

ISSUE 2

VOLUME 1

JULY 2022

CÓN-SCIÒ

POETRY | PROSE | ART | PHOTOGRAPHY



FEMINISM IS
ADVOCACY FOR
EQUALITY, NOT A
GENDER BATTLE

OLISAKWE TALKS
FEMINISM AND
RELATED THEMES
IN OGADINMA.

IDENTITY

DAMILOLA OMOTOYINBO / AMOYE FAVOUR / TAOFEEK "ASWAGAAWY" AYEYEMI / ADERETI AYOMIDE
OLUWASEUN / NKET GODWIN / OLUMIDE MANUEL / OLAFISOYE-ORAGBADE OLUWATOSIN DAVID / GLORIOUS
KATE AKPEGAH / PROSPER IFEANYI / SUNDAY T. SAHEED / ROY DUFFIELD / ABUBAKAR SADIQ MUSTAPHA / OJO
VICTORIA ILEMOBAYO / IBRAHIM AJANI LAWAL / MATTHEW K CHIKONO / UBONG JOHNSON / R. C. OFODILE / S.
SU'EDDIE VERSHIMA AGEMA / UDE VIVIAN CHIDIMMA / TAOFEEK "ASWAGAAWY" AYEYEMI / MHEMBEUTER
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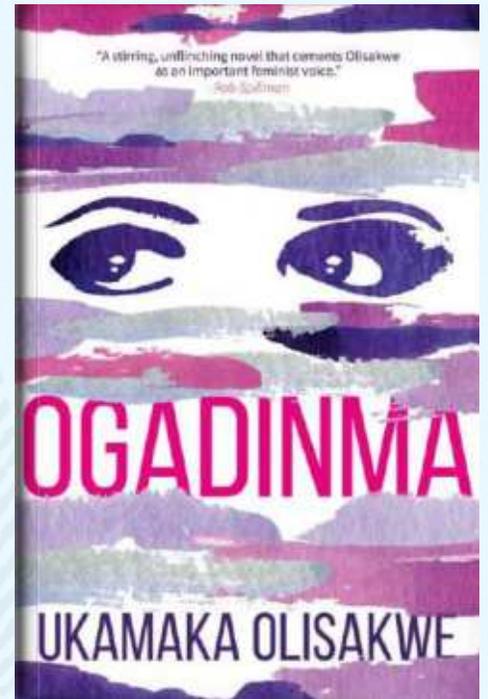
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Editor's Note

It is always a pleasure to introduce a new edition of CỌN-SCIÒ MAGAZINE. This Issue, which invited us to share our individual and collective knowledge and perceptions of the various shapes and hues of 'Identity', is especially special to the CỌN-SCIÒ editorial team.

After three successful issues, CỌN-SCIÒ is taking another step towards realising its mission to provide a Nigerian magazine that recognises and rewards Nigerian creative output by offering a token payment for all works accepted for publication. It is unfortunate that reward for art is lacking in the Nigerian art community, and most Nigerian creatives go overseas to find rewards. We are therefore pleased to reward our contributors starting with this Issue and plan to increase the amounts in the future.

Of course, with reward comes the expectation of improved quality, and you will be pleased with what we have for you. *IDENTITY* features an insightful interview with Ukamaka Olisakwe, exploring themes in *Ogadinma*, her novel which won the *2021 SprinNG Women Authors Prize*. You will find amazing poems, essays, stories, photographs and art that bare, obscure, illuminate, conceal, appreciate and define the things that make us, or otherwise.

I invite you to read, discuss, and share this gift that is Issue 2/Volume 1. Like me, you may uncover layers of your identity that you never knew existed and, perhaps, become free: "*When I discover who I am, I'll be free*" – *Ralph Ellison*.

Thank you.

Kukogho Iruesiiri Samson

July 30th, 2022

Editorial Team



JIDE BADMUS is an electrical engineer, a literary promoter and a poet. Jide is the author of three poetry collections: *There is a Storm in my Head* (2017), *Scripture* (2018), and *Obalúayé* (2022). He is the Poetry Editor of CÒN-SCIÒ Magazine.



EHI-KOWOICHO OGWIJI is a writer who examines womenfolk issues, mental health, and environmental realities. Her works have appeared on several literary platforms and she has won accolades for her writing. She is the Features Editor of CÒN-SCIÒ Magazine.



EUGENE YAKUBU is a seasoned editor, book critic, reviewer and storyteller. Eugene loves art and nature and spends his time reading beautiful novels and writing stories. He is the Fiction Editor of CÒN-SCIÒ Magazine.



KUKOGHO IRUESIRI SAMSON is an award-winning writer, communications expert, and publishing entrepreneur. Kukogho has authored four poetry books and an award-winning novel, *Devil's Pawn*. He is the Editor-in-Chief of CÒN-SCIÒ Magazine and CEO of Auhorpedia Publishers.



IN THE
SPOTLIGHT:

Ukamaka Olisakwe



IN THE SPOTLIGHT: **UKAMAKA OLISAKWE**

Feminism Is Advocacy For Equality, Not A Gender Battle

Interview by Ehi-kowoicho Ogwiji

Ukamaka Olisakwe, author of *Ogadinma*, was born in Kano, Nigeria, and now lives in Vermillion, SD. A UNESCO-World Book Capital “Africa 39” honoree and a University of Iowa’s International Writing Program Fellow, she is a winner of the VCFA Emerging Writer Scholarship and the Prince Claus Fund Grant, and a finalist for the Miles Morland Scholarship, among other honors. Her work has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Granta*, *Longreads*, *The Rumpus*, *Catapult*, *Rattle*, *Waxwing*, *Jalada*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Sampsonia Way*, and more. She is currently pursuing her PhD in English at the University of South Dakota—Vermillion. Ukamaka’s novel, *Ogadinma*, won the SprinNg Women Authors Prize in 2021. In this interview, she discusses feminism and related themes in *Ogadinma*.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: UKAMAKA OLISAKWE

OGWIJI: What exactly did you set out to achieve with *Ogadinma*?

UKAMAKA: I wanted to tell an important story and stir a necessary conversation. I guess I was successful, because here we are, talking about it.

OGWIJI: You have also spoken strongly about your feminism in several interviews. Did you set out to become a 'feminist voice' as suggested by Tin House magazine's Rob Spillman who described your book as an "*unflinching novel that cements Olisakwe as an important feminist voice*"? In answering this, how would you address the idea that feminism is a 'fight' against men or merely a combative movement against patriarchy, instead of a method through which a woman tries to resolve the conflict between her and society?

UKAMAKA: I set out to tell a story and my readers interpreted it. I am grateful for all the kind responses and support I have received since the publication of *Ogadinma*.

Regarding your second question, Feminism is advocacy for equality. The idea that it is a battle against a certain gender is disingenuous at this point because we all can look up the meaning and the multiple talks and papers that have addressed this deliberate misinterpretation. I'll also like to add that people who hold onto these ideas, who underpin feminism with such harmful connotations, do not want to have an honest conversation.

Feminism is advocacy for equality. The idea that it is a battle against a certain gender is disingenuous...



OGWIJI: You once said in your interview with *Shallow Tales Review* that '*Ogadinma*' is a "love letter to the women... married off to much older men... when they were only teenagers." This comes as a culture shock for many, like me, who believed that teenage marriage was only a Northern Nigerian problem. When such conversations arise, such people will think of Aisha or Amina, not necessarily *Ogadinma*. How pervasive is this culture in southeastern Nigeria? And how close did it get to you as a woman?

UKAMAKA: This culture was endemic in Nigeria, and still is. You only have to look, or ask. A lot, though, is changing; my immediate community now actively rejects early marriage, and my catholic church in Aba will not marry a person until she has reached adulthood. These changes happen because of conversations like this.

OGWIJI: A common theme in our society is the celebration of mothers who stayed in very difficult marriages as heroes by patriarchy supporters. Many believe that long-suffering is coded into the feminine DNA and genes of "good women". *Ogadinma* successfully discredits this. How does that make you feel? Is this a personal victory?

UKAMAKA: Oh, yes, it is. This novel is set in the early 80s, a radically different time in our history. *Ogadinma* endured situations I would never tolerate. At the time of writing the novel, I wanted her to fight back, and viciously too.



IN THE SPOTLIGHT: UKAMAKA OLISAKWE

I wanted her to stand up against her family and to perform certain heroics I expect of today's women. But such heroics will not be true of her, her time, and her cultural/financial situation. She is the sum of the women I know, and I wanted the story to reflect reality. When she eventually stood up for herself, I sighed with relief. So, yes, her story, in the end, despite all the ugliness, is a personal victory.

OGWIJI: Ogadinma does a good job addressing the burden of patriarchy and how it easily blames women for everything. Interestingly, 'ogadinma' loosely translates to "e go better" in pidgin, which aptly captures the societal realities of many women who live as purveyors of evasive hope while dealing with numerous gender-related challenges. What can women who are currently under the weight of patriarchy do to triumph like Ogadinma?

UKAMAKA: They are telling their stories. We find them on social media, on radio stations, at town meetings, calling out oppression. The other day, I was listening to an FM station and a woman called in to expose her abuser. My relatives have shared stories of women in our community who put their foot down and refused further abuse. This is how we turn the tide: by telling our stories. I am glad that more of this is happening in my time.

