

It Begins Here

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It Begins Here

Nelson Ratau



I will roll home the thunder of honour and gratitude to the
spirit of Christopher Okigbo.

*For my beloved mother of wonder,
Hlakoše Maake, Boleli wa Mphela!*

‘Time is growing,’ he added. ‘And our suffering is growing too.
When will our suffering bear fruit? One great thought can
alter the future of the world. One revelation. One dream. But
who will dream that dream? And who will make it real?’
– Ben Okri, *Infinite Riches*

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PART ONE

Gratitude, Appreciation and Tribute

Village queen

As the years plodded along, you fought
Monsters with the serenity and calmness
Of a pool, while we sat blind in the darkness
Of ignorance, unknowing of your real power.
You kept our eyes and our hearts clean with love.
And you quenched our tongues and fed us full,
With the sweet juice of childhood that we sucked deliciously.
And we were unknowing of the demons solo you fought,
Beneath the silence, in your every slow and fidgety night.

We did not hear the cock crowing the dawning
Of your heroic deeds – single mother of tough umber.
We did not see as the sun hailed and kissed your
Skin in affectionate delight as you toiled the soil.
We did not see that the flames of the fire danced ballads
Of your quiet legend, the watermelon bearing
The proverb of your unseen, but real wonder – single mother.
We did not see that all the birds sang a blended epic of your being.

And now I see you, with your skin folding, eyes misty,
And the sap almost sipped out by age – combatant.
You have been a generous riddle of strength and toughness
That wraps itself in calmness and gentleness.
You have been a teacher of love and courage – I see you.
I see that there is, beyond the tranquil composure of old age,
That frames you mute as you sit on the veranda,
There is a subtle twitching to go on doing what you
Always did for us; the fire of mothering still burns in you!

The battalion of your hand, chest, breast and heart
Will not rest from what you did best, luminary of life.
O! Iron-willed moon, your orbit cannot be broken, I see.
The echoes of the thunder of your heart will not die.
You refuse to grow old; you are like gold – village queen.
Is it the way of a soldier, to refuse to stop fighting?

The luminescence of your love still goes before me.
O', village queen, you have lived well – you know;
For you served, prayed, played your part;
You have given us all your heart; and you are an arch,
Under which we are blessed as we enter the future.
You have planted seeds of greatness in our spirits, and
Chaired life a dream in our eyes –
Village queen of silent power, how about harvest now?

Your crown

Mother, the stories that cascaded from your mouth
Imbued us with the magic of higher dreams.
Dreams of becoming, songs of facing fears and fires.
These your stories, flung our spirits into the
Invisible gardens of enchanting possibilities,
And we reeled and read in perfect harmony,
The violent blue light of the stars and their stories.

Mother, your voice, stored with love and sincerity,
A file of firm abstract prayers for our wellbeing,
Was always lacquered with a silvery effect
Of dignity; mother, you are a flower of visions;
You are the primal colour of motherhood,
The stubborn song of hope, paragon of humanity.
There are invisible oak leaves that crown you.

Sweet mother, I will cover you with all the invisible
Flowers of the world, a coat of my eternal love for you.
I will cast the stars unto your head with my wish
To be your crown for, beautiful mother, in your living
You symbolised their unpretentious beauty and light.
In your loving us and life you made living a miracle.
In your simple dishes you made wounded moments
Stories of haunting memories of courage and faith.

So, I will fly all around, my obeisance for you
To make a splendid blend of your name
And the quiet air of miracles into a constant
Reminder to time that you lived, a humble blessing.

Mother, I will store, in the armpit of time, your
Legend for all seasons to find and imbibe your wonder
Into the fruits of their coming and going that never ends.

You will never end, for your crown, in its sublime
Invisibility, is the paragon of immortality.
Your crown is the courageous, simple, but powerful
Love that dares rivers, deep dongas and steep mountains,
Thorny fields, biting weathers and scorching days,
Just so you could express it to us in the language
Of untiring actions; mother, Rose-of-Jericho, your crown,
Invisible, but unconquerable like time, is higher.

They too had names and dreams

I refused to forget to pray and cry a libation,
For those whose eyeballs hung from their sockets.
For those who carried their legs with melted-burned hands.
For those who had their flesh eaten by radiation.
I pray million forget-me-nots for their eyes that saw
And dreamt, and loved without saying, before saying.

I refuse to forget to remember, in blessing poems,
In silent rhymes weeping a conjuring rhythm for
Those who were half-burned by bombs of hate,
And blind decisions of military stupidity.
I will not sit and not greet their invisible presences
All around, tears pouring out and pleading forgiveness.

I refused to forget to pour out teary solemn libations
Of remembrance and reverence all around, in their names.

Those who were zombied by the atomic madness.
Those whose flesh melted under the incineration
Of dangerous discoveries in the name of scientific
Evolution; I refuse to be part of the demonic church.
The church of brutes and dictators. They will fall flat!
They will deflate like a fart; their gluttonous bellies will rot.

So, I refuse to forget to dream a new dream every day,
And dreaming rivers of protest that will flow into a new
Republic of the incarnated children and trees that
Died in untapped innocence; I will dream for them.
Children who perished in the Biafra flames and had

Their music coiled into silence by howitzers; I sing for them.

I refuse to languish in fearful silence,
To not let life and living read the story of my breath.

I refuse to forget to dream for the children of Nigeria,
Who died in the unfortunate civil war that lacked civility.
Whose innocence was incinerated by flames of politics.
I will dream and write against curfews that took
From children their dance and songs of freedom,
Their imaginings of winged horses and maiden-headed
Butterflies that whispered to them the future in colour.

I refuse to forget the screaming echoes of those who
Were trained into mirages of home, to their deaths.
For them, I choose freedom over fear and anti-Semitism.
For the people who died in mad games of military
Show of might and political arrogance, I choose the *'fight*
*Through books, paintings, poems and novels, and music, football,*¹
Over destruction; I refuse to be a politician but a poet.
For the fathers who spoke to the gun in Marikana,
Whose blood watered more and more injustice, I weep!

Heaven put this romantic burden of barding in my soul,
So that I may write rhymes of liberation for my people.

So, in my silence I will pray for human rights
Over tyranny and terrorism; I write for humanism.

1 Someone said somewhere

I chose His amazing grace over Armageddon.
I chose to pray for women than to prey on them.
I chose to follow the music of the primary impulse
Of human connection over racial division and sexism.
Now, I refuse to forget those of my people who perished
In senseless wars; for they too had names and dreams.

They too loved and were loved; they laughed, hummed to songs.
They too smiled and wished to join the butterfly in the sky.
They too dreamt dreams of freedom, joy bursting in their hearts.
They too giggled and joked over picnic meals and the reading
Of poems, lying under the sun over the carpet of grass.
They too praised the sweet apple and thanked God for the
season.

I refuse to let Anne Frank's soul remain restless in her early grave;
I sing and dream for my people who died in the Holocaust.

I refuse to settle for comfortable beliefs that free freedom
Is impossibility; I refuse to not see –possibility in *im*-possibility;
That equality and a nuclear-free-world is idealistic thinking.
I refuse not to see the –thing in *no*-thing; like Prometheus,
I will give the torch of love and dreaming to the children of
the world.

And every morning, from my dream, a river of hope will rise,
Heralding into the land of the mortared martyrs, new stars,
To lead us to the primal playground of our oneness.

Woman

If I have not taken the opportunity
To say thank you for all the good
You have done for me over the years,
Therefore, pardon me for my lack of vision.
Pardon me for the pomp that goes before me.

If I have not told you how much
Of a miracle and blessing you are to me;
If I have not blessed you with songs,
Sculptured your name in the air, again,
Pardon me for my ingrate egotism and ignorance.

Now, take from my enlightened lips,
Even in their shock over belated tribute,
Take this chorus of gratitude for your
Priceless significance in my life.
Take from my heartbeat and prayers
A kneeling sculpture for being my mother.

Sister, for taking our mother's roles,
I rain on you, confetti of tribute, for the dish
You mastered for me when Mum was not
Home; I say sister, for making sure
That I wore warm and clean clothes,
The air cannot contain the song I sing for you.

My love, woman, you of my ribs,
You who is fertile with possibilities,
Thank you a million years over for loving me.

For making me a better man, for cleaning me up.
Thank you for being the paragon of home and hope.
Before your feet I will plant a river of happiness.
I will put your heart to endless humming;
I intend to be kind to you – woman.

Woman, I know that God decided to create
You so that man can flood the earth, dream, sing,
Brag, create and feel like he can – so I say,
Mother, sister, lover, you are the song of us all.

Flower of my heart

The repertoire of your voice
Vibrates the core of silence
With the secret music of flowers.
It compels the wind to remember the
Old songs of the golden days of the earth.

Darling, you are an orchestra of the wind,
A symphony of goodness, in and out.
You are a summer note of a wind-chime.
You are a well for all that must be quenched.
Dear one, your actions are the perfect
Wisdom of love.

The music of your kiss enchants the wind tonight,
The wind that makes love to the stars
In a dance so slow, but sure to wake
Ghosts from their sleep of unfinished dreams,
To roam the night pregnant with gifts of warning,
For those who fear to give in to love, to dream.

Your beauty glows in the mellow silence of the night,
As if a greeting from our dreaming sighs of hope.
On the wings of your voice, with the soothe
Of your well-woven tapestry of affection, I fly.
Darling, dance for me, the rhythms of the stars.
Theatre to me, that your smile which knows harmony.
Your smile, a mirror behind which the world dreams.
One more time, let me siesta in the garden
Of your sweet eyes, have their smile tickle me.

To a passionate dreaming of places unseen.
If anything, flower of my heart, you are a living painting
Continuously perfected by the invisible
Hands of the Master-artist; flower of my heart,
Your beauty is the innocent choir of children,
Giggling under the soft patter of a summer shower.

Good friend

When I first met you, I smelled
The acacia miracle of your soul.
I saw a vision in flower fragrance.
My spirit nodded to the aster
Silence of your humble character.

Good friend, I see and feel the boulder-
Toughness of your conviction all the time.
Your heart always beats undivided
Care for me, it seems to beat the
Drum of kindness for my blessed living.
I admire most, your mignonette being.

You are a good friend, my good friend.
So, I want you to know, as to rapt airs
You seem to have come from the spirit
World to aid me, I have also made
A corn-cockle pact with the universe
To be your good friend, all the time.

Therefore, when it rains on you, my friend,
Do not be too blind to see my humble hut.
My dinner table always asks of your presence.
And as for the plate that I keep in your name,
Complains of being useless.
Good friend, make of what is mine then,
The quiet joy of being my good friend.

Sleeping fathers and mothers

I am a horn full of songs and oil of tribute for you.
Resting fathers and mothers in the infinite beyond,
Receive me before your great unseen presences,
To pour out the oil of tribute before your spirits.
Let me anoint your names for they should not be
Forgotten; your names that are charts of wisdom.

The African air is still heavy with your unflinching
Courage that faced the fire-stick of the man of steel.
The sky is still in awe of your genius that made
Tools out of stone and fire without a match – *ha!*
The ocean still dances to the drums of your chest,
For you carried in them the rhythm of life and love.

Oh resting fathers and mothers, imbue me with your
Fire and raise me with the porridge of your rigour.
Smiths of spears of guardianship, raise me in the
Light of the stars that went before you in war
As you fought those who called you soulless and
Savages and came to conquer your kind because
You were too kind to see their ghoulish vision.

