



**THE  
GLOOM  
AND THE  
RAY**

Gill Oluwatosin Adekannbi

# **THE GLOOM AND THE RAY**

**A COLLECTION OF POEMS**

*Gill Oluwatosin Adekannbi*

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## THE GLOOM AND THE RAY

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## Preface

A lot of inquiry has gone into interrogating ancient Greek and Latin literature in terms of reception, adaptation, interpretation and representation from the critical perspectives. Classical Reception, a rapidly developing field of research, has influenced the thoughts of scholars in different fields of studies to the extent that the perception of issues in modern cultures is illuminated by many ancient concepts. Situated within a largely Classical **milieu**, *The Gloom and the Ray (Tenebria et Raia)* portrays life as a coin which can flip at us its dark and bright sides. Overall, it is an attempt to revitalise the classical tradition which should be an integral part of the learning culture in ivory towers especially.

As with every creative exercise, there always are inherently the beautiful imperfections. The author fully understands and appreciates this fact. Hence, the attempt to interweave allusions of classical origins with those drawn from Biblical and Yoruba cosmological allusions should be seen as a creatively conscious innovation towards preserving the classical tradition. The author therefore hopes that the manner of couching the imagery may be seen for what it is intended: a novel attempt to reach a wider audience in a contemporary society where everyday happenings can hardly be divorced from the mythological events from which it has so distanced itself, wittingly and unwittingly.

This collection, containing fifty poems, is a revised edition of *THE GLOOM AND THE RAY* that was published in 2000. Many of the poems as found in the first edition have been embellished with some completely transformed. New poems were also added to this revised version as a breath of freshness. Freshness to this edition is also its division into sections or parts based on content and thematisation that collectively explore the modes by which notions and experiences of classical origins manifest with poignancy as commonplace beliefs and events in our contemporary world. Part one, "Enduring Hope" has 13 poems, themes as it explores theme. The second section, "Leadership Woes", has 12 poems which delve largely into crisis in governance. Section three, "Time and Tide", with another 12 poems, speaks different sides of socio-religious issues. The last 11 poems of section four, "The Ray Triumphs" imbue all sense of ultimate victory. In the subsequent paragraphs of this preface, examples of such intersections of ancient themes which recur in the interpretation of current issues are highlighted to give readers a glimpse into the pieces of poems in this edition.

The Roman belief in omens speaks well to the dark side of human life, that fear of the unknown. Similarly, the activities of ambitious politicians in Africa who seek power by all means often evoke scenes of violent gladiatorial shows in Rome; while the lives of greedy leaders who 'devour' the purse of the state bring to mind how the exploitative Roman upper class merged the lands of the impoverished citizens together and turned them into

*latifundia* (large farm estates). Sallust's Jugurtha epitomises the havoc corruption wreaks as the demagogues' desperate quest for power in the base court of the people mirrors the mounting woes of the people. Plutarch's *Life of Nicias*, beyond presenting a story of a military misadventure in Athenian history, furnishes an example of precarious leadership by a General whose rootedness to superstition brings about a downfall when stratagem should have displaced contortions of fear.

It may be general knowledge that 'January' is derived from 'Janus', the Roman god associated with beginnings and endings. In the past, it was reminiscent of the festivity at the beginning of a Roman year, a time that was sacred to Janus. Today, Janus still visits many homes, as it were, on the first of January. *Sana mens in corpore sano* (a sound mind in a sound body) which usually connotes physical wellness as the outcome of seeking medical help, may also leave the thought that 'a sound mind' is a desirable product of physical well-being. In other words, the treatment of the body must also be most agreeable to the mind. The ancient Hippocratic Oath still impresses on medical doctors the need to use their knowledge and training to attend to the patient, the classic connotation of one who is 'suffering' (*patior*) as well as in need of the help of a sympathetic doctor who can dignify him or her as a guest (*hospes*) at the hospital.

Helen, Menelaus' wife, inspires lines on the snares of a beautiful but fickle minded woman. Zeus' escapades when

he elopes with charming Europa to the island of Crete provide insight into the psyche and subliminal motivations, not only of kidnappers, but also that of rapists even in 'the holy place' who portray themselves as angels simply to get the better of the fairer sex without any regard for age or vulnerability. Like Zeus, who plays on Europa's naivete, appearing in the form of an extraordinary bull in order to deceive her, regaining his human form, and then violating the hapless princess, these ones manifest degrees of perversion concealed in deceptively innocuous overtures. In the Nigerian filmic context, the playboy character popularly dubbed "Yoruba demon", the euphemism for purported ritualists who are said to prey on young maidens, is but one among numerous associations that can be drawn from the classical allusion of Zeus and Europa. To the universal context, that the name Europe is derived from Zeus' abducted bride—Europa— is another significant association from the allusion. Could we construe the new highs and lows of socio-political and socio-economic crises emanating from Europe and spreading like cancer to other parts of the world as mere coincidences or renewable parallels? Well, the argument is best left open to imagination.

The Erinyes or the Furies, deities of torments, are usually depicted with snake-like hairs and eyes dripping blood. The menacing appearance mirrors the wanton relish they derive as they punish retributively for 'all crimes' by grotesquely tormenting the culprit. The hideous torment

can be likened to the pain and misery meted out by modern day terrorists who conceal their sadism behind the mask of punitive ideologies that are used to justify dastardly acts of terror committed with impunity. The Martial Festival brings to mind the period of incessant military coups and uprisings, intermittent civil wars, increasingly endless factional strife, inter and intra ethnic disputes and feuds, hate crimes and religious violence common to Africa, Asia and beyond. The hunter-poet, Pliny, the Elder, relieves with some lines on the naturalist atmosphere that is best suited for a creative work which the Fulani boy evokes as he plays music in the company of his droves. Nemesis portends the uneasy blending of joy and sorrow, the presence of misery in the midst of prosperity that leaves man with no uninterrupted happiness. There is the allusion to Asclepius, the ancient great physician and surgeon, who was determined to bring relief to the human endless search for a cure to all sorts of grievous ailments. Yet, Philippides, with the cheering news of victory, sets all his eyes on Athens from Marathon and, to the last drop of his blood, he epitomises endurance in the course of honour.

The climax is heralded by the Chorus, signaling tentative expectation, a dangling between despair and a longing for hope for our globalised city space with growing challenges defying that clear-cut panacea. Thus, gliding towards Catharsis or purgation after engaging the tropes, imagery and allusions drawn from the classical age, the Holy book and the Yoruba worldview is a logical way to conclude this



collection of poems which adopts 'experimental' thematization. To make for the ease in penetrating mythical events in particular, there is the inclusion of in-text footnotes to help the reader achieve a literary and exploratory reading experience. In the course of attaining those goals, the author believes that the reader will also gain insight into classical learning, and be left with a consciousness that would usher in the ray of triumph over the gloom, that gloom, whatever its appearance; the waiting for relief that is sure to come along with the 'Lord of Oils'—the Balsam in Gilead!

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**Part 1**

**ENDURING HOPE**

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## 1. Hope

Our woes  
Arrows from our foes  
Cascading tidal waves  
In the throes of sorrows  
Eyes stare at tomorrow  
Darkness triumphs over light  
Beyond Goliath's might?<sup>1</sup>  
Dread exists no where  
When zeal matches as a martyr  
Never to be weary like a tire  
Hope retires with the fading full-moon  
In the strength of the blooming dawn  
Enclosing gloom  
Thunders doom  
The clouds on the horizon darkens  
Gathering storms of tears  
Flickering rays  
Dampening days  
We refuse to stagger  
Goaded by brimming hope  
Resisting a submission to rope

---

<sup>1</sup> **Goliath** is biblical allusion to the David-versus-Goliath scenario. The glory of the might of the giant champion of the Philistine army, who taunted the battle line of the Israelites, faded away like race medals. A shepherd boy humiliated him in no time.

## 2. Where is the Guardian Spirit?<sup>2</sup>

Figurines of *Lares* <sup>3</sup>

Treasures of the cupboards

The forbears still carry torches

At nuptial games

Honoured in anniversaries

Bequeathing on birth day

Wishes, gifts and songs

The spirit of vigilance

Pervasive, hovering over

From the cradle to the grave

To repulse *mis-fortunes*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> **Guardian Spirit.** The ancient Romans believed in a guardian spirit whose duty was to protect an individual right from birth. Guardian spirits in Roman times were held to be tutelary deities who served as patrons or protectors not only for individuals, but also for cities and places of great importance. A person or a city could have as many as tutelary deities considered necessary, upon whom all honour was bestowed, to guarantee safety. The belief, similar to belief in guardian angels, was principal in Roman religion and particularly relevant to the people in times of war and crisis.

<sup>3</sup> **Lares.** These were guardian deities in ancient Roman religion that were associated with hearth, fields, boundaries or fruitfulness and other activities and locations. They are also sometimes viewed as ancestor-deities. The guardian spirits were expected to closely keep an eye on events in their jurisdiction, safeguard and maneuver happenings in the interest of their adherents. The statues and presence of the *Lares* were ubiquitous: they were seen during family meals and were believed to be on hand at important family functions.

Leaving countless puzzles  
Where do you fix attention?  
When drought visits  
Where do you place interest?  
Does misery come in your siesta?  
O Lares, behold afflictions  
Making cries to soar high  
And Whys descending  
Your votive  
A statute of immanence  
The song of young and old  
Filling the air constantly  
Bewails of promise miscarriages  
Lamentations of interrupted joys  
Questions rise everywhere  
Bumper is the harvest of whys

---

<sup>4</sup> **Mis-fortunes.** The prefix, mis-, just like 'mis-' has 'ill' as one of its meanings. It also conveys the sense of 'bad'. 'Misfortune' then literally means 'ill' or 'bad' fortune. 'Fortune' comes from the Latin word 'Fortuna', the name of the goddess of fortune and representation of luck or chance in Roman religion 'mistaken'. The goddess is portrayed as veiled and blind, playing ambivalent roles of bringing good and bad. Hence, 'misfortune' then refers to calamities originating from the goddess of luck, Fortuna. While the Romans would seek favour from Fortuna, in all spheres of their daily life, they sought protection against the calamity the goddess might wreck from the Lares.

### 3. Ode to Jerusalem

Even after Masada<sup>5</sup>

A song I sing

For you I sing

O Jerusalem!<sup>6</sup>

Darling Jerusalem

From the Arctic to the Amazon

From the Sahara to the Everglades

You tower above the heights

Above the peak of peaks

My hand I raise in haste

The right and strong hand

I stretch it for you, oh Zion!

I deride food of shame

Awful banquet set before me

By swarming fans of gluttony

Eating the meal of tomorrow

---

<sup>5</sup> **Masada.** This is the Hebrew word for fortress or fortification. Historically, it came to be known as the final stronghold or the last pocket of Jewish resistance against Roman invasion after the destruction of the temple that was rebuilt by Herod the great in 70 CE. The Romans took Masada desert fortress in 74 CE and this really meant the decisive end of the ancient city, Jerusalem.

<sup>6</sup> **Jerusalem.** The name Jerusalem is used symbolically in the Bible. The Christian Apostle Paul refers to a 'Jerusalem above,' (Galatians 4:25, 26). Revelation 3:12 also mentions Jerusalem in a grand ethereal setting as 'New Jerusalem'. The contexts of the foregoing references depict a Jerusalem that is, far from being under any siege, radiantly poised to record a glorious decisive victory and usher in untold blessings.

Saying aha, aha as I stumble  
But I rise, to undaunted position  
In the strength of Judge of all  
Charming Zion, splendid splendour  
Entrances my resolute heart  
Arrests my resilient soul  
By thy brilliant constellations  
Beloved city of the great kings  
Your unfading beauty and radiance  
Makes me daily a joyful captive  
My eyes glued, mouth ever agape  
Weightless and sleepless, all day long  
At the sight of your magnificence  
Eternal in glory, beloved Jerusalem  
You triumph against king's enemies  
I dare all and proudly boast  
Your light shall lead forever!

