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THE MODERNIST AND THE MAGICAL: A POETIC DIALOGUE WITH TARES OBURUMU[1]

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Modernist is perhaps the one word that comes closest to capturing the spirit of Tares Oburumu and his poetry, but even that is insufficient. His work is also magical and metaphysical, embracing the obscure and the abstract. Across his collections, from *A Breath of Me* (2014) to *someday i will be the shape of my story* (2022) and *Origins of the Syma Species* (2024), Tares has developed a poetics that privileges silence, disappearance, and intimation over spectacle and clarity. If readers can imagine my absence from this dialogue, what unfolds might be read as an autobiographical excavation rendered through poetic reflection. He does not hold back. He journeys, unflinchingly, into his past, his poetics, and the private textures of loss, longing, and becoming. His poetry, he reveals, is deeply immersed in both personal memory and a wide-ranging engagement with literary and philosophical traditions. It is shaped by grief and restlessness, by a yearning to articulate that which exceeds articulation. Our exchange maps the evolution of his craft; from the short, highly abstract lines of his early work to the more extended, episodic, and autobiographically resonant poems of recent years. What is also revealed here is how deeply critical of what he perceives as the dilution of poetic seriousness in contemporary literary culture. He speaks of a "flush of poetry" in circulation, verses he considers unworthy of the craft's deeper demands. For him, poetry is not performance, not a chase after trend or acclaim. It is a sacred act. He insists on poetry as a rigorous engagement with the unknown, an act of faith, resistance, and refusal. This dialogue, conducted online over several weeks in 2025, offers a rare window into the defiant portrait and poetics of Tares Oburumu.

Tares Oburumu is a poet, essayist and playwright from Warri, Delta State in Nigeria. He graduated from the University of Benin. He's the 2022 winner of the Sillerman Prize for African Poetry with his book Origins of the Syma Species. A two-time Pushcart Prize nominee, and the winner of the GAP Poetry Prize. He has published seven chapbooks of poetry. A poetry mentor to over a thousand young Nigerian poets. His works have appeared in Connotation Press, Poetry Foundation, Icefloes International Journal, Eunoia Review, ilora press, Loch Raven Review, Lunaris Review, Dawn Review, Bluepepper, Okiti Literary Journal, African Writer Magazine, Kalahari Review, Konya Shamsrumi, Juked International Journal, The Agonist, Ngiga Review, Agbowo, NigeriaNewsDirect Poetry Column, Mersey Review, Arts Lounge Journal, The Muse, Sentinel Magazine,

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Tolulope: In 2022, you won the prominent Sillerman Prize for African Poets with *Origins of the Syma Species* (2024). I read somewhere that this marked your entry into the poetry landscape, a notion I disagree with, given your earlier works. From *A Breath of Me* (2014) to *someday i will be the shape of my story* (2022), your poetry has remained consistent in its truth and depth. What inspired your creative journey? How has your voice evolved over the years, and in what ways has winning the Sillerman Prize influenced your trajectory?

Tares: My mother. I do not know any form of inspiration other than my mother. It was hard to be the third child of a family with two mothers and a father. Hard to be the reason my mother dropped out of school. Hard to know her uncle, her sponsor, an almoner of a sound reputation, couldn't find the connection between determination, resilience, and the principles guiding failure. He gave up on her, having held on to the promise of seeing her through school for so long, truncated chiefly by her unintentional yet juvenile desire, not so base, to stay in love and be loved by a man who was an undergraduate of a prestigious university. Everything Tares moves like the earth around that story; of a mother who would rather raise her kids in a turbulent village and not leave them entirely in the hands of her four brothers who barely survived. In the absence of a father, who died lugging timber from the creeks to the towns to earn some tender Naira, they, too, were thrown into the hard times which marked such remote places, as severe as the banks of River Forcados. Nothing suggested affluence, nothing meant hope save farming religiously acted on, with the belief that in making it professional, being fishermen will be easy. I learned to build my world, piece by piece, with what laid before me, the water around me, and what I was given: hoes, cutlasses and paddles. With my mother, hoisted in the center of the survival manual, the transition from an infant to the adolescent I became, was, for the most beautiful part of my existence, made a little difficult, quite different from the children living on the marshes, a little easier than the life of those with single parents, and those with none, even though my mother's foothold was as noxious as that of a single parent.

The life I was given was my mother's. She was breath, flesh, blood, and nature prepossessing in the way the rivers run, the flowers glow, the birds fly, the sky paints the sea blue, the animals live according to the order of the universe, in the way a man looks at another and says "love is all there's to advance the course humanity should take." The comfort of my mother is everything I needed in my pursuit of happiness, certainly ennobled in a poet, a matter of pride. With her came that urgency to read, and in reading, opening one book after another, endlessly, I found myself tethered to a world of books. All I wanted was to stand in, undoubtedly, for my mother where she could neither read nor write, consciously putting her in my dreams, that whatever I become, she becomes. She has become the poet I am.

Moreover, I carried a certain hope which threads through the places I have been, ado about my voice, to which I pay much attention, the best gift a writer should ask for. We do not sound the way we did when we were much younger, so it is with the one who writes. Book after book, read, the change comes. Sometimes, it is more appealing to the distance you have covered, shouting in a crowd that is too loud. You must be heard in the din, and your voice should be heard a little above the other voices in you, acquired by dint of exposure. A voice recognized by the other voices which belong to the avant-garde, powers itself, turns on its volume, becomes intentional. The Sillerman Prize, first, cut off the hubristic feelings I had, then charged me with a brassiness I didn't know, filled me with the dreams I thought weren't possible, the forte, a newfound joy, to get things done. Suddenly, I grew more mature in my approach to events, people and states of being. My sensibilities improved and became boundless. I reasoned; if my life could stretch this far, I could go farther than I thought I could. One Saturday morning, I sat, broody, before the window of my rented apartment and I saw for the first time the meaning of the boy I was, holed up in my father's small bookshelf, turning the pages of *Gulliver's Travels.* I realized that by writing a book, I can go to places out of reach.

Tolulope: That's very endearing and insightful**.** Let's discuss the trajectory of your voice. There seems to be a radical shift between the tone of *A Breath of Me*, which leans towards extreme modernist abstraction and the more grounded and conscientious tone in *someday i will be the shape of my story* and *Origins of Syma Species.* What informs your poetics? How would you define your poetic philosophy and intent?

Tares: Hopkins*'* disease is one of the best things that happened to my poetry; challengingly provocative all at once, as much as it is inaccessible, aesthetic yet obscure.

