

**ON SONS WHO HATE THEIR FATHERS**

**By Stephen Ogunfoworin (Nigeria)**

Eleven

There are only a few things you know  
But you know enough to fear your father's anger  
And the silence that comes with it  
The trembling baritone, when he is finally able to speak  
And that violent stammer that chokes his words  
You know the mad look in his eyes when he is livid  
You know the hardness of his thick hands when he strikes your soft face

Twenty-one

You hate his presence  
The way he sits in that cane chair, staring into a sea of nothingness  
For hours that become eternities  
But you also hate his absence and how it feels thick and alive, like a person  
As though it had its own existence, separate from its owner, but just as cruel  
You hate how it reaches out to you, grabs you by the ear and taunts you

One

Your father likes to punch your pregnant mother in the chest  
But this time, he gets her in the gut  
Though you are not old enough to understand  
You will never forget that metallic smell and all that shimmering red

Thirty-one

He is dead now, but you hate him more than ever  
There are children living in your childhood home  
They are not your mother's children, and yet they have your father's face  
Sometimes when you squint hard enough through the corner of your eye  
You can almost still see your mother rubbing the soft folds of her belly  
Speaking to her body, begging it to give him more sons

Forty-one

You see your father in your own eyes  
In all that anger and cowardice  
In the mornings, you spend more time at the mirror  
And as you stare, you cannot tell where your father ends and you begin

Fifty-one

Your son is eleven and there are only a few things he knows  
But he knows enough to fear his father's anger  
And the silence that comes with it  
The trembling baritone, when you are finally able to speak  
And the violent stammer that chokes your words  
He knows the mad look in your eyes when you are livid  
He knows the hardness of your thick hands when you strike his soft face.

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**Names carry tribes...Names carry war**

**By Janet Kali (Kenya)**

*I speak in tongues fluent in silence  
Hiding in syllables that hide from themselves  
Because in my land  
When the devil comes to your door  
Asking to know your name  
You do not sin  
You do not say your name  
You do not let it betray you  
You remember the burning agony of the soil beneath your feet  
The shapes of cowering silhouettes in silent corners  
The cries of your tribesmen being swept away by bloody rivers  
You remember war  
In the days mothers cooked ugali with machetes  
You remember  
Names dig graves  
You remember  
Names carry tribes; they carry war  
You do not sin  
You do not say your name  
You do not let it betray you*

\*\*\*\*\*

**38 photographs of depression**

**By Marial Awendit (South Sudan)**

1

an old man floating in the sea  
searches for his umbilical cord.

2

survival is a mosquito  
shaking a spider's web  
but suicide is a body's  
way of finding final peace.

3

other ways to understand a life  
you were not asked to consent.

4

you will find yourself  
a room too large  
you will only coil at one corner and  
try to turn the globe into an apple.

5

endless falling in a black abyss,  
you attempt to grab your self  
but your hands are too slow.

6

depression is an act of humility;  
recognizing the weight  
of the globe on your cranium.

7

sometimes the whole world  
would fall asleep and you  
are just the eye of the night.

8

our fears are so heavy  
they would still float  
after five bottles of gin.

9

silence turns a body  
into night.

10

solitude makes the body pay  
attention to its bloodless wounds.

11

the sun will not erase  
some shadows.

12

get away from the crowd

to hear the footfalls  
of your grief.

13

the night does not drown us  
we are only watched to discover the sun.

14

emptiness lets the gourd  
hold milk.

15

dead people packed with them  
dreams but forgot their worries.

16

the sun's loneliness makes it reach  
for the songs in our hearts.

17

sometimes the night has more  
heartbeats than a body.

18

the sun unlike the night  
has no boats to row us home.

19

our hearts are afraid  
to turn into stones.

20

silence is another response  
to pain.

21

our hearts have very few locks  
to keep the night out.

22

some days the sun fails  
to rise.

23

the body has no current  
to carry away solitude.

24

there are more people  
inside us to be one.

25

in solitude we ask god  
to leave us alone.

26

sometimes we have to mourn  
the universe, we may not be there  
when the time comes.

27

there is no blade  
to cut darkness from marrows.

28

the body will search  
for freedom to self-destruct.

29

the mind contemplates burial  
of dead memories.

30

knowing is burdensome the mind  
will carry only that which it knows.

31

we try to be the things  
we lost.

32

trees have no hunger  
to suck grief from bones.

33

burial is also air  
covering a body.

34

a fall measures the distance  
between the earth and the mind.

35

three yellow *diazepam*s  
and the universe goes missing.

36

we fear the night  
will turn into water.

37

the mind like a deserted room  
longs for stains of breath.

38

the body will name  
places that fill it by leaving.



**Stones**

**By Adedayo Adeyemi Agarau (Nigeria)**

somewhere after sunset  
a mother on her way from work holds her son  
like faith, like belief, a boy carries  
a bouquet of flower for his lover  
daddy shoki sings at the market central  
little boys stand by the teeth of the railway  
watch as Shawn Michaels switches music into Triple-H's throat  
light bokeh flickers  
into a pressman's eyeballs, he sees a newswire  
as a girl pressing her voice into his ears  
sells bean cakes  
hot oil unsettled like feet of people rushing  
unsettled like the bewildered children watching Triple-H slam Shawn Michael through the  
table  
god watching this place through a dark glass  
does not see a fire coming  
does not see the pipe leaking  
sees as, within a twinkle, a city-place  
becomes a room full of cremated bodies  
sees a boy writhing, half dead, the other half  
hanging loosely between imitation of water  
sees as mouths move, calls his name in language  
oluwaaaaaaaaa o  
oluwaaaaaaaaa o  
but he is off duty on tuedays  
the mother's hand melts into her son's  
the flower boy needing to love himself more  
gives himself flowers even into his own death  
embers of bodies badly burnt beat bokehs  
into becoming burial ground  
fire still limping out of the chest of the pressman  
like stones  
like memories  
fierce people don't burn out quickly -circa 2002, lagos

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**BROKEN AEROSOLS**

**By Osadolor Osayande (Nigeria)**

Tonight the earth boils,

#BABISHAI2018 LONGLIST

it has become a commonwealth of seething bones,  
a pregnancy of humic spirits seeking exhuming!

