

## POETRY, A FACE IN DIFFERENT PHASES

By

Chris Anyokwu, PhD

Professor of Poetry and Postcolonial African Literatures, Department of English, University of Lagos.

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I would like to begin this address by congratulating everyone present, here, both *in person* and *virtually*, on being able to avail yourselves of the opportunity to partake in this, hopefully, memorable intellectual feast—this Festival of the Arts.

As we all know, poetry is like a well-made soup, richly filled with such condiments as song and dance, oratory, verbal dexterity, dramatic and theatrical expression, and masterful storytelling. Fittingly, we have been, and shall continue to be, regaled with drumbeats, fancy footwork, and the rhythmic movements of the body and *interphonal* give-and-take between stage and audience, performer and spectator.

For us in Africa, poetry is not merely the powerful overflow of a bard's emotions and thoughts, arrested and frozen in cold, lifeless writing. What does Scripture say? "The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life." Thus, we are gathered here on this auspicious occasion—the commemoration of World Poetry Day—to fete the verse; to intone the paeans of poetry, and to celebrate poetry in all its multifarious, multidimensional manifestations in *Naija*!

Deep in the human psyche has always resided a congenital instinct to *imitate*—to replicate observable phenomena and to mirror the reflex motor, psychosocial behaviour, and accustomed attitudes of the life forms with which the objective universe teems. These life forms include broadly speaking *flora* and *fauna*—rendered more prosaically as the plant and animal worlds.

What is more deeply lodged in the human soul is the inborn and innate instinct for *harmony*: the natural response to *rhythm*, the impulse to organise movement to the poetry of things. *Homo sapiens*, from the very beginning, has loved to play with *sound*, to create *beauty*—specifically aesthetic beauty—which, in our contemporary situation, we call *poetry*.

It has been said that poetry is the oldest genre of the literary arts, its provenance nestling in antiquity. Our hunter-gatherer progenitors dreamed, conceptualised, and spoke in poetic tones and

accents, prose being a much later, watered-down speech-event. In this unsullied pristinity of antiquity, humans and their hominid cousins conversed, lived, and had their being in coded gestures, meaning-bearing gruntings, and signalling sounds—what we may now, in settled society, call *poetry*.

Casting about for the probable birthplace of modern poetry, T. S. Eliot surmises the thesis that poetry had issued forth from the drumbeats of prehistoric peasants and forest dwellers;<sup>1</sup> from the rumble of thunder, the twittering and warbling of birds, the roar of lions, and the piping of elephants. While not mere noise, these sounds were signs and symbols—codes of communication conveying either pain or pleasure, felicity or danger.

The feral sylvan universe to the untutored eye was/is an ordinary jungle, alive with dangerous bivouacking beasts. Writers of old, including more recent prose stylists such as D. O. Fagunwa and Amos Tutuola, in their novels, make us realise that the forest is home to dreadful spirits, incubi, goblins, and sundry projections of human phantasmagoria—the free-wheeling grandmother imagination.<sup>2</sup>

Beyond, therefore, the reality of the existence of ogres and baleful pachyderms in forests, human poetic projection has also imagined the wilds as sites and loci of the dreadful—a frontier of mortal danger.

It is within this zone of nature's mysteries that T. S. Eliot elected to pinpoint poetry's manger—its cradle. In a word, within the hunter-gatherer ecological system, sound/ing was a multifunctional instrument, normally deployed for diverse functions and roles.

Over aeons, through millennia, this innate capacity and faculty for *sounding* metamorphosed and transformed, with requisite refinements, into clearer chords—more discernible and symphonic forms of music-making: a call-and-response exchange between cantor and auditor in an invariably convivial setting. Rest and recuperation after hunting expeditions and the exhausting labours of farming created an atmosphere of thoughtful bodily reflection among our primal progenitors.

