

CÓN-SCIÒ

POETRY | PROSE | ART | PHOTOGRAPHY

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VOL 2

EXSOLVO



ADEDAYO AQARAU | JIDE BADMUS | EHI-KOWOICHO OQWIJI | KUKOQHO IRUESIRI SAMSON | S. SU'EDDIE
VERSHIMA AQEMA | HILLARY OFUKOCHO ANFOFUN | JAKKY BANKONQ-Obi | MARIAL AWENDIT | AMY
SHIMSHON-SANTO | OLUWATOBI EZEKIEL POROYE | ABOSEDE OQUINDARE | ISMAIL BALA | DEREK EHIOROBO |
CALEB ISHAYA OSESHI | ADENIRAN ABDBASIT ADEYEMI | TAIWO BISOLA OWOEYE | TAOFEEK AYEYEMI
"ASWAQAAWY" | EDWIN MAMMAN | TOLA IJALUSI | EKWEREMADU UCHENNA | MARYANN IFEANACHO |
SESUQH IORLIAM | EHIQHOCHO RUTH JAMES | QLORIA OQO | AMIRA ABDUL-AZEEZ

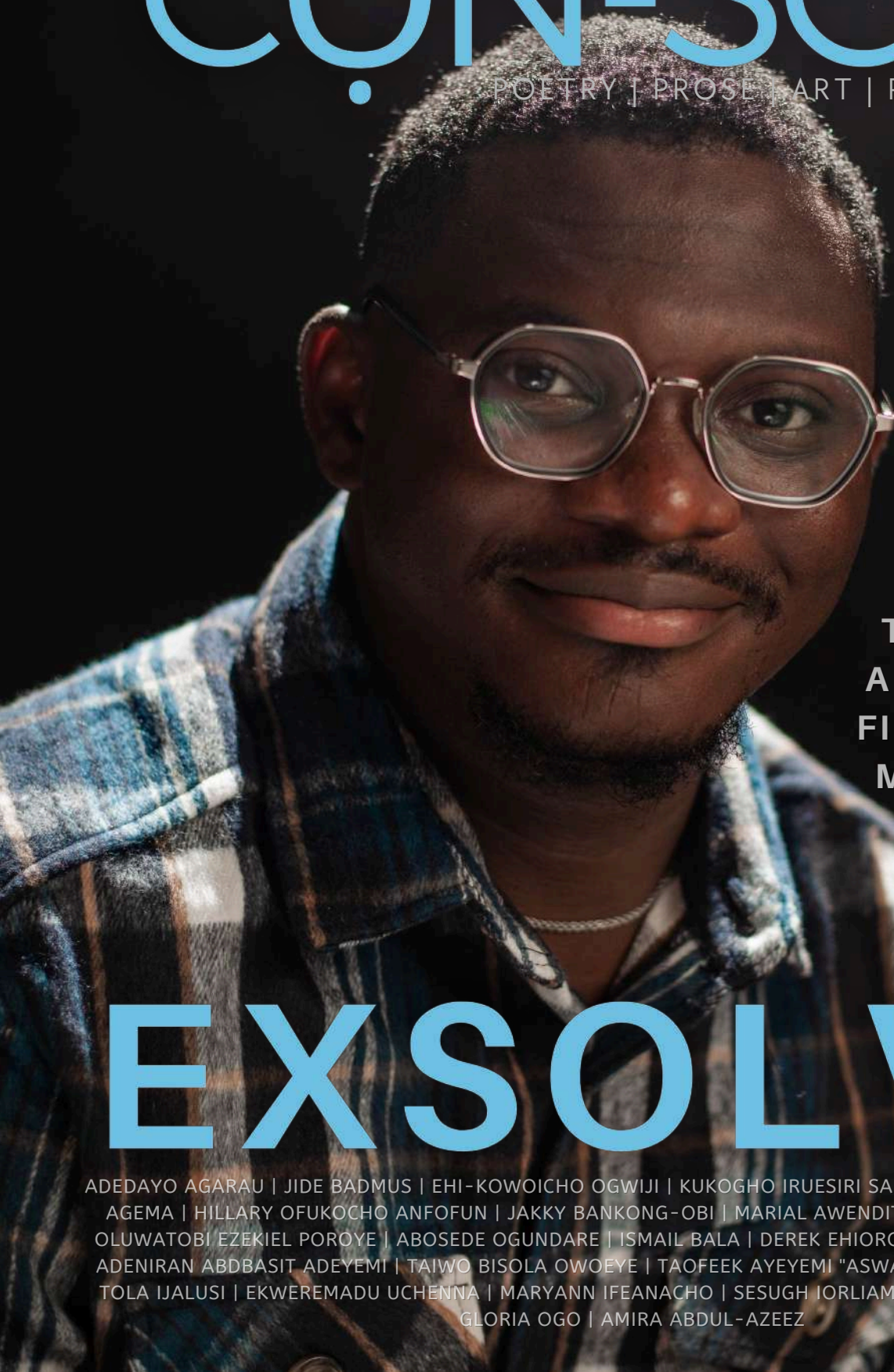
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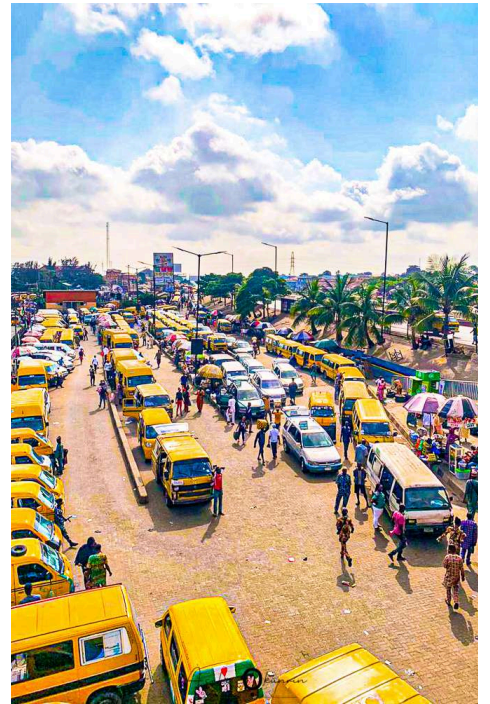


THE FUTURE OF
AFRICAN POETRY
FILLS ME WITH SO
MUCH URGENCY
— AGARAU

EXSOLVO

ADEDAYO AGARAU | JIDE BADMUS | EHI-KOWOICHO OGWJI | KUKOGHO IRUESIRI SAMSON | S. SU'EDDIE VERSHIMA
AGEMA | HILLARY OFUKOCHO ANFOFUN | JAKKY BANKONG-ObI | MARIAL AWENDIT | AMY SHIMSHON-SANTO |
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ADENIRAN ABDBASIT ADEYEMI | TAIWO BISOLA OWOEYE | TAOFEEK AYEYEMI "ASWAGAAWY" | EDWIN MAMMAN |
TOLA IJALUSI | EKWEREMADU UCHENNA | MARYANN IFEANACHO | SESUGH IORLIAM | EHIGHOCHO RUTH JAMES |
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EDITORIAL TEAM



Jide BADMUS is an engineer and poet inspired by beauty and destruction. Author of four books, including “Obaluaye” (FlowerSong Press, 2022) and “What Do I Call My Love for Your Body” (Roaring Lion Newcastle, 2022), Badmus’s poetic exploration extends to curating anthologies. Amongst other things, he is the founder of INKspiredng and serves as the Poetry Editor of CŌN-SCIÒ Magazine.



Ehi-Kowoicho OQWIJI explores themes of womenfolk issues, mental health, and environmental realities. She is the author of the poetry chapbook, *Icebreaker*, and Editor-in-Chief of *Eboquills*. Her works have appeared in *Lolwe*, *Harper’s Bazaar*, *Ake Review*, and elsewhere. She is the Features Editor of CŌN-SCIÒ Magazine.



Su’eddie Vershima AQEMA is an acclaimed writer, cultural activist, and development practitioner. At the helm of SEVHAQE Publishing and the Benue Book and Arts Festival, he champions literary and cultural growth. His notable works include “Bring Our Casket Home,” “Home Equals Holes,” and “Memory and the Call of Waters.” He is the Fiction Editor of CŌN-SCIÒ Magazine.



RUKOGHO Iruesiri Samson is an award-winning writer, communications expert, and founder of the not-for-profit art development organization Words Rhymes & Rhythm (WRR). Rukogho has authored four poetry books and an award-winning novel, *Devil’s Pawn*. He is the Founder and Editor-in-Chief of CŌN-SCIÒ Magazine and manages WRR’s publishing imprint Authorpedia Publishers.

EDITOR'S NOTE



Dear Esteemed Readers,

Welcome back to the captivating world of CŌN-SCIÒ!


In this Issue 4, Volume 2 2024, themed EXSOLVO, we invite you to experience a literary and visual journey rooted in release, exploration, and creative expression. Exsolvo—meaning "to loosen" or "release"—perfectly encapsulates the emotions and ideas that weave through the incredible works within this edition.

At the heart of this issue is an exclusive interview with the acclaimed Nigerian poet, editor, and educator, Adedayo Agarau. In an insightful conversation, Adedayo shares his profound insights into his writing, life journey, and aspirations for African literature..

Within these pages, you'll encounter a diverse tapestry of creative expression.

Immerse yourselves in the poetry of S. Su'eddie Vershima Agema, Hillary Ofukocho Anfofun (*winner of the Brigitte Poirson Literature Prize 2024, Poetry*), Jakkų Bankong-Obi, Marial Awendit, Amy Shimshon-Santo, Oluwatobi Ezekiel Poroye, Abosede Ogundare, Ismail Bala, and Derek Ehiorobo. Explore the essence of release in Taiwo Bisola Onwoye's self-portrait, and the visual narratives of Caleb Ishaya Oseshi, whose photoseries delves into the impact of mobile technology on human experience, and Adeniran Abdbasit Adeyemi, who captures the vibrant and dynamic essence of Lagos through the lens of the iconic "Danfo" buses. Engage with insightful reflections from Taofeek Ayeayemi "Aswagaawu," Edwin Mamman, and Tola Ijalusi. Discover compelling narratives by Ekweremadu Uchenna, MaryAnn Ifeanacho, Sesugh Iorliam, Ehighocho Ruth James, Gloria Ogo (*winner of the Brigitte Poirson Literature Prize 2024, Short Story*), and Amira Abdul-Azeez.

EXSOLVO is a testament to the power of creative expression to release emotions, ignite imagination, and foster a deeper understanding of the human condition. On behalf of the editorial team, I am deeply grateful to all our contributors for responding to our call and entrusting us with their unique voices and perspectives.

We invite you to explore these pages and experience the liberating power of art. You can click the link  icon on each article to read the web version.

With gratitude and anticipation,

Rukogho Iruesiri Samson
Editor-in-Chief

INTRODUCTION



In a fast-paced world where everything seems to blur into the indistinct, the notion of release, of letting go, becomes a necessity. This is the spirit of *CÒN-SCIÒ MAGAZINE Issue 4, Volume 2, December 2024*, as embodied by our theme, *EXSOLVO*. With this Latin word meaning "to loosen" or "to release," we journey through narratives and imagery that explore the unshackling of burdens, the freedom of creative expression, and the essence of letting go.

A sense of liberation thematically binds the works within this edition, each showing what it means to set oneself free, or in some cases, to be bound. A central part of this edition is undoubtedly our conversation with the celebrated Adedayo Agarau, acclaimed poet, editor, and educator. Adedayo reflects on the intersections between his craft and his personal experiences. He speaks candidly about the themes that have shaped his work, grief, familial memory, cultural specificity, and the responsibility he feels toward his audience. Through his words, we glimpse the transformative power of storytelling, poetry's force, and the capacity of literature to offer release and resonance.

In the poetry section, you will encounter Hillary Ofukocho Anfofun's deeply layered piece, *Akpabana's Banquet*, where myth and justice intertwine in a dance of reckoning. The award-winning poem paints strong imagery of needed justice for societal recklessness. My poems, *Slum* and *Transition*, capture the resilience born in the shadows of displacement and give a shot at grief. Thus, one sees the keen interplay of the duality of displacement and survival. Somewhat similarly, Oluwatobi Ezekiel Poroye's *A Table Where I Am The Breakfast* invokes the visceral interplay between personal and national identities in a gripping dance of grief and resilience. On another note, Marial Awendit's *Rwanda* chronicles a nation's rebirth with meditative and charged undertones. And Jakky Bankong-Obi's *Sweetness & Ruin* unfurls a lyrical exploration of the delicate balance between allure and destruction. Abosede's *A Passage Through Time* quietly blends reflection with memory, while Amy Shimson-Santo's work here explores the intimate and transformative moment of life's fragility. Ismail Bala's *Blue Top* and Derek Ehiorobo's *God's Waiting Room* invite readers into deeply personal spaces where human connection and introspection bloom. In all, these poems carry on the spirit of commitment early African writers are known for and act as an extension of some of the thoughts Adedayo pursued in his preceding conversation.

The stories in this edition continue the exploration of our thematic thrust, beginning with Gloria Ogo's award-winning *The In-Between* which transports readers to the liminal spaces of memory and existence, where the past is both a torment and a teacher. Amira Abdul-Azeez's *Saving Adanna* unpacks the complexity of maternal love amidst mental health struggles, presenting an evocative portrait of fragility and redemption. Then there is *Neneh* by Ekweremadu Uchenna, which artfully blends memory, loss, and the cyclical nature of life, personifying trees as sacred totems of familial legacy. Sesugh Iorliam's *I Do* reflects on personal growth, fear, resilience, letting go and being rewarded in the face of imagined betrayal and heartbreak, while Ehigbocho Ruth James' *Bestie, Bestie* probes the painful territory of unspoken love and friendship. MaryAnn Ifeanacho's *Through Thick and Thin* contrasts ideals of beauty and identity, offering dual perspectives on self-perception. Together, these stories remind us that breaking free often requires a confrontation with the chains we did not know we carried.

The pictures in this edition are equally enthralling. Taiwo Bisola Owoeye's striking self-portrait embodies the resilience and unyielding spirit under the sun's piercing gaze. On the other hand, Adeniran Abdbasit Adeyemi's photographs of Lagos' iconic "danfo" buses encapsulate the city's bustling dynamism, while Caleb Ishaya Osheshi's photos reflect the inseparability of humanity and technology in a world perpetually on the move, capturing moments of connection in an increasingly digital world.

In the final section of this issue, the essays offer a meditative counterbalance. Tola Ijalusi's review of Aremo Yusuf Balogun's *ORI* unravels the concept of destiny within Yoruba cosmology. In a separate piece, he also reviews Adedayo Agarau's *For Boys Who Went* while Taofeek Ayeyemi's *My Progenitor's Tongue* revels in the evocative power of language as a vessel for both expression and liberation. These essays invite readers to pause, think, and engage with the deeper undercurrents of our shared existence. There is also Edwin Mamman's *Medicine* which reminds us of the well-regarded tradition of journaling as therapy.

In general, our theme, *EXSOLVO*, as explored in this edition calls for introspection and urges us to think deeply and embrace the transformative power of release. Whatever your thoughts, passions, or feelings are, there is something in this edition for you and a lot of room for release.

We are grateful to our many contributors for these gems. To my fellow editors, Kukogho Iruesi Samson, Ehi-Kowoicho Ogwiji, and Jide Badmus, your dedication has been nothing short of inspiring. And to you, our cherished readers, we invite you to immerse yourself in these pages, to find both solace and awakening and perhaps to discover your *exsolvo!*

S. Su'eddie Vershima Agema
Fiction Editor



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Adedayo Agarau



IN THE SPOTLIGHT: **ADEDAYO AGARAU**

The Future of African Poetry Fills Me With So Much Urgency...

— *in conversation with Kukogho Iruesi Samson*



IN THE SPOTLIGHT: ADEDAYO AGARAU

Adedayo Agarau is a Nigerian poet, editor, and educator whose work explores themes of identity, loss, and resilience within the African experience. A Wallace Stegner Fellow at Stanford University, he holds an MFA in Poetry from the University of Iowa, where he was awarded the Deena Davidson Friedman Scholarship, the John C. Shupe Scholarship, and the 2023 Summer Scholarship from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

Agarau is the author of the chapbooks *For Boys Who Went* (Words Rhymes & Rhythm, 2017), *Origin of Names* (African Poetry Book Fund, 2020), *The Arrival of Rain* (Vegetarian Alcoholic Press, 2020), and the forthcoming *The Year of Blood* (Fordham University Press, 2025). His works have been featured in *Poetry Magazine*, the Poetry Foundation, the Poetry Society of America, *World Literature Today*, and other esteemed publications.

