

THE
MYSTIC OF
SMALL
DREAMS

PROPERTY OF MASOBE BOOKS

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ROMEO ORIOGUN



MASOBE

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As always, for Dorcas, my mother
and for Noura, whose life has cast a light on the
darkness of my existence

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“Exile is a dream of glorious return.”

— Salman Rushdie

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EXILE AND THE MUSE OF MEMORY

Romeo's voice is the soulful outcry of a far-wandering exile, roaming the distances of alien lands, yet inextricably linked by invisible bonds of love to the native roots of his homeland. This filial bond, like an umbilical cord running from the womb of his motherland, the cradle of his childhood and early youth, works like a telegraphic wire-cable from which, unceasingly, he draws inspiration, as from a never-failing spring source bubbling from the age-old richness and fertility of the African soil.

With almost every poem, Romeo seems to soul-travel to his beginnings, to his past, a major recurrent motif threading through all his work. In this nostalgic excursion, the bard takes you gently by the hand, along with him on his soul-wanderings, back to his origins, the world and country of his earlier times, and over the landscapes that are his memories and reminiscences, his musings, dreams and hopes, interwoven with the breath of his joys and sorrows.

There is a welcome access, an inviting readability, to Romeo's poetry. The words of his poems, it would seem, like the most amiable of tour guides, approach the reader's sensibility with a sort of delicate mindfulness and respectful courtesy. In his words lie a gentleness and reassuring calmness, a childlike innocence, pure and unspoiled, like the crisp caress of the harmattan breeze or the cool drops of the first light showers of the rain season's return. His lines own the softness and malleability of the red clayey earth of his Benin home town, and they flow with the quiet grace and lucidity of undiscovered and unpolluted village streams. There is a bardic magic that glows in almost every line, a dexterity and formal polish, an expert finishing, that bears the stamp of the master.

The experience of a poem can sometimes feel like an evening stroll through a garden, or better still a grove, filled with unassumingly simple and yet exquisitely astonishing beauties at nearly every turn. Every poem is a fascinating fresh species, a newborn dream, a novel mystery, yet familiar and natural, like all flowers and birds that belong to the earth.

Intimately confiding with his reader, Romeo shares with an eager generosity of heart, the varied thoughts, sentiments, intuitions, hopes and longings that have been a part of his journey and experience. Rooms,

roads, vehicles, buildings, farms, forests, rivers, seas, sky, clouds, seasons, villages, towns, cities, cultures, travelers, friends, family, strangers, animals, objects, words, songs and sounds—everything that he encounters—is given back again to the world, transmuted into a kaleidoscopic wealth of poetic impressions and images. Even seeming insignificant details, at the poet's touch, come alive with meaning and import, with suggestions and allusions, strong enough to bind the reader's attention, to arouse and unfetter the imagination.

You can sense in Romeo's style, and hear in his thoughts, the outcome of a sufficiently rounded cosmopolitan poetic experience and culture. You can heed echoes of the brooding meditateness of the travelling exile poet Byron, catch flashes of the deep reflections on Nature of the pilgrim-wanderer Wordsworth, discern streams of the solitary discursiveness of Frost, the philosophic fortitude of Goethe, and perceive tones of the trance-like, incantatory evocateness of Okigbo. But Romeo's voice remains exclusively and entirely his own.

At the bedrock, however, of Romeo's poetry lies the irrefutable presence and authenticity of the human spirit, those timeless qualities that are peculiar to all truly great poetry: the irrepressible longing for meaning and purpose, the insatiable hunger for dignity and worth,

the yearning for light, the consciousness of truth; the gravitating inwards, towards values that matter, towards the deeper self, towards communion with the inner being.

ONESI TAIWO DOMINIC

Author of *The Mirror*

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