These were nights of mental recall and *mimicry*. They would re-enact and *imitate* the varied antics and mannerisms of life forms—birds, terrestrial animals, aquatic creatures, even plants and trees—with which they had come into frequent contact. More frequently, they would dramatise their rites and rituals of hunting—failures and losses as well as victories and triumphs.

Oral narrative, and poetry in particular, originated from these nocturnal sessions of simulation and make-believe. The truest form of art took root in these ancient battles of song, dance contests, verbal invocations, and ritual incantations.

## II

However, the susurrus of creative activity in our time—a stretch of history preceded and punctuated by wars and conflicts, seismic climate events, and global geopolitical eruptions—has culminated in tectonic paradigm shifts in civilisational trajectories. The world has often feared the worst: the approaching vortex of Armageddon, or, as some hyperbolic commentators might declare, “apocalypse now.”

How does poetry feel—and fare—under these so-called end-of-history scenarios? Does it experience an unseasonal bloom, or does it suffer the proverbial lean years? It is only natural, indeed, inevitable, that poetry produced under such apocalyptic conditions would acquire, at the very least, vestigial residues and urgent pulsations of anxiety and paranoia.

Is this the endgame? Are we living through the Beckettian straits of absurdism? Or, to change the metaphor, are we merely turning and turning in the widening gyre, where the falcon can no longer hear the falconer? Is there a breakdown in interpersonal communication and a complete loss of community? Is the singer of tales—the poet—reduced to pouring out his overburdened soul in furtive self-defence, without the benefit of a listening ear, without an audience that can share or relate to his or her concerns?

In Hopkins’ “God’s Grandeur,” generations have trodden and tried the “seared” and “bleared” road, seeking succour and solace but often finding mirages. Why so?

For his part, T. S. Eliot famously dismissed his post-war era as “an immense panorama of futility and anarchy,”<sup>3</sup> a conclusion drawn from the unprecedented carnage and devastation wrought upon humanity during World War II. Using his notion of the objective correlative—a landscape of ruins and debris—he concretised the human cost of modern catastrophe. In arguably the greatest poem of the twentieth century, *The Waste Land* (1992), he thundered against the ultimate futility of violence and the neuroses of the modern age.

Similarly, in *Ulysses*, James Joyce speaks through Stephen Dedalus: “History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.”<sup>4</sup>

The question before us at this juncture is this: has history always been thus—to echo Thomas Hobbes—nasty, brutish, and short? Has history always been “red in tooth and claw”? Why do scholars and writers across the world so often portray it in such grisly and gory terms?

Following Karl Marx’s iconic formulation— “All that is solid melts into air; all that is holy is profaned”—modern humanity finds itself compelled to confront, with sober senses, the real conditions of life and its relations with his land.<sup>5</sup> Drawing on this insight, Marshall Berman

published his influential book, subtitled *The Experience of Modernity*. In that work, Berman analyses the cataclysmic transformations and nerve-racking dislocations associated with capitalist civilisation, notably in the West.

He convincingly demonstrates how advanced capitalism—through its modernising onslaught—empties lived human experience of stable meaning, leaving earth’s denizens floundering at socio-economic crossroads, reduced to anonymity and alienation, as though trapped in claustrophobic echo chambers. We may, in passing, identify some of the likely causes of this historical nightmare that has overtaken humanity.

First is the mechanisation of agriculture. With the momentous advent of the machine, society was fundamentally and irrevocably transformed from its traditional, customary structures rooted in subsistence farming and cottage industry. Second, this transformation spawned aggressive urbanisation and the rapid depopulation of rural communities, leaving the common people disoriented and uprooted.

Charles Dickens’s novel *Hard Times* captures this paradox of “progress.” Drawing upon the theoretical and ideological insights of Jeremy Bentham, who championed the doctrine of utilitarianism, Dickens exposes how the cold calculus of “facts” and the mechanistic application of utility wreaked havoc on humane values. Industrial modernity disrupted organic rhythms of life, wrenching people from agrarian patterns and thrusting them into the harsh, smoke-belching environments of urban existence—grim, soot-stained landscapes emblematic of industrialism’s dehumanising thrust.