I spent more years reading Christopher Okigbo than I did the other poets guilty of such obscurantism. Enmeshed in E.E Cummings, Gerald Hopkins and T.S Eliot, there was no room for what I do not believe to be poetry. Each of these men, contributed in no small way, to the ideas I hold against what now pass for poetry, most of which read like a novel of six to less than fifty sentences. Poetry, even when it's written in prose, shouldn't be made to run out of its course. Interestedly, it's a kind of yodeling, a conscious experience achieved through the dig into uncharted depths, highly impersonal, allowing the nexus between poet and the audience, some level of either an agreeable or disagreeable understanding. Its wrought language, often in separate bends, becomes the body within which every part moves.

I wrote *A Breath of Me,* disposed to the stylist that was Hopkins, Okigbo in the foreground. It came off an absolute abstraction, an unconscious effort to bring the aestheticians to the fore. However, the influence stirred up the greater faith I had in the modernists and their quest for what is simple, beautiful, nonetheless controversial. In the *labyrinths,* Okigbo was supernatural in each of the lines he delivered, keen on his roots, dug solidly in the beauty and philosophy of the Igbo. The emergence of the new voices, confessional, sing on with a sense of life's precarity. Hardly, one lives through a chain of poems a day without being grievous. So much banality marking a generation that ought to have the next clamor for the originality that lies ahead. I couldn't keep up with the pace the book set. More confessional glamour poured in from the emergence and convergence of the world literary order and it left me with a slim chance of being heard. My voice changed. In the years that followed after my first chapbook was published, a noticeable effect assumed importance, moving a part of my assertive beginning to the background.

When I sat down to write *someday I will be the shape of my story,* the need not to be misunderstood in disputable meanings became clear to me. Interestedly, Syma, situated on the bank of the River Forcados, in my formative years, was, as I often see it, a kind of natural library where I read not just books but the tall palm trees, the brown river, the birds, the life of the fishermen, the fishes, reptiles, and the cloudy sky above them. It daily opened its world like the pages of a good book to me and daily I found myself obsessed with it. I have always believed in its obscure nature, that someday I will write about it, the life it gave me. I kept that dream alive in *Origins of the Syma Species.*

Tolulope: Several of your contemporaries regard and praise the distinctive aesthetics of your work. However, your dense imagery, layered allusions, and fragmented forms

suggest a level of rigor that may challenge readers. Having gone through your collection, I recall referring to you as a reincarnation of Pound. Is the texture of your poems intentional, or does it emerge unconsciously? And how do you perceive the critical reception and accessibility of your work, and do you find it necessary to challenge readers this way?

Tares: Though I fought hard to excuse the influence Hopkins had on me, unarguably, it was difficult for me to completely shed him. Breaking away from the language I have known to what I should know, to keep up with the modernists, became for me a necessary change. But in a peculiar sense, I was aware of present judgement and taste, and my inability to change. Most times, I sit for hours, fixing a poem by simplifying the language, readjusting syntax, ideas, and meaning, intent on the reader, the kind that wouldn't want to suffer his mental strength, or subject his sensibilities to excess rigor. It surprises me that, after a whole lot of principles are applied to help the reader in the understanding of the work, the text remained opaque. Subsequently, I decided against this conscious experiment, and gave the unconscious the freedom it deserved. If I did write with the sole aim to be accessible, most of what I write would be unoriginal. Although I do not wish the readers to wallow in such rigor, I am yet to find a way around how the modernist perceive simplicity. In my writing, I seldom thought of the readers. I just sit down and write. I have come to terms with the interpretations. And I believe with each interpretation, I will be looking at my work from a thousand perspectives, all becoming revelations.

Tolulope: Talking about experimentation, the poems in *someday i will be the shape of my story* are written entirely in lowercase, including the title of the chapbook and even your name. Also, the cover is stripped of images or illustrations, presenting only the title and your name, which creates a minimalistic aesthetic. Does this reflect a deliberate effort to deconstruct conventional hierarchies?

Tares: Conventionality bores me. This notion, tradition perhaps, bland, is not, in my opinion, interesting. Its purpose is to perpetuate the past as evident in the present. Rules stifle growth. It is advisable that we set aside the usual sense of progress and sometimes bring to bear something incredibly distinct. Once, I wrote a long poem, showed a friend, who, unequivocally, dismissed it. Too long, he said, one will think you are writing the biography of an important figure. He opened up a new world for me, and in it, I found the

love I had for minimalism. Conscientiously, I worked on innovations, *juxtapositioning* languages, forms and identity. The penchant for the revolutionary tilt, even in art, to me, should take precedence over already existing forms, language and identity. The conformists run the risk of exhaustion when faced with choices far gone into the untouched territories of an art that now imperils tradition. I have read T.S Eliot's essay on tradition and individual talent, more times than I can remember. The sense of convention, if properly understood, requires some level of radical transposition, harnessing, or the remodeling of the past to give the present a meaning different from both.

As it is with the advancement of humans, so it should be with art, a solemn yet unseemly modification for the purpose for which art exists; the beautification or rejigging of universal intelligence. For most parts, we know, it is geared towards the mental embroideries that encounter it; to excite, provoke, and educate them. There's more to what I believe is novelty. I have dreamed about the movement to include, not just a part but the whole of art in a piece of poem. While we sing and read, what we sing and read should take flesh in dance and dialogue, telling the story, that like a spider in its web, connects and pulls everything to the center, brief and unfamiliar. I see the desire to inspire as a desultory bent. A whole world would come running into you in a flash, then back and forth, repeatedly, with you holding on to the thing which breathes in you. If art is deliberate, its receptivity would be. Overtime, it loses its essence. If my work is deconstructive, it's because I do not intend to be, something deconstructive is in it, a thing I do not know about, I just want to write what I should write. If what I write comes out unconventionally, I owe myself a toast to the opinions I embody, which refuse to be bored.

Tolulope: As we have already highlighted, your poems evoke comparisons to modernist figures like Pound, Eliot, Okigbo, Valéry, Mallarmé particularly for your dense imagery, classical allusions, experimentation, and fragmented stream-of-consciousness style. But in identifying with the modernists, how does it intersect with your contemporary Nigerian reality?