And there is a woollen agbada of words,  
worn daily by my people, wefts and warps  
that wail thus, *a grave expels spirits by burying  
his fuzzy logic into living literates of bones.*

Humic spirits call out from weary pores,  
call to coated sons until they become  
welcome pongs in the lungs of owned literates.

Tonight the literate is lavishly You.  
You who could retrieve himself from  
the charring canoodle of a foreign nightmare.

You wide awake, runs out of You's room.  
You has a membrane of time numbing tonight  
from raping the dawn. You forays into the  
night with thumping sprints. Even so  
You's whole clan remains asleep.

And there in the heaving night,  
You finds an ephod—faint as You's membrane.

The ephod says "Bring them out!"  
You exhumes the whole earth, straddles  
the humus, gazes till it becomes a tumulus.

The ephod says, "Pick! Pick bones!"  
You picks tibiae and fibulae, to embody the  
pristine black walk—untainted into the hue of honey.  
Thrown, the seethe tells: You has been journeyed into  
by snow, bought from a muzzling garlanded with downs,  
where confidence and dignity are sold in aerosols.

You picks ribcages.  
Thrown, the seethe asks: Can silt coat loam?

You picks more bones, skulls, throws, hurls  
until the bones are empty.

And then, You hears a sigh, gingerly turns  
around. Men, legions, You didn't hear thumping along.  
Broken aerosols in one palm, scoops of humus  
in upraised seconds. You's membrane shreds and  
the dawn unclothes tonight, chairs the intimacy.

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## **TURGIDITY AND TASTE**

**By Osadolor Osayande (Nigeria)**

My best friend believes all mankind  
must blossom like a scalp of turgid, African hair,  
be they greyed or tarred by their combing days.  
His endorsement of cloven bonding is  
my pull from the darkness to the blackness  
of my prime, still he pours it on me like muck  
when he swears that I must learn  
how to become a living streak of keratin,  
grow on the scalp's groove where lives  
arouse the tongue called life.

He palms his soul and it becomes a soft prayer  
combing the scalp until we are elsewhere,  
sitting in the clinic of a smile-coloured  
doctor, a strand of turgid grey hair.  
I do not cure diseases, whispers the turgid  
grey hair, I make people birth themselves.

This strand of turgid grey hair, coos, Weep.  
I want to wail, Doctor, I need to grieve to weep!  
But my best friend, espies my surprise peeping  
from behind my calm, squeezes my palm.  
Somehow, I am not too practised,  
my calm flutters, and the doctor helps me,  
leads me to an empty crater the size of Jupiter,  
coos, Sit, do not blink till dawn.

At dawn, I am sitting in an induced wept-ocean,  
spiriting into my body, swelling.  
This strand of turgid grey hair is walking  
on water, on my separated wept-ocean,  
spiriting into my body, swelling.  
My best friend is gambolling, along my shore.  
The doctor coos, Sleep, let your eyes heal.

At dusk, I am sitting in my crater of self-salt,  
my best friend explains that this is the secret.  
That we can all be oceanic bleeders of sea,

born to take in oceans of spring.

I do not recognise my turgid beauty  
nor wish to remember my shrivelled humanity.  
This strand of turgid grey hair, coos, This is how  
to source the salt that arouses the tongue called life.



***The Genesis***

**By Madu Chisom Kingdavid (Nigeria)**

Our first ensemble was in a pigpen-like connection  
house in Zindane where hundreds of us sprawled

like a snail with crushed shell on a german  
floor that reeked of sweat, cigarettes, sperm  
and blood. Presence of

prostitution there but absence of prostitutes.  
Cheap drugs and fake passports  
were peddled too.

"Jedits, it is time to go," shrieked our agent,  
a middle-aged Nigerien with countless  
tribal marks on his face.

We stood still - teetering on the cusps of chimera  
before we were crammed in a pickup truck  
and set off. We wheeled

along the sun-hellish roads of Zinder -  
a squat town of remote images before  
breaking into Agadez -- Africa's

smuggling capital on the navel of Niger  
stretching to the southern nipple of Sahara,  
with a labyrinth of low

Mudbrick buildings where smugglers  
would often confine migrants before a  
hilux-truck takes them to Libya.

It is the crossroads of death and  
hanging hope of reaching Libya. Midway  
our truck silenced...

## #BABISHAI2018 LONGLIST

as death and danger looked us in  
the eyes. "It seems death lies ahead and behind  
is hopelessness," said a Somali

boy shipwrecked by fear - fleeing from abject,  
prolonged war. The

iron sun was at its sharpest. "Being  
stranded in Sahara at noon

is like putting one leg in a grave and  
the other nowhere." our driver submitted.

As we folded into deep metals of the  
sun in laboured steps, panting. Our systems  
started to shut down

and no sentinel in sight. Many began  
to slump into absences for they were  
too weak to trudge on.

We buried a few; there were some  
corpses to feed the earth, but we couldn't  
for strength deserted us.

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### Telephone Monologue

**By Olamide Adio Olanrewaju (Nigeria)**

My mother called:

'Your father has walked a pilgrimage (again) on another woman.

Like a thief, she steals into his ablution kettle,

Hides in his prayer mat like a corpse where she smells like a burning home.

She sits in the unzipped pocket of his wallet

(Where I first found a condom dripping oil over you and your sister's passport  
photographs)

And leaves every morning just before *zubbh*.'

She continued;  
'I'll clasp my palms into secrets and I'll sew his infidelities like a corpse in the earth  
— Even you know this only because you're a bastard.  
And each day is a new pilgrimage eating me from within till I cannot even kneel.  
Till I'm broken into *ayahs* of perpetual prayer.  
In short, your father has become a God.  
Pray to him for me because he says I no longer speak in tongues.  
I learnt this language (of tongues) when we locked lips.  
When we swapped spittle and I heard *Suratul Ahad* is recited for dead people.  
Yesterday, your father buried my name into *Ahad* with this new woman.  
Pray to him for me. Pray to him for me.'