In the creeping dystopia, the fresh and the organic are replaced by the fabricated and the mechanical. Third, one of the most profound outcomes of this mechanisation of social processes was massive job loss and chronic underemployment, culminating in widespread impoverishment and abominable misery.

Fourth, the so-called “invisible hand” of economic ideology made its trumpet entry, ushering in an age of capitalist exploitation and the reification of labour power.<sup>6</sup> Unsurprisingly, the rampaging onslaught of capitalism undermined agrarian culture—the so-called Agricultural Revolution—and set the stage for the ascendancy of the Industrial Revolution, which for centuries fuelled colonial and imperialist despoilation and the wholesale impoverishment of colonised peoples, including those of the Indian subcontinent, Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

It must be stressed that the emergence of capitalist modernity ironically provoked the colonisation not only of territories but of society itself: family values, social norms, religious taboos, and cultural mores—the essential grid of communal life. Religious belief and dogma were sidelined and, in many quarters, symbolically incinerated in the bonfire of secular scepticism.

Accordingly, scientism drove a wedge between humanity and nature. As time went on, this scientific scepticism appeared to eclipse the God of the cosmos and the once God-blessed universe. Man, as *homo viator* and self-proclaimed ruler, was left entirely to his own devices. In *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Friedrich Nietzsche dramatised this upheaval through the proclamation that “*God is dead*”—a metaphor signalling the collapse of transcendent moral authority. Humanity was compelled to create its own values, divorced from otherworldly or divine sources.

Under this nihilistic vale of existential despair, experience itself attenuates, at times morphing into a coliseum of manic paroxysms—an arena in which meaning is contested and often violently unmoored.

### III

The foregoing excursus, therefore, is a rough-and-ready sketch of what the social scene preceding the modern age looked like: a dystopian world, depicted and poeticised by the likes of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Robert Browning, William Blake, Matthew Arnold, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, and others.

It should be added, however, that before the British modern poets (whom Chinweizu *et al* like to call Euro-modernists)<sup>7</sup> came fully onto the scene, the French symbolist poets were already producing refined modes of verse. Symbolism was a movement that focused largely on intense subjectivity, musicality, and dreamlike imagery to convey and cognise emotion rather than to describe objective reality. It relied heavily on metaphor, synaesthesia, and layered symbolism in an attempt to elicit and evoke hidden truths.

Among the leading French poets were Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Arthur Rimbaud. Standing upon the shoulders of these continental precursors, such British and Irish poets as Ezra Pound, W. B. Yeats, and T. S. Eliot were able to enlarge and enrich the métier of verse.

Across the Atlantic, American poets carefully extrapolated what was formally and technically valuable from their nineteenth-century French predecessors, adapting these innovations in a distinctly Anglophone textual idiom. In this way, poets from across the English Channel assimilated the logistics, mechanics, and aesthetic strategies of modern verse-making from continental Europe—France in particular—thereby reshaping the trajectory of English-language modernism.

The French writers and poets succeeded in articulating the deep-seated social neuroses and spiritual pathologies afflicting their age. Colonialism and imperialist expansion were entering

turbulent transitions; industrial juggernauts were replacing factory “hands” and plantation peasantry with mechanised systems; the steam engine was being revved up on an unprecedented scale; the telegraph was revolutionising long-distance communication; and the printing press was proliferating apace, fostering mass literacy. Industrialisation unleashed immense prosperity and extraordinary profits for captains of commerce and the well-healed titans of trade.

As a consequence, the gentry and leisured classes sank ever deeper into complacent indolence, while increasing numbers of labourers languished below the poverty line. This social bifurcation found poetic expression in William Blake’s poem “London”. The paradox of progress and prosperity became a dominant theme of modern European verse in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: hunger amidst plenty, hope without optimism, moral rectitude devoid of spiritual depth. Such existential dissonances became standard fare.

