



# ANCESTRAL MUSINGS

TOP 20 POEMS OF THE BRIGITTE POIRSON POETRY  
CONTEST (BPPC) FEBRUARY / MARCH 2021

*Edited By*

BRIGITTE POIRSON  
KUKOGHO IRUESIRI SAMSON

*Other books in the series:*

Wind of Change (2015)

Loops of Hope (2016)

The Train Stops at Sunset (2017)

Citadel of Words (2018)

Vortices of Verses (2019)

A Pandemia of Poetry (2020)

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## INTRODUCTION

2021 launched a year of poetry with a first contest centered on today's challenges and issues as the ancestors would see them from their experience and wisdom. Would they agree with our new norms or lament our modern, unnatural way of life?

*"We are words in a sentence our fathers began and our sons will finish",* a Massai saying states. The writers have underlined and exploited the fact they are a social and historical hemistich in a family sentence that forms a poetic and political unit. Poetry connects generations because it points to a direction inspired by the ancestors and redefined by their inheritors.

Many poets appealed to their ancestors to enlighten their sons on today's thorny paths. Some saw their forebears approving new visions of life and the use of new tools of communication that enable us to make the most of what our predecessors have achieved.

They generally did so with style and creativity and deserve congratulations on sharing their poetry, their love and their respect for the loved ones quite artistically.

Brigitte Poirson  
*March 2021*

## FEBRUARY/MARCH 2021 WINNERS



OLALEKAN DANIEL KEHINDE is a poet, essayist and storyteller. He has contributed to several anthologies and has works in *The Peace Exhibits Journal*, *The Shallow Tales Review*, *African Writer Magazine*, and elsewhere. He has won several awards for his writing and authored the top essay of the National Students Write Hack 2020. Olalekan is presently a student of English and Literature (Education) at the University of Benin (UNIBEN). He loves to read and teach the English Language.

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AKOR AGADA NATHANIEL is an award-winning poet and Economics student of Benue State University (BSU), Makurdi. His poems have made the top 10 shortlists in various editions of the Brigitte Poirson Poetry Contest (BPPC). He has a great passion for creative writing and is a member of the Writers League, BSU chapter.



OLOWO QUDUS is a blogger, poet and spokenword artiste. His works have appeared or are forthcoming BPPC anthologies, *CÓN-SCÌÒ Magazine* and others. He is currently a student of Sociology at the University of Ilorin, Kwara state. When he is not busy he explores humanity, religion and philosophy.



## ARE OUR ANCESTORS FOREIGNERS BECOMING

OLALEKAN DANIEL KEHINDE, 1ST PRIZE WINNER

You burn your toothless cowries, use the ashes to cross your foreheads  
and nickname it Ash Wednesday, while each bead of holy rosaries skips your  
thumbs.

You burn incense and chase the spirits of your fathers with its fumes  
strong as the smoke escaping the fire beneath the pots of concoctions,  
yet you wonder how your fathers went without waving you well?

You chew the name fortified with deep heritage, spit it like "pako" ruins  
and cast spells with cloven tongues upon the ancestors that nurtured your  
back,  
weaning your mouths from the incantations that cooked you strong,  
yet you wonder how your fathers went without waving you well,  
or how each syllable they speak in the leftover toothless cowries are foreign?

Your ancestors tell you to loose your hearts from the web of ignorance  
that traps you like vulnerable preys that lost their strength;  
they tell you to see how your white neighbours rhyme your songs,  
and how they hear the voices of the ageless cowries that speak in their  
palms.

They tell you not to wonder if their spirits perch at the center of your  
neighbours.

## THE WORLD MUST HAVE GONE MAD

AKOR AGADA NATHANIEL, 2ND PRIZE WINNER

The skin of depression still wears the sickness of devastation  
In an era of hybrid civilization erupting thick lavas of costly corruptions,  
Casting sullen shadows that often slap the sunshine of our proven traditions,  
With her costumes of pride radiating the cologne of sophistication.

