



Chiedu Ezeanah, an award-winning poet, has worked as a journalist for ten years with the *Nigerian Tribune*, *TELL*, *The NEWS*, and as editor of *Sunday Monitor*. Presently, he is an Assistant Manager with First Bank of Nigeria Plc. He graduated with a B.A. (Hons.) in English from the University of Ibadan in 1988, and also studied for an M.A in English at the same university. His hobbies are reading, traveling and cooking. "VISTA" is excerpted from an unpublished collection – *THE TWILIGHT TRILOGY*, comprising "Twilight of The Fog", "Endsong", "Song of Songs". A prominent member of the 'Thursday People'—a conclave of poets and idealists of the eighties at the University of Ibadan, he has won the Music Society of Nigeria Festival of Poetry Competition in 1999 and 2001.

GLENDORA *poet* review

VISTA (FIVE SEQUENCE)

"Travelling through lonely tracks Discovering the country with its wonders..."
-Rabridanah Tagore.

"A drifter is the hero of my tale"

-Derek Walcott

I. LAGOS

The first cockcrow grinds out souls
The dawn and the crowd are in a chase again
Through blue mist
Impatient gesture, gasp and curses and indications
Lagos strides in steel swings that crust for her
Everything conjured here rattles again

Unbound amidst touts
I've mimicked the jostling boy
Sleep walked through fumes
History's congested tongues feast here
I have been re-invented here
I'm one with the grasping tide

City of still waters, city of sonorous chaos
Friends of your dewdrops
In dizzying chirographies
Before the first birdcall
Off to their grinding-go-round
The anonymities of their secret eyes
Where do they sleep?

Desperation topples desperation here
Shrill destitute music dupes the peace of still waters,
All animated
The flowing dilapidations of Mushin
All pent up
The photogenic Victoria Island

City of still waters! City of sonorous chaos!!
What is a city
If not this grating heaven
Out of which destitute music grows!!!

II. OGWASHI-UKU, March, 1984

A sea of heads
A village's spontaneous ensemble
We accompanied him; Son, Nephew, Wife,
Co-workers-
All the way from Kaduna-
In the Post and Telecommunications Vans
Into the hearts of Ogwashi-Uku

Uncle Walter, meek uncle, undone by asthma
Who loved his bible, Lobsang Rampa, and Shakespeare
And Zik (only the complete works of Shakespeare tempted me)
He also loved Ojukwu
I still wonder why.

The ethnic wars of the 60's
Brought him back home to build on Miss Ross Street
Cottage walls by the family house in front of which
His corpse was now planted.

Heavy eyes pregnant with rain
A sea of sounds, a bitter-sweet sea
Music in man flourishing for man
Poetry drumming out new dawn out of night.

For the first I listened to a village dirging
Feet stamping in joy to meet other feet in song
Night had withdrawn into the empty wine gourds
And left the cockcrows to the dews
The dews drop their tiny tears into the small voices of mourners
By the family garden

Night had withdrawn for farewell rites
Trills lead on to trills
To women's waist vibrating
Trapping the applause of other women
Daring drowsy men to clasp
The charm in their tones

I am telling this with an envy
Of one who'll retell their tones

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III. IKOGOSI...

Ibadan...Owo...Akure...Ikogosi
Galloping potholes of ellipses route this
resort...

A smile climbs uphill to fountainhead
Of running pure white warm and cool
springwater:
Inscrutable water ties
Kinshipping of water
Flowing downhill like twin tempers of ages
Water also springs unions of contraries
Like marvels, numinous, not to be
understood?

Cup your palms and scoop,
Feel earth's unfathomableness
In twin tempers of springwater
Make a bed among the trees' calm abandon
Laying to rest the township's turbulences
Along the stream's lines...

Along this stream's lines, Tai Solarin, famous
atheist
Meets the missionary Baptist Priest
The Priest rebuffs the atheist
"This is a private resort discovered by me
It's not open to the public..."
And the famous atheist' replies-
"We shall see"

Tai, headmaster and proprietor of Mayflower
School, Ikenne
Returned to Ikenne
He came back with a busload
Of his pupils intent on sightseeing Ikogosi

The atheist confronts the priest
And the priest gives up his discovery
The pupils came to Ikogosi, saw Ikogosi's
fresh spring water
And paid obeisance with their children's
laughter.
Along the stream's lines
The shadow of the priest and the atheist
loomed
Like an ageless story...

