

THE  
TRAIN  
STOPS AT  
SUNSET

*Other books in the series:*

Wind of Change (2015)

Loops of Hope (2016)

# THE TRAIN STOPS AT SUNSET

*(Brigitte Poirson Poetry Contest 2017 Anthology)*

*Edited by*

Brigitte Poirson  
Kukogho Iruesiri Samson



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ISBN: 978-978-963-710-2

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National Library of Nigeria Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Printed and Published in Nigeria by:

Words Rhymes & Rhythm Limited  
Suite C309, Global Plaza Plot 366, Obafemi Awolowo  
Way, Jabi District, Abuja, Nigeria.  
08169027757, 08060109295  
[www.wrr.ng](http://www.wrr.ng)

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## FOREWORD

### *Lady-poets, gentleman-poets,*

Let us herald it bluntly from the outset: no artistic activity can transport us further and higher than poetry. Other forms of art require material support to be brought to life. But poetry is breath. The sonorous signature of the soul. The essence of life. We only print it to better inhale and exhale it together.

This is the third time *Words Rhymes & Rhythm* have compiled an anthology from the monthly selection of the *Brigitte Poirson Poetry Contest* (BPPC) poems. But all the contestants have steered the language so aptly and displayed so much *heartistry* that they have all breathed into us the conviction that each poem is in fact a genesis and an apocalypse in an epiphany of words.

Mr. *Kukogho Iruesiiri Samson* has kindly chosen the title of this anthology to honour *Patrick Poirson*, who left the tracks of life while wending his way through 2017. Patrick was indeed always deeply involved in putting back old trains and young poets on the rails.

Yet, he was but one rail on the line. One is missing... What is one, compared with the thousands of miles trains speed on every day? Actually, everything. Because if one track goes missing, no train will be able to run. One is the whole, or the whole is no longer one.

“The train stops” means non-stop love. Patrick is not my late husband: up to this very day, he has never been late in love. His train is still on track. The inordinate number and quality of your poems –

*whether submitted or selected* – can amply prove it.  
And they all contribute to mend the missing track.

You, poets, illustrate the truth expressed by René  
Char, a French poet who actively lived through the  
horrors of WWII:

*“Each time evidence collapses,  
The poet will respond with a salvo of future”.*

(my translation)

– *Brigitte Poirson*

## INTRODUCTION

As a member of this ever-changing plane we call Earth, two things make me happy. One is seeing people from different backgrounds with different experiences coming together to achieve a collective task. The second is seeing expressions of creativity, especially from young people.

This is why the Brigitte Poirson Poetry Contest (BPPC and the annual anthologies we compile from the entries, are dear projects – the collective expressions of our purposeful creativity. As with the other editions – *Wind of Change* (2015) and *Loops of Hope* (2016), this year's anthology contains beautiful poetic expressions harvested in eight months of the BPPC, differently themed from February to September 2016 – *Gender Equality* (February), *Confusion: The New World (Dis)Order?* (March), *The Mental Health Silence* (April), *The 21st Century Woman* (May), *As The Muse Leads* (June), *The Forbidden Fruit* (July), *Life Is For The Living* (August) and *What Lies Beyond The Silent Night* (September). Of a fact, the poets did do justice with their poems.

We present these poems to you in this collection entitled *The Train Stops At Sunset*. No matter your poetic preferences, this anthology has something for you – creative, original, fresh, and very purposeful. It might be useful to note that the August and September editions were themed in honor of Patrick Poirson, a longtime supporter of the WRR project and train-lover whose train stopped at the sunset of his life, and inspired the title of the anthology. We will never forget him and his contributions.

– *Kukogho Iruesiiri Samson*

*for*

PATRICK POIRSON  
ALBERT JUNGERS

*and*

the many whose trains  
stopped at sunset...

## HONOR ROLL

February Winner  
CAN WE BE EQUAL?  
*by Emmanuel Faith*

March Winner  
PREACHER, PREACHER  
*by Izuchukwu Saviour Otubelu*

April Winner  
DEATH IS A DELIVERANCE  
*by Adebayo Kolawole Samuel*

May Winner  
JACK AND JILL (revised 21st Century edition)  
*by Ige Rachel*

June Winner  
IGNORANCE IS BLISS  
*by Oka Benard Osahon*

July Winner  
HOW TO ESCAPE THE FIRE  
*by Aire Joshua Omotayo*

August Winner  
MIDNIGHT MORNING  
*by Chinazom Chukwudi Otubelu*

September Winner  
THE NIGHT BEFORE WE DIE  
*by Udokamma Wilfred*

## CAN WE BE EQUAL?

by Emmanuel Faith, February 2017 Winner

Can she spill sparky sperm in billions?  
Or make semen march in millions?  
Can his zest zap zygote till foetus?  
Bouncing boy with boisterous features?  
Can he feed with teats and udder?  
Can they swap role of each other  
Can he alter her synthesis?  
To fit into his quotidian praxis?  
Can we cut short assiduous assault?  
Molestation in meagre and mammoth  
Can we give her a voice, the voiceless?  
Can she be ferociously fearless?  
Can we halt heinous hegemony?  
Of patriotic patriarchal ruining matrimony  
Can she use the skills in the kitchen?  
To impact, impart and flourish in teaching  
Can the pillar of the home  
Who curbs dangerous daggers that roam?  
Be given a space in the state  
To wipe off machos' and such slate  
Can Eve's dazzling dauntless daughters  
Be let loose like running waters  
That flourishes trees by the rivers  
And calm His fears, when he shivers  
Can Equality equate equity?  
Or entities have an identity?  
Can we be equal?

## AND DEATH SHALL BE FAR FROM YOU

by Otubelu, Chinazom Chukwudi

Weep not, child, for the gods have woken from the laps of  
harlots  
Those sagging breasts on thy chest shall smile again in the  
rain,  
When the scorching sun breathes life to torn tongues of dying  
starlets  
Upon blood-stained hills that glitter like a rainbow that was  
slain  
Arouse that creeping serpent that crawls unseen in thy sleep  
Shatter screens and roofs and doors, let the world know no  
peace  
Tell man and his train that gender slavery is not skin-deep  
They may call you a rib, but do not stop to strip the sheep's  
fleece  
Time is but a prancing toddler dancing naked in the dust  
Take its outstretched arm and be not enslaved to thy facial  
care  
Let the broken bones of thy breasts strike against the metal  
rust;  
That greedy rust that peels thy heels like yam tubers that  
goats tear  
Do not ask for my name, cos I am as ageless as the cloud  
That hangs limp and useless in the sky, yet praying with dumb  
lips  
Woe is she whose hairs grow grey like antique drums that  
chant aloud  
To deaf ears that hear only the curvy sounds of women's hips  
Dawn will be born soon out of the mild hands of tomorrow's  
midwives  
And death shall be far from the wizened flesh of thy fainting  
feet  
Twilight may rave like brave birds that pecked the swayed  
blades of sharp knives,

Yet your songs shall emasculate the beast that dwells in man's  
street  
My soul is chained, but I see light from the bend of yonder  
way;  
I see stones coming with drumming to build thy cars a garage  
I shall say no more, lest the winds should blow my weak voice  
away,  
But that furious, flowing river must never be a mirage  
My brave, young daughter, kings' harps shall play non-stop at  
thy return  
The stars shall yell and dance, and that stinging smoke shall  
cease to choke  
Things shall fall apart again and death shall be far from thy  
grave!

## THE ORIGIN OF BIAS

by Agbaakin O. Jeremiah

- i.  
mother sits by the orange ember  
of an abandoned firewood,  
and recounts the history behind her scars.
- ii.  
she said God is a crazy alchemist  
in the dark laboratory of Eden  
when He carried out nuclear fission  
inside our father's body;  
made lust a lower isotope and called her woman.
- iii.  
said our mouth is stuffed with used excuse  
when the gods that dismembered Adam  
later instructed us to arrange the splinters  
into an equal calcium and single love.
- iv.  
said when Eve bought the serpent's half-truth  
and ate the fruit to tower above God in wit.



the gods deprived us of lust's lactose  
and we became too weak to treat darkness  
as an equal of the muscular day.

v.

said: they were never one  
that when the serpent teased Eve  
under a solitary tree;  
where was our father?

vi.

so my mother spends the remaining night  
in the fists of grief;  
she would curse the Y-chromosome  
God tucked in the alphabet of her skin  
on creation night:  
she'd count the scars growing on her skin  
before she finally offered a fruit to her lord.

## MY DAUGHTER IS A WOMAN

by Izuchukwu Saviour Otubelu

Mother,  
I sit by the fireplace to gaze at the moon and stars  
For men have dug their teeth into my bruised, battered bones  
I have emptied my dreams into leaking water jars  
What dutiful wife sits upon her husband's throne?  
My daughter,  
Do not enslave your thoughts to the ashes of yesterday  
You are the living voice of the late Maya  
Do not build your hopes with sand and mud and clay  
You are a daughter, a maiden, a bride, a mother  
But mother,  
Men have wiped off their sweat against my infant skirt  
They have buried their gloom in the shadows of my pain  
Where is my breastmilk that watered the dead desert?  
I am a cloudless sky that searches for rain  
Dear daughter,

You are the neck that hangs on a noose in wondrous wonder  
Above the head; you are a darkness that illuminates light  
You are a slave-girl that lays down the law for her master  
Phenomenal woman! You are the sun that shines at night  
Yes mother,  
I am a tree, whose roots reach out to the underworld  
For my silence cries louder than a metal gong  
I am a crumpled flag that has slowly unfurled  
I'll teach my lips to sing this feminist song  
And when Time crosses the bridge over the river  
Daughter, thenceforth your hands shall wield the gold sceptre  
\*Maya- Maya Angelou (a black American poet, writer and  
feminist)

## LESSONS FROM CONSTELLATIONS

by Elemide Benjamin Odunayo

There are lessons for us from the constellations  
if only we are patient like pebbles to learn.

.  
Stars learnt to speak million things in silence,  
listening to moon's teachings and philosophies:

.  
moon meditates photons of light that escaped the sun  
till darkness leaves the sky for dawn to live.

.  
Sun rules the sky by day, moon by night,  
not for competition, but for complement,

.  
so that when you dream of work at night,  
you work your dream into reality by day.

.  
Let women be stars; let them learn in silence,  
and not be dumb when abuse strays into sky;

.  
let them also be moon; let them teach hope

to future stars, for light is the end of dreams.

.

Let women not forget to rule the day as sun  
and not be afraid to dominate the night as moon;

.

let them shine - no darkness can memorize  
the verses of hope written in the rays of light.

.

Let men know there is no shame being stars,  
learning the art of illumination from moon.

.

Let them also not forget that being sun is no  
excuse to drop exasperating rays on womanhood.

.

Stars are the same when twinkling from afar,  
but they are different, and bear names too.

.

These are lessons from the constellations  
if only we are patient enough to learn.

## A SONG IN TONGUES OF FOUR WOMEN

by Adebayo Kolawole Samuel

let us pray.

we sing in tongues of silence  
for our mother who walked out  
of our father's palace last night.  
she bore a song of sadness  
strung on chords of blue notes  
on her lips of a thousand bruises.  
our father,  
who art in palace  
we all owe you a name  
of dangling penises and drooping scrotums.

of boys who never walked down  
the tube of mother's fallopian.  
of beards that never grew  
on your children's chins.  
you named us debtors  
for we wore a suit of vagina at birth  
and gave us a name that is below every other name---  
omobìnrin: "a-woman-is-a-servant-of-men."  
so, you made our mother walk  
into a night of aloneness  
and poured the ashes  
of burnt clothes  
in her mouth.  
a woman is a servant.  
servant blood  
runs in you.  
we are all servants...

