



TRACERS

Uche Nduka

the shores shake hands  
the shores embrace

she gives birth in a tree  
the flood clamours

on a steel slab  
someone is kneading dough

a ceramist rides a motorbike  
through the floor of the Atlantic

to deflag is to rejoice  
begin the scrolling

soliloquy has come to this  
we're sent to extol  
the sap of love.

tillage forbidden?

reason corrodes  
the plausibility of  
closing in on horned earth.

as bait for transparency  
break a token  
break a token.

go to the bravura profiled  
go to the grotesque espoused.

ululation forbidden?

into a palimpsest isn't where we're sent.  
dust comes bearing truth.

through these gleamings i am  
high and am yet to get drunk  
you too i am a boulevard you too  
no matter what you say this war  
has gone farther than a planetary  
herald this war is knocking a  
hole through my cranium your  
cranium this war has sped  
from Newtonian to Einsteinian  
wahala i fell got redeemed then  
unredeemed i fell got saved then  
unsaved you too you too said all i  
can to feed your fixation on burning  
places on burning flesh on burning flags  
Long live multi-logoed Casbah

is it history  
or is it mystery?  
are they mean  
or just lean?

firm on outpacing  
a chainstep;

not that;

and with as many  
leaves per tree  
as a situational forest;

not that;

old/new prancing seeds  
that wear out a handgrasp,

to push a boat out,basically.

a spider froze the Mic  
the guitar has been drinking  
and typing a blue-collared rhythm  
it made a holler feel fine  
when a song went off-duty  
it wasn't a mirage it wasn't  
a dabble a cop-out an omission  
what rocked a fight who called  
the frogs who mauled a cropper  
a shadow standing alone  
red verdict that is going to wiggle  
a third life a third gripe

danger encroaching

obviously a song raping a gun  
a sleepwalking guitar  
on a cold tin roof—footloose boogie  
the blitz has spoken  
                            purpled dazed

another playground, crucial

appraise my vanity  
mixdown the wattage  
a sixty minute bustle

what have i done  
have i been snotty

audacious in my spatial glory  
in my fight-fixing roll up roll up  
in my catchall call

in my skyblue-in-waiting

another outside that is my inside



not to hide  
from ancients  
and moderns  
a primer called Love

the worried storied  
mouth became graced  
and mated with a tasteful truth

it can squeeze a dry lemon  
and still get drops out of it—  
that hilly variation  
between muck and a soft place

the gut-wracking brainjuice  
flowed spread  
after a blizzard

she sits,leans towards the phone,grabs the receiver  
with her left hand and with the right puts on her nail-polish,  
her nail-paint,blabs to her lover who is on the other end of

the phone,in another city,in another weather.she has just stepped out of her shower.bathroom tiles excused her,a gathering of lights surround her—candles,torches,electric bulbs.as she talks her former self surrounded by vials, syringes,glass smoking pipes is kept at bay.suddenly an infant guineapig catches her eye in one corner of the glowing room.is she Miss Luck or an undercover operative?

upstream a brown canoe  
is faithful  
to a cherub of song.

a frog remembers  
the ringlets  
of a death jettisoned.

i remain appeased  
by unpagged sacrilege.

as if i had a reason  
first i looked at an icicle.  
i held a chubby hour in my hand.

as if i had left a slow street  
and made for a fast alley

where fricatives looped  
and lumbered, thinly lit.

which filigree there was in jeopardy?  
did tulips prepare her for a menace?

because it was a bright brownline  
between twin towers  
i tried to leave the underlife.

what happened first?  
i pawned fantasmagorias.  
tore rancour's coat.

because i couldn't stand still  
after a cloudburst of cupolas  
i tried to become a cleanup man.

whitecliffs,  
the isthmus that links  
your coast

to the pontoon bridge.

turnabouts,  
these goings-on  
in tulipfields.

a nation maced  
on the spine.  
soul in a sling.