I call my father  
But I do not speak of my mother.  
I do not speak of the other woman.  
I only recite *Qurisiyy* for his longevity.  
Then I end the call and weep.

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## Commerce

By Ayodele Sosegbon (Nigeria)

Disparate figures wade through a river of vehicles,  
Slowly pooling against a traffic light dam,  
Slippers and fruit, poison and footballs, all held aloft in tissue bare arms,  
An emulsion of dust borne by desiccated air,  
Lends all surfaces a laterite tinge,  
Dry dusty merchandise clasped by dry fingers,  
Clasped by dry figures with wet hopeless eyes.

Starvation thin margins necessitate selling in bulk,  
Yet nothing fat or plentiful is seen,  
Thin men with thin arms, thin hopes and thin sales,  
Desperately moving with frenzied limbs,  
At the base of a shifting mountain of debt,  
Heavy items are carried long distances,  
Carried long distances between indifferent cars.

Desire suffuses the savanna like air,  
For food, for things, for a day free of toil,  
Each figure unbalanced sways as they walk,  
Embodiments of want, minds far away,  
Lives incomparable to those in the cars,

#BABISHAI2018 LONGLIST

Borne by the flow of success far away,  
The flow of relative success far away.

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In my brother I see:

**by Mhraf Worku (Ethiopia)**

-- --

In my brother I see,  
softness, (like woven silk held to the face)  
sweetness, (like the sweet suckle from a ripe mango)  
tenderness, (like the way a mother holds her newborn)

In my brother I see,  
softness, (evolving into calcified indifference)  
sweetness, (sucked dry by a ravenous world)  
tenderness, (beaten out of him because that is no way to be a man)

| And I told God, 'Kulich' is becoming a man |

\*\*\*\*\*

**anchor**

**for Tsiwah**

**by Adedayo Adeyemi Agarau (Nigeria)**

—

when your grief fell off the balcony  
& broke into the tally of language  
we cried, didn't we? your eyes —  
a spreadsheet of rain and streetlights  
carefully caressed its grief.

we give name only to things with faces &  
water is fluid because it wears a new face  
each time someone begs to see  
a boy in a white jalabiya sings the evening into oblivion  
he sits somewhere in your poems —a dark city  
in accra, —he has the many faces of water

you —unsaid silence in the mouth of a dumb boy  
fetching cities for his blind mother— are a gypsy

telling places into poems, casting shadows into  
the vowels

maybe we are never meant to have a name  
— your grief forms into your country  
— gives itself a language  
— wears the skin of your father's first son  
— someday, we will perfectly know how to give names to things that do not talk

insha allah

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**REDEMPTION by Onele Peter-Cole (Nigeria)**

*"Deny me Speech, Deny me Life!"-Euripides*

Yesterday I daydreamt of my redemption,  
From the clutches of clueless curators continually  
Reneging regal responsibilities sworn before the screaming  
Multitudes and the queerly quiet ones watching with Eagle Eyes.  
I dreamt that my lisping lips brutalized by locks of municipal conquest,  
Received their liberation and crooned a melody of boundless beauty  
Echoing Redemption in timeless verses that spoke of Justice's broken chains,  
And swaying to the intense frenzy of freedom's enchanted drums.

Last night I slept and night-wrenched Your redemption, oh Friend,  
From the bumped fists of fire-threatening friends on Power's Chair,  
Promising freedom but serving soups of stagnant servitude  
Which you gulped, gawked, guzzled and gone was the fight for the right.

I witnessed your face lit up into smiles that passed miles  
Everywhere you live-In strife-broken huts of Sudan, the lice-invested bridge nests of  
Nigeria, and the crumbling buildings of Democracy in Egypt,  
I witnessed you defying those blind guides who forbade joy for travelers on their ill-  
fated trips.

Friend, I saw you eat redemption's porridge, and smashed the platter on them!

Tonight I'll string my grandfather's Kora\* and we can all lose ourselves  
To the cozy embrace of Djembe's\*\* tapping rhythmic magic,  
Stamping our Jigida-laden\*\*\* feet to the note of the Emir's Flute,  
For the days of our forgotten past are relics to relish, not haunting memories.

We will dance unbound by bounds strung by vicious hounds

Clad in human apparel who despise our flowing freedom,  
For while we blissfully welcome Redemption; they are beyond it!

- \* **Kora:** A very popular African musical instrument that has strings. Vagrant singers, storytellers and keepers of legends traditionally play on it. These are mainly residents of Guinea, Mali, Senegal, Guinea-Bissau and The Gambia.
- \*\***Djembe-** A popular African drum played all over Africa that reminds one of a cup or hourglass with its form.
- \*\*\***Jigida-** Beads usually worn by dancers and maidens in the Hausa culture of Northern Nigeria. both on the waist and ankles.

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### **RETRIBUTION (For those who steal our hope)**

**By Onele Peter-Cole (Nigeria)**

The symphonic drumbeats of the Ocean's interminable fury,  
Stamping the inevitable apocalypse of the patriot-pirates who swindle  
The golden wealth walled within our whistling waters,  
Never begin with piercing torrents  
Thumping pulsing eardrums  
And rolling in roaring waves to their colourful carnage,  
No!  
They begin with one simple crack to the giant stockades  
Of arrogant sea-walls sprawled in gigantic splendor,  
Riding the headless-horse of the aroused night,  
Upsetting the snoring ritual of the hundred-thousand  
Shored citizens who sleep on in their watery slumbers below open bridges.

The jingling bells heralding doomsday's enthralling Orchestra,  
For the truth-merchants who peddle decorated fabrications with reckless  
Abandon along the boulevards of the people's smiling misery,  
Occupying spotless citadels perched on lofty heights,  
While we their innocent shoppers abide in forgotten alleys,  
Are never gonging clangs on iron surfaces marked 'plea bargaining',

They always arrive  
Without the deafening thunder of Thor's untiring Hammer,  
In the petulant sounds of raped innocence,  
In noiseless beats of sobbing justice,  
In voiceless vocals of imprisoned law,  
In the raging calm of the daily provoked,  
Ringing in silent rhythmic ding-dongs,  
Clanging like dummy balls of ping-pongs.