OGWIJI: I immediately liked the character Nnanna. From his first appearance in the novel, he gave off what I like to call the "Sweet Boy" vibes. I initially thought his demeanour was just a charade—I mean, characters shock us every now and then. However, as Ogadinma's challenges ascended the steep curves of misfortune, he continued to identify with her, and he won my heart completely. Did you worry about Nnanna coming off as the type of man that would be described as "docile", "effeminate", or what some might call a "simp", in social media lingo?

UKAMAKA: I think I am warier about people who use such terms to describe supportive people. It says more about them. And I don't engage them because discourse with them is a waste of time.

*This is how we turn the tide:
by telling our stories.*

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: UKAMAKA OLISAKWE

OGWIJI: When Ekene calls out Tobe over his ill-treatment of Ogadinma and says, "You have behaved like a mad man, and it is the family that bears the shame because the mad man does not comprehend the concept of shame," I see you likening domestic violence to madness. Please, something about this, as it doesn't seem like an accidental allegory.

UKAMAKA: I didn't really liken domestic violence to the broad definition of madness. The proverb you quoted is a popular one in my community: madness, in this context, (not mental illness), is a catch-all for all forms of bad behaviours and crimes, and the speaker here makes it clear that it is the family that bears the brunt; it is the family that suffers shame when their relative misbehaves. This is why they called out Tobe's bad behaviour and admonished him.

OGWIJI: Until those hard lashes came and left their welts on Ogadinma, I enjoyed the beautiful bond she shared with her father. I am a little uncomfortable with how that bond did not create a safe space for her to speak up about Barrister Chima's predatory advances until, like the proverbial dried fish, it became difficult to bend without breaking. This is a typical Nigerian girl's experience. Is there a message hidden here?

UKAMAKA: This novel is a letter to my people because Ogadinma is a composite of the women I know. Her story, though set in the early 80s, remains true today. And I am grateful for the conversation this book stirred in my immediate community. We have a saying where I come from that aptly captures the importance of history, the reason I wrote *Ogadinma*: a people who do not know where the rain began beating them will not know where it stopped. A lot is changing in my community, and it is thanks to the people who insist on having this conversation. It is only when we have interrogated our complicated past, that we will be able to avoid repeating our past mistakes and forge a better future for ourselves.

OGWIJI: It is refreshing how you aptly captured how some women put wind under the wings of patriarchy through characters like Auntie Ngozi and Mama Iyabo, and also gave a perfect example of "Women Supporting Women" through Ejiro. Was this female character range deliberate, and necessary? Why didn't you, for example, make a man—"a knight in shining armour"—come to Ogadinma's rescue?

UKAMAKA: I was only interested in telling a human story. We have Nnanna, who, for example, is just perfect. He supported Ogadinma when everyone in her family turned their backs on her. We also have Ejiro, who offered Ogadinma support. However, we also have complicated characters like Auntie Ngozi, Ifeoma, and Uncle Nnanna, who, at different points, were the community Ogadinma needed until they weren't. These people are complicated and I enjoy exploring complex characters...

[**CLICK HERE TO READ THE REST OF THE INTERVIEW.**](#)





POETRY

Damilola Omotoyinbo, Amoye Favour, Taofeek "Aswagaawy" Ayeyemi, Adereti Ayomide Oluwaseun, Nket Godwin, Olumide Manuel, Olafisoye-Oragbade Oluwatosin David, Glorious Kate Akpegah, Prosper Ifeanyi, Sunday T. Saheed, Roy Duffield.

unmask



by *Damilola Omotoyinbo*

how does it feel / to gaze through the window / of your being / search for self / petri dish
of questions under a lens / feel the quietude of a man whose flesh is not just a cloak /
upturn the last "t" in identity / soul search / revel in this satisfaction / this sense of
belonging / to crawl into a depth / & not be labelled alien / to find a place in your soul /
you call home / unmask / you are on / the ledge of a mountain / your doubt a mirage /
when you get the last piece / of the puzzle / don't walk alone / search this street for your
kind / souls atoned / with names etched / on a canvas of gold.

Damilola Omotoyinbo (Frontier XIX), is a Nigerian Creative Writer. A Fellow of the Ebedi International Writers' Residency and an Alumna of the SprinNG Writing Fellowship. She is Damilola Omotoyinbo on Facebook & Instagram and @creative_riter on Twitter.

Is This Body Still A Temple?



by Amoye Favour

My Mind has become a Cascade of emotions
And for each thought that desires to be let free,
There is turbulence. That is to say that
My sanity and my emotions are distant companions.
But my desire for emancipation is greater than me.
On the lips of a crow is found truth, telling me to
Reach out and desire all the things I am not meant
To have. A man walks by me and I ask him what
He makes of life. He said:

*To live is to be evil,
You just need to spell it the other way around.*

His answer felt like a capsule too heavy to ruminate upon.
Somewhere in me is a faucet that spills out odd contents and
I don't know how to stop the flow without damaging myself.
To quench it would be to lose what defines me,
To allow it would be to ask for something my being can't contain
This flow from the deepest embers of me gets too heavy at times
And I question if this body is still a temple. Is this body still
One of God's most decorated tools or am I finally giving in
To the alluring call of the dark

Amoye Favour draws from vivid Imageries, life experiences, and relationships when writing his pieces. Popularly known by the pen name "The Poetic Newton", his works have been published and is forthcoming on issues of "The Literatus", "Maintenant", "Written Tales", "Masticadores", "Pickles Magazine" and many others. More of his works can be found on his Instagram handle @thepoeticnewton and whenever he is on the blue app, he tweets with the handle @amoyef.

A Careful Exaltation of the Body as the Purest Form of Art and a Side Note on Beauty



by Taofeek "Aswagaawy" Ayeyemi

A muezzin's call breaks into this body/ dips my tongue
into a Diwan's chorus/ In this room/ scripts of litanies pile high/

I pull a local blade from its cracked wall/ sharpen it against a cornerstone/
and reshape the edges of my tribal marks:/ the magnetic metals

calling hearts into submission/ I fill the cracks with nine flower
roots each/ where nails of fear were once drilled/

where owls and bats once nested/ This room once had a furnace/
Sometimes I assemble fish and bush meat over its fire:/ a reinvention

of furnace into a fireplace/ into a kitchen/ into a beauty salon/
Beauty is not the object sitting on the canvass of my mirror/

beauty is the smile on my face/ redressing grief/
opening floodgates for bees to deposit their nectars/

for serenade and aubade/ Some nights/ I was the fuel
igniting the fire burning me/ I was the pain across my windowpane—/

a blur dispelling its credence before the morning drizzle did the wiper/
Today, I befriend miracle / I am a magic/ I hold water and warmth/

Sometimes I go into prostration to worship my body/
God is not that jealous/ He had created man in His own image/

I am picking stones and crumbs of bean pods/ separating
and shifting beans/ Who is cutting onions? / This body is burning/

but its smoke is of incense/ This room / is a make-up kit/ &
this poem is the grip of goldsmith/ fanning the fire of my comeliness/

[The title is a Twitter caption by Adedayo Agarau for a short video clip of himself, posing.]

Taofeek "Aswagaawy" Ayeyemi is a Nigerian lawyer, writer and author of the chapbook *Tongueless Secrets* (Ethel Press, 2021) and a collection *"aubade at night or serenade in the morning"* (Flowersong Press, 2021). A BotN and Pushcart Prize Nominee, his works have appeared or forthcoming in *Contemporary Verse 2*, *Lucent Dreaming*, *Ethel-zine*, *Up-the-Staircase Quarterly*, *FERAL*, *ARTmosterrific*, *Banyan Review*, *tinywords*, *the Quills* and elsewhere. He won the 2021 Loft Books Flash Fiction Competition, emerged 2nd Place in the 2021 Porter House Review Poetry Contest, and an Honorable Mention in the 2021 Ito En Ōi Ochai Shin-Haiku Contest, the 2021 Oku-no-hosomichi Soka Matsubara Haiku Contest and the 2020 Stephen A. DiBiase Poetry Prize among others. He is @Aswagaawy on Twitter

Glass Book



by *Adereti Ayomide Oluwaseun*

Enters the legend—of focus, of belligerence and victory heretofore contested
Enters a writer—my head is my home, and in this home, rest may not prevail
A pointed ladle filled with ink yet drains life from me by prose, by stanzas...
till I can no more, till the last stop on the page before I begin another
With every lying wake I arise anew with thoughts overflowing
Albeit some mornings, with shores of inspiration hard from desiccation as baked bricks in
ancient Egypt
If the ideas come, if they come not, still I muse

I tell stories of death, no! I write stories of resurrection
Stories of a boy straining from ocean depths and a girl fanning ice to flame
In my path, I am many things—a chef serving a menu of bitter-sweet
a fool, oblivious of all reality, all truth, save the doctrine of them with fuller ink ladles or the
writer himself
As the world eats itself or leaves me in the past, I yet write

