



provertry

poems of their country

rotimi ogunjobi

proverty

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ROTIMI OGUNJOBI

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Dedication

This book to the youths and peoples of Nigeria.

About the Author

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A Tale of Their Country

Listen:

The shuffle of weary feet, on tired road,
Pitted, pitiful, tired as its daily load.

Listen:

The feet, they drag their way home,
A day's work, a day's dearth of work,
The feat: over and done.
Each weary step, a sigh of defeat,
Every hopeless thought mired,
In thoughts, sad and hollow.

Thinking:

The daily travels, the daily travails,
Toil, that reward with meager gains,
Labor, that fills the hands with emptiness.
Else, a saving grace: a man's duty done.

Acquitted of shame,
The feet, they shuffle on homeward,
A refuge from the punishing toil,
The feet press on homeward, the feet.

Home:

The hopeful wait, watch, pray,
But fears of their hearts, again comes to roost,
To taunt, to laugh at prayers, to mock their faith,
To serve them their bitter supper : a litany of woes.

They share from a paltry pantry,
With contrived happiness,
They grieve, for the future,
Grateful for sustained love.

Watching:

On television, the nine-o'clock news,
The days' tales of a country torn asunder,
Avaricious rulers, flaunting unearned wealth,
In contempt stuffing deep gullets with plunder,

Watching:

They, the pious constituents bent and bowed,
Marvel in awe, marvel defeated ,

Consoled by promises of a good side of eternity,
Meekly bear their earthly gains: perpetual pain.

With restrained fear, with restrained tears,
They share their nightly prayers, they retire to bed,
To haunting nightmares, of a murdered past,
To haunting nightmares, a future opaque and cold.

Cold,
As the tales, their country has told.
Listen:

Ennui

With sternness, the jackboots came,
Their lofty promises, a different game,
With bungling hands, with brutal hearts,
All obstacles they ripped, they tore apart.

Places of pleasure, they turn to death traps,
Laying dead, destroyed, reduced to scrap.
Where once there was a bustling factory,
Becomes shrine, for purveyors of Calvary.

Where once there was a place of comfort,
Now a place of tears, gnashing, discomfort,
Lost for purpose, the saviors mingled with the mess,
Lost for a savior, the land festered in distress.

From the north and the east the tearful fled away,
From poisoned swamplands, foul with decay,
Seeking succor, from their poverty woes,
Seeking respite, from unbearable throes.

Big city: gold field of hope, for the bounty train;
Big city: sad reality to become, of bounteous pain;
Big city: the clime they also find, of vast obstructions;
Big city: where dreams come, destined for destruction.

Where again will they flee, the constant strife,
The ceaseless disasters, the angst of daily life?
At home, there are only torrents of anguish,
Far away they journey, far away they languish,
From Europe, the Americas and far away Asia,
Battered spirits yearn, for the comfort of amnesia.

Where again, shall they find a comforting bed,
Else amongst the destitute, the mad and the ,dead?
Amongst the legion resorted to hope no more,
They, who nothing again matters, not anymore.

Like locust next came, the sly politicians,
Predator eyes, the smile of morticians,
Their promise: a new game, a different game,
Their passion : to deceive, to rob , to maim.

Spirit of the City

Hobbling along;
Empty, unhinged,
On a journey, without purpose;

The road, sticky, like mud,
The air, hanging still and stale,
Like the lifeless breath, of a corpse.

Hobbling along;
Fugitive, fleeing pursuing darkness,
Hobbling along,
Aware only, of the blistering stare,
Of the ferocious noon sun:
The hot, angry eyes,
Of a celestial cyclop.

Eyes.
His world, full of walking eyes,
Staring, following his unease.

Eyes.
The world, full of eyes,
Timid eyes, angry eyes,
Hateful eyes, tired eyes.

Eyes.
His world full of eyes,
Inviting, to a promised psychosis.

Hobbling along;
On a journey, without purpose,
He must regardless, hasten along,
He must regardless escape, the eyes.

He ought to return home, to sleep,
But that, hardly defines hope.
Perhaps a noose, around the neck,
But that, hardly describes courage.

