



Leaf and Bone: African Praise-Poems

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Praise poetry is a mode of verbal celebration that is distinctly African - not uniquely African, for throughout the ages and among all peoples, poetry has been uttered and written in tribute to singular existences. But in Africa praising is ubiquitous, a cultural institution cutting across ethnic differences, and expressing a profound humanism grounded in inter-relationships. All the poems in this book were originally "performances". Some praises are of individuals, others are more concerned with the family or clan. Plants and animals, even bicycles and trains are also addressed. Many praises are lively descriptions intended to elicit from the subject some service to the human community. By paying close attention to the way these praises present themselves as poetry on the printed page (rendering their imagery and rhythms as precisely as possible in English while retaining their African idiom), and by annotating the poems to make their cultural references intelligible, Dr Judith Gleason has brought traditional Africa into focus for the general reader, to whom the continent remains all too dark and hazy. There is African humour in action, there is the delicacy with which African poets have traditionally perceived the things of this world, there is the respect these poets feel for themselves and for others there are the hopes and despairs all people live through on whatever continent.

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