I spin stories of war, no! I write stories of vanquishing
Stories of armies, staggering forces locked in battle
To die is not defeat and to live is not victory
Our war cry is the urging, and our banner the encouragement
When the field is ridden with the screams of our hush, and our banner, our enemy's
then we are defeated and shame is our lot

I am the writer, another of my kind
In this war the ink is my blood
and victory will be mine...

ubuntu*



by Nket Godwin

since i learned how to count legs of stars
and sluggish steps of moon
pick little stars and tuck into my hair as dream flower
i have walked the road of being
intent as the miracle of celestial sparkle
watched me in the mirror of meaning
reflecting polysemy of selves
and like equations i have always been
equal to the reflections i give my neighbours
so if i make my neighbours vague of virtue
my image of virtue is vague too
i am fish equal to the exertion of the river of my faith
in anything that guides the leg my current
whatever ocean of belief gives water to my river
my matchbox world gives my family light from my moon
for we are soluble in this water of being

**Ubuntu, translated as “I am because you are” is a philosophy of humanity peculiar to the Zulus of South Africa.*

Nket Godwin is a final year student of English and Communication Art at the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State. His poetry is concerned with the revival of human conscience to revitalize the essence of the seeming-lost humanity. His poems have been featured or forthcoming in some anthologies including Towards a Beautiful Becoming by Words Rhyme & Rhythm, Repostes Lockdown Voices, 60 Seconds Silence, Best Poets Of the Year Anthology by Inner Child Press. He is the author of the poetry chapbook, Sexperimenting Verses. He can be reached on Twitter and Instagram via @nketgodwin and Nket Godwin on Facebook.

A Poem is a Gesture Towards Home



by *Olumide Manuel*

After Jericho Brown

a poem has to start from somewhere,
progress gracefully through the drafts
and arrive with a form of class.

a poem can just be a point or
a moment; might weigh the 21.3gramme
of a soul or something less than a feather.

my most familiar gesture is silence.
it is what my father taught me.
it is what justifies him too.

the silence reclines in my throat; knuckle-like
Adam's apple: my father's father's father's
seeded gesture that found home in my body.

a home is as hard a body to define.
a home is either the end of the journey
or all the places I'm coming from.

I came from a generation of firsts:
the first son of a first son of a first son.
the first son of a first daughter of a first daughter.

Now all those seeds are fruiting my body
to ripe into a long poem. the poem is
not this. the poem is at home

There's a Ghost in the Mirror



by Olafisoye-Oragbade O. David

i.
they said i'd learn who i am,
learn the secrets heaven hid in me,
if my body is a poem from God,
maybe I can read the lyrics when I see my reflection.

ii.
the stories i see scare me.
a ghost in the mirror -
he wears my face,
but paints an image of broken bodies buried.

iii.
i am what i see,
or, i have become what i saw,
a plaque for many fallen to fear,
my insecurities leaving there and renting a house in my flesh.

iv.
a roaring sea,
a deafening earthquake,
a still small voice,
i am Elijah again, without the meal from the gods.

v.
a hashtag here,
a "woke" comment there,
i like, i stan, i share,
i'm lost in the talk, i'm nowhere.

vi.

i carry a face of different colours,
like a rainbow did my makeup,
or a mirage,
cause i disappear when asked,
"who are you?"

vii.

i can't sound an answer to "what's your name?"
cause how do i choose one and leave the other,
like, "I'm a feminist with a touch of masculinism"
like when a Priest plays devil to a young lad.

viii.

maybe, i echo the loudest voice,
or i happen in time,
the sound of now,
the sound of today.

ix.

i would learn,
a book of me knows me better,
when i become today's yesterday,
a story to be read,
a life already lived, when i come to the end,
to know who I am.

x.

the epilogue.
there's a ghost in the mirror,
who today is...

**[CLICK HERE TO READ THE
REST OF THE POEM.](#)**

Olafisoye-Oragbade Oluvatosin David is a 4th-year medical student at the University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital, Kwara. Known by the pseudonym "King Davey", he is a poet and spoken words artist who enjoys playing with words. David won the ILUMSA Malaria Day Poetry Contest in 2021 and was on the top 20 longlist of the 2021 Nigeria Students' Poetry Prize (NSPP). He was also awarded the Best Poetry Content at Poethon Season 4 and ranked 3rd at YWCA's Spoken Words Artist of the Year 2021. His works are published/forthcoming on African Writer, Arts Lounge NYC, Shuzia, SprinNG, BPPC Anthology and elsewhere. David is @thekingdavey on Instagram and @TosinOlafisoye on Twitter.

i've heard that a native name is a long string.



by *Glorious Kate Akpegah*

a string that has one end tied around a person's waist like a talisman and the other end tied to the root of a family tree, an ancestry.

a string so long that it pulls you back from long treks overseas into a colloquy about your tribe and the tongue your people break bread in.

it follows you around like a shadow and silently, steadfastly speaks over you.

sometimes it calls out to your maker to clear your path - chidùbèm,
it may pronounce you blessed - Ibùkún,
make you the subject of a coronation - sàràuniyà or
tell a tale, a prophecy about what or who you should be- ùlèyi.

sometimes it lies quietly, brooding over the episode of life that hatched you.

i've heard that a man's native name would grow on him like yam tendrils, traversing crevices and crannies that have lined his life, fitting into his being the way a plug would fit into a socket.

even if he's lost in a sea of humans,
these tendrils will grow out,
leading his ancestors to him or him to his ancestors

Glorious Kate Akpegah is a Nigerian writer and medical student at the University of Calabar. Akpegah enjoys reading and writing poems. She is the 2nd prize winner of the Brigitte Poirson Poetry Contest August/September 2021 edition. Some of her works are published or forthcoming in Spillwords, The Hearth, Pawniers Paper, Petals and Pitfalls Anthology and her Instagram page @gloriousakpegah.

The Offing



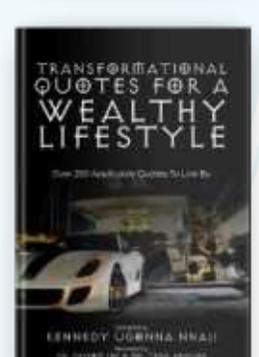
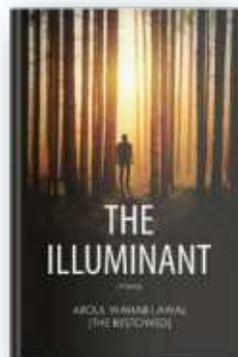
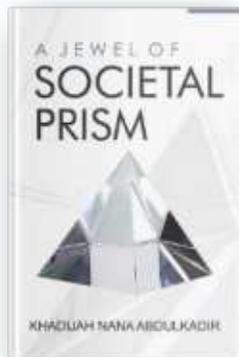
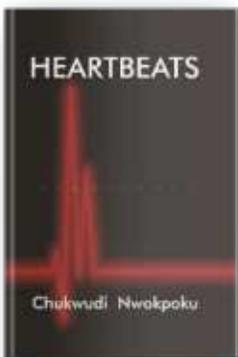
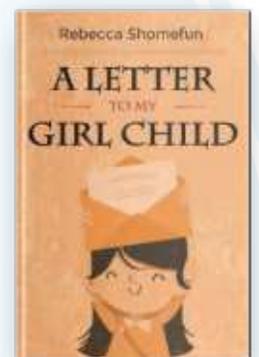
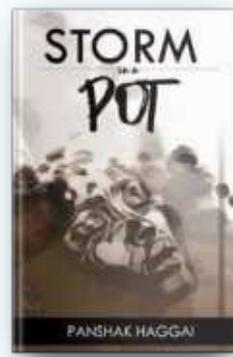
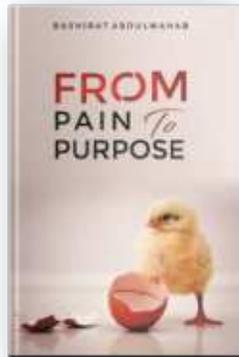
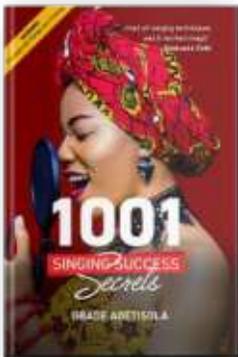
by Prosper Ifeanyi

*when I saw God
I trembled like a man I used the
wrong pronouns
—Kaveh Akbar*

A boy, prettier than me, asked if I were truly
an image of God or just dust clotted from a womb.
I had the answers. They were wrapped somewhere
around the clenching of my palms, & he did get
them. At dinner
I bricked up my mouth hole with
the lord's prayer but didn't say amen because I
had learnt to question that, too. This boy, foolish boy,
wouldn't know God, his father, even if he
looked him in the face. Wonders why he can't
sniff rose flowers too, or wear frocked skirts.
Maybe I
am just uglier in the outside
& pale onion white in the inside; maybe
I am a sundial without a gnomon as a child without
his father. When a black
boy does it—it's someone did it. When 'nother does,
it's he did it. Identity is future. "Future" from
the Latin *futurus*, meaning I am, but I still
don't know what.
Somewhere in 2060, a boy
is being promised a sister, but the robots aren't horny

