

# He Has Three Legs

Tadaferua Ujorha

**T**HE literary wheel made a handsome turn recently, and this has resulted in delightful additions to the burgeoning field of children's literature in Nigeria. Yusuf Adamu is a medical geographer and a lecturer with the department of Geography, Bayero University, Kano, and his *Butterfly and other poems* is a collection of fifteen poems which focus on and are addressed to children, in the context of their needs, likes and hopes. Against this background therefore, the work must become as simple and natural as possible in order to capture the inimitable contours of a child's psychology. The poems are svelte happy songs. Lyricism is assisted by the regular use of repetition, alliteration, and the employment of run-on lines. Through these techniques, the poet strives to capture the speculating intellect and the endless chatter of the child.

The poem 'My Dear Mum', first in the procession, is a salute to all mothers, that it is unpunctuated might go to suggest that the salute is non-terminal or endless. The child is filled with an endless desire to repay its mother for her selfless services and profound love towards it. This is a beautiful and thrilling beginning for it represents a child's first natural instinct. The child's perceptive spirit and humorous bent is then related to 'Our old man' and 'my gran-nies'. In the former poem the child speculates 'he has four eyes/two made of glasses/he has three legs/one made of a stick' In the latter

**Yusuf Adamu, BUTTERFLY AND OTHER POEMS, Joji Publishers, Kano, 1995, 24pp.**

the child exhibits a critical and humorous analysis of his grandparents. He reflects, 'their hair is grey/their skin slack/their voice is soft. Only a child can consider his grandparents in this clinical and humorous fashion. The poem 'Today' is a prayer, the first of the poems that is expressed in a stanzaic structure, and reflects the author's tendency to experiment with style in the collection.

The twin poems *Butterfly* and *Tiger*, are identical in length, and similar in their openings. The alliterative *Butterfly* is filled with lines like 'Fly so high/flower to flower'. And its lightness supports the jocund and genial overtone that characterises the work. The metrical system in 'Tiger' suggests a dense or heavy reality, and the child can be perceived as making critical distinctions

as it observes life around it. All these tendencies highlight some basic capacities in a child.

Evidence abounds that the poet has paid especial attention to organisation and chronology. Thus poems with very identical concerns are placed close together, explaining the propinquity shared by 'our old man' and 'my Gran-nies', 'Map' and 'Ka'abah', 'Rainbow' and 'Weather'. The presence of elements from the turf of geography demonstrate a felicitous association between the child's universe and his own orientation. This is immediately observed in the titles of the poems 'Maps', 'Weather', 'Rainbow', and 'Mountains'.

A number of typographical errors are a disservice to the work. For instance the omission of 'to' in the first line of 'Maps', or the addition of 's' to 'face' in

the fifth stanza of 'Ka'abah'. We see the child progressing from home to the school, and then are suddenly thrust into the world of 'Map' and the 'Butterfly'. Perhaps a poem or two on the teachers and other pupils in a school would then become a vital background for the exploratory poems such as 'Weather', 'The Solar System', and 'Mountain'.

Nevertheless, Yusuf Adamu does succeed in speaking to children, and this dialogue is facilitated by a simplicity of diction, a sustained lyrical and humour laden atmosphere, and unpunctuated verse. It is the author's first collection of poetry for children. He has other works, *Mu Koyi Turanci!* (Let's learn English) included, published in 1994. Children's literature has suffered neglect and it's contemporary resurgence in terms of both art and criticism is very encouraging. We can almost hear the radiant cadence of children's voices singing joyfully in the *Butterfly Park*.

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