The nemesis of the tireless Treasury tappers,  
Who empty the coffers of our flattened treasures inside out,  
Who devotedly drain the wetlands of maltreated motherland,  
Altering our adorable territory from an Ocean welcoming  
Singing Rivers flowing in from different sources,  
Into a scorching hotbed of amalgamated anger and clannish hatred,  
Will surely come on a full moon in the knocking nights,

Retribution will be exquisitely served to them in three royal-courses-  
**Shame** shall be first served-that spiceless appetizer!  
With Contempt its accompaniment-that tasteless wine!  
**Conviction** shall be the main Course- that dish delicious only to onlookers!  
They shall have for dessert, **Regret**-that medicine that always arrives too late!  
For Retribution is not a beautiful fairytale told to put breast-fed babies to sleep,  
It's a scary nightmare that summons aged adults to witlessly wet the night.

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## Like Torn Kites In An Hurricane by Rex Omonla (Nigeria)

*I cannot speak because my mouth is a grave - 'Departure' -Romeo Oriogun  
Out of the depth my cry, give ear and hearken- 'The Passage', Christopher Okigbo*

Am here and there, like torn kites in an hurricane,  
lift these broken cupids- the memories  
of an ephemeral love- off my eyes  
and teach me how to be here again.  
wake the bones the quills of your departure scythed to shingles  
and grinded thoroughly to dusts by those memories of rose-budding and ritzy plastic  
asps

touch my heart, lift the phoenix that keep memories and caligraph  
in the nucleus of my heart the ways to let go and find love again.

Lift these fingers of song that buried the soporific egret I had been  
before the shredding of the sky

Hold my mind away from wandering to the lawns and boulders  
on which we had supine and rolled fancying the hovering  
clouds, heart frisking heart.

Malandra ! Take me back; pick me away from the lonely  
road in this tainted rose-quartz dotting my heart .

Malandra! am gone old with white turfs on my scalp still  
counting the days of love , death, kisses , romance  
and beads that carried your waist to  
the full moon-  
teach me the rhymes of living ,  
the song of resuscitation, the dance of reawakening- teach  
me how to see you in the eyes of another maiden fair as Malandra ,  
slim, quaint Easter Angel. Teach me to love again- that  
love isn't what takes us away but keeps us,  
that love isn't a parazonium that parts the tongue and hide in its belly  
burial grounds defaced by the anguish of burning relatives-  
lift away pains of memory- zap the outlines of  
death pouring and drenching me  
with fluids and grimes of catacombs –  
lift the graveyard am becoming and stick in abyss  
the twirling mourners roaming my street,  
once golden, now jagged, tainted by footprints of  
howling ghosts and reeks with the corpse of  
the angel cartooning lullabies on heaven's gate.

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#### **THE PRAYER OF A SOJOURNER**

**By David John Esu (Nigeria)**

O lord of land, sea and wind  
Lord of the earth and skies  
Oh! mighty lord up high.

Look upon your son with compassion

#BABISHAI2018 LONGLIST

You brought me in wont you lead me out?  
The might lion of lions  
Are you not the ruler of the jungle?  
Thou who reads the heart of men  
I know my heart is blank  
Won't you reduce my burden?  
He who eyes don't blink nor  
His eardrums cease functioning  
Won't you listen to cries of sorrow?  
Like those of a defeated warrior?

If I ask anything of thee  
I will make it worth giving and receiving  
I ask as recompense  
Like a father who opens his arm  
To a worthy son  
I ask as compensation

I ask for power in me  
Like that of a thousand great warriors of old  
Give me the bravery of a lion  
Whose roar shakes the forest  
Give me the sight of an eagle  
To oversee the deeds of fellow men  
And make a go at opportunities  
Give me the flight of a hawk  
To reach heights all dread

I ask for the courage of a camel  
Who grunts but never weeps  
When faced with challenges  
I ask for the authority of the midday sun  
That none will look me in the face  
I ask for the radiation of the moon  
That makes all things beautiful

If my wishes are impossible for thee to grant  
I offer my life to thee  
I beg to return to mother earth  
To be made dust  
Where rest shall be forever  
Where no step can be taken  
I wish to return  
Anyhow, anyway, anytime

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**PARASITIC ANTI-SYMBIOSIS**

**By Babalola Joseph O (Nigeria)**

Unaware, you mounted our bare bosom  
Crawling up thither, with thy tiny itchy legs  
Thy blood-stained teeth, deadly sharpened  
You plugged in, deeply, into our resources  
At first, we never fought it; we agreed blindly  
Oh! For a mutual advantage we really hope  
For payback, what do we get in return? Poor us!

Indeed it's full, yes, our mammary gland  
Ripe of milk, flowing with sweet honey  
Our melons may have sagged for heaviness  
The offsprings' mouth it's filled up for  
Though our dual fleshy tube be running over  
It's all up, wholly, for the virtuous compatriots  
Not for a selfish, crude but bizarre organism

How then can the offsprings drink in peace?  
How then can our mother land rest in peace?  
Our common teat, like running tap, you left open  
You punctured our real essence, our existence  
Our lives, thy impious selfishness has wrecked  
We thought it's over; our sweet milk, thy tyranny  
Till on our land's blood, like wine, you sip deep

Thou art a devouring tick; always sucking  
Clung savagely to the jugs, twenty-four seven  
Milking out our thick green blood to drink  
From the very outset, thou art so small  
Small, with a proportional teeth and storage  
Over the few days, the obese you we see  
Same small head, nose; but really pot-bellied

Thy bloody straw reached past our milk store  
All the way to the active running veins beneath  
Should you stay longer, you'll bleed us totally off  
Should we keep silent; our mother, us, all doomed  
If we should fight all the way back, back to before  
Our resources, though spent, will from source surge  
And you, our noble parasite; expelled for our good



**NEWCOMER by Olabode Olanrewaju (Nigeria)**

(to the demagogue)

“I know the colour of wind,

I know the smell...

I know the squalling urge

Of pain and its sickle art.

In my head lies

The blueprint of the staysail.

In vain shall be the tailwind

And the headwind wreathing this ship

When the sail sets

And the ship builders

Have gone to rest.