This hollowing-out of subsistence and meaning lies at the core of W. B. Yeats’s “The Second Coming”, which stresses a sterile climate of fragmentation and alienation. As earlier noted, this atmosphere constitutes the fulcrum of T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and even the earlier Gerard Manley Hopkins. Unsurprisingly, in reviewing James Joyce, Eliot described contemporary experience as “an immense panorama of futility and anarchy.”

If there are concepts that appropriately capture modernity, critics often reach for terms such as futility, chaos, fragmentation, eruption, and anarchy. Existentialist thinkers have written copiously on this condition, notably Jean-Paul Sartre and Harold Pinter. Even the ancient Greek myth of Sisyphus—condemned by Zeus to roll a massive boulder up a mountain only for it to tumble down again *ad infinitum*—underscores the futility and tragic repetitiveness of human striving.

This punitive routine symbolises the seeming meaninglessness of existence: the tragic inevitability of frustrated effort and the recurrent cycle we call life. Raising a family, providing childcare, organising routines, indulging in sensual pleasures, enjoying sports and diversions—these activities occupy the mind and structure daily existence, yet they scarcely dent the permanence of pain or the involuted mystery of temporal life. Above all looms the imperishable fact that poetry seeks to mollify: death.

Death, grim and patient, bides its time, striking with impartial certainty at whomsoever it chooses. Yet it is precisely this bitterness of life, this fragile joy, this precariousness of hope, that paradoxically endows existence with meaning and renders it worth living. Without the umbra of death, life and love would be emptied of urgency and essence.

Thus, as Wole Soyinka exhorts, let us celebrate “everything grey”<sup>8</sup>—even in the shadow of mortality—the fullness and gravity of being.

#### IV

It was W. H. Auden who took a long, unflinching look at the world around him and denounced his interwar epoch as an “age of anxiety.”<sup>9</sup> Alongside his fellow poets, he experienced first-hand the fragmentation and alienation of urban existence—its spiritual barrenness and bottomless *ennui*—before arriving at that sobering conclusion.

In this sense, the very texture, tone, and tenor of modern experience may be characterised as a nightmarish landscape: at once a Dantean inferno, an Orwellian dystopia, a Foucauldian panopticon, and a Soyinkan crypt. Postcolonial states, in many instances, appear to spiral between intrusive authoritarianism and creeping fascism, creating systems that oscillate between totalitarian control and political paralysis. The populace, suspended in a condition of arrested development, resembles the inmates in the “Allegory of the Cave”—indoctrinated into believing that the shadows on the wall constitute the unchangeable substance of reality.

“Nothing to be done,” as Samuel Beckett writes in the opening line of *Waiting for Godot*. In such a Beckettian endgame—beneath the spreading chestnut tree of betrayal and casual blackmail—what kind of poetry can be produced? What is the bounden duty of the artist in such a depressing environment?

If *instruction* and *delight* constitute the *raison d’être* of the arts—and of poetry in particular—how does the poet compose verses that embody both utility and pleasure? How does one sing and dance under a jackboot, when sheer survival is the operative imperative? Should the artist sing the praises of power and sovereignty simply to earn a living?

Let us be clear: before the advent of figures such as Alexander Pope, who was able to subsist largely on the proceeds of his book sales, most artists performed—mark the word, *performed*—before courtiers and royalty, flattering inflated egos and embellishing reputations in a desperate bid to extract material reward from wealthy patrons. The arts have long borne the imprint of this ancient system of patronage and preferment.

The alternative, of course, has often been stark: criticise the powerful and risk exile—or worse. As the saying goes in Asia, “tell the truth and run”. The fraught relationship between power and the arts stretches back into mythic memory. Consider, for example, the tales embedded in *One Thousand and One Nights*, where storytelling becomes both survival strategy and subtle resistance. Power rarely welcomes opposition; it demands praise, not parody.