is this an endless  
playback of a skirmish?

self-irony feigns dissonance.

leprous homunculus  
barbarous gigolo—  
intermediaries between  
then and now.

join the jugglers  
join the clowns  
power to plump-cheeked wastrels.

the tumult begins  
not in exclamation  
but in notation.

there,  
an after-storm.

you've got  
the hairflip of a soul-soother.

your wounds are seamarks.  
your wounds are frescoes.  
your wounds are marshes.

thinks innuendo must die  
hyperbole chills.



arsonist:

optimize a nine-legged doctrine  
hemming you in.

come through a bone-curtain  
to the sky  
inside of me.

i am seated in quartz and amethyst.

blessings unlit,  
conjurances ungranted.

portals ensconced  
in the hand of song.

    makes exact  
the lyrical deficit  
of a clavichord:  
    that hand.

hooks on antipodes referenced.

to trump the chess  
of what Gelatin wants to say

no noon lights this  
pupiless demiurge

ice stars for Honey Play  
pandemonic scare-eagles

conversations with beetles

snake-back solos?  
snake-back solos?

burning tapers  
obliquely speaking.

detours in burnt clay  
praise the tulip  
between your buttocks.

bum-and-rum shots  
plotted by anemic Yashicas.

this dawn  
this dawn that has  
thrown her legs around my waist

this dawn  
this dawn seeking safety  
in wordlessness

caught between  
thighboots crowding  
a wooden staircase  
and cardoors pounding

an augury telescoped

tattooer,impaler

peace to rainweed  
peace to sponge of change  
peace to song unthundered

what we're doing  
seems like hydraulics

we can go back  
to the lively stance  
of kindred passions

or to sequins and silk

anyway i like  
to slough off  
births of tin hovels.

roars of burials.  
gas flaring.

pigments boiling,  
churning wastes.

to pull a rug  
from under a rug.

what's given  
is given from gooseberry bush  
to digital undertuft

and what's riven  
is riven by reserve  
rather than kleptomania

his daughter helms  
his yuppie-in-panic factory  
his shoes are no longer laced



it's getting harder  
to wield an ashplant  
in noonlight:

harder:

harder to make  
an inventory of  
appendices, wallworks, drumrolls:

ultra properly,  
tone after tone:

harder:  
leave-takings, arrivals—  
so much to appease at inceptions.

nonsensical when  
it gets to blaming  
a rooster for its  
well-padded comb.

the seizures  
of steam to contend with.

olddays longlost,  
carpings scrapped.  
nothing but citrus fruit,  
corn on the cob,  
mango stones.

they left the applause unpunctured  
and cheered him on  
    from Brooklyn Bridge  
        to a Breadline

as if bestiality were a bonus  
as if to strip dispersions  
of a random glare

true to size  
they didn't leave  
    their obligation undischarged.

insomnia is my shelter  
in a town called twelve.

resist.resist  
the traversals of sugarcane.  
the alarm of tocsin.

to curtsy  
for a goldfinch  
and its moontalk its floundering?

two silences—and i  
refuse to choose one.

a ragpicker stumbles  
and threads his extracts  
through the arcades of dawn.

to him grottoes  
are our argosy.  
craters already face us.

a proviso—either way—  
strews across dust and rust.

pogoing:what has dirt got to do with it?  
a smash-and-grab reception  
defrosts a flying saucer.

jangly is a slimline cameo;  
a visible pertinence  
keeps it pulsing.

inklings in poppyfield:  
what have they got to do with us?

sandbedded in our soundtrack.

noisy ones at  
the height of harmattan  
spirited away  
to work on mishaps of a love-hotel.

heedlessly dead-pan,  
road-block with a motive.

they are still washing  
clothes inside a rueful river.

blindfolded.