Hobbling along;
Wishing mere virtues were useful tools,

To carve winning ways, through a arduous life.
Hobbling along;
Wishing to thin away, like smoke,
Hobbling along,
Wishing to mingle, with the breeze,
Hobbling along,
Wishing, to silently fade away.

Seek and you, will find:
This is what the good book says.
Out there he knows, there is nothing to find,
Beyond obedience, of the command: to seek.

Hobbling along;
Seeking... like the wind,
The wind, with no name.
Hobbling along,
Seeking... like the wind,
The wind, with no destination.

Hobbling along;
He is the wind,
Seek, wind... and you will find.

Seek, wind...seek purpose,
Seek, wind...seek to be,
To be a person,
To be a somebody,.

Hobbling along;
Navigating days, robbed of sunlight,
Dark streets, winding, fetid alleys,
Confused jumbles of congealed ghosts,
Of dead dreams, of dead purposes;

Navigating streets cluttered with doomed souls:
The walking detritus, of metropolis.
Plying streets, where carrion-eaters, lie in wait:
Pimps, prostitutes, preachers, peddlers,
Pawnbrokers, sundry professional prosthetics,
Gallimaufries of cannibalistic pursuits.

Eyes.
The world, full of eyes,
Watching every meaningless step,
Toward a forgotten destination.

Hobbling along;
He must needful hustle along,
Ride on board the coach trip to nowhere,
Pay the fare, for his melancholic journey,
In the dwindling currency, of stubborn hope.
Ripped off, along the way, the torturous miles,
At each saddening milestone, losing more hope.

A long wait:
The only promise of the trip is, a long wait,
For something to happen,
For someone, mayhap the savior, to come.

But nothing happens,
Nobody comes,
Thinking, the days can never get more evil,
Fellows, you are so damn surprised.

Noise:
A cacophonous dissonance;
Street vendors, yelling,
Sundry touts, yelling,
Fake apothecaries, yelling,
Schizophrenic preachers, yelling,
The robbers and the robbed, yelling.

Noise:
Sudden palpitation: his heart thumping,
Thumping so loud, the noise fills the world.
Fear:
His lips death heavy, dry as dust.

In the beginning, was the sun,
And then, there were the eyes,
And then came, the noise,
The noise persists, triumphant.

Hobbling along;
Riding the wings, of a contrived belief,

Believe:
Though there is nothing, left to believe
Though nothing , is destined to work.
Believe.

You Sit Speechless

You sit there listless.
Before you, a friendless face,
Sparse, impersonal, severe perhaps.

Before you, an apparition,
Swathed, in the flag of a nation,
Perusing, an open file: your life.

Against the unspoken inquisition,
Your soul, cries a protest,
A silent scream, for rescue,
Against, the unfolding erasure.

The formless ghost:
Spirit of a desperate enterprise,
Mission: to break your life,
Into little, meaningless, pieces.

The formless ghost,
Swathed, in the flag of a nation,
Mission: later to rearrange the gobbets,
Into a shapeless, purposeless, tragedy.

The formless ghost:
Spirit of a convoluted regimen,
Mission: to incinerate, your life,
Mission: to erase, your existence.

You sit there speechless.
You sit there helpless.

We Once Had Heroes

We once had heroes:

Men and women, of prime, pristine values,
Who journeyed lofty mountains, deep valleys,
Fought demons, fought wicked kingdoms,
In search, of a land of hope and freedom.

We once had heroes:

Men and women, who their task done to the best,
Stretched out their legs, in well-deserved rest,
From the precarious quest, their lengthy toil,
Proud of their land, of honey and gushing oil.

We once had heroes:

Who now watch aghast, in eternal alarm,
Their hard-won prize, once a fertile farm,
Become wasteland, of weed and brambles,
A playground, for thieves, who live to gamble.

We once had heroes.

Life is Hell

The sky, dark, like it's going to rain,
The heart, sad, as in screaming pain,
Does the situation ring a bell?

Does the situation ring a bell?
I'm thinking life is hell.
I'm thinking life is hell.

Brother, can you see with my eyes,
It's a time, of senseless inversions;
Forces of oppression, roaming and growling.
Preaching peace, pursuing perversion.
Soldiers of evil, behind them trailing,
Hand tools, of a desperate iniquity,
After them tears, and sadness lingering,
After them fear, and sorrowing mingling.

