

CITADEL OF
WORDS

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Wind of Change (2015)

Loops of Hope (2016)

The Train Stops at Sunset (2017)

CITADEL OF WORDS

(Brigitte Poirson Poetry Contest 2018 Anthology)

Edited by

Brigitte Poirson

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ISBN: 978-978-969-288-0

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National Library of Nigeria Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Cover Design: Akila Jibrin

Printed and Published in Nigeria by:

Words Rhymes & Rhythm Limited
Suite C309, Global Plaza Plot 366, Obafemi Awolow
Way, Jabi District, Abuja, Nigeria.
08169027757, 08060109295
www.wrr.ng

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INTRODUCTION

Poemize.

The hundreds of poets who have offered their talents to the 2018 BPPC poetry servings resulting in this anthology - the fourth on end to date - deserve a special neologism to qualify their poetic feats! Not only do they use the hues and colours on the palette of literary devices along impressive lines while following the wanderings of their multifaceted creativity, but they have proved mature enough to air their views on many burning issues with a singularly authoritative voice. Whether they poemize the country of their dreams, their journeys through life, heroes, solitude and other demons, or the relationship between poetry and ideology, they all explore the roads to nowhere which lead somewhere under their quills. Nothing falls outside their poetic ambit. They all happily follow the adventurous streaks of originality.

The contest, initially launched with Words Rhymes & Rhythm to promote Nigerian poetry, was opened to poets around the world this year. Artists of the pen were pressing to participate beyond borders – after all, poetry, by essence, knows no boundaries – so alongside Nigerian talents, this anthology is honoured to include authors from Ghana, South Africa, Guyana and India.

They all deploy the resources of their imaginative and innovative minds with generosity, caustic humour, irony, deep insight, a sense of direction. Some weave long, intricate lines; others compose one-word verses. But they always hit at the heart. They handle the arcanae of linguistics with an apparent natural dexterity. Playing with free verse or sonnets, Olde English or blank verse, African affricates or slews of jingling figures of speech, they write verses that serve. They pen, distend, transcend. They never lose sight of the stakes, never sidestep the issues. The buoyant might of the pen may send

them frantically soaring or descending to hells, but their global vision of life is never blurred.

In a world that tends to drift along uncontrolled currents, they steer poetry with a sure hand. Modern societies fluctuate between totalitarian or autocratic systems that negate individuals, and democratic systems where institutions are becoming abstract frames leaving individuals to compete fiercely and stigmatize one another, which generally leads to negating the person. To the ugly faces of fanaticism, oppression, greed and blind violence, poets oppose the unique combinations of their artistic words. They know that it is not distance but defiance, not difference but indifference, that separate people. Taming monsters, creating worlds beyond the clashes of cultures and dehumanizing histories and systems, they walk on air in their creations, but only to get a better view of the vicissitudes of the world below, in an endeavour to change the perception and meaning of life's trials and tribulations across the world. "The real citadel of strength of any community", Everett Dirksen once wrote, "is in the hearts and minds and desires of those who dwell there", the very realm of poets, who reside in the hearts and dreams of society. It is then a matter of strength and authority versus power and force, bliss versus hubris, domination versus creation. "When power corrupts", J.F. Kennedy stated, "poetry cleanses." So, in J. Keats's terms, when he "spin[s] from his own innards his own airy citadel", any man can construct a renewed world for himself and others.

As such, the poemizer holds the tenure of his art. Placed on the eminence of his creativity, he represents a stronghold of inventiveness, a fortress of fantasy and enlightenment. Etymologically speaking, doesn't the word *citadel* come from *city*, the centre and heart of the community? Who else can exemplify this more properly than the poet?

Yet, in this vigorous volume of verse, the citadel the poets build together from their various abodes around the world

and in their different styles does not have much in common with the tower of Babel. One of the winners of a monthly contest, N.G. Nyuwem, is adamant about it. "Amidst a babel of languages" he certifies he heard but "one voice." "In the diversity of cultures, [he] beheld a symphony." Though he refers to the past, he definitely points to a direction for the future. The poets resort to very diverse forms of expression, but they do speak the same language. Isn't poetry the Esperanto of the heart?

Their meters measure and gauge the personal, societal or spiritual cracks of life and produce just the right touches of artistic skill, wisdom and craziness to fill in the gaps with their words and visions which, bound together, create a citadel of words.

*When thunderous rage roars into your ears,
Ready to ruin present, future and yesteryears,
If the sky yields but simmering, shadowy shades
Or drops of acid rain strike you like blades,
Build yourselves into poetry! Leave the herds!
Build the world into a citadel of words!*

B. Poirson

By the time you finish reading this anthology, you would have read a year's worth of (Nigerian) poetry, versed by the most active population of contemporary Nigerian poets. It goes without saying, therefore, that what you have in your hands is a slice of a people's history, a handful of their shared breath and a cocktail of their personalities – *all frozen in words*.

K. I. Samson

Dedicated to:

Patrick Poirson, and all the dearly
departed who live forever in the
lines of our poetry

HONOUR ROLL

February Winner

DEAD MEN WALKING

Chinazom Chukwudi Otubelu

March Winner

THE WORLD WITHIN

Tukur Olorunloba Ridwan

April Winner

GOLDEN STATUES OF AFRICA

Olajuwon Joseph Olumide

May Winner

CONVERSATIONS WITH MY PILLOWS

Alhassan Rabiu

June Winner

MAULING MY MONSTERS

Akor Agada Nathaniel

July Winner

DON'T CHAIN US WITH YOUR RULES

Ogedengbe Tolulope Impact

August Winner

ON A STORMY SHORE'

Kingsley Dominic

September Winner

NIGERIA GETTING MARRIED AGAIN

Nwagbo Ebubechukwu Bruno

FEBRUARY: 'FREEDOM'

DEAD MEN WALKING

by Chinazom Chukwudi Otubelu, February Winner

Before the western winds, our bald beards scald in sad mud
To hear the famished flood thunder like a metal thud.
These green lands we married have become a nagging wife,
Grazed upon by footfalls of a leprous, pregnant knife.
Amadioha! Where is the clash
Of thy rumbling flash?

Sweet-voiced damsels have dug their deathbeds afar
To wail morrow hopes that linger like a scar.
Ye, brave brothers of black ancestral soil,
Do heavens weep not that we boil like oil?
Ani! Thy sacred earth now sucks the breasts of a dog.

Our soft, shrivelled hands bake cake crumbs in midday sun
Beneath the beastly feet of a peeled-pawpaw-skinned gun.
Our mute mouths melt like snow to the roar-like whistling whip.
Yet, the vain rain refuses again to unzip its locked lip.
Ogwugwu! Have you gone for a lame walk in the woods?

Our clan is but a ghost smeared with pots of rotten ash,
A pungent pin that pricks the soul and flees like a flash.
Nothingness has bought the magic boot that bears our foot
Upon troubled mountains that stain our grains with soot.
Idemili! Have thy rivers given birth to deaf deserts?

Have we not, before streams, sored our knees on hills and stones,
That we may feel the breath to praise thy immortal bones?
Are these flames fragments of a forgotten past,
These walls that stretch farther than a radio mast?
Young men, please, tell the gods that bedtime is long gone!
Maidens, please, strike the chords of freedom once again!

WE MUST BE FREE FROM FREE-DOOM

by Ayeyemi Taofeek Kehinde

There is a sun beneath every dangling tongue,
Like a near gale pregnant with whispering song.
It rises when the heart is intoxicated with courage,
Casting fear and voicelessness into bondage.

Freedom begins with the liberty to keep my hair today
And the undisturbed decision to go bald the next day.
It is when the finger picks the mucus of the eye to its face
And walk away without the meeting of palms on its face.

Yet, today sees sky raining icy hell on ill-named avengers:
Where are Issa and Farid, the Palestinian right defenders,
Tanner, Tep Vanny, Mahadine and the Chinese Ni Yulan?
Speech is expensive, not by scarcity, but for its boomerang.

Freedom, the blind archer, has shot them into a free doom
Where rulers seize the voices of scattered, steep broom.
Why is “freedom fighting” a green ink on the death warrant?
Why has beseeching for rights worn the lapel of war rant?

You may cage us, castrate us and strike us with your rod.
The wounds are places where freedom enters the world.
When there is ruin, there is hope for profusion,
And we have juggled the virulent vigour of liberation.

We must be free without oppression – the echoless oven.
Why should we hibernate when the door is so wide open?
We beseech a society and world where words are heard,
And the next day we won’t be heard for being dead.

A DIFFERENT EARTH

by Ikenna Igwe

Seated relaxed atop the cool, grass-covered rock
Stoutly jutting over the tranquil azure ocean, I stared –
Transfixed, transformed, and eternally enthralled
By the magically momentous rising of the ageless sun
Ascending gracefully along the serene scenery,
And ushering in the eagerly-expected new earth,
A planet liberated from the shackles of creed,
Unhindered by the manacles of ethnicity,
Eyeless to the discriminating differences in color,
A globe meticulously wrapped in the cozy covers of peace,
Overshadowed by the immutable display of inestimable love,
A unified earth, tongue-deep in earnest equality,
A cerebral civilization where the segregating walls of status are buried,
Where no denizen is poverty's prisoner; a violence-free empire,
Woven with morality – scoring superbly in every ramification.
I see an earth empty of foes and burgeoning with friends,
Where the lambs lie securely beside the lions –
Caring and sharing – all rapturously cherishing one another,
A world where the natural embraces the supernatural
To form a universal, positive whole
Powered by truth, painted with justice, and pulsating with freedom.

WHATEVER HAS WINGS

by Ngozi Olivia Osuoha

I am a pigeon
With the blade of a surgeon
To cut loose this dungeon.

I am a raven
Tamed and wild. I was given
To reach the heaven.

I am an eagle.
I am one. I cannot tangle,
For here is a dungeon.

I am a dove
Always on the move
To consecrate love.

So wherever the cage,
I am not in bondage,
For I am on rampage.

Though I am dry,
I belong to the sky.
Though I cry,
I must always try,
For whatever has wings
Is destined to fly.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE RUNAWAY BOY

by Kolade Malik Ademola

He slaves away the earth in fright
And toils the yard at night.
He has laboured hard in the light,
Hoping for a day when freedom will be on sight.

His wish is to be the Aves
That soars in the vastness of the skies,
And not the caged Ibises
Whose shrieks only call for freedom.

He admires the beauty of the Pisces
That dive freely in the shallow seas,
And not the family of the Loaches
That swim round the borders of the aquarium.

If freedom cost a fortune
He would break the bank to get it.
But to the runaway boy, freedom is a mirage,
A reality that tornadoes of bombs have shrouded.

In the cozy cave that drips of bane,
The runaway boy speaks of pain
Of the freedom that deprives him to be sane
And configures his limbs to be lame.

He speaks of freedom that lies not in the food he eats,
Neither in the water he drinks
Nor in the air he breathes,
But painstakingly, freedom that lies in the lines of the books he reads.