Tares: Transition is phenomenal as it is disruptive. To live each phase of your life successfully, as you transcend the human in you in relation to the whole of it and the different mental states you occupy, requires a kind of sacrifice, self-love. It is impossible to love others without, first, loving yourself in far greater measures, if it can ever be

measured. Ezra Pound, for me, true as he was to his imagistic self, was the force that drove my artistic calling through the infant I was to the adolescent I became, regarding Eliot and the later days of Hopkins in equal love, the expedient feeling, I had, to be grounded in poetry. I dare say, I am a child of Pound, grandchild of Eliot, and I was well fed with the milk of the two giants, who, if they were still alive, would argue but not against that tradition they knew to be sacred. Last year, as the landscape of Nigerian poetry expanded, almost peaked, the various debates against such expansion thickened. I read a few of them, commented on fewer than one. Various platforms, thought patterns, and less innovative points of view now line that landscape, with little or no critical exertion on its development as a form of art. What I see, sadly, is a dominant effect, a preponderance, aggravating factions established along social divides and lines of decade long friendship. The cream of those who now write poetry and are called poets, tread haphazardly on a clout, shallow yet vociferous, in its hold. Depth: the lack of it, suffers the lot that are overtly obsessive.

There's this debate that, ambitious as it seems, tends to reposition the question: how Nigerian is contemporary Nigerian poetry? In every working system, the resultant effect of such arguments becomes the norm, and it makes for adaptation, innovation, and change in the positive direction possible. I often ask, not merely, about the concepts of tradition for comparative purposes. It seems Eliot's tradition isn't universal in its attempt to explain the import of the past, present and future of art, it only, as it appears in the Nigerian context, succeeded in giving that tradition a Western voice. If tradition is seamless and absolute in its bridging of the past, present and future, as Eliot saw it, the question remains unanswered, or unanswerable, what is the nature of such traditions? The young Nigerian poet that doesn't know or who is oblivious to the existence of a Kalu Uka, or Kofi Awoonor, on what tradition can he build his poetry? Or is the Western tradition all he needs to know, to build from? I see the trajectory; in years to come, the African poet will fizzle out, and the works of J.P Clark will be forgotten. Can we say this about John Milton? Eliot's tradition is seamless. Ours is a chain of norms, ethics and values, ruptured. How about the effects of the tribes and their ripped traditions? Colonialism, with its flaws, further made what originally wasn't English, English.

In support of this, another argument about emergence and convergence arose. It's laughable, quite impossible, now, to detail the nuances of African poetry without excluding its Africanness. Out of the thousand poets writing poetry, only a handful comes from this part of the world. More accessible are the poets not from this side of the planet,

which further corroborate the influence and its effect. I am a child born of a colonial union, what else do you expect of my poetry if it is not a potpourri of traditions, or the absence of one? If a young Nigerian picks up pieces of my poetry, he will be reading more than I can write. It appeals more to global audience than the Nigerian readers, and sadly, the Nigerian reader has attained a higher level of globalization than its precursors. Here is where you will find the intersection.

Tolulope: "first glory – a shape of music" is rooted in disembodiment and dislocation, transitioning from the garden ". . . set ablaze / by its own flowers," to the "questions going up in flames" and the ". . . amphitheater burning, / the only door open wild open in a closed country." Many of your poems evoke an undercurrent of mourning, reminiscent of the elegiac quality found in modernist poetry. In "A Carol Upon the Drowning Pied Piers," for instance, you write:

> The world is at war with butterflies, Breathing upon endless drums to silence
>
> funeral songs
>
> Lasts of the harmonies. Lasts of the choir at the endgates
>
> Singing of rain.

How does mourning shape your poetics, and what does it reveal about your worldview?

Tares: I knew loss, quite early. Recounting the stories makes me sadder than the events that followed. At seven years of age, I experienced my younger brother die close to me, in bed. We were helpless. Acting primarily on some tender instincts, we took hold of him, shook him till we were exhausted. He was buried, rather wrapped in a mat and lowered into a grave less than six feet.

I could see them in the eyes of my mother whenever I stared in her face. I was ten, maybe eleven when another died, then another in two successive years. And we almost lost the last child of the family to the same ailment that plagued the others. He carries a burnt mark, spread on his face. A reminder that we were lucky enough to have saved him. It wasn't just disease, intertribal wars, which caused some monumental loss that largely determined the survival of one in the brutal riverine areas. The sound of guns became for us a thing of imitation as we staged it on our playgrounds. I died inside, the day they shot my mother on her left foot, my grandmother couldn't restrain herself from the several attempts she made on death. Those are days I can't forget, and they live in me, I carry the experience as one wears a necklace. It's not surprising that it appears in my poetry, the

death, not only of my brothers but of those who died fighting to save the land they depended on for sustenance. The tribes scattered along the banks of the River Niger fight oil wars, just to claim ownership of the land on which the crude is extracted, to share the bounty that comes with it, doled out by the multi-national oil companies, operating without a blueprint to develop the areas. Consequently, the debris and the emitted gases damage not only the environment but the people of the area, who lack everything of great value: basic social amenities. And I am one of them.

Death, the seemingly irreversible meaning of life, tends to be meaningful only in being relative. And what's death without the additives? When I write about the death of my brothers, I am writing about those who died in the pogroms ravaging Northern Nigeria, the victims of kidnapping, the hunger crisis and the children who die from it, the cases of police brutality. I see in the eyes of each distant dead, or catastrophe the love I had for my brothers. Life is beautiful because it is transitory, perfect because it is whole. Its complementariness suggests a subsumable understanding. Grief and elation are one and the same thing, and by becoming opposites, therein lies the positive presence. What is the meaning of the unshed tears in my eyes, if I wasn't made to cry? What sustains my eyes, vision? Or what replenishes the earth if not death? Isn't death a form of maintenance? It's almost impossible not to be given to grief as a poet with such experiences, born and raised in the brutal riverine area.

Tolulope: That is quite colossal. I am so sorry for your losses, and your grace in holding it all together is commendable, especially in its collective gesture. In the fragmented stream of consciousness that defines your poetry, there is often a recurring chain of expressions or ideas, something akin to gradatio or anadiplosis. This technique not only connects thoughts seamlessly but also delivers both clarity and a sense of climax. This is particularly evident in the titles, which often function as fragmented but also interconnected narratives themselves, and within the lines of the poems. Could you elaborate on how this structural and stylistic choice serves your poetics? How do you see the interaction between fragmentation, minimalism, and cohesion in shaping the reader's experience of your work?