Thus, the stakes are high. To “trick out” one’s song in safe, ornamental strains may guarantee protection. To lace it with satire or prophetic candour may invite reprisal. The perennial question

endures: can poetry speak truth to power without forfeiting its own survival—and if so, at what cost? Hence, Niyi Osundare cautions:

Says Galileo: the earth I see is round.  
And Lorca's head comes smiling in Franco's platter  
And Defoe's plague years, within the Crown's slit  
in his dissenting ears  
And Paine's countless wrongs for tomorrow's nights  
And Brecht hit the waves, Hitler's headhunters  
on his epic heels

Says Galileo: the earth I see is round

And Brutus's ballad, and the Apartheid dragon  
And Soyinka's shuttle in the General's crypt  
And Ngugi's travails on the Devil's cross  
And Mapanje's chameleons and Band-it gods

Says Galileo: the earth I see is round.<sup>10</sup>

Whilst it has long been customary for kings to keep bards and praise-singers in their royal courts—woe betide that griot who flags his principal in his song.<sup>11</sup> By the same token, we may broadly distinguish two schools of poets in society: first, the court poet; and second, the people's poet.

On the first category, Niyi Osundare in "A Dialogue of the Drums", lyricizes thus:

"Whatever song you raise  
Is what the world sings after you  
You singer of royal songs  
Your drum, dumb in the marketplace  
Only talks in the palace of gold  
Your song extols those whose words  
Behold the world."<sup>12</sup>

In Nigeria, for instance, there is no shortage of court poets and an ever-growing tribe of pro-establishment versifiers—right-wing, ultra-nationalist, and reactionary wordsmiths—who hide behind the suave and sonorous fig-leaf of patriotic posturing while recycling shibboleths and threadbare clichés. Their plotlines drip with vapid rhetoric; their eyes, as always, are fixed on the grand prize: government patronage, whether in cash or in kind.

Such figures may aptly be described as “turncoat pens for hire”<sup>13</sup>—writers who align themselves with power for material reward. This coterie is often found among journalists, broadcasters, professionals, bureaucrats, civil servants, academics, and sections of the artistic class—legions who proclaim themselves literary progressives heralding a “new dawn.”

They emerge in the generational aftermath of earlier poetic formations: the politician-poets of the 1940s and 1950s; the Independence generation; and the post–Nigerian Civil War cohort, which included figures such as Niyi Osundare, Odia Ofeimun, Tanure Ojaide, and Obiora Udechukwu. These poets, in varying degrees, deployed poetry as platform and megaphone—articulating regional anxieties, national disillusionments, and the contested terrain of postcolonial power.<sup>14</sup>

Setting aside questions of periodization with its defining features, let us also consider how Biodun Jeyifo assesses and evaluates the intellectual credentials—or lack thereof—of the *primum mobile* of these “phases of poetry” in Nigerian letters, for in assessing these phases of Nigerian poetry, Jeyifo interrogates not only their epistemic foundations but also the ideological limitations embedded in their praxis. He raises pertinent questions about the extent to which poetic engagement with structures of power constitutes genuine resistance rather than a rehearsed oppositional posture that risks devolving into rhetorical populism, and whether the often-invoked claim to radicalism can, upon closer critical scrutiny, sustain its theoretical and political coherence within the broader discursive economy of Nigerian literary production.:

Indeed, if we are to stare this particularly discomfiting crisis squarely and unblinkingly in the face, we have to admit that, barring a few exceptions, African literature is today very poorly taught in most African universities. These are universities which are themselves buffeted by unprecedented crises of underfunding, the demoralization of faculty, staff, and students, the rise of a perverse culture of obscurantism and fetishistic pseudo-intellectualism, and the attendant subversion of reason and critical thought, as many senior teaching and research staff of academic departments come under the sway of evangelical chiliastic religious movements.

And in similar terms, what Biodun Jeyifo is trying to tell us is that the standards of cultural production—verse-making in particular—have been thrown to the dogs, thanks in the main to the deleterious consequences of neoliberal policies.