PUTRID EDOM

by Mbagu Valentine

From t'is fair'st carcass call'd bondage, we desire freedom,
That we, by all means, might taste liberation and ne'er die;
Thus shall we no more feed on the wretch'd putrid of edom,
But by all certitude drink from this empty river which canne'er dry.

Though it be that we were once captivat'd from seeing the light,
Now feed'st we our eyes on the flaming flames of liberation,
Making out a famine where abundance lies to our eyes so bright,
And a befitting feast of freedom fit for a fitt'd feast of celebration.

Thou, oh, freedom, 'rt the most treasur'd of all precious ornaments,
And only thy name shall herald to the gaudery stem of the spring.
In thine own bud shall sprout out many seeds of sweet merriment,
And tender, thy softness, which giv'st increase in times of Spring.
From t'is fair'st carcass call'd bondage, we gain'd freedom,
Thus shall we no more feed on the wretch'd putrid of edom.

WORTHLESS IMPRISONMENT

by Abdullahi Halima A

Those wings on the falcon cease to fly.
My heart aches for ever asking why.
How could luxury be confined in penury?
How could such strength become so lowly?

As the world daily changes her garment,
We get confined in worthless imprisonment,
Incarceration of struggling souls
Left for dead in shams called homes.

Our identities and legacies seem inactive,
Made to think that our skin tans are less impressive.
Racism reigns in every kingdom.
How do we sleep on the laps of freedom?

Martin and Malcom birthed a dream
That still lives, but shines so dim.
Our hosts gladly erode the mission
And blur our every vision.

We saw them vanish with every iota of liberty
And leave behind the pangs of misery.
But at the end of every tunnel lies a glint of hope,
Where we shall rise again to cope...

EQUATIONS

by Titus Adeolu Adekunle

There is the first equation –
a sum of two of the many variables.
And then a second –
the variables have coefficients and raised to powers.

The manual to her freedom are equations.
“But mathematics is a language she cannot speak”.
She was barely done with basic arithmetic.
So it is okay to be tensed beyond units.

Like the first equation, it didn't quite add up,
How after only a dozen years since her first cry,
She should be traded to a man already digging his grave.
Her freedom is a mystery puzzle to be solved.
But like I said,
“Mathematics is not a language she can speak”.

The second equation only shows her the powers –
the ones that built brick bulwark of sorrow around her,
Casting a spell of shadow over her young glow,
And the power driving through her thighs,
trickling raindrops from her eyes every other night.
And like the helpless coefficients,
Her parents were willing merchants –
a product of poverty and illiteracy,
Dependent functions of coveted cattle and strong ties.

Her freedom is a mathematical puzzle to be solved.
But like I said,
“Mathematics is not a language she can speak”.
And like her, there are many like terms.

STANZAS OF FREEDOM

by Ndifreke George

Freedom is water rushing down the staircase of hills
through rocky banister to moisturize the earth;
a zillion drops from the sky like angel's spittle
funneled into the crannies of the thirsty, parched earth,
and the green joy in colourful blossom;

the rising of smoke from Dad's cigar in a psychedelic dance
to weight up the canopy of cloud suspended by word of mouth.

Freedom is a music we all love to dance—
whoosh of the guiltless wind,
chiming of birds skating outside the cage;
splatter of raindrops like drums of festivals
snapping of chains tired of holding back;
melodies of two hearts beating as one
and solo from the nocturnal on permanent night shift.
Freedom is a girl child cuddled in the arms of a male,
unhurt, untouched, un-abused, unharmed,
and she's free to pour on him the perfume from her yawn;
old men dancing in the rain
and children gathered to cheer and clap.

Freedom is picking my biro to write,
and the inspiration is greased by the truth living in me.

THEN 'TIS NOT FREEDOM

by Thamsanqa Job Mzamo

If I can't express my vote
Satisfactorily,
Uninterrupted,
Give it to whom I like,
Then I'm still a slave.

If I can't kiss your white lips
Passionately,
Hungrily
And lovingly,
Then 'tis not freedom!

Freedom is just an illusion,
A bursting bubble

In the eyes of men
And women bound;
'Tis a fool's delusional Paradise!

If corruption can prevail,
Fraud runs rampage
And i can't detain it,
Tame its wild trot,
Stem its destructive pace,
Then sorry, 'tis not freedom!

MARCH: SOLITUDE

THE WORLD WITHIN

by Tukur Loba Ridwan, March Winner

The power of 'one' lies in its prime
standing tall like the tower amongst all.
Glory too to the iceberg across the sea
and to the only Everest of heights.
Sullen souls seek solace in silence,
their caves devoid of company and care.
The earth is a cocoon of life and death
where lone glows the moon and shines the sun.
A solitary reaper sows nature in her ambit
and tills to sow more life for herself.
Books are buried in brains of banished frenzy
and grasps earned off narrowed paths.
Sages seek signs from the ethereal
while estranged from material vanity.
A monk mingles with minds yonder,
stealing motion from fictions before mere eyes.
Nothing blooms like a flower in the wilderness,
standing out among spines and thorns.
Nothing walks faster than lone legs
in the forgone benefit of helping hands.
We toil thoroughly in our own world of work.
We walk the talk with our will and wheel.
A planet is a lone man, growing from within.
Each man is a lonely planet, growing within
while intact remains the face and size.
Riding solo speeds up the wheel and will
and draws the destination closer.
We become towers and mountain tops within.

THE BLISS OF SOLITUDE

by Ogedengbe Tolu Impact

(A quatern)

Find me the bliss of solitude,
Oh, ye, loners of aged yore!
Fetch me silence's fortitude,
Oh, ye, hermits on lonely shore!

Oh, ye, who mingle with silence,
Find me the bliss of solitude,
That I may ease this troubled sense
With the calmness from quietude!

I have climbed rocky altitude
In search of comfort for my soul.
Find me the bliss of solitude,
That I may calm this raving ghoul!

There are raging storms in my head,
A wave rippling in multitude,
And for me to conquer their dread,
Find me the bliss of solitude!

A MOUNTAIN IN LABOUR

by Ishola Abdulwasiu Ayodele

The mountain shudders in stillness,
rumbling at rest.

.

Last night, a blind man entered the cave of her womb,
dark and stark like a naked night,
his heart a quivering flame.
He sat
and made love with the mountain,
penetrating the blanket of blankness

till he lost himself
in a burst of starry ecstasy,
a fusion of galaxies.

.
But the mountain is a goddess of gateways
who swallows seekers for rebirths,
so this dawn, she's moaning muteness,
and a man opens his eyes to serenading lights,
an aura of aurorae.

.
Then the mountain swaddles him
to the zenith of her hunched back,
so this new born man
with mind of glowing waters
sees everything...

SOLITAIRE

by Gomathi Mohan

Epiphany struck me, high in the hills in tranquil quietude,
Unveiled soul's pursuit to live my passion with fortitude.
Sights, sounds of serenity in such a scenic surrounding.
Nature ensconced me in solitary bliss for pondering.
Rolling thunders and winds gushing,
I sat through icy showers so refreshing.
Effused by soil and water as they made a wet pair,
Heady earthy fragrance wafted in the air.
Delighted I felt with coloured bow hued across the skies.
Priceless sight comes for free without any price.
Disconnected at large and though stranded,
Connected to the Self, I felt newly branded.
Of late, spending more time alone,
Not thrust upon, but a choice of my own,
I stand isolate in crowds listening to sound of silence,
Whilst inside of me plays a symphony of dissonance.
Fears, aspirations, doubts along with will to fly,

A paraphernalia of thoughts pass by.
I took some courage to peep in, gauge the cacophony,
Embrace my Self, with all the scars and acrimony.
Rhapsodic after the attention, inner turmoil subdued,
Awareness dawned of things I most valued.
I saw the larger picture emerging in absolute.
Be it the moon shining with its graceful attitude.
Writings, paintings, creations of great magnitude.
Cognized, beautiful things happen silently in solitude.
Since then, penning away in my space poetry and prose,
In it I have found my catharsis and my soul – repose.

INTERRED SOLACE OF MY SOLITUDE

by Kolade Malik Ademola

When the sun overtly deserts the day
And the beat of my heart springs to gay,
My soul, that I know is frail
Seeks solace in the solitude of my holy grail.

The threat to my unnatural existence
Is the murmur that conjures my silence
Which lays a siege on my solitude
And sings me dirge of the highest magnitude.

The sanctuary of my heart is shattered to pieces,
My whole and soul deprived of their peace.
My solitude is poached, since sociability is a bliss.
Where does my solace lie, that I so much miss?

In intimacy, cacophonous is the sound of the rhythm
That I hear in the hollow of my breathing,
But in solitude, euphonious is the melody of my silence
When the birds sing along to its cadence.

When the wind sings the melody of the night,
My soul communes with the darkness in the light,
And when my heart palpitates covertly in fright,
My solitude, I've learnt to enjoy dolefully in delight.

SOLITUDE IS A WOMAN

by Akor Agada Nathaniel

In a world where nuisance with nauseating noise is fueled by
negligence,
Delusion will always be the attire of despondence.
I feel lonely whenever I weigh her absence.
Her serene nature is the seat of ambience
Where men rest their uneasiness behind silence.

Solitude showed me her treasure trove as a result of my patience,
Captivating my soul like the fragrance of frankincense,
Breaking my defense with her difference.
Her sweet embrace smoldered the embers of suspense
As time lost its essence.

I drew back the curtain of memory, lighting a lamp of reminiscence.
The resurging turbulence took solace in my persistence.
The river of thought was intense like an orgasm in transience.
Basking I was under the euphoria of independence.
Who will not be struck by her magnificence?

With her appearance, who would not grant her audience?
Ecstasy clouded my entire existence
As my countenance shone like a fluorescence.
Annihilating the spirit of distraction with defiance,
The aura of pretence disappeared with her presence.
Solitude became my wife and world slaughtering life's depressing
sequence.

Behind every great man, there is a woman.
There is wisdom in women and solitude is a woman.

SOULITUDE

by Abubakar Ateeq Abbas

Drunk on the morning mist,
stuck in this hallowed seat.
Left to do nothing
but drown in this deluge
of thoughts.
Only flutesong to my ears
to help me whelm these fears
Muting the murmurs without,
Drowning the whispers within.

I found solace in solitude
in the tender whisper of the wind
and the silent murmur of the waves,
in the demure dance of the trees
and the solemn sway of the leaves.

Tell my muse I have found a hearth
To rest my heart and weary bones.
On the tree stump by the water
is where I'll build her altar.
And if the river asks where my home is,
I'll answer: "Flow on without me".
For draped in the morning mist,
A lost memory left adrift,
My soul found solace
in sober Soulitude.

DREAM PATHWAYS

by Teslim Opemipo Omipidan

Kindred, if your children ask of the lonely leper
that lives ten poles after the abandoned market
and how he finds solace in his utterances,
tell them the tale of how you flocked his doorstep
like ants do forgather around sugarcanes,
when he had oil dripping from his palm,
and how you turned to things invisible,
things that linger on dream pathways,
when his palm dripped crimson blood!