Tares: I do not so much like the idea of journaling my poetry. Every single poem means so much to me, and I love seeing them in one place, expressing the same idea, limitlessly, in hundred ways. The book-form appeals more to me. Bliss is when I read a body of poems in a collection, woven, aesthetically around a single theme. Being minimal is an

assertion that life is short, held together in place by fragments of relief and anguish. Fragmentation, evidently, espouses cohesion, and that espousal is something I aim to name in my poetry. If I succeed in naming it, the extent to which the naming will chaff off the conventionalities will be far greater than my earliest dream of making poetry a revolutionary art. Certainly the innovation, as I believe, is not likely to be adopted. Not likely, because the creative genius of the times appears to be excessively conventional. Art is perfect just as I believe life is, made possible by its fragmentation, each part is united in a way that eases co-existence. The unusual or usual, objection is gleaned from the subservient parts. On one hand is the lower structure, on the other are the enormities of the unknown and the known. We refuse to see that life itself is the sum of the good and the villainous. Disjointed as it seems, it is plausibly coherent in that disconnection. I take every form, possibly, to be useful. From that vantage point, I was able to polarize more forms of poetry and arrive at *someday I will be the shape of my story.* It became a shared experience achieved through interconnectedness which exists on a certain level of appreciation, otherwise, of course, exhilarating, in bringing the reader face to face with his own sensibilities improved upon by what underscores his outlook.

I traced my mother's history, made luminous in mine, by accentuating the leaps and bounds, performing what needed to be connected to the vagaries that mark the life of every man, every woman. That life is the needle, my poetry is the thread I pass through the eye of the needle, the universe which lay before me, in its vastness, endless, is the machine, producing that fabric, the indispensable whole. I needed to tell my readers that they, too, are made of parts, and each piece of them bonds miraculously to achieve the personalities they have become. Nothing, as I have seen, lives in isolation. Even in isolation, you have yourself. And the self is composed of the impetuosity of your thoughts and the elements of wind, water, fire and the earth. They are companies. Like the novel and its seamlessness in the simple narration of events, all I wish for is to break the ideas into compact whole and connect the parts to a single thematic preoccupation. A poem, also, breaks and continues, sometimes moves out of the box it's in and comes back to itself, never loose, always compact. I expect no greater responsibility from my readers than to see the truth about being parts to a whole themselves, perfect, veritable creators who have the knowledge to own the whole, become it, and have control of its parts., which is the essence of minimalism.

Tolulope: Water bodies and specific locations like Finima, Bomadi, Lagos, and Luxor are recurrent in your work. How do places influence your poetics, particularly in navigating questions of cultural identity, personal belonging, and in the depiction of the Niger Delta? How does your Niger Delta background add a socio-political undertone to your poetry?

Tares: The greater part of my formative years was lived in the marshes, islands and the creeks. Frequently, I go to the sea, not only as a fisherman but a trader and an explorer. I drank from the river while on a boat, eased myself in the same river, either in transit or as a form of livelihood. Together with my siblings, my mother being the breadwinner at the time, we cross rivers to farmland. As a child, to bathe, I swim to keep clean the body that knows more dirt than any kid should. Paddling miles to get to the other nearby villages to trade on fish, pepper, salt, clams among other sea foods, was one thing I loved as a child, and my mother would take me with her. We usually spend days rowing. Sometimes, I imagine what life would have been for us if the river didn't hold such great wealth and promise. At the backdrop of where I come from, there's the forest but it didn't hold as much as the river, which we depended solely in washing the dishes after meal, the clothes when they are dirty, drink from by fetching from it when we are thirsty, and because we do not know what is a motorable road, we travel on it, sometimes to merely visit a neighbor. We use the river as the only means of transportation.

So, you can see that we live for the river as much as it lives for us. The places are connected by water, and this connection is made possible by the body of water which provides us with everything we need. Leaving the place of my birth where I spent half of the years I grew up as an adolescent, I carried that culture, that identity with me, to all the places I have been. To write about anything, is to write about where I come from. It is what makes an artist, being socially and politically aware of where you come from, and by it, every other thing is well-defined in relation to the world and the body of water I live in. Me and the Niger-Delta are inseparable, just like fish and water. It is only understandable that my poetry breathes because I am from a distinct place and the distinctiveness should be the reason I am who I am.

Tolulope: Home, identity and belonging are some of the most important concerns of this generation of creatives, and reasonably so, and these are central to your work as well. In "glory to lagos," we encounter home as ". . . where they break bread & pour wine/ enough/

to keep holy the biographies we live . . .” Could you elaborate on your perception of home, belonging and identity.

Tares: A line from one of James Wright’s poems will suffice, “A chicken hawk floats over, looking for home. I have wasted my life.” We have been made to believe in movement, the constant flux of not just people, but of every other thing. The race against place and time as a form of escape from what is known to what is not known, or from what seems to be in the unknown to what’s known. They look out for what heaven is. No doubt, the idea of home is watered down to permanence, never temporary, even though it appears so, the meaning of identity too, with culture standing in-between, obviously prehensile, holding on to, never letting go of both. Truth is, we are constantly moving, carrying the parts of us that are important to us, that melting and adapting, adopting, seeking for the grandeur, always at par with it. A solid shift is always there, the need to change while being grounded in the primary states which are the origin of being, the places of birth, the people and their culture, that existential question we pursue, most intelligently. Whatever the existential programming is, at the end of the day, we come face to face with the puzzle, who am I, which undoubtedly assails our sensibilities more than it confounds us.

Even in the wake of the new world, the patterns of movement do not change. Migration or not, it’s still movement, just as the discoveries made by Christopher Columbus, colonialism, and the simple narration that we are more connected now than before with the advent of the different levels of technology. Now, we can fly and sail, drive or ride, hazardously or legitimately. We know about the Mediterranean Sea, the stories of migrants. We know about the poverty of black Africa, political insecurity and the forces controlling the states, the movement from regions of perpetual danger, not sure if by moving, we are solving an existential problem. Contemporarily, the movement is what underscores the new generation of writers, both of Africa and the Middle East, especially. It is by this outflow we become more aware of home and identity than we were. If I was writing in the medieval era as a Nigerian and a poet, from this part of the world, what would I write about, war, emigrants, poverty, my black skin or summer?

I have long moved from who I was, to who I presently am, yet I do not know who I really am, but I carry in me, not just how I came to be, where I was born, the things I am made of by the history and philosophy of living and the relative experience in the interconnectedness of the human race. In moving, everything I have seen, touched,

smelled, felt and tasted, have become parts of who I am in relation to the other, to the whole, becomes home and identity. If I am looking for home and identity outside myself, to exclude certain aspects, or things, my relation to others and what I carry, what I have come in contact within the course of movement, like James Wright, I have wasted my life.