vis-a-vis ecriture

water's dream

the water that fetched us

a man and a woman  
about to take off their clothes

dream's dovepoint

a rope a chain in water

a man and a woman  
about to disrobe  
where blinds are not drawn



round us the back steps  
the knuckle-headed omissions  
invigorating sutures  
of metaphor and cliché

to have done with  
the judgement of God in soap parlours  
plastercasts meat racks coalmines

brown exits disembowelments  
sartorial studios pipelines  
twisted tainted

round us the frontsteps  
ostriches on tour

bash on nonetheless  
i want to thank

this merry mess—  
to peek out from

under this miracle  
this encounter

with the five shades of black

do you want to answer  
a question that hasn't been asked

or do you want  
to prattle around

what's left of a tangled weed

if a seaneedle  
is good  
enough  
to  
hurtle  
into song  
so are we

and still thinking  
of the crematoria  
called Biafra that  
hasn't upped and left.

is a taste for mourning  
also an acquired one?  
has a hurled grenade  
ever gone into a coma?

wouldn't mind it  
befriending an Icebox.

snagglevoice  
from a scragglyhead

the one who pulls  
the helix along

get busy:oblige a digital  
alchemy

aeronautics have not  
forsaken a lovefield

undercover jive /  
a strap-on

perfect imperfections  
a ceaseless gum-chewing

reeling them in /  
feet hung on a frown

no end to the cheekiness  
of a spearhead

mind your mind /  
enders doing love

like ferrets you kept as pets

turds tidied up  
huddled inside a hive

it is a Geodesic dome  
this Sunday needs

a place to go gill-netting from /  
you don't think a

planter's land-grabbing  
has got a valued chance there

that belief is easy to pursue  
but first sift through vines and ravings

fitful in discovery of dementia's flesh

canecutter split asunder  
canecutter split asunder:

you are not among the  
vassals of palm leaves

how to take apart  
how to break  
the habit of  
a cuckoo clock  
down on its luck

and salt low-keyed  
and sierrarose syndicated

the termite would know  
would know  
when you become as  
nimble as an oarsman

Ojadili, Obiligbo:  
were you once mugged for canoeing?



iron in an iris.

in some after-whiff  
of hair in a quiff.

ridge,slime,  
quadrant.

sure:a hawk can  
also be a swallow.

terracotta matters  
to a daubed aspiration.

nothing nothing  
disuades the quicksand  
from visiting a wimp.

a smokescreen  
is a puppet escaping  
through a pipe

grease up  
or shut up

o nine-eyed crime

that's how thoughts  
are pumped into a room

in crossfire wank  
in Saran wrap

when i think of it  
that we couldn't hook up  
a brainy hookworm  
when i bloody think of it  
that we broke our thumbs  
cracking our replicas  
the bloody-mindedness of it all

how dare you give us eggwhite,  
delirious lust

these forays into pupal pacings,  
presentiments gerrymandering

a dart board asking what it is like  
to be a kite string

six days,six nights

in Claytown  
everything you touch  
becomes ragged/jagged

every road leads  
to penguins

a diaphanous circuit  
pressures you to attention

you've not been  
at a midpoint between them  
you've been both  
at the same time:  
lover and beloved

they defer often  
to the critical waffle  
of a plaster saint

where are the petulant regattas?  
banned.  
who banned them?  
i did.

half past seven.  
time for a paper hat.  
no use for paper deals.

over-refinement is harakiri.

through sweetness  
and sweat  
this takes us  
from the socratic  
to the Delphic:

a thought left  
lying around a begrimed street.

microcosm of the macrocosm?  
a trance about to be amplified?

glass igloos  
cable-bindings  
and their possibilities situate me

not mousey capitulation  
to strip-lights,  
mirrored machinery

inverted cones encircle me

indications of deals  
with tarot cards,  
lollers, crooked crosses

from a stewed barn  
to a laughing bed

earth's flesh  
of which we are proud

the question the answer  
a nesting time of two faces

looks like it's time  
for cherry picking

where's the seahorsing in that ?  
what are we doing ?