Sharpen my tongue like your formidable spears,
So that I may fight for the poor who sleep without
A morsel in their stomachs – plant in me the seeds
Of Ubuntu and something of the African music,
So that I may follow the mould of your simple
Wisdom, which is in fact higher than the mountain.
Lend me the keenness of your eyes that saw rains

Brewing in heaven's bowl and saw harvest in
The smell of the first clouds – make me ashamed
Of my laziness – sleeping fathers and mothers.

Make my ears awake to the echoes of your lessons.
Teach me how to learn from the bees and make
My own honey; pollinate my person to work the
Garden of living every day without a complaint;
The future of our children must find seeds; they must
Know that we lived more for the coming than the present.
Hear your son's prayer; may your smile come upon
Me – this is a needy hour we are living in – so shine on us.
Sleeping fathers, you who were warriors, forge my bones
Like iron; sleeping mothers, you who multiplied and
Nurtured my race, give me the mastery of your hands.

Too soon

(Hoping for Christopher Okigbo)

Into the labyrinth of the unknown
You went too soon, towncrier,
Leaving us with enigmas in poems
Sweet with wonderful questions
That pare away our thick ignorance
Even though in your name it is too late.
We did not see you, we did not hear you.

Were you here before as a butterfly
And then came into our age to ask
Us to listen because you knew
The garden that the world was?
Were you in our age, to temper us
To learn from history, its spiral dance
Whose rhythms come to us too late
When we have already repeated
The squandering of our light?

We saddened you Okigbo because
We did not see that ours was not
To war but to look around us with
Awe at the splendour of us
As seeds of the same fruit.
But we incinerated one another.
We gassed each other to the
Ever-favoured grave that never
Stops gaping for more bodies.
You left too soon and we saw too late.

We did not see and hear that Alto is us.
We did not notice that you were
Weeping over us in pleading verse
Bleeding redresses before it is too late.
So sage butterfly you had to leave
Too soon and we lost to our rages.
Our land is always strewn with
Rotting corpses of our own
Because of our bloodthirsty hand
That yearns to grab the tower of power.

Okigbo, you left too soon.
I hope they see and hear me, for you.

She is here

Like a blessed miracle,
She smiles rainbows all around.
She unfolds quietly like a flower,
Whose petals never lose colour.

Like the Babylonian gardens,
She hangs in the unseen in her
Silent and unassuming beauty.

Like a waterfall from the scale
Of the consortia of the brightest stars,
Her laughter pours into my heart,
A new silent harmony and, like a child,
I skip to the sweetness that only she can give.

She is here

She is a poetic dream of the palaces
In me; her hips, as they swing
In the colourful breeze of spring,
The universe discovers the geometry
Of a new kind of mathematics,
A higher mathematics of dancing.

Her voice, an endless choir of heavenly
Sonatas; perhaps birds draw their
Morning melodies from her voice.

She is here

She is a proverb spoken by prophets
Of love; a mystery scientists never dare
To unravel, for her beauty lies in the invisible.

She is the silent background song
Of a monk's meditation; a prayer of my heart.
She is here, revising my life into poem.

I celebrate her with every ray the sun
Pours; I pay heaven a kneeling sculpture.
She is here, and I sing a split-tongue song
Of a warrior; finally, my house has warmth.
That flower of my heart is here.
Heed the dancing glow on my face.

I tell you

Darling, my love for you,
The world and all its gardens,
Are too small to sing!

When son comes home

When son comes home,
The air will know that it is
Too small to contain the opera
Of your voice all around.
Time will know that its pages
Are too sparing to narrate the legend
Of your courage that you
Tenderly touched our lives with.

When son comes home
The sky will expand into an
Explosion of colours as your
Ululations will theatre the vibrant
Score of happiness oscillating
In your hardest hit but love-lit heart.
When this your son comes home,
Mother, there will be flowers in your soul.

When son comes home,
Your chest will swell up into
A drum of pride; the mountain
Will dance too, the valley will
Echo your potent quiet acts that made me.
When son comes home, mother,
The limpid glitter of your eyes
Will finally return, and I will weep,
Endless streams of joy in your name.
When son comes home, mother,
He will be laden with homage, and all will
Be a celebration of your unconquerable spirit.

Lanterns of wishes

The magic of silence is the prayer
Of the suffering who bend without
Whispering their tiredness to time
They silently look to the rising sun
And greet it with a prayer of being
As their hands interpret time in work

Hope lives in the sighs of the toiling
Suffering their wisdom to keep affianced
To the spiritual, for them living is no ritual
They live on the meridian line of humanity
Ever-embroiled in ever-brewing misery

Their sighs are the Kongming lanterns
Of living aware of heaven in their hearts
And with their minds they will seasons into
Blessings of time's tyranny of no interludes
The poor are the miracle the world have
For the work and what they hope for
Are wonderful mignonette magic lanterns
In the margins of the world to turn it into gold

So let us not despise being poor of material
Let us not despise and reject the poor and simplicity
Let us regard them with wishes of knowing
Life as they do the power of feeling and hoping
To be drilled into impregnable toughness by suffering
Let us let float in the sky the Kongming lanterns of wishes
To return to the rustic homelands where the poor tell stories
Of what it means and feels to be human every day
Among the stars where a bowl of courage burns.

Homeward path

To the fountainhead of unfeigned love,
One must invite himself rushing
Like a river to the sea, after foot-sore wandering.
Like a youthful mustang of dreaming,
His soul must be as hungry as its feet,
As they dream of running to drink from the river
That whispers of origins, from its mysterious depth,
Sonatas of natural freedom that sound and abound
Like the amount of the air; the call of home I hear.

Since living is dreadful, and life wonderful,
One must remember home; there is life there.
The simple cookings are meant to remind
The heart of its place, the tongue of its song;
Home is therapeutic, has the heart of music.
The laughter over reflective stories of childhood.
The innocent incidents that belong to the misty days,
When the world was upside-down, food tasty;
All melody to the heart that dreams of being a festival.

Remember when you were caught
Picking in the biscuit ampoule, and ran home.
Let one take the homeward path for the medicine
That juxtaposes itself against the general fear of death.
When the heavy shadow of living approaches one's joy,
Remember that at home the candle of rapturous joy
Never conforms to darkness; home is the place of stars.
Take the road to the homeland of unrehearsed love.
Every word or gesture of goodness has a unique

Accent when the place is home, when mother is the giver.
Giving also her smile that comes from the river within.

So, before the sun declines, learning from the birds
In their flight homeward, their wings conducting the
Wind of home-going into a flight-song to origins,
I too will let my feet affianc the path homeward.

Invisible crown

Please tell my mother to forgive me
Because I could not be home always
For I have been out here mining and
Weaving and burning for the finding
Of tribute jewellery of gritty glory for her.

So tell her to excuse my blindness, for
Now I know that her crown is not out
Here, but on her head already, invisible.

Stories from Mum

She would begin, elliptically,
To tell me a story whose point
Pointed me into the future
Seducing me into yearning to see
The magic of the miracle of us
As our good works interpret time.
Her words, laced with lavender wisdom,
Uncoiled notes of curiosity in me,
And cleared shrouds of clouds.

Mum poured into my spirit tellings
Coded by a knowing reservation
Of explanation; for she knew
That living must not be explained
In words, a child must be thrown
Into its ellipses that temper
Imagination and curiosity.
Let the child find a story there.

I may have degrees and read
Huge books with big strange
Words whose fascination dies
With the dictionary –
But I know that Mum's
Stories are the dreams of the future,
With whose elliptic music she
Touched my young mind.
All the poetry I write today,
My mother imprinted in my

Spirit, so that as I live, I may pull
It from the air, and feed those who care,
And seduce those who stand to stare,
To wake up to the living of their stories,
That mothers always tell.

PART TWO

Wishes, Dreams and Hopes

It begins here

The spirit of dreamers does not have a jurisdiction –
So dream, dream eagle of the mind – the future in you!

I want

I want to be free,
Free from the tyranny of
Excessive thinking,
The unseen lure of solipsism.

I want to be undefined,
Undefined by the angle
Of my present reality.
I want to have a touch
Of all the colours in my voice.

What I want is to be open,
With an open heart to the
Unknown coming things of life,
As I grow in my perpetual becoming.

I want to dream;
I want to dream new dreams whose reams
Of wonder know the secrets of higher realms,
Where heaven dreams.

I want to dance,
A dance that in itself is a song
Of hearts rhyming through time;
A song gestured by the rapid, but serene
Rhythms that my body shapes
In the wind that is so kind.
I want to laugh,
I want to roll on the ground

In a paroxysm of mad freedom,
For I too was born of freedom.
I want joy to whistle in my moments.

I just want to be spontaneous,
Like a song coming from the blue of the sky.
In my want, I want to want all the beautiful
Things that I think of; I want life.
I want to keep falling in love,
Fall asleep in the falling, wake,
And dream and live falling, keep falling
In mad love – keep wanting to fall,
In my wanting to fall in love.

Poem for a new year

Now the New Year is here
For another fantastic leap,
Let the courageous take flight
To see the sky's peak.

Oh! Those who dream are what
The world will noise in legend.
So let them be awake to own
The future with a wanting grip.

A new era

Have you noticed?
That a new era has begun.
Dreams are the new currency.
Money has poisoned the river
Of humanity with greed.
Corruption has wounded the land.

The angels have spoken.
We are to dream every day.
We are to invest in our dreams.
We are to mine their magic.
We are to harness their possibilities.
We are to be simple outwardly.
We are to be jaguars within.
We are to build the city from the inside.
We are to be guardians of truth.
We are to be custodians of justice.

A new era has come.
But have you noticed?
The human spirit yearns for things unseen.
Will you feed the vanity of things seen still?
Or will you join the workers of dreams?
I tell you, it has begun, so, awake!
The land itches for tillers of new dreams.

The era of you and me to create
Our world from the inside stirring
Of our being and fire has come.

So, meet me at the field, with your hand open,
To hold mine; let us show the poisoners
Of our world that we see the beginning of
A new era and the beginning of their end.
I am here to see it come about.
But I have to ask: Are you there?

Age of watermelon

Move, move, move forward
To the truth of things.
Though like the snail,
Or the tortoise or the chameleon
You may seem to step,
Let the sun drink visions
In your pointed fire that purifies
The gold of justice.

Speak, speak, speak
To the heart of our dreams.
Though unknown
In an unknown corner
Of the world, like the colour
Of the air, speak
For the poor in whose
Hearts heaven is close.

All great suffering
Precedes true greatness.
So, watermelon being
Among us, brew, brew,
Brew in the cellar
Of your silent wisdom
The uncomfortable true change –
This our world needs.

Firstlings of new dreams

Oh children, the time has come
To dream anew and as firstlings
Of dreaming flowers, become.
Let us fly away from the rotting tree.
Like the cycle of the sun from the illusions
Of old dreams we must be free.

Let us pray to the invisible kingdom for light.
For in this new fight we need a new might.
In this new riddle we need a new simple wisdom.
The wisdom embalmed in dreams; there is freedom.

Oh! children, now is the ripe season,
For us to imagine and forget about human reason.
For reason has failed the past ages.
Let's us write our own strange story
Of magic on the remaining pages.