Even my shadow deserts me in the dark.
My eyesight too leaves without looking back
and I reminisce moments we have spent in the light
till sleep creeps in like a fugitive in the night.
Let the trees perform their choreography,
let the sky too match this topography,
let the Benue embrace me in its laughter,
let the wind sing to me songs of hereafter,
for there lies immeasurable joy and happiness
and none of the letters that make up loneliness.

Kindred, if your children ask of the lonely leper
that lives in the village outskirts without a helper,
do not tell them of life, humans and attitude!
Tell them why I learnt to live in solitude.

WHEN?

by Nyuwem Goodness Nyuwem

As I wandered down idle paths in thoughtful solitude,
Numerous, the perturbations that accosted my mind.
How did we raise a crater that evades sheer congruity?
For a people we were, of love, peace and a sturdy bind.

Amidst a babel of languages, I felt one reverberation,
Like mad echoes in a resonate precinct, just one voice,
Like the grumbles of ocean turbulence in feigned elation,
The echoes of grumbles from a people without a choice.

Amidst the diversity in cultures, I beheld a synchrony.
Like pregnancy that can't be hidden, it was ever obvious.
A unified tune it was, that mocked the crazy cacophony
Of our subordination, subjection and dire suppression.

Alas, we await the moment we'll gape into wakefulness
To uncover gloominess that so envelops us every day,
For a people we are, bound in tethers of hopelessness
And our soil so littered with ruins of our fathers' decay.

When? When will these imprints of slave chains fade?
For they adorned our necks, wrists and ankles ever so!
When will our voices ever rise beyond Jericho's wade,
As a soulful tale of our spell in hell is surest way to go?

See, we have the grey matter to build assured posterity,
For ebony sons we are, beloved of dear Mother Earth.
O, when will we be liberated from civilised animosity
To navigate surging rise till our greatness be birthed?

For I see a people peculiar, riding on the wings of liberty.
I see a race unique, revelling in the joy of emancipation,
Just as I hear voices chant creeds of their sovereignty.

A JOYOUS DAY

by Uzoma Ibekwe

There I stood, the bride dressed in white,
The image of perfect stitch work and splendour,
A thousand glittering set off by light against smiles,
Smiles that never reached up to the eyes.

Staring down the well on my lover's face,
I searched for the spark like a child searches for his favourite toy.
His face drawn tight held by pins at the edges of his lips. Smiles.
Cold hands clutch mine tightly like a suitcase of money in a heist.
My value, joys and will, folded to suit cases, jars,
Repackaged like a product long past its shelf life, tagged: New Me.
Like a suitcase, I have no feel. Handled the way they please.
Melodious words buzz in my subconscious; each vow pronounced
pierce my heart; a suck of blood from my veins. Numb.
My eyes connect with the audience, linking parks of well-wishers of
doom.
I see my mum mop rivulets off her cheeks with handkerchiefs that do
no justice.,
My siblings display pearls in the show glass of lips. Smiles.
This is a joyous day.
The day my family would officially pay off its debts,
The day my younger sister would be set free from the bondage of
tradition,
The day I can walk on the streets with my head held high because I
have a man,
The day I become complete in the eyes of society as I am deplete of all
that is Me.
This is a joyous day,
The day I'll finally wed the man of my dreams.
And as I stare into the deep wells on my lover's face,
As I hear the cheers explode like fireworks on new year's morn,
As I'm embraced by close friends and family, a thousand kisses and
hugs,
I find myself truly alone.
Lost in a world no one would ever know.

APRIL: 'MY AFRICAN HERO-INE

GOLDEN STATUES OF AFRICA

by Olajuwon Joseph Olumide, April Winner

(for the worthy African mothers)

O, fertile wombs of the black shore, blessed are you
for nurturing your seedlings through impulsive seasons!
When scorched rays burned in rage and the sea ate lands,
when the sky-god cursed our climes with regent drought,
in all, black gladiators yet emerged from your navels of care.

Lullabies of African mothers are ancestral encomium
chanted to our ears when hydra-headed life nods us
into frailty of fear, and our mouths form self-pity cries.
“No scion of Akin* prides in garb of dread, man up, child!”
This food for the soul has fortified forts of black brave men.

Mothers are the genuine sages when life loots away truth
from the rowdy market stalls, where cowries of hypocrisy
are heaped on black warriors though their stallions stray!
“The brave who oft launch attacks with no retreat, one day
may become eroded by unseen war”, yeye* warned jogunomi.*

Mothers are architects of nations as men build tall towers.
When the walls begin to crack and thud, it's their weakness.
In my homeland, a cosmos of twin brothers split like red sea
when nature called their mother to rest from labour of life.
The brainy tap heritage of wealth from their mamas' springs.

So, in this pantheon of my poetic heart, I have carved
golden effigies of odes for these African heroines of mine:
the makers and refiners of future Madibas, proudly warriors,
the making mothers and refining wives of ingenious men,
the widows wallowing in the mud of survival to mould futures.

Footnotes

1. *Akin*: a name from Yoruba lineage, meaning bravery
2. *Yeye*: means mother of the son, *Jogunomi*
3. *Jogunomi*: a brave warrior from Ibadan who ceased not to war
4. *Madiba*: Nelson Mandela

GHETTO ANTHEM

by *Kofo Adejo*

Kitchen empty, wardrobe naked;
credit plenty, dirty full pocket.
This hardship no be chise;
head dey parboil like rice.

Poverty don mark our face,
tears no wan give smile space.
Monday to Sunday na borrow;
life rough like Agege agbero.

But this dirty film no go play forever;
one day, our dry bread go soak butter.
This heart no go rust for pain prison;
one day, this rain eyes go enjoy dry season.

This dirty film no go play forever;
one day, miracle go wash this gutter.
This legs no go die for suffer church;
one day, we go shine pass D.P.O torch.

This dirty film no go play forever;
one day, beggar go give Cesar.
This burial songs no go master our mouth;
one day, we go vomit all with a joyful shout!

We no go ever allow today deceive us;
remember how many river bros Joseph cross?

Our akpu go surely turn cake,
na only small time e go take.

Till then, we gallantly dey push;
we no go fold hand dey look bush.
Our akpu go surely turn cake,
na only small time e go take.

LETTER TO AN UNKNOWN SOLDIER

by Izuchukwu Saviour Otubelu

Dear Unknown Soldier,
Everyone supposes you haven't got a name,
But your blood pours along the riverside.
Your face wears the smokescreen of injured pride.
You have built a hut at the backstreet of fame.

Dear Unknown Soldier,
Your garden is a safe haven for homeless babes,
Yet your name's missing from the pages of Vanguard papers.
I do not find your statues on the streets or anywhere.
Your deserved glories have dissolved into sour grapes.

Dear Unknown Soldier,
You take a plunge into the sea when there's a shipwreck,
Yet the telecaster always forgets your name on TV.
Your valiant deeds are swept under the cloak of obscurity.
You haven't got medals to wear around your neck.

Dear Unknown Soldier,
Stray bullets of the Biafran war lodge in your bandaged arms,
But the market women do not sing songs at the square.
Children do not carry your placards to dance in the open air.
Everyone is quick to forget your broken bones and blistered palms.

Dear Unknown Soldier,
I remember the night you kissed your wife goodbye.
With teary eyes, she watched you step away from the door.
She wished you wouldn't go, but you'd sworn to fight for your
country's honour.
Months later, she welcomed your headless body with a sigh.

You remain a stranger in the face of your tireless fights,
But in the blank pages of my heart, you are a HERO!

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

by Akor Agada Nathaniel

Every contact with him was a contract of eternal value.
His smile, his time seemed too cheap to be true.
He never had a clue of what he could do,
Until he came to the rescue.

His greatest weakness was the greatest virtue.
It could transform a vessel to a vehicle of value.
Love made him a god, not just his word,
When saving souls in a dying world.

He was a hero with a heart,
An ordinary man with blood and bones.
He pleasantly played out his own part.
His heart was of flesh, not of steel or stones.

Today, heroes are needed.
You and I can be enlisted.
The Good Samaritan is my favorite hero.
He said saving the world starts from saving a soul.

From zero to hero or hero to zero,
The Samaritan sees every man as a potential hero.

He insists that heroes are made and not born,
That our decision in life determines our destination

This Good Samaritan is a black man.
He is an African and a proud Nigerian.
Everyone knows he is a Jesus fan.
He is my father, Akor Lawrence the vegetarian.

HEROES NEVER DIE

by Godwin Nket-Awaji Alpheaus

“Heroes never die!”
I spotted on cosmic graffiti,
Soused with icicles of sapience.
Their vestiges linger like bees on petals,
Transmitting pollens to renascent twigs.
On the bush paths, tree trunks they transverse,
Between zephyrs and gusty gales of their season.
There I know heroes never decay like trees.
Without wheat, they live like eagles in their eyrie.
They reincarnate in man’s coronary cosmos
With shadows as sparkling as Jehovah’s,
Always ascending on the plume of metamorphosis.
How did Opi’s* confluence gnaw at Christopher’s** anecdote,
Yet he told me yesterday he died today
And will still die tomorrow?
How did death disguise Achebe’s*** shadow,
Yet he strides in phantasm into faceless moment?
And in a million cold days, Azikiwe**** died – still dying unremittingly!
Yesterday, Madiba***** took a cold kip; elegies spiralled.
Today he continues his Long Walk in my nipples.
His cadence reiterates evanescent melodies of yester-festivity.

My dream becomes banquet, where sepulchral faces
Dine with moths, nocturnal birds frolic in the sky.

They seem livelier than my artificial father.
Their countenance tell tales of death throttled on deed's gallows.

Dive on Time's plume into paths,
Where feet streaked glistening footprints!
There, you will spot walls crinkled with heroes!

Footnote:

**Opi – a junction where Christopher Okigbo was shot during the Biafran war*

UNFADED

by Ohiro Sarah

Tomorrow is like the cunny adder
Lurking afoot on the greenery of time.
It is the prized chest
Where all great treasures lay rest,
The face of courage and strength,
The unbleached cover girl apparelled in red.
It is the speaking ink,
The fastest legs,
The fiercest but fearful moments before the curtain is drawn.

Yet
Courage sleeps in a dingy old bed.
Her unbleached skin shivers inside a leaking roof
And the flood in her brain
Inks enough to swim in,
Too still to scribble words.

So
Let so great a cloud of "Ancestors"
Fallen and yet upright come!
Let them stand at the "T"
Where the junctions meet
Let them call forth the spirits of our inner selves!

Let the words carry with them a great many convictions,
A reminder too often forgotten
That we too are our own heroes
Fighting daily
For the freedom our souls seek!

BLACK POWER

by Tukur Ridwan Ishola

Brighter days give nights of our skins a chance
to shade sketches of our symbols of the (he)art.

.
A map with a horn cradles man and nurses him
to grow green and glow the sun's eyes like melanin...

.
until he was free in chains: trailed, tailed
and trained through thorns and throes
to transcend time higher than trees of told truths.