Sister, can you see with my eyes,
The man of the house, on his knees, weeping;
Weeping as a child, in the grip of pain,
As a child, in the grip of despondency,
The future creeping up, without mercy,
A plague of troubles, knocking at the door,
Hopes lost, withered, dry as desert dust.

Brother, sister, can you see with my eyes,
Beneath the stare of power, full of contempt,
Children playing, playing away confusion,
In the cold sun, and in shadows cold,
Children hide, away from frustrations.
Sad souls, drawn one to another,
Like nightflies, to comforting nightlights,
Dreaming of the sunshine, hopefully to come,
After the darkness is done and gone.

In the dark sky, a dark storm brews,
In distressed lands, in tormented souls,
In hearts, that in sadness scream;
Tired dams restrain, restless angers,
Promising soon to fall, upon famished lands,
With terror, with a raging fire.

The sky dark, like it's going to rain,
The heart sad, as in screaming pain,

Does the situation ring a bell?

Does the situation ring a bell?

I'm thinking life is hell.

I am thinking life is hell....

Judgment Day

for Leah Sharibu

Terror, comes prowling by night,
Silent as ghosts, bearing not a light,
A savage horde, vowed to destruction,
Their sinister mission: murder and abduction.

In the wake, of their rampage trailing,
Death, tears, days and nights of wailing,
Babies torn out, from mothers' wombs,
Children stolen away, to certain doom.

But from the citadel, there is loud silence,
No reproach, no condemnation of violence,
With boldness, evil struts day and night,
Day by day, reigns a fearsome blight.

A wind of evil, blows in the streets,
Making monsters, of the willing mind,
Making timid the heart, of all humankind,
A wind of evil blows, in the streets.

Blowing over streets, scourged by sorrow,
Pledging more pain today, more pain tomorrow,
By a tyrant's frown, by slumbering justice,
Day by day, the people crumble, from injustice.

They that strive to live forever must bear a cross,
Like angels, they must aspire to be free of dross;
From bodies broken, by the fists of oppression,
Arise spirits, strong and ever with a question.

Surely, cries of anger and pain will arise,
To speak against, the baleful device,
Speak against, the terror of the night,
To speak against the evil, that dreads the light.

Surely, cries of anger and pain will arise,
To save the slumbering, from their death;
Surely, cries of anger and pain will arise,
To rouse, against the relentless threat.

Cries of anger and pain will arise.

On Feb. 19, 2018, a group of Boko Haram terrorists kidnapped 109 students from Government Girls' Science and Technical College in Dapchi, Yobe State, in northeast Nigeria. One of the victims, Leah Sharibu, is yet to be found.

The Grassroots

Fragments, of shattered hopes,
Is all that has been left to gather,
After the politician, has come and gone,
Promises made, promises broken.

Fragments, of shattered lives,
Is all that has been left, to mourn,
Cruel gift, from entities without virtue,
Gathering daily, to new acts of roguery,

The battle, will be won at the grassroots,
That is the place, of freedom;
The battle, will be won at the grassroots,
That is the place, of victory.

Mother, sitting head bowed in sorrow,
Father, hard at work, unsure of tomorrow,
Brothers, sister looking ahead,
Wondering what sadness, lurks beyond.

Rivers of tears, will not heal your lands:
The broken earth, brokenhearted,
The barren trees, standing, dejected,
Like skeletons, of abandoned scarecrows.

The birdsongs, may again return,
The magic, lies in your hands,
The future, may again be bright as the stars,
The magic, lies in your hands.

The battle, will be won at the grassroots,
That is the place, of freedom;
The battle will be won, at the grassroots,
That, is the place of your victory..

The battle, will not be won by blood and tears,
The battle will be won, by hard resolve,
The battle will be won, at the grassroots,
That is the place, of your victory:
The grassroots.

I Laugh

Long time ago, when we still be small pickin,
When we still small, dey eat leg of chicken,
Our papa and mama, dem say make we no dey lie,
Because person wey lie, go soon begin dey thief,
Person wey thief, dem go soon put am, for prison,
Even self, dem fit shoot am die, for same reason.