But shall I navigate through

The storm, eavesdrop to the

Sound of thunder and dodge not

Its arrowed path

If twisted becomes the weather?

True, I’m the light to banish darkness in our clime,

But now, I won’t pass through fire,

With a bunch of dry tinder,”

Says the Newcomer.

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**HYMNS OF A BROKEN SYMPHONY**

**By George Gumikiriza (Uganda)**

An ocean of words,  
Beneath an unmotivated bed of withered lilies,  
A thirsty wind for love,  
Memories, a frozen lump of cheese  
For the bruised emotions the mind bears of a lost family

Echoes of lullabies and bedtime stories in mom's voice,  
Hers I still recall,  
Like the ringing of a million soft melodious bells  
That put all nightmares to sleep,  
Ticklish toe pinches on a woollen carpet  
And cold floor games, with a man I once called, Father

Once a beautiful song sang by jolly eyes and grin faces,  
Now an empty modern cave,  
Painted on each wall, a stain of torment and twisted agony  
For the thorns I bear at heart as memories  
Of those I loved hopelessly but fell asleep too soon

Cracked clay cup,  
Clear steamy water,  
Heavily burnt lip and red sunken eyes,  
I found audience in the hurting silence,  
Sobbing voices and a depressed breeze from every house corner  
And all they asked was, "What now?"

See I learnt the tree and sky parables  
In this silent depression, my heart's loose bay  
For they listen to what no man cares about

I sing along with the morning bird  
To yet another empty day because I only watch the sunrise,  
But lost track of its setting  
And alone I stand against a hungry world  
With nothing to offer, but selflessness.

\*\*\*\*\*

***Journey of a Magus***

**By O. Chiedozi Kelechi Danjuma (Nigeria)**

the night is a black polythene bag  
with a single full constellation spilling

through the louvres into the room.  
the rays bathe you naked –  
you makeshift glow.  
we are papier-mâché wet  
with want astride air.  
the ceiling is disappearing.  
I say: *you are home.*  
*I end at your water, you with every  
thing soft & wet.* we discover old  
science- mouth making rivers out  
of a rock to transmute skin divine.  
some expert men once noted  
that a lone bright star  
on a cold night could lead  
to a lady, legs spread,  
insides blessed & sacred.



**A Song from the Foothills by Titilayo Mabogunje (Nigeria)**

*A poem on nature*

It's peaceful here

The only sound that sounds  
Is the melody the wind sends around

It's peaceful here

For reasons I don't know why,  
I feel like I can touch the sky

It's peaceful here

Away from civil tribulations  
This feels like a better civilization

For here, there is peace

But I know I do not belong here  
I know I cannot stay  
I know this isn't my home  
I know I must go away

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For though this land is most beautiful  
And though the foothills have shared its space  
It's time for me to go  
Every being has its role and its place

I will always be thankful  
For the things the mountains made clear  
I know I'll always be one with you  
For I've left a big piece of my heart here

But tomorrow will be tomorrow  
And the sunrise will once again start  
And no matter how close I am to these beautiful foothills,  
Our realities will be worlds apart

\*\*\*\*\*

***Our Yellow birds***

**By Bo Chacha (Nigeria)**

*On the coquina slates I supine  
bland eyes watching but hearing  
Not the songs of our yellow birds  
Sprawling like a raceless mongrel before incensed  
hearts for leniency,  
Rejuvenation of baking cells  
Of the minds  
Our birds we know had sang on the definition  
Of the evanescence of human affairs  
The consistency and the infinitive of longing  
Praying in cryptic rhythms only the  
Camaraderie of our hearts could decode  
The endless continuum of our fusion  
And when they did what alarmed our songbirds?  
We know, we sang it with attitude conspicuously repudiating  
It's appearance for the;  
awareness of indelible cataclysms,  
salvation of the hearts  
We know it and in loud barks of entrapped narwhals  
We had ardently chorused it,  
We know it and it's longing  
Gold wear away as silver as any costly silks  
Not longing it stalks us to the grave.  
When you broke to shards this fusion  
You storm them as me  
With what we fear. They miss yet our  
echoing Beethoven symphonies monopolizing  
and gulping their songs  
the romantic sweats of our warmth  
enkindling the fire of dreams*

*our laughter re-shaping  
awkward beaks.  
You are gone  
And they long  
For our reunion  
I see it in silent shadows  
And perturbing calmness  
My sort of longing.*

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Rained**

**By Lod Nael (Nigeria)**

The palm trees floundered without a care,  
while the clouds glided like troubled smoke.  
The horizon looked so clear,  
but the fore sky seemed to choke.

The clouds squeezed themselves like a sponge,  
they furled like a bicycle's rim.  
there were incessant arguments,  
between the rain and the roofs,  
they chattered and chattered for long.

Brown liquids dripped carelessly  
from the roof above my head.  
shortly after, they became crystal clear,  
the dusty stories, told by the earth,  
were washed by the wind and the rain.

Some trees floundered like drunken dancers,  
while some just waved their hands.  
Some appeared tired and looked asleep,  
as the anxious rain untied its bands.

After a while, the horizon lost its clarity  
to some cold and misty fog.  
The sky now looked pale and grey,  
thunder subtly roaring in the distance,  
as if calling the rain to retreat.

Then, the earth became drunk,

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it vomited mud and spat out sand.  
brown blood started flowing,  
through its gullied veins.

The chattering seem to have seized  
but, it didn't seem strange to me  
that the drizzling will not simply end  
even the rain wants an eternal ovation

Banana trees are the drunkest of all  
they wouldn't seize to shiver  
I saw them go up and fall  
like a broken lever

The sky then became clear,  
and the air far dearer  
birds went back to their flying  
and the wind, back to its course  
and the trees that seem to be dying  
galloped like an Ethiopian horse.

after a while, the drizzling stopped  
Alas! its quiet now.