Tolulope: Certainly, we are always in a flux, of mind and body, and it is not unusually accompanied by dislocation. Your poems are heavily punctuated by ellipses, spaces, and unconventional syntax that suggest silence, absence, and fragmentation. They evoke tensions between displacement and situatedness, particularly of loss and memory; however, on the other hand, the repetitions and climatic anadiplosis emphasize situatedness thereby creating a tension, between home and displacement, past and present, integration and disembodiment, love as both transformative and consuming, presence and absence. How do these formal choices enhance the depth and preoccupations of your work?

Tares: As an introvert, given to solitude, the desire I inhabit, to pull to the self and make centrifugal the other selves that are separate, is something I have struggled with for years, not until 2013. There is always an emptiness yawning, and in the gap, there's an overt silence the distance between the staidness of voice and the need for a meaningful locution. An expression that's life in itself. Sometimes, I stretch myself farther than the reach, in the attempt to engage the mystic I have become. It's intuitive, the power to subject the will to not conform, the otherness staring at you from the void. We are comfortable with order, I am not. It's this disorderliness which we cry wolf about I am inclined to. Because I see beauty where it doesn't exist. I still remember, in 2013, an event that almost threw me into the abyss we call death. I was surrounded by people I had not seen, the motorcycle in total disrepair. While I was unconscious, bloodied, I could hear the stories they tell. They were all pointers to life's saving grace, the benevolence of the creator they serve, the miracle there's. My attention was acute, with wide open ears listening to the woman who kept saying it was what was meant to be, it was not an accident but a springbok to something I would later be thankful for. This isn't the destiny we know. For destiny is the sum of the leaps and bounds you consciously bring under your control. That story stayed with me till this day. A story of beauty in disaster. Storms were no longer storms to me, after I heard that story, they became for me, the beauty I seek, which was made ugly so it could be elegant. The time it took me to get to that realization marked with elation,

brokenness, pain, near-death situations, defined the spaces, the long wait for hope to be a thing with feathers, the absence of people and things, the parts of you that cannot be made whole, the elliptical tendencies of movement, the displacement inherent in surviving the grotesque limitations, the love and the betrayal they incur, the familial, the long walk from darkness to light, all these represent a buoy.

My poetry, if you look at it closely, is the perfection we seek, which we have not, or have failed to positively ascribe to imperfection. Simply, the world is a perfect place because it is imperfect, so is my poetry meaningful only in its brokenness, the displacement it employs, the disaster it is, the unity of fragments achieved in the whole, and the task I have given it, to go deep into the void and extract from the unknown what we ordinarily wouldn't dare. If you place it within the ridges of experiment, it will be difficult to step on, to understand, and the purpose for which you exist. To answer the question of being, I turned to writing and I have found a way to make meaning of the world by learning how to stand at a distance, away from everything I was taught. My life and my poetry are the depth I have reached in a world of antagonism. The naming of it is mine to do and I am doing well with what I have found beautiful in ways that are ugly, influenced by the vicissitudes of the whole, which, to me, is the height of alienation. I cannot be free, if I am not in chains, which are spaces I move into, occupy, leaving pockets of emptiness, the absence of people, light and darkness, the distance between silences, between one hope and the other, the places I wouldn't have been, those I have been which I ordinarily wouldn't have been, the choice to be in love against the backdrop of falling out of it, the friends I should have had, those I shouldn't have had, the family I was born into, in constant struggle with a non-consent existence, war, famine, poverty, the reason to be politicized, the why's not to, the power of nature in annihilating a city, the meaning of hunger, that inordinate sense of acquisition, the spaces between us, between all of life. Look at these, clearly you will see the reason for the question you asked.

Tolulope: The dense imageries evoked in your poetry are surreal and cinematic, like "a falcon lifting a ripe olive" and "rainwater, drunk with nightfall." How do you evoke your imageries to enhance and navigate the emotional depths of your poems?

Tares: Depth fascinates me, not just in its obscure form, but in its subjective leanings, not easily perceptible. It's various, a polychromatic understanding of the world within and around you, that it's replete with interpretations, spices life, debunking the single story, or the single storytelling. However, it stretches your mental elasticity beyond the

limits within which you find your potentiality, imbues you with the courage to accept the universe in its diversity. I am averse to what they call prose-poems. A sham mix of goldbricking, in a bid to assuage the modern readers concerned about the plain surface of things rather the depth that's their lives. And depth is the thin line between poetry and the other genres; imagery is the breath. And imagery being the breath should enable sacredness, be the surrealistic point where imagination and the written word meet. Writing a piece of poem, for me, is a generative task, fructuous. Each line is made locomotive by the simple act of the application of the metaphor in its stark form, using the senses concretely. I do not write down a word or a line of poem as a negation to spontaneity but as a pattern of thought edited long before it appears in ink. My mind does a lot of movement, back and forth, taking notes, paying attention to the details integral to the themes, or the theme I am working on. Though impetuous as it is, it is beneficial to both structure and form functioning within a boundless realm, where I can pick as many concepts, or points of views as possible and subject all of them to concretion. And because I see emotions are physical things, I write to touch, feel, smell, hear, and taste what I write. If my imageries are dense this way, it's deliberate because I love suffusing my lines with more meaning than one; it's my responsibility as an artist to make deep and broad the endless world I live in.

Tolulope: "glory to lagos," resonates well with Martins Nduibisi's "The Harmony of Lost Things," is an ode to Lagos: to the rush, the uncertainty, the disillusion and the isolation it embodies. conveys both admiration for the city's vibrancy and a subtle critique of its overwhelming nature: ". . . here, / holy is the man who survives his own body." We are let into the fragmented self of the poetic persona and others (things, thoughts and people) he engages, and the further disintegration he experiences against the bustling city.

Tares: Before I knew what kinship was, what was familial, I knew that a disconnect is possible even at the most congenial level. The stories I hear about brothers who never return home in person but in coffins as corpses, and those who never return either as corpses or as people aggravated my concept or my faith in home as a permanent place. I was young when an uncle of mine left for Lagos. He doesn't come home for Christmas, or visits, or attends the funeral of a loved one, a member of family, as we always want to do. Till this day, he's still in Lagos. There's a chasm between him and every other member of the family. Whenever I think of him, I see clearly the ellipses in my poetry, the silence, the absence, the piece of the man made of fragments I have become. My uncle being a

fragment of a larger family, of me, lost in the labyrinths of a city bustling with that cosmopolitan cathexis, made me see the city for what it is; a no man's land, where one can be interred properly without the exorbitant demands of kinship. There's a certain solitariness in the poem drawn to such keenness I admire; the isolation it embodies in the wake of a disintegrating member of my family, yet its vibrant state, the uncertainty is not lost on me. I only lived a few days fishing somewhere close to the lagoon, I hear the rave, saw the chaos of the movement of the yellow buses, and I noticed the disillusionment from afar, that even when I left the lagoon, I didn't feel a separation but a presence. Each of us is a piece of the other. This, aptly, defines humans, to which I belong and to everything else, which makes me human. You can see the resonation it struck with Martins Ndubuisi's "The Harmony of the Lost Things, "something I didn't know existed, I have never read. We are (animate and inanimate things) all connected in so many ways, but I think that the imagination is stronger, as evident in my poetry, as it is with the origin of things.