He has received numerous accolades, including the Poetic Justice Institute Book Prize for *The Year of Blood*, and was a finalist for the 2024 Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Fellowship.

Agarau serves as the Editor-in-Chief of *Agbowo Magazine* and has edited for publications such as *The Rumpus*. He is also dedicated to teaching and mentoring aspiring writers, fostering the growth of the next generation of African literature.

In this interview, Agarau discusses his writing, life journey and influences, current projects, and his vision for African literature.

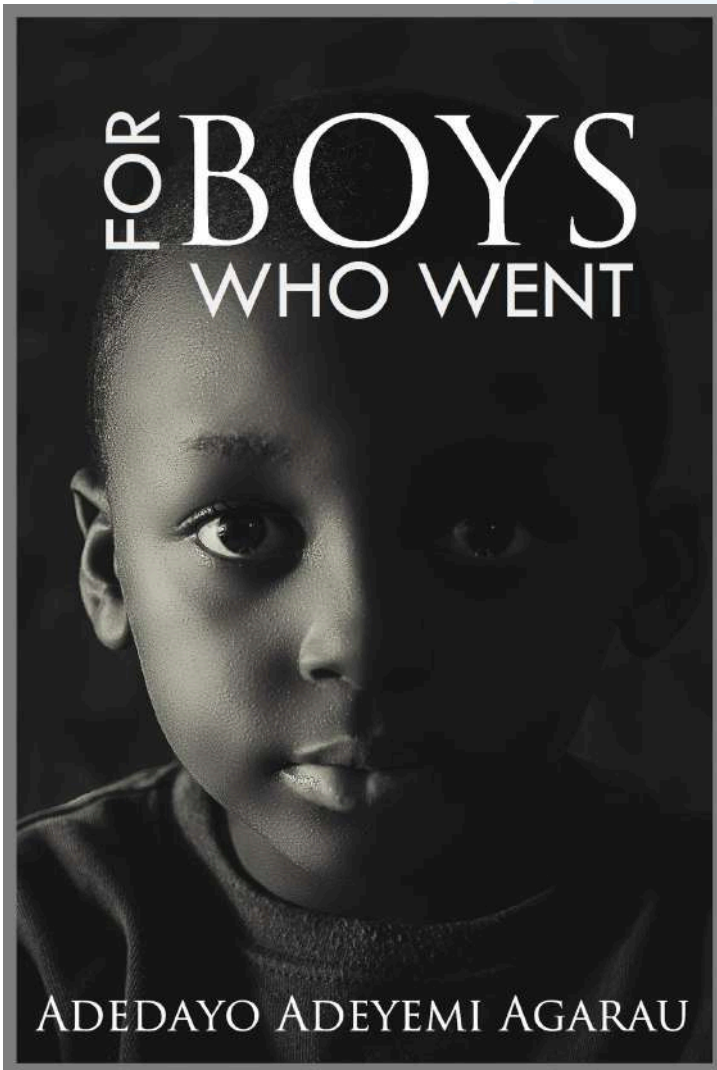


KIS: *You began your journey as a nutritionist but have since developed an impressive creative career, supported by renowned publications and academic achievements, including an MFA in Poetry from the University of Iowa and a Wallace Stegner Fellowship at Stanford. How have these diverse experiences influenced your growth and perspective as a poet?*

AA: I have been thinking, more recently, about the science of the liminal—how we can move from space to space, threading through difficulties or uncertainty, searching for answers to the questions the world presents. As Solnit reflects in *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, “The things we want are transformative, and we don’t know or only think we know what is on the other side of that transformation.” Starting as a nutritionist provided the basin for critical analysis and enriched my pedagogy. I am not entirely sure when the switch happened or when I decided that this was what I was going to do for the

rest of my life, but it didn't truly sink in until my father, and I arrived in front of Dey House on an August morning.

I am most grateful to everyone who has held the doors open for us—how the dream persists because people have dreamed and lived the dream, our dreams. From the large classrooms in Federal Polytechnic Ede during my Pre-ND program in 2011 to the political struggles I experienced as a student leader to the cult clashes in Owo where I witnessed men beheading a student, Nigeria has informed my language of grief. Our life experiences workshop our language, our syntaxes. Our small lives have been workshoping our works, preparing us to tell our stories even more succinctly before arriving in Iowa.



IN THE SPOTLIGHT: ADEDAYO AGARAU

I have enjoyed tremendous support from faculty members in Iowa—Elizabeth Willis, Mark Levine, Margaret Ross, Jim Galvin, and Tracie Morris—who believed in my stories, cried together with us in the workshop, and encouraged us to use curiosity to find answers to the questions the work requires. At Stanford, I found further guidance and inspiration in Patrick Phillips, Aracelis Girmay, Aaron Van Jordan, and Lamar Wilson. Both in the workshop and outside of it, I have experienced the most growth and gained the audacity to speak.

As Junot Díaz notes, *“The workshop is where the alchemy of voice and experience transforms into story, where we learn not just to write, but to see each other’s worlds.”* That alchemy—the transformation of voice and experience—has defined my journey, teaching me how to craft stories that answer, interrogate, and embrace the questions and silences of the world.

KIS: *For Boys Who Went*, published by Authorpedia Publishers, was pivotal in launching your career and became one of the most widely read Nigerian chapbooks in 2016/2017. Looking back, how did the success of this chapbook influence your path as a poet, and what impact did it have on your subsequent works?

AA: I think the success of *For Boys Who Went* was both affirming and transformative—especially since it was published at a time when young Nigerian writers were also experiencing attention that was timely and important. At the time of its publication, I was still grappling with the idea of myself as a poet, unsure of how my work might resonate beyond my immediate circle, so it was surprising how many people read the work—and how many people it inspired.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: ADEDAYO AGARAU

Its reception was an awakening—proof that the stories I carried, the themes I explored, and the language I laboured over could find a home in readers’ lives.

I was in Ijebu Igbo this weekend, and most of my uncles called me *For Boys Who Went*. Until the publication, my uncles had no interest in literature. The popularity gave me a sense of responsibility to my audience and the work itself. It encouraged me to think more deeply about the narratives I wanted to tell about fathers, absences, and loss and the voices of sons and boys I wanted to center. It also sharpened my sense of what it means to write from and for a place of cultural specificity. Because I was in Nigeria, I didn’t think of the universality of my work, and I wasn’t concerned with it. I just wanted to write a collection that mirrors us as children.

The poems in *For Boys Who Went* also dealt with grief, familial memory, and childhood—themes that have since become central to my practice, which I now explore in increasingly complex ways in my subsequent work, especially in my forthcoming debut collection, *“The Years of Blood.”* More practically, the success of the *For Boys Who Went* opened doors. It connected me to a network of other writers, publishers, and readers who have been integral to my growth. I am also sure it put my writing on the universal radar, although at that time, I didn’t know what that meant or looked like. It provided the visibility and confidence to pursue larger projects and take creative risks.

Each poem I write now is still in conversation with those early works, and they have evolved from the foundation they laid.



IN THE SPOTLIGHT: ADEDAYO AGARAU

KIS: *"The Years of Blood," your forthcoming book with Fordham University Press, explores deeply resonant themes. Could you tell us about the inspiration behind this work and what readers might expect?*

AA: In a recent NBS report, Nigerians paid over N2.23 trillion as ransom to kidnappers in 12 months. Every day, someone is missing on Twitter. Human trafficking in Africa is grossly underreported. I grew up in Ibadan, on Ogunleye Street, near Liberty Stadium, which is a hub for child kidnaps in Ibadan. Taofeek came to school on Thursday, and that was the last time we saw him. When they found what was left of his body, it was near a bush near his father's house on Joyce 'B' Road in Ibadan. I was kidnapped, too, as a child. The hysteria of loss moved through my childhood like a heavy hand touching every house. Our fathers took shifts protecting the street, burning tires. I document in *The Years of Blood* how all of these losses were happening in the backdrop of political restructuring, linking the desire for power and money to the need for body parts and

Each poem I write now is still in conversation with those early works...

ritualism. We have seen people get hacked in real life. We've heard news of women whose body parts were harvested and left on the street. I also grounded in the collection that what the West considers as speculative is everyday African life. I moved through collective grief, established that I am Yoruba and that my poetry thinks first in my mother tongue, the language in which I grieve and dream.

KIS: *What drives the themes in your poetry, and how do you choose the focus for each collection?*

AA: I may have mentioned this too many times, but my writing is heavily influenced by Carolyn Forché's country language and Richard Siken's iconographies, especially how his poems engage with his own painting and life. His obsession and depression, the plain of the field, the depth and the silence. Like Siken, I am interested in spaces and what comes and goes into and out—what goes through, what passage, what medium?



IN THE SPOTLIGHT: ADEDAYO AGARAU

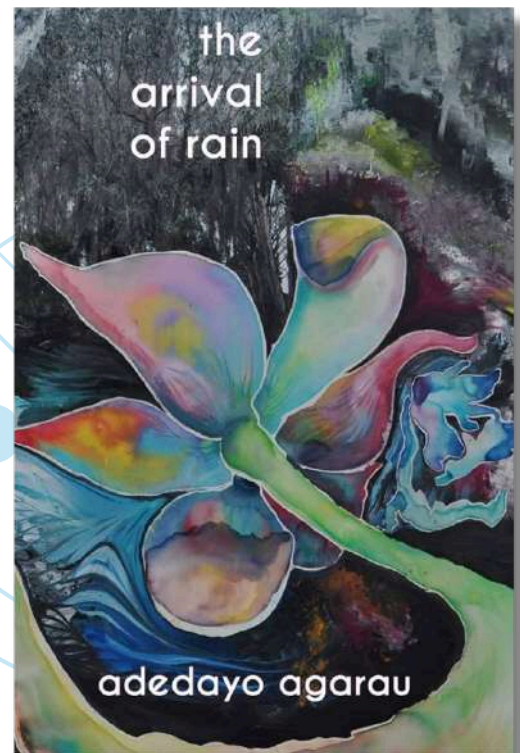
In *“For Boys Who Went,”* for instance, I am thinking through family and absent fathers. In *“The Year of Blood,”* dead friends. In my two-time Sillerman finalist manuscript, *“The Morning The Birds Died,”* I am considering the space my grandmother left and how it opened a portal of dreams through which we communicated after her passing. My work engages with the fearful, precise, and spiritual and considers land empires of the body and physical geographies. In a developing manuscript, *“The Book of Cain,”* I am questioning empire, the creation and the destruction, and the concept of predestination and purity, which seeks to address colonial ideologies empowered by religion. See how all of my manuscripts are in conversation with one another? Even the titles and themes, although some take more world view than others, I am writing the same poems over and over, hoping to arrive at what seems like the shadow of an answer. The shadow, like Elijah, is all I need.

KIS: *Many of your chapbooks, including “The Origin of Name” and “The Arrival of Rain,” have been widely recognized. How do your Nigerian roots influence the imagery, themes, or language in your poetry? Are there specific cultural elements that you feel compelled to explore?*

AA: Yoruba impresses itself on you. If you once lived the language, you live the language forever. I cannot think of myself without my mother tongue and it was only normal I centered the language in *‘The Years of Blood’* because my Nigerian root is my only root.

I cannot thrive without the language of the cities that brought me up. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o reflects in *‘Decolonising the Mind,’* language carries the weight of our culture, our memory, our entire way of being. The Yoruba language shapes how I speak, and how I see—each metaphor carries centuries of wisdom, each proverb a universe of meaning.

In my work, particularly in *‘The Years of Blood,’* I find myself echoing what Gloria Anzaldúa calls *‘linguistic terrorism’*—that profound act of reclaiming one’s mother tongue in a world that often demands its silence. The imagery in my poetry emerges from what Édouard Glissant would call the *‘poetics of relation’*—where the rhythms of Yoruba oral traditions meet contemporary forms, creating what Homi Bhabha describes as a *‘third space’* of cultural translation.



I cannot thrive without the language of the cities that brought me up.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: ADEDAYO AGARAU

When I write of rain (in all the forms that appear—physically or in the third space), it's not just precipitation—it carries the weight of what Wole Soyinka calls 'the fourth stage,' that liminal space where memory and myth converge. The cities that raised me—Lagos, Ibadan, Owo, Ede, Ijebu Igbo—speak through my lines as what Walter Benjamin would call 'constellations' of meaning, where each image is anchored in both personal memory and collective history. As Chinua Achebe once said, 'Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.' In my chapbooks, I strive to be both lion and historian, letting Yoruba take the grandness, letting the poet think first in the language of his father, and centering Yoruba's profound philosophical understanding of existence, its ways of naming and knowing the world.

KIS: *As Editor-in-Chief of Agbowo Magazine, you have a significant role in amplifying African literature. How has this editorial experience influenced your own writing journey?*

AA: Agbowo serves as a prism through which African literary consciousness refracts in countless directions. Reading submissions illuminates how language carries cultural memory, political resistance, and personal transformation. In several of our past issues, we have tilted towards considering how the ephemeral is also eternal, the doorway between now and beyond, and how things transcend. What emerges through this work transcends individual narratives—we witness the emergence of a collective literary cartography, mapping experiences across the continent and diaspora.



As Kwame Anthony Appiah theorizes in *'In My Father's House,'* African identities exist in constant dialogue with each other. Through editorial work, I've observed how writers from Nigeria to Kenya, South Africa and Botswana intersperse distinct local traditions into contemporary forms, whether prose or poetry.

Beyond my work, which I obviously care so much about, I think of the quality of works that move through the many portals of journals today. The drafts that cross my desk reveal both the vitality and the gaps in our literary ecosystem. While talent abounds, institutional support remains concentrated in particular regions and demographics. The profound work happening in places like Kampala or Dakar often struggles to find wider platforms. Writers in Zambia curate powerful narratives about urban transformation, while voices from Ouagadougou paint intricate portraits of social change. Yet, these stories frequently remain confined within national or linguistic boundaries. Africa is telling a single story and introducing the languages to tell it.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: ADEDAYO AGARAU

The question of access and visibility becomes particularly pressing when considering writers working in indigenous African languages. Our works offer unique perspectives on contemporary experience, filtered through linguistic frameworks that carry centuries of philosophical and cultural knowledge. The stories and poems we receive at Agbowo reveal how these linguistic traditions can enrich contemporary literary discourse that offers alternative ways of seeing and describing the world.

Digital platforms have begun to bridge some of these gaps, creating virtual spaces where writers from different regions can engage with each other's work. However, the digital divide across the continent means these opportunities remain unevenly distributed. Some of the most innovative writing emerges from areas with limited internet connectivity, reminding us that technological solutions alone cannot address the structural inequalities in our literary landscape.

The work ahead involves institutional building and imaginative leaps as we envision new ways of creating a literary community across expansive distances and diverse traditions.



We must create infrastructures that connect writers from different regions, languages, and traditions. This means establishing more pan-African literary initiatives, translation projects, and mentorship programs. Regional writing workshops could be linked through travelling fellowships, creating circuits of exchange between literary communities. Publishing cooperatives could pool resources to increase the visibility of work from underrepresented regions.

The future of African literature lurks in fostering these connections— between emerging and established voices across linguistic boundaries and beyond geographic borders. Through such collaborative frameworks, we can facilitate a more inclusive and dynamic literary landscape that reflects the continent's multiplicity of voices.

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



POETRY

Hillary Ofukocho Anfofun | Jakkv Bankong-Obi |
Marial Awendit | Amy Shimshon-Santo |
Oluwatobi Ezekiel Poroye | Abosede Ogundare |
Ismail Bala | Derek Ehiorobo | S. Su'eddie
Vershima Agema

Akpabana's Banquet

by Hillary Ofukocho Anfofun



'Akpabana's Banquet' is the winner of the Brigitte Poirson Literature Prize 2024 (Poetry).

