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hopes for a society that will show greater understanding and tolerance for the many disparities of life. However, the greatest point of similarity between Walker and Bandele is the eagerness to be open about their lives. The 'literature of openness' is surely on ascent. There is this feeling that after years of being relegated to the background (through ancient and modern slaveries) and suffering through humiliation, nothing could be too weighty to say. Walker describes herself as a 'shameless writer' and Bandele does not feel shy in talking about what she is going through in a bleak but hopeful relationship. Perhaps because both writers draw from the same historical experience, pain becomes a romance toward clarity for them. Bandele's life reflects Waller's shock at a society becoming more and more hostile and lost.

Bandele's memoir is so intense and spontaneous, perhaps reflecting her deeply internal concern, and Walker through introspective contemplations serves a needling social commentary; yet something of one reflects in the other. This is possibly due to the fact that, as most African-American writers would agree, what they have become can hardly be separated from where they are coming from. Importantly, both writers subscribe to an internal courage that is capable of always triumphing.
Quick to spot a title-giving line, he in turn grabbed it for his response. And as if to prove a point, ensured his is a full one hundred-and-one line longer. Joy, a thousand lines more. I would say, if at last the lean years are over! Predictably, he accepts the main reason proffered by Soyinba — "an overdose of reality that stuns the mind and beggars lyric" — and this forms the subject of the first movement of the long poem in Dreams: "Some wounds cut so deep", he says, "we forget... how to flow/Some hunger grows so steep/It cuts out the sun/and takes away our eyes..."

Indeed the argument in self-justification continues into the third movement: "in the heat and sweat of the wrongs/that come our fare before every arrival/... we must wait for the selves trapped in stone to awaken." Finally, he goes to Ogun, a shared patron-god, who "waited till his anvil could hold the heat and sweat of the wrongs/that become the rubbish heap/taught the musician of knife stuck in his back.../his broken sax on road/.../O let there always be those/who call the guilty by name.../and one line longer. Joy, a thousand lines more. I would say. if at last the lean years are over!"

The second part of Dreams titled 'Gods and Tongues' has poems for Fela. "it was the knife stuck in his back.../his broken sax on the rubbish heap/taught the musician of rattles and banter/to take the bitterleaf of his song to the soup.SpringApplication/.../no revolve life's crooked timber.' Obafemi Awolowo, the "patriarch (who) asked for joy, naive/to the end in childlike play/to raise tramps to the height of avatars.../the dancer who became our forward-gaze", Sheikh Abubabar Gumi, who knew "that no tongue could escape from sin/nor could hearts live by tongue alone/where God is one, languages many". There are also poems for the late Zimbabwean writer Dambudzo Marechera, who "cockroached through parts and alleys/the dark democracy of forgotten undergrounds/wishing there were no slogans to die for.../in a world where the broadday whore/soon wins Virgin Of The year Award", Che Guevara who "preferred to be reaped far from altars.../shines and gravestones, grooves calling to pilgrim's feet.../and thought it 'far better to be honoured by birds/flying with strips of his song/to fertilize barren acres', as well as Ortega and Vaclav Havel who now could "lower your folded sleeves/stiffen your collars/...get used to well-knotted ties.../and acknowledge the million hearts flung at your motorcade."

The third part: "True Worship" raises the question of what gods are truly deserving of our strongest feelings of respect and admiration. Personally. I could worship his "Oyn", the first poem, "a brittle wonder that survives/the eternal risk of poetry.../a life that civil faith/has turned into a hymn/.../simply woman made joyous."