The hour is here, for us to be firstlings of new dreams,
To let run, in abound, in us,
The dreamy new story full of beams of renewal.
Yes, let us take the imaginative leap to the stars.
Snatch new songs of a new age in our spiritual bars.

Oh children of the world, the generous sun is up.
Let us imbibe its limitless magic and with new
Dreaming fire be amped up.
The task at hand of changing our world
Is for us to tend.

Let us come together as a new dreaming band.

Child, the remedy for our dying
World is in your voice.
Come on now, use that power within
You and make the choice.
Dream wherever you are to no end.
Dream anew every day and never
Let your time be wastefully spent.

Oh, children of this our troubled times,
Let us take up the courage and from
Apathy rise in action's aims.
The world and all its music and magic is yours.
So, if we fight now to mend it, the future will be ours.

Wake up now, wake up from the sleep of ignorance.
We do not owe anyone the powerlessness of our tolerance.
No, children of the world, that we cannot afford;
Let's redream our world young so that this murky
River of paradoxes we will ford.

7^{1/2} intonations

1

Dream more than you eat and sleep;
The world needs dreams more than politics.

2

Seek to see clearly, beyond your eyes;
Listen hard, beyond your ears and thoughts.

3

Begin with that which you find yourself shaking your head at,
Disapprovingly, that others are not doing or seeing.

4

Dare to love and to forgive; for these two know the spring
Source of the river of freedom – the free know that.

5

Tell yourself stories; especially the most strange
And the most impossible, and believe them;
Think of them as the truest reality, unfolding.
Just do not turn up your nose at others' reality.

6

Live every day to make your stories realities,
For the tonal alteration of your situation lies in the stories.

7

Do not count the days of your life by birthdays;
Only ordinary people do that, and you are not ordinary;

So count by how much you love, give, dream, and create.
Even though you will discover that your life is measureless,
Death will fear you, and life will follow you to the grave, for the
Living will call your name, as if it were a talismanic mantra
And as if you were still alive.

7^{1/2}

Be impossibly the best at being you. Who else can you be?

Vision count

The calculus of our daily creativity & curiosity,

&

The vector of our visions from

The murky places in which we now lodge,

&

The logarithm of our prayerful sighs,

In this sublunary abode, is infinite wealth.

There is wisdom notated in the feline's
footsteps.

...

The arithmetic of visions is infinite within us.

Let the parallel tangents: actions and

Love for fellow human beings and life,

Follow the mould of our vision count.

Regaining paradise lost

A neurotic mist prevails over the land

To restore the paradise lost to us
We must flood to the homeland
Of dreams, and whisper sweet things in the
Ears of our children so they may dream.

We need to see how
Our material wealth has wounded
Our basic magic of simplicity.
We need to create a new poetics
For our souls, the poetics of dreaming
Beyond the residue of old fiestas.

We need a new mathematics,
The mathematics of counting how
Many friends surround us,
More than how much we can make if we save
Money than to save a friend from hunger.

To regain our paradise lost, we need
To create a new kind of politics,
A politics of leaders who feast on poetry.
The poetry of walking the ground with the people.
We need leaders who always want to operate
And serve the people while walking with them,
On the common ground of humanity, for spiritual prosperity.

Before sleeping

To her whose eyelids bat
Many prayers over meeting me:
I too in the gentleness of a summer
Night, like a piano played in the
Background of a thinking silence,
I pray, sometimes without knowing,
About you, before sleeping.
I fill nights with tender mantras of your
Unknown name and your silent fame
That will light me within, filling my hour
With wonder and a joy that knows loneliness.

Can I share with you a finding I made?
All beautiful and powerful things are
Made out of sorrow and longing – you know.
O', you are the epitome of them all.

Don't worry too much about the
Future then, when the loneliness is heavy
Upon your soul with a wet blanket of boredom.
Don't curse but bless the coming
Moments that carry within
Their minuscule impulses, flowers
Of the pain of a thousand years,
Of a waiting that appears to be in vain,
For there will be for us that single
Moment of the rarest kind of happiness.
Soon we shall share the secret
Rhymes of our heartbeats,

Remembering in their humble
Memories the silent, but fervent prayers
We made in our private spaces
In which we faithfully stood our waiting
In an unknown unity of lovers apart.

Pray on then, over me, for me
Before sleeping because my prayer
Over you, for you, before sleeping, is endless,
It rims beyond dreams in gold that longs
Only for you, the mercury that
Will finally hold my heart in whole.
I pray on for you, before sleeping.

Night song

Beneath the moonlight
We said whispers in delight,
Our song of the night.

A man with a dream

When a man has a dream,
A great dream for that matter,
All that others think of him
In relation to themselves
And life as they see it, are as a
Part in the balance of living.

A man's dream, however invisible,
And however improbable, however little
To the world, is his greatest weight.
For if he is to be hurled into a gaol,
Dark like the womb of a storm,
His dream, like the sun, will burn
Him a way to the scale of the galactic
Places of the Greats; he will be a monument
Among the stars, a miracle of courage.

So, if every one of us heeds and feeds
His dream, all that happens, suffering
And what appears as nothing in his want,
Will not bother him like a man without
A dream; for a man with a dream
Reveals to humanity the unsuspected
Power it has; a man with a dream is like
The last jazz note that speaks to hearts of man,
With the music of overcoming;
Let us dream beyond death then.

The African dream

Africa is dreaming
And Africa has a dream
The dream of Africa is gold
The dream of Africa is a rebirth
Of our best values and best selves
And the dream of Africa is true freedom
And a new story of us to remember that
We too have a place somewhere up there.

Thus Africa dreams of the rustic village
Where no one owned a plate or a bed
But we all did own the bed and the plate
Because we shared the small bed and together
We shared the locust's head and together we
Slept under the stars laughing and telling stories
This was when even the moon came to listen
And to see us because we were Africa's dream.

Africa dreams of the time when it rained
Because our oneness was prayer and a dance
That shook and liquefied the clouds to pour
Africa dreams of the time when to eat alone
Was to die and to mind your own business
Was to be irresponsible for yourself and life
For Africa dreams in a proverb's vision that
The whole village must still raise a child.
Africa is dreaming and Africa has a dream
But Africa's dream lies imprisoned with the poor
With the hungry and the orphaned and the homeless

And until they are fed and clothed and mothered
And fathered and given shelter among their own
Africa's dream will remain stuck among the stars
Like freedom on the tips of a prisoner's fingers.

Becoming

One day,
The world will
Drink from the river
Of magic that runs
Quietly in my voice,
Stored with simple wisdom,
And something of a poem

...

There is a river of dreams too,
In my thoughts, which contemplates
The world into a smile, a tree;
I dream of a new borough of free trees,
A nation of dreaming flowers,
A new cycle of miracles
To re-wed us with the stars

...

There is the fire of truth
In every stroke latched
By my words in their poetic and
Prophetic preoccupations; they will
Burn anything cloistered in claddings.
There is something of the rebellion of
Prometheus in me; I will give dreams
To humanity, even to the butterfly.
In this age, there is no time for sleepwalking.

...

In my breathing, I am weaving a new
Tapestry of the fire of dreaming anew
So that I may temper the world into
A revolution of the mind; we must dream!
Here then, I initiate an elliptic beginning.
A dream of an unborn child – we wait!

A tempering

Dream, dream little child
And never break the dance
Of your curious mind;
Your dreaming is vital to mankind.
Dreams that to our future are kind.

Let the world hear your silent
Power; there is no time for interludes.
Let you and I fill the pure space
Of humanity with notes of our
Hunger for greatness; all the time!

Dream, dream sweet child.
This is your time to project the measure
Of yourself in the arena of living;
So, give the taste of the genius
Of your inner yearning to the air,
Tomorrow for your praise will be there.

Song of courage

As my eyes adjust to the unreal
Light of the sun, and as my soul
Adjusts to the skulking moods
Of turmoil that tilt the angles
At which the sun pours its sweet light
Upon the quiet wells of our souls,
Not lacking of poetry though, I learn that
Mine is the courage to accept
That sorrows will always be there
As long as there are tomorrows.

Let's wait then the return of their pains,
And learn that they are part
Of the paint that gives the sky
Of life its permanent hue.
In the enchanted orchestra of our hope,
Let's always grope for the perfect wisdom
Of courage to face the music of this truth:
The blues of life will always
Be the painfully edifying interludes
Of our optimistic music of becoming.

Therefore, to despair, in season of sterility
And pain, will be idiocy.
Real courage is to dance, to sing,
Even in our dress of sorrow, today;
Brother, let's do it even tomorrow.

Dream

One dream, even if from
Some dark corner in the world,
Can be a revelation; dream then.

To her with hope

When the night is lonely and silent,
And the stale air is loveless,
Laden with ghosts of boredom,
And the calm wind without the remembering
Whispers of my singing of your name,
In my rich absence, and the painful
Long wait of my return to your arms,
Darling, keep praying with your stubborn heartbeat.

And when the day tastes of hopelessness,
Rich with nothingness, in the audible silence
Of my breath, look to the sky, and if it is still
Blue, know that my devotion for you
Still reads the book of immortality,
Still sings your name in the language
And tonality of forever, the music of flowers.
For out here, I know no garden other than you.

Out here, every ounce of hope in my anatomy,
And the anatomy of my becomings,
Traces the elegant structure of your body
In the secret consciousness of the things I treasure most;
Lovely one, you are the background music of all that I live
and do.

Then, know this, my soul whiffs no foreign myrrh,
For your perfumes go with me even into
My dreams; your smile echoes even in the silence
Of all things, seen and unseen; I hope you sigh in relief.

Sweet Tambudzai, my eyes only laugh
To your pearly teeth, and my fingers
Know only the piano of your velvety skin.
So, if ever, you seek to know if I am thinking of you,
Look around you; every grain of soil,
Every star in the night sky, every drop in the ocean,
Every grain of wheat ever harvested and still to be harvested,
That is how much I love you; I hope you smile.
You are the queen of the anatomy of our love.

Tomorrow, surely

When this sinister dawn of paradoxes
Grows old, grey as my grandfather's
Softening hair of futile pains,
Of experienced wisdom and lived revelations,
I will sit in the sun, tell it the
Stories, not sorries, of my new
Stubborn dreams of new beginnings.

I will take the dance of my impulses
To the centre of things, there draw
Around me a ring of daring light and fight
The anxieties that come with growing.

I will play the fleeting time the enchanting
Music of my wishes, and tame
The demanding expectations of age phases
With the glowingly rich face
Of my promising stomach of limitlessness
That houses the capacity of bold and
Boundless possibilities.

I will saddle the Apollonian horses
Of my wild imagination,
Rein them, wisely, across and around the invisible
Path of seasons, trailing my own path
Upon the one of the old, the old who
Walked before me, sighing and singing
Fears, regrets and anxieties; I will
Listen and heed their doubtful fluctuations of reason.

I will lend my ears to their shy and hesitant heartbeats
That missed out on love.
In the end resort to taking the miracle-prone
Road of newness and risk-taking.
I will tread and torch upon the
Landscapes of newly flowering
Buds of the new songs of flying.

I will write notes of the new sonata
Of dreaming on the higher scale of things,
Where God fantastically arts and speaks the peculiar
Spectacles of our world, our destinies;
And debate whether we will surely find the beginning
Of our meaningful end; perhaps we have already begun,
But we do not know it.

I will call magic even from the core of the simple things;
I know the stones can sing,
They just need someone who listens,
Longer, as if their life drew breath from listening.
In this way, I will be acting myself a god
Who takes after his Father,
Whose colour and honour is to pencil
The pathway of hope for the people.