## A WOMAN'S PLACE

by Ogedengbe Tolulope Ayobami

(a Triple triolet)

Don't deny a woman her place  
For the world belongs to no man  
No matter the scars on her face  
Don't deny a woman her place.  
There is a race for her to pace;  
A unique race to wow her fan.  
Don't deny a woman her place  
For the world belongs to no man.  
Don't deny a woman her place  
For the world belongs to no man  
No matter her skin or her age  
Don't deny a woman her place.  
Don't treat her with bias of race,  
Thinking it's wrong to have a tan.

Don't deny a woman her place  
For the world belongs to no man.  
Don't deny a woman her place  
For the world belongs to no man  
No matter the weight of her brace  
Don't deny a woman her place.  
Yes, God has given her the grace  
To stand out great like a titan  
Don't deny a woman her place  
For the world belongs to no man.

## A LETTER TO MAMA

by Nome Emeka Patrick

Mama, how this ocean breaks on the city on your cheeks  
Holding your soul with teary tunes like little chirping chicks,  
Your soluble sighs strain the sight of the stars and moon,  
Yet, you wake up, new as dew, and hold gaiety like noon...  
I know your heart is a confinement of teary tales and sour  
songs  
For the fire that has made an abode in your fine bountiful  
bosom;  
How papa spat on your hair, kinky like the greeneries of Africa  
And how you held soliloquies in our kitchen, making him  
dinner.  
I know a girl, whose thighs are a river bound for her husband,  
How her betrothed visits at the death of dusk to quench the  
gland  
Of fire burning in the crossroad 'tween his black and heavy  
thighs  
And how she folds the body of nights into sour songs and  
sighs...  
We all burn the same way, our brittle bones creak the same  
rhythm  
For we are borne into a land where our gender has no  
reasons..

Did I tell you Mama, of the scars engraved on the slate of my heart  
How some devils tore my wrapper and crushed my feminine petal?  
Mama, I know you're like a yacht lost in the fury of a raging storm  
And We are like fine fishes pulled to shore, out of our aquarium.  
Hold on to patience, Mama, and give your prayers wings to fly  
For even when we fall, we still dust off our weakness and rise...  
Mama, even the sun with its great guts and glory and threats  
Still envies your soul for how it bears forbearance and strength.  
Mama, remember, Queen Idia, Nefertiti of Egypt, Amina of Zaria  
And how they broke the walls of stereotypes limiting their power?  
Mama, for long have we been lurked in this stubborn storm,  
Yet, the shores ache for the touch of our footprints and forms.  
For in the body of the wave, on the peak of a ship, sits a dove  
And it hums thus: 'You're beautiful, and you're strong – woman.'"

## THE FOURTH DAUGHTER'S ELEGY

by Laolu Poe Alani

Tell me, Iyaagba[1]. She wished, did she not—?  
Three daughters she birthed before me  
Did she wish for an arole[2] but I was born?  
Do not answer. I fear that your answer may shatter me!  
Tell me, Father. How many more did you lay with?  
For an aremo[3], someone to call Akinlabi[4]—  
Did Mother curse your iyawo[5] tun-tun[6] with her last breath?  
Three more daughters were born to you after me!

I tell you, sisters: Father never loved us!  
No—Not as he would have, a son! Nor as dearly as we loved him!  
Not even when we climbed the trees—all seven of us!  
Not even when Arike[7] named her bastard son Akinlabi[4] after him.  
Olowo ori mi[8], I long to share your pleasures in bed  
But my first lover—the okola's[9] circumcision knife—  
Nipped off budding teenage passions in my tiny bud.  
While Father held apart my tender, infant thighs.  
Conscience is a drum that a lover's heart should beat.  
Olowo ori mi[8], tell me; my arms ache for children to hold dear  
But I carry in my belly the same seven-headed fear as Mother.  
Will you love me less—for every daughter I bear?  
Will you flee our love nest—lest I birth another?  
Do not answer, olowo ori mi![8]. I fear your answer!  
Do not answer, olowo ori mi[8]. My heart may shatter.

- 1. Used to refer to the most senior mother in a family perhaps a grandmother or a great-grandmother*
- 2. A family's first son.*
- 3. Heir.*
- 4. A Yoruba name for a male child.*
- 5. Wife.*
- 6. New.*
- 7. A Yoruba name for a female child.*
- 8. An affectionate term used to refer to a husband. It translates loosely to "The one who paid my dowry."*
- 9. One who circumcises or marks children tribally.*

## GENDER RAPE

by Anointed Olumuyiwa

Rape?

Rape is also trust speared with thrusts

when:

Weighty words work weariness  
upon the tender stems of ambitions  
divulged in confidence

When gilded gestures  
hush shush and stifle

natural yearnings of nascent souls

When antediluvian conformations  
command curiosities to order  
and to be ordered!

When familial love's lustre  
is lazily and steadily leached  
by society's suppression and oppression,

When almighty societal grooming  
is naught but sequential programming!

And when gender markings,  
mutilations and insane morbidities  
are entrenched, enforced and enlisted!

Such is the nature

Of that dreadful horror

Unconfined to the wanton lusts

Of degenerates and degenerates

But present in all of us

And all around us

All according to our wills... and all according to our ways.



## PREACHER, PREACHER

*by Izuchukwu Saviour Otubelu, March 2017 winner*

Preacher, preacher, which way does the wind blow?  
The cocks have ceased to crow; the rivers have ceased to flow.  
I am a freeman with fetters around my feet,  
Enslaved to the fast-paced tempo of your heartbeat.

Preacher, preacher, I am a blind man groping in the dark.  
I am a castrated dog that has lost the strength to bark.  
You steer the rudder; I float atop your boat.  
Your words have sharp blades that slit my tender throat.

Preacher, preacher, I stack your barn with yams and grains  
But my thatched mud-house lies stark naked in the rain.  
You spin a web of false truths upon the path I tread.  
I am an old man with no grey hair on my head.

Preacher, preacher, sweat seeps through the pores of power  
That lie in lifeless bones buried in a cave in Zamfara.  
Machete strokes have reduced men to ashes and dust and  
smoke.  
Religion is a naked sun that wears a black cloak.

Preacher, preacher, you said religion is the way forward,  
Yet you taught me to wield spears and unsheathe the sword.  
Tears trickled down my grandmother's swollen eye  
When she saw Chike's blood smeared across the sky.

Preacher, preacher, which way does the wind blow?  
The cocks have ceased to crow; the rivers have ceased to flow.  
I am a freeman with fetters around my feet,  
Enslaved to the fast-paced tempo of your heartbeat.

## SCENTS FROM DOWNTOWN

*by Oladipupo Solomon*

In a street downtown,  
The smoldering voice of a young boy  
Rises above the drones of a burning city.  
He is a phantom long abandoned  
Along the city's broken boulevards.  
Mama is an old wick, much too old to ignite,  
Yet they say the currency is sinking under heavyweights.

In a street downtown,  
There are flames in the soul of a little girl.  
She burns from the pangs of armed men  
Who sold their hearts for the peeling walls of a petite city;  
Chibok is a lame girl searching for home, for comfort.  
Aleppo is an unclad boy lost in the rubble of an old souk.  
Oloibiri flows with milk and honey—sour and dry!

In a street downtown,  
Young women wear night blindness on punctured pupils.  
As they measure the city's length in pitiful parades,  
Young men bear arms, rewriting their destinies  
On the pages of a broken slate.

In a street downtown,  
The heart of a poet sinks in deep solitude  
Into old Titanic's sprawling floors.

How do we construct a future  
From the dew of a fading past, of a fading present?  
Who shall put off these unfettered flames,  
Peeping from yesterday's embers, from today's ashes,  
So we can build a better tomorrow?

## RUDU (CONFUSION)

*by Mustapha Gimba*

I prayed for the day to come  
When the crowd will gather  
And cheer for me.

I waited for that day--- and it came  
Like a gust of wind  
On a market square;

On that day,  
It was a fifty naira affair.  
The crowd cheered  
Only to the amusement  
Of my battered face  
In ruthless course for my change.

## SLEEPING DOGS

*by Otubelu, Chinazom Chukwudi*

Arise from your beds, sleeping dogs of woe,  
For thither waters wither the morning dew  
Beyond vast valleys that bald beggars go.

Mad goes that fast horse; trouble tells its foe  
Tongues twinkle like stars, yet birds sing forth few.  
Arise from your beds, sleeping dogs of woe!

What land is this that lore tales mumble so,  
Where glowing smoke laughs whilst cooks stir sour stew  
Beyond vast valleys that bald beggars go?

We thirst unfilled before thy fountain's flow,  
As days birth rays, our broken bones to hew.  
Arise from your beds, sleeping dogs of woe!

Thy sword slays the brave flute that dares to blow  
The face of thy sky that races far from blue,  
Beyond vast valleys that bald beggars go.

Like wild winter, you throw thy icy snow  
To boo yon wives that our eyes pray to woo.  
Arise from your beds, sleeping dogs of woe  
Beyond vast valleys that bald beggars go!

## BURNT BOATS

*by Gaius Isuwa*

This swinging sounds of blames  
echoing far away from the shallow  
depth of our carefulness...

This dirge that pierces our ears  
with the sharp fang of regrets  
as we celebrate sadness  
from the shallow depth of our carefulness...

Are we not the ones,  
the ones that left our fuel  
at the hands of a match lit  
swallowing our joy and love?

How do we then cross over  
when our boats are burnt?  
How do we then cross over  
with burnt boats?

## THE THINGS I KEEP REMEMBERING

*by Adedayo Adeyemi Agarau*

The things I keep remembering  
Are that we burn the world from here  
with our smell of smoke, like incenses  
cutting corners to find a room in the clouds.

We make songs a little more than a collection of notes.  
Sometimes it is how we say a prayer for my brother,  
my mother and the names of the boys that made ashes,  
the remains of burnt bodies;  
At other times, it is the way we mourn.

I try to squeeze my body into their coffins  
— the hearts of people crying for them,  
because people who are burnt in a room as they sleep  
do not fit in coffins; they are placed in tea cups —  
and I hear the echoes of their broken souls.  
Like disjointed arms,  
they are displaced from here, placed in a dream, stranded,  
made to live in a town that has no street.

A boy woke us one dawn with tears that reeked of terror  
and terrible absence.  
We knew what every sigh meant:  
they burnt his father and made him watch.  
He was seven.  
Another body has been made steam floating to clouds.

It rained in Barnawa that evening.  
We rushed into the fall to save water for our farms.

The news says Barnawa is peaceful.

## SCARS

*by Dennis Felix*

The dance begins in silence  
at the crossroads,  
then spreads to the streets,

As a reluctant dawn reaches out,  
sprouts a hand  
of six blood-stained fingers.

The red in a rainbow grows,  
grows outrageously crimson

even as the sidewalk bleeds  
with the scars of a mutilated daybreak.

Taproots dig deep to drink desolation  
from the heart of a despoiled earth.

The lacerations cut deep!  
The desecration is complete.

Mouthless,  
the gory story tells itself...

## SIEZED

*by Agbaakin O. Jeremiah*

In my city  
where waste is the currency of wealth,  
we don't ask if you'd mind  
a bowl of iyan, white as fright.