The last part. "Muafangejo's Kraal", which came out of a poetic intervention in a 1991 Oxford exhibition of linocuts by the late Namibian artist who is eponym of the poems. is an elating experience that turns Ofeimun's eye so fixed on the public space, onto himself. I do not think that the rest of the poems in that intervention live up to the beauty of "No Way to Go", admirably captured in a wistful, defiant melancholy where the poet seems to be saying to himself. "You are (growing) old Father Williams, and at your age..." ("The fog of sadness comes over/my sense of songs, my kit of dreams", waifs Ofeimun at the beginning). This poem does to you what a good old blues tune, such as Miles Davis' "Kind of Blue" or Satchmo's rendition of W.C. Handy's "Atlantic Blues", does. By the time one gets to the last lines, "I seek/vanes for my guitar to wrest waves/for my blood to know its acre/and be at home with it itself again!", one is tempted to immediately take the road leading to that house of experience.

The Muafangejo poems testify to the unity of art, in striving to represent much in images and words. Ofeimun's ability to conjure the original drawings before the reader denied their visual advantage connects with the kindred feeling and uncanny insights that only true inspiration can bestow. As homage to resilience, Dreams is brilliant in showing how truth discerned from art provides the mortar that binds an often quick-to-succumb flesh to the spirit that keeps dreams alive and truly at work.

From Ofeimun, we also have the second life of Under African Skies, which had first been published in 1991 under the same Hornbliss House imprint. This collection is born of a communal ethos of art going back to the origin of time: an African dance ensemble in London commissions a poet (Ofeimun) to write poetry to select dances telling a story of Africa from pre-historic times till a now (then) best captured in the state of unfreedom that was South Africa before May 1994. Under African Skies is poetry-as-performance written for the live
stage, though it can singularly be related to as poetry, devoid of the theatrical.

The collection scours the continent to distil tales—reaching from the ‘golden age’ of earth-mother worship, marking an epoch resolutely opposed to blood sacrifice, to the period of priest-rulers and divine kings which was also the warrior and empire-building epoch, down to the continental agony of slave trade. The pitfalls of an anti-colonial epoch, down to the continental agony of resolutely opposed to blood sacrifice, to the earth-mother worship, marking an epoch distil tales—reaching from the golden age of

As poetry written for, and actually performed through a tour of 13 cities (twice in London) in the UK in 1991. Under African Skies gives meaning to the widely-held notion that poetry, mostly, aspires to the condition of music/song.

If Under African Skies tells a pannational tale, A Feast of Return concentrates its attention on South Africa as a way of engaging the ravage attendant upon the cradle of humanity, Africa. Here, through the priestess of memory a sort of chorus links the visions of commoner and king, warrior and housewife, priest and supplicant. Although written before the historic dawn of May 1994, and ending therefore with the refrain, "when shall we arrive?", "when shall we breast the warmth/of homecoming", it is clear that "the one song of many voices/thrusting from the earth’s marrow/to the farthest star" which the sojourner yearned for came to be lustily sung at last. One poem that distinguishes A Feast from the regular run of verses on South Africa is “Apartheid: Mother and Child.” In it, an African mother’s love courageously nurtures a ‘mixed’ child, not the product of sexual assault, against the outrage of both the chieftains of color bar and comrades who “sneered at my daughter as if to say/go throw that blighter into the gorge/... or how dare you/flaunt that bastard like a prize.”

With London Letter, Ofeimun principally interrogates the fortunes of people and the cities they inhabit, at different turns and through the eyes of an exile. Though, "free from the swarm and crush of Lagos/the sweated journey turned to a basco/fiercer than the wars of democracy", he nevertheless sees Lagos everywhere, none the least in “fellow countrymen interpreting Jim Crow/saving London from London’s filth, sick city falling/artlessly beggaring my city by the lagoon" (Lagos). No surprise that the refrain, a self-inflected irony, is that of a popular highlife tune which sealed in the public mind the notion of Lagos as the city of “so so enjoyment.” It therefore went in similar logic that London had to be “so so enjoyment” as well. The thanks for how this wasn’t the case goes mostly to Dame Thatcher; and even at its (London’s) low, Ofeimun’s countrymen “knowing that the pound yields no stink at dusk/after the sweat of day returns to the Thames” still seek their dreams there. T.S. Eliot once referred to London as ‘unreal city’, and while observing crowds flowing over the London Bridge remarked on how he ‘had not thought that death had undone so many.’ London or Lagos, Ofeimun in London Letter seems to be saying: “I had not thought that life had undone/can undo so many!”