I am Akor Agada's ancestor laughing at the light of this age  
Whose carnage of damage has crumpled the curves of true courage,  
Like our mother's tongue kowtowing before a strange language  
Where she once steered the ship of kings and sages.

Gone are those good old days of legendary folklores  
Gotten from sojourners whose feet bore the stings of blistered sores,  
Thanks to today's technology triggering those torments blinding our sights  
with gores,  
Shipping young descendants of our late ancestors to distant shores.

Today's fashion of social realities is decayed flesh for vultures.  
The spirit of our fathers has long lost its flavours  
To the glamorous razzmatazz of other so called saviours  
Whose followers long for like some sweet smelling savours.

All I have seen is enough reason to make me sad.  
It is gobsmacking how yesterday's taboo now makes many glad.  
Not everything is good for food, but when the good becomes bad,  
Then the world must have indeed gone mad.

## METAMORPHOSIS

OLOWO QUDUS OPEYEMI, 3RD PRIZE WINNER

*".....where they have traced their signs for us blind  
and unworthy sons  
who see nothing of what they have made  
In the air, on the water, where they have traced their signs"  
— Birago Diop (Vanity)*

Our stygian soils now wither and whimper  
at the earth's core, as if its belly bristled.  
They said it was our progenitors purring out  
yowls of deplore we planted in the citadel of their psyche.

We no longer chant their wild paeans,  
Nor play our frolic flute into the pristine wind.  
Our moppets now mock the sly dances  
of our masquerades; they call them "stodgy savages".

Time usurped the feats of our past.  
Men no longer descant dirges for kinsmen  
whose feet beckoned the bait of the grave,  
and our requiems are sung with grotty hypocrisy.

The brisk moon now gawps with a dumb despond,  
for old sages no longer tell lores at nightfall.  
Instead, we relish the groovy taverns  
and stark strippers dancing on a straight steel.

At dusk, what if they creep in and cry  
in their glum cloaks with regrets tainting their souls,  
for the home they built quaked and shuddered  
in reckless ruins and toppled into the earth's gullet?

## EIGHT RULES TO LIVE BY

ADEBISI AMORI OLUWAFUNMILOLA

One. You are part of a family,  
a descendant and an ancestor,  
an end and a beginning.  
Two, choose to love truly and deeply.  
Even when you're hurt and it's hard,  
choose to love harder,  
for there is no greater way  
to start a revolution.  
Three, speak our native tongue.  
Find the beauty and wisdom it holds,  
embrace it and hold on tight.  
Four, love and support beautiful people,  
for even you are one of them.  
Five, as they did to us,  
outsiders will label you, limit you,  
but child, choose to step out into the light  
and bring to life the truths they've buried.  
Six, hold on to faith  
and always look up to the heavens.  
Seven, remember freedom is fragile,  
so fight for it, protect it, preserve it.  
Eight, just as you open your eyes,  
open up your heart to life and do good,  
so that when you ascend above,  
life will thank you  
for the beauty you added unto her.

## HOW MUCH OF US ARE YOU?

OLUMIDE MANUEL

You, an echolalia of anthesis,  
cut lights into a million shards  
to pierce the god-eyed agathe.

You sit, unweeded, in scars,  
in the eclipses scattered  
between brown cornfields,

in axletrees, in indexes  
in obscurities, in the winking  
of headlamps bellying mysteries.

Towards midnights, you grow  
inward into yourself,  
buffering skototropisms.

You patch your grief with blanks,  
your laughter with holes, holes  
with hopes and hopes with hopes.

And we are here, wondering among the coordinates  
of our beauty and whatnots...

how much of us are you?  
how much of you are we not?