as for trailhead,  
it is between currant and larkspur.

the puffery  
between pajamas  
and bathrobe  
is a tease.

my why trembles  
in the enigma  
of a convivial vagina.

how i wish  
you would stop  
touching my double chin.

of praise and persiflage  
in a planetarium-

supple? the attentive  
longing that looks straight at you?

the eel-grass  
does seem exempt  
from prettified dichotomy.

atonement washes off.  
big deal.

be all things to me.

the unsure thing-  
a thornbush dozing  
on the lap of a harbor.

jumping over a skyline  
i stumble on  
their shindig.

hoedowns,tenebrae-  
their fins applaud  
their wings applaud  
their legs applaud.

may the barroom floors  
of heaven  
be endlessly kind  
to the tipsy eyes of paintbrushes.

waxwing and shagbark:  
i take them back.

serene your hen-yard.  
serene your mis-speech.

living like a screwdriver  
makes me fry your apologies  
at dusk.i don't need your  
godawful dawn.who knows  
what it might mean—what  
this endarkenment is all about.  
living like a screwdriver  
makes me house-hunt  
with your worn laundry.

come to where heels  
of words  
have never trodden

to a tabula rasa

if his winterized levitation  
marks a return to love,  
the bald-headed magus doesn't let on

it's either he is inaccurate  
or his truth is immaculate

roads have bedded  
themselves down in you.

those roosters are loud.

your stripped doubt  
stares back at you.

those opinions go nowhere.

mid-ground you subtend  
unveiled feet,  
weigh victimage  
in your hands.

there are coordinates still glinting.

it's well.a triangular day  
is fobbing me off.i am  
being lawfully animalized.  
pigskin hovers over a steeple.  
green intrudes into the temple  
Of my eyes.crossbeams  
crash into a flagpole.gears  
defy guilts of speed.

this celerity is ultimate.  
this sideslipping.

packed-in,  
airlifted.  
something akin to being  
given a talking-to.

a banquet of the blind.  
sandpiping.

dare celebrate  
doing things the hard way.

thunderclapping.



i will not clog  
your aptitude for  
cyclopean rococo.

they call it semisleep.

go home to the debris  
of your glitterhouse.  
a felicitous earth will reclaim me.

they call it a hermitage.

after the thickened  
fires of Dresden  
come the offerings of flood.

lowlights,  
    lowlands  
        on nigerwings.

in nicotine wax  
in nubian contortions.

sole to sole  
    pouch to pouch.

a reckoning  
unclouded by faith.

too:  
    wick-powered flames.

a beat's meat  
in a bout of catch-as-catch-can.

one uppercut was all  
it took to louse up his Guru.

his secret weapon raised hell.  
he refused to lead  
and refused to be led.

Herman,  
when will you brood your  
way into a wild romance again?  
when?

from the husks,  
oak log in Coal Camp.

long time coming:  
deafness of oak leaf.

pure-bred oak taunting  
a drawback.

duration well meaning,  
cataleptic—luminous bumpkin.

between log and leaf  
all is not dross.

lead mustn't always journey to gold.

of being nibbled at—

skins of successive  
doubts—

their minutely  
startling aspirations;

chains being torn,  
being exceeded;

of emplacements  
of ampersands?

downdraft of massaging oil  
over hair,muscle,nail—

exits smearingly arrowed,  
writhing or keeping still—

whatever it is we're doing  
is good, is good.

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**Uche Nduka**, poet, essayist, lyricist, was born and brought up in Nigeria. His books include *Flower Child* (1988), *Second Act* (1994), *The Bremen Poems* (1995), *Chiaroscuro* (which won the Association of Nigerian Authors Poetry Prize for 1997), *If Only TheNight* (2003), *Heart's Field* (2005), *eel on reef* (2007). Nduka has lived in Holland and Germany. He presently lives and works in New York City.

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