Tonight, a minister makes merry,
lavishing numberless notes
on a bevy of stunning ladies
somewhere at a top Lagos lounge,
while little kids go to bed hungry;
their bellies knotted, their dreams of bread fragile,
dreading the ambush of the next day's hunger

In another corner of the night,
a senator snores in surfeit,
fatigued from the long day's toil
of diverting the path of public treasury.
A smile sprawls across his scheming face,
while a civil servant lies sleepless,
mourning the untimely demise of his paycheck

But far above, in the tower of Justice,
a cauldron simmers with a searing brew;
the scent of reckoning rises, thick and sure,
for every stolen coin and shattered promise.
Slowly, a masterful feast is prepared,
its aroma sharp with a truth that cuts,
and shadows gather, anticipating the taste

The host, Akpabana*, paces the sky,
stirring clouds with heavy hands,
as he issues invitations with each rolling peal;
Soon, beneath the heavens' trembling roof,
the potbellied profligates of public trust
will dine on the bitter fruits of their schemes
as lightning carves their names into the night sky.

* *Akpabana is the personification of thunder in Idoma mythology.*

Hillary is a Nigerian writer, social critic, and academic passionate about social justice advocacy and the rule of law. A graduate of English, he serves as a Teaching Fellow in the Department of English at Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo. Currently completing his MFA in English at the University of Ibadan, Hillary has written numerous short stories and poems highlighting pressing societal issues.

Slum & Transition

by S. Su'eddie Vershima Agema 

Slum

In my village, herdsman wield guns and erase lives
their cattle crush the fields
and the blood in their eyes force farmers into camps,
where they count grief on strands of prayer.

The camp becomes a slum
and we learn to beg under the sun
swapping tales of strength
for chants of survival

In my mother's village, it happens again—
herders invade, fields burn, and another slum rises.

Transition

(for Verun, Charles Ayede, the Ayede children, TV Agema, P. Aduro, Pius Adesanmi & too many others)

The earth's hunger is eternal
its stomach swells with our loved ones

in farewell, we make concrete beds
and mound pillows

scribbles show senseless summaries
of names and dates, while bodies rot within

these graves are an encyclopaedia
pages of a neatly forgotten past

S. Su'eddie Vershima Agema is an editor, cultural advocate and development practitioner. Among other works, he is the author of *Memory and the Call of Waters* [Winner, Association of Nigerian Authors' Poetry Prize 2022; Finalist, Nigeria Prize for Literature 2022]. Su'eddie convenes and directs the Benue Book and Arts Festival (<http://bbaaf.com>), an international arts festival domiciled in Nigeria and England. He blogs at <http://sueddie.wordpress.com>, is @sueddieagema and @sueddieofficial on Instagram.

God's Waiting Room

by Derek Ehiorobo



In God's waiting room, the receptionist hands you
a bowl of sweets, & the TV only plays reruns

of a show you forgot, from a time
you still laughed from your stomach.

In God's waiting room,
one magazine wears your mother's crying face,

another looks like a dead friend,
you look around & see you are surrounded

by grief. As they say, faith is not an absence
of suffering. A woman you recognise

walks in and sits across you.
There are blisters on her knees and her eyes

have sunken into their sockets,
taking the depth of questions left unanswered. ++

She croaks an hello & you nod.
The receptionist tells you God will be with you in 5.

Seconds? Hours? Months? Years? You ask
& she laughs but says nothing more.

The woman sitting across you
shares a tired smile.

She hands you a metaphor
of a seed buried & left to die,

tells you to hold it close to your chest & maybe
it will turn to a prayer.

You give her a chorus in return, wishing
you could do more.

In God's waiting room, the sweets yell prophecies
when you unwrap them. They burn your

God's Waiting Room / 2

tongue & refuse to break when you force
them between your teeth.

Someone joins you, & now you're three, waiting
for who knows how long.

This one sits beside you. A boy with tattoo sleeves
& piercings under his eyes.

He asks you how long this usually takes
& you shrug. He says he's here

because he has never slept.
He says his body has been chasing

relief since the second he was born.
You hand him the metaphor

& say nothing else. He stares at it &
presses it on his chest. The woman meets your

eyes with a smile. At God's waiting room,
it rains when you least expect,

& sometimes, that may be all you need.
The woman sitting across you bursts

into a song you recognise from
your favourite memory.

The boy sings along, & you nod your head,
flipping through magazine pages,

hoping neither of them can see you crumbling
into raindrops.
community of literary enthusiasts.

Ehiorobo Derek is a writer, poet, and spoken word artist. His work has been published in Praxis, Poetry column-UNJD, Liquid Imaginations, How to Fall in Love anthology, and How to Fall in Love Again, anthology published by INKspiredng. He is also the 2024, co-winner of the Evaristo prize for poetry. You can find him on Instagram @derekimagines, where he writes for a community of literary enthusiasts.

Sweetness & Ruin (Qummosis)



by *Jakky Bankong-Obi*

You can trace the swarm path
searching for a rationale all season long
if the longing persists —coquettes of ascension, juvenile
butterflies of the rolling years — always with the grand fluttering of flimsy
afternoons & you with a heart rapid of lofty daydreams, childhood. Millions
of light years & still they reach us as winged,ultraviolet, radiates of small
careening galaxies, infinite notions of whimsy. Wanton celestials of perpetual
ruse & lift. Then, the invisible drag of a dark patch of native roses. The lush
lure of a greenery enflamed. Some forests vine with nectaries of sap, wax,
ruin, flowering with a sweetness that snares, forestalling the impulse to flight.

Jakky Bankong-Obi is from Kakuwe-Beebo, a village on the corridors of the Cross River Rainforest in southeastern Nigeria. Her chapbook *What Still Yields* was chosen by Kwame Dawes and Chris Abani for publication in the *New-Generation African Poets* box sets, by Akashic Books and APBF (Spring/Summer 2022). Jakky is a Media Consultant and Co-Editor at Ice Floe Press, Poetry Editor at the Liberian magazine, *Pepper Coast Literary* and Co-curator at *Poetry Sango Ota*. Her work is forthcoming and in *London Grip*, *The Kalahari Review*, *Reliquiae Journal* (Corbel Stone Press), *Pipevrench Magazine*, *Hobart Pulp*, *Qutter Magazine*, *The Poetry Review*, *Pidgeonholes* and *Umento: An Anthology of Contemporary Nigerian Poetry* etc. Her work considers the intersection of nature, landscape, myth, and otherworldly geographies as prism for identity and being. Jakky is on twitter as @jakkybeefive.

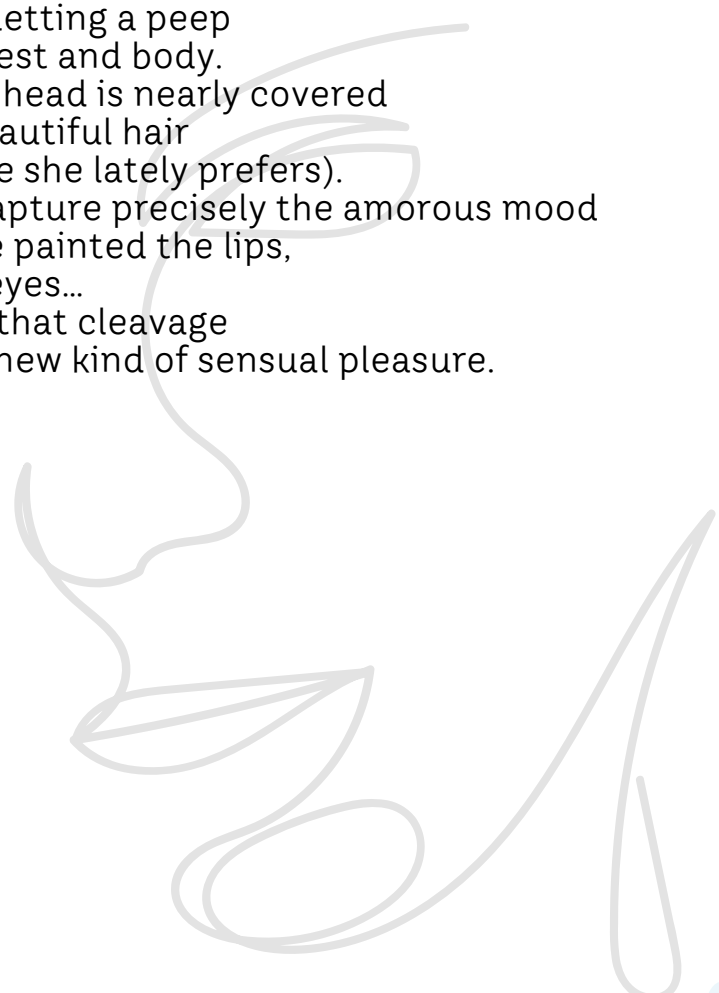
Blue Top

by Ismail Bala



(after CP Cavafy)

He completed the painting Wednesday at noon.
Now he admires it line by line. He's drawn her
wearing an unzipped blue top,
no bra, shoeless, with a camel-coloured
shirt, unbuttoned, letting a peep
into her bulging chest and body.
The left side of her head is nearly covered
by her curls, her beautiful hair
(weaved in the style she lately prefers).
He's managed to capture precisely the amorous mood
he fancied when he painted the lips,
when he drew the eyes...
That smile of hers, that cleavage
so prime to fulfil a new kind of sensual pleasure.



Ismail Bala is a poet and translator who writes in both English and Hausa. His work has been featured in renowned journals across the UK, USA, Canada, India, and South Africa, including Poetry Review, Ambit, New Coin, Ake Review, Lunaris, A Review of International English Literature, and Aura Literary Arts Review, among others. Born and raised in Kano, where he completed his university education, he pursued postgraduate studies at Oxford. Bala's poetry has been translated into Latvian, Belarusian, Nepalese, Slovenian, and Polish. A Fellow of the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa, he is the author of *Line of Sight* (Praxis, 2020) and *Ivory Night* (HSR, 2024).

A Passage Through Time

by *Abosede Ogundare*



There is a fleet of thought journeying through your mind,
a convoy of suppressed memories,
graves of dead words crack themselves up to give you a glimpse of heaven.
Heaven resides in dead things too.

There is a passing carriage,
strong things too wither.
Time is a seer; a prophecy
of ashes clogged in beauty.

This is a carriage of: a connoisseur, a psychic and a naïve nomad.
It is a convoy of the known and unknown,
wanderers seeking home
for messages etched on their soul.
You are also in this,
a fleet of thought passing through the path of time

Abosede Ogundare is a Nigerian writer and the author of poetry chapbook, *Enjambment* (Inkspired, 2023). Her works have appeared on *Word Rhymes & Rhythm*, Longlist Nigerian Student Poetry Prize 2017, Los Angeles Public Library Chapbook and elsewhere. She draws inspiration from books, history, music, paintings and nature. She is also a lover of country music.

A Table Where I Am The Breakfast

by Oluwatobi Ezekiel Poroye



my silence prays to god
of violence
& the sea sighs
beneath a ship.
the wreck that follows
is not a miracle;
the whale drowning in
its own home is.
home cannot save you
when an earthquake
finds you so attractive.
my heart longs for one
who wears my country
in its dark entirety.
every sunrise,
my country invites me
to a table where
I am the breakfast.
but I am gradually
becoming an uprising
in my lover's tea mug
& I do not care
how this sail ends.

Oluwatobi Ezekiel Poroye is a Nigerian poet and ghostwriter. His poetry explores themes of grief, migration, motherhood, social justice, and nature. Published in *Jalada Africa*, *Perhappened Mag*, *Agbowo* and elsewhere, his work has also earned him nominations for Best of the Net and a shortlist spot for the NigerianNewsDirect Poetry Prize 2020. Oluwatobi is a co-editor at InkspiredNQ. He tweets @yungprinzet.

Rwanda

by Marial Awendit



A flower sprouts
Out of red paint,
Rinses its petals in rain:
You cannot colour me forever.

Kagame atop the hills blows
His horn,
And the echoes melt the machetes
& the barricades men built with the blades
Of their hurts,
Then he bid national dreams
Green all in the belly of Kigali.

Marial Awendit a.k.a. James Marial Matueny Majak, is a South Sudanese poet. He is the author of several poetry collections, including "The Night Does Not Drown Us" (Babishai-Niive Poetry Foundation, 2022), "Keeping the Sun Secret" (2021), "Whispers over a Brewing Dawn" (2022), "The Nilotic Coddinwomple" (2024), and "Who Told You to Be God?" (2024). Marial won the South Sudan Youth Talent Award for Best Poet (2016), the Babishai-Niive Poetry Award for African Poets (2018), and the African Writers Award for Poetry (2023).

What is Being Born Inside You?

by Amy Shimshon-Santo

naked feet on wet porcelain
water pours onto my back

body bent, i am trying
to save two precious things

from slipping
down the drain

a sparrow, small as a wish
its saturated feathers floundering

& an egg the size of an olive
too small to sit on its own

awake all night
the dream marauder says:

never underestimate the power of the weak

(Excerpted from 'random experiments in bioluminescence', Flowersong Press 2024)

Dr. Amy Shimshon-Santo is a writer, educator, and culture maker who believes that creativity is a powerful tool for personal and social transformation. She cultivates inclusive cultural ecologies for planetary justice. Learn more about her work at www.amyshimshon.com.



ART & PHOTO

Caleb Ishaya Osesi | Adeniran Abdbasit
Adeyemi | Taiwo Bisola Owoeye



IN MOTION, IN TOUCH

FEATURING THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF CALEB ISHAYA OSESHI

In a world where everyone is on the move, humans have mastered the art of staying connected with the realities of the happenings around them through their mobile phones while on the move.

Caleb Ishaya Oseshi is a documentary photographer. He embarked on his photography journey during the pandemic and has since never relented. He aims to tell stories through photography, exploring nature's beauty and human diversity. He participated in the UNESCO World Heritage Volunteer Program (2024) in Nigeria and collaborated with the Kaduna Fashion and Art Exhibition (KAFART) as a Research Photographer (2023). His photographs are featured in Sunlight Press, Synchronized Chaos, Watershed Review, The Word's Faire and other publications. With exhibitions in Nigeria and The United States, he is a member of The African Photojournalism Database (APJD). Caleb is @caleb.ishaya on Instagram and @cishaya1 on X.