**WHAT OUR ANCESTORS THOUGHT THEY SAW**

NZERE CHINEDU

If they were told that the land is no more greener on the other side,  
That it no longer paves pastures for our broken feet,  
That our dreams are now made into mourning clothes of sack and ash,  
That we have torn down their altars of reverence  
And now chant inaudible curses at the sky,

What would they say? What, if they found out  
That black is now symbolic of where the sun rises  
And we are its silhouetted frame,  
That the waters which took them away from home now flood our lands,  
Yet we subscribe to polished chains?

If only they knew,  
They would have sunk those hallelujahs  
Before we broke our bodies into a liturgy of psalms,  
Kneeling before the altar, tongue out,  
Chanting monochromic amens!

## NNAMDI KANU, HAVE THEY SENT YOU?

SAMSON ABANNI

*(In memory of that madness)*

Have they finally cracked the code?  
have they discovered the scam?  
Have they finally counted the dead of the Biafran war  
and noticed that the Igbos did not complete their assigned quota?  
Nnamdi Kanu, have they sent you?

Then begins the story with the list of the dead:  
Okadigbo, Ikoku and others.  
For we began with half of a rising sun  
and ended with a quarter.

Were you in those trenches when men left like bullets  
and never returned,  
when the bushes gave way for burial sites,  
rough hurried holes for two adults  
who have become roommates in death?

And the rumour is that we are lazy,  
that we paid our war levy with only children.  
But I don't blame them.  
They now ask for another round of contributions.  
So Nnamdi, you have come  
for the rent of a house about to collapse.  
When the gods complained of hunger,  
we showed them where mosquitoes bit us  
but found no blood, like oil in the Chad basin.

Nnamdi, please, lower your voice, our dead are still sleeping.  
We are not known to discuss in the open what we have not raised in private.  
Where was your birth?  
Then ask your elders, and they will tell you how we fought the gods  
for our autonomy.  
For fear is not our kinsman...  
As traders, we have haggled with death and prevailed.

Please, lower your voice,  
for even Death has a king,  
but we have none.



## DECENT DEFINITIONS ACCORDING TO MY GRANDFATHER

### BLESSING OMEIZA OJO

Lies: the foundation of a capsizing nation.  
Lekki massacre: they said there was no death...  
were there sons among the protesters?  
Dreams: they do not flower realities, here.  
Tribe: a group of stains on hope, on oneness,  
perhaps outstretching...  
Democracy: a fancy word for Golgotha  
Reincarnation: my peers, power drunk, return to torment you.  
Herders: business men trading with the government.  
National Anthem: sham words; we care less about our nation.  
Lockdown: mercy-killing or easy death for those with no means.  
Palliatives: a compassionate treatment for the dying.  
Fire: a gift for anything that has body and soul.  
Bullet: a matter searching for space; your body is a space.

Earth: full of tender dreams and bodies.  
Mouth: only for dirges and songs of lamentation; we  
thought we had sung enough to liberate  
you.  
Flee: I am sorry you have been rostered to  
death  
for speaking up.  
Silence: me, a moment from now. or you, if  
you  
refuse to flee.

## REGGAE AND BLUES

### UDOCHUKWU CHIDERA AMARACHI

- 1).Bathing in the glare of the full moon,  
We danced in twos to the tune of the flute.  
Now, a resounding silence echoes through our playground.  
We no longer move to the ikoro sound.
  
- 2).When gods in form of men walked the earth,  
Offerings of the fattest cow and goats to them we served.  
The abode of our ancestors is now an ashy ruin of red mold,  
An unbecoming ode to the men of old.
  
- 3).The loin clothes that once held our breasts,  
Have given way to ropes showing off the divides of our chest.  
Like fads out of vogue, we have dethroned the old gods,  
Engaging in a toxic romance with the new ones.
  
- 4).Our farmlands and barns are stripped of their glory,  
As youngsters carry guns for a quicker success story.  
In days of old, virgins were betrothed to kings.  
Now, the talk of chastity hits unfamiliar rings.
  