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Crossword, Or Ode To A Man's Identity



by Sunday T. Saheed

for every crossroad that diverges
comes a canon loaded with questions
of identity / of tagging myself to
a name. this is in the belief that,
whatever carries blood around must
be named. the sun dragged its rays
to the feet of this poem, where a
hand pokes a finger to my turban, &
identifies me – you're a fucking
muslim terrorist! a moon disassembles
at the mouth of this poem, where a
hand pokes a finger to my skin, &
identifies me – you're a negro, shit!
the stars crawled what remains of
their twinkles to the cranium of this
poem, where a hand pokes a finger
to my chest, & says: you do breathe
a mother ferries her love like paper-
boat to light this poem. a hand pokes
a finger to my vein. identified me,
as human, as dangerous, as queer,
as everything a man is named after

Sunday T. Saheed is a poet, reviewer, and smudge artist. He studies English Language at Lagos State University. Saheed is the author of the poetry collection "Rewrite The Stars", listed by Konya Shamsrumi among the top ten books by Nigerian teen authors in 2021. He is also the recipient of the Nigeria Prize for Teen Authors 2021, and a finalist for the 2018 Wole Soyinka International Cultural Exchange. His works have appeared or are forthcoming in magazines/journals including Rough Cut Press, Brittle Paper, The Temz Review, Salamander Ink, Arts Lounge, The Lumiere Review, Comstock Review, Afrocritik, SprinNG, Rigorous magazine, Ice Floe Press, Synchronized Chaos Magazine, My Woven Poetry, Aster Lit, Pop The Culture Pill, Kissing Dynamite, Gyroscope Review, Giallo Lit, Kalahari Review. He is a member of the Hilltop Creative Arts Foundation, an assistant editor for The Nigeria Review (TNR), and a poetry editor for the Teen Lit Journal. When Saheed isn't writing, he can be found reading, watching movies, or enjoying comedy skits. He is @poetsundaysaheed on Instagram.

Unnamed



by Roy Duffield

the indiscernible tread
of communal footprints
stamped en masse
on the shores
of the Nyanza
they're still dredging
up new bones

Roy Duffield is a working-class writer/translator and the art editor at Anti-Heroine Chic, a journal that puts those on the outside inside. He won the 2021 Robert Allen Micropoem Contest and you can read more from him in Jalada Africa, Mamba, Quills and postscript.



ART & PHOTO

Abubakar Sadiq Mustapha, Ojo Victoria
Ilemobayo, Ibrahim Ajani Lawal

Damisa

by *Abubakar Sadiq Mustapha*

This picture was taken during the Kilisa Festival in Lapai Emirate of Niger state, which is celebrated twice a year to mark the five-day end of the Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr celebrations in the Emirate.

It x-rays the life, culture, and history of the people of the Lapai Emirate.



Abubakar Sadiq Mustapha is a storyteller, a poet, and an art curator. He believes in the power of photography and how it can be used for mental health advocacy. His work has appeared in the Ebedi Review, The Song Is, The Nigeria Review, The Shallow Tales Review, Libretto Magazine, Literandra, Lolwe and elsewhere. He is a fellow of the Bada Murya Fellowship.

Who Am I?

by Ojo Victoria Ilemobayo

"I remain
Myself, no
matter what
the world
throws at Me."



Ojo Victoria Ilemobayo is a poet, sickle cell warrior, video editor, sticker creator, smile therapist and aspiring guitarist. Some of her works are in WSA, WHI anthology, Firebrand Magazine, Sledgehammer, Nnoko, GEMP, Prawns Paper, Mixed Mag, Agape Review, Mad Swirl, The Beautiful Mind, Enceladus Magazine, The New Man Gospel Movement Fringe Poetry Magazine and elsewhere.

Boju-boju (Veiled Monster)

by Ibrahim Ajani Lawal



This piece of art is titled "Boju-boju", a word in Yoruba (Nigeria/Benue-Congo) language and mythology which translates as "Veiled Monster" in the English language. It is an acrylic painting done on a strawboard.

The muse behind this piece is deduced from elements of Yoruba superstition which the artist has detailed in a poem that accompanies it. The art's thematic preoccupation is the projection of the identity of the veiled demon, considered one of the scariest creatures among the Yorubas. Boju-boju is sung as a lullaby to lull wailing infants to sleep.

The beautiful ugliness of the masked monster is the beginning of another pulchritudinous African-Nigerian culture and aesthetic identity; unveiled.

Ibrahim Ajani Lawal (Hajani Hibard) is a Nigerian visual artist, cook, poet, and writer whose works have been published via CÒN-SCIÒ MAGAZINE, The Quills, Fitrah Review, Feral Journal, and elsewhere. He is a student at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria; and he loves humanity, cares for cats and cherishes coffee and cupcakes everywhere and every time. He can be reached on Twitter or Facebook or Instagram via @Hajani_Hibard.



SHORT FICTION

Matthew K Chikono, Ubong Johnson, R. C. Ofodile, S.
Su'eddie Vershima Agema, Ude Vivian Chidimma

The Exorcist

by Matthew K Chikono



Someone splashes cold water on your face. You open your eyes again. You are still sitting in the dirt and tied to the small tree. Your father is kneeling on your right a few yards away. Once in a while, he cast a nervous glance your way. You know exactly what he thinks of you.

You don't know exactly what to make of the man pacing back and forth in front of you. He is the one who poured water on you. He is huge, bald, and probably the darkest of men you have ever seen. For a second, just a second, you wonder how it would feel to bear him sons. You quickly push the thought away from your mind. It is not appropriate to have naughty thoughts for a man of God who is trying to save you.

The man of God walks slowly towards the tree, the one you are tied on with loose rope, and plucks a small twig. His huge and once white garment drag dirt in his wake. He is barefooted; you are on his holy shrine after all. You can smell his unwashed body from three feet away.

"I command you to tell me, who you are!" The holy man barks in your ear.

"It's me Naledi," you tell him for the third time.

The man shakes his head and walks towards your father. You can hear him whispering in your father's ears. "The demon possessing your daughter is very powerful. I need permission to use my special technique to exorcise it."

Your father consents. The dark man returns with fury in his eyes and the small twig in hand. The situation is getting ridiculous.

"Who are you?" He bellows again. Before you can answer he hit your face with the twig. A tingle of pain rips through your face and you can feel a couple of teardrops roll down your cheek. "Why have you taken possession of this young woman's body?"

You don't answer. Either way, you were going to get hit again in the face. You look at your father with a plea on your face. He looks more scared than you. The man in the huge garment is in control now.

"Tell me demon who are you?" He is louder now. "I know you are hiding in her. You are the one who is causing her to refuse to get married."

You preferred to finish your diploma in education before you are married off to someone you don't know. You know it's not a demon but you. You know what he will say next; the demon is responsible for you quitting church. You know the demon was the church bishop who wanted you to be his third wife. Besides, you have always found comfort and peace in the way of your ancestors than the white dead man hung in the church.

"Demon show yourself!" The man of God is oozing with sweat now. "You demon telling everyone she is a lesbian."

Naledi has been telling people she is a lesbian. You are Naledi! You are Naledi, right? Or maybe you are the demon. Who are you? You don't know. A slap on the cheek brings you back from your thoughts. You glance in your father's direction to see his face beaming with expectation. He will probably give the man of God a hen for his service in getting rid of you or the demon in you, you can't tell the difference yet.

"I think it's working!" Your father said from the other side of the shrine.

"Yes, it is, but we have to know who it is before we send it to the gates of hell where the other dead souls are!" the holy man says, "I will ask you again, who are you?"

THE END

Matthew K Chikono is a short story writer and editor from Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe. He has published a short story collection entitled Dreams of Paradise. He has also compiled and edited a collection of short stories by Zimbabwean writers titled The Rules of the City. Currently, he is co-editing Prima Anthology; Prose and Poetry from Africa.

We Are Many

by Ubong Johnson



Where I am from, a corpse's last task is to remember what it used to be: a coffin is brought into the compound where it would be buried, and its family moves to welcome it. There is silence so tense one can hear footwear slice grass as they approach. Gin feeding the ground, the family chief steps forward and, in bitter incantation, begins to urge the corpse to remember. To find rest, the corpse must remember. It must remember.

*

My granduncle believes my sister's hallucinations are a result of my father's failure to remember who he truly was. The girl is eight, and every night, she sleepwalks into my room and calls me father. I heave a bitter sigh each time and pull her into a hug. "I am not daddy. I am your sister."

But she insists. "You are daddy. Mommy is looking for you."

Uncle says my face was the last my father recalled, so he is trapped in my body. Which is to say: he has become me.

This is why we will be visiting the village to break the bond as soon as the day breaks.

Just before we step down the few stairs at our door mouth, Mommy asks if I am prepared. She fondles the lock. I nod. I understand my task: to help my father remember, so that he can rest; so that my sister can sleep better. I am to do this by filling my mind with my identity when I lie on that gravestone. This will drive him out; only this can.

Mommy doesn't let me drive. She insists it's not fully morning yet, as though a 48-year-old woman has better eyes than a 19-year-old. So I turn around and heave into the backseat to sit with Makamba. I pull her close and begin to ruffle her hair. She never calls me father when she is fully awake. The hallucinations always happen when she is half-asleep. Fully awake, she remembers nothing. Now, for example, she is the eager child we know, itching to see the road, to watch the rising sun chase our car.