### **god in butterflies**

**by Muna Chinedu (Nigeria)**

god forges a baby's giggles into his home  
folds himself into the wings of butterflies  
lost in the feathers of little birds  
and kindles them into songs.

we're praying at hilltops for moon  
the innocence of a baby, like god,  
hides the darkness of the night in its fist.

there's a shadow of god in every breath.  
before a lion sinks its fangs in your skin  
look into its eyes, a silhouette will peep.  
a lady throws a baby full of gurgle into a pit  
then goes to mecca and jerusalem  
to shed tears bulging with angels  
trying to wrestle themselves from drowning.

a wave in the model of awe burns into our veins  
hearts pulse with winds.  
god's a tender feeling  
we choose to be numb

because we're condemned  
in endless attempts to mold god  
into the genitals of religions.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Alpha I**

**By Badmus Jabril (Nigeria)**

I have reached a lot of places thanks to sheer imagination,  
when alone I tend to ungo places I have been in the past.

Lately I have been pushing myself to the bare minimum  
a person can be, and this again is turning out as my favorite act.

I have been rearranging the books that keep falling off my shelf,  
the pages have a crisp touch that feels like the syntax of my own living,

perhaps this could be the state I wished for every night I rest my head  
on the velvet pillow my grandfather had his first night as a man.

Somedays I would give in to the peerless shadows, to become a clear  
antipathy of something generally accepted as light or time.

Over there a curlew is flying at an impossible angle and the water  
molecules are re-changing into subliminal air like deceptions.

Another theory of nature says we are all different flesh drawn from  
the same crucible, which makes me a part of you.

Peering at that puny mountain, it must have been patient to hold its place  
when everything else is shifting according to the struggles of the cosmos.

I moved my feet imagining how resolute the sands below them are  
having to support even me a pack of thoughts with warm bloods.

If I went in search of love what would love bear?  
perhaps a smile that has been lost in a picture since the first lyrics of light.

I have my semblance now and it's not my dad's gait, his arms thorough  
as a column submerged in a sturdy lake. The river is home

it joins another river so that it feels like a rack of a perfect symphony.  
This sorrow brews like the morning ale, but so long

this symphony continue I will be happy, when the sound stop

I'll draw back into oblivion, into dreams.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Rites of Passage**

**By Darlington Chibueze Anuonye (Nigeria)**

Before dawn

I was a tiny seed  
buried in the entrails of the earth.  
I sprouted: a beautiful bud  
delicate and innocent

At sunrise

I became a rose  
and attracted flirtatious insects.  
After pollination and swollen sepal,  
I mothered another.

At dusk

Life finds me tasteless,  
having spent all my desires on mothering and been murdered  
My wrinkles are a python's scales  
Admired, not desired

\*\*\*\*\*

LISTEN

**By Kazeem Adeyomola Ismail (Nigeria)**

Young soul,  
Listen,  
Be still,  
When you go to the river,  
Keep your thirst in your home,  
For I do not know how,  
Nor do I know why,  
But perhaps,  
the fervour of the river to quench thirst,  
Is why fishermen drown.

.....

**Calypso's Song (For men who try to love me while I'm broken)**

**By Tariro Ndoro (Zimbabwe)**

I tell them my arms  
Are not a safe place to bury a heart  
I tell them my hands are fractions  
Fractal, fractured  
A broken soil that will yield no good crop  
A contaminated microcosm that will choke  
Even what it holds dear

I tell them my heart is a bottomless void,  
A sea of chaos, abyss of nothingness  
Where love has forgotten its own name  
I tell them my fury is a fiery tsunami,  
A seismic wave of immortal rage  
Yet sailor like they bury their trust  
In my arms in my hands in my waters

Prideful pirates aim to tame me  
They'll break the rage, that is what they claim,  
These seafarers - the ones I toss and turn  
In swirl, in pain, in maritime storm  
I spit them out on foreign ground  
Reduce those Crusoes to dull smoke signals  
For nearby boats. Still none of them believes  
A contaminated microcosm will choke  
Even what it holds dear  
Nothing, nothing, nothing grows here  
\*\*\*\*\*



**MY LETTER TO YOU**

**By Grace Sharra (Malawi)**

Because the sun stopped not for me  
And now I am stuck in between  
Of my maimed past and faith-laden tomorrow,  
Because my rival was a ghost  
And the bond of death is unbreakable  
(or was I to die for him too?)...  
And at the confluence of my sanity  
Did I wrestle with the ghosts and lost my thigh?  
We shall call it Penuel  
And gag my yesterdays' shame and cowardice  
Until I come back for my pound of flesh  
And shade off the skin

So April may be the cruelest month  
(I have Rwanda to attest to that)  
But O you fool, who said May for all her beauty is any kinder?  
It's May again but the kicking hope in my womb is gone  
I now must wriggle my beardless waist for a *thayo*  
And perform my mourning dance for a dream deferred  
Without losing my head in its ghostly echoes  
For it has become a world of stillborns;  
Of brotherly love, of comradeship  
Naked of trust and hope and sacredness  
Blossoming in brotherly betrayals  
As we try to rinse the thickness of our blood off our hearts  
And sup on sorrow (too much stale taste-sense a meal;  
We can use a little joy for seasoning)  
And until I find me and come back for what's mine  
I must sit here and unlearn all my innocences and trustings  
And somehow unravel the ageless riddle of the Phoenix.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Unholy Sermon Notes**

**By Yakeeb (Nigeria)**

Beer thirsty in church,  
The sermon is like a coward's babble,  
I wait for God to strike me dead,  
Spill my guts on floor  
Because I don't believe

I think about sex in unholy ways  
Serial fornication with adulterous wives  
In their kitchens I delay their husbands' dinner  
Heavenly Father, forgive me  
For I have sinned  
My lust is self-sufficient

I pray for wisdom, knowledge and understanding  
To become a passionate criminal mastermind  
I want 1000 strokes of luck and then, a miraculous moment  
For repentance, turning over a new leaf and all that crap  
My body is the temple of the living God  
Nicotine will not be the end of me.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Journeys

By Badmus Jubril (Nigeria)

It was always boring looking out of the window on  
our way to the hospital every Thursday morning,

my dad rants about the road that keeps bending in front of him,  
he swerves left and right in mimic of the black swathe that stretch

in front of us, the city has been the way it is since  
we were born my father says; the junctions, the alleys, the dints,

the bridges, the curb with its history of redness.  
A boy with tribal marks locks hands with his mother,

A lady is pacing left and right trying to dodge the civilization  
that keeps intruding her sphere, she is not alone in her struggles;

countless others at different close too, people walking;  
their foot in protest of time. If we imagine this people to be

somewhere on the Atlantic sailing north, different  
people with one expression, blistered feet from harmattan....