.
As a slave, a distant relative like Kunta, he lives
in our hearts to house these hands held together.
One like Maya makes mankind feel the fortune
that fares upon failures, to find freedom
for herself plus her kith and kin home and abroad.

.
Scorned and severed from his sacred salience.
But silence is not Malcom's best answer
to this treatment of inhumanity to humanity.

.
Michael also spoke to the man in the mirror
where there was no water for others to drink and reflect in...
And water is blind, can't tell if thirst is coloured or not.

.
Nelson would crack these walls of wails
till the prison yard becomes paradise through hell
in years spent to bloom in the cell of life through dearth.

.
A woman like Rosa would insist to sit when asked
to stand against her will on the wheels of a bus.

.
These (wo)men would break black boundaries
to shed more light onto the nights of bias and hurt
like stars across the sky, until bright become the days,
after prior darkness beyond the cradle of humanity.

THE WIFE OF A FREEDOM FIGHTER: WINNIE MANDELA

by Anyanwu Timothy Chibuiké

A revered holy book said she was a product of a single bone.
It convinced the universe she was a weaker vessel even before she was
born.

It mapped out for her the status of a subordinate.
It made her recognition so much dependent on her luck to procreate.
With an ambiance of racial prejudice engulfing her youth,
She convinced herself and promised a quota that would not be mute.
Nomzamo, she knew her part was that of strives and trials
She was determined for the June 14, 1958 knot with a Madiba docked
for betrayal.

Now married to a freedom fighter,
Her Ideal idyllic bubble paved part for painful pleasure
Of dark moon with no honey.
8115 Orlando West of the 50s and 60s was not a place known for
couple's jolly.

Wife of a freedom fighter is a suspect under restrictions.
Marrying a 'terrorist' is accepting to live under suspicions.
It gives matrimonial bed adorned in the blissful Robben Island,
Where nuptial kissing and hugging are for the oppressors to command,
And conjugal coitus covered in cloudy cogitation.

Wife of a Freedom Fighter is a subject to the whims of the might.

Wife of a Freedom Fighter is with no freedom and right.

Wife of a freedom Fighter is a frail widow

Trampled upon extensively like an Argentine meadow.

Hauled from Marshall Square police station to the hellish Brandfort,
Enjoying the Ninety Day Detention Act and the Terrorism Act,
Wife of a Freedom Fighter is a married single woman fathering her
children.

She was seen by the King in Proverbs.
She may quite be a single bone; she is not a weaker vessel.
She married him to free him and them.
She is Winnie Mandela, the heroine.

REQUIEM KALAKUTA

by Paul Chiwude

How dark was the eve of hush noise,
When the sounds of the jack boot
Crouched to silence the lone voice
Who sang tough with his open tooth!

Lo, they came terrified by his guts,
For he had no weapon but his song,
With a message that drove them nuts,
To liberate the masses from the wrong.

Like a zombie in the night they came,
Brandishing rusty gun and dagger.
Their shirts were worn and legs lame,
In service to the pot-bellied of swagger,

Oh, you princes of vibrant kalakuta,
You fear not the men in khaki and beret,
For your saxophone has broken the junta,
And your fist has punctured their day.

In your calmness they saw boldness.
You stood tall where many feet tremble,
Gladly daring the whips and the coldness
Of a ruthless era of iron clad rumble.

But despite your dark travails,
Your spirit was never conquered.
Despite the shrine's ruins and wails,
You still gave strength to the shattered.

Now the sunlight and crow dawn,
Vanishing away the relics of the past.
Your legacy and beats still yawn,
Reminding us that legends last.

FEROCIOUS FELA

by Emmanuel Faith

All hail the king of Kalakuta republic,
Whose resplendent regalia radiate in mesmerizing music,
Erupting from a polished potpourri of cacophonous choruses,
Cymbals clashing loudly in captivating cadences.

The dazzling director, the boisterous bevy of ladies
With whimsical waists wriggle like KSA*s steps in the eighties.
Have you been inebriated with a cup of felagoro,
A polished potpourri richer than ogogoro*?

A sapient soldier whose weapons were neither guns nor swords,
But synchronizing symphony of sagacious, stringent words
That oppressed the oppressors and relieved the masses,
Rained torrents of taunts on paunchy politicians in secluded classes.

Those zombies were once zealots whose zeal and zest were zapped,
Monkey dey work, baboon dey chop3 - isn't that how strength is sapped?
Your yellow fever was a Blackman's cry reaching bleaching divas,
And the boisterous beats of beasts of no nation sent callous shivers.

Water no get enemy, but heralds of truth breed many.
The slaves of colonial mentality, whose malady has no remedy,
Did an army arrangement and invaded your apartment,
But rays from the scorching sun cannot falter the firmament.

Anikulapo, you held death captive in your pouch
Till it stealthily encroached into your couch.
Your shakara and grah-grah4 made everything scatter,
As the world of Afro beat suffered a disaster.

But you live in our hearts, your name, your fame, your thirst and quest.
May your music make mellifluous melody to your soul wherever it
rests.

MAY: THE COUNTRY OF MY DREAM

CONVERSATIONS WITH MY PILLOWS

by Alhassan Rabiu, May Winner

Let me lay down my pretence,
To remind my land we are not there.
Let me wear a tongue of prudence,
So I can make this dream clear.

We are strangled in pretentious smiles
While reality is far in zillions of miles;
So my heart mewls with my pillows,
Whimpering like that of fresh widows.
On my wet pillows I stand for a country
Whose agony has lived in a century.

Yet I see hoards of gold in a realm
Whose story shall stand tall and firm.
Here the pillows whisper to me
Images of a tranquil sea,
On whom a ship travels to my soul
To deliver fruits of my heart's gaol –
A people cloaked in true prosperity –
With a tomorrow of grace in eternity.

As the whispers lull me to a sleep,
Sleep leads me to a heavenly keep,
Where there are no swords and spears,
Where true smiles are the only tears.
Then I see writings on ancestral walls –
'The kingdom shall know no falls',
'The land to be free of gender inequality',
'Diverse cultures to sow seeds of unity',
'For at last, Ghana, a story of prosperity'.

I AM AT THE END OF WORDS

by Wayne Adewale Samuel

Teetering on the edge of lips,
I remember what the first was,
I know what the last word is.

We have prevailed,
E go better.
A seesaw to comeuppance.
A coin toss of one chance.
We got it right,
Then we were terribly wrong.
The wailing in the night
Was the morning's victory song.

Should've stayed in his hands;
White Jesus could've saved us,
But his brother bumbled the Middle East,
So maybe it was a favour.

Maybe the swing and the boy on it
Need to grow up.
He needs to get off and do the work.
It needs to stay up there.

Stop treating this like a playground!
They need to come back
Where people hold their heads high as the flag
And adult men no longer play in the sand.
Guns no longer immunize the hand
And take shots at the masses around
Where a prayer of thanks is the only time
Hands kiss the sky, and knees hit the ground.

COUNTRY OF MY DREAM

by Gideon Sampson Cecil

The day is green in this blessed land, Guyana.
Grey clouds wear her wardrobe over the sea.
Green parrots march like soldiers in the wind.
Brown waterfalls walk across this blessed land.
The dark-red horizon falls in love over the sea.
A red robin rejoices on a joyful coconut tree.
The vociferous ocean sends her rains from afar.

In the dew-dawn day, cows graze down an angry river.
Slender corn trees weep in the eyes of the wind.
Sea birds dance on a brilliant, bone-white beach.
High sand hills climb the air to stand
stretching their beautiful arms
across this immortal land, Guyana.

A pale half-moon hides her face
behind a succulent mango tree,
as the world slumbers in rest.
In the dead of night, the rain clouds dream under the skies.
Her dark veil hides the silver stars.
From the eastern horizon, the crying moon shows me her pale light
for me to see the beauty of Guyana, for my eyes to delight.

A green macaw calls her mate in the dead of night,
waking the night owl from her rest.
The teeth of the wind bite me from afar.
The warm moonlight caresses my lips in the rainy breeze,
conquering my dreams of love for this blessed land.

NIGERIA OF MY DREAMS

by Oche Celestine Onjewu

I dream of a land of tranquillity as our founding fathers did beget,
Where I shall salute the national flag with zero regret,
Where the green part of the flag actually means agriculture,
Not some desolated fields where farmers lay dead as food for vulture.

I dream of a country that I shall call home,
Where I am welcomed in every part of this dome,
A land where I can work anywhere I am residing,
Where value addition is better than certificate of origin,

A country where honesty makes sense and integrity holds water,
Where elites enter politics because they have something to offer,
Where an Igbo man will in sincerity rule Bornu state as he swore,
And we shall hear the drums of war no more.

I dream of a country where 'leaders of tomorrow' is no longer just
some song
Making me feel that my teachers all this while were wrong,
A country where the young are given due shots at leadership,
And are not stuck in an endless loop of recycling politics.

I dream of a country where a child is accounted for
And even before birth is cared for.
I dream that Religiosity died on the altar of spirituality,
Where federal character was sacrificed on the cross of meritocracy.

I dream of a Nigeria with love as its core,
Where education is loved and catered for,
Without any strikes and hate from the professor.

I dream of a nation where hunger is no longer on,
Where the gap between rich and poor is closed-up on,
Where due process everywhere is followed to the latter,

So that, be you rich or poor, 'first come, first served' is our new character.

I KNOW WHY THE BAT IS BLIND

by *Samuel Kuye*

Ere monsters began to feed on flesh, we were green,
We all, so green, fed on leaves; fish fed on water
And snail on humus; none lacked skin, food or shelter,
Till peacocks and ostriches contested for the fat and lean.

The cats, dogs, hippos, hyenas, orcas and sharks, strong-willed.
Snakes, crocodiles, eagles, hawks, all gone wild.
On land, air and in waters, blood spilled.
The herbivores and hens, hopeless, helpless, but mild.

The Bat and I sought for a world of old order.
We stayed on trees, heads down, watching fighting and feasting.
Claws, fangs, arrows and swords tore flesh with no order.
We saw deaths delight dukes and dancers. More crying, less smiling,

The bat and I moved at night, roaming round in pain and hunger.
Then I flew around in light; net wrapped me; cage kept me.
From hands to hands, for coins, I was starved and taken to homes.
Seeing hens and chicks fed with maize, I lost my innocence,
For in escaping, I caught a chick and ate it. I lost my way for long.

I'm no more faultless, now in a web of violence,
And bats fly in daylight; they're hunted and killed.
But I helped my friend escape and she saw me prey on a chick.
"Alas, hawks now delight in death. I'll rather press my eyes
Than see the innocent, gone wild, violent".

"Dear bat, night traveler, I still dream of a country
Where there's no trap or deaths during the day,
Nor hunters and arrows at night, nor greed and avarice;

For I know it's not scarcity that caused insanity –
There's abundance to tame violence.

TIME FOR RECKONING NIGERIA

by Godwin Nket-Awaji Alpheaus

It is here, the holy hour of reckoning,
Hour to redress our bedlam-cluttered bed –
The cradle of my youth, blanketed with counterpane of convoluted
concatenation.
A bed where we, offspring of surrogate mother,
Wake with bleak dreams strewn on our scalps like bristled wisp of air.