I will listen to the road, whose echoes
Of horrified ancestors of the path to
The rarefied fields of being, jellies
The courage of those whose determination

Draws breath from the fading clouds of show.
Tomorrow, surely, my finger will be a wand
Whose magic commands the stars to dance
To the silent drums pummelled in the garden
Of vision by unborn flowers of a new age.
Then remaking the world with the fire of freedom,
Flaming in me like a dreaming rose, alone
In the heart of a desert; I will dream the firstlings
Of a truer transformation.

I will configure myself into a prayer
For my riddled nation to be attuned back to
The primal score of true freedom, of public dreams.
Tomorrow, surely, I will find the secret trail
That leads to our lost dreams;
And there, begin to dream anew.

Waiting for the bus

The crescent moon
With its soft radiance
Touched her face,
And her eyes shone
Like pools of some secret
Garden in the quiet of night.

When she smiled, there was
This delicious peal of song that
Made her seem like some
Fairy from the homeland of dreams.

She closed her eyes,
And her eyelids were like
A queen's silky veil, and
When they fluttered, as she
Laughed, I was sure that
This lady I will always
Take for a ride on my bicycle
To some colourful field,
Swarming with the fairness
Of summer's play.

She would giggle like
A child; I would swing
Her round in her floral dress,
Draw her close to my stone-like
Chest, and her tender hands
Would touch into it quiet

Rhythms that joyfully betray
The secret of my love for her;
I would be shy.

She speaks in silky words,
Laced with quiet notes of some
Nostalgic song; I know heaven
Is all around, pelting upon
My life, relief blessings of love.

I will look into her eyes,
See the garden to my joying.
I am changed into something
I never thought I would be.
I am a lover, lost in her smile, waiting for the bus.

To die kindly

You of my symmetrical ribs,
When I gaze at you, my first
Blaze of awe is to worship
The miracle of you with which
The Hallowed Giver upon my life
Bestows, any hour I can fall
To my death.

So, waste no second while I still
Bask in your sweet glance.
For once our mutual foe, with
His wings of fear, comes to dig
A gulf perpetual between us,
There will be no second chance.

I pray you love me till your chest
Hurts – give me your best and the rest,
So when I die, it may be with
A kindest grin I bid you goodbye.

Love me where the sun
Does not shine, let your smile
Take me beyond the dry mile.
Make my imperfections sublime.
Turn my fear into faith; love more.
We must all die kindly.

When I find you, finally

I will take you with me,
Into the night of soft silence,
I will hold your face with my heart,
Plaster it with prayers of forever –

When I finally find you, rare rose,
I will choir the garden of the world
Into a song that celebrates you.
I will quieten the world just that
Your eyes' smile may sing to me –

When I find you, finally,
The boy that I am will make life
Into a palace of love for you to queen.
I will surrender all my foolish, boyish
Dreams to you so that you may know
My vulnerability and kiss me there –

When I finally find you, butterfly of my mind,
I will prolong the night with my wish
To see you dance for me on the dreams
Of the night; I will tame time just that the
Stars could write the poetry of your hips
On their luminous petals – when I find you –

I will take you into the purple breeze
And beg to sleep in the theatre of your eyes.
I will feast on the lilac wonder of you.
When I find you, finally, all will be a song.

Flowers of new dreams

Let the wounded air weep not,
But open its canvas for the dreamers
Of our time to carve new gardens of hope
For our world to thrive through this life of strife.

Let the fortunate meadows that still brag
Of their vegetative agility
Hum and sprout with butterflies and
Whistle songs of the wild tinged with rich sunlight.
Let them remind the human faculty of sensations
Of the joy and awe of the aspect of nature's fairness.

Our children want to know how it feels
To play in the score of natural freedom.
Let the butterflies give us, once more,
Their colour and simple beauty; let them dream.
Our future must imagine itself in the wings
Of the colourful birds of the mind; let them sing.

Let the rivers that still flow reflect the pure light
Of the ancient stars of stories,
To remind us of the beauty and the hum of life
We have lost in our inertia.

Let the hills that have never slept,
Even through troubled space and time, recount to us
Our foolish deeds of greed and ignorance
That led to this dark night of nightmares.
Let the baobab tree with its watery trunk

Quench our thirst for the knowledge
Of the road to this spasmodic avenue
Of elusive nostalgic memories;
I miss the forest,
All its bustles, the song of the weaverbird.

Oh, let the valleys echo to us
The passionate rhapsodic promises
We made to the forests, the rivers and
The dreaming landscapes; there is a story
In the scars of our land.
We made a promise that we will always treasure
And nurture the maintenance
Of the splendour and flower of our world.
Let the hyena remind us in hymns of lamentations,
As we look back in hindsight,
To the day we refused to listen to the simple wisdom
Of the grey-haired solons of the wounded land,
Who understood the gesture of the kola nut.
We are drowning in sand; can we stand?
Let the mamba murmur to us the beginning of our wrong
 footing,
On the hungry road of enigmas and illusory matrixes.

Let the Orange River reverberate the pact
We made with the Limpopo River before time
Was written in words and numbers,
That we will respect her purity
And never throw our vomit in her bowl.

Let the antelope remind us of the tranquillity
Of the wild we have defiled.
Let the moth lead us to the light of truth
Which will guide us to our primal heartbeat
Of Ubuntu and communality,
Whose place today is occupied by individuality.
Let the Khoisan speak to Mother Nature on our behalf
In the original language we have forgotten to speak,
For our tongues took to weave notes imitative
Of cultures not our own. Let the savannahs and
The anthills plead for us; let the antelope
Supplicate for our awakening.

Please, let the great rocks of the Sekhukhune mountains
Reveal to us our forgotten
Stories and histories; let the Leolo Mountains
In partnership with Kilimanjaro take from above and sing
To us the songs of our ancestors to God,
And remind us of the heights we have abandoned to ascend.
For we were enchanted to play other people's games,
And seduced into marvelling at the colour of their dreams,
And in the dance forgot to realise our win.

Baba wa Taifa, Julius Nyerere,
Please tell us the story of *The Gentleman of the Jungle*.
For in this our times of paradoxes, of contradictions
And confused transformation, we need
To be guided by our past, tutored by our heritage,
Reminded by our history of the unfinished dreams,

Howling to be redreamt; let us wake up to our shame.
So that we may know that this is the time to espy
The garden of flowers of new dreams.
Perhaps we should pray that to every African child, a dream.
For our children are the flowers of new dreams,
They are what the futures dream of; let the children have visions.

PART THREE

Death, Pain, Courage, Forgiveness and Love

Love

Love is strange music.
One must sing it and dance it.
When we end, it doesn't.

Just love

Oh, cultivate the holy seed in your heart,
For love and love is all that we are about!

Martyred mother

(For my aunt, killed by the mob in 1993)

Oh, martyred mother, your innocence is an enemy,
A raging ghost of justice that haunts many's conscience.
The acid of their fury, which moved them to direct
You to the grave, in unwarranted violence, eats at them.
Out of the craze of their own righteousness, that hedged
Around the malignant rumour that demonised your name into
A myth that drove the flow in their veins boiling,
They sang and filled your stomach with car battery drink.
Was your existence, your peerless beauty an insult to them?
Or could they have thought they were killing apartheid?

Oh, martyred mother, fed to the grave by her sons
And her daughters, her brothers and her sisters,
Her neighbours and her fellow whisperers of communal news,
Stokvel friends, because you might have been a witch.
I pray, forgive them, for the fire that made you monster
When they burned you, plays so in their souls in volcanic fury.
I hear, departed mother, many toss and turn, spinning their
souls
Into cobwebs of nightmares – o', forgive them dove of above.
Forgive them and rest village butterfly – rest now martyred
mother.
Do we know if they knew what they were doing, too?

We are going

We came to go,
Like a wave and its foam,
It comes in force and height,
Only to recede for the one behind.
We too came, with our dreams,
Beauties and talents, came to go.
And as we go, others come,
And they too go, that is what
They have come for – to go.

Nobody knows if it's a going
Or a returning, and if our former
Home awaits our coming,
Which to us is a sad going,
From which we never return.
But one thing is certain,
And that is we came to go,
And we are going!

No one is prepared to go.
For on this journey we take
Nothing that we own here.
It is unnerving that I buy this,
Sell that, and then, without knowing,
Die, leaving all behind, sometimes
For hyenas to howl over it in celebration.
When the river of your time here ceases
What sweet echo do you want to leave behind?

We are going,
To a coming that we all fear.
But before we go, let you and I
Be the best that we can.
Let us dance, reach and live
Our dreams, and leave behind
A lesson, a song, a poem, an invention.

And if we leave behind a shadow,
May the light of hope dwell in it,
May it tell the story of us in wisdom
of hope's fire and love seeds.

For now, may you and I know that
We are going, for we came to go.
We are passers-by, and WE ARE GOING...

Growing up

My heart cries
For the things in the before
While my teeth dream of the
Dusky becoming
When they will be free
From the soft tyranny
Of the loosening gums
It is growing up
But there is still meat to eat
Bones to crush and marrow
To suck in the many tomorrows
And I sort of hate my teeth.

Before I die

Long have I seen the fire
Of living in your avid eyes.
Long have I heard the river
Of dreams in your layered voice.
Long have I seen the mixed tinge
Of the fear of death and of the fervour
Of life on your enigmatic face.
Long have I whiffed the scent of
Greatness in the mystery of you.
Not long have I not feared for your death.

I stopped fearing for you when
I knew that I would write
You a poem, my friend,
Before I die –
To share with you courage
Found in the quiet of strange nights.
One's death should be the birth
Of their legend, it should not
Bring about their end; death
Is not a finality, my friend.
But a beginning of a golden lesson
That only your name can leave behind.

My friend, to fret about dying then, or about living
To the highest zenith to leave behind the gold of having lived?

Finally

When finally, we realise that our hearts
Are bigger than our suffering
Tough enough to defeat death through love
This world will be a flower buzzing
With a new festival over the pollen
Of salvation; we have a big task to love.

And when finally, the eyes divorce the physical
And embrace the spiritual, feasting of its
Fruit of vision, the miracles stuck in the unseen
Will finally link us to freedom, and we be far from
Our suffering; there is a prayer calling us to see
Clearly, in this dusk of individualism.

When finally, we put to sleep our conceited
Notes of the self, and choir the jazz of us,
The world will finally tell us the original
Story of our origins; then all that has brought
Us here, to this midnight of paradoxes,
Regrets and anxieties, will be smoke.

When we finally call for that one heartbeat of thyme,
That joins us all to the first rhythm of our creation,
All the trees, the birds and the butterflies will kiss
The rainbow to seduce us into knowing
That we are love; so, we must stop sleepwalking
In the silent violence of thinking we are not connected.
We were born to love and to be loved, more than we suspected.

Pillow letter

I woke up to watch you sleep.
Your eyes seemed to dream
The rising sun, from beneath
Your gentle eyelids that palled
Over your lilac gaze that soothes.
Your lips, seemed to softly murmur
An asphodel plea for a pillow letter.

Now, tell me, you who sleeps
Like a petal of a marigold in dew:
If I were to show you my fears,
The other side of me, of flaws,
Would you still love me?
Will you still look at me in that
Cherry-blossom sort of way?