Strangers coming together as water brings together oil droplets,  
they do not feel the usual bliss that accompanies the sail.

They are close to the border and someone says in Arabic  
*smile, we ll look better, the dream is at a touching distance*

the tide pouring them to the shore: dark, loam and greedy,  
The *Guardia Civil* motions them to the rescue center, wary of the dirt

beneath their nails, the thick lips, their body as white as the clouds overhead.  
*things are only beautiful in imagination* one of the migrants whispered.

This dream is an expanse of land, gothic cathedrals, glazed tiles,  
this dream is a loaf of bread, a pen. Some night two

migrants found themselves in a room of dream, one is getting  
ready for the night howls, body of booze, blanched face;

the other is relieved of his past, eyes sightless,  
quiet as his footprint buried at the shores...

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**A Premature Sunset (for Innocent Bukhuni)**

**By Wafula p'Khisia (Kenya)**

when a giant, aged iroko tree falls in our homestead  
we don't cry bitterly, for the nestlings left in the cold  
would be mature enough to endure the jungle heat & hunger;  
but when dry thunder strikes a blossoming palm tree, and sips its life with cruelty  
excruciating pain grips our hearts, and tears blind our eyes.

i fumbled to gather my little fragments, scattered on the beach  
by the blast of news of your untimely exit  
as angry waves sped away with your breath-- echoing afar like a dying song  
of childhood memories, we sang whilst playing in mama's kitchen  
I remembered your forest of dreams, lying fallow for eternity  
and blood freezed in my veins  
You withered in our hands, a young shoot-- just stretching out of the testa without  
warning us, to measure new suits for the festivity!

so in silence the sun, moon and the stars communed  
and agreed to disappear from the map of the sky for a while  
to ease the pain of witnessing a premature shoot swallowed by the soil  
the sky wept bitterly, wetting us in vulnerable places;  
But we stood still, arrested by your unmoving eyes  
to let you-- the only dancer to bow out before the sounding of the last drum  
go in honour.

**BECAUSE EVERYTHING WAS BEING SWALLOWED UP BY MEMORY**

*(for Aunty Ebum)*

**By Boluwatife Afolabi (Nigeria)**

Because I tried to reimagine time  
and it became a body of water  
and we are fragments of matter  
floating in a dismembered torso  
but we are not drowning,  
only her.

**II**

Because I thought I had forgotten the  
language of loss and I was  
a butterfly, gifting myself to the wind  
and allium and god and basking  
in the song of cuckoos-  
softly  
slowly,  
dancing.

**III**

But grief does not have a mother tongue.

**IV**

And her body suddenly dissolved  
into memory and I offered hands  
to the son and prayed for a miracle:  
*the transmutation  
of memory  
back to body.*

**V**

But it was not enough.

**VI**

And I also tried to pull all her names  
I had learnt out of my tongue  
and hang them on the open spaces  
of my skin

willing them to live again-  
*the transformation*  
*of names*  
*back to woman.*

**VII**

Still, it was not enough.

**VIII**

Where did we first learn that  
the answer to loss is grief?

**IX**

I bury my head in seawater  
seeking new ways to disremember,  
I taste salt  
and I forget to forget her, again.

**IX**

So,  
here is a memento-  
to all your laughters  
that drowned in the songs of loss  
to the fragrance of your skin  
melting into the wind  
to your bones sinking into shadows  
to your breath fading into a whisper  
to your body becoming a poem.

**X**

Here is your reincarnation,  
because everything was being swallowed  
by memory  
and I was too afraid that  
my body will become god's acre.

**A poem for Hugh Masekela**

**by Zibusiso Mpopu (Zimbabwe)**

How is it  
that a breeze born  
in the midst of violence  
could wax poetic  
at the sound of a trumpet,  
and tell the story of ancestors past and present and transcendent?  
You told your story.  
and your music lives on as though  
everyday.  
is the coming of the rain.  
rest.

WHAT LIES BEYOND THE DARK?

**By Samson Abanni (Nigeria)**

Have you noticed that we are amphibious?  
Have you noticed that we are toads?  
We came from death to marry, raise and bury and then silently return.  
But when we submit our passport at death's embassy,  
those servants of the most high never ask "business or pleasure? "

And because we are roads each must run his shift in silence.  
But I sincerely want to ask, what lies beyond the dark?  
And why do all who enter the grave always shut the door behind them?  
How thick is this curtain of darkness between here and the hereafter?  
And please, what lies beyond the dark?

We have sent a letter to our maker,  
but I doubt if it will return before our death: our final birthday gift.  
Truth has been our tour guide but truth does not scout these fringes.  
This dressing room at the ocean floor where time change shifts.  
Under these soft dark blankets where time enters and leave pregnant.  
When fate sits to write its report With its nine billion kids tucked in bed,  
Who run the antenatals for time, who births tomorrow?  
And who supervises the transfer of nine billion destinies,  
when a day is about to die?

LEARNING TO LOVE MY MOTHER IN A NEW WAY

**By Okwudili Nebeolisa (Nigeria)**

Many things, for me, begin with my mother,  
Even the stories that had to do  
With my father and his distant brother.  
Stories that did not so much as venture out  
As they caused me to look introspectively  
At my all too unaccustomed life.  
She was the sepia section of my life –  
Her eyes alone could lead me in the dark.  
She caused me to apologize profusely,  
To be sorry for each good poet out there  
Staring out the window, at greying clouds  
In search of metaphors, who I had not read,  
She caused me to stare at her for an image.  
What could I swear by, it was not my fault.  
Her grief was pulling at my hair, hungry child.  
Loving her was like climbing the stairs;  
A pain but a distance nonetheless.  
How could I have been harbouring these thoughts  
For whom whose teaspoon of life had moulded me,  
She who anytime something fell from her skirt  
I couldn't stop imagining myself  
Tumbling from in between her at my birth,  
You for whom I could never imagine  
Another life, for whom the past was mine.  
Dear housemaid of my heart's tiny rooms,  
The aloe vera of my love: clear green  
But spiked, healing but bitter, noon nightmare.  
I could have quitted long, long ago but  
I couldn't bear the luxury of it.  
Yet I couldn't bear to think I had lost it.  
Mother, I'm forgiving everybody!  
Ma, I'm your good boy now, vigil by your bed.  
What could I swear by, it was not my fault.