*

Three of my uncles are seated on a bench by the front door when we drive into the unfenced compound. Mommy does not make the turn right; one of the car's tyres almost gets stuck in the angle between the slab and the gutter. It lets out a tearing noise and the car jerks forward. Mommy mumbles thank God. It has been at least three hours spent on the road.

My uncles walk over and welcome us. My mother holds her white gown at the waist with one hand to keep it from touching the wet ground as she steps out of the car. It rained here, it seems, even though the fierce sun makes that hard to believe.

Mommy wants everything to happen quickly. This is why she hands Uncle Edidem some money just before we enter the house. He is the youngest one of the uncles. He takes the money and, at once, is on his way to get some native eggs and alcohol.

My oldest uncle holds my hand. "Do you know what to do? Has your mother told you?" He looks at me like he did my mother months ago, during the funeral. This look, a blend of pity and hope, draws his eyebrows closer. More than anything, I know he is this way towards us because we have money. Had we been poor, like Ebenezer's mother, who was asked to return to her father's house, taking not even a pin with her, we would have been met with bitter hostility each time we visited here.

I nod, again.

"Okay. You are like your mother, a strong girl. I know you can do it."

*

The sun sets and it is time. I have just changed into a white linen gown. My uncle writes my name on my forehead with white chalk. Beneath it, he writes my father's name but crosses it with a single line. I stare at my face in the mirror and release a held breath.

We Are Many

by Ubong Johnson



My mother and two uncles walk me to my father's gravestone. Uncle Edidem remains with Makamba, to keep her from coming outside.

I lay flat on my tummy, arms spread out, on my father's gravestone and close my eyes.

"Who are you?" The incantations begin.

My breathing is heavy and slow as I reach into myself and try to remember. An egg is cracked open and spilled onto my body. And just then, I am somewhere else.

At first, there is nothing here. The bare land stretches to no end. But people and houses soon start to emerge into view. Everyday people, just walking hastily, as though they're trying to catch up with something.

I stand and glance about, struggling to recall but failing. I can't tell who I am. Behind my eyelids when I close my eyes, I am a child seated by my mom, watching as she pounds yam. The image flitters past and I am hugging her, preparing to leave home.

A woman walks over and taps me. I jerk out of my vision. "Hey, I know you. What is your name?" This woman looks not less than eighty years old. I look away from her breasts. And I struggle. But still, I do not know. I walk past her.

There is another vision soon after I walk past a leafless tree: in this one, I am yelling at my father, telling him to not marry my mother because she is cursed. He looks into my eyes, sighs, and then walks away. "I am the one who will live with her, not you, Mama."

But he doesn't go far. Air snatches him before he is out of my sight.

I open my eyes. A shorter woman is before me now. She is smiling.

"Don't mind that woman." This one says. "These old people keep spoiling things here with their tags and names. Don't try to remember. We don't have names. We are the same thing. We answer a common name."

"Thank you," I say, still confused. "But, please, who am I? I have to help my sister."

She looks at my forehead, a glint of unwelcome recollection in her eyes. Just before fading away, she says: "You are all of us."

*

I wake up in the middle of the night to meet the real world: its cricket noises and dim lighting. A candle at the corner of the room fights the breeze for its life. Mother jerks awake the minute I hack a cough. "Ekpoawan, are you okay?" Her voice is tired.

"Yes, Mommy." I looked about, confused. "Where is Makamba?"

Just then, Makamba comes rushing in. She hugs me: "We have missed you, Grandma."

THE END.

Barbs Are Bared

by Reginald C. Ofodile



Ehimhen stamped in exasperation. He hated the English language. Although sedately seated, he fumed as he racked his mind for a word to describe his feelings. Ehimhen felt a distaste for Oche. He frowned as the word he sought sprang to his mind: pretentious! Ehimhen was coming to the city for a day's business. He planned to be accommodated by his friend, Ekong. He had arrived in the city when Ekong phoned to say he had been called away from work, but his friend Oche, 'such a nice guy,' would host Ehimhen. A few calls and a taxi trip later, Ehimhen was ensconced in Oche's sitting room.

The salon was bright and stylish, neither stiflingly tidy nor offensively untidy. Ehimhen was at ease.

He was bidden to the dining table and served a meal. Ehimhen noted how meticulous Oche was overlaying the table. As he ate, Oche chatted to him, trying to draw him out, halting frequently to hear him. As the evening continued, Ehimhen wondered how his friend, Ekong, a 'man's man,' had become friendly with Oche. Although all three men were similar in formal education and occupation, Oche's excessive refinement was a damning oddity.

Oche was like some men Ehimhen had encountered in Europe, stripped of their masculinity, bludgeoned by societal repression and ferocious feminism into being neither properly male nor female. How, Ehimhen wondered, could Oche retain such a disposition in Nigeria?

Oche, obviously striving to be a communicative host, asked, 'I hear you execute contracts?' Ehimhen nodded and grunted his affirmation.

'I'm told it can be a hard life for contractors,' Oche said, 'going to ministries, having to kowtow to everyone from messengers to directors.'

'We try. It's not easy anywhere,' Ehimhen replied, pondering Oche's habit of speaking in proper sentences, enunciated as a television newsreader's, feeling inferior to Oche and resenting him for that.

He was further irritated when Oche said, 'The saying goes, "ease is promised to none." A luta continua!' Having assured himself that Ehimhen liked the programme on television, he excused himself to the kitchen.

Oche later appeared with a tray of steaming, enticing items and syrup. 'Specialite de la maison,' he announced excitedly. Ehimhen must have looked uncomprehending of his French, because he translated, 'the house's speciality.'

Ehimhen relished Oche's pancakes. When he declined yet another help, feeling his gusto was becoming unseemly, Oche urged, 'You're my guest. Abeni... that's my girlfriend... was meant to come, but has an early start at work tomorrow.'

Ehimhen was surprised at Oche's allusion to a girlfriend. He had felt a man so emasculate must be gay. Oche's next remark surprised him.

'I wish Abeni were here.' Adoration was writ large on his face. 'When she's here, the place lights up.'

What kind of man is this? Ehimhen wondered.

The practice Ehimhen espoused was that a man might abase himself to a woman until the consummation. Afterwards, the man would be offhand with her, sometimes kindly in a patronizing manner, but never adoring of, or deferential to her in front of his friends. A man, Ehimhen felt, must be loath to be despised as a 'woman lappa': a man who fawned upon and clung to a woman, like a sarong ('lappa') tied around her waist.

'Well, we'll still have our outing without her,' Oche declared in forlorn resignation. He explained that, as Ehimhen was his guest, even if only for a night, he must give him an outing.

Oche drove Ehimhen to a beer garden in town where fish and chicken were grilled and sold, and diverse acts – singers and dancers – performed.

Barbs Are Bared

by Reginald C. Ofodile



Ehimhen caught himself warming to Oche, even as part of him disliked the man for having dropped what he, Ehimhen, considered Oche's proper Nigerian identity. He found Oche's civility – to the waiters and acquaintances they encountered – cloying.

When they were in Oche's car for the drive home, Ehimhen said, 'You act like white people.' Oche appeared not to hear. He was concentrating on easing his car out of a cluster of closely parked vehicles. When they gained the street, Oche asked, 'mind if we don't use the ac?'

'You're free,' Ehimhen said.

'It's nicer without when the air is cool,' Oche explained. The pleasant night air was indeed preferable to the contrived chill of the air-conditioner.

Ehimhen, irked afresh by Oche's repellent refinement, repeated, 'You act like white people.'. Oche bared his barbs.

He pulled up at the side of the road, snarling at Ehimhen, 'that's the second time you've said that.' Looking and sounding on the brink of murderous violence, he charged, 'people who say that have an inferiority complex. If I make you feel provincial, it's not my fault. My ways are not your business, right? My obligation to you, solely as Ekong's friend, is to host you until tomorrow, then you can fuck off.'

Oche maintained studious silence for the rest of the journey home. He merely showed Ehimhen to the room where he would sleep, nodded and turned away without uttering even a syllable.

Ehimhen remained resolute, battling the conviction that he had transgressed, that his words and conduct abused his host's hospitality. To his surprise, he was restless in bed, unable to sleep...

THE END.

Reginald Chiedu Ofodile is an award-winning author and international actor. Ofodile has been a very prolific and versatile writer, producing three novels, two books of plays, two poetry collections and a collection of short fiction, as well as essays and criticism. His awards include the Warehouse Theatre International Award in 1997, the BBC African Performance Award, the World Students' Drama Trust's Awards and the 2015 ANA/Abubakar Gimba award for a short story collection. He has also appeared across nations on stage and screen in many productions and coached actors.