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#### 4. Eclipse of the Star

Your beaming smile  
Ushers in the dawn  
And with a shrill voice  
You utter good morning

To a crowd chanting hope  
Joy illumines new abode  
Sole horn for the dynamos<sup>7</sup>  
The fountains of prowess

Great overflow for new gem  
From Centuries' trees, shelters  
Whence then the viral foe?  
Legions<sup>8</sup> pouncing on vitality

One and then the other  
Now the berceuse from Hades<sup>9</sup>  
For the timid snow-heads  
As the sky hastens to turn dark

Strangely you are strong

---

<sup>7</sup> **Dynamos.** This is the plural of the word dynamo that is fittingly used for a person that is full of youthful vigour, having the physical strength at its peak

<sup>8</sup> **Legions.** See footnote 11

<sup>9</sup> **Hades.** See footnote 4



Your head no more dejected  
The summoned solace comes  
Strength to go on springs up.

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## 5. Release

Good! The fruit turns sour  
Bitter leaves of garden plant  
Sooth the yearning palates  
So well feels the farewell  
Sweet indeed the great pain  
It comes at the swift escape  
Of love in deep sore distress  
An outstay of prized welcome  
From heart in dismal bondage  
Already singing innocent blues  
In taking daily allegiance oath  
No advocate would plead  
A course nobler and more just  
Just once comfort, quick succor  
Release! Release! Release!  
Throw behind of a masquerade  
Of pieces joined by a fashioner  
Cast aside portion of yesterday  
Forgone like forgotten ancestors  
Those measuring upon measure  
Commands then, demands now  
The gates presently wide open  
Grand departure's very long due  
Shut-up heat quits for breeze  
Allies join jolly celebration  
Loyal and beside to say bye-bye  
To plaster the wounds, to heal  
Gather together scattered bones

Rebuild dented weary frames  
Restore networks of muscles  
Strained by pointless struggles  
Weakened in fight over words  
No one can tell the story better  
Night muses over faultless dreams  
Safely closing eyes, bringing sleep  
At last, free, set free  
From all anxious care  
Over vexing Quadratilla<sup>10</sup>  
The exit of pungent affection

---

<sup>10</sup> **Quadratilla.** Ummidia Quadratilla was a wealthy and influential Roman woman who was known for luxurious lifestyle common to the upper classes. Without any intended allusion to her personality, her name is simply used for the overbearing character of the poem.

## 6. Nocturnal Flight

They cross six rivers  
And then another seven  
Respite beckoning at a distance  
Eight mountains swiftly evolves  
Yet, ebbing energy is summoned  
Men forge ahead with hopes  
Since Hercules<sup>11</sup> completed tasks  
Descending and ascending  
Contemning unending valleys  
Loyal panorama begins to fulfil  
Promise of relief for weary souls  
In the sight of desirable terminal  
Where somnus<sup>12</sup> valiancy endows  
Now the militants lay the ambush  
Winged creatures, Pteroids  
With famous loathsome songs  
Brandishing weapons  
Making infusions  
Bringing dread to nocturnal treat  
With sudden profane transfusion  
The obnoxious gift for the helpless

---

<sup>11</sup> Hercules. In Greek mythology, Hercules, a demi-god is the son of Zeus and a mortal woman, Alcmene. He is famed for performing extraordinary tasks, which included wrestling with Death and visiting the underworld twice, during his difficult life course.

<sup>12</sup> Somnus is the Latin word for sleep.

Heading back to the tropical sun  
With pitiable battered body  
Clambering more hills, more Alps  
After awful plaguing encounter  
Of harrying midnight flight

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## 7. Dirge for the Fallen Flesh

O mighty Flesh  
So, you crash  
In a flash!  
Solomon the wisest  
Craved exotic thighs!  
Mystery of flesh direful  
Leaves me rather fearful!  
In agora<sup>13</sup> he stands  
Basking in the glory  
Of his meager props  
His door hastily opens  
See, he is how earnest!  
Memory of the bad damns  
Virtue with passion extols  
Who does not admire Jehu?<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> **Agora** was one of the prominent features of the ancient Greek polis. It was the township-centre where many of the people, especially the nobles, usually resided. The town square was an open space or, according to the literal meaning of the word, a 'gathering-place' with easy access to all citizens when meetings were called. An 'agora' was also known as a centre for sports, entertainment and political life of the city-state.

<sup>14</sup> Jehu, the son of Jehoshaphat, in the biblical account received the commission to spearhead the elimination of the whole house of Ahab, including Jehoram and Jezebel. This was at the time when the nation of Israel was under the wicked influence of Jezebel who promoted the Baal cult, killed God's prophets and corrupted the people with her 'fornications' and 'sorceries'. (2 Ki. 9:22; 1 Ki. 18:4,

But, hear, O brethren  
Dirge for the fallen flesh  
The Song for a Solomon  
Recall the repeated odes  
For the crumbling stars

---

13) Jehu, characteristic of his disposition, wasted no time in carrying out the execution. Jehu was known for driving furiously as he zealously carried the assignment (2 Ki. 9:20). However, the house of Jehu would be held as bloodguilty (Ho 1:4). Paradoxically, it is sobering to note that, despite his faithfully carrying out his commission, Jehu's tolerance for calf worship resulted in a lot of bloodshed (2Ki 10:29, 31).

## 8. Pliny to the Fulani Boy

can life be any easier  
more than he sees it?  
safe in his world  
under a mighty tree  
the Fulani boy sits  
with able woman's skill  
busy with strings  
partnering a puny calabash  
even in a solitary world  
he refreshes with music  
intently musing over  
a faithful favorite cow  
its nunu,<sup>15</sup> breaks his fast  
the calf soon becomes his  
hmm, the Fulani boy  
see Pliny<sup>16</sup> in the woods

---

<sup>15</sup> **Nunu** or, in full, *Fura de nunu* is a popular local drink made from unpasteurized cow milk, common in the northern part of Nigeria. The dairy remains the delight of many homes in the north and in other places among the Fulani herders.

<sup>16</sup> **Pliny.** Linking nobility with virtuous past, the Roman elite extolled activities relating to rustic life, especially hunting. A Roman going on a hunting expedition was not merely looking for game. That kind of activity was viewed as a form of recess and escape from troubles. Pliny describes the atmosphere as best suited for a creative work when he says: 'the poems ... are perfected most easily in the woods and groves (Pliny Ep. 9.10). In this situation, he would have 'a pen and writing tablets...thinking about something and writing it down, so that, if [he] came home



keep his company a little  
will you share his stylus?  
will you desire those tablets?  
would you set heart at task  
and teach your hands his arts  
of more bumper harvests?  
the Fulani boy  
therein lies the lesson  
that you take to your hut  
dearth fulfillment is in bites  
greater is the bliss of food  
when return comes from stylus  
this, Omoluabi<sup>17</sup> well knows

---

empty-handed, nevertheless, [he] would bring back full notebooks'(Pliny Pliny Ep. 1.6).

<sup>17</sup> **Omoluabi.** This Yoruba philosophical and cultural notion is used to describe a person of honour. It conveys the thought of moral excellence that is not only manifest in good conducts but also in display of intelligence.

## 9. What is never in Vain?

Male dogs  
He-goats  
Do relish  
Pleasant transience  
Fleeting fruition  
Butterfly  
Radiant with wings  
In passing glory  
Salacious nectar  
Eagerly enjoys  
Feat of termite?  
Legendary hard-work  
Mighty, massive  
Then, crumbles  
Puffy Agama-lizard  
Snooty red head  
Boasting every second  
Crushed by junior hunter  
The mortal subdues  
Puts behind all odds  
Cling feathers to his bodies  
Wearing caps in colours  
Listed in the hall of renown  
From summit of Everest  
The next day he plunges  
And he licks the dust  
What is never in vain?  
What rests with Eternity?

Consumed with joy today  
Savoured with passion tomorrow  
Water from eternal spring  
Soothing, inspiring strength  
Dwelling in vivid memory  
In archives of treasures  
Ad infinitum are its marks  
Imprints ever on the rock  
If it is never in vain  
It is forever a gain

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## 10. The Dawn Arrives in Triumph

Darkness  
you depart like a horse  
trotting after a fruitful campaign  
galloping in style to a halt

i behold Today ascending  
parting ways with Yesterday  
with a banner Tomorrow rises  
flaunting crystal-silver lining

sighted in Africa, yes, seen  
in the Far East, in the Antarctic  
transcendent Dawn is a victor  
the conquering Dawn is here.

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## 11. Search for Cure

Whence this heat?  
Burning vituperations  
If from Mount Olympus<sup>18</sup>  
Would that host of votive  
Besiege the Olympial  
Delphi<sup>19</sup> receives pilgrims  
Bringing and bestowing gifts  
Asclepius<sup>20</sup> now prophesies

---

<sup>18</sup> Mount **Olympus** in Greek mythology is the abode of the twelve Olympians: Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Athena, Apollo, Artemis, Hestia, Demeter, Hermes, Aphrodite, Ares and Hephaestus. Their dwelling was established after the Olympians defeated the Titans. In Homeric literature, the Olympian Apollo and his twin sister Artemis, with the use of their arrows, are often symbolised as harbingers of sudden breakout of diseases. Hence, Mount Olympus becomes a source of sickness or plagues. The earliest example of disease appears in the Iliad when Agamemnon insults Chryses as the priest seeks to ransom his captured daughter. As punishment, Apollo brings a highly communicable disease to the Greek camp by shooting his arrows, first at mules and dogs, and then later at the soldiers (Iliad I.9ff)

<sup>19</sup> **Delphi** was a prominent ancient religious sanctuary; sacred to the god Apollo and central TO the Greek world. According to Greek mythology, Delphi was the point at which the two eagles released by Zeus met after encircling the world. City-states and individuals regularly visited Delphi where they obtained enigmatic predictions and guidance from the oracle of Apollo. Besides, Delphi always played host to the PanHellenic Pythian Games

<sup>20</sup> **Asclepius** is spelt in Greek as 'Asklepios' and in Latin, as 'Aesculapius'. He was the Greek god of medicine, the personification of the Divine Healer or miracle working

Unbending rage of a Titan  
Hail his skilful manoeuvres  
To spare vibrant plants  
Bounded by militant worms  
Hygeia<sup>21</sup> voices sanitary

---

physician. Greek mythology presents Asclepius as the first product of Caesarean section. Through an act of medical intervention, Apollo cut open the womb of Coronis and freed the baby Asclepius from his mother's womb as the god punished the mother with death on a funeral pyre. Subsequently, Asclepius learnt the art of healing from a centaur, Chiron, who was assigned to raise him up. Besides, Asclepius practised healing through use of the art of divination, obtaining responses from Apollo through oracles. Asclepius became a great physician and surgeon and was credited with attainments of landmarks in ancient Greek medicine. Practice of medicine and religion in his instance went hand in hand since Asclepius obtained his knowledge of drugs, herbs and the nature of many things, with which he treated diseases, from auguries. He passed on his knowledge to his sons and students whom he had in his apprenticeship. The symbol of a staff with a serpent coiled around it in medicine today is reminiscent of the attribute of Asclepius who was often depicted as standing, dressed in a long mantle and with bare chest.

<sup>21</sup> Hygeia. In Greek mythology, Hygeia was a daughter and attendant of Asclepius her father; the goddess to whom was attributed good health, sanitation and hygiene. Her office of welfare and prevention of disease which worked in conjunction with 'Panacea' (remedy) and 'Iaso' (recuperation from illness), her sisters, was an indication of the close relationship between cleanliness and health in ancient times. Hygeia, along with Asclepius and Panacea are specifically mentioned in the age-old Oath of Hippocrates that calls on all the gods and the goddesses to witness regarding a doctor's displaying proper conducts and faithfully fulfilling his medical obligations. 'Salus', the corresponding Roman name of the goddess, has the

As sanity for Panacea<sup>22</sup>  
At no cost of a journey  
To Epidaurus<sup>23</sup> sanctuary  
Hippocrates comes from Cos  
With oath learnt by heart  
To break mystery's fetters  
Asclepius temple endures  
Beheld by leisure travellers  
Still standing monument  
To the quest for respite  
Now resident in capsules  
Epics of the past

---

English derivative, 'salubrious' or 'salutary'; words that point to healthy, health-giving or healthful condition.

<sup>22</sup> Panacea. See footnote 24.