The maids ambush guests with dead meat  
resurrected in steaming ogbono soup,  
Nene shawled with parboiled Ugwu,

And let their lips flail in shock  
inside the ocean of iced Lacasera,  
too lost to say: eku alejo wa.

Perhaps it was some goblins  
giggling in the Gorilla Glass,  
that spelled my Android keyboard,  
creating an error: Nigerianers.

When writing, I asked my smart slave  
to type about a people cast in several spectra  
of tongues: broken as the sun shatters  
into splinters of rays before it touches earth.

But with a cyborg's cold omniscience,  
she suffixed the prompt: Nigerian-ers:  
again I swiped the silk-smooth screen gently  
not to incense the mad goblins;  
the mockery peeled my pupil in a rite of fresh discovery:  
to see the invisible chains on the minds of gods.

The revelation was evident from the suffix itself:  
our servants inflect us  
into something to be bought,  
reduced to pieces of thumbs with kingdoms  
to be seized during elections.

## PAINTER OF BLOOD

*by Hussani Abdulrahim*

Learning to polish blood, our blood,  
into stranded molecules etched on silt  
is the self-imposed ritual of the big man  
whose big tummy bounces like jelly.  
Just for his #10000 we turned the city  
into a conundrum of seething smoke  
flying hither, thither, like stunned birds  
the sky can no longer contain.

The shouts of men and quaking hearts of children  
were the supposed tunes of arousal  
furnished by lustful gongs reaching for a waterfall.  
We, the hell-makers, are bronze gods burning thickly  
like the sun  
shining chrome,  
like the delirious joy a cattle-whisperer evokes in a lamb  
telling it that it will grow into a handsome lion  
and death dripping from brown leaves,  
and coconut air shall be wary.

But then, we the painters of madness,  
from where shall we arrest redemption  
when we've become clumsy stars  
in a failing galaxy?  
Of what profit betides this insanity  
when our gullible souls become flimsy cobwebs  
hanging from the ceiling of hell?  
Before we realized the magnitude of the incursion,  
It wasn't strangers we killed, destroyed or burnt,  
but our fathers, mothers, siblings, our abodes  
letting their blood drip like the pitti- patta of teary rain.

And when the turn of our season came again for carnage



to be fertilized and grown like bahama grass,  
peanuts was no longer the price, but his son:  
"this time, let your only son lead us.  
If we must die, we'll die together.  
Let thy blood be the worthy appeasement for thy dubious gain  
and our blood- libation for the sorrow-stricken earth  
a landmark for dawn's tourists who will paint not with blood,  
but the awesome peace of their curiosity.

## NEW WORLD (DIS)ORDER

*by Kolawole Samuel Adebayo*

A TRUMPet is sounding in a distant land  
and we hear that some black skins  
are being raptured into a heaven  
of sun, and dust, and elephants.  
They say this heaven  
is the country home  
of men hewn from black stones.

Intermission:  
I hope these skins will see  
that heaven is a land flowing with milk and honey.  
I hear a man is building a wall  
and even the Pope cannot pray it down.  
They say he brags about his victory over a woman  
in a war of words that burned the world into mutters.

Here, in this part of heaven,  
our king drove himself into a holiday.  
His health is receding like how our money  
is swiftly walking the wide way of recession.

This is the way of the new world:  
a king casts others into waters of disorder,  
and we all don't know what he'll tomorrow order.

*The Train Stops at Sunset*

A governor is scurrying through deserts  
on a night of one thousand silences.  
no man must see him. Our money  
is walking in shadows— stealth.

This disorder is the new world order,  
and we are all looking for salvation...

## death is a deliverance

*by Adebayo Kolawole Samuel, winner April 2017*

*(of songs that heavy souls sing of death...)*

I cross my legs  
one upon the other  
and drink memories into me  
and sing songs like dirges and elegies.

I think of heartbreaks  
and my art breaks loudly  
like how this poem will soon break  
into fragments in the middle of its alley.

How I sold firewood  
to fend for four boys and an ailing mother.  
How my work went into darkness--- mother died.  
And how Rose left me in the lurch.  
It is true. Roses are blue,  
and cold too!

I drink more memories  
into my belly of unspeakable words  
and my heart becomes like a thousand valleys  
of shadows of death and dried bones and swords.

And this war rages on within me.  
I smile to my neighbor every morning  
and kiss my wife into reckless abandon.

But I am losing this war within,  
and one sturdy black rope is leading me  
to the mango tree behind our small yard.

And I am thinking: "When do I go?"  
"eventide or midnight?"

I am singing myself a threnody:  
"Death is a deliverance. O death is a deliverance..."

## BREAKING A FALL

*by D. E. Benson*

i

Sitting on a branch  
in company of dusk,  
a soul opens  
heavenwards  
to share secrets  
only his thought  
and the air can hear.

ii

A mild breeze responds.  
Speaking the tongue  
of leaves,  
it says:  
"Oracle speaking in the tongue of leaves.  
Nothing is."

iii

The soul concurs  
and jumps  
off the branch,  
but a kind noose stretches  
to catch him  
around the neck . . .

## AN ELEGY

*by Aderonmu Joseph Ayotunde*

You picked up your own soul like a peg  
and wrung it in a loop you made for yourself  
till you saw the stars in their celestial conglomerate,  
and you can no longer look back to wave goodbye.

I still reminisce the night we sat and watched  
the dying embers of the cold harmattan  
and we played host to the frigid touch of nature.  
I never knew of your appointment with the slaying monster.

Right under the shade of the big Iroko tree,  
we drew a world of our own out of thin air,  
we rode and journeyed through it on our horses of words.  
But you're lost in a voyage with no route to trace you back.

Your smile was enough shadow for every of your devises  
how I fell under the deception of the sweet wine we poured  
down  
as you hid your pain gracefully each time you raised up your  
cup  
never knew you left even while you are still around

I was around all day. You should know  
we could have worked hand in hand  
on those nights that seemed the darkest.  
Together we could have walked us out of this grief.

But you left me with memories I can't touch,  
wasted dreams, thwarted desires and tangled wishes.  
The marks on your neck will stay with me  
and always ignite the deceptiveness in smiles.

## SAVED BY THE SUN

*by Justice Gift Ogochukwu*

Yesterday, I climbed up the cliff of my neck to jump off,  
to let the wind expel me from my body  
before it plunges and sinks to the bottom of forgottenness.

But the dying sun on the far bank winked at me.  
He told me that he is an ogbanje  
who journeys on death's canal nightly  
until god's water breaks;  
that death is a mute madman blacker than darkness,  
with a mouth that stinks more than life;  
that there's no peace in his embrace,  
only suffocating stillness.

He told me that he knows about depression,  
of how a man grows into a sad boy  
and lives in a corner of his body,  
digging for the meaning of life in his sores, opening his veins  
so that the voice of his blood can reach the ears of god  
till he begins to find faith in emptiness.

"I find god in many things:  
in petals that smile at me,  
in portraits of my ephemeral life on canvasses of seas,  
in seeing myself in the eyes of lovers.

Search! You'll find paths in eyes  
that lead to love poems.

Do not be fooled by the epitaph 'rest in peace'!  
Stillness is not peace.  
Dying is overrated".

## IMAGES

*by Alade Toheeb Oluwatoyin*

Some images walked with their heads.  
Some had countless limbs.  
Shadows bled in the center of a Battle.  
Silhouettes stood with no visible images.  
Horrible masks wore faces.  
The life of abnormality they lived.  
Are they deities?

A rainbow stood  
Amidst a torrential rain.  
Afar was a tempest.  
'Strip yourself!'  
'Run to the widest forest!'  
'Eat your defecation!'  
Strange voices echoed.

Images vanished.  
My hands were chained.  
My legs were shackled.  
Before me stood an 'agbomola'  
With an amulet and a magic wand.  
He sang incantations and chants of djinns.  
"What happened to me"?!

## MUSINGS OF A BROKEN SOUL

*by Wisdom Nemi Otikor*

How do you live in a body that curses you?  
Do you make your skin a sanctuary of whoredom  
And drown your being in a prayer of questions?  
Or make your soul a graveyard of guilt  
feeding your corpse with the foreskin of your shame?

There is a war in my head,  
A world of echoes and voices.

Mum says these are the demons  
Come to feed off my soul.

She says 'pray them away, son,  
Lest they dwell longer.'

But this body is a senile stranger,  
A forgotten song of a broken dawn.

My soul is a wandering feather.  
Home is where the wind calls her.

'Pray this away, son' she says  
'Lest your soul burn in hell'

But mum does not know  
Every day is a shade of hell.

My soul is burnt church.  
My body is a tomb.

And these wars in my head,  
How long before they win?

## FAME FROM WATERS

*by Mesioye Johnson*

When you see a man coloring his voice on a burning tongue  
now lost under feet of storms like a bird without wings,  
when you see a woman disown her smiles in a room  
held by wailing walls rising into a home dead of honey taste,  
when you see boys keeping their worries under their armpits,



checking how it smells at intervals at a riverbank of their tears,  
and girls finding survival in a pillar  
undulating under a man's knicker,  
make them a surviving story for others.  
Think of how heavy the loss is on women who weigh absence;  
think of losing a dream to nights embracing stars with claws;  
think of what makes a man wish to have tides as his mother  
forever.

Depression comes in shades:

1. forgetting one's self in a world of sighs.
2. falling, rising, falling, falling in one's self, and floating in  
dead things.
3. wishing the soul to die,  
and the body, a corpse that breathes.

A man thought about fame, sought his heart, everywhere  
and wished to peel his name into magic of loud waves:  
his body is a camp of fire and everywhere called safe.  
He knows how miracle becomes a maiden name of rivers  
when burning stands like the shadow of devil in places  
where lost boys fuel their mothers with absence.  
He remembers today's sermon:  
"Man shall not live by bread alone..."  
and turns a Lagos lagoon to the mouth of God  
where he can feed on life.  
He forgets everywhere is fiercely hungry, even waters.

So when you become a body worn in different shades,  
Remember dreams in the throat of a river, and Orji,  
and how fame comes through dissolving in water.  
So when everything dies, live!

## FROM BLADE TO BLACK

*by Dhee Sylvester*

I cut myself in three different places,  
just to feel the taste of my own skin.  
(blade)

Like sand sprinkled with salt,  
the gritty taste was as bitter  
as the metallic rust of my toxic blood.  
(bleed)

Each swipe of the blade was a solemn tribute  
to a depressing sequence  
of needles, pills, and booze.  
(blues)

Death is a whore in a gray colored hijab;  
and maybe it's true that I act the horny Arab  
better than most horny Arabs.  
(bliss)

Mirth is a jester's face on the sleeves  
of a bleeding wrist;  
but each cut was a pleasurable thrust,  
and each sprout of blood was an epiphany,  
of my own melancholy.  
(bleak)

Dying, but ever smiling,  
I found solace in solitude  
and learnt how to laugh  
at the crossroads of two chronic hells.  
(black)

## notes to self

*by Ama Udofa*

i.

I am the fading sigh of everything I long for,  
nothing more than just a storeroom  
for broken tools and rejected toys.

I am the echo  
of a lost voice crawling out from withered lips,  
a scream reduced to a whisper  
struggling to survive outside blistered lips.

I am the faded image in a polaroid  
of a starry-eyed kid mouthing questions into thin air  
with shards of broken mirrors  
hanging from his mouth.

I am mimosa learning to fold into myself.  
I am the verse of a dirge  
chanted in defiance to the sky:

Sadness is a microphone to dirges of broken souls  
and unwanted ghosts.