Then know this:
My fear is not losing myself,
For you, but to be lost by you,
To not find myself for you, in us.
I want to weave the matrix of
Us into a grapevine of wonder.
So, keep me closer like a cushion.
Write me in your soul like a letter.
Put me on the billow of time for destiny.

And count wishes

Darling,
Let us get away from
The cacophony of the city,
Peruse the blue darkness,
Paddle the rain,
Brave the rumbling thunder,
Upset the silence of the moon
And the stars, page the chapters
Of the night's book of dreams,
Abscond from the secret horror of nightmares,
Find the right mood and place to take a risk and kiss,
Under the shy flashes of the enchanted lightning.

Let us run against the night then,
Like mustangs of love, speaking to the sacred
Landscapes in wild passion,
Transpose ourselves to the isolated hill,
Sit on the edge of the night, tell stories
And laugh our blended voices
To the sky, let us find our centre in all the chaos.

Let us find a spot in the murmuring grass,
Lie down side-by-side, like children of summer,
But only to look up at the starred sky,
Count our wishes against the uncountable
Pulses of the stars in their ever-young passion for the sky.
Let us go then, to the riverbank,
To see the beams of the moon caressing
The flat curves of the river.

To see the other face of the moon,
Then count our wishes against every drop of water
Massed in the river, and the ocean it dreams of.
Count our wishes against our every enchanted heartbeat,
As we touch each other with silky tenderness
That taste of the silvery light of the moon.

It's coming

Sometimes I can feel it,
Other times I touch it,
Or taste it in my mouth.
It is always there or here with me,
Inside me, part of my
Inner beats; it lives side by side
With my waning light, life.

Death is always married
To living; and it seems,
Life would not have
The taste so sweet if dying
Was not coming to take its place.

That is why I am at home
With death, and life comes out
As a sweet enemy, that I love,
For as I start to enjoy it
It reminds that it will leave
Me and never come back.

Silent prayer

When I am not there,
Sweet one, feel in the air,
The hazelnut-blossom
Of my silent prayers,
To put your heart to
A lavender song of hope.

When I leave, do know that
I am always coming home.
In my spirit, you have planted
Thyme, and in its roots,
Our souls sublimely rhyme.
So, my love for you is never
Far off from home.
Clover!

Now that you are here

Sweetheart, now that you are here,
Let us take a walk through the stars.
This is our age of rain, and fruit to bear,
And butterflies to sprout from our scars.

Now that you are here, let these my eyes
Touch your kind face with new dreams.
And with my breath weave wishes of happiness
Coloured in your name that in my soul swims.

Now, dance with me nightingale of the wind.
Let the peacock know that the rainbow is born
From your chorus voice that paints the sky.
I look up and know that with you I will be strong.

Own the night with me then; lend the wind
The full enchantment of your gentle smile tonight.
Let the moon see its heart in your eyes;
The gardens in your breath must finally
Spread their butterflies into the wounded air.

Now that you are here, flower of miracles,
I feel the throb of purpose in my bones.
Now that you are here, let the world dance;
You are songs of the rainbow as it dreams.
So, now that you are here, let me love you.

Rustic memories

In a star-roofed ambience of night,
We feasted from enchanted stories,
Accompanied by a perfect silence.
Her sweet, dreamy voice woke
In my spongy mind, creatures
So strange, that I felt like floating
In a realm of the most delicious music.
I still dream of seeing the butterfly
Whose wings flaunt luminous rainbows.
The invisible fount of the mellow silence.

She reached her wake before I could
Take her out with me to the open
Field swarming with the fiesta of summer.
I have always wanted to lie down,
With her by my side, under the
Canopy of quiet stars or in the play
Of the sun's rays; I wanted to kiss
Her cotton-soft cheeks, see her eyes
Smile to my shy face, melting me to worship.

Now, her face and name are my rustic memories.
I hope on her grave, an immortal flower stands.

None has it

*One thinks one has it
But really one doesn't –*

O', life, what quick silvery
Dream you are!
Property of the heavens.

I saw you slip and slip out
A body of a masculine man,
And he was left no more bold.

I saw you leave the body
Of a beauty queen, and her lips,
That quivered men, were cold.

Do I who write you in verse,
Immortalising my voice,
From the river of my spirit –
Do I have you?

Accomplice

A soul plaited into knots of pain,
Writhed, eyes wide open, wrought
Knotted wails, so that the pitch was high,
In punctured interludes of silent anguish
At times, so that its image deafened the space.

The many faces, actually, masks of an unfeeling
Age, wore stoical indifference to the blood
That gushed, as if it were a burst gutter pipe,
The crowd passed the soul by, one tough face,
I too passed, but moved, though to nothing.

I did not know then, that by following the crowd,
Folding into its indifference, I was kindred to the
Man who robbed, stabbed the well-dressed boy,
Dying on the street side of a city rotting in our eyes.
And with him I died – though minding my business.

The gold of suffering

Any kind of suffering yields
Some golden advantage,
Charts a warren of wisdom.
One has to look hard in the heat
Of their ordeal, life offers a deal
To those who dare it to give its
Worst, and they do their best.

In death, there is the birth of the
Intensities of seeing and of hearing.
We begin to see: the value of life
At the funeral, the power of laughter.
The wise courage to live for something,
To make every moment a miracle,
That counts every heartbeat as a blessing,
To create monuments of becoming.

One is liberated from myriad
Prejudices – one begins to appreciate
Even the small things and *nothing* things.
One's conscience becomes attentive.
One suffering to suffer, is worth it.
For in suffering, there is gold.

So, through the tough odyssey
Of your becoming, trudging through
Muddy lands of relentless suffering,
Grove, finally, the golden thought
That suffering is necessary to make
Of one a soldier, a seer, a teacher.

The gold of suffering is that it heightens
The sufferer's sense of being alive,
Of seeing clearly, the city below the sea.
May the sufferer be always, that
Awesome personification of the human
Spirit that keeps going, rising;
Always Awake! In the moment.

Face of love

I saw the face of love once or twice
Not only did she smile with her eyes
Her dahlia lips tore a smile that knew
The dreaming place of all happiness.

She dazzled me with the stars about her air
And made me wish to play with her hair.
All about her sounded a subtle sepia sense
That made me realise that life was a fragrance.

When you get to see her face warped with love
Her eyes dazzling with something of divine music
Which knows sorrow to be a source of beautiful things
Only then will you know that love has a face.

This face appears to be melting away with the moment
Caught maybe by the heart fortunate upon the second
For tomorrows that know the explosion of fresh romance
Born of the miracle of seeing the face of the most sought.

This flower

Like fire, spreading its orange palms,
When it begins, it seems, you end.
There is a disappearance of your
Best wisdom, your heart a defenseless
Kingdom, submits to a new music,
Subtly sounding of freedom –

It feels unreal in the beginning,
The sensation of floating in the air,
As if there is something of the butterfly in you.
Something of the blackbird's wings
Enters your spirit, your soul swings
In the cool breeze of the jazz
Of the unknown, part of a new light –

The child tastes of something nostalgic
As if there is a magic lantern waking
Up elusive avenues of your soul
Into a play for the tickling fire
Of this flower; petals of joy blossom in you.
When it is here, your inner world becomes
A festival, making marigold promises –

The celebration of colours colliding
In rainbow dust and delicious silence
Choir your inner being into a song,
Which you hum unknowingly,
And a slave you become willingly
As it taunts and haunts the edgy margins

Of your spirit –

It is as if you see a castle in the air,
Built of wind and the melodies of the
Invisible birds of the sun and the smile
Of the moon revealing and concealing
The gate that leads to its mystery which
Lives in you but feels like a visitor
To your intuition; this flower –

Plays so, a summer song, in fleeting feeling,
A smile and some sweet fear that tastes of freedom
From all the serfdom of calculated romance;
It wakes from your skin drums of hope,
When you finally realise that all of that
Unevenly, but divinely serialised dreams
Were parts of her, when she finally comes
Out of the clefts of chance, like a river gushing
Out of a flower that had been silent for years.
She is here – this flower – celebrate her!
Let her be the clover in the garden of your life.

Childhood river

I went to the river
And watched the moon in silver;
I am old forever.

Universal citizen

When the one whose breast fed me,
Made my bed, fought for me the bad,
Cooked the meals, which the cents
She scrubbed floors for had bought,
When this one did them all and more,
I did not see clearly; and when from
The shine of the sun she was gone,
Death gave me new eyes; I saw beyond
Mundane visions of normalcy.

I am now an almost finished universal
Citizen, who seeks, with a pilgrim's rigour,
The simultaneity of seeing; to the rainbow
I have written letters, asking how can one
See like him, with eyes of all colours, tones.
I have asked to be tutored on how
To climb the scale that his hues dwell,
Without the urge to tilt others beyond the edge.

I have texted the sky, to lend my mind her vast
Generosity, so that from all schools and tools
Of men, my mind can imbibe the wine
Of harmonious and open-living –
To be like music, like hunger, like pain, like life,
To be a universal citizen, an ultimate dream.

Kindred spirit

This is for the talented, but moneyless,
Who follow the sun's revolution in quiet,
But taut, dreaming footsteps of faith.
This is for my many mothers in the village,
Who make meals out of an onion skin
And the dust of maize meal; who taught me
How to forgive, love and dream for others
Even when in pain; village queens.

This is for you, you who know
The cupidity of the pollen of dreaming
Beyond the shadowed corner of unknown places.
Brother, this is for you, you who smile
Beyond the intensity of dry seasons, and starvation.

This is for you my sister, you whose eyes
Dare oppressions with a smile that makes
Moments explosive with hope beyond ignorance;
For you my mother's daughter, who carries
Future greatness in your humble womb;
You my sister in whom the moon rotates.

This is for you and me, you and me
Who live in confident cynicism,
Bred or wrought in universities, and promises
Caught in political speeches.
You and me who survive on a lot less,
But still have the fire and sigh to bless.

This is for you fellow-sufferer, whose life a queer
Oxymoron; you and me who go about
Thinking we are living, while we might be waiting
To leave behind shadows of weeping,
Ghosts of dreams unrealised, windowless huts.

This is for you and me, the poor aid and company
Of the rich; you and me who are rich with our dreams
But poor in *their* reality; you and me who know
Abundance with our eyes not our lives;
You and me in whom contradiction, irony
And oxymoron are natives; you and me in whom
Faith is almost undid, but refuse to die void of nascent legend.
This is for you and me, in whose hearts
The Beyond is radiant, however latescent.

Be strong

Life is hard, but be strong my brother.
Being alive is a malignant challenge,
But be strong my brother; be strong.
When the rain does not come down
From the sky, among the stars, the bowl
Empty and quiet, no thunderbolts playing,
And the season is dry along the plain,
There is a reason, so, be strong my brother,
Do not weep or complain.

Living is suffering and hoping and discovering,
So, in it all, be strong my sister, be strong.
When tomorrow is here but all that you
Prayed and wished it could give does not
Speak or wave for you, be strong my sister.
Dreaming is the magic that keeps us in the dance,
So, when the world shuns your magic, be strong.
Be strong my sister, be strong my sister.

When still the child is hungry and dying,
No one seems to spare or care, be strong;
Be strong my brother. Be strong my sister.
When our sister is still stamped upon,
And her beauty and fire are scrapped off
From her soft face that sings even in silence,
Her cry, helpless and hapless, piercing the lion's heart,
Be strong my brother; be strong my sister.
For I tell you, life is wonderfully hard.

