

**Tanure Ojaide's** poetry awards include the Commonwealth Poetry Prize for the Africa Region, the All-Africa Okigbo Prize for Poetry, the BBC Arts and Africa Poetry Award, and the Association of Nigerian Authors Poetry Award. Currently the Frank Porter Graham Professor of Africana Studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, his poetry has been translated into Chinese, Dutch, French, and Spanish.

## The Cows of Mt. San Angelo

Groomed as royal, the cows of Mt. San Angelo  
 have the abundant pastures of the mountain  
 to themselves; evergreen grass all year round.  
 Plump and healthy, no cows can be bigger  
 than these multiethnic crop of Virginia cows.  
 Black, brown and white-faced like a mask,  
 they mow the grass gracefully; no hostile figures  
 or irritants to worry about. Young ones  
 prance to their mothers when I come close,  
 but there's no fear of poachers in this pasture.

The cows of Mt. San Angelo cannot cover  
 the entire meadow that's green with abundance.  
 They know not that outside famine kills a number  
 and rinderpest and poachers are on the loose.  
 They are half-covered in lush grass without bother  
 of ticks—above, birds sing their hearts away  
 in the paradise they share. There's no Fulani  
 herdsman lashing at them to take the right course  
 in the lines they always fall into in the open space.  
 They yawn at night from the day's plentiful food.

They have the garden world to themselves—  
 they know not the harsh struggle or sweat  
 that each day brings; they are self-assured.  
 They share the road and their shit bothers none.  
 If one should be a cow, wouldn't one wish to be  
 one of the selected cows grazing Mt. San Angelo?  
 But, after all the pleasures, will the butcher  
 spare them the fate of other cows envious of them?  
 The cows of Mt. San Angelo belong to a class  
 of their own—treated royally for the king's table.