



# **TOWARDS A BEAUTIFUL BECOMING**

Top 20 poems of the Brigitte Poirson Poetry Contest (BPPC) August/September 2020.

Brigitte Poirson  
Kukogho Iruesi Samson

*Other books in the series:*

Wind of Change (2015)

Loops of Hope (2016)

The Train Stops at Sunset (2017)

Citadel of Words (2018)

Vortices of Verses (2019)

# TOWARDS A BEAUTIFUL BECOMING

TOP 20 POEMS OF THE  
BRIGITTE POIRSON POETRY CONTEST (BPPC)  
AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2020

Edited by  
BRIGITTE POIRSON  
KUKOGHO IRUESIRI SAMSON



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## INTRODUCTION

### *Towards a Beautiful Becoming...*

It is refreshing to read through the lines in this excellent chapbook, which presents the poets' main concerns and reveals the main aspects of their poetic minds. The poets, through their verses, prove the eternal truth: that words and expression are very important.

Many of the poets that entered for this edition have proven their creativity. However, I noticed that some poets used wrong sentence structures, weird choice of words, and a strange kind of lineation – sort of formatted mathematically, as if to get lines of equal length, irrespective of the derivable meanings. It seems the only concern of these poets is originality at any price.

This is the last edition for the 2020 season. I appreciate all the poets that entered for any of the editions. I urge you all to keep writing and honing your craft because the 2021 edition will soon be here.

Brigitte Poirson  
*October 2020*

## AUGUST/SEPTEMBER WINNERS

Martins Deep is a Nigerian poet, photographer and author of [\*A Sheaf of Whispering Leaves, a poetry chapbook\*](#). He is passionate about documenting muffled stories of the African experience in his poetry & visual art. His works have appeared in several Nigerian and international literary platforms.



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OJO ADEWALE IYANDA is a Nigerian poet and native of Oshogbo, Osun State. He studied Applied Chemistry at The Polytechnic Ibadan. His writings have appeared on several platforms.



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JAMIU AHMED is a Lagos based Nigerian writer and blogger. He has several works featured on digital literary platforms. His writings have also performed well in competitions organised by Poets in Nigeria (PIN) and Word Rhymes and Rhythm.





## TOWARDS A BEAUTIFUL BECOMING

Martins Deep, 1<sup>st</sup> Prize Winner

I want to bleed acrylic onto the palette of hope.  
I want to watch her paint on the pall of fear  
the imagery of me as a boy lengthening his tongue to trap eavesdrops  
to dull the aftertaste of his stepmom's acrid breast milk.

I want to inhale songs of giant shrikes  
Against the crows echoing endless dirges in my chest.  
Their sentence: death by impalement on thorns that grew from the soil  
where I sowed seeds of tears and sweat.

I want to exhale songs of nightingales from my ribcage  
to burst into songs on my lips and hair.  
For the enanga in their beaks  
pluck strings disentangled from this noose dangling down my ceiling fan.

I want to stand on the headstone of doubt  
and stretch towards father's god  
to shred the veil over his face,  
to wash scales off my eyes, as I dance in this August rain,  
so I can find his fingerprints on the script of life.

I want to weep acrylic onto the palette of joy,  
and on the fog before me, watch her paint me  
in the fragile body of a girl sucking illumination from her wounds  
to light up every household lamp

## THE ART OF BURNING

Jamiu Ahmed, 2<sup>nd</sup> Prize Winner

Yesterday, father got lost in his father's shadow.  
Today, I'm tracing father's path down to the foundry.

In starless nights aflame with only fireworks,  
unwilling logs blazing inside the hearthstone,  
my dreams are cinders; oxygen kept them alive.

To shield the dying flame from Life's windy bluff,  
I swallow the fragments of the smouldering coal.  
I read "How to escape fire" with a twined tongue.  
My ardor fumes from the chimney like smoke  
and becomes 'bon voyage' prayers billowing up.  
How do I leave home, while fiery fire flares  
on the roof without burning the whole city?

Under the skin-tearing rays of the raging sun,  
I trudge down into the belly of Ladipo-Lagos:  
where missing men melt metals for mad men,  
where boys' brittle bones crackle in the furnace.

Father's words become a hammer hitting my skull:  
"Man must be steel with high tensile strength."  
Maybe life is for the metals with staple fibre jacket  
and living is for boys burning as fuel in base-burners,  
as incense of a cedar tree dying to give light and aura.

I enter the hearth to melt into a titanium dragon.  
Now I stutter and exhale fire after every volatile word,  
coals burn inside me, while I walk in an invisible smoke.  
Like a ticking bomb, Home awaits the blow-up news.  
Survival is an art for lone boys burning into iron gods.