Tears are tributaries leading to deserted lips  
and blistered tongues.

Love is a mirage:  
close for you to see, too far for you to ever reach.  
Pain is grey paint on teeth that no longer know the road  
to a smile...

ii

I am a handful of dust  
fighting desperately against the wind,  
searching for home inside weakened fists.

I am a bag of unyielding bones

bent by stones and sticks and spades,  
yet not broken.  
Slashed at by blunt knives, yet not cut open.

I am a candle fire  
burning my body to stay alive,  
dying to give light,  
yet living still.

## AFTERMATH

*by Jonathan Otamere Endurance*

There is an empty music in the throat of a boy  
Saying: "Bawa!, Bawa!, Bawa!" — his father's name.  
His voice is a bird finding its parents  
In the outskirts of an abandoned war.  
His breath is a tornado rocking a city  
Searching water in the dryness of broken streams.  
This is an aftermath of war.  
It tells of how a boy, say 16, is a drop of bitter wine  
Trapped in the bottle of broken memories  
And the crimson of roses marking his father's grave.  
How sweet is it to be a wing  
Trapped in the mouth of the wind  
And cadavers of bodies weaved into  
A casket of his beloved?

He is trying to weave his broken bones  
Into the dances of intoxicated butterflies  
And dust his body from the web of sour memories  
Holding him to the music saying: death, death, death.  
This is what memories are made of:  
It is a picture of a boy whose heart  
Is a map leading into dark places,  
Say insomnia—loneliness—suicide...

## JACK AND JILL (*revised 21st Century edition*)

*by Ige Rachel, May 2017 winner*

Jack and Jill went up the hill  
To fetch a pail of greatness.  
Jack came down and Jill stayed up  
To rule the world with finesse

They broke the bank for Jack to school  
While Time's for Jill to kill,  
To toil in the kit-of-Chen, and wash in the toil-of-Et.  
Jill's face must never see the sun  
Since Jack and it are one.

They said "mate, mate, mate!"  
Till the ma'am birthed a macho mister  
And said "shhh, shhh, shhh, woman!  
Let your wailing wane to a whisper!  
It's a man's world, you are merely a caretaker."

As time progressed and centuries went,  
Jill's troubles grew and grew.  
She then rebelled and grabbed the horn.  
The feline mist was born.

Tis' centuries now of the twenty- first  
And Jill conquers with zest.  
She builds her Home and empires too  
And wears the white collar well.

So Jack and Jill went up the hill  
To fetch a pail of greatness  
Jack came down and Jill stayed up  
To rule the world with finesse.

## LET ME LIVE MY DREAMS

*by Ogwiji Ehi-kowochio Blessing*

Yesterday, young Nwakaego left her hut  
as green grasses bathed in the morning dew  
and the birds' beaks emitted notes of glee.  
She had in her hands a cutlass of defense  
and an atlas of courage  
to guide her sojourn to the land where dreams come true.

She travelled until sunset and steep darkness came along  
when women had to walk like frightened kittens  
just not to threaten cowardly men  
with the footsteps of their success.  
She tiptoed, begging the dry leaves to grant her plea,  
and refrain from screaming as she stepped on them.

But just when she thought she had maneuvered her way  
through the thickness of friendly thorns and thistles,  
her ear was greeted with male voices accompanied  
with bitter whistles  
and no longer could she pace on, as her cold feet froze,  
for she was familiar with that hum of cruelty,  
a medley of desire and defeat  
which makes men stretch penile claws  
to tear hymens for early dinner and chew wombs for dessert,  
feeding the voracious appetite  
of their lean, lanky libidos and egos.

That sour night, they snatched Nwakaego's cutlass,  
yet she fought hard,  
but her punch was like puff-puffs hitting their coarse male skin  
They killed her, buried her dreams  
six feet beneath that heap of darkness,  
because she's just a woman, they said,  
What good is she  
beyond the earthly heaven in between her thighs

and those milk jugs  
hanging and dangling happily from her chest?

I know about Nwakaego  
and all that befell her that opaque night.  
And I am here to ask such men to let me live my dreams.  
For I am not just a woman. I am a human.

## JUST A METAPHOR

*by Chidinma Osigwe*

We called her out of darkness into twenty-first century light,

Gave her contact lenses for foresight,  
Changed her face beat from "bata" to high life,  
Reshaped her lips from circle to oval when she talks,  
Poisoned her mind from being robust to slim chick,  
Changed her hair style to the heir's style.

There is a reservation for you in the sky.  
Your kind was strong enough to move a car in Africa.  
You are crafted for the world... Explore!

We have smashed our perspective of female patriarchy.  
We have recycled and crafted her for a positive social change,  
Though this change is only a seamless probability in Africa.  
Ninety per cent of our women suffer from illiteracy  
to the sickness of the other room.

You give us hope without a rope.  
You expose us to the world and crush our homes.  
We are forced to suit up our cultural ideologies  
And be befitting twenty-first century females  
When our husband and family's perching eyes  
Want us to born again.

It is silly when they tell us we are Kings!  
We know we can only be Queens!  
Our biological clock murders our dreams  
Under the canopy of matrimony.  
At least, we are fortunate to birth kings...  
In Africa, a twenty-first century woman only exists  
In our ideologies.  
It's just a metaphor!

## THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY WOMAN

*by Onabajo Christiana Odunayo*

Jet damsel, manifold creator of creation,  
Light darkness unfathomable,  
Rare species in logic,  
The twenty-first century woman!

Togetherness is her aim.  
Oneness is her joy.  
Kindreds of greatness,  
Undying love-sorrow  
For her family,  
The twenty-first century woman!

No color or race division.  
She is beautiful in nature,  
Stunning of all creations,  
The twenty-first century woman!

She rules with power.  
Unsolicited, welcome authority  
Crowned with royalty,  
Clothed in majestic  
equal-patriarchalism,



The twenty-first century woman!

## THE UNHEARD

*by Patrick Nwamaka Ophelia*

Yes, we broke loose from the shackles,  
these chains we wore like amber bangles,  
beautiful, twisty things adorning our shrunken wrists  
and ankles, locking us to a space, a place-unheard.  
The much-celebrated workhorse bought with a price,  
flowers on flowing mane  
And gold-plaited whips clinging to promises made at the altar,  
led with mirth to the workhouse with a bridled mouth,  
white lace fluttering in the wind. Can we really break loose?

Mother once told me... Wear him like a gold manacle,  
wrap him up in sweet-scented peace, fluttering eyelashes  
and hot plate of ofe olugbu and akpu.  
Keep mute when the brute erupts like a forgotten volcano  
suddenly presented with sacrifices.  
He is your god. Worship at his footstool.  
Keep your head bowed.  
Never look him in the eye. Call him 'my lord'.  
Innocent me, I learned well; Eddie Murphy's Princess  
barking and wallowing in the mud at his behest.  
My god spoke, the earth shook and lava poured.  
I was the blind, the deaf, the dumb, unheard.  
Taught lessons learned at the now dormant firewood glow  
of father's faded eruptions.

I want a voice, mother. Can you lend me yours?  
So I can whisper 'Free' in between quiet pages  
folded at the tips, to remind me of bravery, of daring.  
A life is what I desire so I can creep towards the light,  
taste the sea on my tongue and dig my toes  
into the receding surf and warm sand.  
The unheard one have I remained for too long,

*The Train Stops at Sunset*

hidden underneath the heat of your loins,  
lost in the fumes of kitchen smoke,  
wrapped within laundry, starch and ironing tables.  
I am worn out, my body dying quietly, watching the clock  
tick-tock my dreams into the embers of faded wishes,  
watching the lights dim and that flowery mane crinkle,  
crackle and cackle, over-extended, permed, dyed and grey.  
watching from the window  
while he chased after the unworn body,  
its firm bosoms mocking the lassitude of my lax mammary.

Get the shackles far from me so I can find life in my solitude  
And trek this terra firma, be it on wobbly feet.  
Find myself I must, be it just a fragment of me.  
I have preached my emancipation  
from the reign of our iron-fisted gods.  
But can we really break loose?

## LEARNING FEMALENESS

*by Hannah Onoguwe*

We wore our youth on lips varnished  
with strawberry lip gloss dripping warm and sticky  
onto English notebooks collaged with famous faces,  
Madonna and Eddie Murphy and Boys II Men.  
Breasts in snug bras, impatient to fill the vast spaces  
between budding and bloomed.

Creases ironed into uniforms reeking of borrowed musk,  
our modulated walks were the anthem  
we sang to young patriots with divided loyalties;  
Plaits, a pledge to dialects of femininity learned  
on our mothers' oiled, sulphur-8-ted palms.

Laughs free and unfettered, hastily doused  
with admonitions about how 'ladies' should behave in public,

our bellies were the soft soil of future children.  
But first, they were the training grounds for overeager boys  
who visited those plains hesitantly,  
and then cursorily ploughing uneven grooves,  
raising dust...

And yet, we would still long to present unpierced pearls  
to nameless, faceless husbands on platters of patriarchy.

We were oranges. Tangy tough on the outside,  
slumberry sweet sections revealed to those with patience,  
the yellow of our tentative dreams floated like fumes  
in the dusk of awareness.  
In later years, we learnt that  
good things don't necessarily come to those who wait,  
and the voice between our ears is the only difference  
between a slut and a saint.

## APART FROM THE TEMPLATE

*by Ruth Mahogany*

A parent, a spouse, a keeper of the house:  
Depart from this template and criticism is aroused.  
Could her dreams be voiced?  
Could they be said aloud?  
What makes her choice insolent  
Or her audacity unallowed?

Tender hearts and sweetness and compassion of females:  
You take benignity for weakness? It's a pity, your lead fails!  
In the century of a score and one,  
Games turn; tough ones are born.  
They gird themselves with confidence  
And prove that gender never limits competence.  
Gravid they are with offspring and possibilities.  
They groom families yet birth trends in industries.

*The Train Stops at Sunset*

The single, one time insecure, one time prone,  
Now strong, fend for their begotten, fend for their own.  
While societal expectations cry out, demanding to be met,  
Many succumb; a few others owe no one a debt.  
For some, the heat cannot be borne - they exit the kitchen,  
Ending it all - the loved ones are left grief-stricken.

Well, apart from the template, there is more to be.  
Apart from it, there is greatness; there is more to see.  
Great strategies, great counsel  
Often come embedded in damsels.  
Tell him, there is more to her than warmth in bed!  
'There's wisdom in women'- This, Rupert Brooke once said.

## I HAD SO MANY DREAMS

*by Opeodu Pascaline*

I had so many dreams  
Of how to erase the lines of poverty from my village pages,  
Of how to lessen the fatal cries of infants  
And their helpless mothers,  
And reduce the strokes of the pangs of hunger on my people.

All my dreams ended when I turned fourteen.  
Father and the other elders said I was now a woman.  
I had begun to entertain my monthly visitor  
The two pointy fleshes on my chest could satisfy an heir,  
The king to be.  
So they thought.  
I wept bitterly.  
Mother said marriage was the greatest achievement  
A woman could have. Painful.  
First the native doctor had to loosen the rope,  
The rope my father put there to save my maiden innocence.

Immediately after my circumcision,

I thought my husband would let the fresh wound heal.  
But no, he did not.  
He took me like that,  
Amidst the pain,  
The pool of blood.  
It was a strenuous exercise.  
The pain of the wound and the breakage of my feminine core  
Made me scream so loudly throughout.