## V

Regarding the latter group of poets, it is instructive that a vast majority of our poets can stand up to be counted in that category. In their book entitled *Protest and the Conflicts in African Literature*, Cosmo Pieterse and Donald Munro investigate how history has shaped the temper and trajectory of modern African literature. Lewis Nkosi, in *Tasks and Masks: Theme and Style of African*

*Literature*, equally posits that history is the hero of African literature, considering its pivotal role in shaping what constitutes African imaginative production. Succeeding generations, to be certain, have consistently echoed this view and, more importantly, produced what could be termed protest poetry. Public themes of betrayal, politically irresponsible leadership, economic hardship, and mass hunger and deprivation dominate their writing. Whether in prose fiction, drama, or poetry, the message is unmistakably the same: the writer is angry and disaffected, and therefore uses his or her pen as a weapon of social criticism and mass conscientization against a common enemy—the leadership class.

Beyond these superficial differences in ideological posturing, almost all our most established writers and poets may be considered people's poets. Perhaps where these pro-masses poets part ways is in their linguistic choices, poetic method, and style. David Crystal argues that there are two main tendencies in usage: those who write difficult poetry and those who favor simple diction.<sup>16</sup> This is hardly the place or time to plumb the intricate depths of the contending and countervailing claims of the warring ideologies. It is, however, advisable to steer a middle course, since extremes often result in needless digression.

A brief digression is in order at this juncture, as the invocation of volition in the discourse of poetry is often synonymous with obscurantism—targeted, willful obscurity, private egotism, and what has been described as the “Hopkins disease.”<sup>17</sup> Critics such as Stanley Macebuh have attempted to defend this evolution of poetic rendition. Wole Soyinka himself—hardly an obscure defender—has tirelessly fronted his traducers pound for pound, leaving them “bruised and broken and hung over the fire to dry,”<sup>18</sup> to borrow his metaphor. Even so, critics like Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie, and Ihechukwu Madubuike found such poetry unduly obscure and sufficiently hard-going. Those prone to the humanization or domestication of the language of poetry championed what Funso Aiyejina described as the “Alter/Native Tradition”, said to have been specifically instigated by Soyinka's style. In fact, Niyi Osundare's poetic manifesto “*Poetry Is*”<sup>19</sup> is a riposte directly aimed at the doctrine of poetry as a jigsaw puzzle popularized by Soyinka and his ilk—Okigbo in particular.

Nevertheless, the unresolved impasse at the heart of Nigerian poetry remains. The question still stares us in the face: what really constitutes poetry, and what is good poetry? We shall leave the answers to these posers to each and every one of us present here. As Shakespeare says in *Hamlet*, “To thine own self be true.”

In our contemporary times, our poetry mostly falls under what is normally referred to as lyric forms—elegy, ballad, ode, satire, praise poetry, and panegyric. We have gone past primary and secondary orality. With television, radio, and film, and under chirographic and typographic conditions, the electronic and digital ecosystem has further transformed literary production.

Writers have now laid down the pen and are working on their devices—desktops, laptops, iPads, and the like—to create and compose works of imaginative art, mostly digital poetry.

Poetry, intrinsically a verbal and oral art form, has made a full circle: from the village square to the page, from the stage to the screen, and now to the virtual space. The revolutionary metamorphosis of poetry from primary orality to virtual environments deserves serious scholarly investigation. Even so, the past remains prologue. Try as we may, we cannot sever the umbilical cord connecting our present realities to the distant past.<sup>20</sup>

Today, all the rage is about the digital turn and the algorithmic age. Welcome to the net generation. In this virtual playground, systematic arts training hardly exists. No certification in creative writing is required. Your nature—that is, your God-given innate talent or skill—is deemed sufficient. No need for honing or whetting your edge. If you are sufficiently curious or adventurous about writing, regardless of the subject, just do it—jump on the bandwagon. After all, everybody is a poet.