- 5).Things have fallen apart, the centre has given way.  
The streets of social media are littered with girls that now slay.  
Challenges beget contests that enthrone nudity,  
Their bare bodies up for intense public scrutiny.
  
- 6).What would we tell our fathers has gone wrong?  
Alu! Abomination, a distress call would be made through a gong!  
They would beg Chukwuabiana not to visit us with thunder,  
Making sacrifices of fowls and goats for our blunder.
  
- 7).Gone are the days when men charged into holy wars.  
Now, they recoil under their shells when the lion roars.  
Our blood no longer dances to the music of our roots.  
We now tap our feet to reggae and blues.

FROM ELYSIUM

ABDULMUEED BALOGUN ADEWALE

What would your ancestors say,  
if the blue purdah fell, they saw you  
with glee ditching their golden path,  
beheld your legs gyrating  
to the toxic tune of the new world,  
which in their time would have been muffled?

What would their mouths say,  
if the fingers of a careless wind  
slightly opened the divine window,  
then overheard your lips calling them hypocrites,  
saying their precious traditions are fables  
coated in silken veracity?

What would plunge into the minds  
of your ancestors, who were saints, who were gods,  
if they peeped through a tiny hole,  
sighted you walking the streets,  
a snail with a sheer-skimpy shell,  
giving away your pride before the night of flight,  
ruining culture's face under the banner of civilization?

From up there,  
if they saw all these, what other song  
would the lofty lips of your ancestors birth,  
if not a dirge, consoling a moribund precious culture?

## THEY WOULD GRIEVE IN SOULFUL SILENCE

IDOKO SADDAM IFEANYI

The hitherto glittery sky becomes replete with blank gloominess.  
Ay! In my Fatherland, the sea appears hollow and tainted.  
The brilliance of the elements dims into emptiness.  
Nay, Like the smoky cavern of the hermit,  
The elements get blurry forthwith.  
What would our ancestors say, as the Sceptre is now but a Sabre?  
What could they, now our blares eclipse our cheers?  
Like a stump, Humanity lingeringly withers away.  
As depravity wins in winning men's hearts.  
O what would the ancestors say,  
glazing over how the rhythms of their words  
are henceforth played in diminuendos,  
With the trails of their big feet  
Muddled in the mud of negligence?  
What would be of their plaintive heart,  
Beholding the vintages of the Glory days,  
like the drowsy sun, fleeting and fading?  
They would grieve in soulful silence of rebuke.  
They would be effusive in abject melancholy,  
Grieving and still wishing  
the land could brighten in its horrid hue.  
They would be effusive in abject melancholy.

## I DREAMT OF MY ANCESTORS

ABUBAKAR ADAMU DANJUMA

On stormy days and dreadfulness,  
Of quelling quagmire and squalidness,  
A furious fire flew fast like flashlight,  
Lighting the juncture of my eyelashes.

Waggish words  
Of thoughts and feelings  
Are to be read – not to be wrecked!

LaboriousLife,  
The source of existence on the planet of nothingness,  
Speaks into the darkness of the sea, sweating sorely.

My ancestors came to me dreamily.  
From all their magic-like mouths,  
I saw furnaces of light.  
In an unabashed unison, they said:  
"Now that you have grown up,  
You are the pilot of your plane:  
You can do better than all of us."

