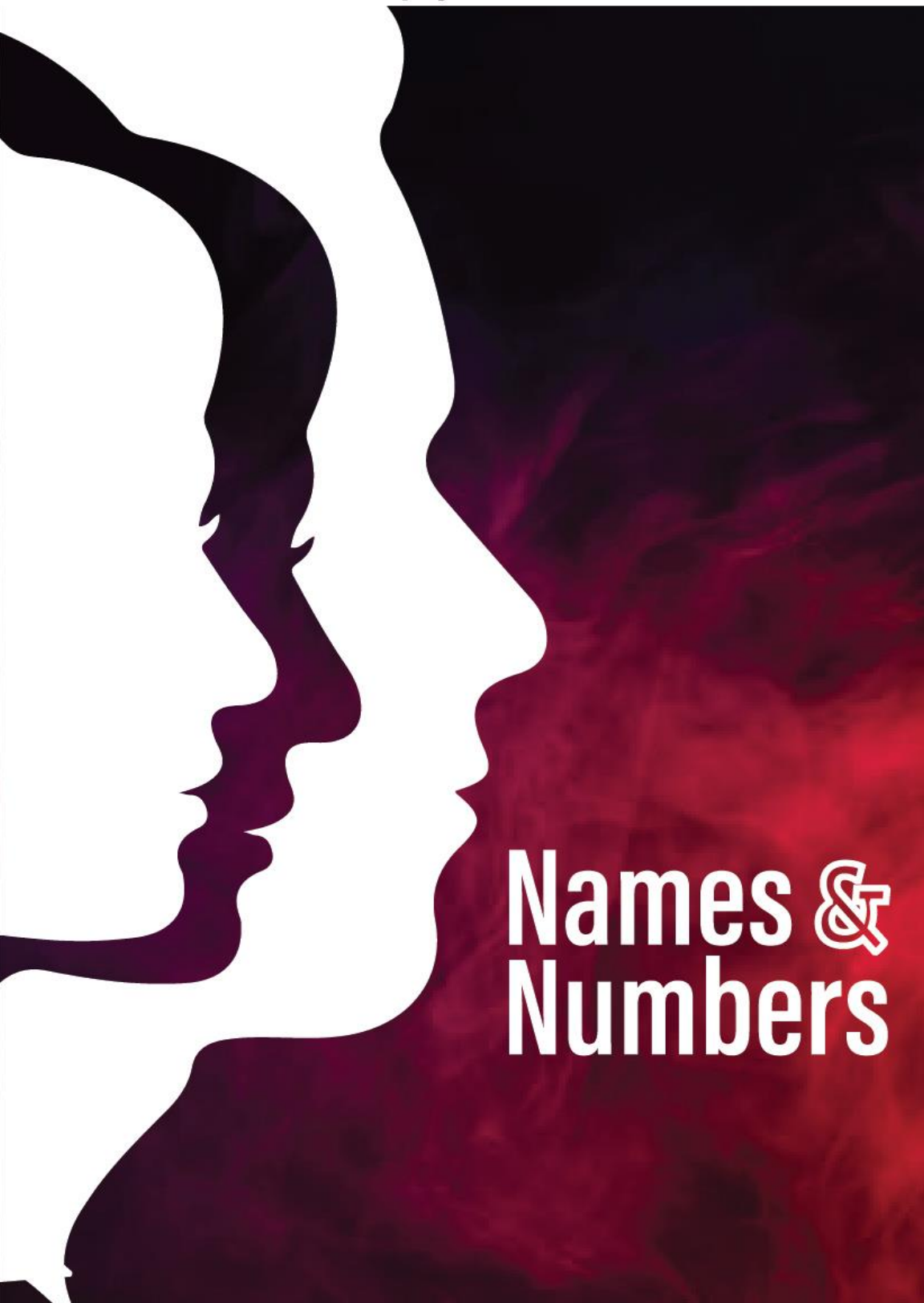


Opeyemi Oso



Names & Numbers

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Poems

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INKspired

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for Alexandra

PRAISE FOR “NAMES & NUMBERS”

Ope crutches on the permission of memory, history, and lived experiences to construct a book that not only mirrors him but also other people emerging from his socio-cultural context. This book is a passage to the visage of existence.