I know he must have thought himself a very powerful man.  
The next day I overheard the other men congratulating him.  
What a shame he cannot hear my thoughts...

I wish I could tell him his manly pride  
Was as tiny as my pinky!  
All these I wish I could tell him.

## THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY WOMAN

*by Ojeniyi Oluwafunmilayo Comfort*

Unequal and inferior they were,  
Miserable and damaged.  
Capped with curbs,  
They dared not raise their heads.

Attempts at speaking freely failed.  
Stymied by brown ropes,  
Imposed with a great burden,  
They ignored every opportunity for freedom.

Her entire life spent on the home front,  
She catered for husband and children.  
No hopes of living a life of her own.  
A knife to life itself.

Evolved a much different woman,  
After many decades in history.  
She broke free from old boundaries,  
Her former self lulled to a deep sleep.

More educated and well-informed,  
Her opinions changing the world,  
She lifted her ceilings of restriction.

Gone are the days when it all began,  
When she would take cover and run  
For the concept of being a nonentity.

Today she is a fascination  
Parading in glorious glee.  
She has risen from behind:  
She is the twenty-first century woman.

## FEMINISM

*by Dambani Deborah Tambari*

Who made the lock and key? We did.  
A world where she became the lock,  
And never the key, never to be  
An answer to a deepest plea.

When did she become a piece of metal with a groove,  
To look a certain way and act, perfect, lustrous,  
Waiting on her mother's porch in front of the door,  
Till you walk in from seeing the world she was hid from?

When did she become in need of a perfect fit,  
Like she couldn't be her own answer,  
Till there was a perfect he?  
In need of a key to open her door, so she could be fulfilled,

As though her destiny was confined behind that door?  
No!

She was never truly in want of a key,  
Although, yes! her mold made her vulnerable.  
To be safe, she had to let you fit.  
But before you go clanging and jingling  
With your fellow keys of how needful she is,  
Remember:  
Twisting, turning, conniving, lying and cheating  
Only open the first two latches,  
Her heart and her emotions;  
As for the door, only her inlock does the trick.  
Self-control, self-worth, and self-love  
Give her a full view of her destiny, not you!

## IGNORANCE IS BLISS

*by Oka Benard Osahon, June 2017 winner*

It is not the sight of mother  
Folded like a rock warming the sun on the lip of the bridge  
That caught the fake eyelashes, no...  
It is the child  
Staring with bright eyes at the speeding chrome wheels,  
A well-sucked thumb slick with spit twisting her shirt  
Into knots,  
Who caused well-pressed verbs and tainted adjectives  
Framed in glottal stops and affricates  
To rustle and fall from glossy lips,  
Like small stones caught in the feverish grip of a dust storm  
On the piece of humanity wrapped in the sun's warm shade.

Mother Earth has spat her children to the sky,  
But father Sky has denied his seeds and we stand in between,  
Hanging like pollen in the air,  
Blown about by the seductive winds  
Of overfed vocal chords who crushed truth  
With slippery handshakes,  
And pinched eyes shut with the tips of scented nails.

Mother moaned as several momentous morphemes  
Were expelled.  
Her eyes blinked to the return of memory,  
Yesterday's pain and today's misery.  
She murmured a question. Gold-edged glasses heard nothing  
But the worried river flooding the bank with bloated bodies.  
Or was it the whistling wind wrestling sand off bleached  
bones?  
Pleated skirt pointed to undernourished child  
And descended into cliché.  
Canned words processed on TV interviews  
With bloated agbadas hmm-ing and ha-ing...



Mother murmured her question again...  
'What did you say?'  
Pointed heels bent bleached knees delicately.  
'Did you bring food?' dehydrated lips ask.

## A TUNE FROM MY FLUTE OF FREEDOM

*by Ogwiji Ehi-kowochio Blessing*

Watch my fingers sway this way and that way  
as I play a tune to recall that day, such a beautiful day,  
when I broke free from the pen-cuff of themes.  
Back then, I was behind bars of rules and rhyme schemes,  
and those days, every single day, from sunrise to sunset  
I'd in vain try to write a singular sonnet.

Sometimes the prison wardens wanted a ballad,  
but my muse prepared and severed African salad  
with a lot of Abacha, mixed with a great deal of Buhari  
and their black stare seemed to demand my remorseful 'sorry'  
but how do I crawl out of a satire garnished with humor  
released for laughter-starved fellows to relish, without an  
armor?

Well, I gave them an idea. 'Make my poem a legal entity'.  
Give poets the liberty to see through the soul of humanity  
by staring long and hard into the blazing eyes of the sun.  
Allow our rivers of emotions meander in its chosen  
tributaries.

See, if in a poet's frantic attempt to be lucid  
his words become as corrosive as concentrated sulfuric acid  
burning the skin of your hardened hearts and sooty souls,  
let him be excused, for I have seen bombs stroll  
out of laboratories to execute lethal pilot projects,

yet we swallow the detriments of those experiments  
performed by scientists who are left un-trailed, un- jailed.

So, to the throne and throng, I throw this thorny question:  
how else do you expect a poet to exercise his poetic license  
other than by scribbling clean this sullied society of ours  
as he sweeps the system with his overflowing costume of  
words?

## MONSTER

*by Ikechukwu Blessing Onyinyechi*

Midnight. It's dark. Everyone else is dead asleep.  
But you're awake, waiting. It's coming.  
The gate bangs open with a metal wail,  
Footfalls, heavy, like the drums of doom  
Booming down the hallway. It's here.

At your door, a choir of ravenous fingernails  
Singing, scratching, scraping on wood  
Making macabre melody. It wants you.

Drenched in cold sweat, biting your pillow,  
You lie shivering under the covers.  
A prototype of fear, you groan soundlessly:  
'Leave me alone, I'll never let you in.'

The voice that replies is in your head,  
A sad, hushing, hissing whisper wrapping your mind  
In wraith-like fingers of smoky mist.

"I cannot go away, my dear. You know that,  
And you know why.  
These nocturnal trysts will never end  
As long as you keep the door shut."

You're tired. Exhaustion fills your bones like lead.  
'Enough of this!' you think. 'It ends now!'  
You toss off the covers, march to the door,  
Grab the knob, fling it open in angry surrender.  
"Come in!" you scream. "Come in and let me have peace!"  
Your eyes meet the monster's, and you gasp.  
Those eyes are your eyes, tinged with a hint of madness.  
Its face is your face, only with an unholy sneer.  
Its body and yours are mirror images.  
It is you, but it is not you. But it is you.

## A WORTHLESS GOLD

by *Mbagu Valentine*

Tis above all this war for Unity that must be fought,  
And it must not be lost as its cost must ne'er be bought.  
It should not be desired, 'cause her gold is worthless.  
Howbeit she is priced, when can we invest in oneness?

She must weep all night to dawn for her tears to be desired,  
And bought by all who yearn for her worthless gold to be  
priced.  
Tis not fit pricing a chaffy gold but we be desperate for Unity,  
Therefore must we die of this plague whose cure is solidarity.

Let's embrace Unity till it be that the heavens touch the earth  
And all mankind see reason to dry up the stagnant river of  
disunity,  
Henceforth must we not fight one another for we grow one  
breath.  
Till the hills reach the sky, we must make Unity a hallowed  
deity.

Ne'er will we fight for we must sacrifice every forbidden fruit  
in our midst.  
Only then can there be a worthy gold fit for a profitable feast.

Our hatred must be quenched by a burning love for the sake  
of harmony,  
Howbeit we treasure one another in chaos, aren't we but one  
country?

We must all invest in Unity for it should ne'er be despised,  
'Cause it must be bought as its worth is become fit to be  
priced.  
It must be desired if we must live to exist in solidarity.  
By so doing can we restore the chaffy gold of Unity.

## THE MAN MY FATHER MARRIED

*by Abah Linus Ajene*

The man my father married  
Is from the lineage of lions.  
He sees thick forest as clear desert.  
He calls night bright morning  
And hunts elephants for breakfast;

The man my father married  
Is an eagle in the sky.  
He flies to meet the farthest horizon  
And travels millions of miles on high altitude  
Just to catch a dream.

The man my father married  
Is a Solomon in wisdom.  
He knows how to track the tricks of tortoise  
And even escape through the needle's eye  
To bring breakfast to my father's table.

The man my father married  
Is graced in every endeavor.  
He is endowed with countless  
Flairs and oils of aptitude

To break the hardest rocks  
And mine the hidden gold.

The man my father married  
Is the mother of my father's children.  
He is whose womb I have visited,  
The one whose breast I have sucked.  
He is a man inside a woman.  
He is the man my father married.

## JUNGLE OF JENTA!

*by Okoliko Amina Grace*

Jump in the legendary jungle of Jenta!  
Sting not your lungs with wafts of its stink.  
Skillfully skip its frothy evil filths  
For the fish grillers smells of smoke more than fish.  
This proud humble jungle of junkies  
With gods of whoredom and goddesses of sodomy  
Is a poisonous grey garden of Eden

Basking in bounteous trees and sumptuous fruits  
Dotting lone hills and manicured rocks  
And a dizzying stream that catwalks across  
Gliding buttocks upon cursed stones.  
Fawned hibiscuses flatter lissome lilies  
As they flutter purple lashes to Nature's charm.  
A picturesque beauty indeed jungle seems.

Oh, but chimneys from her nostrils paint the skies black!  
Pungent, putrid weeds impregnate the air,  
Marijuana and cocaine, a strand of noodle their hopeless lip.  
Maman mama sweats in haste to serve her burukutu,  
But dingy Danjumas' hands are much too wobbly,  
And down goes the toxic brown broth  
Spilled sleekly upon a spongy earth.

Garose leans upon a tattered mud house,  
Knocked up and knocked kneed in ripped jeans,  
Sandwiched between two thugs in upturned face caps.  
As I skitter through that dreadful morn,  
A withered lad with black, saggy lips whistles at me.  
I simply shake my drooped big head in envy  
At how highly elated they easily hardly be.

Glossary:

*Jenta - a ghetto-like street in Jos*

*'Burnout' - a drink made from fermented corn gruel*

*Garose - a female given name from a major tribe in Plateau*

## MASQUERADE AT THE SCHOOL GATE

*by Nwagbo Ebubechukwu Bruno*

Mr. Kobo, masquerade at the school gate  
With ekpo face and Ojuju Calabar's fearful gait,  
Deep guttural laughter of a vengeful ghost  
Smoking furies of evil forest: the chief masquerade of my  
town, and its host

Armed with fat whips like a bloody soldier  
Asking for a gate fee or 'about turn' home; my dear,  
Should you fall for his trap, your bail is not free.  
Roger 'Awolowo's head' for the policeman in exploitation  
spree.

Kobo is a kola-loving god with large gullets as a big boss.  
He swallows our lunch box to launch his abdominal box.  
Even his pen needs to be oiled to mark our scripts.  
We scratch our pockets to scratch for his phony phones.

When Mr. Kobo sends for you, count your book, take stocks.  
If anything is missing, pad your pocket or pad your buttocks.

Rub his palms or he robs your buttocks with twenty needles.  
He has no ears for cock and bull stories or nettling riddles.

Dashing out of the house today, at the door I crash.  
But it is better than be dashed Mr. Kobo's lash.  
I have no cash to wade off the clash.  
A masquerade's bash is harsh and rash.

As I go to school today on high gear,  
Behind my brisk steps there is this burden I bear.  
Every school morning, there is this dread I get.  
I dread the masquerade at the school gate.

