



The Horizon

A. O. Odimayo

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The Horizon is a brisk collection of poems that address loss and hope in traditional formats.

The poems collected in A. O. Odimayo's *The Horizon* are narrative-driven takes on human loss and triumph.

The book's four sections trace a rough twenty-year chronology, starting in 2003. "Madrid 2003-2004" is an autobiographical section whose entries cover a year abroad in Spain. It began with hope but turned sour, leaving the visitor "jaded and disenchanting": luggage was stolen, a confidant disclosed their disturbing drug habit, and a prejudiced landlady refused to lease the outsider an apartment. Indeed, Madrid is depicted as awash with troubled, despairing souls.

The sections that follow are more abstract, touching on universal themes including freedom, fate, and divinity. Several images and ideas recur, including those related to homesickness, water as a healing force, Yoruba ancestry, and drug abuse.

Most of the entries take the form of rhymed quatrains, though the rhymes are too often clunky. A decasyllabic pattern is hinted at but abandoned in favor of steady ABCB rhyme schemes and irregular rhythms. Restricted to this format, strong ideas become cumbersome in their delivery:

Persistence tried to crack an imperious system.

Frustration spat at her equal scales.

Futility strode head long into perdition.

In providence the anger still prevails.

Elsewhere—in particular in the second section's environmental poems—complex ideas are treated with unsuitable brevity, as with "Compassion? Tsunami (2004)," in which the catastrophic Boxing Day tsunami and the Darfur genocide are addressed in three brief stanzas. Elsewhere, a metaphor-laden natural description ends with the terse and obscure line "Kyoto treaty you can still save this terrain."

Still, there are some concrete, evocative descriptions of other people throughout the collection—as in "The dreamer," an expansive exploration of a person's interior visions that covers the legacy of colonialism over the course of centuries with flair. Likewise, a series of short vignettes are gathered in "The cloak of circumstance" in a dramatic and effectual way. But this human-scaled drama is rare in the book in general, which favors abstractions over clarity. And toward the collection's end, the subject matter becomes even more spiritual and amorphous, resulting in ornate verses whose flourishes come at the expense of clarity:

Dissension spread throughout the lands.

A fuelled machine charged the race.

An enemy applauded derisively.

His weaving compassion was effaced.

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ISAAC RANDEL (December 28, 2023)

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