—**Pelumi Salako**, *Journalist and writer*.

“The sing-song of Opeyemi Oso’s voice reminds me of a river— its craftiness, how it bends around boulders in its ever graceful sway. Language opening into language, Opeyemi offers us an eclectic collection— darkness and light breathing in their glories. Radiantly fantastic debut!”

—**Kolawole Samuel Adebayo**

Author, “INVOCATIONS” (APBF & Akashic Books, 2021)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

AUTHOR'S NOTE

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
—The Waste Land, T. S. ELIOT

I have queried myself at the conception of this book—should a collection of poetry be my first published work? For someone whose first love in writing is fiction, how do you pour your heart and emotions out for readers to drink? It is simple. Poetry is almost spiritual—you write your truth in metaphors for the initiate minds.

In the lines of T. S. Eliot as stated above, it is almost as though a poet is at once a seer when his quid or pen kisses virgin papyrus or paper. It is as though s/he is blessed with vision for centuries or millennia after. Penning this note in April has been as cruel as it is exciting—just as “mixing memory with desire”. But we have to get out of our comfy beds if we must tell our story. For as a contemporary African writer puts it— “The minute we fall silent, someone will fill the silence for us.”

This collection of poems is as personal to the poet as it should be to the reader. After all, even though I do not write for everyone, poetry speaks about everyone. I intend that within the lines laced with elements of philosophy, eros and both intrapersonal and interpersonal politics, and war, readers can pick a reflection of self and society.

The book title —Names & Number is from a rhetoric last line from one of the poems of the same title. It is a pointer to one of the core reasons why I write— a good book must aside from educating or entertaining allow the reader the luxury of reasoning, about his/her identity and the society.

In all, as above, this book is intended to be spring rain to stir readers' emotions, to evoke love and tenderliness, as well as touch nerves to stimulate healing. This asks the question—”is poetry medicine?” —I do not so presume, for that is to rob a physician of his training and cunning. But if I could point a patient the way to go, or as Emily Dickinson wrote, “stop one heart from breaking... or help one fainting robin unto his nest again. I shall not live (write) in vain.”

ỌpéyemíỌsó,
Ilé-Ifè,
April, 2021.

*I have walked the long road to freedom...
I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill,
one only finds that there are many more hills to climb.*

—Nelson Mandela

We Need New Names

we need new names
say, dawn is ne'er enough to tell
our dreams—
the air, too thin to be bothered
with the weight of our worries

a city of ruins remains of a boy's hope
a happy ending is not always true
of fairy tales—mere comedies of a sad story
—a tragedy.

we need new names
for dawn, morning and whatever
births fragile aspirations
nightmares are broken truths
too scared, too scarred to make it
till daybreak.

a boy is many things but his name
call him Achilles, named after the strength of a thousand
stallions, and falls to decay at the heel
what is our memory? a two-edged blade
to cut old wounds.

we need new names
for this body, that shoulders
responsibility like an *okrika* shirt
turn too swift, you are reminded
why poverty is a bad name.

A Mockery of Logic

We asked God for a sign
And got nothing

Silence is omnipotent
A thousand answers and none

Faith has to be blind
—a mockery of logic.

O! that thou rend the heavens
Out of season, and confound the wise

We seek God in boundless darkness
Infinite possibilities upon void.

“Could my tears forever flow?”

you breakdown
God’s masterpiece into
a stream of emotions

wrestle with God
—a melee for that which
is unknown but needed
a pile of supplications

broken masterpieces
jagged prayers

let the heavens rend.

Currency of Our Youth

When we say, we are tired of the truth
We mean, dredge our shallow understanding
You may yet be ready for deeper thing—

When we say, lie is the currency of our youth
We mean, bring a pouch full of truth
You'll go empty.