## MIRAGE

*by Jamiu Ahmed Adewale*

Ghost of dreams on the horizon,  
Refraction of light gleaming hues,  
Where thoughts fade into a spook  
Of unattainable image of memory...

Looking through the mirror of the past  
That reflects the emptiness of ettle,  
Peeping via the window of tomorrow,  
Only to see a man chasing the skyline.

Days of wearing imprudent wings,  
Soaring against the altitude of time,  
Running after the shadow of tomorrow,  
With yesterday's meaningless stance.

The firmament is the universal mirror,  
That reflects the magical aurora at dawn,  
Where beautiful colors radiantly glow,  
But vanish into the vacuum of onirism.

A volume of dusty rubble and malarkey  
Vaulted with vanity of unattainable race,  
The images are mere inverted reflections  
Waking up to realize that life is a mirage.

## A PAINTER OF BLOOD AND WATER

*by Osemwengie Zion*

Our journeys are better explained with the butterfly.  
Gently, it flaps its radiant wings  
Against the golden flickers of the sun, bursting of lights.  
It becomes a basket trapping hues of admiration.  
It becomes a rainbow body covering a burdened soul.  
It becomes love.  
Soon, it meets mother in the field of grains,  
Mourning the death of her larvae broken by careless feet.

How do you console a mother whose child never grows  
To know the taste of nectars?  
How do you console a mother whose wings never serve  
As a shelter for her offspring ?  
How do you tell a mother who hides in shades and thickets  
Just to see another second to smile?

Hate kills.  
Love kills.  
Sickness kills.  
Health kills.  
Beauty kills.  
Something must kill a being.

In the hope of getting to safety under a leaf,  
It picks tiny fragments of its broken soul and sews them up,  
Then journeys back,  
But runs into the palms of butterfly hunters,  
Children diving amongst grasses or oldies killing for no return.



Evening comes and it sits still in their cup.  
Death will come for beauty soon,  
And mother will weep seas again.  
So, it silently rehearses its death  
And paints images of blood and water.

## POESICOGRAPHY

*by Solomon Olajide Oladipupo*

i

Tonight, I fall for you:

ii

like pieces of poetry  
spread on a poet's wheel,  
every piece, every bit  
remolded, like clay,  
into metaphors of regeneration,

iii

like songs, broken,  
dying slowly into decrescendos,  
every tune, every hum  
reawakened like sunrise  
into sopranos of a rainbow cock,

iv

like shadows, left without a trace,  
bound blindly into brittle memories,  
every face, every pace  
rearranged, like the destiny of Esau,  
into brighter shades of portraits.

v

Tonight, I fall into you:

for

breath

for

melody

for

light.

*The Train Stops at Sunset*

*\*Poesicography is a word I coined from three words: poetry, music and photography, to show how they interplay.*

## HOW TO ESCAPE THE FIRE

by Aire Joshua Omotayo, July 2017 winner

Hold your waist in the middle of the wind,  
gulp the breeze till it reaches the brim,  
then wait and say your name to the face of the debris!  
Let your eyes be filled with rage; then run!

Write yourself a dirge  
and let your feet stick into a broken poetry!  
Let the rhythm sway you amidst the broken lines  
and watch as tears trek down bitter faces; then run!

Fill your eyes with burning rivers,  
trap a rainbow around their edges,  
then watch as the rain falls bitterly on you!  
break the rainbow and fight back with the flood in your eyes;  
then run!

When the moon is lost,  
hold your shadow from dancing into the night's pouch,  
then seek the stars and fetch a cup of light!  
Drink to your fill and stare at the sun's rays; then run!

Run! run!! run!!!  
...like insomnia escapes into the spaces of dreamland  
when whipped by boring lullabies...  
...like an antelope sprinting on a river track  
when it smells the hunter's headlights!  
Run! run!! run!!!  
This is how to escape the fire.

## MAD MEN MUST NOT EAT CAKE AT NIGHT

by Kanyinsola Olorunnisola

*[double-ended acrostic]*

**M**y fatherland is a paradise on fire, a forsaken kingdo**M**.  
All our gods are drunkards clothed in the sanctity of agbada,  
drinking away the glorious dreams the oracle foretold.

**M**y poems are famished ghosts bearing dreadful mayhe**M**,  
endless in their ghastly terror to expose and exterminate  
night-demons planting shadows in the womb of our nation.

**M**ay these cursed words be the queer heralds of doo**M**  
upon the plotters planning plunder against this plateau!  
Soldiers of darkness have made home of our shores.  
Take up words with me in battle! Together we must fight.  
Narcissism has taken captive the hearts of our me**N**,  
our wondrous woes woven into teary tales told on the radio.  
Today, let us rise against the evil in the land with all our might!

**E**xcuse me if my sharp-edged diction cuts you like a knif**E**.  
A poet becomes a butcher with a few lines and a stanza.  
The true taste of freedom lies in rebellion's forbidden fruit.

**C**ome, be weird with me! Let our madness be electri**C**!  
Annihilate the spirit of fear with defiance and chutzpa!  
Knock down society's walls of hate, brick by brick!  
Engender a rebirth to usher in a newer, brighter age!

**A**ntoinette's incarnates may try to silence our brouhah**A**.  
Tell them that this revolution is a song that can never go quiet.

**N**ever eat the national cake with those who starve the nation**N**!  
Indulge not your values in the flexibility of an origami.  
Giwa, wiwa, and fela are entombed in history's gong,  
Hailed each as heroes for daring to be a norm-breaking pariah.  
They were mad men who never sold their souls – never ate  
cake at night.

## MOTHER

*by Chinua Ezenwa-Ohaeto*

Mother is round and patched with boiling hearts,  
knock-knees, dismembered intestines and soured tongues.  
Her dreams are of people humming lost songs,  
And her face is the distance between sadness and  
unhappiness.  
Her heart holds chambers of soaring dusts  
and ravaging storms.  
One chamber harbors Father who left some time ago  
but never returned and never wrote her any words.  
Another harbors men with brushes trying to paint semen  
in-between her thighs.

So, every night I draw her face on an empty canvass,  
as happiness is far from her, I give her a smiling face.  
I stretch her lips to her ears, that she may forever know  
happiness in my eyes  
and in the eyes of those who rape her with things.

In the mornings, I also put my lips upon hers  
to bury in my mouth the nightmares of people here and there  
living in ruins, dried as bones;  
of people forcing a god over other peoples' god,  
crimsoning sands;  
of people who write love off their hearts  
to replace it with ammos, shells and grenades;  
of a boy who wanted to die another day,  
burnt alive for scooping a handful of garri;  
of killings and counter-killings  
somewhere in the Niger-Delta and Bayelsa;  
of girls caged by men at twelve or ten or thereabout  
and used to soothe itches;  
of souls in prisons and elsewhere shrinking, crying, wailing...  
But my mouth cannot bury them all.  
It is too small a graveyard.

Then I try to search her eyes  
to see if I can find any pint of hope,  
no matter how small.

## EROSION

*by Oppong Clifford Benjam*

A mother once said to her daughters:  
fill a man's heart with rich, loamy soil  
and plant in it a sprig of acacia,  
that it may blossom.  
But most importantly,  
note that the storm will pass by your farm,  
and manure will join the rest of the earth  
to be washed away.  
Away everything may fly.  
Your acacia may go too.  
Your sweet acacia may go to another woman,  
and strangely, your acacia may be doing well  
in its new earth.  
Dear daughters, verily! Verily!! I say  
acacias are not to be eaten.  
Loamy soils are found in every pair of trousers.  
Cry a short while for your lost acacia.  
Refill, re-plant and expect the storm again:  
that's how to live loving.

## BIRDS ARE MADE TO FLY

*by Nemi Otikor*

*(For Maya Angelou's "I know why the caged bird sings")*  
Did they clip your wings

In doctrines of righteous jealousy,  
In holy chimes of saintly sanctimony,  
And ordained you, wallflower of all eternity,  
Such graceful beauty, for Oru-be's consumption?

Fly, little bird, find your heart and fly!  
Grow and then fly!

Did they cage your being  
Sapping bravery in orbs of fear bars,  
Breathing metals, coughing cages, sneezing shackles,  
A mute synecdoche, Oru-be, their father?

Beak on, little bird, don't just lie!  
Grow, heal and then fly!

Did they poach your song?  
Forgotten, your voice cracks.  
Impoverished, you await Oru-be's verdict.  
Boycott the sermon from the gavel, child!

Did they cackle at your brave confusion,  
Chuckle at your tear-mapped face,  
Chortle at the throes of your hope?

Recover, rejuvenate, little bird, stop the sigh,  
And heal, then fly!

GLOSSARY:

*\*Oru-be: An Okrika word for the devil.*

*\*Okrika is a minority group in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Their language is Okrika.*

## THE FACULTY OF BERSERK ARRANGEMENTS

*by Nelson C.J*

It was in the fore, in your teeth,  
A hard thing to gnash.  
It made crystal spaces in the milky set.  
Then these spaces were openings,  
These openings a passage way,  
This passage way?  
Recollection.

Now that you have luxuriated in thirsting,  
In conditioning your body to read itchy lines,  
To align with the things that terrify the Je June,  
To wink at a boy or say a luxurious Hello,  
To allow yourself dismay when he says "Wetin Happen?" -  
And not Hello back.  
Nice, and carrying, and suggestive, and askew,  
And wrongly right.

Now that you have spiked up to own your body,  
Soul, being and thoughts,  
The Faculty of Berserk arrangements immured in your brains,  
Shake their wizened strands at this.

You dey fine trouble, they clang!  
Society attenuates your likes that ruffle its stiff, stiff plaits.

Now that you have spiked up to learn your body  
The truth of desire,  
Society, as always, as in all things perturbing-  
Has things to say.



## CLOUD'S CRY

*by Savage Rahmotallah Abisola*

The bright, blue sky turns pale in confusion  
Like a bee trying to get nectar from the sun.  
A cold breeze hits my gentle skin,  
Sending shivers down my spine.  
Thunder growls from afar.  
Mother Nature must be angry.

Bitter tears roll down her rosy cheek,  
Pouring down in thick sheets of water  
Submerging the earth and sky,  
Making it difficult to ascertain  
If the rumbling thunder  
Actually comes  
From above or from below.

## TEARS TO TWO

*by Ajisafe Victory Tobiah*

Your mother was the ocean that gave birth to the Earth.  
My mother was the atmosphere that gave birth to the sky.  
And we, the children, mortal and unblind,  
Saw I, did You; saw you, did I.  
If only I could hold You tightly through the lonely nights!  
I wish my tears that jump on You to your mother rode...  
As your mother flies to mine, I stared  
Violently at the sea; cruelly at the ocean, breaking  
The cobbles, the veil. Shall I come down or You come up?  
These words and tears I drip are mine!  
My mother was a lioness that birthed a kitten.  
Your mother was a rabbit; so cute the rat she'd borne!  
And we, the children, mortal and unblind,  
Caught sight - did I - of Your sapphire eyes.

But I know not what You caught-sight-of of I.  
I feel the fire inside my chest: your sapphire!  
But if I be too close to You to touch your gentle skin,  
To taste the Your flavored kiss, to ride on the wind  
And touch its horn, ignite the rainbow, to dance  
In Tigris and Euphrates, to feast your eyes to mine,  
And beat in your chest! But then I'd be close.  
'If I be too close, I ought to eat you, you to cower.'  
So said my mother; so said your mother.  
But no. Let's burn these tears in the ocean's fire  
And dance among the ashes to the tune of our hearts.  
We'd bend in and eat till we die out, I in You; You in I.  
These words and tears I drip are mine!