Tolulope: Music as a recurring motif in your poetry, symbolizes harmony and resilience, bridges personal experiences and universal struggles—through rhythm, word choice, and references to "jazz," "lyre," "G chord," "sinfonietta," "notes ferried in a boat to syma," "voice-box," "treble clef" and more. What role does music play in your creative process and thematic explorations?

Tares: I wanted to study music at the University. Many things played out their own parts, mysteriously, in making sure I landed in philosophy. Later, I found out that even in philosophy, there's music, the didactics. Or the dialectical sense of it, by which music is made beautiful. Subject to excitation, the meditative proclivity, and universal highbrowism, it is as well highly therapeutic. My father owned a gramophone, this meant I was exposed to music much earlier than I imagined, being an expensive piece of sound player, not many could afford at the time. I remember buying a lot of cassettes with the pocket money I was given for lunch at school. Except for some excitable reason, it didn't make any difference hearing just the beats. I was enraptured. I grew up with the feeling. And now it's my life buoy just as my poetry. The intersection, I believe, permeates the literary world. I am yet to see a good writer that has no element of music in what he does.

Tolulope: The structure of your poems is experimental, lengthy, and unconventional. While many of your poems are fragmented, "first jazz – sasha like a flower in a field

which grows as wild as the universe" takes experimentation further with its incorporation of silence and repetition, ellipsis and spacing, while still being concise. Also, the often-lengthy titles, even longer in "first dream – my father who plays a harp & thinks about living on an island - another word for paradise," is divided into segments of pedals. Do you aim for these to mirror the chaos of the preoccupation the poems express, or are there more intents or aesthetics to these unusual forms?

Tares: I write, sometimes, with a revolutionary tilt, to cause forms and structures that do not exist, or are not known. In *Someday I will be the Shape of my Story,* the artistic bent was clear with a deliberate stand. I experimented though not experimentation in the sense of it. It was an appeal to innovation. I have read a lot of boring poetry stuck on conventional approaches, to the point I was agitating, innately, for something different, something sublime yet engaging to the poet I had longed to become, an iconoclast, anti-bohemian yet less bohemian in an island of my own. I am surrounded by a unity of objectives, not chaotic preoccupations. It was about the aesthetics in forms and structures unusual, just as ingenious. The idiom of the verse is the import of its proneness to diverse structures and forms, not to be tamed. Verse is an open field and should be variously pursued, not corked in a box as we have seen for thousands of years. What is it with the rules? I want to break them into fragments, silence, spaces, ellipses, absence, segments, repetitions yet brief and meaningful. The collection itself is a touchstone, a taste of what to come as against the norm.

Tolulope: War imagery appears frequently in your poetry, such as references to "federal troops" and "inheritance surrounded by waters," as well as allusions to Biafra. How do you use such imagery to reflect on personal and collective identities? What does the inheritance of conflict signify for you?

Tares: The Biafra war ended in 1970 on the 15th day of January; it continued on a larger psychological scale. Sadly, the social effect it has on the fabric of the Nigerian institutions eludes us as a people. Pretentious are the actors at the national level still perpetuating it along tribal divides. I wasn't born into the war, I was born years after the war, but I learned from public discourse the devastations told in stories. One was told by my mother who lived through it, how Biafran soldiers made a mess of a small settlement by the bank of river Forcados while recovering guns that got lost along with the boat that sank. They forced a few of the villagers to search for the lost guns, and when it wasn't fruitful, they

met the most dehumanizing of torture on the local divers. From the stories my mother told me, we were Nigerians placed on the wrong side of the war, yet I see myself as a Biafran, mentally avenging the death of Isaac Adaka Boro, of the Ijaw extraction who died in the hands of the Nigerian military, after he fought valiantly on the Nigerian side to save Port-Harcourt from Biafran onslaught. I was in my teens when another war broke out between the village where I come from and a neighboring town. It was an intertribal war fought based on boundary adjustments and claims of ownership. Though I was too young to be in the battlefield, I witnessed the pogroms. Dead bodies floated on water, the sound of gunfire at night, the refugees from the warring community pouring into the villages nearby, the hunger caused by the desertion of farmlands, the trepidation that united us, and the wounded carried on logs of woods, the blood bathed boats, the experience was real. It was a war we inherited and to make sense of it, to survive it, there was the need for reprisal actions, either emotionally or physically, in some ways. As a young boy, I was fascinated by the arms and ammunition, the shelling of enemy territories, the unity that existed amongst us. How else do you want to make sense of a world ripped apart? When my mother was shot, I felt I should be in the lines at the field of battle to save my people from being killed and wiped out of the surface of the earth. I felt I belonged to a people. I felt the need to stay alive by accepting facts rather than being sentimental. My poetry isn't just about the joggling of what is imagined, it's borne of experience. When I write about babies thrown into the river, I am writing about what I saw. It was an experience that shattered me, seeing tots smashed on wooden boats, then thrown into the river. It happened mostly in the late hours of the morning. I was always at the bank of the river. I was always there to wash the bowls we ate from the days before the mornings. I saw how war united people against the forces that were inimical. I am always intentional when I write about war or grief. I have seen what terror it caused, the disaster that it is, and inside of me, the poetry I have embodied, with no restraint, is a testament.

Tolulope: The tone of "someday i will be the shape of my story" oscillates between melancholy (loss and displacement) and resilience (survival and faith), and the voice, between the first person and third person. What drives this tonal and perspectival variations in your work?