Cut my breasts today

**By Daniel Many Owiti (Kenya)**

My dear husband, if you will have to cut my breasts then cut them today,  
When they are still erect and full of honey,  
Do not cut them tomorrow when I have lactating babies and they are swollen with milk!  
If you will have to chase me away from this house that we are building together,  
Then chase me away now when I still have enough strength to build another,  
Do not throw me outside in the cold tomorrow when my thighs are withered and my body is frail,  
Do not throw me outside in the cold when I have seven children clutching at my feet and my hair is broken!

My dear husband, if you will have to cheat on me with a teenager.  
Then do it now when I still have the curves,  
Bring her home and let her also see my smooth round buttocks and my soft lips,  
Do not bring her when my lips are cracked and my buttocks having stretch marks  
Do not bring her when my breasts have fallen on my chest such that she calls me an old woman!

My dear husband, if you will have to beat me with blows and kicks,  
Then beat me up now when I still have young blood running through my veins and the wounds will heal faster,  
Beat me up now when I am still alone and I can run away and look for another husband,  
Do not kick my stomach tomorrow when I am heavy with your child and cause my vagina to bleed out thick clots of what was supposed to be our child,  
Do not beat me up tomorrow when my son has started growing hair on his balls because you do not know what the young adult may just do to your hairy balls as well,  
Do not beat me up to tomorrow when I will have nowhere to go to and my skin is wrinkled making the wounds to pain forever!

**for women**

**by Timothy Ojo (Nigeria)**

this is for women who left their teardrops on a platter for the urchins to soak their wicks in and light up their fears...

this is for women who have baptised their heads in a jar of indecision smothered with pains,

this is for women who have been to the peak of icy mountains looking for smoky paths

this is for women, ladies, girls who have had their chambers down below turned to a museum\_\_\_\_\_ a subtle wind of hell runs on your face in remembrance.

this is for you-

who have had wreaths of verbena laid beside your bodies,

this is for you-

oscillating between getting loved by you and by others\_\_\_\_\_ a subject of abject excoriation by vultures who wants bits of your skin,

i see how you want to shred your skin - moulting into what you don't want to be, all for you to be a hibiscus in the desert,

hibiscus becomes an easy meal for desert's armadillos, did you know?

i see how you search for tongues on the feet of men, hoping that they disintegrate into dust of freckles on your face -an array of splinted sandstones mocking pearls

be a fern in the desert -blends but still with her unique features.

don't wait for the shyness of the moon for you to bloom\_\_\_\_\_

do not wait for the howls of the night ghouls before you soar into the starry nights.

my mother told me that you can be a million light years from yourself if you follow the revolutions of the earth- my mother is a sage that ties wrappers, she echoes the voice of God in a singsong.

this is for you, ladies, women, girls.

**the music man thinks about Dapchi**

**by Salawu Olajide (Nigeria)**

1.

I do not know how to write a poem  
where girls are mathematics we leave  
as our values for sorrow. I am still learning  
to write about eyes that have forgotten how to cry  
and mouths that have forgotten how to smile;  
and when you say love, your eyes become a story  
where girls are shovelled away and ghosts  
of barbecued men are feathered by the wind.

2.

The inside of this poem is the inside of your mother  
whose stomach's floor is a dredge of grief  
and, at first, you became a cloud of hope when  
she told you what men desire when their eyes interlock  
with yours, and why flowers are not expensive metaphors;  
but now, you are a shadow fiddling inside her heart.

3.

Look at what my poem has become tonight;  
feel the elegy in your mouth like ashes  
and the heat oozing from this land's quicksand.  
See how it burns you every time you mention Chibok,  
before Dapchi says,  
*run, run for your dear life!*

## **I see the clouds gliding**

**By Lod Nael (Nigeria)**

Behind our laws, behind our government  
behind the walls of our parliament  
I see the clouds gliding  
behind our statues, behind our pride,  
and behind all our giant strides  
I see the clouds gliding  
Behind our trees, behind our frees  
and behind all the oppressors  
I see the clouds gliding

behind our shame, behind our guilt  
behind all that march in the boots  
I see the clouds gliding  
behind our bombs, behind our swords  
behind our words and our songs  
I see the clouds gliding  
behind the dead, behind the living  
behind the atheist and the believing  
I see the clouds gliding

behind our fall behind our stand  
behind the pyramids of our hands  
I see the clouds gliding  
behind our sleep and our wake  
behind the heads on the stake  
I see the clouds gliding  
behind the nooses, behind the nails  
behind the crucifix and the hails  
I see the clouds gliding

behind the silence, behind the voice  
behind the whispering in the noise  
I see the clouds gliding  
behind the curtains, behinds the halls  
behind the writings on the wall  
I see the clouds gliding  
behind the divide, behind the join  
behind the umbilical and the loin  
I see the clouds gliding,  
watching, anticipating,  
waiting, for our end.

.....

**Once Upon My Beautiful Skin in Tanzania**

**By Salawu Olajide (Nigeria)**

Once upon that man running after my frail body. Once upon the knife he is wielding towards my neck. Once upon my priceless blood. Once upon an old man drinking it. Once upon my beautiful soul in a ditch. Once upon headless Dunia waiting for the vultures to eat what is left of his trunk. Once upon white-snow arms chopped off in the dark corner of the street. Once upon the wind that blows a child's legs off in my country. Once upon my ghoulish hairs. Once upon a place called Mwanza. Once upon the slow death we are dying. Once upon the money they are going to make from my goddam body.

.....