It is here, the time to sing with primordial flute.
For innumerable days, we've been stranded in this quagmire,
Nurturing the cacophony of being dumb.

We have watched the risible disguise of our Coat of Arm:
The valiant eagle becomes emblem of question, not national exertion.
Where is our strength, when the eagle becomes duck fettered in
sadistic minds?
We have watched gavel become gravel hurled at poor birds,
While sanctity pledged allegiance to affluence, not porous pocket.
Because our river has no weir,
We watched tide of birth flu immerse our shore;
Our oblong sphere suffers religious cardinal eclipse.
We send our offspring with tattered clothes, like Fulanis on street edge,
To hawk, not school, for there are a trillion jobs in the country.
Our gullible minds become receptacle of stale truths,
Where rites of reincarnation play ubiquitous sleight.

Oh, Nigeria of my youth, flowing with tender corpuscle of a suckling,
Will your auspicious shadow recede in my dream?
Will you silently watch hegemonic perfidy trick you into becoming
tawdry?
A stale dream produces a rotten future!

Will the future perennially stare at your offspring with bleak eyes?
A man who motivates his neighbor to destroy his home
Will never keep him under the same roof for eternity.
Build, build your home, for there's no death as deficient as suicide!

THE NIGERIA OF MY DREAMS

by Ogedengbe Tolulope Impact

i

Tomorrow, in the diary of my poetry,
I will write about a new country,
A vast haven beneath the silvery sky
Where honey flows and never runs dry.

I will write about her shining rivers
Coursing their paths in endless wonders,
The green plains, and the fertile fields
Producing bountiful grains with plenty of yields.

I will write about her hilly mountains,
The vegetations, and the frolic fountains,
The precious stones, and the crude minerals,
Mined, refined, and piped freely to their terminals.

ii

Tomorrow, in the diary of my poetry,
I will write about a new country,
A hallowed heaven devoid of terror and strife,
Where citizens know the true value of life.

I will write about a unified nation
Forcefully fortified against opposition,
An empire consecrated with perfect smile
Where truth reigns regally with no guile.

I will write about a blissful heartland
Where food is as common as sand.
I will write about the fount of pure streams,
A graceful utopia- the Nigeria of my dreams.

THIS DREAM

by Ernest O. Ogunyemi

Yesterday,
Softly, like butterfly on flower,
Something lighted on my brow
And crept into my eyes,
Something real and tangible
Like Nature's beautiful world.

II

There,
Children sucked no dry fingers,
For mothers were the fullness
In the pockets of fathers.
Life was survivable there:
We ate no bombshell.
And like each stroke
Of the Artist's brush,
In our many differences,
We found beauty.

III

Day broke into my eyes:
Life is still the same here,
Unchanging like the regurgitative return of Abiku.
But I pray
That this dream of yesterday
Will, if not today,
Be the reality of our tomorrow.

TIME

by Chidi Jennifer Orjinta

A priest meets a man at a confession,
“What troubles your soul?”
I am pondering over time,
The time it takes the love birds to sing in the wind,
With beautiful baby girls and strong boys dancing to their beat.

These images keep me up at night,
As I envision this alternate reality,
A place that fills me with pride.
As I gaze, my achievements span far and wide,
Shaded by rooted branches resembling soothing tides,

That all children could feel again,
For they hold the seal for a tomorrow,
To give new life into old hearts,
To smile brightly at the world
And talk about what truly matters.

“And what truly matters to you, my child?”
‘Time’,
Too much time has been spent accumulating and accounting.
Such hard rocks we all have become.

“And how does that make you feel?”,
‘Trapped’,
Trapped enough to believe in all the illusions I cannot see,
Trapped enough to have my dreams conflict with time,
Wondering if time aids or sings a contradictory chime.

But I appreciate the lightness of my troubles, father,
For when an elder listens, a child can truly feel free.

NIGERIA, WILL YOU MARRY ME?

by *Veralyn Chinenye*

I grope deeply in thinking of you again and again.
The waters roar synchronously with my voice.
I hold a leaf in the middle of this ocean,
Wrapping promises on the feet of rushing waters.
With fearful excitement, like a bride,
I crawl up to the deep,
Defying the odds thrown at me.
I think of you...
You have stolen a chunk of my heart.
I'm lost in the beat of your drums.
Please take me...

For I have no tribe, this is my tribe...
I connect bridges between Amala and Ewedu
And watch Fura de nunu swing her waist down,
For my love is unified in diversity,
Treating all with dignity,
Neglecting tribalism and shutting nepotism,
Folding the rising tides of ferocious favouritism.
My love is beyond boundaries and bodies
My love is a cup full of Hausa's drinking with Igbos,
Yoruba's dining with Edo isoko
And Urhobo embracing the Efiks.
Come, let's drink from this cup and ignore the poisoned beer from Satan,
For in the saltiness of lake, there is sweetness.
Will you marry me, Nigeria?

JUNE WINNER: FIGHTING PERSONAL DEMONS

MAULING MY MONSTERS

by Akor Agada Nathaniel, June Winner

The ignorance I entertained blared like a moving train
As the ghosts of gloom grew grains of guilt again.
I felt the rain of pain reigning in my brain
Because I could not let go of every single drain.

Trying times taught me how to be tough,
But I was tired to be a diamond in the rough
Rolling submissively like a bread dough on a baking trough.
Enough just had to be enough.

Suicide was never an option in overcoming my dark side.
Instead, I crossed over to the other side of that divide
Where darkness could no longer hide
The sweet smile of sunshine stemming the tide.

I started searching deep down for the wars I needed to win,
Refusing to run away or give in
To the trick of those monsters grinning within,
Playing provocative pranks pricking me like a pin.

The solution to my struggles was not to shout.
Mauling my monsters was the only way out,
Not acting like a street tout in the middle of a bout,
But knowing that when parrots pout, men should test their clout.

When words wear wisdom's wears, wounds wander and get lost.
Covering the claws of flaws for courage to pay the cost,
I hang on, even when it hurts the most,
Trusting not on thrusting, but on the Lord of host.

MY ELDER BROTHER HAS LEFT THE FAMILY

by *Aremu Adams Adebisi*

*We all face our demons, internal or external, personal or imaginary, monsters
we strive or like to tame. – Brigitte Poirson*

My elder brother has left the family.
People say he has assumed a new face.
He sees the future in his own monopoly.

How do I tell him last night it rained heavily
And the building is facing a new phase?
My elder brother has left the family.

His is a dungeon from which the birds flee
And the earth shambles in a dusty foottrace.
He sees the future in his own monopoly.

To him is the passion for own's self-glory,
So needless are the efforts of kindred grace.
My elder brother has left the family,

And he is somewhere wandering helplessly,
Till bonds are soaked, mocked in marketplace.
He sees the future in his own monopoly,

And for a second it burns the common glee.
This life that he lives is just so out of place.
My elder brother has left the family;
He sees the future in his own monopoly.

LABYRINTH OF THE MIND

by *Godwin Nket-Awaji Alpheaus*

The mind is the real path
Where we walk with our thoughts,

Wearing boots of byzantine darts,
Boots that lead us to our bliss or fate.

At other times, it becomes a shrine
Where ancestors of dead and living thoughts dine.
And many a time, dead ones make others blind,
For the living are hastier than the dead...

The dead ancestors linger in our insides,
Waiting for their addled aura to reek of our outsides,
Aura that makes passion for existence flurried...
Oh, we are graves where defunct thoughts are buried!

The mind is a labyrinth where emotions tread,
Treading and dreading the thorns on its edge.
Often, we find ourselves standing with one leg
Dangling, like pendulum, on reputation's verge.

Yesterday, men wandered in this labyrinth;
They treaded left feet on a left path, oblivious of what it meant.
Its corollary only led them to a cairn
Where ghosts of becoming brood incessant pain.

Those cogitations become shadows of our beings;
They become path snaking into different scenes,
Like sermons presaging one's righteousness or sins;
And like windmill, we navigate its wind.

But we can go nowhere without this path!
So we tread, we tread this inevitable path,
Quenching and lighting the wick in our hearts,
Seeking, finding, burying and resurrecting our wraiths!

BLACKBIRD

by Tisereh Magaji Evelyn

Dart in skillful hand, I squeeze my eyes;
Precision, clenched teeth, I won't miss.
First hurl! Horrific! Shame has no size;
All my reputation summed up in a diss!

The charlatan comes, seizes the dart,
Winks with new mischief, many hails;
Shamefaced, I return to the old rut.
I jolt to my feet. Ah! Those old nails!

Black and blue, the walk of defeat.
I yearn for the cuddle of the mocker.
To deal with the target, I was no feat.
Another way, the way lower.

Maybe I'm all about a cosmic joke,
Destined to remain the clown in old lore,
For the tale of my dream only gained poke,
Repelling the crowd like I had wild sore.

A fervent whisper springs up.
From the ruins in me I feign deafness.
It won't relent; it pitches onto the rooftop.
I squeak in reply, but protest is baseless.

The crevices, they could shelter no longer.
I rise in my delirium; my feet hit the platform;
I secure a target; I lift up the wager!
It is done! The blackbird, utterly cribriform!

THE CONFUSED IDENTITY OF A MOSS-COVERED ROCK IN
A MEADOW

by *Chimeremeze David Okafor*

The Ocean is a long, unbroken line of depths
beginning with a bedrock of regrets.
Rocks detest unplanned migration;
Even worse is cleaving.
A parent rock has to die
to bring forth a lonesome rock-child.
But the water does not stop
To ask: "How are you coping?"
Instead, it takes up and moves
and moves, swiftly.
Until suddenly,
A rock domiciles in a meadow.
To belong,
He dons a covering of moss.
Each day, he battles
with the question:
"Who am I?"

Because art is the expression
of the self,
and because you cannot express
a self you do not understand,
I went to see a therapist.
She sat, cross-legged, in a prim office
and took notes,
and nodded solemnly –
these feelings are bubbles
slinking out of a very deep ocean.

FIGHTING PERSONAL DEMONS

by Ifeanyichukwu Peter Eze

I'm human.
Man cries.
I cry.

Life is chaos.
I'm chaos.
I forgive life.
I forgive myself.

Life is hell.
I'm hell.
Hell is sizzling.

I look.
Monster looks.
Our eyes lock.

We jam.
Monster shoots.
I shoot.

We punch,
Kick and
Scuffle.

Monster is dazed.
I'm breathless.
Monster is tamed.
I'm resilient.
Monster succumbs.
Horror fades.
Beauty wins.

I'm dead.

MY MUSIC MASK

by Adetimilehin Inioluwa Victor

Like music to a deaf man's ear,
I was born sincerely ignorant,
Oblivious to the factual denial
That the shackles in my mind
Were not the mystic perplexities of Providence.

God does make small boys mute
Against the false doctrines of fatherhood
Bullying,
A spice of Ahab, a sprinkle of Jezebel
The food poisoning of Josiah.