—IN MOTION, IN TOUCH—



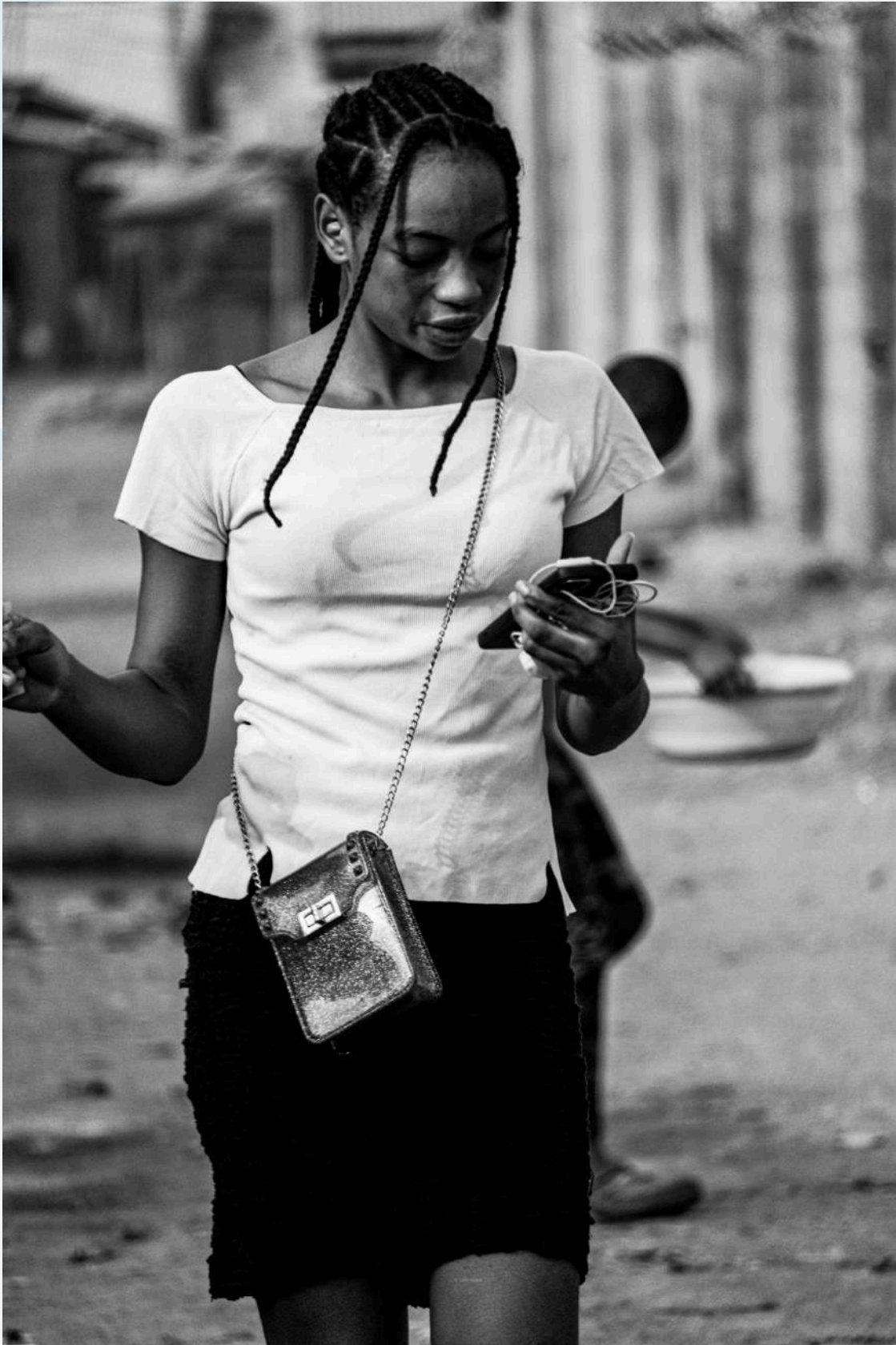
PHOTOGRAPH BY **CALEB ISHAYA OSESHI**

—IN MOTION, IN TOUCH—



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PHOTOGRAPH BY CALEB ISHAYA OSESHI

— IN MOTION, IN TOUCH —

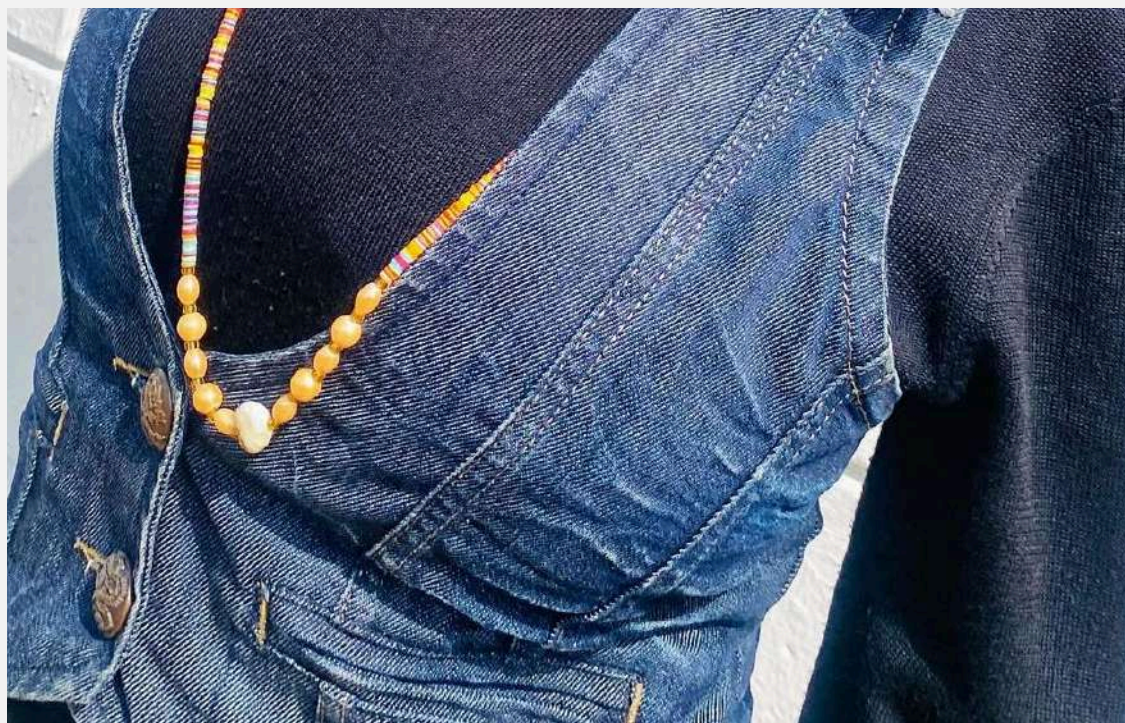


PHOTOGRAPH BY CALEB ISHAYA OSESHI



A young woman stands poised under the intensity of the sun, her eyes gently closed, absorbing its warmth. Without a shield above her, she wears layers of elegant beads, her rosy cheeks glowing against the sunlight. Her fingers splay gracefully across her face, as though channeling the energy around her. She radiates strength, freedom, and resilience—an embodiment of a spirit unyielding, like the glowing orb above her. Nothing holds her back now.

Taiwo Bisola Owwoeye, known as DECHOSENI, is a poet and mobile photographer with a keen interest in the arts. She enjoys storytelling through photography, capturing the essence of nature and human expressions with her phone lens. She also explores self-portraiture and indulges on YouTube videos. She is @DHECHOSENI on X and Instagram.



LIKE THE ORANQE ORB

FEATURING THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF TAIWO BISOLA OWWOEYE

LIKE THE ORANGE ORB



PHOTOGRAPH BY TAIWO BISOLA OWOEYE

DANFO: HEARTBEAT OF LAGOS

FEATURING THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF ADENIRAN ABBASIT ADEYEMI



Yellow buses, known locally as danfos, line the bustling streets under a radiant blue sky, capturing the vibrant pulse of Lagos. This chaotic harmony of movement and stillness reflects the city's unrelenting energy, where the ordinary transforms into art through the lens of daily life.

Adeniran Abbasit Adeyemi is a writer, Yorùbá bullroarer, teacher, transcriber, painter, and amateur photographer. His evocative poetry, marked by vivid imagery and lyricism, delves into themes of love, life, nature, and social issues. A 2024 Fellow of the Ebedi International Writers Residency, Adeyemi's works have appeared in Brittle Paper, CON-SCIO Magazine (Exsolvo Issue), and other publications. An advocate for literature and the arts, he actively supports emerging writers. He is @AbdbasitAdeyemi on X and Instagram.



DANFO: HEARTBEAT OF LAGOS



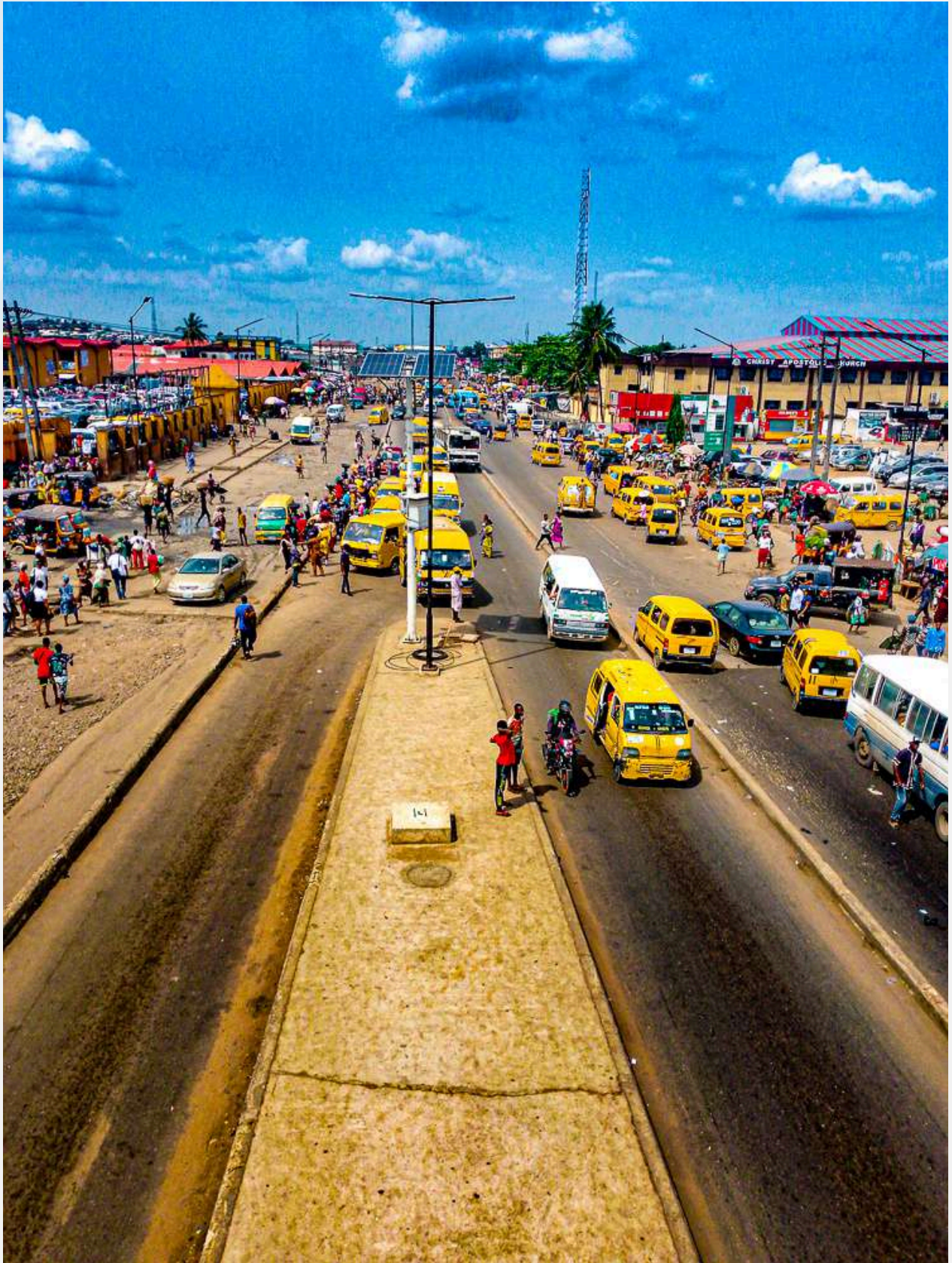
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DANFO: HEARTBEAT OF LAGOS



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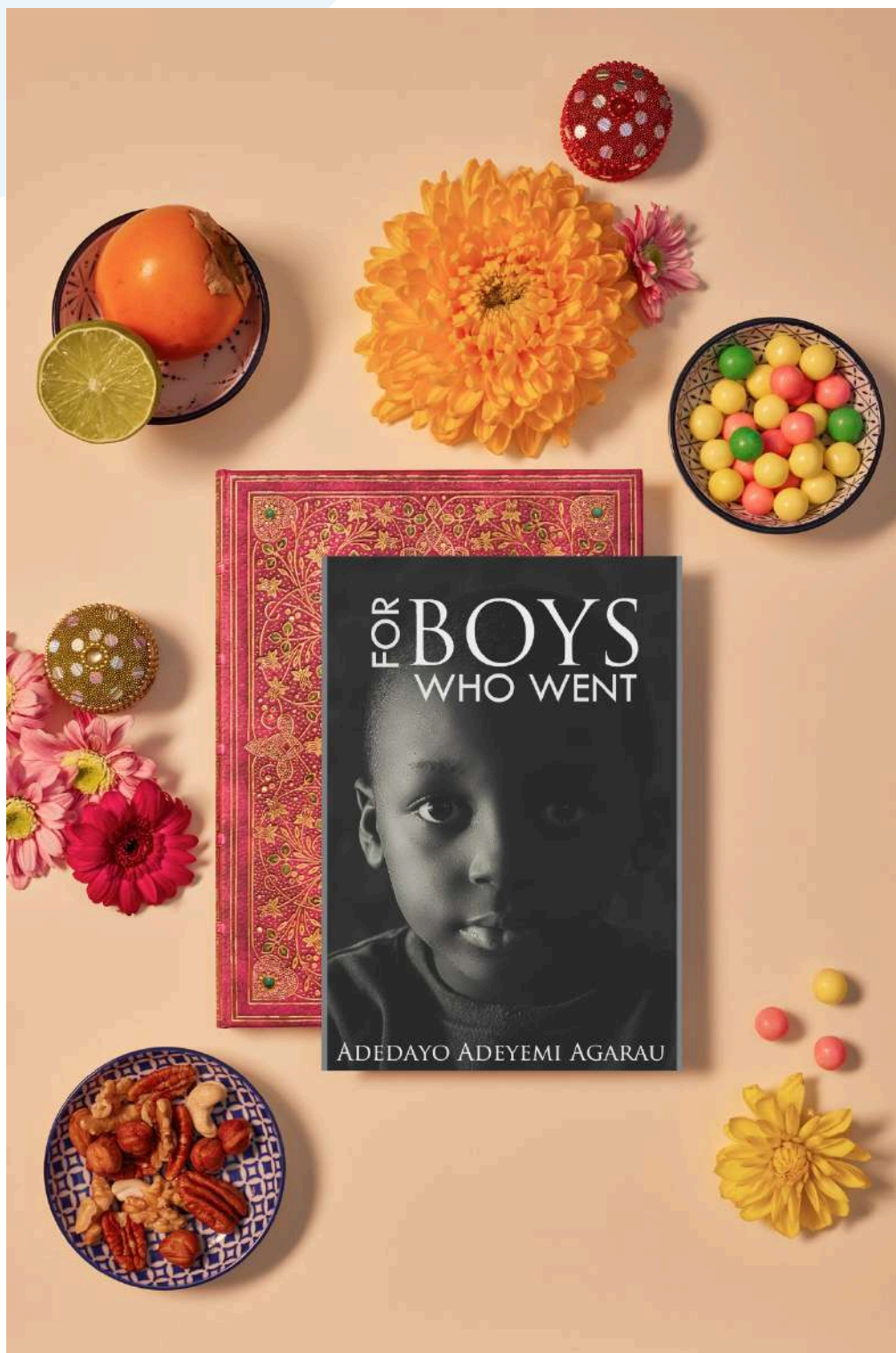


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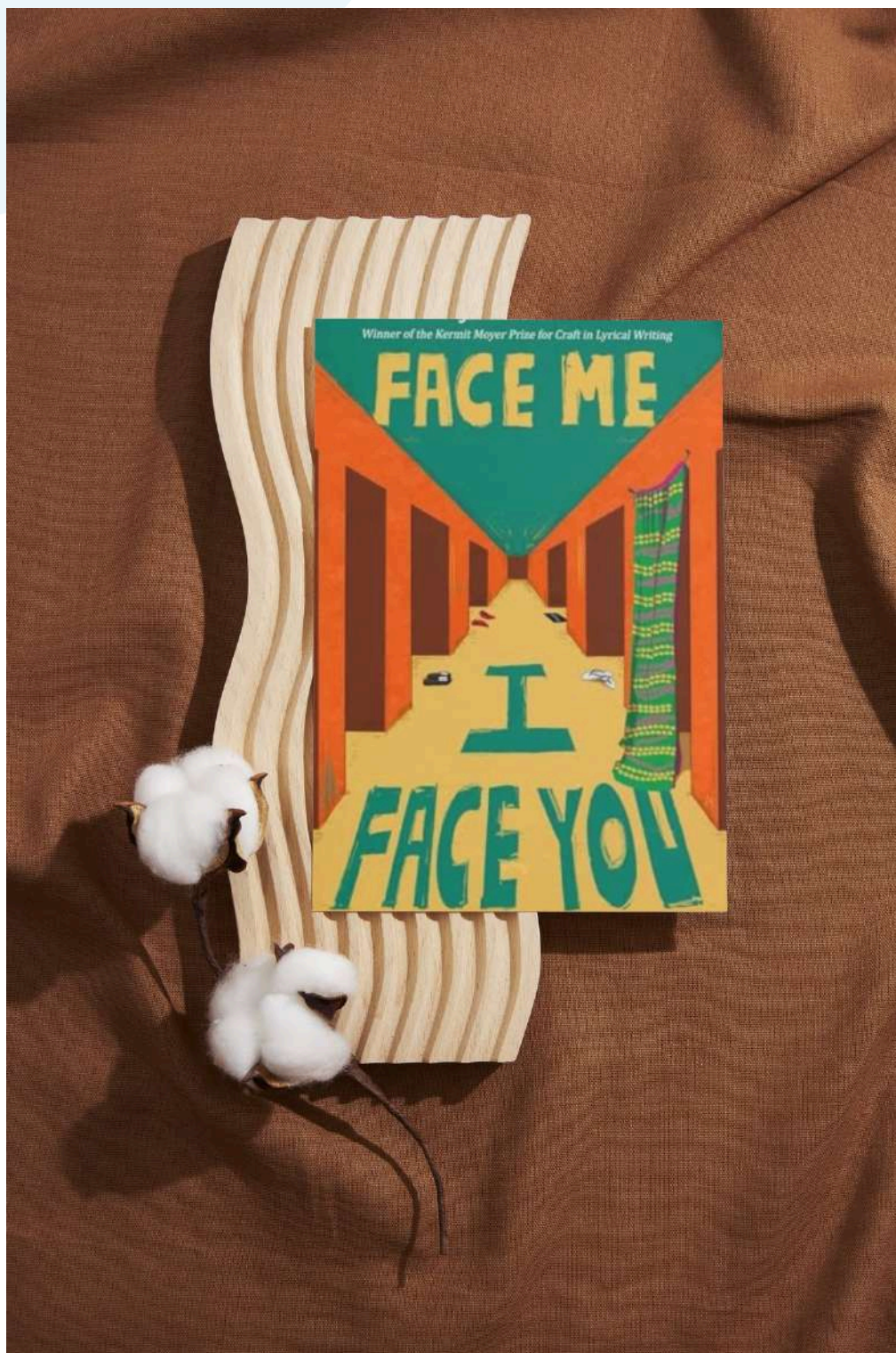
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SHORT FICTION

Ekweremadu Uchenna | MaryAnn Ifeanacho |
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Ogo | Amira Abdul-Azeez

Saving Adanna

by Amira Abdul-Azeez



1.