When we say, we are tired of dealing in truths
We mean, we have weighed the balance
And every time we ask for change
May be with our last breath.

The Happiest People

we could almost believe it
—the greatest paradox of our lives
once set upon a lofty dream
overflowing with saintly milk
and kingly honey
till a friendly war asunder rein
our brotherhood
here, here, we now believe it—the reality of
our everyday cackles
in the self-adulation of poverty
—unsavoury sweetness of mucus on a sixties' baby lips
the almost impossible dream that this giant
here snores, to wake up a laughter
—the joke had been made
but I am not laughing.

*I spit
honey out of my mouth:
nothing is second best
after the sweet of eros.*

—Hilda Doolittle

Love is a Flower

*—you must care too much
or you don't at all.*

You, my love, are a wild beauty
man's care or not
nature tends her own
—tender love in a lawn,
carefree blossoms
in no man's land.

Love is a flower
—rose or sunflower
Prickly or kind
a flower is a find,
one for every kind.

Jello

I know things that soften you
& I am jealous of them

water— how it licks every edge and hole.
baptism, sanctification— how you are made whole

touch— you become jello on the palate,
un-mouthed prayers seeking liberty beneath
your throat.

if I ever give voice to my doubts,
take me for a bath, remind me of
water— how ceaselessly we flow— god and a
trident, through myths and time

touch me where it's soft,
teach me soft words like
kiss, bliss & the taboo
no one mentions but us.

African Child

dear African child,

come, sit at the bosom of the moon
listen as the crickets flute at your
crescent buttocks

omo eni 'ii sedi bebere
ka fileke sidi omo elomii

I will tell you
Why you lust for the sea
I know why the deep calls to your soul
(dance)

freedom within you craves the waves
like your ancestors who traded chains
for the drown

I know why mother beaded your waist
—to set the world on fire
but the Atlantic isn't enough
to quench your desire

omo eni 'ii sedi bebere
ka fileke sidi omo elomii

when the drum begs you dance
kick away at dust
& eyes that lust
after the “oil well” at the confluence
of your luring thighs

sway as the wind.

Things I Never Told My Feminist Girlfriend

I feared if I stared too long at her chest// she'd
Say, 'a woman's body is not a map for broken
Boys'// I wanted to say broken boys do not need
a map// save a balm— a rub among the solemn hills.

She said pregnancy is a patriarchal curse// pain
to keep womenfolk down// I'm lost in wonderment//
what better way she'd have come// if the choice was hers.

I once told her// 'love is the potion that makes forget
all sentiments'// she laughed// should I have said// 'stay
mad at men forever if that makes you happy.'

Tourists

boys like us
are tourists
we are not
meant to stay

...

a woman's
heart is a
country-side
motel,
each new
stay, registered
by a creak.
she knows
how long he'd
stay by
how loud he'd
knock

...

boys like us
are tourists
we do not
know how well
to stay

...

a woman's
resolve is a
temple bell
reaching deep
into a deaf's
skull
once it is
benediction
she butchers the grace,
wipes the altar
& locks the gates.

...

boys like us

are tourists
I fear for
country-dwellers
like you.

Game Street

I know this street
like my backhand
playing ping-pong
on a date with fate

here, no one wins
it's a tale for time's
cracked lips. I hope
tomorrow bites you
kola

I know this game
—men trade words
and barter esteem
imperfection mocks
the perfect, we simply
glory in absurdities

here's the tarred road
to my love's yes
—loser takes all,
'love is not a victory
match.'

Home

Last time the door creaked
Home was gone
The windows echoed
Nostalgia from a lost eon

This place, this house held us
—good memories
On time’s tongue

A new stranger lives here
I wonder if she sees the wonders
Etched on the closet mirror
Does she know ‘TF’ are no initials
“Together Forever” was our mantra

Last time this door creaked,
She asked,
What happened to the home?
I replied, “you left.”