## HERBS AND PSYCHOSIS

BAYOWA, AYOMIDE MICHEAL

"I had a night in which everything was revealed to me [...]" — Sarah Kane  
 I speak of it again- knowing I shouldn't when an adult speaks.  
 Head down, listening. Fixed stares at sunset lagging behind. The human  
 body  
 is an archaic language not everyone understands. I shrimp like an aged  
 African storyteller, self-handcuffed to spine. Just like my father's  
 grandfather.  
 An uncaged captive with all old-age charges dropped against him-  
 yet tied to an illness or the other. "There's a curative leaf for that,"  
 he'd say rest assured in his sick bed. That is why our people don't die  
 young.  
 They live to see what will become of their procreations. Ready for work,  
 ready for school; my stay-at-home order remains; to stick to my  
 medications.  
 I am awake earlier than usual, curious about a nightmare- of a pipe  
 my windpipe breaking. Plumbers charge too much for repairs.  
 Too much water will be lost & the hydro bill will become double.  
 Nothing worries me more than the pills that will be found therein, stuck.  
 My husband & children will despise me for that. Between those who  
 sleep  
 with a bible or phone under their pillow, one awaits a call. Like a nightmare,  
 before grabbing a scripture to pray. However, there's a leaf for what's  
 wrong with me. A stick of weed, I think. My forebearer would prefer a  
 chewing stick. He'd advise against any sort of needle on my skin too.  
 If in need of healing, he'd beat about the bush with cutlass adages. Basic.  
 Memorable, like Queen premier's incantations. He'd  
 tell me not to interrupt  
 him & listen to all he has to say. I stand feeble, my head weighing  
 down  
 my tiny neck like a mushroom. A little poke can flake me out.  
 Head down, with fixed stares at footprints or his mouth as he  
 chews raw  
 locust beans- To wash my mouth with gin tea & breathe in my  
 backyard's  
 broken climate & simply live like everyone else in the family.

## WHERE DID I GO WRONG?

TSHEPANG SEKELE

“Looking around I put my hand on my mouth,  
Failing to understand where I went wrong.  
I hesitated to witness this eyesore.  
Is this really what I worked for?

Why are my children so parched?  
Why are my children living destitute?  
Why are my children killing each other?  
Where is the wealth our motherland gave us?

My gaze fell on the women when I thought I'd seen it all.  
Their hair was not like how I remember.  
Why do they have all those colors on their faces?  
Are you sure you brought me back to the land that nurtured me?

Then I thought my ears were playing tricks on me.  
Can you hear that? My children are chatting among themselves,  
But I do not understand them. I cannot comprehend what they're saying.  
What language is that?

Why are leaders subjugating their own under oppression?  
Is it all because of those small printed papers they keep exchanging?  
Why are they treating them like animals?  
Why do they give them scraps while they give themselves big portions?

What happened to Ubuntu?  
Nigeria, Somalia and South Sudan, please, help me understand.  
What is going on with you and your siblings?  
Why are you budding heads?

Please, put me out of my misery and tell me where I went wrong!

## ORIFLAMME OF TRUTH

FUNMINIYI AKINRINADE

Leave your haunted houses  
Gather at the town square  
Bring giant stones not burnt skulls  
Make a fire with firewood not broken limbs  
Add paraffin not your brothers' blood  
Fan the inferno till its flame rises to heaven's eyes  
Make the skies feel the intense heat here.

Leave your haunted houses  
Gather at the town square  
Draw down your nose masks  
And breathe in the polluted air  
Filled with stench of rotten countrymen  
Countrymen rid of breaths by your bullets  
And pulled apart by apartheid.

Leave your haunted houses  
Gather at the town square  
Hold firm this oriflamme  
Like couples hold hands at the altar  
Alter not this nugget of truth:  
"You need one another to survive  
In a country where everything pushes you away."



## ANCESTRAL FACES

### OGEDENGBE TOLU IMPACT

Drifting into lands unknown,  
Again they were there,  
That night of independence,  
Sitting under a big Iroko tree,  
Arrayed in native attires,  
Their necks decked with beads.

They called me,  
My very self in the veins of newborns.  
I moved towards them.  
They sang in one accord, a folksong  
Which seeped down the depths of my emotion  
Stupefied I asked  
Who are you, they answered  
Ancestors of the black soil.

They took me to a habitat of dumps  
Once a sacred shrine for the gods  
Whose stories I read about  
In the chronicles of forsaken tales  
Entwined in the leaflets of history.  
They spoke about the nudity of our culture  
Exposed in the lunar glare of the marketplace  
And the new breeds of clothed heritage  
Dragging our dignity to the river of shame.

