; I have been doomed to constantly
see myself in the mirrors I hold in my hands.

16. **June: The Shape Of Water.** *I like the way your apron makes it look like you are ready for war –*
Ocean Vuong. Let there be an ocean, he says. And here's the boat, but there's no water in sight,
as it has always been when the rains come, when my liquid drive refuses to dock, so I dream of
the harbor, of blue exits, moving; luting an old history, distant, of a wild escape, of migrants, of
voyage. The magic where the ships float on impermanence, the way the white egrets sail on the clouds.
Like any boy from Finima, I paddled myself through the beautiful pieces of me to paint the truth of
what heals after the chaos, to probe the ipse dixit that things that are colored like me could be broken
and still remain whole. Like the halved sun. Like the eastern birds, still preening their torn feathers
together for a flight. What a beauty to watch them put their wings in the wind. They know what to do
with the sky. No love aftershock, it could have been a seaquake. Chiedoziem and I, stand to paint all of
me on this sea, held in the waves. A long line of water rolls towards the faith the soft blue light in his
heart. Painting the storm, I sail, fluttering, to get to the shore at the seaweed-infested side of the city.
I am almost drowning in the rain, the rain reshaping my body. My sea blue dream, going green, lifts its
application for survival. *Am I not my own lifeboat?* Above me the yellow sun burns but dimly. How bright
would my wreckage be? How heavy it is, this constant breaking of the sea on me? How long is the
shoreline, length of a year? Here at last. The final shape of June appears as land, the rains fading.
I step into the present as the future made of glass. Inside the horizon, I could see my face, painted now,
with revolutionary paths. It looks like the world; clear eyes, strange drifts, hair inventing hope. Yet I
reflect the things that want me dead; the art, or science of erecting a country, the blessings of a love
that bombards. What a strange and harmonic invention the future is – so far away in this body I carry
from shape to shape. I sit in the past, and I am seeing all the sun I couldn't find. The hillsides growing
from the rain, the bridges rising, the trees riding the birds, the story in my hands telling what I have
been holding in the dark, sometimes I get afraid I run back to the sea to have my boats. All I ever
wanted is this season, this ocean. Something in me always say, *don't cry*. But I do anyway. Because it's
June, and I am still brave. Because I know I am standing on land. I am drowning in it.

13. **All Of Peter Brown Singing The Dead Alto In A Room At Turner Road, Yenagoa.** In all of my nights,

I carry the lighthouse with me.

In it, I am but a window

facing a kind of music

I have not heard, loosely

faint, a little loud. It roars.

I can only hear it from the years

far away, days I hold in my throat

as the seabed holds a oyster

shell, bright but it has no light.

The window closes around me,

the doors, countless, open.

I step through the dead

into life; a night with absolute

sunshine. I stand in the altos

my emphatic rooms, and look

towards my house. It is built

as though I have been let down,

with rays, into summer;

the furnished home for a grave.

A saint, as clean as Francis,

bows over the history of how

I have been a saxophonist

for more than a hundred diamonds -

the years that sparkle,

without touching the instrument.

He says, *play for us, brother, what*

you see in the dark. I see the earth.
The angels that bring the flowers
after the mass,
a woman I have known for weeks.
She has no love for me, just a bouquet
of sympathies. She doesn't know
happiness. I don't know her, too.
To joy and sorrow, I am grateful
for this life I have as rose, as spine.
There's a green wall in the priest's halo;
the painting of the Biafran War
with eighteen songs, a Trojan stage,
pieces of microphones and an encore
which repeats choices not made.
All I want is to be real in each color.
Someone tends the yellow like fire.
Create, it says to the music. Grow,
I say to myself. Love the dead
while there's still time to paint
yourself under this bright drum,
which is the sun I sing, the concert
I cannot hear.