*I must study politics and war,
that our sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy...
in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music...*

—John Adams

A Man of Peace

*men who seek peace
must first prepare for war*

I have trained my hands to war
& taught my tongue, seek peace
For, men who war must first be counted
lovers of peace,
or to what end do we sacrifice that which
we hold most dear;
the vainglory of victory
or chance for a dance with death?

Et tÚbrute

I know warm things—

hugs—that shawlbrothers
on cold winter nights

blood, free-flowing from
The betrayal of *esprit de corp*

Stabbed by the same blade
That once guarded me through nights

..

I know warm things—

but shudder at the thought
of our last embrace
—cold night, cold embrace &
a cold plunge

it makes no sense
that betrayal is a synonym
for brotherhood

& things so warm
can be as cold
as the death of us.

Beyond Redemption

for all who(’ll) ever consider(ed) suicide

dear son,

redemption is at the secret place
behind your fear
—pull the trigger
and you will understand
silence is louder than a mighty roar!

father,
I don’t suppose home resides in an abyss
what I seek is beyond the light.

Names & Numbers

we know what the last line reads
before the scripts were rehearsed
dust to dust

thin air carries with it
memory of the ages
—from nought we came
To nought we are cast

this skin glories in absurdity
scars are a tale of miracles

the lingering question lives
—do names become mere numbers
In death?

*hope rises like a phoenix
from the ashes of shattered
dreams.*

—S. A. Sachs

Sulphur & Hell

Men burn
I do
Some rise
(From the ashes)
I do
Remember this
When next
You threaten
Sulphur and hell.

Seedlings

We named ourselves after things
given to the earth in hope
—seeds, sacrifice, libation
given away with sealed lips
like first seedlings
poured away in salty eyes
like marital blessings
but father knew, boys must first die
before they become men
so, he gave us to the earth
& said kiss mother nature
& rise as mighty oaks.

Survivors

we have worn a thousand faces,
two will do for testament

..

Scarface— for days when our battles
aimed to swallow our beauty

we bear the testimony of death
on our cheek

men who have seen a certain decedent
& mockery, when the shadow fell

he shall pass us by— already,
we bear the mark of the slain.

..

Joker— our scars are only evident in our hysteria
we wear no relic from past-life

abikuis a modern demigod
—immortal, cursed with long life

wearing the worries of reincarnation
like rainbow on a poker face

depression does not claim us,
a thousand ways to die makes no appeal

every night, we wear our lips
into the shape of our consistent death

and name ourselves
after a familiar name— survivor.

What It Means to Be Water

a boy's angel named him after
water. after seamless flow of
bridled emotions. but water is
chaos gushing over a leaning
mountain.

a plunge pool is dangerous
like my name-destructive in its beauty
—anger waiting to pounce— to change
the landscape forever. isn't that
what this universe is? Reason I frolic
with anger— the audacity to repaint
what is.

a boy named after seamless water
knows what resides in the deep, that
bridled peace is no calm, that silence
is everything and a storm, and chaos
means change— which is not always
unkind. to frolic with anger is to dare
the heavens, to break down rain and ask
the earth to bask in the deluge.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Opeyemi Oluwadare Oso writes from Ile-Ife, Nigeria. An avid lover of nature and Art in all forms with keen eyes for poetry.

A trained Geologist and Public Servant whose devotion to Poetry and Fiction writing has seen him contributed works for both Nigerian and International publications. Names & Number is his first published compilation of poems.

When not carrying out his primary duties as a Public Servant, he is attending, or organizing a literary event under the aegis of his group - Echoes of African Art & Music. A literary platform started in June 2018 with its maiden event -ARTITUDE; a date with poetry, art and music, held in Ile-Ife. He has been dubbed Officer of Poetry for his keen interest in promoting the art and also participate.

Opeyemi Oso looks to the future with much hope as he aims to keep putting out works that enhances others and address societal issues.



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