This chapter is called grief.

“Oyinbo pepper, see how she is yellow and fresh like tomato Jos,” a familiar voice coos from the living room.

You scrunch up your nose as you stare at the stranger in the mirror.

And she stares back at you.

Hooded eyes concealed by exaggerated, arch-shaped brows search for yourself in the reflection, as you slowly drown in a myriad of thoughts. You close your eyes and try to mumble the words of Psalm 31:31, but your tongue and brain have been in constant dissonance lately, so you just stick to the first verse of the Hail Mary. You weren't a prayer warrior like your mother, but desperate times would have you grasping at tufts of grass to stay afloat, wouldn't they?

The daunting realization that you couldn't hide in there forever dawns on you so you quickly rinse your hands and straighten the ostentatious gele sitting on the top of your head. You flash a placid smile at yourself, but it doesn't touch your eyes – the still blankness in them rush to betray you. The cakey makeup that your sister-in-law wrestled you into getting done was starting to smudge, but you still looked beautiful.

Beautiful Nelo.

That was what you were called growing up. The name had stuck like a moth to a flame. You no longer considered it a compliment but a mere statement. It was just as the sky was blue and the sand was brown – Chinelo was beautiful.

Adrenaline floods your system as anxiety sinks its talons into your sides and your eyes frantically search for your husband among the sea of well-wishers that have now filled every inch of your cramped living room. Your belly precedes you as you gracelessly trudge through the seething

crowd, stopping at intervals to respond to greetings from your unending guests. You say Amen to the prayers of healing, while you nod and smile at the Yoruba words you're unsure of. Chants of “iya ibeji” accompanied by loud cheering mark each of your wobbly steps.

They are here to celebrate you.

You silently repeat these words to yourself, willing them to be true. It was what Folarin had told you last night when you tearfully insisted on cancelling the ceremony.

You lock eyes with Folarin across the room and he gives a reassuring smile. He beckons you to come and sit beside him. He is dressed in the same blue kampala fabric as you, with a pink fila on his head. His presence is sweet; a summery comfort that soothed a small part of you and for a fleeting moment, you feel everything will be alright. You look down at his arms and realize he is holding it.

You freeze.



Saving Adanna / 2

Your legs become tree stumps and you become rooted in position, unwilling to move. The whole room starts to spin on its axis as a sudden lightheadedness wraps you in a tight embrace. You want to run, but where do you go?

2.

“Rachel”

“Naomi”

“Toluwanimi”

“Tifeoluwa”

“Ayomidun”

“Adedola”

“Adanna”

“Uzoamaka”

“Achalugo”

The *alaga* rattles out all nine names in one breath over the microphone in her hand, so that each one reverberates loudly in the room. Almost immediately, a clash of tongues bursts into joyful benedictions, highlighting the ethnic range of your families.

“*Ibu chim o, ibu chi anya nji ahu uzo*” your mother breaks into a loud worship song, her shrill choir voice serenading your guests. Your aunts chime in, lending a melodious soprano to the medley.

“Are you alright?” Folarin asks with furrowed brows.

“I’m fine, why?”

“You have been awfully quiet.”

“I’m fine.”

It is time for pictures. Your husband’s nephew, Bolu volunteered to be the designated photographer for the day. He was awaiting admission at the University of Lagos and had

taken up photography as a side hustle. He makes you all stand by the wall facing the television and begins to take pictures.

You look up at Folarin and he is all smiles, holding it up proudly like it was a victory trophy of some sort. His other arm is draped loosely around your shoulders, rubbing circles into your clavicles. You smile at the camera.

“Can we have one of just the mother and baby?” Bolu asks from behind the lens.

Suddenly, dread has your chest in a chokehold, quickly joined by its usual companion, fear. A huge lump forms in your throat and the pungent taste of bile fills your mouth. You feel flustered – all eyes are on you as you look up at Folarin who pushes it towards your outstretched, shaky hands.

It is calm today; no shrills, no crying. Maybe it is not so bad after all. It is dressed in pink-pink overalls, a pink tulle skirt, pink stockings and a pink bow over its pale head. Your mother-in-law was the one who picked out this outfit. She had asked if you liked it and you nodded absentmindedly from the corner of the room. It almost looked cute. It squirms in your arms and the uneasiness comes creeping back – the movement. You look up at the camera and smile. Bolu clicks away and you keep smiling. As that is what is expected of new mothers. Its little feet gently graze the sides of your belly and you lose it.

It all comes trickling back in slides. All you see is red – there is blood everywhere, lots of blood. Your blood. There is pain. Obliterating pain that rips your insides open. The type of torment that leaves you writhing and begging to die because the agony of death is far more honourable than this torture. You feel it, down there. Your palms become sweaty as a sudden uneasiness envelopes you.

Your heart starts to race and you feel your knees begin to buckle under the sudden downward pressure from the weight of it. You try to balance it on your shoulder but you immediately feel it slipping from your hands. Everything happens too quickly.

Saving Adanna / 3

It lets out a loud shriek as it slides down from your grip. You try to save it, but you're not quick enough.

Swift hands belonging to your husband stop it from landing on the tiled floor.

The whole room goes silent, save for the shoulder-curling wail of it. You had startled it, but at least it was alive. All eyes are on you. Judging you. Everything becomes a blur. You want to bury your head in shame. You see your mother's face in the crowd. She murmurs something in Igbo. The grimace on her face tells you that she is not happy. It is the face she had when the doctors told her that your father wasn't getting better and funeral arrangements should commence. You turn and run back into the room but Folarin doesn't run after you.

3.

Crying awakes you from disjointed sleep, and the jarring realization that everything that happened wasn't a dream sends you back into a desolate state. Sleep is no longer an escape from this nightmare.

Fresh tears of guilt well up in your eyes as you find Folarin holding it and trying to lull it back to sleep. His back is facing you. You hear him quietly hum a hymn, as he holds it in the crook of his neck, patting its little back as the screams start to descend into hiccups.

"Maybe she is hungry," you say, startling Folarin who looks back as you shuffle to unbutton the first few buttons of your nightwear.

"Don't bother Nelo, there's an extra bottle in the fridge from what you pumped yesterday," he mutters, his back facing you again.

"But I can just—"

"Go back to bed, Mama and I can handle Adanna," Folarin orders, his voice growing louder, making you jump.

Your mother-in-law immediately rushes in from the living room, where a couch has been set up as a makeshift bed. There is a spare bedroom but she says she prefers the living room so she can easily monitor it. She stares at you and Folarin for a moment before she collects it from him and tactfully retreats to the living room.

You stare at each other in unsettling silence for a moment until he walks out of the room, the icy coolness in his gaze hitting you by surprise. You hear the front door shut. He must be sitting by the balcony enjoying a smoke, you think to yourself.

You are pushing him back to his vices.

The thought sits heavily on your mind as you perch on the edge of your bed. Folarin had always wanted a girl. That was why you had handpicked the name Adanna after getting a scan. It meant a father's daughter. He had busted into tears of relief as newborn cries filled the room on that cool December morning. He had turned his glossy eyes to you and whispered in a broken voice that she was here and she was perfect. Your families had camped outside the delivery ward overnight in joyous anticipation – the first grandchild. Everything looked promising.

The first time it was placed on your chest...

[CLICK HERE TO READ THE REST OF THE STORY](#)

Amira Abdul-Azeez is a Nigerian writer, essayist and lover of art in all forms. She was recently shortlisted for the K & L Prize 2024, the fiction component of the SEVHAQE Literary Prizes.

The In-Between

by Gloria Ogo



'The In-Between' is the winner of the Brigitte Poirson Literature Prize 2024 (Short Story).

I awakened from the void with snatches of the previous lifetime, carrying the weight of a gruesome death, brimming with memories of a great wrong, unrequited love, an unavenged injury. An unfinished life.

I remember everything.

I remember how I died.

Hands tied behind my back, feet bound tight with ropes, writhing in agony beside the odikro's corpse in the uncovered grave.

I remember fire ants scurrying across my face. They burrowed into my nostrils and crawled out of my mouth, their stings worse than any torment I ever felt. Each twist and turn to break free of my bounds triggered more bites, forcing me to scream the incantation to end my existence and transition to the abode of souls: into the shadows vanish, unknown and unseen.

It took me three days to die.

I am not supposed to remember any of this.

The instant I exited my bite-ridden body, leaving behind an empty husk in the shallow grave, my memory of this lifetime should have ceased. I shouldn't remember the obaa panyin saying I was lucky to accompany her husband on his journey beyond. Any other time, her voice, which often frightened me, would have lashed out in rebuke. But instead, it dripped grief.

Her words buzzed around me like annoying flies: "Serve him well," as if this were some great honor. What did that even mean? How could I serve one who no longer breathed? That she deemed me a better companion for her husband than herself nearly drew a bitter, sharp laugh from my throat.

I remember the questions I did not ask her. *Is it really luck to follow the odikro into the afterlife*



like some wretched, loyal dog? Why isn't your precious son Darko the 'lucky' one? Darko, with his easy smile. Darko, who'd seen the same thirteen seasons as me. The answer was simple. I didn't matter. My kind was inconsequential. Any slave could have lain next to the elder's lifeless body in the dugout earth and it wouldn't have mattered.

I remember the morning of the first day after I was stolen from my people. Back then, the odikro's skin was a deep rich brown and his eyes the color of cocoa, and I was a child who had only seen eight seasons. I remember the weight of the odikro's hand on my shoulder, how I flinched when he squeezed and said, 'Your life is ours.' I thought he meant, 'You're a part of us.' I felt I belonged. But five seasons later, I understood the true meaning of his words.

I remember that final glance at the most wicked of worlds—a sky that was the brightest of blues yet devoid of warmth, and the vibrant green of trees that felt lifeless. I remember the faces in the crowd peering down at me. Some of them I'd met at the stream or greeted on the way to the farm. I don't remember crying, just the wetness on my

The In-Between / 2

cheeks as they stared right through me like I wasn't there; lying in a grave that wasn't mine.

I remember the face I didn't see in the crowd. My young master Darko. He swore an oath of protection after I risked my life to save him from bandits, taking a dagger meant for him to my chest. His oath was a lifeline in a world where assurances were rare. I remember the searing hate that coursed through my body. I cursed him until my voice went hoarse.

Death freed me on the third day.

But before that, it was three days of life slowly draining from my body.

I remember the howling wind that tore through the village on that third day. It ripped roofs from houses and smashed into trees, which, unable to withstand the assault, snapped like twigs, their branches flung violently through the air. The sky tore open, and the rain, relentless and brutal, dislodged clumps of sand from the heap on the surface that crashed onto my chest with a suffocating thud. Mourners fled in terror amidst shrieks, stumbling over each other as they tried to escape lightning.

No one heard the obaa panyin's half-formed scream as her fate was sealed beneath the crushing weight of a falling palm tree.

Abandoned in a hole with a lifeless companion, I do not remember fear—only the cold and the gnawing certainty that something precious was slipping away. Like the sunlight that flickers through the leaves of the old guava tree in my grandnana's backyard, casting fleeting patterns on the red sand. The wind that rushes past my face as I chase my screaming cousins around the chicken coop on moonlight nights. My baba's deep, resonant voice responding to the greetings of passersby, as he sits in front of his hut soaking up the sun.

Remembering is my pilgrimage.

It is trying to make sense of the things I already know, yet not knowing exactly what I am looking for.

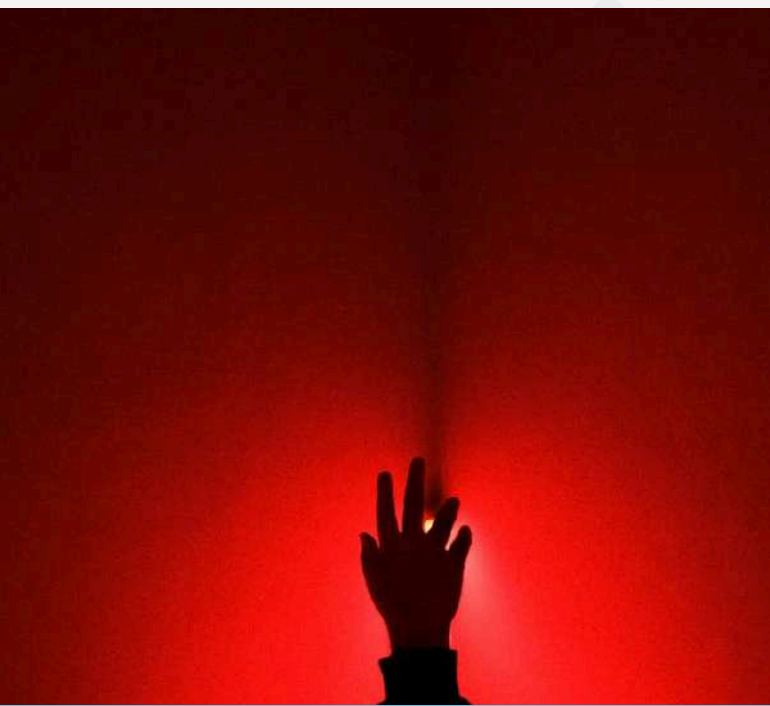
Remembering is the present backwards.

It is the branches tearing through the air, reattaching themselves to trees that stood upright once more. It is the fallen palm tree lifting itself off the obaa panyin and righting into place, her dress no longer sodden. It is the sand floating away from me to the diggers' shovels, ants running backwards to a reformed mound, and roofs settling back onto houses.

Remembering is the village intact once more, whole, untouched.

A clear sky with the midday sun shining brightly.

And me standing beside obaa panyin, her hands poised to shove me into the hole. But instead of her husband's grave, I was staring at the flickering flames of the hearth in my childhood home, once again a baby cradled in my mother's arm, whose soft voice sang lullabies that lulled me to sleep. At night she had those horrible dreams. The one where masked men came to steal her child from her. She cried out and reached for me, but instead of my mother's hands, I found myself clutching Kwame's hand beneath blooming cherry blossoms at the riverbank, both of us listening to the running water in the fading daylight.



The In-Between / 3

His body bore marks of long exposure to harsh elements that left his skin dry and rough with a permanently sun-beaten, leathery texture, but it was his face, creased with a slightly cracked appearance around the lips and eyes that held my attention. Away from prying eyes, our fingers laced together, we pondered the possibilities beyond our shores, imagining how different our lives could be. I yearned to tell him that there was no hope for us slaves. I wanted to tell him a lot of things.