But in the days of Ramadan,
When I was weaned on the breasts of impunity,
The meanings you had read into my heads
Was the backdoor hack that made it difficult
To see the line between jihad and genocide.

While I make heaven wait, or at least its colored variant,
I must carry the cross of not being my father.
I will not be a man whose ego is a teenage loin
That erects itself spontaneously
At the slightest provocation of touch.

I will not be my own father.
I will not sing my son the notes of this fatherhood.

BEYOND MY FEARS – I AM

by Gomathi Mohan

I live life as the day unfolds, knowing it is not a rehearsal.
I am as bold as my heart can hold beyond all appraisal.
I am as tall as I stand up to grow beyond limitation.
I am as fat as I spread my girth beyond emancipation.
I am as brave as my belief in myself beyond all doubts and fears.
I am as content as my heart measures beyond pressure of peers.
I am as sportive as I pit against myself beyond all competition.
I am as workaholic as I allow myself beyond all satisfaction.
I am as fierce as the sparkle in my eyes that goes beyond piercing a soul.
I am as weak as I let myself be beyond a hurdle to my goal.
I am as cool as the airs around me beyond winter's chill breeze.
I am as strong as my tears that roll beyond an iceberg to unfreeze.
I am as heavy as the scales weighing me, beyond all worries and thoughts.
I am as courageous as my never-say-die spirit, beyond battles I fought.
I have passed all tests of life on my terms to stand beyond gain.
Lessons for a lifetime learned hold my smile beyond pain.
I have learned, grown and changed over all these years
To better my version not to seek approval or validation from my peers.
Every arc in my story in itself is a trench – a discovery made in depth.
I battle demons beyond doubt until at it adept,
Drawing up a treaty as a resolution draws nearer.
After each fall I rise up, now that I hold myself Dearer.

THIS PLACE I CALL HOME

by Chinazom Otubelu

I pray thee, father, speak to the cursed clouds that bear thy son's wish,
For this sick dome I know as home has stung lush lungs off my fish.
I try to leap into space, but strange songs sweep my eyes with sleep
And dreams drum distant dirges in shallow wells of waters deep.
This place I call home puffs cigarette fumes into my broken nose.

Mother! Please, plead my cause from yonder lands where thy old bones doze!

I beg the lurking rains to flood the doomed deserts of my flight,
But their tongues are drunk and they flee like the sun at night.
I look in the mirror and mute monkeys stare back at my pale face.
Can a frozen frog croak again to remain in the river's race?
This place I call home spews flames to raze the rhythm of my soul
Amid the silent thunder of faceless ghosts as hot as burning coal.

How swift do I leap to reach the racing hands of the clock
Ever in sprinting cycles, crowing like a horny cock?
Take me to the buoyant fountains of a newfound beginning,
Lest this present turns an offspring of a past lost in meaning!
Let the bliss of morrow laughter warm my breath in bed,
For this place I call home is a fever in my head!

My eyes are dimly shut; visions are shattered in the stormy breeze.
I aim at a fleeing thief; brave bullets shiver and bleed and freeze.
I am a nursing mother, whose breasts are in want of milk,
A flowing lace robe that sprouts the foreign fibres of silk.
This place I call home has the yam and I, the knife.
Who then shall strike first; who dares to submit as wife?

Father! Pray, show me thy face, for I am trapped in my own web!
This place I call home is nothing but me –
That clumsy being that breathes inside of me!

DEMONS IN COLOURS

by Ojo Blessing

When they come in brown
Or earth colour,
I am reminded of how my parents
Were planted in the depth of heaps
Like tubers, and never sprout.

And when they come in red,
They flow endlessly
As in bloody rivers in Benue
And gory rainfalls in Plateau.
Sometimes, they are fire burning my heart
To erase the thought of home within.

When they appear at night,
They're black, the colour of sorrow.
Some nights, I stay awake in horror.

At dawn, I turn pale
After the scorching thoughts
Of my inexistence and how it would be,
Maybe like butchered humans
In retaliation of the missing cows,
Or helpless like a driver stuck
To the steering wheel of his car
After a crash.

But when the sun brightens,
I'd meander into it and adapt her colour
Like a chameleon
Whose colours are for survival,
Then blot out the demons in colours.

JULY: OF POETS AND IDEOLOGIES

DON'T CHAIN US WITH YOUR RULES

by Ogedengbe Tolu Impact, July Winner

Don't try to chain us with your rules,
For we are poets with free wills.
We write our poems in our hues
Don't try to chain us with your rules.

We have found freedom in our tools,
And we ride our words on muse's wheels.
Don't try to chain us with your rules,
For we are poets with free wills.

Don't try to chain us with your rules,
For we are poets with free wills.
We choose the tools of art to use
Don't try to chain us with your rules.

See, you may mistake us for fools,
Because we follow our hearts' thrills.
Don't try to chain us with your rules,
For we are poets with free wills.

Don't try to chain us with your rules,
For we are poets with free wills.
We paint images from our views
Don't try to chain us with your rules.

We have seen rosy inks spilled blues,
And pens suffered doctrinal ills.
Don't try to chain us with your rules,
For we are poets with free wills.

PEACEFUL WARRIORS

by Gomathi Mohan

As poet, our pen gives us prowess to be warriors with fortitude,
Across nations breaking barriers, winning battles in solitude.
A sword's metre long blade, fierce and sharp when unleashed,
Cannot achieve what humble tip of a nib can, when published.
Destruction needs no thought; sword just breaks and slays,
But to build, to ingress many a fortress, with elan the role our pen
plays!
To protect, restore and expose murky truth our pen keeps up its might.
No matter the milieu, our pen never shies from expounding what is
right.
As the pen scribbles away stories of hope and success,
Many lives are shielded from war and its excess.
Peaceful pacts by our pens inked with wit and wisdom
Have seen it all in history, how it has saved many a kingdom.
Ink flows the message across oceans to reach each continent.
Pen's power breezes through, its outreach immense and imminent.
As we burn the midnight oil to sit in silence and pen,
Our pen creates many an inspiring work to reckon.
Subramania Bharti, Maya Angelou, Pablo Neruda, Frida Kahlo and the
Beat Bards,
Didn't their pen awaken society by inking the whole nine yards?
Our pen never sheds blood or thrusts hardships upon mankind.
Its quest is to seek the truth to answers which are hard to find.
When states are run as entities making war a profitable business,
It is our pen that comes to the fore to lay threadbare its hollow
messiness.
Seeing innocent people at peril, our pen makes a relentless appeal,
War does no good for the state to grow wise and repeal.
Our pen shakes up from within the Zen lying dormant therein.
A sleeping society awakens to the debris they are lying in.
Pen heralds in harmony as its ink cadences with poetic chimes.
Poets are peaceful warriors, much needed in present times!

HOW A POET'S MIND WORKS

by Oni Tomiwa

Call it first a lagoon,
A still mass with no tributary,
Deep, drowning demeaning demons.

Think of it too as a waterfall,
A restless body of splashing thoughts
Hitting the base of troubled souls
Searching for something in nothing.

Say it is like the sun
Rising each day in restless stir,
Giving lights to legs, stiffened,
In the dark of dusk,
A giant illumino.
Name it also a dynamo
Converting mental friction
Into warmth when the world is freezing.

Sometimes it is perched on a drying branch,
Sometimes sailing the sea of the sky.
Sometimes it is weaving its new home.
Sometimes it is the kingfisher
That empties the lake of its fishes.
A poet's mind is a bird
Tearing apart the haze of the day.

WHAT I SAW

by Ezinne Onyekachi Oha

Submerged within my soul are wise words, which my whole craves,
Voices whose roaring breath enslaves the caves of sunk slaves.
Last night, I dreamed my eyes to death before the mystic moon;
I saw silent silhouettes of owls breaking hens' eggs at noon,

And words began to lay long bricks upon the bloodied face of the sun.
Amid hissing of grumpy storms like heaving athletes on the run,
I saw doors creak open to pass thoughts of flowing ink,
Spilling fresh drops of a new dawn that dry lips may drink,
Like pregnant clouds that engulf crippled hills of blurred visions.

The scorching flames charred the calm brightness of daylight
And time grew swift wings like a witch on broomstick flight.
I gazed at its mirror and saw broken bones of an old hill.
The bones became words, birthing the future that poets' moods instil.
Yes, I saw a stream of ghosts sowing seeds of deep muse on mountains,
That dogs may bark no more, when pens give life to voids of lame
fountains.

I dared not wake, for the gods were still drunk with wine,
Stitching poets' plots in time in a bid to save nine.
I lay still for ages to fill the blank pages of my wandering thoughts.

Faint rainbows surfaced to breakwaters of a pregnant morn.
Yet, my eyes hung shut to sleep like young teeth on a corn.
In the arms of a new world, I saw words weaving a basket
Of stars, dumping stale songs of deaf ears in a crumpled casket.
I saw the oceans and deserts making a grand toast
To a new world born from the womb of a poet's creative post.
The gods blessed my snoring eyes to sway away in bed,
To live the times when flashy queens shall bathe a pig's head.
Indeed, the skies are torn to shreds and poets' words now fall as rain!

HOW I BECAME A POET

by Aire Joshua Omotayo

Through the nights of fading muse
and the tincture of rhythm and blues,
my soul danced on the stage of stammering history
with drums and lyres scribbling my story.

Through the lips of the nightingales,
the gurgling gongs and moonlight tales,
solitude blared its jingles through my windows
as the snores painted my walls with punching blows.

The night's skin crumbled in tatters of grey
and its body laid in a crucible of silence's bay,
where rivers burn in ruffled flaming borders
as their waves crackle in fiery waters.

My lips were blunt like the butt of a sabre
as the remnant of unspoken words formed an acre
of lands serenading the terrains of my mouth
with letters traveling from north to south.

My fingers bled on fields of war.
When the scrolls of my heart fell in shreds of gore,
my tongue became a pink fire rising from a tomb
and the flames beacons on the hills of morrow's womb.

This is how I became a bard on blank pages.
When the street of my ears wore the feet of the words of sages,
the lines of my poetry filed into a long river, serene,
and stretched into a rope wetting the fields of green.

PROPHETS OF LIGHT

by Tukur Loba Ridwan

Given a quill to scribe
of diverse homes and climes,
a poet makes the world a verse
which thoughts traverse.

Let he be of the ages past
and his words stand time's test,

so she, of this teeming time,
sees post-modernism at its prime.

They would not neglect the need
to make love to the sound
of souls seeking to feed
their hearts with humane creeds.
A poet seeks and finds freedom
through the master key of words.
He breaks his chain of doom
by reshaping his plighted world.

She showers spells of sympathy
on wives and mothers whose joy
is drained by the pit of matrimony,
in the hands of a delinquent hubby.

Poets are prophets of light
thriving through tunnels and thorns.
They are preachers who would fight
the battle of voices lost to scorns.

The earth deserves to be nursed
with views of a better place,
to leave behind the strife of breeds
who toiled to repair the damages.

I AM POETRY

by Alexander A. Oduma

I am the voice you hear
From your sweet love, dear,
Which, like a swift, sharp spear,
pierces a young deer.