Long time ago, when we still dey primary school,
Dey waka go church, dey waka go Sunday school,
Our teachers dem, go say make we no dey lie,
Because person wey lie, na to go for hell fire,
Dem tell us, make we no dey thief, our offering,
Make we no take, Jesus money, buy another thing..

But my people, see how ting done change now,
Na our government now, dey get Ministry of Lies.
The job wey dem dey do, na to laugh the truth.
I swear:
If you no careful self, dem go turn you government pickin,
Dem leader, na the biggest liar, wey dey for our country.

Time done change my brother, my sister, time done change,
Our papa know say, person wey go prison, because he thief,
Him family go suffer, shame go drive dem comot for town.
Time done change my brother, my sister, time done change,
Na for that time bad people, thief and liar dey go hell fire,
Today, today, statesmen dey thief, dey thief, dem no dey taya.

The ting tire me my brother, the ting tire me my sister.
How to tell small pickin of today, I no know how I go do am,
Say na hard work and no be by thief, person dey take rich.
How I go tell am say, if him want become, to be good leader,
Him go honest, him go wise, him go get love for everybody?
How I go tell am, when him self get eye for head,
Him get eye to see, say the ting wey I dey talk na lie.

The ting tire me my brother, the ting tire me my sister,
How the pickin, no go look me, like say I dey craze.
How I go tell am, wey the pickin, no go begin laugh me.

The ting tire me my brother, the ting tire me my sister,
Na the reason, wey me self I come dey laugh.
Na the reason, wey me self I dey laugh.

This Land Can Be Healed

In the wake of a war, all that will be left is sadness:
Sad runes, written upon scorched landscapes.
Should the dead ever, be able to remember,
Many words of betrayal, will again come to them,
Said by men, ever gathered to speak of peace,
Departing in a moment, to new chicanery

Pain never flow away in time, like a river,
It remember the peaceful groves, those tranquil gardens,
Where treasured pots and vases, were in fury shaken;
Flung upon the ground, smashed and shattered.
The shards, though scattered, though utterly distressed,
Eternally cry for revenge, never remaining, silent.

The shards:
Youths in their prime, murdered, by keepers of the law,
On mere suspicion, for a crime yet to be committed,
Leaving kinfolks grieving, albeit without recourse,
Who do you call, when the murderer is the law?

The shards:
Farmers hard at work, eking out a paltry living,
Murdered by roaming brigands, without fear nor pity,
Kinfolks, thrown into silence, into fear and wondering:
Why does the government take sides with assassins?

The shards:
Patriots standing their ground, in the street protesting,
Warning of a future, that looks like a dinner for dogs,
Fallen upon, they are by, soldiers beaten and murdered,
Cowed to silence, they sigh at the hopelessness of it all.

The shards:
Tribes, races, seeking better grip of the way forward,
Peaceful advocates of equity, for their troubled folks,
Marked as rebels, they are hunted like beasts, into the woods,
Bullets, prison: the rewards for their virtuous zeal.

Can this land be healed?
Can there emerge, harmony and equity?

Unity and peace are not fruits, plucked from a tree.

Where power is usurped, by clueless hoodwinkers,
And those with true wisdom, considered as without,
Of what use is peace; where is the hope of unity?

This land can be healed.
When brothers talk with brothers,
To learn where it hurts,
When the trapper, humbly sits,
To dialogue with the trapped.

This land can be healed.
Not by chance, not by a miracle, not by a million prayers,
The problem must stand, juxtaposed with the solution,
The solution must eagerly stand, to embrace a plan,
A healing plan, with brotherliness sitting in firm control.

This land can be healed.
From the desert North to the poisoned South,
From the wild West to the hurting East.
By a refreshing rain, of true brotherliness,
This land can be healed.

A Psalm for the Perverse

A conceited child, on a journey of vainglory,
Upon his way, he accosts a wise Master,
Who in scorn, he strikes upon the face.

Upon the way, he meets a great Healer,
Who in contempt, he deals a vicious punishment.

Upon the way, he finds a pious Priest,
Bowed in worship of Olodumare – the great God above,
Whose face in mockery, he shoves against the ground.