Life is a river my sister, carrying us away
Into the unknown sea of wounds and wonders.
So, if it wounds you my sister, and there is
No wonder, be strong my dear sister, be strong.
When we are beyond life and all its sufferings
There is a nest of rest where the mutual fear of
Death will be a thing of yesterday, but until then,
Be strong my sister, be strong my sister.

Soon, with the waning moon that looks full, maybe
In the afternoon, I will lay dead, probably in my room,
And I will not be here to see you jump the broom,
I will not be there to tell you that life is mysterious,
And it needs that you be strong, so be strong
My brother. So I tell you, love life and your wife,
Cheer your child, and take care of our mother.
And please be strong my sister, be strong my brother.

I almost cried

After the rape, my sister
told me that she felt the
most painful thing was not
– after all – being raped,
but sitting in court
facing the perpetrator.

After the rape, my sister
told me that she felt
the most painful thing
was not – after all – the rape itself,

but sitting in court
to face the rapist,
at the mercy of both judge
and the sluggish proceedings.

Feeling the creeping pain
on her face as justice
dragged her foot like an old snail,
crossing the road while
a truck laden with a load
of corruption roared its way.

More piercing her faint heart
was the slow proceedings
in the name of realizing
justice through unsympathetic procedures,
consultations with laws that failed

the writing of a prideful history
of us and justice.

‘Son of my mother’,
She said, her voice muffled
by salty tears of rage and pain,
spiced with weeping despair,
‘Justice is not fair.
do not tell anyone though.
they might argue you to death,
for they have not seen
what I have; maybe yet. Or they
have but decided to be silent,
and conscripted the horror
into some impregnable fate,
unalterable.’

‘As for lawyers, theirs is to parse
in fancy language and artificial energy
what they did not experience
in their cant, flaunting their flair
to reason and argue, construe,
sculpturing self-importance in the face
of my sorrow.
theirs is to mint a story that
always lacks the relative horror,
the real cloud of terror,
that engulfed my life
in the form of my killer’s

shameless shadow seeking momentary pleasure.

'Son of my poor mother,
do not cry, I have cried a confluence
of the river of haplessness
enough for the both of us.
But if you must cry, let it
be for this our troubled world,
for our land of contradictions,
entangles in its riddles of paradoxes.'

Next day, I found
my sister hanging dead from the roof
of our humble shack, her dead face
jutting an enigmatic smile;
she looked both happy and sad.
She looked buoyant in her dress of death.
I did not know whether to weep or
sleep off the hallucination.
I knew not to question the dead,
for they too do not know why
they have to die, sometimes without
saying goodbye.

our died of TB last year. I am alone.
I will eventually pay the university fees,
Before I die.

Shine your light anyway

Like the moon, hanging lone
Among the stars, above the artificial
Light of men and their ignorance,
Shine your light anyway.

There is always that discrepancy
Between appearance and substance.
So, because they cannot see your substance,
Which is in radiance, within, do not fret.

Let your shine freight across dry seasons.
Enter every one of them with courage and calm.
May they one day see, in regretful retrospect,
Their oversight, that you too have the light.

For now, let it shine in invisibility.
There is something of Okri's magic lamp in your soul.
Let it burst forth in constant celebration of you.
Hum it even in dark night;
Great servants are brewed in silence.
The wise and strong, gifts to the world;
They are like watermelons.

And may your eyes that know no acts of love,
Find a new sky in the realm of dreams.
Do not hide your shine then, show it every day.
Yes, shine your light anyway; the miracle of you!

To love simply

If we all have a good heart
Filled with a simple desire to love,
And a dream each;
Then, the world of our future
Is rich.

And with love as the value,
The peaks of greatness are
Ours to reach.

Now, to our children let us
Have love to teach;
By loving one another, simply
Because we are human; reflections
Of love from above.

Share in my suffering

Come, come you of my blood,
Come and enjoy my meal;
Share in the roast meat of my kill.
Share in the wine of my grapes;
But first, plant the seed with me,
Join me too in the weeding,
Let the sun burn both our skins.
Share in all that life cares to give me.
Share in my stories, and my sorries.
Share in my portion of pain,
Share in my cry, my mourning;
Share in my struggles, share in my suffering.
Share in my mornings dinged with hope.
Share with me in the sunset of wounded airs.
Share with me in beginnings that promise
Pain and meaninglessness; pray with me.
And when the blossoms of summer
Greet the air with fragrance, and colour,
Come to the new festival of my life, play with me.
Come, come you of my blood, share in my art.
Nod to it when I say life is hard,
But one must play his part; hear me.
Hear even my silent heartbeat.
Listen to my fears, heed my anxieties.
Come, come those who want
To come and tell the world that
They knew me; share in my suffering.
For suffering reveals, it tells of one's identity;
It doctors one's substance.

There is legend in my name, unfolding.
Share in the living of my waiting.
And as you share in my glories,
Intend to staunchly stand by me
In my falls too; when I rise, you rise too.
You of my blood, share with me in all.
Hard and sweet to the heart; be my buffering.
Share in me, and share all about me,
So that my children's children
May hear the story of my name
In the library of your voice,
Because you would have shared with
Me in all that I am and can be, in my sufferings.

I see you

Even when you are not here.
Your face goes round with me.
As if in a light-dimmed dance.
Because I see you, even in my sleep.
But you haven't looked at me once.

I made a fool of myself a couple
Of times, supplicating for your
Eyes to fly my way, in keen vision,
That casts the flame of tacit dialogue
Upon my face, a pledge to dance
With me, the true dance of hearts.

Albeit you never yield; but, I will see
You still, beyond the tough presence
Of your painful absence in my life.
I will see you in the sleep of flowers,
I will see you in the dalliance of silence
And the dreams of the sun and the unknown,
As if you were that hundred years-to-come
Dream of the quiet music of the stars.
I will see you, though invisible,
For my seeing you knows the fire of faith.

I know you will see the red carnation
Of what I live for; I will keep seeing you.
Like a blind man seeing the colour of music.
Tasting the pulse of time, as it riddles
Through our lives, taking us to the gate of fate.

Yes, I will go mad for you, because
Those who look at me, wonder at who
I am smiling at; they do not know, I see you!

PART FOUR

Identity, Imagination and Memory

Where is your gold?

Jo'burg, Johannesburg, where is your gold?
Whenever I come to you, this question,
Like blood in a vein, flows out of my mind;
It gushes in torrents of horror and disgust,
A waterfall of shock and a repeated question
Over your ghostly dress; Jo'burg?

What have they done with your gold?
Your residents are flimsy; you are filthy and
Slimy with water rotting in unmade canals that
Meander the once beautiful avenues.

Where have they taken your gold?
Was it stolen or to distant foreign lands sold?
Oh, city of old gold, I search you but you are cold.
Jo'burg! Where, I ask, is your gold?
Not even an echo of gold do you have. Jo'burg?

Please speak up, for you are horrid; I am worried
By what you have become, a urinal cake
Of my beautiful country; pff! I cannot hold back
My spit, for Jo'burg, Johannesburg, you have
Become a pit of dirt, debt, death, crime and grime.

You are disgusting! You scare me! You are shameful!
Where is your gold? Where is your gold?
Are your riches now wistful things of old?
Your beauty and splendour in retrospect we are told.
Now all you have is the name; you are a phony!
Oh! Jo'burg, I cry for you – where is your gold?

Individual community

I hear you, declaring yourself your own self,
An individual in the river of life – oh, how mad!
Contemplate yourself; you are never an individual.

One of many: your hands, fingers point to community.
Your hair, a throng of strings on your head; your head
Contains a brain whose thoughts are not one but many.

Your legs, in their walk must tell you that one cannot
Do it alone, one cannot dance alone; your eyes, a pair
That rhymes with your two ears; you are not an individual.

For the cells that make you, are a community, though
For different functions, together work to make you
A community, like all of us in the world; your neurons!

Should I say more? Need I say more? A body trying to
stand on
One leg could be trying to fall; one tooth cannot chew
The bone. Where did you see one finger pick a grain?
Can you scratch your own back?

You are not one even in your madness of individualism.
There are many of you, a community of individualists,
Joined in common notion – you see, you have no way to run,
For every way you go, the river of us calls you home.
Oh, silly individual community, you will always intersect
With others in the matrix of living and being human –
Your very nature betrays your rebellion; so, let us dance.

Will I forgive?

I carry the scars too, right?
They come with the knowledge
Of the world, springing from the
Curious questions I nag those who
Know just about right how we got here.
I am bound to catch the grudge, right?
I mean Douglass's narratives enrage me.
Solomon Northup's Twelve Years scar me.

I know of the Senegalese port that saw
Many of my ancient fathers and mothers
Cross the sea bound for hell.
I know of old mother Sara Baartman,
Displayed for shame and indignity.
I know of the diamond that gives worth
To a foreign crown – we are hungry!

This pipe cannot air foreign music,
It breaks and breathes out demons
And lets out a jagged cry that cuts
Your hearing with a ferocity that knows
The whooshing of the lash as it ate the flesh
Of our ancestors; should I forgive?
Will I ever forgive?
Should I burn all the history books?

But history's voice is in the immortal air.
Not in the books that spill corrupt ink
To hide the real legend of my people.

History's horrific images have a corner
In the consciousness of the wind, and the seasons.

The sky must know the truth.
Can I forgive then without truth brought before me?

Imagine and be free

In this our enigmatic age of odd old circles,
There is a newer magic than that of reason.
Yes, the rainbow of imagination has all the
Colour and enchantment of living,
Dreaming and looking into our tomorrows,
And the surviving of our sorrows.

Reason makes us wear off, as we become aware
Of the limits and the discerning light
Of our ability and capacity to abscond and reach
The scale of the galactic fields of undiscovered jams.
Reason and what is said to be real
Pelts our lives with the hail of disenchantment,
And incessant disillusionment.

Reason makes us look at appearance over substance.
In times of fears and doubts if we take time
To imagine we find the rocket fuel
To go on and do it anyway,
In mazes of paradoxes and anxieties.

For we dream ourselves beyond our wounded ages.
We learn that reality is unreal, and that we create
Our own realities,
With the secret magic of imagination.
Then child of our troubled world, imagine and be free.
From the rootless tree of what seems to be what it appears.
Dream a new dream every day, and discover
New realities in every way,

So that the adamantine chains of illusion may break.
Run wild in the meadows of imagination,
But be wise and calm to catch the sublime
Dreams of becoming your yearnings.
Imagine child, for there is freedom in imagination.
So, imagine and be free.

Memories of childhood

*Her eyes prayed,
And played a loving smile . . .*

When I was a little child
Of innocent years or so,
I would fake a sleep,
Close my sweet unknowing eyes,
While my mother waged a domestic war with
The pots, brewing warm stew and rice.
Then, seeing me bundled up for sleep,
My mother would throw a worried glance
That prayed sweet dreams in my name.

Looking at my little chest heave up and down,
As if a calm wave playing in the gentle breeze
Of the ocean's summer midday breath,
My mother would sigh her love my way, like a falcon,
To touch my face with the tender message of the
Magic of hope, so that I may grow up to be a better man.
I would watch her, my daring mother,
The tigress-princess of the village,
Watching over me, in my innocent sleep.