<sup>23</sup> Epidaurus. The presence of a sanctuary dedicated to Asclepius the god of medicine brought the ancient Greek city-state, Epidaurus, into limelight. Epidaurus became highly so famed as a healing centre that the Romans after coming in contact with the Greek world imported a statue of Asclepius as well as one of his sacred snakes that had been tamed to their territory and built a temple to the god of medicine. The practice of medicine at Epidaurus was a mix of the paranormal and science as evidenced by surgeons' utilising scientific skills and interpretation of dreams in treatment. The temples and hospital buildings devoted to the Epidaurean deities remain until now monuments to the healing cults that persisted in the Greco-Roman world. Today, as a tourist centre, the site of the ancient Greek sanctuary, its architectural edifices as well as cultural and archaeological park receive hundreds of thousands of visitors each year.

Forlorn hope  
Unending hunt

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## 12. The Race To Win

Who doesn't know Philippides? <sup>24</sup>  
Who never heard his story?  
The strides, his strength  
Obdurate will growing inside  
Deterred by no daredevil  
Stoic Polynices and Eteocles<sup>25</sup>  
Setting eyes to mutual destruction  
Glow, spirit of fire  
shine on! Shine on!  
Leave Marathon<sup>26</sup> at once

---

<sup>24</sup> **Philippides** was reportedly the great-news bearer in 490 BC, who covered the distance of about 26 miles (in about 3 hours) by running to deliver at Athens the message of Athenian significant victory over the Persians at Marathon. He died after saying: 'Νενικήκαμεν' ('Nenikikamen': We have won). Philippides is believed to have performed his first athletic feat at the time when Athens wanted Sparta's help in the former's impending encounter with the Persians at Marathon. Miltiades, an Athenian general, sent a professional runner (understood to be Philippides) to make a 140-mile run to Sparta to solicit for assistance in executing the war. After making the trip in about 36 hours, the trained runner needed to run another 140 miles to Athens to inform the Athenian generals that the Spartans, regrettably, for religious reasons could not provide the much desired support (Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, VI, 106). The will power and endurance that were attributed to Philippides, especially in the heroic race from Marathon to Athens, constitute the spirit behind the modern Marathon sporting event.

<sup>25</sup> **Polynices and Eteocles**. See endnote 48 above

<sup>26</sup> **Marathon**. See footnote 27

With glorious victory news  
Ever fresh in comely heart  
Run the race to win  
In competition with none  
With message so dear  
Utter no greetings on the way  
Look neither to left nor right  
Give your eyes to nothing vain  
Submit to no lure of canaries  
Fight urges for pleasure  
Defy games of treachery  
With heroic tenacity  
Hold the glowing touch  
Kept fervently burning  
Then, at Athens, the ultimate  
Spurt out tidings not quantified  
Engraved on a golden tablet  
The deed is done, die fulfilled

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**Part 2**  
**LEADERSHIP WOES**

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### 13. Lordship of Omens

Tens of ships battle ready  
Hoplites<sup>27</sup> in thousands march  
Young men eager for gains  
Vote in unison for Syracuse  
With spurs of Sicilian mines  
Three officers, three schemes  
With all arsenals to unleash  
Surmounted mountains and  
Rivers, wild roars not deter  
Falcons flap in frightful flight  
No more an aviation delight  
Illustrious Generals shiver  
Troops march with trembling  
Caught in frozen frenzy  
Is it a terror of a humbling?  
Gazing at the strange moon  
Commander peers at *Dis-aster*<sup>28</sup>  
Nicias in freezing confusion  
Stratagem beckons

---

<sup>27</sup> **Hoplites** were the Greek soldiers with heavier armours who, by 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, fought in close formation and gave foot soldiers stronger protection.

<sup>28</sup> **Dis-aster**. Dis- is a Latin prefix that expresses negation. In the English language word disaster, it combines with *astrum* (Latin) to convey an astrological or augural meaning of imminent misfortune; rendered 'bad star'. 'Disaster' is now generally used without astrological connotation to express a great loss or catastrophe.

But augury censures  
Catastrophe looms  
At Sicily<sup>29</sup>  
Soldiers become immobile  
Singing victory in mono tone  
At the spectacle of scientific portent  
Spirit of Triumph succumbs  
Valor vanishes from brave hearts  
In wait for blood and deaths  
Munitions enjoy all leisure and  
Mediterranean knows it well  
The doom of revered army and navy  
Finally, without glory, they bow  
In total submission  
To the Lordship of Omens.

---

<sup>29</sup> Sicily. By 750 BC, Phoenician and Greek colonies occupied this expansive island in the Mediterranean Sea. Sicily was the scene of the Greek–Punic wars (First: 480BCE, Second: 410BCE) as well as the wars between the Romans and the Carthaginians (264 BCE and 146 BCE). Of particular interest was Athens' aggression when she embarked on the great expedition against Sicily between 415–413. This turned out to be the worst misadventure in Athenian history. According to Plutarch (Life of Nicias, 23), the sudden appearance of the moon eclipse caused superstitious fear in the Athenian General, Nicias, and resulted in demobilisation that led to the greatest casualty. This is a historical instance of how a superstitious leader can ruin blind followers.

## 14. Civil Predators

Singing, drumming  
Chuckling, giggling  
Dangling hope with dance  
Before the faithful hopeless

See the vultures!  
With mosaic of crafted truths  
Waving land mine manifestoes  
Visioning of ills by bulging eyes

Our gold, diamond,  
Uranium, acacias and mahogany  
Joyful gladiators  
Make Epicurean<sup>30</sup> pot bellies

Eyes glued to scenes of horror  
Of constant clashing arms  
Roman games at the arena<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> **Epicurean.** This an individual who subscribes to the philosophy of Epicurus who saw the greatest good in human life as happiness that is attainable through pleasure seeking.

<sup>31</sup> **Roman games.** The games refer to violent gladiatorial shows which the Romans used supposedly to reenact or relieve vicious war experiences, even in times of peace. With gory scenes at the theatre, the Romans through their entertainment depicted the vicious human nature that manifested in the Romans' treatment of captives and political opponents.

## Blameless ears filled with tinnitus

A trophy for the victor  
No odes from Italian farmers<sup>32</sup>  
As fields of toils lay bare  
Alas, Hannibal ad portas!<sup>33</sup>

Pillagers finish the meat  
Lick the pot with big tongues

---

<sup>32</sup> **The Italian farmers.** The enlistment of many Roman civilians for the Hannibalic War as well as other second century Roman conquests greatly diminished the agricultural workforce, especially in small farms. The peasants fell into debts, became impoverished and were subsequently compelled to sell or abandon their lands. The exploitative upper class, having merged together and turned the lands into latifundia (large farm estates), ploughed the wealth from war spoils into them. The unemployment among poor farmers was made worse by the influx of captive slaves who provided cheap labour on the farms.

<sup>33</sup> **Hannibal ad portas.** In the Hannibalic War, also known as the Second Punic War, Rome got what she least expected from Hannibal. The Carthaginian general struck terror in the hearts of the inhabitants of southern Italy and caused incessant panic in many homes at Rome. Hannibal being full of surprises became so elusive that his defeat was not as easy as the Romans had anticipated and the psychological impact of his presence in Italy remained indelible in the minds of the Romans for generations. Hannibal instilled so much fear in the heart of the Romans that Roman parents would use the Latin expression, 'Hannibal ad portas' (Hannibal is at the door) to bring their erring children back to their senses.

Innocent tummy rumbles all night  
In all-night measuring of roofs

Who frees pitiful souls from  
Immortalised metrical lines  
Sung by bards for generations?  
Ubiquitous epigraphs of distress

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## 15. Plea for Panacea<sup>34</sup>

the war you saw  
says thoughts must be fought  
while vessels are at shore  
Ares<sup>35</sup> plans not yet wrought  
anger do bend, lest it rends.  
arrays of men  
whose blood became flood  
gratify the thirsty gods!  
frenzy story urging to Troy<sup>36</sup>  
pride, ambition, driving wild  
pushing aside intentions wise  
and they rise in thousands  
blind to everything but right  
tell, please, who desires streams  
of fluid rippling and chilling?  
*sanguis*<sup>37</sup>, not of altar lambs  
of mortals with hot affection

---

<sup>34</sup> Panacea. See footnote 24

<sup>35</sup> Ares, known in Greek mythology as the god of war, is well known for his uncontrolled anger, aggressiveness and undying thirst for war.

<sup>36</sup> Troy. See footnote 50

<sup>37</sup> Sanguis. This is the Latin word for blood. Here, the form is either nominative or vocative case, while the genitive singular form is 'sanguinis'. When 'is' of the genitive ending is removed, what remains is 'sanguin'; the combining form for words such as 'sanguine', 'sanguinary' then becomes obvious.

myriads forward marching  
under the shield of Nemesis<sup>38</sup>  
if only they part at Aulis  
all may know no misery  
but tunes of bliss  
someone must ask  
whose delight  
is Rwanda's plight  
tearing brothers asunder  
and glorifying blunder  
quickly offer up hubris  
hurry to ease grief

---

<sup>38</sup> **Nemesis** in Greek mythology is the goddess that personifies indignation against evil deeds and retributions when fortune favours a person who does merit it. Nemesis as the goddess of vengeance represents the feeling of resentment that surfaces when crimes that are committed seem to go unpunished or the fortune acquired is viewed as excessive or undeserved. Nemesis determines the measure of happiness and unhappiness humans get, striking the equilibrium and making sure neither is in excess. Hence, she is seen 'balancing' joy with sorrow, bringing losses and suffering amidst surplus, denoting prosperity.

## 16. The Few Win

Shareholders of filth  
Bask in the strength of vile  
Boast that they are sly  
Pride in ambitus<sup>39</sup>  
Saddled with largitiones<sup>40</sup>  
Sage night flyers  
Bats, blind with gifts  
Breed loathsome brags  
Stride on with taunts  
To tame roaring crowds  
Hail deafening lyrics  
To assemble forces  
In the name of Sword  
The few pronounce justice

---

<sup>39</sup> **Ambitus** in ancient Roman law refers to an electoral corruption, a crime which involved a candidate using bribery or other unethical means to make the outcome of an election favour him.

<sup>40</sup> **Largitiones**, the plural of the word *largitio*, is used for the various forms that electoral bribery may take in ancient Rome. As part of the attempt to influence electoral results, politicians resorted to distribution of dole and various expressions of generosity, particularly by the time of election.

## 17. SANA MENS<sup>41</sup>

Dear disciple of Hippocrates<sup>42</sup>  
Novel and darling snow  
Enviably are your robes  
With Olympian wreath glory  
*Le Professeur* beseeches Apollo<sup>43</sup>  
Calling Asclepius<sup>44</sup>, next, Hygeia<sup>45</sup>,

---

<sup>41</sup> **Sana mens.** The Latin phrase, 'sana mens in corpore sano', is usually rendered 'a sound mind in a sound body' or 'a healthy mind in a healthy body'. This suggests that physical wellness is not just the end of seeking good health. It could also be understood that 'sana mens', 'a sound mind', is a desirable outcome of a physical well-being; hence, in the treatment of the body respect should be shown for principles that are amiable to the mind. Otherwise, a sound body may not have a sound mind.

<sup>42</sup> **Hippocrates**, born on the island of Cos, off the southwest coast of Asia Minor, is generally believed to be the founder of medicine as a rational science. He is credited with the departure of medical science from the magic, superstition and the supernatural. Although his approach to medicine initially had several serious flaws, he however advocated a rather more objective diagnosis of the patient to ensure an accurate assessment ailment place the treatment on a sound footing. Hippocratic Oath represents a physician as an individual who is sworn to employing all the knowledge of his calling, not only to serve and save, but to keep the dignity of his patient intact in the course of doing these.