2. I Have Been Dreaming Inside A Hoax. I envy the freedom of small things: the birds in the sky's tempera, babies in the crook of their mothers – I was nobody's child – the dead awake in the afterlife; the hurricane sweeps over, the coffins survive the rains, the clock above the shelf – keeps the house running, the wind filling spaces, and I, whole in bed, asleep, as the world passes by. This is the only place I govern myself, where I cannot be broken into fragments, and even if I am in pieces, I bring all the parts, like a spider in its net, to one. I have practiced the shape of my body long enough to know that I am my own deity. *I carry my life in my hands with all the consequences.* How heavy it's for the bee to lift its own hive. Be attentive to honey, says Tares, then the dream, as vast as the oil fields of Finima. My future looks so much like Jesus nailed on his cross, lit by lanterns, like umbrellas, as wide as the clouds. I want love and the resurrection from the things that I do not understand: my prayer – lord, my country, too, is in this map on which a lake pours, yet water never gets to the city that is burning. I ask for salvation for the landscapes to go green above the new half of a sun painted orange – being the evening of its own history. I am a visitor to the hills, to what is remembered only in questions, *why is the noise thrown from across the seceding years loud? Wetin I dey expect from this New British colony wey carry too many northern towns for back? I been dey tell you this. I been dey show you the thing wey separate fire from light. Even a star cannot make this land bright, or these people in my wild dreams white. It's 2023, I do not know I have been in bed for years, my hands have become globes heavy on the green pillow. My eyes are beginning to shift. I could see what moves like a planet around me. I could see him, Harmon. It could have been music, if it were from a friend I have known from the Caribbean islands seven rainy seasons ago. The drops becoming drumsticks on my roof, the sound to which I have given all of my heart. I could hear from my sons and daughters secured by stones up north that things have changed. I am beginning to believe I am the sun. Harmon keeps coiling around how I have chosen to live; to sleep with my head a flag in my hands, eyes white and open, my hands in the next world, reaching for a plot of love to stand the flag, even as there's no land just a ground plan for gunpowder, charnel houses and erasures. Tell me, how I wan take wake up now?*

17. **Credo/Guitar.** I put my heart into the guitar in the depth of your arms' embrace. I open the chords, your birds break out through these veins into the E- major, we play the eastern trees, the combo: I Believe In You, **Bruce Mayrock**, the fire of Westbury. You detonated the sun and was found in the light that watered the United Nations Building till the forest and the ocean floated above it. I am unhappy I am guided, here, by the history of the things I do not see; the babies – tombstones, and string-thin, growing now as flowers on a plot of cynics. In the traffic, they play a tumultuous day, I regret to say orthodox. You place each petal of music in my hands, facing the reconfigurations. I have no love for them, they have non left after the fall, but I want to love you, Ifeakandu, Nnewi.

10. **Marmalade.** The 1967 helicopters boomeranged.
Above the Empire Garden in Aba,
the war is repeating itself.
It's Sasha's day. The clock
says I am two hours and
an ocean away from her.
And I must ride the sun
to get to her dressed in halved
pieces of unhappiness.
Under a green umbrella
which looked like a country
protected by hurt,
two lovers sip from one cup
the fruits suspended
on jelly as the beauty
that binds one knave
to a grammar nazi.
At my back as I gallop
in the wild horses,
through water and thirst,
to the news to find you,
both Eden and city burn.
And those with whom we had loved
the secessio,
The ones who speak Latin
north of America,
who dream of solitude,
with whom I have come

to the conclusion that

in spite of the birds

hovering above us,

in spite of the babies dying

from trip wires and roses

in the shape of a bier,

we will mix with our conversations

and drink sweet marmalade.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tares Oburumu is a poet & essayist. His works have appeared in Connotation Press, Icefloes international, Loch Raven Review, Eunoia Review, Agonist, Woven Tales press & elsewhere. He is the author of five poetry chapbooks: a breath of me, a brief history of july I & II, exit doors & someday I will be the shape of my story. He's the 2022 winner of the Sillerman prize for African poets, the GAP poetry prize & a two times Pushcart prize nominee.