Just before the title poem is a short lyric, incidentally titled “London”, dedicated to Ben Okri. This ‘London’ is a woman encountered at a coffee shop, and its perhaps an attempt to temper the long grim letter immediately following that urged the placement before this of the image of an enchantress, referred to simply as ‘the blonde olukun’. Somehow, by the end of the volume, after the poem to “Eko - my city by the lagoon” or “Tripping Central Bankers at Tinubu Square”; after the self-exorcism over a son’s inability to respond to his father’s “Come home, son” wishes followed by a soul-trying absence at his (the father’s) funeral, and “The Mother of All Mischief”; the last poem which speaks of the amorality of all sides during the 1995/96 American/Iraqi Gulf War; the imagery that persists in the mind is that of a wrench, London. Or how does one relate to the lines where Ofeimun is “gulping every Renoir/that memory could grant as recompense”, or where he lets “metaphors drop their clothes/to free the pure lust (?)/that teased/the roof of my mouth with dryland”?

While realizing his poetry in the oral performative mode energizing Under African Skies/A Feast, Ofeimun seems to have found the oral form irresistible even when his subject nudges toward a different mode; hence, a repetitive mannerism and rhetorical flourish exerts considerable toll on a good number of the poems. This is more evident in London Letter. For instance, while the stylistic device of beginning the next stanza
The Likeness of An Incomplete Masterpiece

BY ADEREMI RAJI-OYELADE'

Memory is all: touchstone, threat and guiding star.

FIVE years after his death, the great American author comes alive, assuredly and textually immortalized in the publication of a second full-length novel entitled Juneteenth. "Always in progress, Ellison's work may now find pause, not cessation but pause...", so concludes John F. Callahan, Ellison's literary editor, in his incisive introduction to the author's long-awaited narrative, a work which has been in constant and peculiar progression over four decades until its appearance in the summer of 1999. The expressed notion of pause rather than cessation is a subtle admission of the phoenix-like creative energies generated in the 'completion' of the text.

The story of the dynamic and inerasable life of Ellison's Juneteenth has taken on the saga of myth. It is perhaps the most celebrated work-in-progress in American literature that would span over four decades; it is the only work of fiction by a major writer of the twentieth century that would be literally resuscitated or wrested from the fangs of fire which consumed over 360 pages of the original manuscript; and it would remain for a long time to come a ready material for literary controversy, an uncompleted narrative rehabilitated and presented in part as an organic and completed novel by the author's literary executor.

Ellison started writing the post-Invisible Man text in 1954 and had almost completed the narrative when on November 29, 1967, his residence got burnt and with it a section of the manuscript. Between 1967 and 1977, Ellison presented excerpts from the manuscript for publication in literary journals and magazines; these excerpts and part of the original manuscript dating back to 1960 (eight in all) were featured in The New Yorker, The Noble Savage, and The Quarterly Review of Literature. And for twenty-seven years after the mysterious fire incident, Ellison continued to re-imagine, re-conceive, and re-write his script such that by March 1994 he had produced over two thousand pages of typescripts, part of which is now known as Juneteenth, the second novel, if not the sequel to the author's narratological commitment to the history, memory and dream of the black person in American life. A prolonged and postponed composition. Juneteenth is the re-creation of a novelist with the soul of a musician, a writer who played the trumpet early, studied classical music, worked as a freelance photographer and became a virtuoso of jazz and the blues tradition.

The novel revolves around Reverend Alonzo "Daddy" Hickman, a Southern black Baptist minister, and Bliss, his formerly beloved spiritual child who would leave him to settle in Washington and live another life as Senator Adam Sunraider. Bliss, a white boy, was raised by the minister in a predominantly black community and church, and on the values of black cultural heritage in the hope of making him an ambassador of blackness. Sustained from the interrogative and dialogic connections of these two characters, the central story of