So says the gods:
To those of this world, deaf to restraint,
Thinking in madness, their selves beyond reproach,
Counseled, to make a sacrifice of repentance,
They laugh, they call the wise Master, a liar,
In disdain, they call the envoy of the gods, a thief.
They decline, to make a sacrifice, of repentance,
Persisting still, in their evil, contemptuous, ways.

So says the gods:
Fulfilled lives, will not come to defiant children,
Who despise their future, who despise their wise old Master.
Long lives, will not come to presumptuous children,
Who shun their wholeness, who shun their wise old Healer.
That conceited child, who strikes the old Priest,
While on his knees, worshipping the great god Olodumare,
Only journeys, in pursuit of his own ignoble death.

How does a maggot perish?
Without remembrance,
Such is how maggots perish:
Without trace.

(from Odu Ifa)

Enchanted

– A Song for Fools

I close my eyes, your presence captures the world,
Beyond the silken screen of darkness, an elusive memory.

I send my thought to you, on the wings of a beautiful dove,
But it flew back to me empty, without a promise of love.
I should go searching for you, but that will never do,
No one, has ever seen you, not in the way I always do.

I open my eyes, a gloomy emptiness fills the world,
Around me a lifeless void, scorned and spurned by all.
Frantic I strive to gather, fading memories of your presence,
But it is all impossible, they never come back together.

I try, but the pictures; they are constantly dashed to pieces,
Like sparkling stars shot down, they crash into a dark abyss.
Maybe this is a simple madness, maybe a stubborn wish,
I grasp at the sweetness, but it takes wings and flies away.

It is all so hopeless; it is all so strange and hopeless,
These fugitive moments, that come without a single word;
It is so distressing, sometimes I think I am dead,
It seems to me, you only live inside my head.

I ask the mad throng in the street,
Where it is you may be found,
I ask those gray, limp faces,
If you truly can be found.

It seems to me, you only live inside my head.

Ghost Town

– The Polluted Planet

A naked shadow, an icy ghost dressed in black,
Rides a horse, of the apocalypse, sleek and dark,
Velvet coat flying, riding the wind, with abandon,
Clattering hooves tap, a drum roll of Armageddon.

Behind closed doors, the people hide in horror,
The stranger comes, with a reputation of terror,
With fear they watch, they wait for his coming,
With fear they wait, for his going, hope receding.

The empty streets, silent, not a voice to be heard,
The empty street sad, somber as a graveyard,
The empty street peaceful, wildlife dancing around,
The empty street crying: this is a ghost town.

Peace is shattered, by a harsh cough resounding,
From his throat, the cold call of death, rattling,
In an instant, ten thousand fall, still and dead,
In the fearful future, there looms, a coming dread,

They crawl out of the shelters, tired, and hungry,
With masked faces, they fear for their country,
They worship, they wail, they await the worst,
Judgment day they fear, has come upon the world.

With fear they raise voices, to demand his name,
When will they be free, when will the distress wane?
For time and time to come, he vows to wear the crown,
Forever he will be, the king of the ghost town,

Blazing eyes reveal, the vision of a coming hell,
Fiery eyes portend, a dismal future, quite unwell,
Humanity lost, under a heap, of mindless lust,
Fiery eyes reveal, the vision of a coming hell:

The vanished rainforest, the poisoned creek,
The injured sky, the ocean soiled and dark,
A world destroyed, by a mindless, plunder,
A world by spite, and hatred, torn into sunder.

A desert world, silent, not a voice to be heard,
A desert world, sad, somber as a graveyard,
A desert world peaceful, wildlife dancing around,
A desert world crying : this is a ghost town.

Of Life

Of life, there is no randomness,
Behind, every daily occurrence,
Only one, eventual purpose to life,
Only one, prime plan to life.

Of life, there is no randomness,
For every entity, there is a business,
A program, a progression, a fated role,
Weaved, into the fabric, of the soul.

Of life, there is no randomness,
For those who watch, with attentiveness,
Memories, seasons, reveal as successive cycles,
Like the annual ring, of a tree, a distinct circle.

Of life, there is no randomness,
For every entity, there is a business,
One, predestined purpose and role,
Weaved, into the fabric, of the soul.