Tares: I am one person on one hand, and another one on the other hand, each is related to the world outside of me. In *Someday I will be the Shape of my Story,* what guided me

wasn't conceived without. It was what I have carried as a poet for long, defining the person I have become in years of drudgery. It was a long journey from who I had always dreamed of becoming to who I was not, a wanderer. Going from place to place, aligning with strangers, sleeping with people I do not know, eating by begging from everyone, anyone, lifting on my young shoulders the burden of survival. I was cut into the size of a small nomad, climbing hills, crossing rivers, and hiking. Most nights, I make a bed under the boughs of some trees, providence making allowance for my continued existence. Severed from my mother, who was particularly concerned about my wellbeing, I couldn't go home. Home was the grave I avoided so I could stay alive. I lived with families I do not belong to. Friends who wanted me dead. I was lonely, hemmed in by a bustling company of people who laugh loudly, deafening the silence I carry inside of me. I slept in a brothel for a year, going in when it was morning, coming out when it was night. I tended to a bout of feverish feelings for days after the laying of bricks. Something I wasn't exposed to. I remember how I arrived at the NYSC camp in Anune, somewhere in Benue State. I had no bag, no clothes from years of wandering, saved my certificates and every other document required for the exercise. At the entrance of the camp, standing in a line of fresh university graduates about to obey the clarion call, perplexed as I was, I was the only one who had no baggage brought to the camp. The camp officials asked me about my luggage, I told them I had none. From the small pockets of the only jeans trousers I owned, I provided all that they needed for my admission. I will never forget the look on one of the faces of the camp officials. He was literally fixated on me, like one cast on a spell of his own, until I became a dot in the crowd. I wasn't cute also, or clean. I was dirty. I carried years of dust on, not only my person, but my appearance. I left Benue State after the compulsory one year in service, got home and began the sojourn. From fishing camps to oil vessels, to burning crude oil into Premium Motor Spirit in local refineries, raided often by the Nigerian Army. Even at the beginning of the nomadic days, I had a mustard seed for faith. Who would read my poetry without listening to how I tell my story? My story is my poetry; the displacement, the illusions, the loss, the resilience, the hope, the absence of life, the presence of a seemingly destiny, the ellipses in every step I take toward where I am headed, resonating with the world.

Tolulope: Metapoetry is a recurring feature in contemporary Nigerian poetry, and your work engages this dimension as a form of survival and resistance. How do you view the

role of poets reflecting on their craft, and how important is it for you to embed this self-awareness in your work?

Tares: We are faced with a dialectical tension cold in its wake, an inbred leaning towards the Nigerianness of most of the poetry we read today. It surfaces, collapses into the uncritical terrains, then resurfaces mainly for the sake of dialogue, nothing more. Neocolonialism, most of us will disagree, following the death of slave trade, is mildly exercising its potent self. I believe the Africans of the colonial era, who sold their own brothers for pieces of mirrors didn't know the consequences of the act until the Europeans took it upon themselves to end it, seeing in the reflections their own sullied, uncivilized faces. Only then the resultant effect was seen in the African American dichotomy, the questions of black America, the catastrophic depletion of the African continent, and the recent upheaval occurring within the body of emigration. The exchange of human resources goes beyond globalization. It is seemingly integral. And incontrovertibly, the expansion of the Nigerian literary landscape is ingrained in the largesse offered by the West. A generosity concretized in MFA programs, funds for literary fellowship projects, prizes and the tentative markets for the literary products. Around 2012, or thereabouts, poetry was a local drive for national consumption. I was part of the cream of Facebook glamour. We wrote poetry for its own sake, the love of it pushed us further into its national life. We were fascinated by the poetry of J.P Clark, Christopher Okigbo, the clean prose of Chinua Achebe; the triumvirate.

When Gbenga Adesina won the International Brunel Prize, the landscape widened, and turning our searchlights to the West, occasioned by that audacious win, we ushered in the age of the journals, and the rise of the Contemporary Nigerian poet. The establishment of the African Poetry Book Fund brought an unprecedented exposure, and it greatly influenced the trajectory; Thousands of Nigerian poets are now exported to America in pursuit of the American dream. The West opened wide its golden gates, paving the way for even the small poet writing from the poverty of his small space, looking at the details on how to navigate the journals which provide the safe landing on American soil. The shift in the structure of the poems we read, the forms and the language marked the beginning of a new era, where to be a successful Nigerian poet is to sound American. The urge to resist the temptation is equal to the urge not to, seeing the poverty of the Nigerian literary space, exacerbated by the Nigerian political and economic impact. Most times, I look critically at my poetry, hoping that I see it through the Nigerian lens,

even though I am certain it sounds American. The arguments for what now pass for contemporary Nigerian poetry fall short of sound critiquing. The self-awareness imperils the freedom inherent in globalization. Until we are ready for the discourse to properly situate Nigerian poetry in the world literary space, we will not be able to make clear distinctions as to what is Nigerian poetry as opposed to what we mean by American poetry. In my own small way, I have been writing a small amount of innovative works to make a little difference which is not enough, looking at the times greatly influencing where I know I am headed, to not deny myself the blessings of the new world.

Tolulope: Beyond the discussed modernist temper, your extensive allusions (ranging from religious texts like *Adeste Fideles* to literary and artistic references like Louise Glück and Van Gogh) place your work in a broader cultural and philosophical dialogue. How do you situate your poetics within this complex intersection of influences?

Tares: The creative self is composed of dimensions. Each joust for expression, aiming at the most striking external part of the things that match. Louise Gluck and Van Gogh among others, harmonize my experience and admiration, just as every other thing I find proportional to my aptitude, the likelihood of butterflies getting stuck on nectar. Painting, like religious texts, gives me goosebumps, improving my penchant for the mystic. The enigma that's Van Gogh remains irresistible in my quest for what plunges me into colors, the depth in which I make meaning of the world around me, the immediacy of perception. Gogh represents the relationship between sight and meaning. Like someone standing before the mirror, the image you see is far deeper than the reach of your eyes, or impulse. When I look into the mirror, I am in the presence of history, the history of being, the philosophy of everything I have come in contact with, the creative culture which I embody. But I am selective in that presence, taking only what belongs to me, what is attracted to me, extending my tentacles beyond the limits. I live centrally well in the limits to stand in the limitlessness of the self, broadening my lines and verses to include everything I am made of, to define what poetry means to me; borderless yet marked with borders. What I write within the enclaves of my imagination resonates with the thousands of others with which I share a common experience.

Tolulope: The imagery of the sea, drowning, and survival recurs in your work, as it does in the poetry of contemporaries like Ernest Ogunyemi, Romeo Oriogun, and they often reflect the psychological and the existential desire for transcendence. Including its

connection to the Niger Delta given your background, what other layers of meaning do these symbols hold for you?