I am the segment you use,
The brain behind your muse.
I make parallel lines fuse
And set every bottleneck loose.

I hold the sceptre of a Lord.
I give wit, wealth and word,
Am keener than a sharp sword,
More flexible than a boneless cord.

I am your true soulmate.
I give you words to relate,
Your deep passion for love or hate,
Ever with you in any state.

I give inanimate objects a voice
To speak for or against a vice.
With my power, I melt frozen ice,
I lead men to the right choice.

I voyage men to places far and nigh,
Even beyond the sky so high
From where they sit or lie,
For I am poetry, I never die.

I WILL LIVE TO WRITE

by Jamiu Ahmed Adewale

On a cold, moonless night, I sat under my roof,
Like a poet's note waiting for the midnight words.
I watched the stars fading into the gloomy clouds.
The world became a secret, darkness a proof.

The earth whirled; my eyes rolled like wheels.
Vision became too blurred to see through myself.

Thoughts piled up like books in my mind's shelf.
Nothing left, but my fingers to write what I feel.

I will live to write my words on the earth's crust,
Watch them grow into a garden of rose and fruit,
For folks, friends, foes to feast together at night,
Hold hands, with hearts whiter than dawn frost.

I will live to write my words on heaven's chest,
For the birds to fly freely without clipped wings,
Sing sonorous songs with symphonious strings,
As the trees dance and wave their arms in crest.

I will live to write my words into a fervent rain,
Let them flow like water into a healing river,
To heal the bodies butchered by gory dagger,
When throes become blood that flows in vein.

I will live to write my words on all the silver cords,
To free children from mothers' enslaving eyebrows,
For different hues to embrace others like rainbows.
I will write till a new world is birthed from my words.

POIESIS

by Emmanuel Udoma

A thin line stands between him and his creator.
He carries a carbon copy of his maker,
Breathes life and takes it away at his will,
Makes and breaks a world
Without form, a world of forms!

Sharing in his creator's creativity,
He illuminates, heals and mends
Downcast and troubled minds

By knitting mere words into images
And messages of hope,

Lives and dies to himself daily
For a universe he calls his.
The blood spills on pages.
Bones fossilize into memories
Of yesteryears and tomorrows that never exist.

Turbulent waters and tempests rage
In the head and mind,
Of he, called the Poet. Daily,
Tears are shed for things wished for, things
That existed only in the mind and on pages,
For this world is not his own.

THE NUMEROUS NOMENCLATURES OF MOTHS

by Hussani Abdulrahim

i.
How did you paint water?
In ponderance of harmony,
I butchered my body
into beautiful colonies,
watched the blood flow from each tributary,
until I degenerated into a single saltless sea.

ii.
How did you evolve?
Sieving self from society's incessant tags
created by doubts of one's anomalies,
I struggled to echo the word LIVE
beneath the strain of snarling hypocrisy
where liberty's just another way to highlight secrecy,
but my combative tongue chiseled her backwards.

iii.
And from society's dementia stem complexities,

So for every entity lusting to sketch me,
for everything questioning the gaiety of sanity
here, I gift you my soulless colonies as libation
in all its shameless, seamless ramifications
and mercurial metamorphosis.

iv.

Mirrors are mean men.

These colonies are dark rainbows she paints,
reflections as inversions of my scar's rightful niche.

v.

We do not need new names!

Pray, let the night strum
into fooled ears of folded men
who with fire kiss what they can't conjure,
who've no bile to withstand mutations!

AUGUST: JOURNEYING

ON A STORMY SHORE

by Kingsley Dominic, August Winner

The waves tossed at me,
Trying to tear me up into debris,
"What will be will be!"
Was all that came to mind amid the crisis.

How does one go from a Pythagoras
To a caricature of the Life of Pi?
Just that on this turf there's no tiger to harass
And help a brother go by.

We paid the little we could garner
To make this trip through the dessert and drought.
Who said prosperity was softly fought?
Now corpses litter the Mediterranean's corner.

In our quest for greener pastures,
We have become more manures,
To whet the history books
With the proverbial clue that what you seek in sokoto
Most times lies in your "sokoto"(pocket).

In our search for what's not missing
We discover that Eskimos aren't really on the northern poles.
That money doesn't grow on trees anywhere.
That the Mediterranean was closer to death than Spain.

On this last voyage of mine,
I finally learn the bitter truth
That in search of what's not lost,
We often lose ourselves.

I HOPE TO ARRIVE WITH A SMILE

by Ogedengbe Tolulope Impact

I hope to arrive with a smile,
Someday on this journey of life.
I am treading the path of Nile,
Hoping to thrive and end alive.

Someday on this journey of life,
I hope to arrive with a smile
And be welcomed home by my wife
After trudging through the last mile.

I am treading the path of Nile,
Hoping to thrive and end alive.
I hope to arrive with a smile,
Someday on this journey of life.

This path I tread is rife with strife,
Hostile strife snaring lives with wile.
Someday on this journey of life,
I hope to arrive with a smile.

THE WANDERER

by Izuchukwu Saviour Otubelu

I am a newborn child gasping for breath,
Sailing on a ship without a captain.
I am a fire roaring in the open hearth
Like a brother in search of his long-lost twin.

I can't see the sunrise- my eyes are bleary.
My fate was shaped before the day of my birth.
Shall I fall forty times before I complete this journey?
I am a newborn child gasping for breath.

Mother believes Pharmacy suits me just fine,
But Father says I'll work wonders in Engineering,
Thus I am left hanging- a broken twine
Sailing on a ship without a captain.

I'm in love with Fine Arts, but everyone thinks I'm insane.
Pray, how many more hills will I climb before my death
On this remote island deserted in the rain?
I am a fire roaring in the open hearth.

I am like the eagle that was made for the air
But instead dwells underwater, soaked to the skin,
Alone on a long and winding road that leads nowhere.
Like a brother in search of his long-lost twin,
I am a newborn child gasping for breath,
Sailing on a ship without a captain.
I am a fire roaring in the open hearth,
Like a brother in search of his long-lost twin.

JOURNEYING IN THIS JOURNEY

by Ololade Akinlabi

i
This journey starts from the sea-men,
Coalition of sea-men to meet the ova;
Crumple and trample in the genital's den
And at the blink of an eye, it is over.

ii
This journey continues in the womb,
A solitude dungeon like a tomb,
Feeding from the filthy filter of umbilical.
The world then is not like this, not identical.

iii
We then cross the tarmac of non-existence
To the wildly wide world called life,

Where all eyes wear the mask of tense
And we crawl, walk and join the strife.

iv

In this journey are days of tasty meal
And the horrible days without a meal.
They are the nights we count the stars,
Sing songs of hope, and grope for our scars.

v

This journey includes a good mourning
On a day we laugh out loud our cries
And make amusement from our mourning;
Death is not a choice, thus we make more tries.

vi

Journeying in this journey includes me, you and us,
And we all ride on the spine of time as if on a horse.
This journey includes a day we shall leave
And other sea-men will be birthed to live.

EARS BY THE FIREPLACE

by Idowu Kunlere

Tears by the fireplace, anguish in the clay pot.
Puffs of old ash weep like fizzing oil, for the young tree fell this day
by the rustler's ruthless axe.
Tears by the fireplace; sadness, like cloves of fire, sears mortal tongues;
sorrow sours innocent tongues.
The young tree which once sat
by the mouth of the biggest water court in the heart of the thickest
forest,
quietly minding its own business,
had dreamt of the day it would blossom into a big canopy
that would give warmth to all,
all, including the games and their rustlers,
for its kindness knew no colour or bloodline.

But here it is today, cut down before its prime,
its bloody sap splattered across the forest, its dreams quenched by
dews of hatred,
its kindness, now a relic of a violent past.
The rustler's strife that ended its lofty dreams respects no boundaries.

Now awaiting it in the rustler's indifferent red flame
is the same fate that befell its great ancestors, at the same fireplace,
to burn to a second death as the rustler cooks his stolen spoils.
Double humiliation!
Tears by the fireplace, anguish in the clay pot.

A TRAVELLER COMES

by Ezinne Onyekachi Oha

Wait not on kind winds to bake crumbs of cake,
For stardom gulps cups, be it booze or tea.
A traveller comes; the gods are awake
To set thy sails on the sly wings of sea.

Smoke fumes choke the stars; the night bird bends song
To form storms of death on thy narrow way.
The tears of the sky drown thy truthful tongue
And clouds cough stones, thy journey's bliss to sway.

Days fade to nights; moons moan like aged arms;
Suns freeze fresh, flowing streams to blocks of ice.
Time breathes slow like dead woods of fired farms,
But thou shall learn the swiftest sword to slice.

Fear not the ghoulish barks of ghostly roam.

KPACHARANYA

by Nwachukwu Prince Chukwudindu

Lend me not only your ear,
But let your soul be here.
Fix your eyes steadily at me
As I bring you the pictures to see,
That you might be smarter than a serpent.
The earth is like the Tower of Babel,
Filled with different tongues and labels.
There are the few on locomotion
And the crowds on commotion
Toughening potential dreams like cement.

O you, zealous and fervent lad
That has left your armour unclad,
Kpacharanya! Lest you loosen your grip,
Lest by ignorance you slip off the tip,
Consider the sacrifices you've spent!

Keep straight the way you traverse on,
Envisaging the crown at the setting sun.
When your heart ponders on backward thought,
Remember the cause of the pillar of salt
Of which aftermath is endless torment.

Beware of thorns in flowery coverage,
Rocks adorned in foamy camouflage.
Ignore the howling and lions' roar.
Keep hold on your vision to soar.
Look out for calling voices at every moment.

Footnote: 'Kpacharanya' is an Igbo word for 'Be careful'

BRITTLE

by Ogwijil Ehi-Kowochio Blessing

my father's voice is a dark hole;
when i was six, I fell into it,
tasted his liquid darkness
and i became a light-
too bright for the prying
eyes of dawn.
in my sojourn, i have climbed
seven mountains of tears
and crossed ten rivers of pain;
but for the map on mama's palm,
i would have been long lost
in this forest of uncertainties.
So each night when my mother clasps
her palms to allow the meandering paths
rub against one another,
she is telling an angel
to carve out another conduit for me,
one that leads to many places.
mine is a brittle story,
and on days like this,
it breaks into pieces
and scatters around
like the lines in this poem-
some white, some black,
but all coated with molten gratitude.

PILGRIM'S VOYAGE

by Aire Joshua Omotayo

The sun has drowned into a rippled river.
Father, dusk is here with a grail of sunset,
And its feet are stained with sands of the Sahara
Where pilgrims found a mirage to cast their net.

Mother, the nights are filled with bitter birds
Whetting their beaks on my rusty roof.
Through my dreams, their chirps carry broken words
Woven around my window like a silky woof.

The tales of harmattan stained my lips.
My feet mastered the dance of sonorous tunes.
Like an acrobatic parade, they went into a frenzy of flips
As the mouth of the wind gaped into mysterious runes.