From the corner of my curious eye,
I would see her face take up the shine of the sun,
The expression of her joy that my eyes are still
Blind to the harshness and barbs of life.
Her eyes would wink endless silent prayers,
Hold hostage meditations of goodwill for me.
Then my mother would pause her chores,

Drop a tear whose rhythm on the ground
Blessed the silence of the good with gratitude
For the many tomorrows of happiness in my life.

I would watch her, my mother the prayer warrior,
Preaching over me the benediction of her womb.
And her eyes would meditate an overflow of supplication,
Enchanting my sleep with sweet dreams.
Then, I knew from those moments, that I am loved beyond
All the wounded things in life; beyond the fear of knowing;
Because her eyes always prayed for me.

Memories of the Sea

It was as if you came with the gentle
Cooling breeze of the azure calm sea.
When I saw you, coming,
More like cascading from a dreamy waterfall
Of the sun, leading invisible waves of new passion
In their impending crushes like sluggish kisses to the beach.
I knew that you were a flower for ailing eyes.
I knew that you were a fresh breath for my new song.

You came into my life, like a childhood song,
Remembered by the placid spirit of the sea.
And you heralded into my troubled space
Symphonies that balm my restless spirit
With elements of harmonious flowers of paradise.
Lovely one, you transformed my being
With a vaster hope like the mystery of the sea.

That is why I say you are like an oak tree
That stands firm through dry and fluid times.
You are standing tall and royal in my heart.
You are a rock-rose in your impossible beauty.
You are an oasis that quenches my parched soul.
Really, you are a lily that seduces smiles in a desert.
For when you came into my life, I saw the world
That I used to see in pain with the colour of a fresh dream.
I saw the world with the eyes of a butterfly, colourful and
beautiful.
Could it be that you are a dream that flows from sunlight?
Could it be that you are a river that flows from dreams, my
dream?

Perhaps you are a collective fantasy of the flowers of heaven.
Yes, it could be that you are of a beauty that Oscar Wilde
Says needs no explanation – for you tire even philosophers
In their preoccupations of explaining everything,
For your beauty is limitless in its abstract flowery wonder.
Darling, you are indeed a perfection that rebukes thinking,
You are all in all, memories of the sea, of what it used to be.

So, I will put a flower in your hair.
For I want to show the world that you are her.
Sweetheart, your son will be my heir.
I wait for the daughter-princess that you will bear.
For queen, she will be a perfect reflection of your
Flowery beauty and my praise of you the world will hear.
I love it when your voice puts sweet songs in the air.

So, take from this poem, the music that nothing
Can really contain the full expression of my devotion to you.
Flower of my heart, you are really an awesome wonder;
Like memories of the sea, contained in every drop.
You are like a marble luminous city floating on the night sea,
For your smiling eyes are like the ocean itself.
If ever I know truth, it will be that
The flowers you see around the world,
And all the gardens that dream of new flowers, butterflies,
And summers, and gentle rain, are reflections of you.
I must say, your beauty does not need a corsage.

Leaking and leaping fences and forces

I will leak and leap over every river or mountain
That threatens to barricade me from seeing
Through the façade of becoming the more that
Over there, beyond here, I am – I will speak and pick
All that stands to block my path to the zenith of my essence.
I resist living around what I achieved yesterday,
For there is a vast, perpetual becoming that pulls me
Towards those unknown, but dreamt of places, peaks
Of excellence – therefore, I take, every day, to walk,
Colourfully to talk and to probe,
To touch and to familiarise myself with the unknown terrains
That stretch yonder, to new scales and landscapes of dreams.
All this is a prayer to live and breathe
As I let the soles of my feet listen to the dreaming road,
Which surely takes me to the many destinations
I will arrive at in my enchanted journeying, to transcend
 myself,
Empowered by unfailing Love.
Like a river, I will flow to sea.
Like a bird, I will go high, for the heights beckon me.
I will fly to the scales where the stars play.

Therefore, I refuse to let definitions close and gloss falsely
Over that which I really am and can become –
So I take, to let my colours leak and leap
Over, beyond definitions which are for the appeasing
Of their fear of what I might become: a might, a light,
A centre, a clarion voice of greatness sounding in the deeps

Of the perennial rivers of my being, of life.
A new flower in the garden of the world's dreams;
A star of the world's invisible sky of possibilities,
A fountain of wisdom sprouting from the profound magic
That flies around us without knowing it,
An ocean of love peopled by waves of desire to wash over hate,
And spread its secret jewels across the world.
Yes, I could be a mountain, a landmark of hope,
Where morality can be traced and its trail followed,
Its heavenly tale shamelessly told.

Oh, like freedom I refuse to be reduced by the many languid,
Ignorant descriptions which never attempt to touch those
Queer landscapes, places, wells, rivers and perennial
Impulses of creativity, of possibility within me –
Now, watch me, yearn and learn
As I let my voice silence the cacophony of sounds
Which use my name and face so to be called the composers
Of the secret music of my heart – watch me as I take flight
To show them, that I too, have wings, and can sketch
rainbows
All around the invisible sky of universal dreaming.
I am a living garden of Heaven's flowering.
And I will make music out of my struggles.
I will remain poised towards the point of greatness, and
becoming.
I will fly myself to tomorrow, and there grow
Myself into a paragon of world transformation and hope.

Now, do not be shy to taste the freedom in my wings.
Call me a great dreamer –
I am limitless, so are my children, both at home
And across the seas, in lands where their name is shamed.
They too, leap and leap over naturalised fences of limitation.
They shun the pathetic and apathetic advocates
Of my prolonged death from the sleep of mediocrity,
– They make my enemies timid and insipid
In their rigid resolve to ambush and abash me,
So that my birth to greatness may be slow as a snail.
Yes, my slayers ferment into failures,
For they cannot match and catch
My leaping and leaping of their disguised bullets.
Maybe I should reveal my mystery;
Like Moffat Sebola, I am *Unchained* and *Unlimited*.
Like James Baldwin, *I Will Tell It on a Mountain*.

Call me Africa.
I am the delta of the world's dreams,
The heartland of the earth.
For hundreds of years they tried to plunge
Me into a night, and concussed me with
A whole lot of evil blows.
But then, I am still here, standing.
I am the consciousness of the world's possibility
And destiny, the paragon of hope.
So, like an antelope of the mind, I will leap and leap lean years.

PART FIVE

Art, Solitude and Thought

The burden of barding

The burden of barding is that one does not
Do it for one's self, but for all humanity.

And though a giver of freedom, barding
Guides the bard, burdening him with duty
To nourish the human spirit; to align not
To malign, to deploy and not to destroy,
To touch not crush, to reveal not to conceal,
To build and not to tilt, unless it is to build,
To add not to subtract, unless it is to subtract sadness,
To relieve burden not to dampen the human spirit;
The bard carries this burden – servant of the spirits.

Therefore, the joy of the bard is to know that he is free,
Though, not really free, for that is the burden of barding.

The sage of silence

There is legend in my name,
Brewing in the quiet cellar of time.

So, in all the pressures of life's strife,
I will not complain but give a smile.

I will give weighty obeisance
To the sage miracles of silence.

I will glorify patience's subtle wisdom,
So that I may see beyond, to freedom.

I will let the weaving of my story unfold,
Breathe pearls and dream its music in gold.

I will listen to silence, its unimposing sage.
I will heed its forest-rose tranquillity, for it is presage.
So that I may not act too quick or too slow, in this age.

Odd embrace

Why should life loathe death?
Or death think he is ultimate?
Who is life without death
To remind the soul that life
Is sweet because death is coming?
Would there be death if life...?
The vanity of hating one's opposite
Is a death that is without parallel,
Therefore, meaningless; who wants
To die that way anyway?

Let black embrace white so that
It may be seen for what it is;
Let white hug black, lose its posturing.
Let the powerful mingle with the powerless,
And relinquish their comforts, cloaks,
For in lending a hand your power is learnt.
The high must let the short stand
On their shoulders to see the future,
For when it comes, the short will say
'From the shoulders of the generous tall
The future did we see, and call forth.'

The savant master must listen to the servant.
And who so pines for the zenith should bless
The ground on which they stand, for from it
They will know how to leap forth, to the height.
Who so points their eyes on riches should
Appreciate the logarithm of the petty strides

Made through universal struggle and silent
Toil on the humble soil of beginnings.
Who so wishes to know all must see the pollen
Of diverse ways of seeing and being.

Basic wisdom

When you and I finally
Wake up to the basic
Wisdom that reality
Weaves itself in different
Colours and patterns, and angles.
The angels of liberation
Will fly from our hearts
Into the world to see
Everyone and everything
With the eyes of a child.

So, let us wake up from
The neurosis and paralysis
Of singlemindedness.
The moon has more than
One face, and us not seeing
The other face does not darken
Its incandescent privacy,
That shines without shyness
Upon some colourless river
Behind our sky.

Let us then, calm down the
Narcissistic solipsist in us.
For it has spoiled so much
Of the fairness of the poetics
Of our limitless mystery.
Let us not let our one side
Of the story be a tyranny.
Really, reality is unreal.

Awakening

I

To lie is to die;
So, in awakening
Let us breathe in
Truth, live, and free, be.
That is an awakening we need.

II

All the travelling we do
Happens not in the confines
Of space and time laws,
It begins within, and ends there;
The world is more in us than us in it.

III

This too, in awakening,
Must be our truth:
In every way, let the pollen
Of our standing for justice
Be a lingering of an awakening,
Beyond the tower of corruption
We have helped them build,
Through the silence that has made
Us accomplices to the thinning
Of the gold of our best values.

IV

Did you know that by not speaking,
By not standing up for the poor and

Truth we have become liars, killers?
Did you know that we are criminals?
When we turn our heads away from
All the rampant injustices in the land?
Let this be freedom in awakening;
To stand, even if it means alone,
For things important, the orphan –
For you too are a legislature; so, stand!

The missing line

There is a line of pledge missing
In the MPs and GOs²
Verse of oath, and this is it, found in their
Made-normal failure and shameless corruption:

'I, so and so, recites to know, to understand,
To uphold and to honour the unalterable fact that
The money I am to use is not mine; it belongs to
The state (the people); so I will not use or squander
It for my personal gain, pleasure and nothing; but
If I do squander it, I should be arrested immediately.'

So, let us amend the oath; or we will always
Lament for the truth – the missing line.

2

Refers to a Government Official

We are one

The world is a street today.
We exchange stories.
I am you, you are me.
We read the same newspaper column.

The sea is a carpet on which we slide
Or above which we float to greet our
Brothers –
The sky is a ceiling below which we glide
To dance and laugh with our sisters
Across the azure waters that house mysteries.

So, whoever seeks purity, in this age
I weep for them, for the end awaiting
Them is a mirage that twists
With skewed images of purity gone.
Let pure be the heart, indiscriminating.

Do not be microcosmic, but cosmic.
Our history is a burden to us,
Lost in its mind, and found in
Our souls in wounds abstract
Even to the psychologist.
We carry it like a silent tumour.
Let us not weep for it, for there
Is not much that we can do to heal it.
But we can transform our history
Into a solution; the transformation
Of history is in our hearts.

So, join me in the dance for the universal
Amen to what the world has become.
For indeed, the world is what we have made it;
We bear then, the duty to calm it down
With new stories every day, stories
That point to a future that accepts.