Kwame often said we would be together someday, but he was promising a loyalty he was incapable of giving. I remember him sneaking up to the window of the room where the odikro's first son kept me imprisoned, and how his accusation, "You brought war to us," opened a chasm between us that kept widening as he added, "That is what everyone is saying." Repeating rumors was one thing, but hiding behind them was another. "What do you think, Kwame? Do you believe I would ever bring war to you?" I remember how his eyes met mine, a flicker of something that might have been pity or guilt crossing his face. It was fleeting, quickly disappearing before I could identify it. But told me everything I needed to know. "I think . . . we should be prepared for anything," he said, and then was gone.

I remember envisioning walking out of that room unbroken. But when the door finally opened and obaa panyin entered to say, "It is time," I felt small and fragile, like a wet leaf about to be crushed underfoot. Each step into the blinding sun felt like the weight of the entire world was bearing down on me. I remember forcing my legs to move, one in front of the other. Forward was the only direction left.

"You must break away from these memories." The child's lips are eternally slanted in a grin that gives her the appearance of finding existence funny. She is tethered to this place by memories

too. Doomed to wander these desolate lands for eternity. I wonder how many planting seasons have turned since she first arrived in this barren wasteland of the lost and hurting.

"What does it feel like not to remember?"

The child lets my question linger, head tilted to the side as if considering her response. I am almost giving up on getting an answer when she speaks, her voice cool and detached, yet wise.

"When it comes upon you, you will know." Her words hang in the air like mist. "But isn't the more important question why you are here?"

Around us, lost children gaze at me with pity, their eyes full of sadness beyond their age from having seen children like me unable to return home to the abode of souls for a rebirth. Each child bearing a story etched in the lines of their spectral faces, their thoughts echoing soft whispers in the wind that speak of forgotten dreams and unanswered prayers, of the fragility of existence, missed chances, and hopes dashed against the jagged edges of despair. Instead of childlike innocence, their faces are smeared with lingering grudges and insatiable thirst for vengeance—children who met brutal ends.

The child's grin remains. "To break free, you must return to the surface and complete the unfinished business."

A group of minstrels begins to play a mournful dirge, a haunting tune weaving through the air but the children show no inclination to troop out and perform. They remain in the same spot, gazes fixed on horizons that only they can see.

Not remembering is the blankness. It is the forgetting.

THE END

Gloria Ogo is a Nigerian author celebrated for her impactful poetry and prose, with over eight published works, including her acclaimed novel *While Men Slept*. Known as a "writer of conscience," Gloria's work often tackles social and political themes, earning her recognition in platforms such as *Opinion Nigeria* and *Daily Trust*. She is pursuing her MFA in Creative Writing at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, USA, while also serving as a tutor.

Bestie, Bestie

by Ehigocho Ruth James



Pretty, pleaseeee.”

“See, this is the last time I’ll help you do this thing.”

“Thank you. You are the best. Muah!”

Shola is the shyest guy I’ve ever met. So shy that he can’t even ask a girl out. But he’s my best friend. We’ve been best friends since 100 level.

Part of my best friend duties is to help him talk to girls. A few other times, I pose as him and chat with them on WhatsApp. Because of Shola, some people now view me as a lesbian because I’m always *chyking* babes.

One time, we went out to a restaurant and this fine babe walked in. Light-skinned, tall and beautiful. He liked her from the minute he saw her. He begged me to help him, as always.

My reward usually ranged from three packs of Bounty chocolate and a big bowl of ice cream to outings in exotic restaurants. This time, he promised to give me cash. I moved on to her. She introduced herself as Anita and said she had come to give herself a treat.

She had initially thought we were a couple. I told her we weren’t and after using my sweet charming words, she agreed to join our table.

I had to lie that I needed to run some errands for my mom, so they could have some privacy. One thing led to another and they dated for three months. Shola cried. They broke up because... well, let’s discuss that later.

Another time, I walked up to a girl at the park to ask her to come sit with Shola as he needed to talk to her.

“Why can’t he come by himself?” She asked.

I replied with the dumbest thing I could think of. “Your beauty is just too much for him to handle. He is still trying to process it.”



She laughed out loud. When she picked up the bottle of coke she had been drinking, I thought she wanted to follow me. Instead, she opened it and emptied it on my head.

On my bone straight!! Of course, I made sure Shola bought another one as his apology gift. I told him that I was done. He had to man up. The worst a girl could say is NO. It was getting really annoying.

I guess it is more annoying because I’ve always been in love with Shola. But he has barely noticed me in that light. He buys gifts for me because he needs me to do his dirty work. He takes me out to exotic restaurants because he needs to hunt for girls. But, he gives me random forehead kisses and bear hugs.

We talk everyday about everything and anything. He is my confidant and I am his. I’ve watched him cry and laugh. I’m always his go-to person. But, I’m still not good enough for him to date.

Bestie, Bestie / 2

He is so free with me. Sometimes, I wonder why he can't just ask me to be his girlfriend. Maybe he is too shy and would need another person to come help him ask me out, same way I do it for him.

"Why are you not moving? The girl is actually leaving. Please nau" Shola had been begging for the past ten minutes.

For some reason, I couldn't move. I just kept staring at him.

"Shola, I am in love with you."

He opened his mouth and closed it.

"I've always been in love with you. I have had failed relationships because of you. It's just sad that you never want to be with me."

He opened his mouth again and closed it.

"Remember Anita? She came into your life and you totally abandoned me. For three whole months!! I had to do something so I sent pictures of you sleeping on my thighs to her.

"I sent cosy pictures and all of that to convince her that we had more going on than the bestie thing. She believed me.

"I was happy she broke up with you. You came back to me and I thought the sadness would at least make you notice me. But you still didn't.

"I'm tired of dying in silence. I am tired of doing your dirty work. Will you just notice that I love you so much? I need you in my life. Shola, be my boyfriend."

When he opened his mouth this time, I wished he had closed it back. He laughed so hard and said, "Is this playing? Somebody hearing this now will think you are a serious person. Please stop joking and help me talk to this girl. Why are you doing me like this?"

I wished I hadn't said anything. I wished the ground would open and swallow me and the embarrassment I had caused myself. 😊

"Oya, how much do you want this time? Any amount," he added.

I looked at him, smiled and walked away.

THE END

Ehighocho Ruth James is a medical doctor and creative writer who writes from Port Harcourt, Nigeria. You can read more of her on Medium at www.medium.com/@ehighocho.

I Do

by Sesugh Iorliam



I rehearsed the words over and over in my spare time at night. I rehearsed really hard so that when the time came, I would say them out like a proud lady getting married to a man of her dreams. Now, staring into Marvin's eyes made me realize I would be getting married but with a dark secret. I panicked. Marrying Marvin meant too many things. It meant; marrying his bad breath in the morning, marrying his bushy armpits, marrying his stinking shoes, marrying his snoring! My head felt woozy and I almost ran out of the church but I willed myself to be strong. I knew I could live with all these.

When it got to the point I had to say my vows, the words came out like a mewling sound. My heart froze, that couldn't have been me! I looked at Marvin. He was smiling so sweetly at me that I cursed myself silently for trying to ruin our day. With a firm voice this time I said 'I do' with more emotion and with a deeper sense of commitment.

I enjoyed my day like every woman should and I knew that Marvin would love me till the end of time. It was easy to love him, but for a long time, I held onto the walls I built around myself. Gradually, like a demolisher he brought them down with much affection, care and shoulders I have refused to cry on, not because they didn't look capable. I was afraid for myself and afraid I might drown his shoulders with my unending tears.

I chided myself for trying to reminisce at the wrong moment and as a way of trying to reassure myself that all would be right, I rushed forward and gave my man a fierce hug that I knew would convey my unspoken feelings. He understood and held me tightly the way I liked to be held.

"I love you Marvin, now and forever," I whispered into his ears. I felt him hold me a bit tighter but I loved it.

I wore the thickest of the new nightgowns Marvin and I picked up at the shopping mall a fortnight ago. He wasn't satisfied with my choice for the night:

"Honey, pink favours you most. Why not try that?"

"Really? You've never told me. Love, do we really have to do anything this night?" I sweetly asked, stalling even as the end was inevitable.

"Of course, dear. Wedding nights are magical."

I felt my heart beat faster and it felt like Marvin could hear the drums from where he lay on the bed waiting impatiently for me to join him.

"Let me put off the light dear," I said walking towards the switch on the wall. I never made it there because halfway through Marvin sprang out of the bed and made a grab for my buttocks. He got a handful. He snaked his hands up to my waist and then to my chest to help himself to my melons. But halfway through, his hands froze. He searched further to be certain his hands weren't playing tricks on him. Though I was backing him, I could describe the look on his face and the whirling emotions in his heart. It was the height of betrayal and selfishness. But I felt total relief wash over me and for the first time since we started dating, I felt calm.



I Do / 2

“How could you? How could you do this to me?” he asked, turning me around with a manly force. I lacked the courage to look into his eyes and I couldn’t bear to see the hurt in them. I merely cried as the tears came down from the well of my soul.

Marvin screamed like a wounded warrior. He turned and grabbed the flower vase sitting next to the television and smashed it on the wall. His light skin looked red from hurt. He began to sob uncontrollably. Something I had never seen him do. He sat on the floor and I moved to where he was, on my knees.

“I can’t take this, Boma. I have loved you like no other woman and this is what I get in return? Half... half...” He trailed off there. ‘It’s too early to get divorce papers! The next time you see me, it would be about time.’

BANG!

I have been married for thirteen hours and separated. How worse can life be? I wasn’t meant to fall in love. I wasn’t meant to feel. For a long time, I told myself I wasn’t destined to love and be loved. I was just meant to love so my heart would be smashed into smithereens. I have had my heart broken fifteen times and by different men whom I felt could love me if they knew everything about me, but I was wrong.

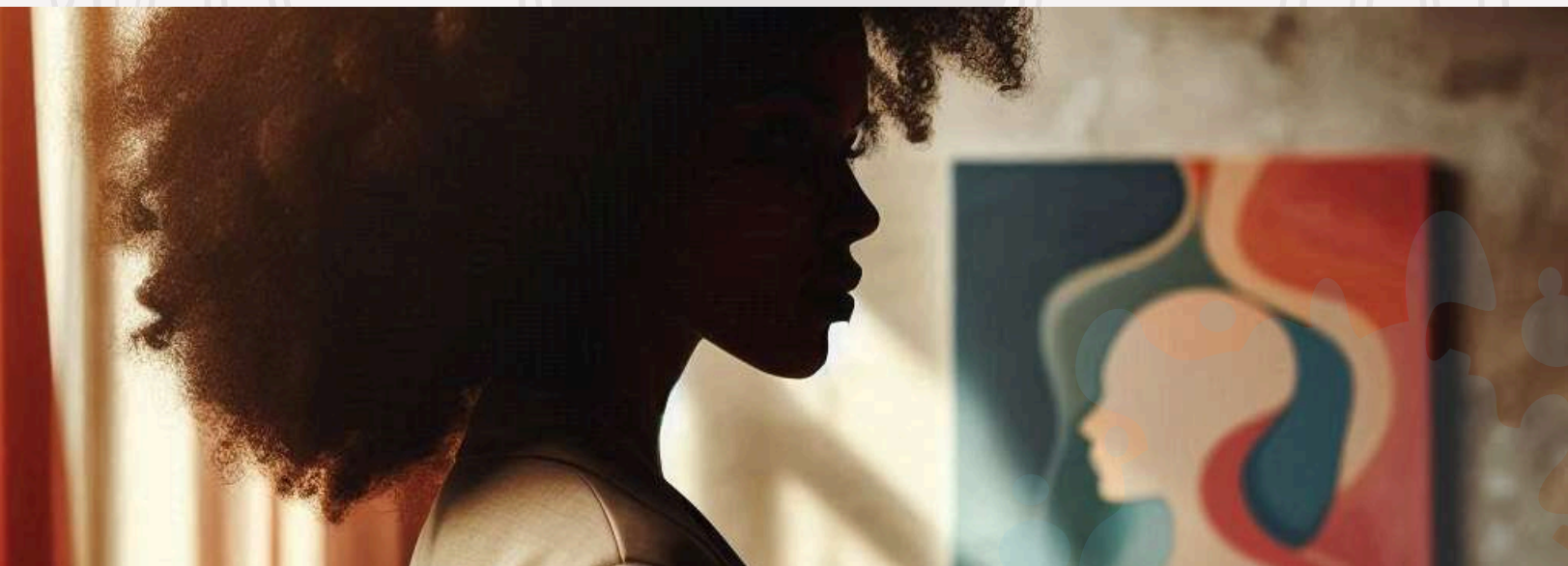
I have gone through a lot but I have come out stronger. Not confiding in Marvin was a desperate attempt to salvage my bitter life. I don’t regret my actions, not now or ever.

I have been a cancer victim since I was twenty-three years. I was told it was hereditary. The lump had grown large and spread to delicate areas. The only option was to do away with the bad breast – the left one – to save my life.

The journey from cancer was a long and trying one and the idea of ending it seemed very appealing. All the men in my life had rejected me. For a long time I felt rejected and vowed I would never let any man come close until Marvin came and something in me changed. And I made up my mind to keep him, no matter what.

On my wedding night, Marvin embraced the ugly imperfection that would stare him in the face forever... That day he not only married me; he married my single breast; he married the ugly scar on the left side of my chest, where a breast once rested. He married my deceit; he married my nightmares.

Two weeks later, here I am still. In my wedding dress, perhaps waiting for my wedding again. But how far do wishes go? I know that when next there is a bang on my door and Marvin’s baritone soars in, they wouldn’t be bringing glad tidings.



I Do / 3

It would be to have our divorce papers signed. Still, my nights are colder than what they used to be and the nightmares have found their way back...

Knock! Knock!

Finally, the dreaded knock. I knew who it was before his voice called out: 'Boma!'

For the first time in forever, I rushed to the mirror and looked at who I had become: a scarecrow. I had emaciated, had my hair haggard; and stringy like dreads. Marvin couldn't see me like this! Instinctively, I moved towards the bathroom then mid-step thought to myself: What was the need? Who did I need to be clean for?

"Boma! Boma!"

Was that anxiety in his voice? No. Probably the residue of what he had taken with him. I walked to the door calmly and opened it. Marvin stood there, a near-direct male reflection of what I had seen in the mirror a little earlier. He was in his suit still. His eyes were to the ground, his voice really low now...

"Boma, do you think we can continue from that night once more...?"

I wondered what to say. It was our wedding all over again. I wasn't sure I would go on this second time. What if he did the same thing again...? I closed my mind and allowed my heart talk:

"I do..."

The next moment, I felt myself lifted... and I was in that lovely grasp that had formed my dreams once upon a time... I hugged him back hard as if my life depended on it. It did.

THE END

Sesugh Iorliam is a creative writer, editor, screenwriter and filmmaker who has worked extensively as an editor with one of Nigeria's most profitable publishing houses. She continues to enjoy weaving magical tales for herself and others.

Through Thick And Thin

by MaryAnn Ifeanacho



Kamsi

A woman's body, they say, is a temple, housing secrets of old in its curves, dips, and valleys. This is not my body.

A woman's body, they say, should be supple but firm. A beautiful paradox of textures. Succulent mountains suspended on a firm plateau tapering down to a shadowed valley. Sloping shoulders that fall to a beautiful spine and finally rise as two soft, rounded boulders.

This is not my body.

A woman's body is custom-made for comfort.

For cuddles.

To be had and to be held. To dissolve serious thoughts in its supple comfort, with outcroppings you can clutch on to as you fall off the ledge of pleasure.

This is definitely not my body.

My body is a temple without doors or windows, all harsh lines and angles. A temple that holds no secrets. And why would it? Any secret hidden here would be out in the open. With nothing to hide behind, it floats away back into the world. My body is a conglomeration of plateaus and planes, devoid of swells and dips. My body is longing, with holes that never fill despite my best efforts. My body is a fighter, challenging chairs, and hard surfaces to battles that leave me feeling sore. I am not a beautiful paradox of the supple and firm. I am a consistent collection of planar surfaces.

I come from a part of the world that likes its women having an appreciable density, a tantalizing suppleness to their bodies.