A Capitalist Tale Or Something Like That

by S. Su'eddie Vershima Agema



One of those days found Timbir taking his usual one-to-two-hour walks. As the sun dived into the earth's bowel, he looked around to make sense of what his town had become. He marvelled at the number of cars passing, the latest models of exotic brands. Was it only in three years that a walk down this same road would have encountered a countable number of predictable cars? He waved to the cook at the corner, working to meet the teeming demands of her ever-increasing customers. She shot him a look of acknowledgement from a window and continued with her work. These days, she had no time to even wave back. That was a big change. There was a time when she would cook only once and have leftovers to spare at the end of the day. In those days, Timbir would go in and chat with her. They would talk about anything and everything. He knew how many stories he had been inspired to write from simply talking to her. There was her son, who had a calabash for a stomach and would have to wait for the leftovers which was usually his only meal.

"Uncle, buy me this." "Buy me that." "Thank you, Uncle." A very warm boy who made Timbir feel like a biological uncle. Who would have guessed they were from two different regions of the country? Such was the warmth. The last time he had seen the boy, there had been a noticeable change. The boy had grown up as had the warm "Uncle." Timbir was now "Sir" in a very polite tone. He heard that the young man was in a very big school now. He missed the boy. It was also one of the benefits of the new times; politeness over warmth. He smiled at the woman, busy at work, in a proper suit who gave instructions to her workers in this big building. Who would believe this was the same person he had called cook?

He continued on his way, stopping at the church, a magnificent giant edifice which had grown from the pastor's two-bedroom flat where people used to fellowship in previous years. It was a common sight to find groundnuts in the offertory box. All the times he had passed the area had made him laugh. The pastor had always told him to be wary, saying that the parable of the mustard seed remained.

"Perhaps, for your grandchildren!" Timbir had retorted each time, with both of them laughing. These days only crisp currency notes lined the box. The pastor had grown from the slim happy-faced man to a busy, fat, clownish person, an exploiting smile on his lips each time. The church's business now took priority, and even the spare time of the shepherd had to be spent on more favourable investments. The prophecy of the mustard seed had sure come to pass. Timbir shook his head. Things had moved fast, and the whole town had changed.

He continued his walk and eventually got to his car, someone on his trail. The beggar came in his tattered clothes and flagged Timbir down. He looked at the beggar and turned his face away. He climbed into his jeep and thought of how different things had become. It was no longer a communal society, and even family had become distant. He engaged the gears and ignited his car to life, raising the dust into the face of the man now left behind. His brother, in his ragged clothes, looked on as Timbir drove off. It was the sign of the times.

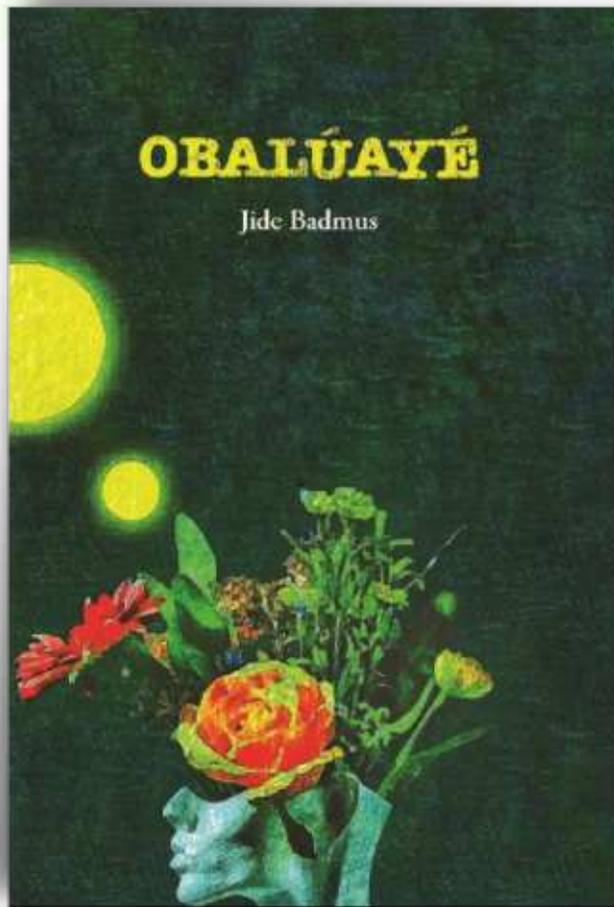
THE END.

S. Su'eddie Vershima Agema is an editor, culture activist, and development worker. A Chevening, University of Sussex and Benue State University alum, Su'eddie won the Association of Nigerian Authors Prize for Poetry in 2014 and was awarded the Mandela Day Short Story Prize in 2016. He blogs at <http://sueddie.wordpress.com> and is @sueddieagema on most social media platforms.

For The Bookshelf



OBALÚAYÉ | JIDE BADMUS
POETRY | 65 PAGES



OBALÚAYÉ
JIDE BADMUS

This collection explores the human cycle—the routine of life and death (*and a possibility of restoration, rebirth*). It seeks to understand the things that haunt us—our fears, our nightmares, quest for freedom, the weight of responsibilities, the paradox of hope, devotion and betrayals, failed states and the covid-19 pandemic.

OBALÚAYÉ is a realization that “*life is a cocktail of sweet, sour and insipid*” and we are born to run this cycle, reaching for light, reaching for freedom...that ultimately leads to the grave.

Will You Marry Me?

by Ude Vivian Chidimma



"Aunty Hilary will never get married!"

You turn your head to glare at Nneka and she will shrug as though she had not just echoed your thoughts. Nneka is the daughter of Aunty Hillary's neighbour, they shared a toilet and a bathroom in that house of theirs that looked like it would fall if the wind blew a little harder. You visit often.

Today, your aunt is not home.

"She went to 'escort' her boyfriend," Nneka said when you asked her.

You wanted to wait but you had errands to run. You did not want your mother's troubles.

You will stay for a while and then leave. When you come again later, your aunt will be home, staring at the wall.

"Nne, I cooked oha. Go inside let me put your food," she will say as soon as you enter. Her hands shook when she touched your braids and smiled at the wall, it made your heart break, must she get married?

"Abi Adanna was here before, Nneka?" Nneka and her mother were eating outside.

"Yes, she was here when I went to grind the beans."

"Hilli, ask her if she wrote this thing on your wall."

"How can she write it? She's just seven."

Then she will smile at you.

"Maama," she called you that most times.

"Please you'll help me get water from the borehole today oh?"

You will nod eagerly, quietly finish your food and lie down to rest wondering how she really felt and immediately run out to get the green leaves your teachers use to clean blackboards in your school, crush them together and wipe the wall.

"Ah, Adanna is cleaning the walls. She must have written it."

"Ada, did you write this thing?"

You fear they know but it was too neat and correct. "WILL YOU MARRY ME?" Aunty Hillary would rather believe an admirer did.

"Bia, mommy Nneka, leave my child alone".

"Mama, if you've finished resting, go and get me the water."

That was the end of that talk for the rest of your lives or so you thought.

*

Now you are 27 and unmarried, Aunty Hillary was just 25 when you wrote that thing and yet it looked like she was the oldest spinster in a world that had no patience for them. You understand her now.

Closing your eyes to daydream, you will forget your pot of rice boiling and the heat it brought to your room. You liked imagination better than reality for then you could live in your mother's house again and she wouldn't be dead. You could bring Obinna back too and you'd go to Mauritius with Somma. Your lips will curve in a smile as you see Obinna in your room, staring intensely at you, his eyes darkening in deep desire. He will kneel in front of you raising your skirt as his fingers find your flimsy underwear, all wet. Your shrieking phone will interrupt your dreams, the ringtone too loud and annoying.

Somma is on the line. You are so glad someone is calling you at least.

Will You Marry Me

by Ude Vivian Chidimma



You would have preferred someone else to call, a man maybe? One of those you wanted to be with. These days appealing men no longer approached you, it did not help that you were in an environment where only the kind of men you loathed lived and that you had a demanding business taking up your time so much that self-care was a luxury too expensive for you. When the men came, you just did not want them. Those, educated without common sense. Some were dirty and smelly, always filling your face with spit when they talked. They talked about everything and nothing. How a woman can have all the education and still come back to cook for her husband because that is her ultimate goal in life without a man, a woman is incomplete. These words infuriated you at first because you did not think the world still had such people, later you stopped being angry and instead became deaf. It was tiring.

You picked up the phone and held it far from your ears because Somma is screaming; "Girl, Sandra is getting married!"

It is the usual thing she does whenever another girl in your distant circle is tying the knot. Just last week, Fisayo married Abdul her heartthrob, a Muslim like she had always wanted. The month before was Ijeoma and Ekene, they only met at your birthday party and barely two months later, they said their vows.

You will picture Somma, wearing a face like one that truly felt discarded when she shouts "God when!" She will recount how that big-headed Yoruba demon, Lanre ghosted her as soon as he got to the UK, how James was breadcrumbing her and refusing to define what they had, always asking for nudes and calling the sweetest of names but going for weeks without communicating with her. The last time he did this, you forced her to tell him that the relationship was draining her and he asked "what relationship?"

In your case, you have only ever been with one person, still stuck in what would have been that never was.

"Wo, Somma it's not as if God intended that everybody should get married," you said.

"You're saying this because nobody pressures you from your family," Somma said.

"Yes, my family is cool but what about colleagues and friends like you?"

"I don't pressure you."

"It doesn't matter, all I'm saying is if this was God's original plan, we'd all be born with our partner's names on our palms."