## I LOVE A FIREFLY

*by Owoeye Olaniyi Andrew*

I love a fleeing firefly.  
I desire its beauty  
But it mocks me.  
Its incandescent belly houses a pyre!

I shouldn't do this!  
How can I love him?  
Cupid hears and smiles  
For he has pierced the Bull's eye.

I am a boy.  
The firefly is a man.  
His nakedness dances in my thoughts  
And his shadow lays with me.

I laugh at the pyre.  
Don't you dare forbid me!  
My heart bears the arrow  
And I will go where it points.

## BEING DIVERGENT

*by Solomon Olajide Oladipupo*

Yesterday, I asked my mother how to rule the world.  
She said, "Befriend the sky.  
Never wait for the slow patters of rusty roofs."

Yesterday, I asked my father how to rule the world.  
He said: "Be meek as lamb but brave as lion.  
Never trust tortoise and his old tricks."

Today, I walk many roads,  
Some to the North and some to the South,

Some to the East and some to the West,  
Some to the right and some to the left,  
Some to blight, and some to light.  
Today, I walk many roads.

I want to rule many worlds,  
conquer many skies.  
I want to be a thousand flies  
free above many fears and frights.

I tried to fly, but wings won't grow.  
I tried to glow, but fade rather slow.

Though I walk many roads,  
I will take that road less travelled.  
Like Frost, I'll make all the difference  
And fly my stars in nightly glows.

## MIDNIGHT MORNING

*by Chinazom Chukwudi Otubelu, August 2017 Winner*

Death dances slowly to the loud drums of mental slavery  
Eating deep into my sick skull that wears a mad man's smile.  
Life's gramophone keeps screaming that six-pack's is not  
bravery  
And I must lead my frozen feet to stardom for a while.  
I can feel my heartbeat stringing strands of a broken sky  
To tame that tricky tortoise twisting my sodden soul.  
The waxing star no more fits the wondrous gaze of my eye;  
Its light must have drunk dryness like washed clothes on a  
pole.  
Ancestral caves crave me to cast my tent on wisdom's grave.  
The teachings of Socrates lie therein like a bold birthmark,  
Forging metal blades from the solemn nakedness of a slave.  
Tears shall no more flow from the lashes of a gentle lark.  
I shall wait not for dawn to call early at my door,  
Before I fall into flames where living souls burrow.  
Death shall be lost like pungent stains on a black floor,  
Whilst time shall be a tailor of morrow's worn-out hollow.  
The mountains echo songs of my newfound name.  
The new moon makes jest of the flattened chest of the sun.  
Life is for the swiftest horses whose hooves shall grow not  
lame,  
For the race has long begun; my feet shall rise and run.  
Home hums softly within the walls of my heart.  
How great thy love that even gods fail to comprehend!  
I hail thee for thy cold clouds that thunder like a dragon's fart.  
May thy pleasing face kiss my lips till the world's end!  
Every man wields a sword to sever flashes of mourning,  
While troubled tummies swell with the yell of a coming.  
Indeed! The times are mere mysteries of a midnight morning.

## A ROSE ON THE RAILWAY

*by Felix Kalu*

Sprouting amidst steel and stones,  
- this is a gory place -  
this rose came in wondrous procession.  
There was fine purple, coral and crimson in her carriage,  
spreading and settling bleeding beauty from every pore,  
ringing patters, the footstep of a queen,  
Unrestrained, unreserved.

I feared a train would pass tomorrow!  
This carnival would be a short tragedy,  
Ought it not to have stood with one leg?  
When the train came and crushed the rose,  
Its roots stayed and the petals flapped all over,  
I saw two petals follow the train away from my sight.  
As the Rose lay beautifully dead,  
her sunshine scattered and extended to far places...

That is how to die a big death.  
Tiny deaths are bad.  
The struggle to grow amidst steel and stone  
must not waste in a day.  
The size of life is in the marks, not in the days.  
That is why a rose holds back nothing.

## LUMINARY

*by Emecheta Christian*

If life is a strong steed,  
I will be that horseman who rides it to war,  
For as long as we are unison in speed,  
Our enemies will all be crushed to the floor.

If life is a burning forest,  
I will be the air that fans its ember,  
For as long as we burn without rest,  
Our impact, the wild will never forget to remember.

If life is a mighty Eagle,  
I will be that distinct set of eyes that makes it special,  
For as long as we dominate without struggle,  
Our fame will spread globally without a commercial.

If life is a raging thunderstorm,  
I will be its numerous twists and turns,  
For as long as we steer without pattern and form,  
Our progress can never be pricked by angry thorns.

But since life is what it is  
And I, a mortal man in search of reason and purpose,  
I have sworn to always give life that warm tender kiss  
And continue living my best until the day I repose.

## LIFE IS FOR THE LIVING

*by Obimba Chukwuma Samson*

Life consists in participation and spectation.  
I indulge in both for my perfection.  
In a life-long enterprise of self-actualization,  
I am undaunted by the many a senseless limitation  
Created by many a cultural contraption.  
By the light of knowledge and fearlessness,  
I explore life's gray areas and recesses.

There might be some greenness hidden in the grayness.  
Call it extraneous expedition, excessiveness.  
I call it part of living life in its fullness.  
Every mountain, I am ready to climb.  
I am poised to cross every river in my path anytime.

I will traverse every region and clime  
And engage my vocation and every pastime,  
Till I find my dream in this lifetime.

When childhood is the most curious time in life and simplest,  
And adolescence is indulged in exuberant zest;  
When of success adulthood rides on the crest,  
And culminates in rest from every quest,  
Then, life will have been lived to the fullest.  
In the grave where the body is perpetually still and static,  
I cannot dance in the sun and frolic  
To the lyrics of this life and music.

Life should be an epic story, not just a fleeting statistic.  
Life is for the living; yes, it is indeed for the quick.

## MY METAMORPHOSIS

*by Akor Agada Nathaniel*

My nightmares could not go away.  
I was scared of dying every day,  
Because the perilous pang of yesterday  
Hunted me like a prey.  
The desire to die another day  
Metamorphosed into a shade of grey.  
Like the black sheep which went astray,  
I was completely lost in life's alley.

My cry was too far from the sky.  
I could see gravity fly as my world went by,  
Making every ocean of hope dry.  
Then, from within, I heard: "Why not try?"  
You must touch lives before you die.  
Inside of me scriptures came to life,  
Urging me to prophesy upon my life.  
Like Ezekiel I did prophesy,

And proclaimed like David: "I shall not die."  
Redemption came from on high.  
Escaping my lips with a glorious sigh,  
I saw stars embracing the whole sky  
As the beauty of a buzzing butterfly.  
Like Lazarus I came back to life.  
Against all odds I survived the knife.

Delivered by the Superman from Zion,  
I metamorphosed from a dead lion  
To a living dog.

I am fully alive, no longer a log.

## APOCALYPSE 2

*by Kolade Seun*

I see the events on earth  
From the golden grave  
Where men rest their eyes behind their lids,  
Where men rest their tongues behind their mouths,  
Where men rest their brains behind their skulls,  
Where men rest their noise behind their silence.

The creeping birds  
Are no longer for the nights alone.  
Their sonorous voices blow the speaker of silence.  
As men rest their backs beneath the earth,  
The wild become the civilized.  
The water in the cloud comes down  
To house the body of the hidden fishes.  
Scents from artificial flowers are the only pollution,  
Not the smoke from war,  
Nor the smoke of worn-out silencers.



The families are extendedly nuclear.

This is the world  
As we stay behind  
Our golden graves,  
Where ants match past  
Our bald heads.

## TO LIVE IS TO DIE

*by Jamiu Ahmed Adewale*

In between the walls of foggy dreams, I sat.  
Bound by the restraining shackles from west,  
Time stood still, compromising fate and destiny.  
She sighed, looking via my mirror of broken days.  
The road to my paunch is the only road to heaven.

Mother, "I'm breaking out of this cage of gory doom".  
Life is not for the coward with fears of gripping death,  
So the ransom to live fully alive is to be willing to die,  
For death is a shadow that walks through life with us.

Mother, "I know where Chaffy golds burn in fire".  
To get one is to pass through the blasting hell,  
Where I will dance to the rhythm of a raving surge,  
Cremated alive with my dreams, feeling guilt for it,  
And my ashes will be refined into a powdery gold.

Mother, "I know where ardors are buried with corpse".  
Cemeteries are the richest grounds on earth,  
Because men died with their passion crying for them,  
For they refuse to let their dreams come alive in time.

Mother, don't cry. I have chosen this route of freedom.  
The liberty to live life's fulfilment is man's greatest wealth,  
If I die fighting for freedom, my soul shall not be buried

among the cold souls who know neither victory nor failure,  
For to live fully is to be willing to die for what you want.

## CARTOGRAPHER

*by Agbaakin O. Jeremiah*

"She tells me of the hole her mother gave her as a gift".  
Gbenga Adesina-Multitude Child,  
my mother is a cartographer.  
She plotted a map of fear boldly  
and said: "Here, do not fly out of here!"  
All day we roost in the shade of her wing.

The rite begins with a big scowl  
penciled across her face like kohl,  
when maiden mules mute to all meanings  
crawl towards a vibrant star circling  
a candle wick in the dark corridor,  
like the three magi being led to Christ.

With a slap on our wrist,  
she would wriggle us from the dreams of fire,  
of duel with ancestral foe living in her superstition:  
dragons, et al.  
and of stitching desires from distance to distance  
under a stretch of the silky sky.  
I do not know what changed,  
but I swear our plosive bodies desired  
the vowel fire stuck in the windpipe.

But mother says our kind is ever-stressed already  
before we flap our wings into declaration of flight.  
Darwin swore we're so close to animals we could be wild.  
Philosophy interjected to second-guess the self  
till we became still as stones.

Religion said there is one God (though each has its own)  
so we became pious, serving nothing.

The law said: "Be servile". We became people of the ass,  
which a few ride into resurrection.

## LIVING OR LEAVING

*by Elemide Benjamin*

Someone knocks. Your heart is a room of many things:  
you cannot open because it is littered with shadows,  
and your excuse is doubt for the reality of broken dreams.  
The table is dusty with plans.

The eighth wonder of the world seats imaginary  
on an expanse of thought; your excuse is time:  
it grow wings before you grow a step.  
Ideas glow in your eyeballs; they are meant  
to show the world out of the dungeon of darkness,  
but no one knows freedom in your name.

Your excuse is the horizon, it is not wide enough  
to rainbow fading lives with beauty.

You do not allow planting in your heart;  
you are afraid of becoming possessed by others.

The girl you allowed to plant love in left  
because you are unfavorable, unyielding,  
and the seedling was choked by hate.

For love is what makes things bloom.

The only memory hanging on the wall is your birth,  
but it seems the knocker is with a casket frame  
to hang you as another memory on the wall of time.

The knock wakes you to reality. You never truly lived.

You look back for a last glance. Like Lot's wife,  
you have become a pillar of regrets.

You reach for the knob, you realize it was death.

You stopped living. You started leaving,  
and I am here to help you pack. Hurry.