You're so skinny, they say, circling my wrist with two fingers. Eat something before you disappear. You are starting to look like a boy.



Some believe I have it easy, that I can eat all I want without adding a single ounce. What they do not understand is that sometimes, emptiness longs to be filled. That sometimes I look in the mirror and believe I failed the first test of womanhood.

Ujunwa

Do they not know how hard life is when you have a body filled with mouths? Each demanding to be fed at obscenely short intervals.

Do they not know how hard it is to engage in physical activity when all these mouths protest at the slightest exertion? Do they not know how you cannot be taken seriously because your cheeks wobble when you try to make a point? How many times does your body get cast in a motherly role when all you want to be is the love interest?

Through Thick And Thin / 2



They do not know how it feels when your body is a bad joke that falls apart in grotesque jiggles and ripples of cellulite.

Kamsi gets it, but then she says I have it better. At least, she says, you have curves, gentle bends that scream your womanhood to the world. But she does not understand that in this world of perfection and moderation, I was too woman, with a body that screamed an octave too loudly. My name even tells a story of fullness.

Ujunwa.

The child of plenty

A self-fulfilling prophecy of the woman I now am. Kamsi doesn't understand that just as mountains are no good when they lack valleys, curves are no good when they grow in the wrong places. Although every girl wants curves, no one wants to have rolling hills where they should have plateaus.

I do not want a body custom-made for comfort because such bodies wear custom-made clothes. I, too, want to be pretty. To wear clothes and underwear that do not come in bland styles and colours. I want to see my feet in the bathroom, to run and jump without hearing my body applaud.

Yesterday, my father caught me passed out in the bathroom. It has been seventy-eight hours since I last ate. I heard his heart break before he even spoke. He says it's all baby fat, and it'll be gone before I turn 17. And even if it doesn't, I will always be perfect in his eyes. Diets, he says, are cures to diseases that don't exist.

But that is his job as a father, isn't it? To see me as perfect despite the apparent alarm in his eyes when the car genuflects as I climb in.

THE END

MaryAnn Ifeancha is a Nigerian writer with a deep love for psychology, languages, film, and literature. She is a mom to the two most adorable cats in the world and a firm believer that bread is ambrosia. As she loves to tease apart the ordinary to find the extra within, her works are mostly magical realism. In her free time, she loves binge-watching oldies, working out, writing on her blog <http://textamentswithanne.com> and sharing high-octane memes.

Neneh

by Ekweremadu Uchenna



Even though the first instruction I received on my first day of work in this house was that anytime Neneh started to whimper and ask to be taken to see her children, I should help the octogenarian out of the bed and lead to the garden backyard, where shards of sunlight rain down through the thick canopy of seven udara trees, it still took some time before I got used to seeing the old woman call each of the seven trees by name and stroke their barks and whisper to them and chuckle. Since last week I have not brought Neneh out to the garden because of the rains which has left the garden floor almost swampy and the air heavily humid and thick with the smell of decaying leaves. She sobbed much of yesterday because I told her it was drizzling and she would have to be indoors throughout. You see, the wheel of Neneh's mind is broken, making her jump from one period of her life to another several times in a day. In a minute, she can be in that rainy night of 1973 when she had her sixth child, and by the next minute, she will have travelled to that Sunday afternoon of 2008 when the priest came to declare open the bungalow her children built for her.

Neneh's husband had died shortly after he got into a dispute with one of his kinsmen over a certain piece of land along the path that leads to the communal stream; after the latter attempt to cultivate the land without first seeking the former's consent. Some two years into Neneh's widowhood, her eldest daughter who was considered the best swimmer in all the five clans, almost drowned in a barely knee-deep pool. Some months later, Neneh's eldest son's left leg swelled to the size of an elephant's just a day after he dreamt that one of his uncles hit him with a rod. The fear of losing any of her children eventually forced Neneh to shed her religious apathy and join a certain church which combined Christianity with traditional spiritualism.

Neneh and her husband had buried the stumps of their children's umbilical cords together with fruit seeds. Rather than use a different type of seed for each child as other parents would do, Neneh managed to convince her husband to use the

seeds she had saved from the sweetest udara fruit she had had. In fact, she had preserved eleven seeds with the hope that she would have that same number of children, all of which should grow into sweet men and women. And to ensure that the children had a good foundation in life, she had chosen the dark and fertile piece of land behind the house as the best place to plant them. Once the children were old enough, they were shown their respective trees. And even as adults, whenever they visited home from whichever city they had moved to, they took time to refresh the engravings that spelt out their names on the tree barks and water the trees sufficiently.

The tree at the outermost part of the garden and closest to the house is Ezinne. Although the last of the seven, she towers above the others and spreads out her branches even beyond the fence such that outsiders also enjoy her fruits. She seems to be the favourite for the birds, which have built more nests on her than on the other six trees put together.



Neneh / 3

An international businesswoman, Ezinne never discriminated between family and outsiders. She had given more scholarships to less privileged children than she could keep count. She used to visit home every Christmas to distribute gifts of clothes, cash and foodstuffs to the needy.

Chinasa tree only bore fruit once since it was planted, even though it looks as healthy as its siblings. Although it is the second oldest tree, it is the smallest of them all. While some attribute it to the fact that she had been sickly in her childhood, others blame her dryness on what they call her “bad blood”. They say her smiling face was a mask behind which she hid her stony heart which could hold a grudge for ten years. They say she was a rat, which ate a sleeping man’s heel and fanned it with its mouth so that the sleeper wouldn’t feel the pain and wake up. Chinasa was able to give birth to just one child, after which it was discovered that there was something mysteriously wrong with her womb. All her efforts of returning home bi-quarterly to prune her tree and dig a trench around it and flood it with manure and water, didn’t make her more fertile.

In the middle of the garden stands Chidera, whose fruit is adjudged the sweetest. Chidera was Neneh’s first son and favourite child, who had left home for the city at the age of twenty-four, and had returned barely six years later a successful building contractor. Back then, Neneh preferred to sit under Chidera to read her bible at the heat of the day, rather than remain indoors inside the air-conditioned rooms. The easiest way to incur Neneh’s displeasure was for anyone to climb this particular tree or pluck its fruits.

The dwarf tree at the right end of the garden, whose boughs are droopy with the weight of abundant fruits is Sopuruchi, the lastborn, who gave up on education barely a term away from sitting for his Senior Secondary Certificate Examination and travelled to Zaria to join the Army, fathering a child or two in every corner of the world he passed by.

The last time I brought Neneh out to the garden, she couldn’t see Ugorji and Ogbonna and Okezie because it started to drizzle and I had to carry her back into the house.

Once indoors, we stop by the large family photo hanging on the left wall of the sitting room. This is always the last part of the tour before fatigue forces the old woman back to bed.

“Look!” I say to her, pointing to the lady in the photo gorgeously dressed and surrounded by five smiling men and two women, “Look, Neneh. That is you.”

“Is that me?” the old woman will coo.

“Yes. And surrounded by nice people (bless their souls!)”

“Nice people,” Neneh will mumble. “But who are they?”

“Your children.”

“My children!” She will chuckle, casting a long gaze at one of them, who has his right hand on the gorgeously dressed lady’s shoulder. “Who is that?”

“That’s Chidera, your favourite.”

Chidera was the first to die in that fatal auto crash. They were all coming back from his traditional marriage when the bus lost control and plunged into the ditch.

When Neneh has gazed at the photo for up to two or three minutes, her left hand will rise to caress the long scar that stretches from her hairline to her left cheekbone. And then, the events of that fateful day will start coming back to her in hazy flashes.

THE END

Ekweremadu Uchenna writes from Kaduna, Nigeria. His work has appeared in Transition Magazine, Jalada, Parousia, Qrub Street Journal, Coe Review, The Write Mag, Afreada, Saraba Magazine, Arts Lounge, Isele Magazine, and elsewhere. He was shortlisted for the R & L Prize 2024, the fiction component of the SEVHAQE Literary Prizes.



ESSAYS & NON-FICTION

Taofeek Ayeemi "Aswagaawu" | Edwin
Mamman | Tola Ijalusi

ORÍ: Exploring Yoruba Destiny and Culture Through Spoken Word Poetry

A Review of Aremo Yusuf Balógun's "ORÍ" Spoken Word

SPOKEN WORD POETRY | 2024

by Tola Ijalusi



When I first listened to "ORÍ by Aremo Yusuf Balógun 'Gemini', I was reminded of the 2004 movie "Orí by the acclaimed Nollywood actor and producer Muyiwa Ademola (Authentic). It was a refreshing listen because I have long awaited a fresh exploration of culturally themed spoken word poetry, where African myths, legends, and histories are consistently represented alongside the prevailing influences of contemporary structures.

Orí in Yoruba is not just the "head"; it holds a profound meaning that extends beyond metaphysical interpretations of a person's destiny, determinism, or fatalism. Yoruba philosophy embraces different strata of human existence, including beliefs in Orí (Human Destiny), Emi (Life-Giving Element), Ara (Body), and Ese (Leg). These beliefs are deeply rooted in tradition and history.

Orí is the element responsible for a person's personality and represents human destiny. Also referring to that which is chosen—the individual destiny or portion, Orí is the personal spirit or guardian ancestor of an individual.

It is said that Ajala, a skilled potter but also a drunkard, debtor, and irresponsible being, is responsible for the creation of Orí. He moulds heads of varying shapes and qualities. Some are excellent, but many are flawed through his sheer negligence, every individual is required to select their own Orí (destiny) from the multitude stored in Ajala's warehouse before entering the world. This myth is common and well-appreciated among the Yoruba people in Southwestern, Nigeria.

Gemini's, ORÍ is unarguably rich and intense with culture. In this four hundred and twenty-two-word Spoken Word poem eulogizing the spirituality of human destiny, Gemini delved deep into the Ajala myth and surfaced it in the plainness of artistry.

It began with an acknowledgement of the spirituals:

*There are gods
There are goddesses
There are genies
There are spirits*

ORÍ / 2



There's Olodu to mare and there's the super mystical.

It continued questioning the definition of Orí to the fatalist saying of “what will be will be” followed by the expression in Yoruba “*Ise ti Kehinde ba se ni ile aye ti Taye ba danwon a ru igi oyin*” meaning “*what Kehinde will do on Earth if Taye attempts it, he will regret.*”

Orí vocals the sacredness of Obatala, Ajala (the Potter), Witches, Iroko, Sango, Moremi, Esu and Olodumare, about the traditional philosophical and religious concept of reincarnation.

“Do not chase kosoko again instead pray that in her next life she pick an Orí that last for eternity; Abiku is not a curse oun gbogbo l’wo Orí. The Ipin of some humans outlive them but Orí refuse to be outlived and then comes Akudaya.”

Tola Ijalusi, Founder of Parousia Magazine, is a writer, poet, and reviewer. His work appears in Spring, Africa in Dialogue, and other publications. He's been featured in anthologies like Wreaths for a Wayfarer and Best New African Poets. He mentors writers in the Spring Writing Fellowship and is a recipient of the Poet in Nigeria (PIN) Excellence Award.

Words like “*Tibi tire la d’aye, the earth is a pendulum of life and death*” turned my attention to the objectivist paradigm of the world. Orí is an apprehension to the response compels tied to human lives, their soft and hard determinism, success, achievement, poverty, struggle and a lot more.

ORÍ is a success, bringing attention to a long-present but less-celebrated genre of spoken word poetry in Nigeria. Although the audio and vocal quality could be better, the slow instrumental accompaniment adds a unique layer of enjoyment to the piece.

ORÍ is a success, bringing attention to a long-present but less-celebrated genre of spoken word poetry in Nigeria.

The poem could have been more distinct had it been entirely rendered in Yoruba, positioning it as a modern piece of Yoruba oral poetry. The code-switching between English and Yoruba created a somewhat jarring experience, affecting the seamless enjoyment of this unique art piece. Overall, Yusuf Àlàbí Balógun has solidified his place as a commendable custodian of Yoruba oratory and culture through his compelling delivery of ORÍ spoken word poetry.

Medicine: Journaling as Therapy and a Journey to Well-being



by Edwin Mamman

Medicine (noun) – something that affects well-being.

Well-being (noun) – The state of being happy, healthy, or prosperous.

The first instinct that prompted me to begin journal writing was the preservation of my sanity.

Once, we lived on a closed street named Sergeant Close in Kaduna state. The cul-de-sac nested a school, two shops and rows of compounds. Ours was the last compound on the left side of the street, just after my uncle's compound.

My uncle taught English, and Literature in the school I went to. At home, his bedroom was my library and wonderland. Often, I would climb the wall separating our compounds, crawl down into his and walk into his bedroom. I would get lost in his colossal dossier of CDs, inexhaustible issues of Watchtower and Awake magazines, and chunky volumes of McGraw Hill books. I learned the names of Greek and Roman gods in his bedroom, memorized big words in the dictionary to impress my friends in school, and played song after song from CD collections I couldn't possibly exhaust in that lifetime.

One day, after over three years of such incredible adventures in my uncle's bedroom, I woke up to a cacophony of screeching furniture, shuffling feet, and loud and indistinct chattering. I peeked over the wall and saw furniture, kitchen wares, boxes, and personal articles being carted away into a Moving Van.

My uncle was moving out of Sergeant Close.



I had been aware of his plans to move out many months prior, still, it felt sudden when the day finally arrived. I felt my whole world collapse around me. I was losing my favourite space. Dragging the overbearing weight of my thoughts and emotions, I headed back to my room, slammed the door, and flipped to the very end of one of my school exercise books.

Channelling all my teenage rage, anxiety and confusion, I wrote. Lines after lines I scrawled until I had pages of raw, unabridged monologues of all the things I felt. That was the beginning of my long years of journal writing.

Medicine / 2

Between 2014 and 2024, I've kept ten fully documented personal journals, excluding the ones lost in the process of moving, and the ones burned to expunge the weight of their secrets. Holding up the pile of journals in front of my bedroom mirror, I thought, 'This is insanity'. But in truth and practice, writing those journals is what has preserved my sanity over the years.

Mark Salzman in his book, *True Notebooks: A Writers' Year at Juvenile Hall*, wrote:

"When I can't make up my mind about something, I start a notebook. I use it to think aloud, I fill it with questions, arguments, and reassuring clichés".

When I started my first journal in 2009, I was an angsty teenager trying to make sense of why my uncle would want to move out of our beautiful neighbourhood, taking with him something I held so dear. Since then, my journals have become my therapist, daily companion, planner, and so much more.

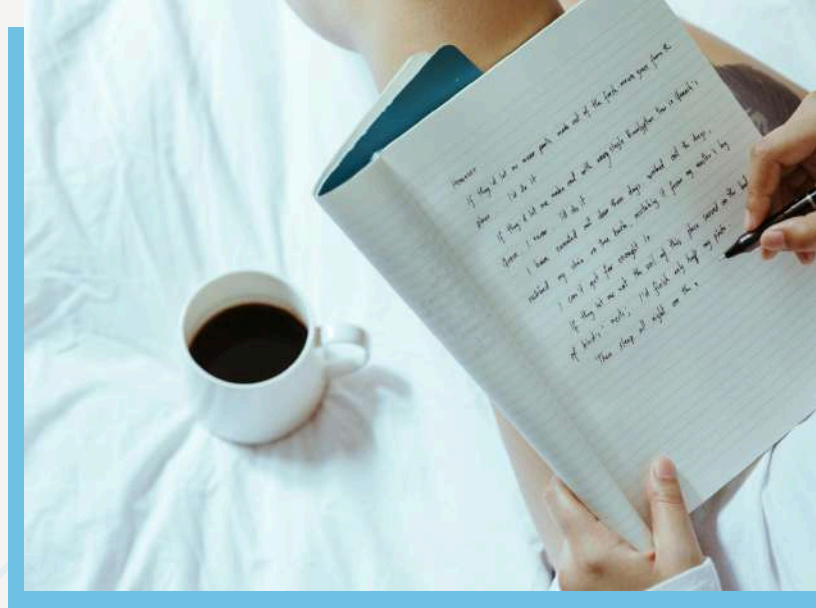
To help understand what a journal is, I'll quote Randon Billings Noble, from her essay, *On Keeping a (Writing) Notebook (or Three)*. She wrote:

"... There's a difference between a diary and a journal... It's like the difference between an autobiography and a memoir. In a diary, you record each day's events and in a journal you write whatever you want about your day whenever you want to write about it".