She will laugh and tell you about her interview yesterday.

"You won't believe the secretary told me that very soon nobody will ask who my father is anymore but it will be my husband giving me a new identity."

"Your name and humanity is enough identity abeg, let her go and sit down."

THE END.

Ude Vivian Chidimma studied English Language and Literature at Abia State University, Uturu. She is an avid reader. She has participated in some poetry contests and excelled in some too, she was the second prize winner of the June/July 2020 BPPC, and she was also in the top ten of the BPPC April/May 2022 amongst others. She has a podcast channel (The Bookery Podcast) where she reviews African fiction she has read over time.



ESSAYS & REVIEWS

Taofeek "Aswagaawy" Ayeyemi, Mhembouter
Jeremiah Orhemba, Ayomide Ruth Oluwagbenga,
Ehi-kowoicho Ogwiji

Self-Portrait as a Helium Contesting Flight With the Spirits

by Taofeek "Aswagaawy" Ayeyemi



A handful of wonders, that's what I am. A God's gentle metaphor, crispy line stretching into stanzas, into poetry. The smallness of the ring that stretches into Solomon's rare glory. An ocean of grace with a tiny opening. Some nights, I check the cadence of my cries to lower its sonority, say: "But cries are not to be enjoyed, God! Hear these plights instead." Tonight, I back my lover and face God with a face paralleled with tears, saying: "God! Handle me with care."

Use: he used me; she used me. Use: a flowery word reduced to thorns of deceit. But when God uses a man, He refurbishes the decaying piers of humanity through him. But who takes a yoghurt when it waxes. We shake it, a hard exercise towards a smooth, subtlety end. Sometimes when my sky is a blend of crimson and silhouette, I ask: "God! Are you trying to shake me well before use?" And my words echo back at me.

Some nights I work with Minkaheel as he changes the depth of the dark, hour after hour. Some nights I work with the Kirama katibin, turning back at Atid and guiding my steps to the notice of Raqib. But my heart, a beachcomber in the vastness of His presence. At times, I am a helium contesting flight with the Ruuhu: a brittle man finding meaning in life after exhuming from the chest of time the meaning of life. Some nights I am a stray cat folding on a foot-mat at the door of a tabernacle.

Some nights, I am a wanderer. Clutched to my bed yet my mind breaking borders like nocturnal birds. Tonight, I peep through the window to see the sky—starless, moonless, with no glee except the sheen of a stray cat's eyes. In the morning, a dog will send haunting barks across the streets, his life punctuated by chain. In the morning, a sheep will stare on into nothingness. Only the cat finds bliss in the warmth of the universe. A legend says when the animals descended from the heavens, only the cat paid the toll fees. These words are not for the cats. They are for you. You whose heart melts, scared by his fate, like a cat's eyes by night. You who is shaken into frustration, see, you're only paying your dues.

Most times, there is no evil in what wrings out tears from man's body. It is simply a good squeezing, producing juices from orange. Sometimes it's a fine crushing, one that releases fragrance from flowers. I imagine a Joseph escaping the heat of dark well. I imagine his body escaping the stench of a prison wall. Maybe we'd only know a righteous Yusuf that's not a king, that's not touched by the regal of royalty. Beloved, stare. Stare into the eyes of that which scares you. Can you see a flood of light?

Taofeek "Aswagaawy" Ayeyemi is a Nigerian lawyer, writer and author of the chapbook *Tongueless Secrets* (Ethel Press, 2021) and a collection *"aubade at night or serenade in the morning"* (Flowersong Press, 2021). A BotN and Pushcart Prize Nominee, his works have appeared or forthcoming in *Contemporary Verse 2*, *Lucent Dreaming*, *Ethel-zine*, *Up-the-Staircase Quarterly*, *FERAL*, *ARTmosterrific*, *Banyan Review*, *tinywords*, *the Quills* and elsewhere. He won the 2021 Loft Books Flash Fiction Competition, emerged 2nd Place in the 2021 Porter House Review Poetry Contest, and an Honorable Mention in the 2021 Ito En Oi Ochai Shin-Haiku Contest, the 2021 Oku-no-hosomichi Soka Matsubara Haiku Contest and the 2020 Stephen A. DiBiase Poetry Prize among others. He is @Aswagaawy on Twitter

The Feminist Burden

Attaining Independence On The Wings Of Unapologetic Rebellion: A Review Of Ukamaka Olisakwe's, *Ogadinma*

OGADINMA | FICTION | UKAMAKA OLISAKWE | MASOBE, 2020 | 251 PAGES

by Ehi-kowoicho Ogwiji



When seventeen-year-old Ogadinma sets out to pursue her dream of acquiring a university degree, she had no idea she was beginning an exhausting journey to independence. She only finds herself several kilometres into a rough, winding road and painfully realises how fast everything is getting out of her control.

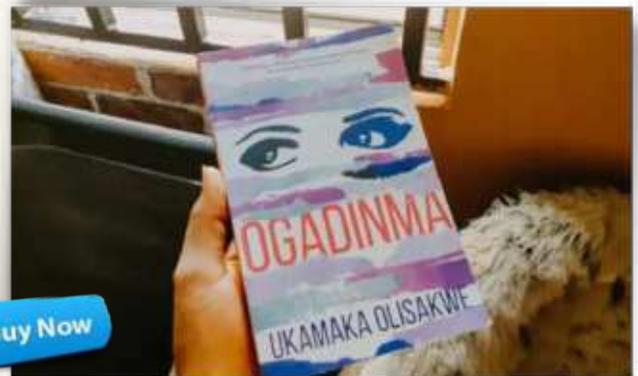
In just a couple of years, she had to deal with sexual assault (resulting in pregnancy and abortion) and the reality of being "exiled" from her home in Kano to live with her uncle's family in Lagos, where marriage, motherhood, domestic violence, and other misfortunes happened in quick succession. She is overwhelmed but takes heroic steps to take her life back, only making do with the little support she gets from a friend and cousin.

Ogadinma is a heart-breaking read because of the discomfort a reader feels watching the damage done to a naive girl whom s/he'd so badly want to rescue. It is sad enough that Ogadinma's dreams are buried in her naive teenage decisions, but to see how she is hurried to womanhood when she has barely finished the cycle of girlhood is even sadder.

In spite of how "emotionally exhausting" a story it is to read, I must applaud Ukamaka's spellbinding narration. She tells the story so softly that it eases the pain of witnessing the MC's woes. What is more consoling than the way she wove the fine ends of the story into a refreshing climax and a neat resolution?

What Ukamaka did in *Ogadinma* is to tell a story so all-encompassing you are immediately sure the narrator is standing with one foot on experience and the other on in-depth research. At some point, you will be enraged as you read this, but anger is not necessarily a bad thing. I often think of anger as a force of inertia, necessary to challenge the status quo, initiate difficult conversations, and conversely push for social change.

Ehi-Kowoicho Ogwiji is a writer who examines womenfolk issues, mental health, and environmental realities. Her works have appeared on several literary platforms and she has won accolades for her writing. She is CON-SCIO Magazine's Features Editor.



Ukamaka explores feminism and its subsets—the resoluteness of cultures around the world to commoditize and possess women, and female complicity in patriarchy, among others. I consider *Ogadinma* a very important story because of how it zooms in on areas of feminism that we barely talk about. What I find most interesting about the novel is how the story, though set in the 80s, seems so contemporary. How she manages to weave it into a confluence story, connecting our favourite classic and contemporary feminist literature, is amazing.

What any reflective reader would take from the relatable characters and the skilful plot is the cosy diction and the didactic ingredients the author works into the story. No doubt, Ukamaka is a brilliant storyteller, and *Ogadinma* is clear proof that feminist stories are neither tired tales nor make-believes to push a misandrist agenda.

I strongly recommend *Ogadinma* to everyone who dreams of a balanced world where a woman belongs first to herself. Everyone who dreams of a world where women are not coerced to, like Ogadinma, attain independence only using the wings of deviance and unapologetic rebellion, should read this novel.

We will always have feminist stories, but *Ogadinma* will always be timeless. I honestly cannot wait to see the magic Ukamaka comes up with next.

Shapes

by Mhembuteer J. Orhamba



H.K is insistent. He wants me to be specific. Am I gay, bi or non-binary?

-I am queer, I persist. Besides, non-binary refers to gender neutrality, not sexual orientation. I am cis anyways. A queer, cisman.

I begin typing again.

I tread cautiously.

-Sexual orientation is not black and white for everybody. For some of us, it is not fixed. It is sometimes moving, sometimes vague.

He throws in a man-emoji with a hand over its face.

-Remaining unspecific means I am resisting labelling. Sexuality is on a spectrum. Have you heard of the Kinsley Scale?

-A book?

-A concept. Google it. Some of us don't fit neatly in a particular box. We just are.

-God! he types. I have never been this confused in my life.

I throw in a string of laughing emojis. What you have to realize is that people are diverse. Even people of the same sexual orientation do not necessarily feel attraction similarly.

My attraction to women is not clear-cut. It's complicated.

I once used "clear cut/ complicated" for another guy who was also keen on me being specific. He accused me that I was bi. Complicated, that's what you bisexuals say. Admit your sexual orientation already!