Father, heave your sighs in the pocket of your face,
For my arms are crossed to the salutes of Wakanda.
Mother, pour your tears into an empty vase,
For the bouquet is weeping at the wilting flower.

The wall of my room is a graffiti of haunted photograph
Hanging on my shelf with dusty vignette.
In reminiscence, carve me an epitaph,
For my bed is tomb, there lies my silhouette.

There are no rooms left in these lands,
No elegies for my tired lips,
For home is not a place made with hands,
But a place where the sun and moon shine without eclipse.

THE HALLWAY OF OUR HOME

by Blessing Omeiza Ojo

So, when asked why I listen
to tales about strange lands,
I answered: "We all travel to places
of our choice, but we'll soon journey
beyond dreams; perhaps I could know
of the reformed norms and cultures
before I journey the path of mortality."

They asked why I didn't
play haunting dirges for those gone,
I replied: "I was a child when I wished
my demi-gods pleasant journey with dirges,
and they never came back.
Now I am a man, I'd rather say goodnight,
for there's hope to see the sun smile at dawn."

And again, they asked
why I didn't bid au revoir.
I said in reply: "It's a subtle way
of sending a soul home untimely."
They smiled and said:
"We are sojourners.
Dust is our actual home.
We'll return someday,
and hole is the hallway, not greetings."

SEPTEMBER: NIGERIA 2019: OF THUMBS & PVCS

THUMPING THUMBS THINK OF TOMORROW

by Akor Agada Nathaniel,

The trip to the top
Begins with a passion never to give up
On ourselves till this crinkum crankum stops.
With our PVCs we will mop out political flip flops,
Appointing ambassadors alert like corps to be the new crops.

Wild whistling wind will have to wrestle with our words.
We will no longer be cajoled by overfed vocal chords.
They are never tired of lording over many worlds
At the expense of other able lords.
The ballot boxes will decide, not the billboards.

We might not smell a hidden agenda for mischief,
But we will still bid goodbye to that chief
Whose ally is a guilty thief.
So the time has come for bitter grief
To vacate the sit for sweet relief.

Losing at the poll is never one's downfall.
Sometimes one wins when one loses standing tall.
Occupying an office is a call to serve all,
Not just to stand tall and make us feel small.
All for one or one for all!
Someone must stand for us all!

The throbbing thumbing of our thumbs can enthrone good governance.
Dusting ourselves from the dustbin of irrelevance
Means taking our destiny in our own hands
With our PVCs and thumbs to execute God's plans,
Because whatever is left to chance has no chance.

NIGERIA GETTING MARRIED AGAIN

by Nwagbo Ebubechukwu Bruno, September Winner

The currency in our hands today invokes even the dollar's jealousy.
Let us go with our Priced Virile Currency
To redeem our fatherland into clemency!

With this currency we will pay a bride's price before the marriage
minister.
The mark our thump will sign in the marriage register
will pronounce our country happily married or aptly marred by next
year Easter

Dear Nigeria getting married again,
Remember Esua who wedded for his stomach's fractured gain.
Remember, he saw his future welded to that exchange of avowed pain.

When politicians in wit come toasting with fried lies and baked beans,
Remember Eden, our wooed mother who failed for the liar's caked
bins.
Remember the woe in the murder of all beings.

Dear Nigeria getting married again,
In this election let us cast our seed into the ballot's belly, but not in
vain!
In this erection, let us cast seeds in our field, bail her out- free and
green again!

THIS CAMPAIGN IS A ROADSHOW (A SONG)

by Blessing Omeiza Ojo

(Verse)

I didn't know you could dance with so much firepower
until I watched you move to the voice of a cantor.
You told me campaign had to do with roadshows
and no longer with ease and manifestos.

Then you swore to remove every crumb
with your honourable thumb.

(Chorus)

But if your thumb is so dear, why offer it for sale?
Your anguish and tears are now without bail
as you watch your chosen elites fail.

(Verse)

This coming hour is for redemption
and not for franchise abdication.
So why dance on the street
in the name of campaign offbeat?
Is your thumb no longer at ease,
or have you been paid some fees?

(Chorus)

But if your thumb is so dear, why offer it for sale?
Your anguish and tears are now without bail
as you watch your chosen elites fail.

NIGERIA'S CALL OBEY

by Ahemen A. Korgba

Four years lead to a day
When Nigeria's call they obey.
With actions, not words, they convey
A longing for a new and better way.

"What a joy it has been" some may cheerfully reminisce,
But for others, years past were not filled with comfort and bliss.
Their hopes of a brighter future rely on this,
And so the importance of the outcome they cannot dismiss.

The number of queues will surely abound
As those yearning to have their say flock around.

In their hands a simple card may be found,
But the power that it holds is truly profound.

Young and old, they arrive with intentions to rock the boat,
As their choice this day empowers them to demote or promote
And their decision to do this is something of note,
For they become change agents by simply casting their vote.

THE CHANGE I DESIRE: CHAPTER ONE

by Maxwell Onyemaechi Opia-Enwemuche

If the change I desire
begins with me as I respire,
then the onus is on me to do better
& take charge, never to falter.

Those who chant these natural hymns
Are not exempted of their sins,
For all hands must be on deck to perform
and avoid every unholy norm.

The change that I seek is here
and I desire a little breath of fresh air.
I'll dust my voter's cards
and not bear conspicuous placards,
For the time to act is now,
and not to cry foul.

This is the change I desire.
I will perspire and never retire
Until my change comes dancing
With victory and unending singing.

The change I desire
Is not to openly walk into fire,
But to consciously vote my conscience

and end a tumultuous era of political nonsense.

POLL DOGS'

by Ukpanyang Kingsley Ayi

Surely the dogs rally, drooling for votes
At the bleak chiming of polling bells.
Once again, power shuffles shells
As parties brandish greedy throats!

Truth wears a condom of lies,
And their words become sterile.
The cost of cheap talk—an indigenous peril—
Grazes hope before our eyes.

We lick our 'bitten thumbs' in despair,
Smear 'Savagery' on social media,
Hallow PVCs like panacea,
Catch our breaths in prayer.

But like a clock strapped to the wall,
The nation winds in a circular dance,
Talking of 'times' without covering distance
On the path where greatness cures our fall.

Youth peeps out like a star in our night,
Boasts it can walk on our troubled waters,
Harvest our dreams within our borders,
Lest we trickle out in flight ...

Youth insists despite the barking of dogs
To oil the crown that reeks of Age,
Not too young to salvage,
Not too young to outrun the dogs.

REWRITING THE STARS

by Soneye Anuoluwa Olusegun

We have journeyed on broken bridges and hovered through flaming caves,
On crumbling bricks and through hollows of hell and hades.
Our past pricks and the fear of a futile future hurts our heart.
Our hourglass of hope counts down in our river of sobs
and our faith falls, for it is tough to put our trust in thumbs.

These thumbprints and card slips have become our Halloween,
our periodical party of masks and pumpkins.
Every thumb on paper event is a checkpoint of putrid pains and regrets;
Every wait for a change breathes a factory of sighs,
but if we hold the garments of hope once again
would our thumbs rewrite the stolen stars and light up the darkened sky?

Like paper planes on karma airlines, our progress planes keep crashing back.
Polly polls through two purple parties panic our prayers of change,
but hope will drive our wheels of faith once again.
Yes, hope will drive our wheels of faith once again.
But tell me the truth,
can these thumbs rewrite the stolen stars and take our pains away?

The dinner of turning-tables is at hand.
Democrats will mount the pulpit and read their scriptures.
The beauty of the dawn would await the moulding of our palms,
but with these black cards laying on our treasured tile.
Tell me the truth,
can these thumbs rewrite the stolen stars and heal the bleeding Nile?

Our thumbs are weary of printing torrid textures on paper,
but our choices emaciate and our options opt out.
So whisper it into the stream of silence and let our souls part.
"Can these thumbs rewrite the stolen stars and paint us a perfect art?"

THE POWER OF YOUR VOTE

by Hussani Abdulrahim

When brays the burgle of ballot boxes,
Shepherds will saunter draped in fabrics of manifestos,
Drumming of golden compasses yawning into greener pastures.

You'll hear supple words swim into minds
Seductive gestures capable of fooling death,
Of kissing a desert with enviable flood.

You'll hear the splashes of laughter
Turning into the impeccable trumpet of sea waves
The poignant pleas and gentleness seeping from souls,
All in a bid to outdo each other
At finding nests in the head of her populace.

The man with the white cap
Says fire leads to the garden of nirvana.
The man in red
Says the parched desert
Undresses into an endless river full of fish,
While the man in green
Says there is an Eden
Through the narrow route of grit and distress.

My mother once said:
All these crows cajoling the mark of your thumb
Are lizards;
You can't tell whose stomach runs.

But the ball remains in the court
Of the compassionate herd.
In the careful truth and armour of PVCs
Lies the migration into seasons of enduring bloom.

INSCRIPTIONS ON THE MOON

by Godwin Nket-Awaji Alpheaus

Brother, the day has dimmed;
It's walking towards dusk, soon the moon will gleam;
Stars will flash their evanescent teeth
And go out, showing our murk-flanked earth,
Where clout pouts at our lustful hearts.

It's time to survey the land,
Not to hear the thunder's flatulent sound,
Nor the ephemeral deluge of its rain,
(For it's the prototype of our yester-pain),
But to uproot geriatric trees and plant new grasses.

It's time to weed out paraquats in our farm.
Do not substitute your PVC for obsequious ram.
Let's make our cognitions sentient
And hunt rapacious whales from our ocean,
Brood mullets, mussels for affable living.

Season has turned; it's another rein of rain,
Rain whose precipitation only erodes our grains...
Do not let its perfidious flood immerse your mind,
For it's mere sophistry played on a blind mind,
Like a game of draught by two drunkards.

Tomorrow, we'll convene again at the pool
And swim, showing our floaty souls.
We, flotsam on the rattling tide of PDP and APC,
Will affirm fate or mirth with our PVCs.

Look at the inscriptions on the moon -
While it's not yet another noon -
Before thrusting your PVC
On the kleptomaniac palm of APC and PDP!

THE DOGS ARE BACK

by Bayowa Ayomide Micheal

The dogs are back to their vomits to repeat their follies
with masks on, bony cheeks and flat bellies,
with tales easily mistaken with stories
and fresh cold promises.

The dogs are back to their bony meats,
to the dregs, in two legs
and beguiling gaits, predecessors' traits.

With masks on,
they are ready to dance to our beats like masquerades,
earn our accolades,
even jump down the high cliffs,
just to walk us down the polls with our pollex.

The dogs are back with sweet tongues,
to promise gigantic mound of scum,
lives after the death of their ink-stained thumbs
and flowers on their sorry tombs.

Even if we know the dogs will soon leave
and cause us to bite our fingers,
but for their manifesto,
we'll lose our voices to their catchwords:
Power! Change!
and become blind to papers changing hands.

The dogs are here, in front of us, pukes,
with new stale promises,
desperate to become our dukes,
ready to propagate PVCs
just to make our thumbs strike them flukes.



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