This is why platforms such as *YouTube*, *Instagram*, *X (formerly Twitter)*, and *WhatsApp* are now clogged and inundated with an infinite deal of kitsch or bilge miscalled poetry. Rather than written feedback by way of criticism, what we now have are emojis, emoticons, and memes—the new hieroglyphic figures of netizens. Likes, thumbs-up signs, and other symbols have become the new critical lexicon of literary appreciation.

Thus, the making and dissemination of poetry is now *laissez-faire*—cake-walk, with no perspiration expended whatsoever on the issue of theme. It is often a monochromatic indulgence in scopophilia, a themed exploration of the appetitive self: sex, sex, sex—and nothing else. Should the focus change to, predictably, politics or governance, then what we see is merely hell-raising haranguing of authority; the political functionary is first game and sometimes even charged with cause of penile dysfunction, alongside allied romantic blues.

Stylistically, in e-poetry as well as much Spoken Word, sub-genre rhyme trumps reason. Unregulated emotional outbursts ride roughshod over reasoned argumentation; hysteria throttles purpose. Rhyming becomes an end in itself. Intelligibility is remote; floating signifiers take center stage. The inevitable result is a loss of structure, whereby the effective and measured use of formal limitations that categorize the art is crudely sacrificed. Moreover, the rich polysemy of suggestion and indirection is sacrificed for the mental indulgences of netzines on the go.<sup>21</sup>

This is where the name of the moment makes its glorious entry: Spoken Word. As in everything else, this subject provokes more subjective views than properly harnessed criticism. Poetry started as spoken art; therefore, Spoken Word is a fit and proper form of poetry. But the tragedy is that most practitioners of the form end up giving the world a watered-down version of poetry as Spoken Word. You cannot give what you do not have; it is as simple as that.

Longinus, in his treatise “*On the Sublime*”, identifies five sources of elevated language:

- i. the power of forming great conceptions;
- ii. vehement and inspired passion;
- iii. noble diction;
- iv. the formation of figures of thought and expression;
- v. dignified and elevated composition.<sup>22</sup>

## VI

Nowadays, everybody is a poet—a keyboard warrior. The poet is now a social gadfly and diarist, reporting on everything from the sacred to the profane, the momentous to the inane. This is the flashy part of digital poetry—Instapoetry, e-poetry, and so on. Rage is good, but rage without vision is useless. The would-be poet must cultivate in his or her soul the qualities of the historian and the philosopher in order to function effectively in his or her office.

Whether you are writing traditional verse or what is now referred to as micro-poetry and visual poetry—for example, pieces on *Instagram*, *Tumblr*, or *TikTok*—you must look into your heart and write, while also looking to the masters before you as guides.

As I round off, I must salute the luminous and heroic efforts of a chorus of singers—some well-known, others emerging—present-day contemporary poets who, despite the odds, are hard at work producing great and beautiful poetry. In no particular order and with no regard to rank or prestige, these griots of the soil, proudly Nigerian poets, include Dike Chukwumerije, Graciano Enwerem, Olayinka Samson Aremu, Kemi Bakare (Kemistree), Adedayo Adeyemi Agarau, Paul Word, Osigwe Benjamin, Kukogho Iruesi Samson, Olumide Holloway, Efe Paul Azino, Godson Osarenren, Tanimonure Richards Adewale, Aremu Adams Adebisi, Bash Amuneni, Chika Jones Onwasanya, Chukwuemeka Anyikwa, Adesero Segun Emmanuel, Adigun Clinton Olusola, Evelyn Oparah, Akor Emmanuel, Adigun Temitope (Idealism), Poetess Erah Ogiogwa, Ambassador Chukwu John David, and Amarachi Chilaka Mbagwu.

A huge shout-out also to the one and only *IBQUAKE*. The earth is listening; the world feels you.

I would like to thank everyone for listening, and I hope I have not wasted your precious time all this while. Thank you so much for your time.

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