Tares: The sea, for me, is life. An endless historical dialogue between those who depend on it and the many shapes it takes. To understand the sea is to make meaning of life. To understand life, I recourse to the sea. But then, aren't both more incompressible than I am? I am a witness to all that it is, being born in it, shaped by it, and my life is an endless dialogue with it, its past and its present. The sea is in me, I carry it wherever I go. It's home, what cradled me, the affinity is boundless. How else do you want to make meaning of a child and its mother? It's where my umbilical cord will be buried, where everything Tares begins and ends, marked with the subtleties of kinship, a cosmological constant. The imagery of drowning subsists on becoming one with it, anti-death. How else do you want to make meaning of the things that give you life in such mysterious ways. On exploring its vastness around 2008, on a boat to Twon through Arunton, a village less than ten miles away from the Atlantic ocean, on a day when the waves where heaviest, crashing uncontrollably on us, we, myself and three others, sank with it. It held my life for two days without crushing it against the waves. I floated on it for two days, drinking from it, finding flotsams here and there, without food. I found a buoy an hour into the third day, and called out to the fishermen I was lucky to have seen from afar. They came for me, believing I had a mermaid for wife. This belief is popular among my people. A wife from the water translated as spiritual wife, will keep you in it even in the valley of the shadow of death. Years later, I look back at that incidence with an emphatic adulation, mentally worshipping the sea, enduring the epiphany. If I have the chance to be born again, I will ask to be born into the sea; the beauty, the calm and its tempestuous disposition, its blue ambience, the life it holds in place for the dolphins, the turtles, the seals, the hyacinths, the white and blue sky over it, the overwhelming sound of both the breeze and the waves, the beaches, the life abundant. I can't imagine life without the sea, and my poetry would be empty without it. Unlike Romeo and Ernest, I was born in it.

Tolulope: In "first glory – last glory," the final poem in *someday i will be the shape of my story,* there's a melancholic acceptance as the persona reveals: "this is the night we have been living." Amidst the dejection and displacement, do you believe there is a space for hope in your poetics and in the realities surrounding it?

Tares: The ever-expanding Nigerian poetry landscape breeds hope. Within interstices, there exists a dialogue strong enough to bolster the crass sensibilities. I believe contemporary Nigeria (its literary and sociopolitical epochs) is a phase and it will pass. Bad as the politicization of the system is, the resultant effect will be pervasively grand. The last and final poem of the collection, as melancholic as it is, traces the present in such a way that it is both somber and radiant.

Tolulope: Continuing the discussion on hope, which is more foregrounded in "first universe – hope. or what can also signify light in the dark," it remains elusive and difficult to grasp. I also observed an Africanfuturist sensibility, which often is not being conscious of, is present in the poetics of a few contemporary Nigerian poets. The poetic voice expresses, ". . . moving through shafts/ of sunlight, dancing to what is a slow progress from our linear colonialism/ to a colonial llano," highlighting the Africanfuturist concern on reimagining the past, present, and futures. This is also evident in the poems "first future – notebooks & piano lessons" and "first paradise – annie & toyboats." Do you notice any additional intersections between this ideology and your own poetics?

Tares: Where and what can one be hopeful if not in the future? Hope is a thing of the future, not immediate, yet in Lenrie Peters' world, it's not a grain of sand, a line that's an eternal truth. It's a long walk-through pitfall, the imminence of intellectual fray and forthrightness, the little lights scattered about in the dark, the infusions of cultures, the leveraging, the institutional melee, and the dearth of the substructure. Can we hold a conversation about African/Nigerian poetry without the economic and sociopolitical effect it is enmeshed in? This is the reason we hold on to hope. Nearly half of those who tell the Nigerian story, live by hoping. I am one of them. But I am more hopeful for the things that are solely ours, devoid of migratory tendencies. We can be hopeful, at home with being atavistic, looking forward to restructuring the past to better the present, which is the future, rather than availing ourselves of the West. If there are additional intersections, they are not far from my obsession with the re-emergence of a form of trade like what once took place on the Atlantic Ocean. It's human trafficking, and the willingness to embrace the seemingly colonial mentality.

Tolulope: In his remarkable foreword to the *Origins of the Syma Species*, Kwame Dawes notes that your poetics gesture toward making sense of the deluge of global information

and the turbulence of socio-political realities. Would you say your poetry consciously engages with this flood? And if so, how do you navigate this overwhelming excess?

Tares: I have a diary. In it, I write down events, most of the things I read on social media, things I see on TV, things I listen to on the Radio; from the grosteque to the miraculous. I do these everyday, quite therapeutic, discomforting as well. Consciously, I interpret these things in what I write, in my poetry, giving them certain shapes so they could become part of my life. I carry the sorrow, the accompanying pain, a form of resistance to the non-committal forces that pervade a world falling off empathy. It's not a surprise that Kwame Dawes saw that in the *Origins of the Syma Species.*

Tolulope: Reading across your body of work, a noticeable shift occurs between your earlier collections and the *Origins of the Syma Species*. The poems are longer, more diffused, and interestingly, less abstracted. There's also a deeper religiosity, a more episodic structure, and a heightened autobiographical presence. The reader begins to witness emergence and formation more directly, as in poems like "Emerging" and "My Father's Last Hope for Water." What has changed in your poetics (stylistically, spiritually, and philosophically) between those early collections and the most recent one?

Tares: A lot has really changed, occasioned by a clear vision of what it means to the poet Tares Oburumu, enabled by a wide range of poetry. Every day I read poems, fiction, non-fiction written by writers I admire. It was a conscious effort to break free from *A Breath of Me,* my first chapbook which was obviously obscure. I wanted my readers to see less of that in *Origins of the Syma Species.*

Tolulope: Tares, it has been wonderful and enlightening to have this conversation with you, and I sincerely appreciate your person and poetic sensibility. Finally, being well-situated in the poetics of your generation, what would you say are the defining aesthetics of contemporary Nigerian poetry? Are there poets who influence or inspire you, are there aspects of the current poetic output that you take exception to, and what creative endeavors are you currently working on?

Tares: I admire the synthesis, the move to make vast the poetry horizon as evident in the works of the present crop of writers. The diverse forms in which they seek to express poetry. The relative re-imagining of the future as seen in the poetry of Gbenga Adesina, Chisom Okafor, JK Anowe, Gbenga Adeoba and a few others. I am yet to read Adesina's

full length collection. He's the standard by which I often measure the length of my own sensibilities. His poetry bridges the past and the present even as I take exception to the prose poem, spoken word and the overt attempt to shove Nigerian poetry down the throat of the larger population.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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