<sup>43</sup> **Apollo**, the multifaceted Greek god is known as the god of medicine and healing. See footnote 21

Then Panacea<sup>46</sup>, all to witness  
Thy hand, raised to the sky  
Of gusto to save the worthless  
The vow to provide refuge and  
Harm none called mendicant<sup>47</sup>  
So, now, plunge in a dagger  
Dislodge a nagging mass  
And it is no cause to shiver  
Neither thy desire for *pecunia*<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Asclepius is the son of Apollo, the god of many sanctuaries many ancient Greeks.  
See footnote 23

<sup>45</sup> Hygeia. See footnote 24

<sup>46</sup> Panacea. See footnote 24

<sup>47</sup> Medicant. The present participle of the Latin word, mendico (to beg or to ask for alms) is mendicans. The word is the root of the English word, 'mendicant'. 'Mendicant' could be used to designate a member of a religious order who by choice leads a life of self-deprivation or austerity. However, the mien of a person who solely relies on begging or on charitable gifts for a living may sometimes illustrate the level of self-esteem of a patient who is desperate for a cure when appearing before a doctor.

<sup>48</sup> Pecunia is generally translated as money; but when consulting a doctor, as is intended here, the word may also convey the sense of property, opulence or abundance of material possessions. Practice of medicine by an individual could sometimes be driven by the desire for any of these or simply result in them. Even when this is the situation, it may not raise any issue when no medical ethics are compromised

But take your oath again  
With this corpus outstretched  
Before your scalpel plunges in  
Pledge not to violate  
Nor defile the soul you slice  
Muse over *sana mens* rhyme  
Leave the laurels unsoiled  
Honours not diminished by venoms  
Issuing forth from connubial crisis  
Nay, a drum beaten by hubris<sup>49</sup>  
Obstruct the spewing  
Oozing from immaculate *iatros*<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> **Hubris** in modern usage is often associated with arrogance or a lack of humility. It is also used to designate rash behaviour stemming from pride or presumptuousness and insolence that belies lack of good judgment. In Greek mythology, such conduct is often portrayed as intended at disparaging the gods or humans. Retributions usually follow. Hubris in Greek tragedy is often the major flaw in the heroes who tend to see themselves as superior to every other person, including immortals. This is reflected in the way they perceive and handle matters at crucial points. With the inflated, super arrogance that obscures virtues in them, they unwittingly set the stage for the precipitous downfall that elicits emotion of pity. Therein lies the tragedy.

<sup>50</sup> **Iatros.** The Greek word means 'healer' or 'physician'. 'Iatro-', its combining form may bring to mind an English derivative, 'iatrogenic', which relates to sickness that results from medical examination or how a doctor manages a patient. Another combining form of 'iatros' is '-iatic' which functions as a suffix.

Your guest come for *hospitium*<sup>51</sup>  
Banish *vituperata*<sup>52</sup>  
Gaze at me in faith  
Keep promise safe in loyal heart

---

<sup>51</sup> **Hospitium.** The meaning of the Latin word 'hospitium' goes beyond what its derivative, 'hospital' means. It implies understanding the right and responsibility of a patient and a healthcare worker respectively at a hospital. Display of hospitality was believed to be a divine obligation in the Greco-Roman world; hence, providing good reception from a stranger was commonly viewed as a form of piety. A guest usually enjoyed meals at the expense of the host under whose protection he had come and may further enjoy the generosity of the host who may eagerly present him with gifts at his departure. When a host fulfilled his duty toward the guest, he expected divine blessings. When he did not, he expected dire wrath or worse punishment if he maltreated him. Interestingly, the English word 'patient' is from the Latin word 'patior' which means 'I suffer' 'I endure'. Therefore, when a patient who suffers some afflictions or infirmities visits a doctor or a healthcare provider, the roots of 'hospital' and 'patient' should evoke the thought of being at a place to receive kind and warm treatment. Nurses as healthcare providers are specially trained to meet these needs.

<sup>52</sup> **Vituperata.** This is the accusative neuter plural of the Latin word 'vituperō': 'I censure' 'I scold', 'tell off', 'blame' 'I disparage', 'find fault with'. The English derivative of the word is 'vituperate', which means verbal use of strong or violent expressions to blame or insult someone. This may regrettably be the lot of a patient seeing a superb doctor (perhaps, 'superbus', the Latin word for 'proud' or 'arrogant' is intended) who chastises lambastes, reprimands, castigates, scolds or resorts to any other use of words that may demean the patient, extinguishing self-esteem. The irony today is that patients are often exposed to 'vituperata' when they deserve 'hospitium'.

And I shall return home  
Whole worth untouched

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## 18. Martial Festival<sup>53</sup>

puh! puh! pah! pah!  
it is their leisure again  
idle boys, no prophecy to fulfill  
defeating the law of humanity  
subject all to inhumanity  
puh! puh! pah! pah!  
their memories spring back  
to the festival of extravagancy  
of blood of the innocent  
puh! puh! pah! pah!  
participants are dancing  
with absolute vigour  
keen spectators are content  
silence is ordained as a new priest  
puh! puh! pah! pah!  
what hot affection of adherents  
eaten up by zeal!  
to set sail with Iphigenia<sup>54</sup> blood

---

<sup>53</sup> **Martial Festival.** Martial is derived from the genitive of the Latin Mars (Martis). Mars is the Roman God of war and the expression, martial festival, evokes the incessant military coups, civil wars as well as bloody factional strives in Africa.

<sup>54</sup> **Iphigenia.** According to Greek mythology, at Aulis, the Greeks could not obtain a favourable wind to set sail to Troy during the Trojan War. Calchas the seer on being consulted identified the cause of the Greeks' plight as Agamemnon's provoking the goddess Artemis when he killed a sacred deer. The goddess decided to stop all winds and the seer told Agamemnon that he would have to sacrifice his daughter,

see the participants descending  
in tens, in hundreds, in thousands  
returning to the dust  
puh! puh! pah! pah!  
oh, what a spillage, in this age!  
two rams lock horns,  
two elephants enter a duel,  
who consoles the grass?  
puh! pah!  
the festival is ending  
the high priest says a blessing  
promising peace, prosperity  
for all eternally  
but do not say I told you  
martial festival comes at leisure!

---

Iphigenia, to appease the goddess. After initial reluctance, Agamemnon employed deceit to bring Iphigenia to Aulis, telling her and Clytemnestra his wife that Iphigenia was to marry Achilles before the departure to Troy. Confronted with the truth at Aulis, Iphigenia unreservedly considered it a path of honour to volunteer herself for the sacrifice. The myth has it that Artemis at the very point of sacrifice, substituted Iphigenia with a calf and transferred Agamemnon's daughter to Tauris where she was compelled to spend the rest of her life as a priestess of Artemis. Afterwards, the Greeks got the right wind to set sail to the bloody Trojan War. However, sacrifices could be made to avert wars rather than pursuing it.

## 19. Oil

Oil, Oil, Oil  
Who lifts our oil?  
Who sells our oil?  
Who buys our oil?  
What fouls our soil?  
If Jugurtha<sup>55</sup> is a prophet  
To the first bidder it goes  
Game of fathomless sleaze  
Leisure of the nation's fathers  
Patriots with plastic skins  
Offer up *Justitia*<sup>56</sup> at once

---

<sup>55</sup> **Jugurtha** was an ancient North African prince who came in close interaction with the Roman soldiers when he served under Gaius Marius at the siege of Numantia between 134-133 BC. During this time and subsequently during the Jugurthine War of 112-106 BC, he became so much aware of the Romans' susceptibility to bribery that he described Rome as 'urbem venalem et mature perituram, si emptorem invenerit' ('a city put up for sale and ready for destruction, if it finds a buyer', Sallust, Jug. 35.10). Interestingly, corruption was particularly rife in the Roman senate in the last century of the Republic and always ranks high among the factors that contributed to the collapse of the republic. Under-development in present times is still frequently blamed on political corruption in.

<sup>56</sup> **Justitia** is the Roman goddess of Justice (Themis is her Greek equivalent goddess). She is depicted as blindfolded, carrying a balance in her left hand and a double-edged sword in her right hand. This posture symbolises her impartial power of Reason and Justice. Sometimes, her wearing a blindfold is used to depict

On the altar of Avarice  
Cold and zealous procurators  
Teaming up with Publicani<sup>57</sup>  
Voracious Vultures full of life  
Scatter with chicken feet  
Hastily devouring the estates  
Of forsaken *am ha' a'rets*,<sup>58</sup>  
Pillaging and fanning wails  
Night, day, saving bloody tears  
In the delta of Niger, and soon  
The session hastily ends  
Choirs sing filthy melodies  
Priests pray in soiled garments

---

objectivity as she renders justice on no account with fear or favour. In parts of the world, the cry for justitia persists amidst the interfering Jugurthine influence.

<sup>57</sup> **Publicani.** Roman firms of publicani got the contract of collecting taxes from the state. The tax collectors made an investment by paying the state a fixed amount as up front and sought to make profit from the taxes they would collect from the provinces. Since procurators (governors) could take money from the publicani in carrying out provincial administration, they had the record of taking bribes and then turning blind eye when the publicani exploited the provincials. The publicani, seemed to have a free rein since, unlike the senators, they could not be prosecuted in the extortion court.

<sup>58</sup> **Am ha' a'rets.** While the Hebrew expression may simply mean 'the people of the Land' or 'the general citizenry', it is used as an expression of disdain for lowly, poor people who were not learned in the Law or who did not live by the rabbinic man-made traditions (Mt 15:1, 2; John 7:49).

Plunderers reverently close one eye  
Keep vigil over loot with the other  
Solemnity ends abruptly  
Amen! Amen! Amen!  
Session for booty is over  
But miserable worshipers linger  
And service song continues  
Oil, Oil, Oil,  
Greed lifts our oil  
Oil, Oil, Oil,  
Sleaze sells our oil  
Oil, Oil, Oil,  
Vulture buys our oil  
Oil, Oil, Oil,  
Venal is our soil

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## 20. The City of Gloom

Dogs do not bark  
Tails droop  
The furs asleep  
Lizards resent motion  
Heads remain stiff  
Birds deny songs  
Wings cease to flap  
Air still, wind lifeless  
No spirit in men  
And I want to cry  
But my eyes are dry  
Trees cease to dance  
Leaves extol gloom  
Sun hides her fresh face  
Loathing joyful duty  
Ashes are sprinkled  
I want to cry  
But my eyes are dry  
It is a gory tale  
Of a living dead city  
District of Dark Ages<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> Dark Ages. Also known as the Homeric Age, usually dated between c.1100-c.800 BC, Dark Ages is typically viewed as 'dark' in the sense that very little is known about it. The period was generally characterised by illiteracy, the fall of the centres of power, continuous petty warfare and migrations of tribes. However, oral epic poetry that events of the time was composed, recited and transmitted by illiterate

Where Hitler reigns  
Behind sinister shades  
I want to cry  
But my eyes are dry  
The loyal traitors  
Pay visits like bats  
Return with crafty sacks  
Breaking news news of justice  
Written in another ink  
Published by a novel author  
Sharers of pot of villainy  
Pledge allegiance of Esau  
I want to cry  
But my eyes are dry

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---

but professional bards. The poem alludes to the atmosphere of the military regime in Nigeria from 1993 -1998.

## 21. They have crossed the Rubicon<sup>60</sup>

they damn the price  
the loathsome loafers  
the Yoruba Demon<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> **Crossed the Rubicon.** Julius Caesar was born into a society with keen spirit of political competition among the nobles. With unrestrained political determination, by 59 BC, he had maneuvered his way to the position of consul of Rome. As governor of Gaul, he did not only exhibit outstanding military skills in subduing the native Celtic and Germanic tribes but also got the opportunity to amass wealth. However, his rising political profile among the people in no time began to constitute a threat to the Senate's authority and to Pompey who were in control of Rome. Hence, Caesar was ordered by the Senate to resign as army general and disband his soldiers or otherwise be declared an 'Enemy of the State'. Since Caesar was not willing to comply, he positioned himself against Pompey who was assigned to enforce the edict. A civil war became imminent. In January 49 BC, while in the northern Italian city of Ravenna, Caesar was confronted with either yielding to the Senate's command or moving southward to face Pompey and begin a brutal civil war. Even when doing so was a treasonable offence, Caesar settled for the latter option after a moment of indecision, and crossed the Rubicon River. Thus, 'Crossing the Rubicon' is now a modern equivalent of 'passing the point of no return', a point when decision is deemed irreversible.