Glimpse of origins

I heard forest dreams in the air.
I heard the rustling of leaves
Dreaming of fruit in the wind –
And I wept condolences.
A voice from the sky suggested,
In question: 'Have we taken a
Wrong leap forward, felling
And almost finishing the trees?'

Maybe we have detoured
From the path of the lamp,
Lost our basic wisdom in
The miasma of technological
Evolution – lost from origins.
I saw a glimpse of origins today.

The joy of being a poet

Death, a going coming for all of us,
Came to my bed to taunt me last night.

I felt his expectant rush of festival
Over my dead body, in mad dance.

I heard his salivating, a waterfall of greed;
His stomach groaning in joy to my going
To his coming; but I told him, that I will rise
Tomorrow, and write a stubborn poem
Of beginnings, unafraid of his approach.

Man, the miracle of poetry, a bursting feast
Of courage! A perfect wisdom of calm,
The fire of bold dreaming; I am here!

Ellipsis of an impulse

I

The wildflower dreams
Of the fertile visit of the musical bee
To bring in pollinated melody, its lover's passion.

II

The wildflower dreams
Of the butterfly's rich wings,
To flutter with its lover's fertile longing.

III

But where are they?
The honeybird sings no more.
Song and honey trade is all gone.

IV

But where are they?
The bee, the butterfly, the honeybird?
The field is quiet, all colour is gone; no song.

V

The river whose banks harboured
Budding passions and unions
Of lovers, the shy laughter; where are they?

Awake!

Awake!

There is no time to sit by the side.
Wake up to the gift of your genius.
The world needs your voice, your choice.

Awake!

In you there is the power of love.
A tapestry of stubborn dreams
That can defy the unruly spirit of politics.

Awake!

Plant a tree here, dream a river there.
Let your standing up to the demons
That haunt our age pave a new
Playground for the child to walk and frolic.

Let those who plunge our world into
The depths of seemingly endless midnight
Be buried in their own acts; this is our world!
Awake and trumpet a new order of the people.

Awake!

Awake!

Awake!

A hat doffed to poetry

In all of us, there is a spirit
whose rhythms still know
the way of origins, whose
breath still remembers the
vibrations that gave birth
to the world and its becomings –

...

that spirit is poetry;
poetry makes my heart, my life
a festival of multiplication.
it makes me contemplate the
highest in me, it pokes the sleeping
fire of wanting to be noble, within –

...

I become a story of great
becoming under its spell,
and in the poetic moment,
I become a humble miracle,
and with the air I build a monument –

...

in my sombre moments,
poetry makes me build
a monument of hope,

for it affects me with its
virus of optimism layered
with the magic of direct addressing
of life, living and the human spirit –

...

poetry is the artistic notation
through which we express
the unseen world inside us.
it is an invisible river whose
fertile inundation feeds the farms
of ideas, dreams and rebellions in us,
to ward off the tyrannies of ages.
its howitzers are ever-loyal to
thunderous path of its original intentions.
poetry is the hypocaust of revolutions
that whirl in us when conventions
push us into damned beginnings.
I doff my hat to this spirit of our mystery.

Stings of life

Like a martial artist, I will fist up
My frustrations into words, and paint
The whirls of the deeps that trouble
My inside in the air, a flag of courage.
I will take the punches
And the kicks of life with dignity, calmly,
As if to be hit was to be kissed by
The silky supple lips of a princess.

I will swallow the bile as if juices
Of love dripping from a heart of honey.
So that the world may know courage
Through the story of my wincing face.
I will fight dancing as if to live
Was an enchanted ball that one dances cloaked
In aggression and contours of pain.

I will take the stings of life in silence,
As if I were only impelled by a needle of love.
I will air no complaint even when in pain.
I will trumpet to my swollen soul that
Life is a surprising song infused with all
That we know and all that we do not know,
The expected and the unexpected.

And in it, what we know we learn again
And give it the courtesy of our
Want for its clear understanding.
And what we do not know we

Take up the tabula rasa mind of a child-student,
And let it teach us its magic,
Imprint its fears and hopes on the walls
Of our daring and dreaming minds.

And as for what we expected, we bless it
And thank God that things come true.
And as for what we did not expect
We swallow the barbs of the stabbing
Arrows of strange pains, soothe our hearts
With this mantra, 'life is no song
That we already know its lyrics to sing
Along'; no, ours is to learn to sing it as we live it.

We dance even in the midst of stings,
And take them for they are the stings of life,
Meant to make us feel more alive than we know it.
Ours is to find the lacunas in the book
That is life, and in them scribble the verses
Of clarity that come when we do not know it.
And continue taking the stings of life that never
Become familiar; life is strange, and it will never change.

Around the corner

The snail, proud of its shell,
its shine teasing the moonlit night,
with its slow-motion-dance,
gave me its poetry of road-crossing,
written gently in its calculated foot-steps,
its walk, a higher mathematics of journeying.

The snail taught and told me to slow
down lest I fall and forget my past
and why I am here, journeying
through life, falling and rising,
in the wavy phases of my dreams, ambitions,
aspirations; slow down and contemplate the road.

then a whole host of clarities pelted
down on me, poems and reason kept
rushing in on me, like the aroma of a frying onion,
like waves of a mysterious azure romantic sea,
somewhere in the middle of life.
Then I realized, I have lost and missed
uncountable songs without knowing it.

Now, mine, it hits me, is to live wildly,
but wisely, going at it easy, slow, like
a sluggish wave, to catch the song around
the corner, where surprises lurk like
the shy blue sky; the road is enigmatic sometimes.
Fear may come to mind, but I take to
ferry its thoughts across rivers unknown
at the back of my head; my quest is life.

Dangerous thoughts

What if then, you and I are being
Dreamt by the seemingly insignificant
Butterfly on the seemingly silent flower?

What if we are in a mutual semi-hallucinatory story?

Please tell the solipsist not to argue me to death.
It all came to me in the enchantment of a fleeting
Moment; no one ever tamed lightning.
No one knows its heart; blame Mum for telling
Me stories that sent me to the chambers
Of the stars, where I drank from the golden calabash
In which all things radiate; I refuse to die like the cat.

What is life?
What does it mean to live?
Is living believing, surviving, wanting
Hoping for a fulfilling becoming?
Where do we go when we die?
Really, what is reality?

Beyond the mirage

We entered the mirage of freedom
All ululations and alliterations
For an unmade future, in deafening
Songs that birthed our unconsciousness
To a neurosis of the nightmare of our past.

We entered the strange dawn half-sleeping,
Half-singing, intoxicated with a suspiciously
Tamed democracy that made us more unfree.
We entered the world with our reality
Already scripted and rehearsed, and our
Select few began their posh masquerading.

We are made to read the story of us in
Skewed images and confused sentences
That sentence us to a scrubbing and groping
For a wealth that is long gone to lands
That look at us with suspicion.
What are we to tell our children?
That God forgot to give us the genius
That sees clearly, beyond excitement?

We must be free from the theatre of us
Scripted and directed by others.
For our children!
We must rise and blow or sweep
Away the mist that shroud our landscapes.
We must come out of the mirage stubborn
With new dreams – to fulfill our own book.
For our children, we must be really free!

Inner eyes

Seeing the outward,
Never go toward the beyond;
Let us see inward.

We surprise me

We spend a big chunk of time
Mused in hair-splitting solipsism,
Feeding the fire of anti-Semitism,
Crafting a nuanced kind of racism
And notions of the afterlife –
Who is of the right religion –
Why don't we use it to learn, then
How to live with each other, in love?
How to create greatness
Out of our sufferings?
How to make apples and water
Out of our fighting?

Who said dark means ugly and
Light or white means beautiful?
Who said flowing things mean class?
I mean, for me the coiled things,
Like my sister's afro, amplify.
For once they are discovered for
What they really are, their mystery,
Their core shown, they shame
Presumptions and preconceptions.

Things are not as they appear,
If fact, they are more than what they seem.
Really, we surprise me.
We must redress this paradox of us.
When will our suffering and fighting
Make light?

To the still racist

Let me put it to you,
Or remind you, if forgetting
Is your coat:
When you die, like those
You hate because of the colour
Of their skin, you will not
Be attended to by butterflies,
Or songful ferries, honeyed silence,
But by ever-hungry worms.

Are you still racist?
Oh, you are rich in vanity!
You are coloured in frivolity.
The grave does not bow to kings.
Alexander the Great taught that,
After living thinking otherwise.
So to you I say, let his last lesson
Be our way while the sun is still up.

Beggars

We are beggars –
We live as if we owe someone
The very air we breathe, as if
Our heartbeat is an insult, or
An intrusion to a master's sacred
Sleep; we have forgotten how
To sing for rain, as if our voice is
Pollution to the ears of a king.

We are beggars; we are beggars!
We have even taught
Our children how to beg
Not how to dream this wealth.

Our hands know how to receive
Not how to conceive; us the
Princes and princesses of a land
So endowed with gems and poems,
We beg as if there are no stars
In our own sky – we are beggars!

We are beggars –
We beg how to be kind to one
Another; we cringe at the sight
Of the poor – we have forgotten
How to be ourselves; rich in dream
And in the cream of unity – we are poor.
The poor are you and I then,
You and I who have but do not have
The heart and light to give to others.

We are beggars!

Did you know that the light the city
Brag to the night-sky is the reflection of
Our dreams, our secret power, flowers
Of our spirit? Did you know, that behind
Our chests a temple of luminous dreams throbs?

But we are beggars in daytime because
We are somnambulists who are rich
But do not know it because we sleepwalk
Through our lives, as if to be really awake
Was a crime to the sun, who rises from
The sediment of our dreams – we are
Gods, but we are beggars because we have
Forgotten this –
The stars come out to drink from our
Quietness you know; the silent river of dreams.
And tell tales of our race, a religion that fuels
Their luminosity.

We are beggars –
We live as if fire did not start
In one of the caves of our land
By our ancient ancestors
Who made tools, spoons out of nothing
And stone, and wrote and painted on
Stony walls in the language of silence,
The colour of the sun's dreams –

We are beggars.

But there are dreams of the stars written
In our palms, our palms that use to say
Prayers through the soil, when we ate
What we planted and tendered for.

But we are beggars because we
Have forgotten the quiet miracles of
The soil – the falling voice of rain,
Singing about the God who sees us.
Now we are beggars because we made
Our own God out of science and theories
Of freedom and the self.

Lo' (behold)! we are beggars –
Us sons and daughters of a King.
Us who the sky and its wonders were
Meant to sing and serve us – we are beggars,
We are beggars – we are!

Out of sorrow, a flower

I do not cry when I feel sorrow or see tragedy.
I cry when the sorrow or tragedy is transformed
Into a song, or a story so beautiful, as if written
With the fragrances of the flowers of heaven.

Darling, do not worry or weep when you see
My eyes blessed with tears, for it is not of fears
Or a scratch in the soul that I cry, but it is only a
Delightful allergic reaction to your beauty and heart.

Sweetheart, weep not, for beautiful things make me cry;
You make me cry –

Grains of gold

Living is like crouching on the bank
Of the river that flows with promises
Of the most sacred and precious metal.

Yes, living is extracting the grains of
Gold from the mud of the river of life;
Wash off the mud, return the water into
The river and hew more mud for more grains.

Then you put these grains in the oven
Of patience and perseverance so that
You can make a trinket, a bracelet out
Of your being here, living and extracting.

So, be not dismayed by having to go
Through the fires of life – it is to purify you,
For there is about you, in you, grains of gold.