We still scan unknowable waters for ourselves
It's for us Ikogosi's union of contraries flow...

IV. STONE MARKET

"How does one move from one slough to
another...?"

-The Swamp Dwellers -Wole Soyinka

Mountainous rocks crowned with streaming
mist

A rock's belly exuding spring water
Birds in amphibious dance at stream level
The sleeping rooms of Ajaokuta's thirteen
clans swim in water.
Scattered and transplanted into a green
wilderness
Ajaokuta's farming clans sink
Into sweet superstition:

We are in a cave
Where can we go?
We do not know where to go...

Eighty-eight year old clan head
And World War II veteran broods
He renders a long-locked secret
From the clan's throne of groans.

The gaggled curses of ancestors
Rarely gazetted
Crippled the Mill...

Ajaokuta's stony fate
Came by way of imperial trade
Our young elegiac guide retold what the river
saw
When the British fished beyond their isle:
"This vast rock was trading-ground.
Of the Royal Niger Company, the U.A.C...
You can see those two warehouses
The wide-jawed-tiger labels belonged to them
Ajaokuta derives from Oja-Okuta
The Stone-Market

Forget succour!
From the steel Mill whose image-chambers
Hush reporters with a meal
Forget succour!!
From Estate Contractors dribbling, promising
"resettlement soon"
From Shuttle-Ministers, from Executive-
Governors
Who promise nothing, but spare no farthing
To stifle the steel-town with "official secret acts"
Forget succour!!!

The shimmering waves weave
Sunny beauties of a river bank

Ghosts come out for air, exchanging
pleasantries
Recognizing the scene of the last
Car crash, the final gun shot.

Hand in hand with insomnia
Unblinking behind my city mask,
I walk past the cat, past the dog, past the girl
Flagging down cars, past the lynch mob
Past the robber wearing the fiery necklace.

I read

The rain – misted urban signs: overdue,
overdraft, overload,
Over charge –
But no overture

Never despairing
I open wide my arms
I embrace the fumes, the garbage, the
screams, the gunshots
The embrace, the fumes, the garbage, the
screams, the gunshots
The rush, the noise, the vendor's, the
Okada's screech, the cele's
Bare footfall, the streets, the screams, the
gunshots, the action,
the reaction.

I take the streets in stages
Turning them one by one like pages
I seek a path through the urban fences,
Feeling for the clink in city's defences.

Glendora

BOOKS SUPPLEMENT



An inventory of inciting debate, extending geographies of representation, and communion with continuously transforming knowledge.



Helon Habila studied Literature at the University of Jos and lectured for three years at the Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi before coming to Lagos to write for *Hints Magazine*. Poet and prose fiction writer, he is currently the arts editor of the *Vanguard Newspaper*. His collection of short stories, *Prison Stories*, was published in 2000, and he won the MUSON Festival of Poetry Competition for the same year.

GLENDORA *poet* review

THE SEARCH

The Pre-rain Streets at Dawn

Walking the pre-rain streets at dawn
I feel life's ante rising sharply with the clouds
Dead bodies bob and sink in roadside
gutters
Flotsam, like cigarette butts floating on life's
Backwaters – the staring eyes, the gaping
mouths
That have lost their scream, their message.
The gunshots grow louder, closer
The screams grow shriller, nearer

Thoughts desert the mind
Void, like a post- coup d'etat street – and the
whole body
Becomes legs, digging potholes in the
asphalt,
Burning rubber, jumping fences, seeking a
hole to wait out
The storm.

Bus Stops

The hawkers are a blur in motion
Needle weaving through metal fabric
Yellow buses that come and go, their
anaemic limbs
Joined each to each by rust. 69 seated, 99
standing
Prehensile bus conductors monkey on and off
running boards
Calling bus stops, places...

Places I have walked on lived on, loved on,
Yaba, Ojuelegba, Ogba
And I wish I could go further, uproot west
To the sun nocturnal bus stop, and blink –out
The world

The knockers

At Maryland a man knocks on a church door,
Furtive, a penitent sinner perhaps, seeking
absolution;
A lady in evening dress and red lipstick
Stands before a back door in Ikeja, knocking;

A wayward wife keeping a tryst with her lover;
Or a prodigal wife, returned, seeking
readmission

Under a Vacancy for Three

A thousand men stand, knocking on the
Iron gate of their aspiration. Don't call us. We
will call you.

Okigbo once stood, naked, leaning on an
oilbean,
Knocking on Idoto's door, seeking
rejuvenation.