<sup>61</sup> **Yoruba demon.** The term, which came into use around the year 2015, is used to describe young men from South-Western Nigeria who are in the habit of breaking hearts of ladies. In the contemporary society, such men, often with the appearance of opulence and also known as masters at deception, they are purported to be ritualists who use intercourse with young ladies as means of consolidating their wealth. This expression may simply be understood as a playboy of Yoruba origin.



basking in overnight opulence  
sealed deals with blood  
from fresh skulls of  
babies, maidens, mothers,  
paterfamilias disappear  
they summon a feast  
after crossing the Rubicon  
flies feed fat  
their white agbadas<sup>62</sup> overflow  
praise singers drum  
For the deaf  
with blind open eyes  
honey is the song of Sirens<sup>63</sup>  
so the lyrics of Thanatos<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> Agbadas here refer to Yoruba traditional garments symbolising high social status.

<sup>63</sup> Sirens. The hero of Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus, when setting sail towards the island of the charming Sirens, heeds Circe's earlier counsel to plug his men's ears with beeswax while he himself is bound to the mast of the ship to prevent any of them being lured away by the seductive song of the Sirens. Odysseus, who alone listens to the alluring song on getting to the island, finds the song so appealing that he begs his comrades to set him free from the fetters in order to head for the source of the flowing song. However, the loyal comrades rather bind him more securely.

<sup>64</sup> Thanatos. In ancient Greek mythology, Thanatos is the son of Nyx (night) and Erebus (darkness). He has a twin brother, Hypnos (sleep). The picture of gloom and silence that the family tree epitomises is complete with Thanatos (Death). Similar to other family members whose names represent their roles, Thanatos is the

no wax congeals delight  
a sanguinary covenant sealed  
after crossing the Rubicon  
with insatiable demons  
with rabid principalities  
hope burns like a candle in the wind  
manicured fingers  
bread palms  
gluttons of overnight opulence  
gallop to meet doomsday  
after crossing the Rubicon

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personification of death. Interestingly, in psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud has chosen the name in advancing the theory that every human has a death instinct or drive.

## 22. Lactating Africa

Darling Africa, the granary  
In Joseph's world of famine  
Shelter to the merchant Punics<sup>65</sup>  
When Campania<sup>66</sup> failed

---

<sup>65</sup> **Punics** is from the Latin word, 'pūnicus'; 'pūnici' in plural. The ancient Romans would call the Carthaginians by this name. Sometime around 813 BCE, the Punic descendants of the Phoenicians founded the city of Carthage in the area that is now known as Tunisia in North Africa and maintained the maritime tradition of their ancestors in the region. Their presence in North Africa increased when, after the fall of the Phoenician city of Tyre to Alexander the Great in 332 BCE, rich Tyrians fled to Carthage with their wealth and used considerable means to turn Carthage into the new centre of Phoenician trade. The Carthaginians displaced the native Africans, enslaved many of them and made others to pay tributes. The Punics had established a flourishing sea trade and produced a mercantile society; rising from a small port on the coast that was a stop-over for Phoenician traders to re-supply or repair their ships to a most powerful city in the Mediterranean that incited Rome to fear and jealousy.

<sup>66</sup> **Campania.** The First Samnite War resulted in the Roman acquisition of the rich land of Campania, a region in southern Italy, with its capital at Capua. The Romans rose in defence of the Capuans against the aggression of the Samnites who coveted fertile Campania. In classical antiquity, it is noteworthy that Rome had to turn to other parts of Italy to meet the need for grain supply since this could not be met by the countryside regions. Therefore, Rome was actually securing a notable source of grain supply when she established a colony at Gales in Campania supposedly to protect the Capuans. By the first century CE, however, North Africa became chief source of Rome's grain supply.

You were much celebrated  
As breadbasket to the Quirites<sup>67</sup>  
Home to Roman veterans<sup>68</sup>  
Your blood inundates the West  
Acres of money plantations  
The sweats of your fingers nurture  
Your soil's honey ever flows  
Your daily lactating breasts

---

<sup>67</sup> **Quirites.** The singular form of the word, 'Quiris' is rendered 'the inhabitant of Cures', the capital of the Sabines ('Quiris' also means 'spear'). Quirites was used as a name for the civic populace of ancient Rome, especially in early times, and may also be used for men devoid of class or rank.

<sup>68</sup> **Veterans.** Roman expansion into North Africa started in an atmosphere of uneasy relationship between two super powers along the Mediterranean, Rome and Carthage. The jealousy and the unhealthy rivalry that existed between them culminated in a series of three wars known as Punic Wars which began by 264 BCE. At the end of the wars in 146 BCE when Carthage was destroyed, Rome became the undisputed master of the world and took over control of Carthaginian territories in Spain and established its first African colony, Africa Vetus, in the most fertile part of what was formerly Carthaginian African territory. Although the remaining territory of Africa was left under the Numidian client King Massinissa, the freedom of rule of his successors began its final journey to the end after the Jugurthine War in 106 BCE. Upon the death of Jugurtha, much of his African territory was placed under the control of King Bocchus of Mauritania, a Roman client. Roman foothold in Africa was made stronger when at the same time Rome gave land to the veterans of Marius' Legions, settling them along the Numidian territory. Thus, a solid foundation was laid for the Romanization of the Africa that was to become the granary of the Roman Empire, paving way for colonialisation.

Clung to by teeming mouths  
From the orient to the occident  
Now, they shed tears for thy wards  
Barely propped by lean frames  
Despair engraved on their foreheads  
Your eyes fatally sunken in  
'Any more milk to drink?'  
Your master keeps asking

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## 23. Demagogues<sup>69</sup>

They sit at tables  
Meditating gleefully  
Hatching brazen lies  
For exhausted ears  
O, shame affects me  
Pity affects me  
Sheep nudge their legs  
Yet, their hearty laughter

---

<sup>69</sup> **Demagogues.** Demagogue, as a term, is a fusion of two Greek words, 'demos', the people, and 'agogos', leader. The concept originated from ancient Athens, the cradle of Democracy. Historically, demagogues have been described as people who undermine the existence and stability of democracy which they claim to champion its interest. They do this by turning the people among whom they have gained popularity against each other. At Athens, the demagogue was perceived not just a leader of people, but as a leader who led by using bullying, coaxing and rhetorical appeal to emotion to gain power. Later, the term came to have a pejorative meaning representing deceptive populist who secures trust, particularly among the lower classes, and ends up misleading them. It is in this light Aristotle portrays a certain tanner, Cleon, who rose to a position of leadership at Athens: 'He was the first who shouted on the public platform, who used abusive language and who spoke with his cloak girt around him, while all the others used to speak in proper dress and manner'(Ath. Pol. 28.3). In the context of the poem, demagogues might be seen as individuals who in their desperate quest for power turn to the base court of the people and consequently use the power obtained to tyrannically exploit the people. The description is apt for the political class who make empty promises to the electorate.

Increases with flowing tears  
Kingly rabble-rousers  
Looking the crowd in the eye  
They swear by the Olympians  
Men of scarce culture  
Best at Trump-ups  
With no insignia of value  
The fat ones of Bashan<sup>70</sup>  
Offer no balsam for wounds  
Yet, pretty well we know  
Tomorrow shall come  
Breeze shall bare pudenda<sup>71</sup>  
O, Shame affects me  
Pity affects me...

---

<sup>70</sup> **Bashan.** Here is an allusion to some Biblical references to Bashan. This region in ancient times was well-known for its extensive fine pasture-land and throve in powerful young bulls and other livestock, such as sheep and goats. Due to its fertility, grain was produced in abundance and it became known as a source of rich supply of milk and butter; a veritable breadbasket (Jeremiah 50:19; Micah 7:14; 1 Kings 4:7, 13; Psalm 22:12).

<sup>71</sup> **Pudenda.** The singular form of the word is pudendum. While 'pudenda' is used to refer to the external genital organs, the derivative form of the Latin word, 'pudere' means to be ashamed. Hence, 'pudenda' may represent objects of shame or anything reproachful. The aphorism, 'afefe ti fe, ati ri furo adiy'e' in Yoruba, translated in English as 'the wind has blown and the anus of a chicken is now exposed', apparently captures a similar sense.

## 24. WOE- MAN

why so enthralled by  
rose in pink Helen<sup>72</sup>  
nesting in thorns?  
honeycomb mouth drips  
belly filled with wormwood  
dicey charming cleavages  
wily step by step with  
winsome suppliant eyes  
churning innocent pleas  
writhing, the twisting snake  
wine, red in the face  
making appeal to Paris  
in dire wants of heart  
artfully ravages the soul  
sorely drives sleep away  
from eyes of the Greeks  
brings Troy to naught  
**wo[e to the ]man!**

---

<sup>72</sup> Helen. The extraordinarily beautiful ancient Greek woman, Helen, is usually portrayed as a good looking woman who dresses attractively. While one myth has it that she was abducted to Troy by Paris who was captivated by her beauty, another myth has it that she is a fickle minded woman who was persuaded by Paris to abandon her matrimonial home, including her nine-year old daughter. This act enraged Menelaus her husband who summoned all the Greeks to the legendary Trojan War that drenched the earth with the blood of many heroes. In contemporary society, amorous, or extramarital relations are formed and marriages broken for the slightest of reasons.



## 25. Painful Days

Grandma  
longing for yesterday  
contending with solitude  
as trembling hands  
break melon shells  
with long stick in hand  
she herds goats to a spot  
she dishes out portions  
calling in vain to wards  
son comes blaming lapses  
out he goes, new orders gives  
then, madam arrives  
pity mama the more  
nothing she ever does well  
what can the white hair really do?  
a fact she silently accepts  
however strong her wishes  
gone are the days  
when she mapped the way  
yet, the truth she knows  
they beg for her days  
what they are she was  
what she is they shall be

**Part 3**  
**Time and Tide**

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## 26. Year Cycle

The Italian Janus<sup>73</sup>

Arrives with heavy keys to  
Gates, Doors and Beginnings  
Foremost Guardian of homes  
Poises this way, turns that way  
Caesar sets the cornerstones<sup>74</sup>  
Barbarians<sup>75</sup> revel in your honour  
Waving bye-bye to woes and

---

<sup>73</sup> **Italian Janus.** Janus was the Roman god after whom the month of January was named. The god was associated with beginnings and endings as well as with gates and doors having two sides. With this appearance, it was reasoned that a phase of life must end before another begins; no middle ground. Janus similarly had two faces: the one looking backward depicted his leaving behind the events of the past year, while with the face looking forward he envisions a prosperous year. The beginning of the day, month, and year were believed to be sacred to him, hence, it became a time of making out gifts and expressing wishes of good fortune for the year ahead.

<sup>74</sup> **Caesar sets the cornerstones.** Julius Caesar in 46 BCE, with the introduction of the Julian calendar, established January 1 as the New Year in the Roman world.

<sup>75</sup> **Barbarians.** The New Year festival that lasted for three days in spheres of Roman influence was an occasion for slaves and masters to temporarily set aside their social differences and dine together. As they laid aside societal discriminatory rules, individuals of various social backgrounds could then do they pleased by engaging in licentiousness. Similar activities of modern New Year celebrations are testimonies to how far reaching the spirit has become.

With fervent imploring eyes  
Beseech you for tomorrow  
O bumper, copious harvest  
Fortuna<sup>76</sup> is filled to the brim  
Dim light commands, booze  
Men and women cross the Tiber<sup>77</sup>  
Young and old in cross-over  
Flashing the sky with sparks  
Pious recount of endless joys  
Triumphant, refuting misery  
Binging befriends Boozing  
Summon hazy swollen eyes  
License is at Festival's door

---

<sup>76</sup> **Fortuna.** Fortuna was the goddess of fortune and epitome of either good or bad luck in Roman religion. It was believed that, similar to that of her father, Jupiter, her office catered for the Romans who desired bountiful harvest during the New Year. Hence, the people supplicated her for protection of their grain supplies. However, in their expectations, the believers also took cognizance of the uncertainty the goddess foreboded as a symbol of the life changes that constantly alternated between success and calamity.

