



DIPLOMATIC LIP SERVICE

When you see a couple
consumed in a public tiff
Don't bash the one to stroke the other
I believe you get my drift.

If they ever invite you
perhaps to stand as judge
Listen well and listen good
But make sure your lips don't budge.

Because when the clash is over
And they're professing love again
You look like a busy-body and
Lose not two friends but ten.

For they'll malign and castrate you
Tag you a murderer of happiness
With your big mouth and know-all ways
You'll be appalled by the nastiness.

So if you're ever called upon
Perhaps to stand as judge
Listen well and listen good
Make sure your lips don't budge.

THE BEAST (MERCEDES 600 SEL)

I am the overweight monster of the road
Six hundred thousand pounds of fat
Six hundred notable marks of excellence.

Overruling dictator of my microscopic
subjects
Governing the highway in sleek splendour
Dominating the fantasies of peasant
headlights
Dashing the hopes of revolutionary wheels.

I establish the affluent
in their righteous quest
for bigmanism.
To the poor,
I am the symbol
of class immobility.

Don't cross my path
Lest I crush you to cipher
with my big fat alloys.

I am the beast, Monster of the road.

TWO WOMEN TWO BEGINNINGS

Two women, Two soulmates
Soldered by a common source.

Two heart-breaks, Two dream-stakes
Riverlets, driven by a similar force.

Two angers, Two comforts
Busting their mushy fetters to society's
flaws.

Two caresses, Two kisses
A sympathetic cure for phallus-inflicted
sores.

Two passions, Two spouses
Bitten full-faced by unfaithful jaws.

Two chances, Two dancers
Riding the meadows on a soaring horse.

Two rebels, Two pebbles
Making a trash heap of their mothers' laws.

Two images, Two grimaces
Listening in on phone calls through cracks
in the doors.

Two promises, Two madresses
Fighting the need for thrusts in bedroom
wars.

Two voices, Two choices
Yearning for release from love's clumsy
claws.

Two goodbyes, Two male friends
Two classical, cyclical stories, a pause.

Two beginnings.

FLABBY TUMS

The fold-laden belly
is really quite fascinating.
Note the advantages of this glorious
wonder.

More effective than any factory-born dye,
It debars you from viewing
that intolerable greying pubis.

Titilola

belongs to the
breed of
emergent and
young female
writers in
Nigeria. Born
in 1974, she
graduated in
English at the
Ogun State
University,
Ago Iwoye in
1995 and has
enrolled for a
postgraduate
degree in
Ibadan.

These poems
are selected
from her very
first collection
of poetry, SO
ALL THE
TIME I WAS
SITTING ON
AN EGG
which is
unpublished.
She is also an
author of
unpublished
short stories.

Less intricate than the horrowing buckle
on your two-colour custom-made belt,
It keeps your trousers from sprawling
lifeless
at your ankles.

More manageable than giant metallic
wheels,
It is proof that you are living and living
well.

JOSHUA OLUMAYOWA

A window.
A window with a silver window-sill.
A window bejewelled with sapphire
flowerpots
that hold roses.
Rare roses of baby-blue.
A window.
A window with curtains
White nappy-soft curtains.

A Hand draws the curtains,
and the sun smiles in,
making my life beautiful.

ETHIOPIAN ROOTS

Copper dreadlocks bobbing up and down
he strolls, city to city
slapping his heels to the Roots Rasta Reggae
he hears in his head.
He chants to the listening spirits, Jah's
emissaries.
Sleeps under the candy-seller's stall at the
bus stop,
Jah's sacred temple.
Wears tailored rags, Jah's superior regalia
Accumulates choice garbage, Jah's
consecrated icons.
Rummages through the skips, Jah's high
table.
Hounds the sane, destructive Unbelievers.

SONG OF THE CONFINED

I
The ballad of the rusty creaking hinges
that choruses at the corridor-mouths
has got to be a love song.

For the tune reminds me
of a certain kind of freedom
I once dreamt up
But it's hard to escape
to that classical place
when the wardens with their gutter-deep
consciences
keep disrupting my falsetto

as they thrust the metal doors
this way and that.

II

Sell me some more
of that brown seedy grass
that sends me two octaves higher
and eases the pain
in the days that swallow the weeks
and sour into months.

III

My claustrophobic limbs
scat in jazzy harmony
so I sweeten the melody
with notes of tired sighs
for the dreams I'm drawing
in musical bars
on these deaf prison walls.

BE ANYTHING ELSE BUT YOU

Maybe I should be more like the sea
through raging tantrums and sweep away
footprints
like they don't mean a thing.

Maybe I should be more like a snail
and bury myself in a spiral home
with room only for me.

Maybe I should be more like a lioness
tearing apart my prey
as it stalks to steal my priceless cubs.

Maybe I should be more like the sky
sitting majestically on a blue and white
unicorn
wonderful to behold, sacrilegious to grasp.

Maybe I should be more like the spider
and build my castles in the crevices
of another's palace.

Maybe I should be more like a cool breeze
dishing out my peace in spurts
-kiss and run

Maybe I should just be anything else
if my being human
is running milk in the coconut,
its source, mysterious.

FROM THE TINGI TINGI HADES CAMP

Shirtless ribs press through
the cyclops lane to misery
bony bare backs of children
in neon pants

magnify italic memoirs of hunger and
homelessness.

Twiggy fingers scrape
yellow plastic cups for the dregs
of palm-full cornmeal

Taut brown skin stretches over
famined faces reflecting
swollen-headed dreams.

Gulleyed sockets cocoon dusty pupils
recollecting histories
for tales,
tales that tick in the grains
of hourglass tomorrows.

Staggering drones tow away
the buzzing bodies of the sick
and the dead are plunged
in the roadside ditches
so the earth can muffle the cries
of Zaire's lost.

FIRING SQUAD

Ten brown bottles
Standing in a row
Each brown bottle
Tied up in a pretty bow

Occasional guffaw
Lip-deep laughter
Flaming tears
For the there-after

Hearts breaking
Grown men shaking
My life is being taken

And it's my making.'

Fire...!
And all is still.

KENULE, EMMANUEL

Haunted and hated,
Tried and tribunalized,
they stole him away
to the ports of our courts
and hung him out at the gallows
to dry.
Pipe-borne tears of surrender
whet his tired soul,
sizzling the flames of vainglorious injustice.
And he cried out
with his last breath,
'Spirit of Ogoni, forgive them,
for they know what they do and do it!'

ABOUT LIFE

Write a poem about flowers!
Of their tender petals
bruised by the heavy black boots
of a sulking son?

Okay, write a poem about birds!
Of the snowy dove, half dead,
dangling in the claws of a falcon?

Alright, write a poem about love!
Of sweet expectations shattered?
Of infidelity, violence, suicide?

Then write a poem about life!
I just did.