Lord we all stand, naked, before the tollgate
Of our dreams, drenched in urban torrents,
seeking admission.

Places, Fences, Defences...

Oshodi

At Oshodi commerce waxes as the sun rises
Beneath lamp- posts, raffia sheds. Bells.
Megaphones.
Cacophones.
Through car windows hands reach for ware
But really seeking contact, reassurance, like a
diver touching
Bottom. Flesh touching flesh.

Ikoyi

Ikoyi lives behind fences
Locking out the crime wave that daily rises
Surging, inroading the shores of their
defences.
Guards leashed to dogs underline the
prohibitive
Notices: MILITARY ZONE; KEEP OFF. And you
can't
Loiter by somebody's NO LOITERING. You
walk on.
You can't piss, can't scratch your ass; you
can't
Bask in the sun, like the lizard, on
somebody's
DON'T WALK ON THE LAWN.

Allen Avenue

Some mother's daughter on her knees,
behind the hedge,
In one hand a cigarette, painted nails- the
red in Coke
The other hand on his bare bottom, some
wife's
Husband, backing the light, his after-work
bag in
One hand, the evening paper in the other, a
beatific
Smile on his face. Her mouth stuck to his
member-
Remember? Allen Avenue.

Victoria Island

Island anchored in the sun,
Treacherous waters lap at your feet, stealing
Piece-meal, sand from your store: Maroko,
Bar Beach.

In your sand-filled waters flows time, briny,
Sowing crows feet on your brow. But
Islands are never Islands without water, and
Water is only water without Island – this is
The pain and the ecstasy.

The ebb tide will take away
The flood tide will graft anew-augmented

Broad Street

On Broad Street there are no people
Only streams of intentions: sellers' buyers,
opportunity addicts
Sidling to you, flashing wristwatches, jewelry,
And drugs.

The money changer waits by the kerb,
Catching your eye, beckoning 1 pounds and
dollars

Floating from Tinubu Square to Marina
between
Mr. Bigg's and Cash 'n' Carry you soon
discover
Here all are predators, and you the seeker
the only prey.

The Subcities

Doors hang from their top hinges, like
suicides
From a rope
The moon hangs at roof level, devoid of

mystery.

The harlot hovers at the corner, waiting for
the beckoning wink,
the whistle.
Youths in alleys hold roach communions,
discussing
Money and other mirages, their hands in
their pockets,
Fondling steel, waiting...

The dog and the child wrestle in the gutter for
The bone; the mother squats in the dirt,
violate.
No frippery; no mystery.

Derelictscape

The crack in the wall deepens, the hole in the
Roof widens; the hold on the temper
slackens;
The landlord approaches. Time ticks.

In the ghettos people stand on the edge
Of the world, waiting to fall over.

The Dreamers

Poets in back-street bars, threadbare in jeans,
T-Shirts
And goatees, compare metaphors and
similes
Dreaming of London and New York and their
Names on the bestsellers list.

Actors in deserted theaters rehearse their
entries,
Their arias, and their exits. Their
Fade to black.

The after – rain Street at Night

At night
Insomnia walks the streets,
Legs high over the after – rain pools, from
door to door,
Spreading wakefulness, raising high the
music in disco halls,
Refilling glasses in dim bar rooms
Bringing ever nearer the gun shots, the
screams.

Under bridges winos poke the bins
Searching for sleep's vestiges
And

Into castanets of ironies
 Two whitewashed boats suffer out
 Their exile from water
 By the weed-ridden banks
 A goat is chewing up cassava chips
 From the boat's belly
 I dipped my feet in water
 Picked a stalk of hyacinths from the river
 And gave to my friend, laughing she said:
 "This flower wilts already in the sun
 Like the farming clans of Ajaokuta expiring
 For iron to grow..."

"Was there ever a happy ending
 To tales flowing from the Niger?
 I asked

Why? People impose fictions of endings
 The bitter and the sweet are endless
 The river is endless, the river bears all...

Her river –verdict
 Does that include the Niger?

V. VISTA

A shy sun hangs behind thick fogs
 This is the last turning to the groves of
 dreams
 Where snakes curl into garlands
 Where vision opens up palaces and pits!

Dream a journey and the sunny road is
 yours
 Speak milestones to the road
 Win twilight's endless enigmas of arrivals
 Win legends of the true life
 In a vista of endless quest...

Knead!
 I'll knead these lodes
 To my heart
 For all seasons...

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