<sup>77</sup> **Cross the Tiber.** This expression is used to refer to what happened during the festival in honour of Anna Perenna (the Roman goddess of long life and regeneration, health and abundance), which held on the first day of the year (then, March was regarded the first month of the year). Both men and women engaged in profligate activity and there was that practice of crossing the Tiber River and going abroad to a place such as Etruria in order to picnic in makeshift shelters. This offered opportunities for indulging in gluttonous consumption of alcohol after which inebriated Romans groped their way back home.

Bacchus<sup>78</sup> leads Great Merry  
Journey back home begins  
Lamps here, wreaths there  
Hardly the city gate closes  
Mothers raise sad lullabies  
Mixed with smokes of requiem  
Janus turns his back again  
Devotees, back to toils, moan  
Pitiable with imploring gazes  
Long for the coming of the First  
It staggers the tender mind  
Why Janus with hopes always goes  
And leaves behind painful throes

---

<sup>78</sup>. Bacchus was the Roman god of wine, merrymaking or revelry. Ancient Greeks knew him by the name Dionysius. The festival of Bacchanalia that was held in his honor often led to debauchery and was a harbinger of all forms of crimes and political disturbances in Italy. Bacchanalia, (see footnote 92) the festivals of the Greco-Roman god were known as Bacchanalia. The events, also called Dionysia, were occasions for Roman, licentiousness and intoxication. In 186 BC, the festivals became so ill-famed for orgies that the Roman Senate outlawed the Bacchanalia in the whole of Italy.

## 27. Time, P-l-e-a-s-e, Come!

Time  
Come  
Run do not walk  
Mountains are crumbling  
Trees are shivering  
Masquerades are threatening  
It's getting too late  
For the melting spirit  
Fly, fly, and do fly  
Mount with eagle's wings  
Bring to me my Blue Eye  
Fulfill my undying longings  
Book no other appointment  
Enter quickly unannounced  
See no other agent of relief  
Time, Come now and with you  
Invaluable soothing oil  
Ease my slender gentle heart  
Remember, never come alone  
I beg thee, P-l-e-a-s-e  
Come with my Blue Eye  
Before Hope becomes edgy  
And disengage from fortitude  
Come, come, come  
P-l-e-a-s-e  
I am waiting too long

**28. When the wind blows**

When by the wind a dry leaf is borne  
Up and up it goes like a kite  
Lo! Wings of a bird it does not have  
To the law of force it is sure to bow  
Brief indeed the story goes  
Bound to come is the villain's end  
When the wind will surely blow  
Even the blind will get know

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## 29. Those Who Are About to Die Are Saying Greetings

They greeted you  
Just now  
Now, now  
Where are they going?  
Heading the same path  
Are more still greeting  
Full of hope  
Full of life  
But let them bend  
Nothing they can mend  
What is man's essence?  
Dew that settles in the morning  
Leaves before the noon, or  
With trouble in the evening  
Turn around and see champions  
Blossoming and holding sway  
Gallants are their passes  
Swift like an eagle they dribble  
Deluge the net with goals, and  
After trophy utters somersaults  
Pitch quickly turns desolate  
The stage performance so short  
When victors say greetings  
Pleasant and full of smile  
Reminisce the glorious time  
Make merry over the feat  
Refrain from boundless thrill



It shreds the heart like a paper  
Jolly troupers come today  
Will they be here tomorrow?  
Soothe the imminent pains  
Recall the ancient truth  
Handed down for millenniums  
*Morituri te salutant*<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> **Morituri te salutant.** The expression, 'Ave, Imperator, morituri te salutant' (Hail, Emperor, those who are about to die salute you) is foremost credited to the historian, Suetonius (De Vita Caesarum, 'The Life of the Caesars' 21.6.) These were reportedly the desperate words of captives and criminals who were condemned to die.

### 30. Theft in the Sanctuary

seat of treachery  
monster's heart  
offspring of Eros<sup>80</sup>  
gets trust with ploys  
induced to action  
by the cruel darts  
of the blindfolded god  
with screened surges  
of distressing urges  
show untamed symptoms of anguish  
glutton plucks budding fruits  
of nurslings, blameless seedlings  
mothers and even grandmothers  
tailing seeds in infant garbs  
so perfect the infamous arts  
leaves the lowly lonely  
leaves the weeping wounded  
leaves the experienced exploited  
leaves the righteous ruined  
ah, a shepherd has the desire?  
father Zeus<sup>81</sup> ravishes Europa<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Eros. According to Greek mythology, Eros, the son of Aphrodite the goddess of love is known for mischievously bringing both gods and mortals together in illicit 'love' affairs. Eros and his Roman counterpart, Cupid, could be used to exemplify sexual power or desires that may become unguided.

puts sheep in sacrilegious trance  
a night of unholy purification  
ordained by the priest of Zeus  
prophet bound to odious desire  
sowing the seeds of rifts  
fo the holy matrimony  
with bitter anointment  
in the land of wandering flocks

---

<sup>81</sup> **Zeus.** The Greek mythology contains several stories of the Olympian chief god, Zeus, with a reputation of engaging in licentious activities. One of Zeus' sexual escapades involved a Phoenician maiden, Europa who became an object of his untamed lust. In another bizarre example of 'sex crime' in Greek mythology, Zeus adulterous desire led him to Leda, the wife of King Tyndareus. This time, he turned himself into a swan, came to Leda supposedly for protection against an eagle and then perfected his art.

<sup>82</sup> **Europa.** Zeus was so struck by Europa's striking beauty and charming look that, at first sight of her, he was obsessed with sexual desires towards her. Zeus immediately took to scheming how he would fulfill the passion without incurring the wrath of his eagle-eyed jealous wife, Hera, Hence, he transformed into a lovely white bull that fascinated Europa while she was gathering flowers. Unwittingly, the maiden began to caress 'the bull' and finally got onto its back. Zeus then 'kidnapped' Europa and swam to the island of Crete where he disclosed his true identity, raped and impregnated her. Some contemporary instances of rapes sometimes suggest superhuman influence in rape stories. As a form of lateral thinking, the 'shame' tale of the almighty Greek god raping a Phoenician woman explains modern nocturnal cases of religious leaders who 'ensnare and hover over' both spinsters and married women when they are unable to tame their sexual desires.

suppliants in search of a saviour  
cry eternally in vain for succour  
lick their hearts and taste bile  
thieves are not lunar visitors.  
trusted foes are not from the mars  
sham ardent love they show  
in stealthy quest for the pride  
Did beast affection come from Olympia?

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### 31. Choking Care

Could he be a friend?  
Always eager to know  
Press hard to unearth  
Are you awake or asleep?  
Prodding with constant eyes  
Faithfully monitoring steps  
Obligated to offer counsels  
Entrenched in all privacy  
Prompt in Hermes' service  
At the sight of a cockroach  
War cries ascend and split air  
Alarmed at little faltering  
Ready to regulate native smile  
Every utterance, every deed  
Stands only after vetting  
Tears mopped before dropping  
Yearns eternally for attention  
Sordid affection smolders  
Intense care suffocates  
Thinking for you, speaking for you  
Narrows the space to gasp  
Petty flaws become crimes  
Constant unwanted care persists  
Choking endearment endures  
And flame of life is fading away

## 32. Aversion

Drainage ends  
Black gutters begin  
Aroma of stench diffuses  
Foraging pigs bathe in rubbish  
Where open faeces are neighbours  
Even when men with brains think  
They cover no face to deface  
Do they really love what is right?  
Bold still to mess the earth?  
Who killed their shame and  
Handed them over to gabbage?  
Partying and ruining their homes  
Who veils the face of honour  
And mystifies anguishes?  
No guilt troubles dirty hearts  
No painful regret hunts  
Who pulls the wool over the eyes?  
In squalid course is pious exultation  
Knife eagerly destroys its abode  
And seeks in vain the culprit  
Redeemable rudder is so nigh  
To steer the ship to safety  
Even in the plague of poverty  
When chamber of water is luxury  
The Ancient peg is at service  
Protection waits at the harbour  
Soap gives handshake to water  
With revulsion for odious scents

With yearning for sanity  
Face becomes averse to shame  
Then Legions shall rise  
To terminate the lease of filth

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### 33. Terror

Behold sons of Erinnyes<sup>83</sup>  
Gallop in full range  
Dashing against Furies  
In pursuit of neighbour  
In hot chase of brothers  
Branded as villains  
Menace is their breath  
Jubilant in the zestful song  
Ruin! Ruin! Ruin!  
Waste! Waste! Waste!  
Mercy-no-mercy!  
They castrate boys  
They maim virgins  
They pound babies

---

<sup>83</sup> **Erinnyes.** In Greek mythology, Erinnyes are the three female goddesses, Alecto (the unceasing), Megaera (the grudging) and Tisiphone (the vengeful destruction), collectively known as 'the Angry Ones'. The use of 'Furies' to represent them in Roman mythology as well as the background to their birth may add to the understanding of the fearful goddesses' activity of avenging. According to the Greek mythology, the Titan Cronus 'harvested' the genitalia of his father, Uranus, and threw it into the sea. The drops of blood from the mutilation of Uranus (known as the Sky) fell on Gaea (known as the Mother Earth), impregnated her and, thus, the Erinnyes were born in an atmosphere of brutality. With snakes as their hairs and blood dripping from their eyes, the Furies present awful, menacing appearance, and would punish all crimes without mercy. They are also known as tormentors of the underworld who would not be swayed by any amount of prayer, sacrifice or tears. These attributes of the Furies provide a context for the English words 'furious' and 'infuriated'. Erinnyes are used to characterise some of the traits in acts of terrorism.



Promise flames are extinguished  
In the middle of sweet dreams  
Words have failed  
Daggers now sway  
Forest forbidden to tourists  
Host the sons of Erinnyes  
Sanguine agents brimming Ares<sup>84</sup>  
From failed mission homes  
Furnished for lovers of suicide  
The seven against Thebes<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup> Ares is the god of war and one of the prominent Olympian gods of the Greeks. In contrast with Athena, another deity of war who represents thoughtfulness and wisdom in the affairs of war and whose protection men sought over their abodes during ravages, Ares is the personification of outright use of force and strength; the raw violence and untamed acts that occur in wartime. Fighting wars simply gratifies him, and in war situations, his delight is in uproar, confusion and terror. Din and roar of battles, slaughter of men and the destruction of towns fulfil his heart. He is loathed by the other gods and his own parents for his violent and sanguinary character (Il. v. 889-909).

<sup>85</sup> **Seven against Thebes.** Eteocles and Polynices, the two sons of Oedipus, took over from their father when he stepped down as king of Thebes and the two decided to rule on the understanding that they would alternate the throne every year. However, Eteocles held on to power after the first year and forced Polynices to go on exile at Argos. With the support of the Argive king Adrastus, Polynices assembled a force under seven captains or leaders. In *Seven Against Thebes*, captains constitute the seven who come under different resolute banners, believing justice to be on their side, to devastate Thebes. Eteocles similarly appoints Theban commanders who are believed to be effective matches for Polynices' seven attacking leaders to defend the seven gates of the city. The determination of the

Carrying banners of Justice  
To shatter all in a flash  
Deft with Poseidon's trident<sup>86</sup>  
Value no name of Zeus  
But filled with foul bliss  
Of mundane future pleasure  
They sharpen skills with vigour  
Place heads severally on guillotine  
Decapitate with blunt blades  
Inundate oceans with bloody tears  
Who has got the utterance of PLEASE?  
Who gets the rod to shatter sinful gods?

---

seven is expressed with different boasting words, and of particular interest is the boast of Capaneus who by his threats dares Zeus to prevent him from razing down the city. Eteoclus would similarly spitefully challenge Ares to hurl him from the battlements. With their frenzied minds, the rest of the seven make grandiose boasts against the city.

<sup>86</sup> **Poseidon's trident.** According to Greek mythology, this was a weapon and symbol of authority of the Greek god of the sea and patron of the seafarers. With the instrument that was only second to Zeus' thunderbolt, Poseidon, a quarrelsome personality among the gods, could accomplish his will; favouring his own and thwarting the efforts of his foes. The god caused devastations and wrecked havocs with the weapon. Causing of tsunamis and waves; producing sea foam and calming the water or making it roar were all the activities of the signature power of the god. When earthquake occurred, it would be credited to the trident.