Journal writing then is simply the act of writing inside a journal.

Although Billings offers a basic explanation of what a journal is, a casual reader or a beginner wishing to get into the practice of journal writing may still be at a loss. Many a time, people wonder; what (to write about), how (often to write), and when (to write).

Again Billings offers some insight from her essay:



"...in my journal, I write down what happens to me, what I'm thinking about, occasional random observations, lists – the usual stuff you'd write in a journal... I often look back on journals to remember a certain time or place or person or line of thought – although I never write in my journal with this in mind".

There's never a strict rule of what you can or cannot write in your journal. You make the rules. For example, on February 17, 2024, I wrote: **I saw Breath of Life this morning. I cried. Many times.** And that was my only journal entry for the day.

Thinking about how frequently one should write in a journal, I find that when I'm documenting a specific progress or project I'm working on, I journal every day. At other times, I may journal as sparingly as 12 times a month (that's how many times I've journaled in June 2024).

Furthermore, as to when one should write, I find myself writing whenever I feel the urge to. 02:14AM, 06:29PM, 03:36AM. Whenever I find myself awake and the thoughts are strong enough to propel me, I journal. However, Julia Cameron, the author of *The Artist's Way*, suggests something called 'the morning pages'. This practice involves 3 pages of free writing every morning where you unburden your mind of everything.

"There's never a strict rule of what you can or cannot write in your journal. You make the rules."

Medicine / 3

Reflecting on my journal writing practices, I've realized one of the beauties of preserving well-documented journals is looking back and seeing your evolution. How you use your journal, and the things you put down in it, are all forms of self-history and a means to self-discovery.

Around 2022 I began a month-end reflection. On the last day of every month, I'd answer questions like:

- what lessons did I learn this month?
- what were my wins this month?
- what challenges did I overcome this month?
- what will I do differently next month?
- what was I grateful for this month?
- what were the highlights of this month?

Further, adopting an idea from a Twitter post in 2023, I began writing letters to myself. November 3rd this year, marked exactly one year since I started those letters.

Also this year, I began a weekly reflection where on the Sunday of every week I'd answer questions like:

- do I like my life so far?
- am I enjoying any of these
- what gave me the most satisfaction this week?
- what gave me the least satisfaction this week?

One of the gems I discovered fortuitously late last year was a book titled *Creative Guide to Journal Writing: How to Enrich Your Life with a Written Journal*, by Dan Johnson. The author wrote about different journal writing exercises like free writing, free association, visualization, list making, unsent letters, etc.

Through the book, I learned the names of some of the journal practices I had adopted over the years. For instance, the letters I've written to myself since 2023 are unsent. All the mindless scribbles in my journal are free writings. Names of books and movies I write down to see later, are lists. And my weekly and monthly guided reflections could be loosely described as free associations.

Journal writing has profound benefits. For some it boosts confidence, for others it provides relief for the loneliness epidemic plaguing society today. One of the things that give me the most satisfaction is sitting in solitude with my journal and writing. Ernest Hemingway once said:

"... When I don't write I feel like shit".

Like Mark Salzman, journal writing helps me organize my thoughts. It also helps me close thought loops. By writing down recurrent and pressing thoughts I'm able to stop ruminating over them compulsively, and by extension, I sleep better. When I don't write in my journal, I become scatterbrained and incapable of making decisions and plans. In essence, I feel like shit.

In its unique way, journal writing when properly utilized, is a potent medicine for self-preservation.

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Edwin Mamman is a sonographer and writer from Kaduna, Nigeria. His work has been published on RAFART's The Revue, African Writers Space, and is forthcoming elsewhere. He blogs under the pseudonym LareWrites on WordPress and contributes to Life's Essentials blog. When he's not working, reading, or writing, Edwin enjoys movies, music, and walks in nature. You can find him on Twitter at @edwinmamman and reach him via email at edwinmamman@gmail.com.

My Progenitor's Tongue As a Fireplace Where Hyperbole Singes the Feathers of Euphemism



by Taofeek Ayeyemi "Aswagaawu"

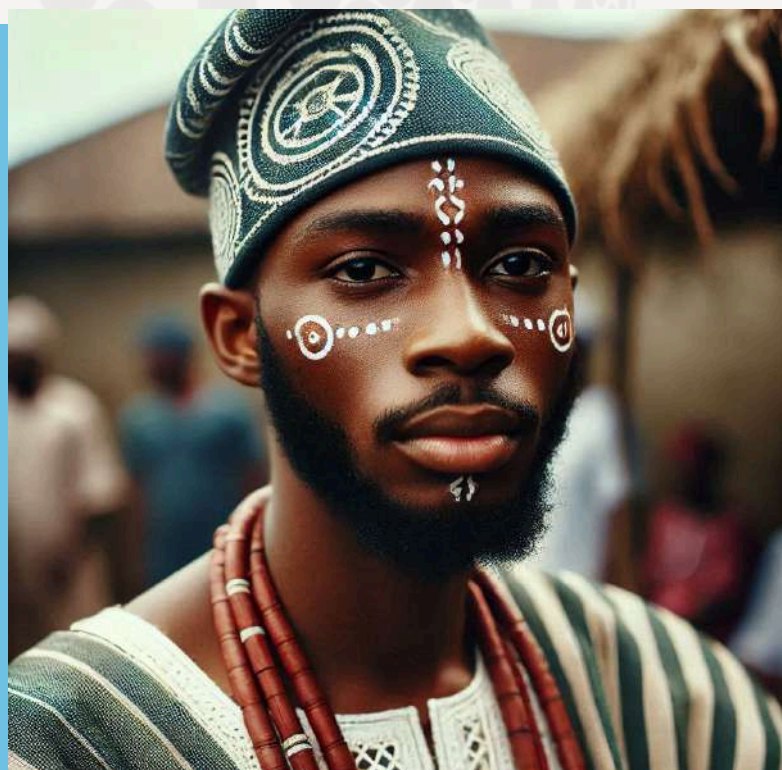
Proverb rides on the back of word's stallion, and vice versa. But here, these words run faster than my expression. A hundred steps at a time. A book of seventy thousand words harvested from the twenty-six alphabets. When the universe would form, it sprouted after the utterance of a word: "Be," and it became. God said, "Verily Our words to a thing when We desire it is to say to it: be, and it becomes." I imagine God speaking in hyperbole, that is, exaggerating events into existence. Don't you think they would over-happen? Did the universe over-happen?

In Yoruba, language lifts rocks and holds down birds; offers shelter to feelings, so wide that it becomes scary to stay in. To describe a headache, we say, *orí ñ fọ mi*; which means, *my head is breaking me*, which is to say I am not safe from my head. This means my head is capable of destruction. Which means I hold a delicate substance on my neck, say a dynamite, a time bomb—ticking towards explosion. Once, Father administered a medication to me. To use above the prescribed dosage is abuse, an overdose. In my progenitors' language, there is an overdose of language that's not an abuse. We widen boundaries and shift roadblocks with words, describe addresses with the fold of our lips, jutted out towards the destination.

When we are hungry, we say, *ebi ñ pamí*, that is, *hunger is killing me*. An emergency alert, a declaration of death. I wonder how Mother asked me to wait a little more after I told her *ebi ñ pamí*. A mother won't hear her child's cry and not

leap into flight, how much more when the child is dying. Is this what the Yoruba mean when they say "the pathway to the throat is the road to heaven?" The English version is "the way to a man's heart is his stomach." You may want to juxtapose the duo, it's beyond the difference of tinctures.

To say "I have a stomach ache" is *inú ñ run mí*. With this, you just declared a state of emergency on your body. You just said 'my stomach is ruining me.'



My Progenitor's Tongue / 2

In Yoruba, language lifts rocks and holds down birds; offers shelter to feelings, so wide that it becomes scary to stay in.

That is, a tumult is happening in my stomach, a hurricane is an understatement. If *inú rírun* kills, then I should have died before the end of my teen ages. But I'm a miracle, a leaf of *bryophylum*, sprouting like fresh plants from total decay, from complete annihilation. A *jẹbò* tree, whose bark grows back a few minutes after it's been sliced off.

To say I am sick or I'm not feeling well, we say *ara-à mi ò yá*. That is, *my body is not fast*. That is, my body takes the shape of a snail. A tortoise is tweaking inside my bone. A wise man once said the slow movement of a leopard is not cowardice but a calculated hunting strategy. But to say *ara-à mi ò yá* feels like saying I am slowing down into death, withering, dissolving. Dying begins with dizziness. To say I'm feeling dizzy is *òyì ñ kò mi*, meaning, dizziness is hanging me, which is to say I am experiencing the aftermath of a neck constricted by a noose. My eyes, the redness of a gallow, painting the night into surrender.

My progenitors are innate poets. Their tongues are sharpened at all edges. Their words split rocks and grind them to powder. To euphemise here is to distract countrymen from you.

They say a man bitten by a snake would neither euphemize nor simplify. He would not say I've been bitten by a snake. He would summon his ancestors instead, would say *Ejò tí sán mi*. That is to say, a snake has munched me; as in, I am dissolving away in its venom; see my life being blown away from my palm, dust by dust.

Yorùbá, pronounced *re do mi*, a tongue soaked in poesy.

Taofeek Ayeḡemi "Asiwagaawu" is a Nigerian lawyer, writer and author of *Aubade at Night or Serenade in the Morning* (FlowerSong Press, 2021), *Tongueless Secrets* (Ethel Press, 2021), *Dust & Rust* (Buttonhook Press, 2022) and *Some Stars Do Not Fall* (Nimble House, 2024). A *BotU* and *Pushcart Prize* Nominee, his works have appeared in *CV 2*, *Lucent Dreaming*, *Up-the-Staircase Quarterly*, *FERAL*, *ARTmosterrific*, *Banyan Review*, *Conscio*, *Porter House Review*, the *QuillS* and elsewhere. He won the 2021 *Loft Books Flash Fiction Competition*, and 2nd Place in 2021 *Porter House Review Poetry Contest*, among others. He is @Asiwagaawu on X and IG.

For Fathers Who Went Like This: A Poetic Journey Through Pain, History, and Hope

A Review of 'For Boys Who Went' by Adedayo Agarau

POETRY | WRR-AUTHORPEDIA | 2016 | 42 PAGES

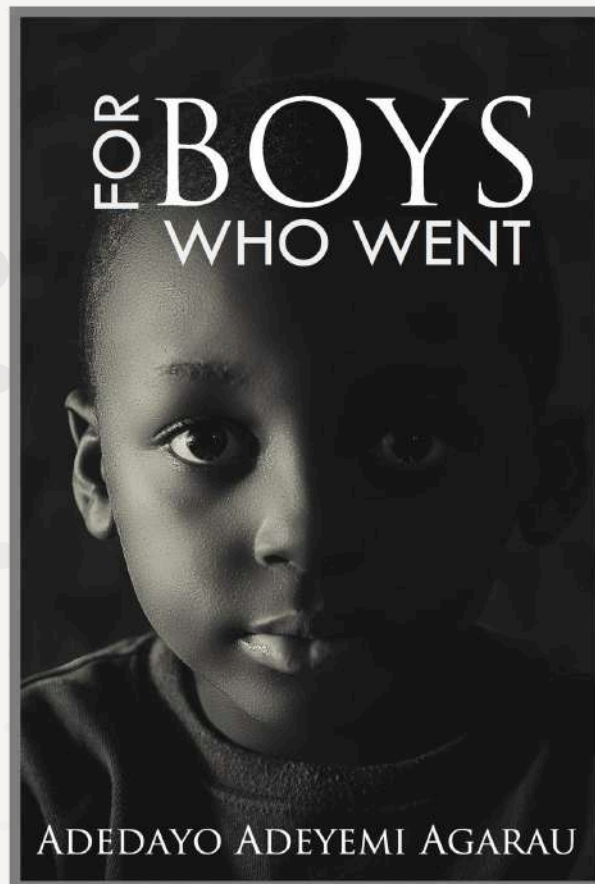
by Tola Ijalusi



In 'For Boys Who Went,' Adedayo Adeyemi Agarau explores the intriguing phenomenon of poetry, envisioning a reality steeped in classic promise. As a vigilant observer, he meticulously crafts his works with a profound respect for language and expression, employing a unique and indirect approach. He boldly captures the tropical sensuousness that reflects the issues prevalent in Nigerian and African society.

He continued with *Homicide*, a poem recounting the violence, militancy, and terrorism that Nigeria has endured, continues to endure, and hopes to overcome in its ongoing democratic dispensation—a struggle that undermines the nation's economic stability, growth, and development, a concern so pervasive it seems even fetuses are aware. The poem, which symbolizes Nigeria as a room constructed with metaphors and similes, narrates the people's ordeal with the Fulani herdsmen in the Middle Belt, Boko Haram in the Northeast, militants in the South-South, and beyond.

*this room is Benue, a circus of blood thirst
this room is Buni Yadi, Mubi, and elsewhere*



*this room is not a room anymore
it is Bayelsa, Bakassi Peninsula, Ikorodu
(page 11)*

*unsettled like the news
unsettled like ripples
unsettled like itself
this country is a room
filled with bodies (page 11)*

Agarau concluded his poem inconclusively ignorant of why, how and who murdered his country.

*my country is in a green-
walled autopsy room
who killed her?
how? why? (page 12)*

The writer revealed that the period in which he wrote his work significantly influenced its form and content, which revolved around diverse themes such as politics, philosophy, gender, and death. These themes are explored in poems like 'the things that drowns us in ourselves,' 'Not Survivors,' 'a lover's error,' 'you may not find me

For Father Went Like This / 2

tomorrow,' 'fresh gods,' and 'how to dance.' Notably, the last line of "fresh gods" concludes with a droll simile phrase.

*she taught you to run
to disallow little boys from telling you
how your vagina looks
a lover's error (page 15)*

*dab like angels blowing the trumpet
fresh gods (page 29)*

Agarau gave a distinct approach to the past, posting reliable knowledge on his "Timeline", an objective knowledge of Nigeria's history with poetic reinvention. He gave an apt history of Nigeria beginning in 1999 when the country's Military Regime closed and Democracy opened.

*1999, we dropped dominance
2000, my country found a name on the atlas
(page 30)*

The poetic historical account also contains not necessarily his memory, his history; of his first birthday party and the telephone the father bought which brought hunger, a relatable experience among families in Nigeria at the advent of mobile phones.

*2001, I had my first birthday party
2001, I was 6 when my father bought his Ericsson
a gadget that caused us to fast then prey
at the sight of our neighbors crunching lunch
(page 30)*

In the poem "Timeline", the poet gave a factual record of national incidences such as democracy, the crisis in Benue, a bomb blast at the military cantonment in Lagos, the re-election of Olusegun Obasanjo as president of the country,

the death of President Umar Musa Yar'adua, the emergence of Boko Haram, and other events, offering a nuanced interpretation of historical context and the pressing issues challenging Nigeria's social, economic, and political systems. The poem concludes on a democratic note, tinged with hope for a brighter future.

*2016,
we are back in 1999 or 1983 or 1960
recession, hunger, joblessness
we are somewhere near a brighter future
(page 32)*

'For boys who went and never returned' is a dogged expression of pain in the visage of defeat, and death; a deep warp with explicit intentions, singing epitome images of despair and agony.

*for mothers are broken
like distuned strings for you
for fathers went like this
and never returned too (page 27)*

'Pilgrimage' is a fine poem of consequential vigour ending this collection on a promissory note.

For Boys Who Went may challenge readers with its coarse literary style, which lends the poems a rich and raw intensity. While its expression can feel unrefined at times, the profound impact of its message on the reader's mind makes it a collection worth revisiting—an offering both thought-provoking and unforgettable.

Adedayo Adeyemi Agarau has boldly carved a significant milestone in contemporary African literature, establishing himself as a compelling Nigerian imagist poet.

Tola Ijalusi, Founder of Parousia Magazine, is a writer, poet, and reviewer. His work appears in *Spring, Africa* in *Dialogue*, and other publications. He's been featured in anthologies like *Wreaths for a Wayfarer* and *Best New African Poets*. He mentors writers in the *Spring Writing Fellowship* and is a recipient of the *Poet in Nigeria (PIN) Excellence Award*.

OUR PAST ISSUES