## THE OL' MAN WHO DIED YOUNG

*by Ogwiji Ehi-kowochio Blessing*

Last night, I was scribbling,  
strolling my muse down a lone paper,  
when I heard Death's sour quibbling,  
as she stood in the street corners of life,  
staring in blatant disgust and wondering  
why breath lingers in dead nostrils  
whose nose perceives none of life's thrills.  
My muse towed my soul to the edge of life's cliff  
where I saw the lonely monument of an oldie  
telling a story in its engraved words: "Pa Eddie:  
The ol' man who died young."  
Once, he was a lucky, lanky lad  
who saw himself morph into a cranky old man  
that never learnt that life's like cold water  
on hot coals. It will heat up and someday boil.  
In failing and falling oft, he boiled his life,  
till he fell in love with his trough,  
and  
left his life on the bare thighs of fate,  
hoping that it'd suckle fortune from her nips.  
Daily, his heart did beat, but like a talking drum  
plagued with a terrible case of dumbness.  
No thirsty ear sipped its rhythmic sweetness.  
A mess of loads of anger and sad efforts he was; no fulcrum!  
He lost his grip on life; existence dragged him to old age,  
and when death met him, he was more of grain than chaff,  
for the winnowing winds of life had lost his address long ago.

## THE NIGHT BEFORE WE DIE

*by Udokamma Wilfred, September 2017 Winner*

The night is a barricade built with the vigor of silence  
Shielding the truth about the break of dawn.  
What does it ultimately hold, beauty or violence?  
What is that about darkness before a light is born?

Maybe the stars are bright with answers,  
But even the light focuses falsehood sometimes.  
I have seen promises levitate to the height of power  
Only to explode into star dusts with the bang of a landmine.

Tell the moon and the sun they'll both get a chance to shine,  
That Ego lurks behind that little hurdle which causes a fall.  
Why the constant fight over a spot on a broad line,  
When we can all stand and rebuild our broken walls?

See how quick we misplace the lessons taught by history  
And adopt the lies the night carries in whispers.  
The future is not how to spell a mystery,  
But the stars and the moon shine the same light when they  
both glitter.

Gather the chirps of crickets; maybe you'll find some truths.  
Maybe total darkness is how the earth speaks of war.  
If unity is how we stand, we must find our roots.  
If we employ the machete, our harvest may turn an ethnic  
gore.

Maybe there is no god, or the god is dawn.  
Maybe what lies beyond this silent night is death.  
Maybe we will all fall and turn crimson, or like rain on a lawn  
Maybe we will bring morning to surface at the expense of our  
last breath.

## A POUCH OF TONGUELESS SECRET

*by Ayeyemi Taofeek*

We've thrown on our backs days and nights -  
Wet and dry like hay.  
But we are like the bulbs of flashlights  
That can never see beyond today.  
And nights are the hinges of a locked gate.  
Not an inch of tomorrow can they skate.  
Nights are curtains between now and morrow;  
Deep, thick, they display no scene.  
It's the earth's bowel where a zillion dreams burrow;  
Yet, not a scene of them is seen.  
For the night is a gourd of atomic solution:  
Silent, but it could be weird at detonation.  
The swinging scrotum of a ram  
Is the fate that lies beyond the silent night;  
A swift-moving pendulum,  
Bringing to the back darkness and taking forth light.  
And we lay our heads like eggs on the hand  
Of death, moved (some unreturned) to the dreamland.  
What lies beyond the silent night  
But the pouch of tongueless secret  
Pregnant with fear, hope, darkness and light?  
Not even the star gazers can see it.  
For we are not only pencils in the hand of the Divine,  
We're also what He writes and what He writes upon.

## NOTE OF TEARS

*by Ojo Adewale Iyanda*

I'm writing a note of tears for the suns that journeyed  
From the shore of silent nights  
To the theater of lonely night- grave.

This note of tears is the struggle of a woman  
Seared in the flames of withering injustice,  
Whose breath is to carve the channel of freedom  
For suns whose hope is alive in death.

This note of tears is for Halima, who was alive  
Until her sun was hid in the soul of silence.  
She was forced to learn how to sing in moans  
Sacrilegious songs that stole her voice.

This note of tears is for Alake's prime heel that was bruised  
By a cruel, crawling creature with nine ribs.  
Her memory was painted with this ruptured truth:  
"God himself is a man", and she lost her worth.

This note of tears is for those who were sung as nursery  
rhymes,  
The suns who left, gone to the grave.  
The silence tree was planted over them at night.  
They went to heaven via the shadow of loneliness.

This is a pinch from my note of tears  
To reveal what lies beyond the silent night.  
Many live with cacophonies in the library of their soul, with  
None to read meaning to silence from the noise of their night.

‘Note of tears’ is the lamentations that comes  
From the suns buried in the lonely night,  
Via the shore of silent nights.  
For I am their voice. I speak in their tongue.

## BEYOND THE SILENT NIGHT

*by Okeme James Jerome*

Many have roamed in the darkest path of pain  
With the hope of gazing upon a flickering light,

*The Train Stops at Sunset*

And lingered in the tunnel of a promise so bright  
Only to realize that that light was an incoming train.  
They were pierced to the bone like with many arrows  
With blows from the hands that promised something sweet.  
Their hearts were flooded with many sorrows,  
But they danced in the rain to hide their tears in it.

They wore smiling masks  
Like a fixed portray smile.  
They clapped with blistered hands  
And quenched their thirst with their very own tears.

What lies beyond the silent night  
If not rays from a smiling light?  
What lies beyond a desired plight  
If not attaining a dreamt height?

The louder the silence became,  
The thicker the darkness became.  
Silent nights,  
Deafening silence!

What lies beyond the silent night  
If not rays from a smiling light?

## TEMPEST

*by Aremu Adams Adebisi*

When night ensnares her subtle plows upon the roused  
heads  
and shadows fleeting to and fro assume conflicting dreads,  
then silence runs and blares among the piercing squeals and  
shrills  
that fetter inconceivably and send down shivering chills...  
When boding stars refute the palms with sepia-lining gaze  
and looking moons in transience of the coming of grim days,



while rivers flow in bellied streams that lap at songs of gloom,  
along the terrain of the sky are night wings reeling doom...  
When cauldrons fill the fate of men like cluttered woven mesh  
and souls a tale of glowing bones decaying in the flesh,  
nightmares are logs on heathen hearths that burn without a  
flame.

Each seam of morning's golden fleece is stitched without a  
name...

When echoes ring from ears to ears like wraiths across a blade  
and cast upon a crumbly wall a long, hard, blinded shade,  
and wind bemoans in suppressed whoosh of graves with finely  
breath

among today's— tomorrow's men, oblivious of the death,  
when essence sleeps in melody that strikes in chords of moans  
and holiness is nothing but a farce that drags on groans,  
stick some little truth to truism, for life is overused  
and every ethic eating deep is knowledge newly fused.

When night bears down her chilliness, I'll plead my precious  
case,

that righteousness to fellowmen and goodness to the race.

Perhaps to dawn my abode calls to intransigent bliss,  
free from chills and gritting teeth that bind a man to hiss.

## WHAT LIES BEYOND THE SILENT NIGHT

*by Olufunmilola Olubunmi Adeniran*

You know, I don't, what lies beyond.

You've seen, I've not, what's true.

You were, I am, right here on earth.

You sleep, I live, for now.

I feel, you don't, the sun and rain.

I run, you rest, we act.

I taste, you may recall the tastes.  
I sing, you hear, the songs.

You danced, a time ago, and now  
I dance for you and I.  
You loved, I love, and still I love.  
You feared, my fear, of death.

I loathe, you wear, the cloak of night.  
I worry, you wonder, why?  
I aspire, you pursued, life's endless trap.  
I breathe, you've ceased, all life.

You're stuck beyond the realm I know.  
You've seen both sides of time  
You try, I believe, to tell me true.  
You're there, I'm here, you can't.

I'll wonder, you know, if life goes on.  
I've read, we'll live again.  
I've heard, we rot, right where we're lain.  
Or wait the trumpet's call

You're certain, what lies beyond the night.  
What happens, when we die?  
You're sure, I only speculate.  
Who knows, we don't, you do.

## WHAT LIES BEYOND THE SILENT NIGHT

*by Alfred Marshal Offei*

I do not know what lies beyond  
The silent night of lonely heights,  
For I have never dared to travel

Down the borderline of distant Islands  
Where peace like a river will attend to my soul.

What I solemnly do know,  
As the Knight of the Black Star,  
Is the hope that lies before the hills of my bright path.

Though I may fall to my knees,  
The ground will never kiss my back,  
For I shall rise daily, looking onwards  
Through the ethereal blueprints of my thoughts,  
Fighting fearlessly like the Odysseus warrior  
On this battlefield of life's adventure.

The sacred sword shall become  
Our creed of Powerful words  
Cutting through thick bars of iron  
And inspiring generations yet unborn.

Then at last, we will gladly lie  
In the pantheon of those Legends gone ahead of us,  
Knowing deeply that what lies beyond the silent night  
Is the evergreen fragrance of the eternal principles  
Of Love, Beauty and Justice.

## BEYOND THE SILENT NIGHT

*by Iliya Kambai Dennis*

There is a home for dead petals after a full-yellow sun,  
Where faces of corpses are not tired of walking or working:  
An endless day of light without a full or half-yellow sun.  
Home of angelic pasta, that satisfy our earthly hunger,  
Filled with dead petals brought back alive with immortality.  
Home of angelic voices, echoing the walls of its world.  
There is a home for broken pearls in transition of after-life.  
After an endless night's sleep, we won't see the death of a full

moon.

An unfading beauty will prevail over our eyes with clusters of flying stars.

This is a place where children become their father's parents,  
And parents becoming their children's offspring is no abomination.

Like a man walking with a third leg would ask,

How long beyond the silent night,

Before I see this impeccable light?

This I will tell my father in his sleep beyond the walls:

Calm yourself like the fireworks of Gandalf and sleep long.

I assure you of beautiful thorns along the path but,

Because I can do it, you can do it.

And to my mother I will say: take me back to thy womb.

Reborn in me, the chanted fire of the chariot of fire,

Never to stumble, fumble or fall.

Yes, beyond the silent night, lies a light I long to see.

But they say I cannot see this light until I romance

With the thighs of death, kiss her lips, wear her garment.

That until I smooch her breasts, sleep with her

In her endless night, beyond the silent night

Will only be a stillborn shadow.

## NOT THE END

*by Olaitan Bernice Adejumo*

Death...

are you an end

or a pole holding two ends?

I ponder over this little dearth

of thought that keeps you thinking too.

We sing tears of the end from our tearing end  
of shattered dreams and bones scattered on streets  
clothed with ashes of burnt memories,  
a sleep forgetful of dawn,  
raiding innocence with dryness in the valley of shadows...

Dark mornings, silent nights....  
A voice unheard that groans and whispers  
beneath the intense rivers of thought  
cut off from its bank,  
and rides the soul into stark muteness.

Death...if you were the end,  
would haste hasten your feet  
to the race you must but run,  
leaving us with imprint of path trodden?

In between your thighs lies uncertainty  
with the certainty that darkness buries itself  
into the pools of the night  
for a long swim, to awaken brightness  
into a NEW MORNING.

## WALK WITH ME

*by Theophilus 'Femi Alawonde*

Come,  
let's go together  
on this last walk,  
the beginning of another journey.

Give me your palm  
that I have always wanted  
and let's walk, eyes closed,  
into what awaits us  
beneath the river.

Come,  
for the fear of the unknown  
is nothing but fear itself.  
So let's go and find for ourselves  
what we always hear,  
disjointed information and misinformation.

Come,  
delay not.  
It has always been your joy to explore with me.  
Let this be no different.

come,  
as we close our eyelids  
and spread our lips  
in this death.