### 34. Flame of Jealousy

smiling adversary spurs on  
waves of plaguing doubts  
wrecks self-image first  
moves on to erode unions  
enriches soil of distrust  
seeps out to vanquish allies  
unmask the critics at once  
displace shield of pretense  
vener of possessiveness  
parent of pregnant anger  
great uncle of misgivings  
prosecutor of every motive  
inventory keeper of each step  
stealthy in show of insecurity  
lodged in enclave of dented will  
forcing faith to a retreat  
clips the the wings of ardent will  
tears apart Jack and Jill  
a slave loyal to anxious care  
conquered by rope of melancholy  
Is she the daughter of Hera?<sup>87</sup>  
Spiral, unstoppable in downfall

---

<sup>87</sup> Hera. The wife of Zeus in Greek mythology, although generally known as goddess of marriage and childbirth, never had a peaceful home. Her husband's cases of extramarital affairs brought out the worst part of her as she was involved in many stories that earned her the reputation of a troublesome, jealous and vengeful woman.

## 35. This Means our Lives

Persian fleets arrayed in myriads  
In formidable march against freedom  
Trusting in archers and cavalry charge  
At the pass of Thermopylae<sup>88</sup> men stand  
Leonidas<sup>89</sup> spirited men unyielding  
The few in dare of menacing numbers  
Dense formation of armoured phalanx  
To fight till the last drop of blood  
Under the shade of arrow-darkened sun  
Firm in position against the Immortals  
We shall fight, against grander spirit  
Opposed to Desire and Vice in council  
Merrymaking over abhorrent weapons  
Laying siege to our precious inheritance

---

<sup>88</sup> **Thermopylae**, a site of several battles fought by the Greeks in antiquity, was the strategic mountain pass where the Greeks chose to encounter the invading Persians soldiers in 480 BCE.

<sup>89</sup> **Leonidas**. Leonidas (c. 530-480BCE) was a king and military commander of Sparta. Despite the formidable appearance of the Persians, the Greeks, particularly the Spartans under the leadership of Leonidas, rather than feeling inferior to their enemies held the narrow strait of Thermopylae for three days with a small force of Greek hoplites. Although the Greeks were defeated in the battle, the heroic feat of Leonidas and the 300 Spartan soldiers, who fought to the last drop of their blood in defence of the freedom of the Greeks, remained legendary to later generations of Greeks. The role of modern day activists in defending human rights against abuse is reminiscent of action taken by Leonidas at Thermopylae.

Our breastplate and the shining helmet  
Our shield and the burning arrows  
With abounding vigour are deployed  
To unshackle our prized souls  
From claws of unforgiving vain master  
Then, Dove of Liberty, prompt in service  
Fill us with passion to loathe Bad  
Enroll in joyful mission to Good  
Why so much passion?  
Why the zest?  
Why the ceaseless vigor?  
No truth is daily dearer  
It means life at its peak  
It deserves all exertion

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### 36. The Strife

Alábàárù<sup>90</sup>

Ha! Relax now

Ease my mind

filled with wonderment

Your bones at dawn

Flaunt thy strength

Despaired?

No, push! Plain ahead,

Oh, sorry, valley in sight

Alábàárù, you are strong O!

Your network of muscles

A fountain of inspiration

---

<sup>90</sup> **Alábàárù.** This is the Yoruba word for market porters or load carriers who make their livelihood by offering to carry different sizes of loads at local markets for those who purchase wares. They are also found at motor parks where they help passengers with their baggage. Even when a few Alábàárù use carts in carrying loads, the work is generally considered socially demeaning as well as an evidence of setback in life. Some of these workers are muscular, strong enough to carry loads of various weights; while others literally or figuratively groan under the heavy weight of how they make a living. The derisive and figurative expression, Aláàárù, suggesting being weighed down by life's burden, was formerly used in referring to the same people. The form, Alábàárù, which literally means someone who assists in carrying one's load, tends to be rather dignifying, hence its preference over Aláàárù. However, while the work brings the money needed to get by, the carrying of both light and heavy loads on head by these workers could be understood as a symbol of hard life.

Your spread out chest  
A mystery of endurance  
But, yield, please, to my pleas  
Calm down. So cruel the day  
Setting on you tortuous eyes  
Frying, baking and roasting you  
Is your spirit ever undaunted?  
Has respite become a weakness?  
Your face offers no mercy  
Consolation also in the blues  
Aha! Calm down, calm down and smile  
Mountains is soon to vanish  
And your sweat you will eat  
Are your teeth still in set?  
Alas, Alábàárò, your lips are miming  
Your eyes sunken fast  
No, rise, please Alábàárò  
In the spirit of the noon  
In the spirit of haughty muscles  
Patrons expect you tomorrow  
To hasten oblivion with onus  
Oh, Alábàárò, If someday  
If again, your strength revisits  
Will you shoulder the world?

### 37. Nuptials

they come  
voices of nightingales  
pleasant beggars  
in vino spirit

they hop and hop  
air becomes a cloud  
they begin to sneeze  
their ardour infects us

like rapid pestilence  
morbid and contagious!  
vivacious, in ecstasy  
in waist-twists, breathless

just before bacchanalia<sup>91</sup>  
suddenly, the cloud departs  
alas! Our Rebekah is gone  
victims in merry tempo

boys we are, handed toys  
is she gone to Abraham?  
is our festival an error?  
we shall not repent

---

<sup>91</sup> See footnote 79



Let the drummers come  
ushered in their droves  
for Rebekah is gone  
to the house of Isaac

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### 38. Liberated

Burden  
Growing wings  
Threatens to fly  
May it fly?  
Bye bye  
Away, let it fly  
Quit at once!  
I am a prey  
Trapped snake  
In tight grips  
In eagle's claws  
I writhe  
Glow of life  
Virtually gone  
Burden  
Are you growing wings?  
Make it fast  
Rise from slumber  
Fly away  
Quick! Quick!  
... And away it flew!

**Part 4**  
**The Ray Triumphs**

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### 39. My Penelope

Men of Dulichium  
Same, Zacynthus, Ithaca<sup>92</sup>  
Let me speak to men  
Kinsmen with hearts  
Is it while I sail to Troy  
To redeem stolen treasure  
Of the royal son of Atreus<sup>93</sup>  
You besiege my vessel?  
My walls remain fortified  
You insist on drinking  
Only from my cistern  
Be worthy Danaans <sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> **Dulichium, Same, Zacynthus and Ithaca.** The suitors of Penelope, the wife of Odysseus, when it was believed that Odysseus would not return, came from these islands that were believed to be part of Odysseus Kingdom and persisted in asking for the hand of the unwilling woman in marriage. These were the sons of prominent families in the kingdom. The suitors were altogether 98 in number; 52 from Dulichium, 24 from Same, 20 from Zacynthos and 12 from Ithaca.

<sup>93</sup> **Atreus** was the king of Mycenae in the Peloponnese and, in Greek mythology; Agamemnon readily comes to mind when the expression, son of Atreus is used. However, the Commander-in-chief of the Achaean forces to the Trojan War had a brother by the same parents, Menelaus. Menelaus was the king of Sparta who was aggrieved by Paris' abducting his wife, Helen, to Troy, hence, a principal character in the Iliad narration of Homer. Menelaus is here referred to by the designation, the son of Atreus, more as an epithet.

Lay hold of the plough  
Till and plant vineyards  
Toil not with hands slack  
Thrust out your sickle  
And pluck from bouquets  
The choicest dates of Hellas  
Then, you will know  
Joy of labour is yours  
Now, flee, wrath looms  
Wild fire ready to devour  
Tomorrow comes with me  
To set my Penelope free  
From visionless hunters

---

<sup>94</sup> **Danaans.** In referring to the forces from mainland Greece and neighbouring islands such as Crete that went on the military expedition to Troy, Homer uses 'Achaeans', 'Danaans' and 'Argives', synonymously; implying the federation of the Greeks.

#### 40. Sour Pleasure

where is the man  
who visited with lures  
to invest my energy  
in self's pleasure ?  
where is the soulmate  
who led to countryside  
and deserted midnight?  
aching is daily  
mixed with nostalgia  
of great blisses  
now, I fall behind  
bills mounts, pains rise  
one-time pleasure is sour  
grief greets regrets  
shadow of a murky future  
a lovebird makes me shiver  
bubbles dance in my heart  
held from floating to my head  
then, amidst the blues  
relief comes for my agony  
a new chick grapples the void  
Telemachus<sup>95</sup> longs for lilt

---

<sup>95</sup>Telemachus, Odysseus's son, who is about twenty at the beginning of the story, was an infant when Odysseus departed to Troy. He has grown without the training and experience engendered by father-son relationship. Although he manages to muster up courage, tact and good heart to constitute an obstacle to the suitors' desperate efforts to woo his mother, his initially lack of poise and confidence to

forlorn hope, futile cries  
yet, he holds out future  
announcing a new season  
when no despair bends head  
lifted up by pleasant tears  
propelled by morning rays  
that escorts me by the day  
instilling faith by the night  
tell all I am strong  
I no longer moan  
I am not alone  
I am complete

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oppose them may be seen as a gap in his upbringing since this is not characteristic of his father. He would evidently have gained more with Odysseus present. The same can be true of children of 'baby mamas' or those raised by single parent, without gender bias.

#### 41. Laugh of Yẹyẹ<sup>96</sup>

An enjoyable laugh  
Of a young man in the street  
Dances with no caution  
Mucus at his door  
Mouth bubbles loud forth  
Bitter sweet words  
Refuge is behind a needle  
Feet with grips of an ant  
Proud of butterfly wings  
Chameleon cheerfully talks  
Light up faces with smile  
The deft actor speaks  
All laugh with their hearts  
What smile?  
What Laugh?  
Who is fooled?  
Laugh of yẹyẹ  
Smile of pẹlẹ<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> Yẹyẹ. This Yoruba word is used to express ridicule, mockery, sarcasm or derision. While other meanings of the word are discernable in the poem, the sense of sarcasm as a form of outward praise that masks a contemptuous feeling is more intended.

<sup>97</sup> Pẹlẹ. The expression in Yoruba is often used to express 'sympathy' or 'fellow feeling' to someone who is experiencing some difficulties, or who has just suffered an injury or other discomforts. It may also sometimes be used sarcastically to suggest pathetic view of the action of someone who thinks he is clever.



Scene of ètẹ<sup>98</sup>  
What a pity!

---

<sup>98</sup> Ètẹ. This word means 'shame' or 'disgrace' in Yoruba. A Yoruba axiom goes thus: ete lo ngbeyin oro, 'shame comes as the outcome of a matter'. 'Matter' in this context usually means a wrong deed that is ostensibly concealed from others only for the wrongdoer to realise it has become a public knowledge while he is still dwelling in false security. This outcome is ètẹ.

## 42. True Friendship

What a fray  
Man lives a day  
Feeble dream  
Disappears like steam  
There are tears for him  
Drops from branches of fear  
Grieve yet finds rewards  
*Amicus*<sup>99</sup> listens with Soft moans  
Springing from sympathy  
Not shoulder of apathy  
Others first, *amicus* comes next  
Daring even grievous text  
True friendship remains rooted  
Like the sun  
Unbroken in faithful service  
Keeping it dry and then  
Restoring water for planters  
Bringing food to tables  
Filling hearts with cheers

---

<sup>99</sup> *Amicus* is a Latin word that means 'friend' 'a loved one' or 'loving one'. 'Amicus' has a range of English derivatives that really convey a deep sense of friendship. For example, 'amity', is the kind of friendship that exists, not only between people, but may also found in animals' world. 'Amity' connotes cooperation and support that are engendered by mutual affection and respect founded on good knowledge that the individuals in a relationship have about each other. In crisis situation, such elements of 'amity' are expected to be displayed.