So I tell H.K why it is complicated. My case isn't the confusion that is the norm for bisexuals. I don't see myself as pansexual or sexually fluid either. I suffer from SO OCD. My sexuality is a warped thing now.

-What's SO OCD?

-You don't want to go down that path, I promise you.

-Okay o. I really thought I knew so much about queer stuff. Seems I'll have to go do my research.

-In case you decide to google it, SO OCD is split into two major types: Heterosexual and Homosexual OCD. Google is rife with results focused on Homosexual OCD. All you have to do is swap the terms as it fits the sufferer. Swap gay for straight.

He must be more clueless than before. It is exactly what I want.

I feel guilty. I feel like a liar. I want to curse. I want to recall the days when my sexuality was all smooth and clear.

Except all I recall is that day:

I'm on a bus, weighed by swirling emotions. The bus conductor's hiss draws my attention and that's when I see her, approaching. She is slender, and covered, except her crop top reveals her torso. Zap!, my urethra stings.

My memory moves on to the following days:

I see a girl and my urethra stings. I resist the attraction, my urethra stings. Jesse, our online support group leader, preaches acknowledgement of these attractions.

"Yes, they are false. But you still have to acknowledge them."; so, I surrender to them.

Shapes

by Mhembuter J. Orhamba



Still my urethra stings.

Fire flares in my chest.

I look up nude men on Google. A gathering pulls inside me, dies as quickly as it started. I try nude women. I soak in their fullness and curves. I wait, for the heady momentum of arousal. The fire in my chest rather grows hotter—I close the tab. Back to muscles, dicks, and toned bodies. My thoughts bunch up. My body feels like parched ground. I must be asexual. No, I still desire a man, I just can't feel aroused. What about the girl-attractions? For Chrissakes they claw!

It is no longer a war as it used to be, thanks to Jesse's recovery tips on the support group. Arousal no longer floods me, but my penis rises when I'm lost in thoughts thick with male crushes.

I mourn the feeling of certainty. It was solid ground.

H. K is typing.

Okay, his message appears.

I should go to sleep.

I put off my data.

Mhembuter Jeremiah Orhamba is Tiv, Nigerian, and the first runner-up for the 2021 Kreative Diadem Flash Fiction Contest. His works have appeared or are forthcoming in FictionWrit Magazine, The Shallow Tales Review, Arts Lounge, Eboquills, The Muse Journal, Agapanthus Collective, ARTmosterrific, and Fiction Niche. He wishes to attain the serenity of water, enjoys watching TK and Carlos kiss, and still loves AURORA and Christina Perri. He tweets @son_of_faya.

I Say My Name

by Ayomide Ruth Oluwagbenga



Trepidation.

That's what I felt, yeah. That fear has masqueraded herself again. She's a sly snake-head this time. The sounds of the heavy equipment in the lab became noisier, time ticked on, and my mind frayed everywhere. If I gave in to hide in the hole of her cowardice, she would bite. No, fangs aren't friendly.

Would one hear the *tuum, culum* effect if a pebble drops in an ocean? A world of a billion and more souls, a galaxy of myriad stars, a community of many children and grown-ups... Can I stand out? It feels like life is about proving our existence in one and many ways, showing that we too can shine from the dark or outshine others. Isn't that why this wanton fear keeps coming, seeking more ways to cut me down?

It's a norm, they say, to just want to break with the hustle, and aim to be big, then bigger, and become the biggest. But, what they don't train us to normalize is the paces or turns each of us takes as we journey through this world. None is slow or fast; neither is anyone too late or so early. We all are atoms taking our time to burst alive or apart with our innate nucleic fields. Note that. Timing. Phases. This life itself is a stratum preceding another.

Abnegation.

Here is a normalized clime of evolution and there are unwritten standards of success by which one gets weighed. But, the bold handwriting still stares at us on the walls of our academic pathways, and we move on to bagging the degrees, slaving or bossing at the 'dream jobs', ticking the 'right boxes', and marrying that special or enforced someone we carry the rightness for head like say na hunter's torch. Oh, we celebrate birthing the cute kids, fulfilling the bucket lists, and on and on, the cycle goes. But for those who choose the pyramidal cuts of life and can make prodigious impacts, skyrocketing beyond the limits, those age-worn balances can't measure, they may get broken and termed 'abnormal'.

Somehow, I'm tired. I don't even want to prove anyone right or wrong anymore. A simple step in front of another took me out of the chair of boredom and desperation, and straight through the doors onto the sunny passage. Sometimes, a big gulp of air could put out the fiery fears. (You call it taking a deep breath, huh? Okay.) It's an easy way of putting on the 'I can't kill myself' cloak and perhaps raising up one's head to refocus on the capable One who could take charge. For me, that is God. For another, it could be a person, an interesting distraction, an addiction, or something else.

Recognition.

A smile broke through my icy blank face within the few minutes I was out of the lab. Somehow, be silly with yourself or whatever, and just smile. Maybe like I did, you can admire the blueness of the sky, coo at a cat, slightly snicker, and wave at a stranger who was about to trip, eat a snack... Just do something to remind yourself that you are alive, you are fine, and you are able to push through.

I often come to rest in the place of recognizing myself and my God. So, I say my name to reawaken my weary self or reaffirm the truths of all I've been, all I am, and all I will become - the full form of me that should get to truly rest in peace. Can't we realize we have become commonplace in the market of what should be a megacity of variety? Yet, we can uniquely be ourselves. I say my name because there is no other Ayomide Ruth Oluwagbenga in the universe who embodies my spirit and soul. I am the only me.

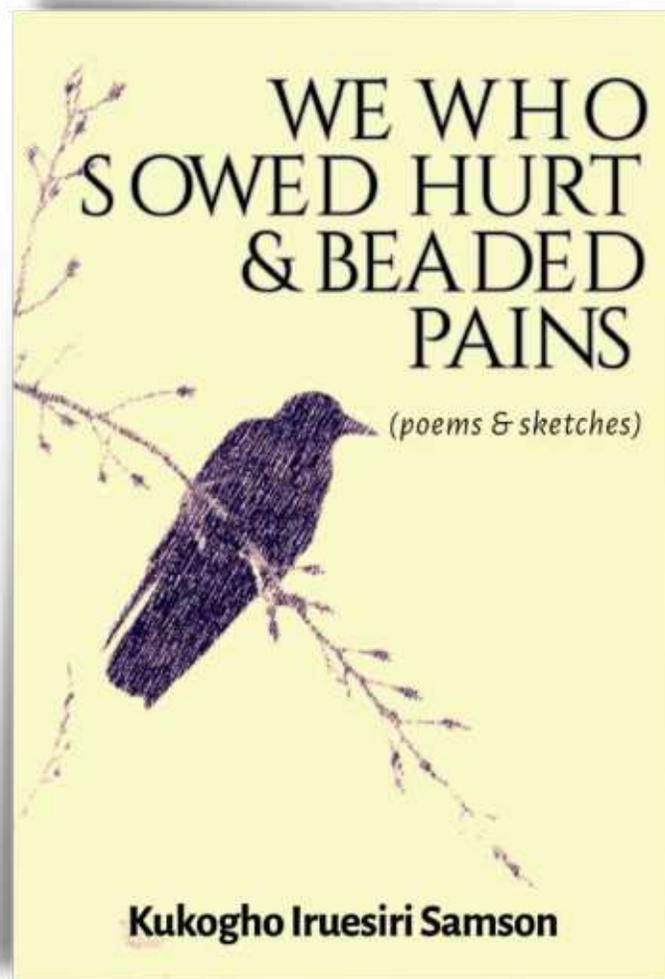
Hence, before the applause comes, before you are driven into the spotlight, and before history is made or a new pace gets set; embrace your being, renew your mindset, upgrade your lifestyle, and say your name, always.

Ayomide Ruth Oluwagbenga is a winning writer among several descriptions. Her hands have put out lots of her thoughts and learnings in different literary formats, and some of them have been recognized and published. If she's not handling other important things in her life, she's occupied with building a lifestyle from writing. You can catch her sometimes on Facebook (Oluwag Ay), Instagram (Ayomide_Ruth) or Twitter (@AyoscoR).

For The Bookshelf



POETRY | 65 PAGES



Depression eats deep into the fabric of a poet's soul and becomes the thread from which this collection is woven. *We Who Sowed Hurt & Beaded Pains* collects aromatic verses that explore depression in a solemn voice and celebrate souls in need of redemption. It is a call for empathy in a sincere voice that will speak to even the hardest hearts.

DAMILOLA OMOTOYINBO / AMOYE FAVOUR / TAOFEEK
"ASWAGAAWY" AYEYEMI / ADERETI AYOMIDE OLUWASEUN /
NKET GODWIN / OLUMIDE MANUEL / OLAFISOYE-ORAGBADE
OLUWATOSIN DAVID / GLORIOUS KATE AKPEGAH / PROSPER
IFEANYI / SUNDAY T. SAHEED / ROY DUFFIELD / ABUBAKAR
SADIQ MUSTAPHA / OJO VICTORIA ILEMOBAYO / IBRAHIM AJANI
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