I saw the discontent on their faces,  
A longing to revive their dead customs  
And exhume the relics of age-old tradition  
From the catacombs of westernization.

*Iroko: A strong hardwood tree found in the west coast of tropic Africa.*

**MY GRANDFATHER SAYS COHABITATION IS THE DEVIL'S WORK**

HUSSANI ABDULRAHIM

We are sizing up each other, I tell him,  
examining what set of prints fits  
into the spaces between us.  
Because the world has grown uncertain,  
every soul is caught in his own fire.  
Thus, I say, we have learnt  
the art of love to be shrewdness.  
Gone are the days of yore,  
when one held a lamp of love,  
merely hoping to find one's own reflection.  
No more the wildness of the heart unbridled.  
This Titanic, we now navigate with the head.

The birds chirp on the old baobab,  
and nostalgia stirs in my grandfather's heart.  
In my days, marriage was sacred,  
because love was a basket holding water.  
No leash on a heart untamed by emotions.  
What you have now are kids  
launching badly fashioned kites  
and expecting them to sail heavenwards.  
Weaklings walking without  
the sweltering beast beneath their ribcages

## OF THE REJUVENATING TAMARISK

### PENIEL GIFTED

Of the rejuvenating tamarisk  
That keeps furnishing our gut  
With buckets of unending dilemma,

With keystones of sand dunes  
Gulping our sunny May wine into  
Pigheaded roots of spotted cowbane,

Dressing us in itching parkas -  
Sweet William, a featherless heeler  
Groaning for gentle dahlias' return.

You will only hear their rants through sore  
Shadows of the Orange branch, their griefs  
Inscribed on the four curbs of their scions' rhizomes.

IF

OLOLADE AKINLABI IGE

If my ancestors could rise from the tomb  
and found our rites are denounced by missionaries,  
they would shriek like babies descending from the womb,  
and ask why our heritage are a theme of mockeries.

If my ancestors were to live once again,  
they would wonder why Sango can no longer reign,  
why Obatala is now a subject of ridicule  
and how everyone believes our science fails to rule.

If my ancestors could be amidst us,  
they would marvel over our lost virtue,  
and ask what it is that befell us  
and why we exalt men with no virtue.

If my ancestors had experienced twenty-twenty,  
they would have consulted the furious deities  
to review the fiends behind the Lekki massacre,  
those who ordered the shooting of our brothers and sisters.

If my father's fathers were still living,  
they would frown at our indiscipline  
and rant over the plague of impunity  
which thugs us far from humamity.

## A RAVEN'S REVERIE

AJAYI MARY AYOBAMI

One day, a white raven followed me home.  
Watchful it was!  
It had the eyes of a million ancestors  
And a large mouth.  
It was as cute as can be.  
Through it, the voices of my forefathers resound:  
Listen to us in words profound.

Across the years, across the centuries,  
They say, showcase your works online,  
Let the world reek of your skills!  
This chance we never had in our time.

The old ones remind us that online technology  
Has paid for our comfortology.

They say the limitations we had  
Have sharpened our senses.  
We look through the medical vagaries  
And see educated physicians  
That ease suffering.  
This chance we never had.

The old ones remind us that education  
Has honed our medical orientation.

They say, let us open our minds,  
Clap hands, and suck the milk of modernity.  
Clap hands and run on.

The forefathers remind us that, despite the history of disadvantages,  
We will accept today's advantages.



Dear Reader,

Thank you for reading this chapbook.

The monthly [Brigitte Poirson Poetry Contest \(BPPC\)](#) is a writing contest aimed at rewarding the under-appreciated talent of young Nigerian poets. It was instituted in February 2015 in honour of [Brigitte Poirson](#), a French poet, editor, and lecturer, who has over the years worked assiduously to promote and support of African poetry. You too can be a part of the BPPC initiative by [entering your poems for any of the monthly editions](#).

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