Causing faces to shine  
Infusing vital vigour  
The will to go on  
Like the moon  
Wavering not even once  
Bringing reminders of tales  
Ingrained lessons of old  
Longings for folk songs  
Sticking clans together  
Seemly urging children on  
So royal and loyal  
Ever darling  
Ageless in loving art  
Very well I know  
True friendship survives  
Life's poisoned arrows

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### 43. Confidence Do Not Desert

Mighty trees crashing  
My heart pounding  
Savage creatures  
Ravenous wolves  
Eaters of hope  
Licensed bullies  
In brazen quest  
For our souls  
Bounteous booties  
Shared by scavengers  
*Cling to the sterling ray*  
*With all keen rapture*  
*To steer your course*  
My will, stay  
Never stray  
Will thou?  
Will thou?  
Yes! Yes! Yes!  
To dishonor deserters  
Do not kotow  
Make your head erect  
Trap the glow  
Remember the vaunts  
The parades in streets  
Shut out raucous shrieks  
And sayings of aha- aha  
*Cling to the sterling ray*  
*With all keen rapture*

*To steer your course*  
Noise frightens  
Noose tightens  
Path becomes slippery  
Share the spark  
With celebrants of honour  
Visioning day of glory  
Confidence, do not falter  
Let the ember glow  
*Cling to the sterling ray*  
*With all keen rapture*  
*To steer your course*

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#### 44. What is your Name?

All contestants are present  
Roll call begins in earnest  
Greeted by ovations and boos  
First, the men leading polis<sup>100</sup>  
Wise or rather full of wiles  
Bringing gains of prizes or  
Passing pains round as succour  
Their cenotaphs fill squares  
Next are the explorers  
Valiant itinerant Phoenicians <sup>101</sup>  
With goods, troops, and arms  
Apt to litter streets with alms  
For countless victims of harms  
Then those who tune hearts  
Setting props, keeping tracks  
Cynosures of all keen watchers  
Made to see only their guises  
Never inferior are the inquirers  
Ever search new lands and paths  
To make many sights stronger  
In quest for new lease of life  
Opening pages of minds and  
Enriching with many thrills

---

<sup>100</sup> Polis. This is what a Greek city-state was called. It was a typical place for ancient Greek community life.

<sup>101</sup> See footnote 66

Visionaries are not the least  
Experts at multicolour views  
Leaders in many directions  
Queried in sundry perversions  
Teeming are their tenacious fans  
Ready to clap, also eager to jeer  
After the proverbial stories close  
Festival with odes commence  
Rhythm of dirges fouls the air  
Somber is the demeanor of all  
And the whisper enters my ear  
'What is your name?'

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## 45. Succour

I have seen in her beauty  
Heart-pouring smile  
Yes, her words soothes  
Heart a deep well  
She seems always near  
Aeneas<sup>102</sup> leaves after many days  
Confines Dido<sup>103</sup> to eternal gloom  
If this track she's set to tread  
When she's so much present  
My grief is not to be brief  
The crave is in vain for succour  
If she comes to stay  
And virtue she treasures  
More than life  
Tell it in the open  
Carry it fast with the wind

---

<sup>102</sup> Aeneas is a Trojan hero in Greek mythology that was born by the goddess Aphrodite to Anchises, the herdsman. Zeus makes Aphrodite to fall in love with Anchises as a punishment for making all Greek gods fall in love with mortal women. According to the Iliad, Aeneas led the Trojan Dardanians and was Hector's right hand man. Having been protected throughout the war by Aphrodite, he is next found in the Roman literature by Virgil, the Aeneid, travelling to Italy where he settled in the region that his descendants, Remus and Romulus founded Rome on.

<sup>103</sup> Virgil, in the Aeneid relates the story of a Phoenician woman, Dido, falling in love with Aeneas when he landed in Africa in the course of his journey. At the command of Jupiter, Aeneas jilted Dido and she consequently committed suicide.



To hills and mountains  
She is the apple  
Delight of all times  
In tender-loving heart  
Her lodging shall ever be

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## 46. The Love of My Life

Are they bastards?  
Do they have any rights?  
Infatuation crowned as love?  
The word makes me weary  
The thought is my groan  
Tell me no more  
And I shall not ask again  
Oh, no, I speak yet of it  
It's more than looks  
Far grander than steps  
Word that humbles heart  
So, tell me loud, clear  
That you love me  
I want nothing more  
Tell me your breath is mine  
And I give my heart  
Tell me you like to sing  
Drummers are summoned  
Tell me you want to dance  
I'm the *Bàtà*<sup>104</sup> of Dance  
Why wouldn't I sing?  
Why wouldn't I dance?  
For the breath of my life

---

<sup>104</sup> *Bàtà*. Yoruba word for shoe.

#### 47. Kùkùtẹ́<sup>105</sup>

Kùkùtẹ́!

You remain valiant

As they rush on you

From nooks and crannies

Devious, endlessly relentless

*Igba oko*<sup>106</sup>, *Igba `ada*<sup>107</sup>

All set to harass you

Firm your course remains

Mountain that never shifts

---

<sup>105</sup> **Kukute** is the Yoruba word for a 'stump'. The Yoruba axiom, 'e ni mi kukute ara e lo mi', (anyone who shakes a stump is in reality shaking himself) conveys the sense of a person being unassailable, unmovable, unwavering. A tree may be uprooted when strong wind blows. Kukute is different. After a tree is cut down, removing the small part of the trunk with the roots still in the ground is another huge task. Some make use of a stump grinder, while others use stump remover. When stump remover that is mostly made of powdered potassium is used, it would require drilling holes in the stump and pouring the granules in the holes and filling the holes with water. After four to six weeks, an ax is used to break the rotten wood. Another method which could complement the foregoing is pouring kerosene or fuel on the drilled stump and setting it on fire. When this method is used, the stump smolders and leaves charcoal in the ground. Such are the strenuous efforts required to uproot the kukute. Unlike a tree, it can never be blown over by the wind.

<sup>106</sup> **Igba ọkọ** is a Yoruba expression that means 'two hundred hoes'

<sup>107</sup> **Igba `adá** is a Yoruba expression that means 'two hundred cutlasses'. *Igba ọkọ*, *Igba `adá*, as used in the poem suggests an overwhelming attack.

Before the king's adversaries  
With boasting threats flying  
Face betrays no trembling  
Hot chase refuses to cease  
Neither the executioner's heat  
Yet, your life is unreachable  
No blinking, no swerving, Sun  
Steadfastly you shall stand  
Not for six but seven days  
To cover boundaries of loyalty  
Kùkùté does not yield  
But what is Kùkùté?  
Who are you kukute?  
The truth is Kùkùté  
Kùkùté is a stump  
He who jerks Kùkùté  
Is kicking against ox goads

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#### 48. It is No More Secret!

Let it burst  
Let it ooze  
From the abyss of heart  
Ease bones and marrows  
In constant nagging plagues  
Relief ever stretched muscles  
Soothe burning nerves  
The chorus<sup>108</sup> knows so much  
How it inflames the body  
Longing for potentate deliverer  
Crying all day long for the rescuer  
That catharsis<sup>109</sup> should come

---

<sup>108</sup> **Chorus.** The ancient Greek drama began with only one actor occupying the stage. With the passing of time, the number increased to three and no more than three even at later dates. This made the role of the chorus very prominent. Since an actor would have to play several roles, the chorus needed to distract the audience when an actor went off-stage to change his costumes or prepare for the next role. The chorus during the interval became the playwright's mode of communication through whose commentary on actions and events that were taking place the audience was helped to have a better comprehension of the drama. Hence, the playwright used this device, not only to achieve some literary complexity, but to also present the societal views on moral and cultural standards to the audience. The chorus interpreted the storyline, putting time meaning into it and bringing about the desired emotions in the audience by controlling the atmosphere, the tempo and expectations of the audience.

To lead temperate souls home  
With minds purged of affliction  
Free of tyrannical dominion  
Incarcerating therapeutic tidings  
Leak out the holy secret and  
Make real eternal manumission  
Roam the streets with the news  
Shout loudly from the acropolis  
Spread it all around the Agora  
Fill minds with love-cheers  
So, now and now  
Again and again  
Let it burst  
Let it flow...

---

<sup>109</sup> **Catharsis.** This concept from Aristotle's *Poetics* has often been considered difficult and controversial. However, no definition of 'catharsis' has left out the idea of arousal of pity and fear in a tragic drama. This is often referred to as purgation of the emotions of pity and fear that are aroused in the audience who identifies with the tragic character, is awed by the character's experience and moved to sympathise with him; imagining being in a similar situation. Apart from easing out the emotional anxiety of the audience over the imminent catastrophe of the tragic hero, catharsis is conceived as playing a positive psychological function of ridding the minds of or, at least, providing warning against the flaws that lead to the tragedy. It becomes the emotional relief that stems from having a realistic view of self, and a mode of self realisation which experienced by individuals.

## 49. Arete<sup>110</sup>

Hostile friends all around  
Rebuff the strange choice  
Pummeling gentle spirit  
Weight bearing call to quit  
Select walk on a tight rope  
Decades' journey to senility  
And yielding at last in peace  
To tenacious bait of deep sleep  
Yet, in the rigid claw-grip  
Remains the glee of lifetime  
Someone tears Bingo<sup>111</sup> from Bone?  
Or, Monkey divorces Banana?

---

<sup>110</sup> **Arete** (ἀρετή), was the goddess who personified virtue in Greek mythology. However, the word has often been used as a term in Greek literature to denote character at its best. It is a combination of qualities such as valor and virtue. 'Arete' also represents 'moral virtue' or 'excellence' of any kind. It refers to the sense of fulfillment at the 'peak of achievement'; 'utility' or realisation of individual's 'full potential' (Odyssey, 13.42). While the word is often linked to 'bravery', it is associated more with 'effectiveness'. 'Arete' is used to judge an individual's action in whatever context, taking into cognizance its effectiveness. It is equated at other times with human knowledge, since knowledge is seen as virtue, 'Arete' is therefore also linked with virtue.

<sup>111</sup> **Bingo.** In the English children's folk song, 'There Was a Farmer Who Had a Dog', 'Bingo' is understood as the name of the 'farmer'. However, 'Bingo' has been used over time in the western part of Nigeria as a name of a dog. 'Bingo!' 'Bingo!' 'Bingo!' is a way of summoning a dog.

Upon ethos is the endless standing  
In defiance of ominous eruptions  
Terror issuing from Agamemnon<sup>112</sup>  
The commander mourning booty  
Upon the honour the stand-up  
To constantly nurture goodwill  
No space shall be for conceding  
In bottomless heart of obedience  
To the unfailing supreme law  
For the way better than life  
Path to perpetually thread  
The rain shall fall heavily  
Trees may tumble in panic  
And darkness visits in daytime  
Yet, stiff the course becomes  
Never the waves of the sea

---

<sup>112</sup> Agamemnon. See footnotes 26, 55, 94.



## 50. Distress Ends

Through the nerves  
Emotions slide down  
Decelerate the pace  
Thoughts stifle at nursery

Agony that is age old  
Pitches tent to scorn  
Tormenting delights  
Grief becomes illustrious

Day turns to marathon  
Night befriends Fright  
The associate of Disquiet  
No balsam in Gilead<sup>113</sup>?  
Behold Respite angel  
Comely and hastening

---

<sup>113</sup> **Balsam in Gilead.** The Greek word, βάλαμον can be traced to a combination of two Hebrew words, namely, 'baal', which means 'lord' or 'master' and 'shemen', which means 'oil'. Hence, balsam literally can be rendered as 'Lord of Oils', signifying the reputation of balsam as finest of oils in antiquity. 'Balsam in Gilead' or 'Balm of Gilead' was a precious medicinal perfume that was produced in the region of Gilead in Bible times. In addition to its use as perfume, it was also popularly used in treatment of wounds because of its curative properties. Fittingly, then, there is allusion to its healing power in the Bible when Jeremiah laments over the dearth of spiritual remedy to his people's plight (Jer. 8:22)

Firmly holding scepter  
To install Relief as king

Friends are all around  
Glad reports light faces  
Hope comes to stay  
Ray shall never betray

The gloom exits  
The ray triumphs  
Exultingly; and  
So ends the night

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gill Oluwatosin Adekannbi is a Lecturer in the Department of Classics, University of Ibadan, Ibadan. He situates "The Gloom and the Ray" within a largely Classical world to portray the dark and the bright sides of life. The collection of poems ends on the note of triumph of light over darkness.