## WHERE DO DEAD DREAMS LIVE?

Ojo Adewale Iyanda, 3<sup>rd</sup> Prize Winner

This is the song of the morning  
I will sing with hoarse voice,  
With pregnant eyes and desert lips,  
Till my mouth is painted with silence.

This is a dance of pleasant confusion.  
I found myself wallowing in the billows of worries.  
How can I start a journey  
From the point of unlike routes that repel?

My heart beats the drum of pondered thoughts  
To hear the sound of truths and echoes of mystery.  
I want to know where dead dreams live.  
Maybe there is a mortuary in the soul of their carrier.

This is my conclusion:  
Dreams can cash in their chips,  
But dead dreams don't die.  
They stay behind as ruins,.  
As onerous medals sashed around the neck  
Of men living in a regret painted with green and white.

They are without graves, walking to and fro.  
Dead dreams are leaders armed with a constitution in the capital  
And everything we have done wrong.

They will endure till we sing them into oblivion  
With spirited voice and holistic action,  
Till we understand living dreams won't come forth  
If they don't hear the voice of truth and the beat of freedom

## WHEN AN ASYMMETRIC ANIMAL BECOMES THE EARTH

OLADIMEJI ADAM ADEDAYO

1

We find ourselves blanched of all colorations,  
Like a coven of chromatophore-less chameleons,  
At the tail of the civil coin, milling in millions  
And nodding to the flogging of our fatal rations!

2

Perhaps, like a ballistic obedience to gravity,  
We have landed on this anal insulated cemetery  
Of a side---of this earth's disproportional symmetry---  
By a prior toss; however, we adhere like wall to graffiti.

3

We feel we are furls of 'gardened' buds, peering at the vale,  
Clenched as Scrooge's fist ... Plastic as metals.  
We feel we bear colours of fanning out our petals,  
Brave in cast and coloration, like a courting peacock's tail.

4

We feel we bear colours of translating our dreams  
Of pollens into fruits!, through the brinness  
Of our oceanic guttation. We feel we bear the finesse  
To sail the mean meanders of this vale's devious streams!

5

But when an asymmetric animal becomes the earth---  
A denervated mater---reined by the carriers  
Of an evil infection, we soon catch the barrier  
Rifting it unevenly, like a diaphragm, into Life and Death!

6

And so, we find ourselves 'secluded' on Death's side,  
Where our etiolated shoots bend away---like the Hebrew  
When their human compass went askew---  
From being robbed of the welkin's eye. Yet, we abide!

7

For we are incalculable caterpillars growing into gossamer butterflies,  
Or into the leaden fabrics of calloused moths, as agog  
As would come the radial incursion of Gog and Magog!

## STYX'S CYCLE

AYODELE AYOOLOWATOMIWA RACHEL

A pale moon's wink foreruns endless doom.  
Desperation is its core, in looming gloom.

Doom seeds Gaia; she births such heirloom;  
Out comes the first, bursting with a bound  
To strike his gurgling kin to a yawning wound.  
Its first step, in seconds, mars all around.  
Its mission - confusion dished - with distress does abound.  
Its names: Chaos and Mayhem and Hound.

Doom gaze roves. Hellstar is the new breeding ground.  
Her offspring, a loon. Its stalk, Earth's bane.  
A mangled mutt on mangled limbs lain.  
Skillfully, it drives man insane,  
Corrupting souls for a mediocre gain.  
Its names: Sinful and Whorish and Cain.

Doom finds in Lilith balsam for pain;  
And like punch drunk, Echo obsesses.  
In her masochistic ways it prowls.  
A fiend they make. Gluttonous, its victims it flairs,  
Shiny, enticing, and gobbles its preys.  
Its names: Envy and Ichor and Sloth.

Soon Doom flees, then sights Eva in white caul.  
It coos, a maiden to woo.  
Her valiant heart is dressed in horror's hue.  
Her will smartens its core strong and true.  
Her progenies in tow, her victory will ensue.  
Eva's offspring, they hoped to screw.

Beware mortals, the hour is nigh.

## OF THINGS TOO HEAVY FOR ONE BODY TO CARRY ALONE

SABUR ADEDOKUN

And of the things that are too heavy for one body to carry alone  
is loss, too heavy for one city to cradle to chest; loss, a swamp  
too muddy for one country to call their own without sinking too deep  
for the first alphabet to cross the border to other places

So, can we call the names of all brothers and sisters  
to ask for a share of their loss, to call this a new kind of feasting,  
to dice this grief into cubes so little that each guest at the table  
can swallow them like a bitter pills, and that is the end?

Can we read the names of brothers and sisters who drown at sea  
as if the sea is our own, as if the salt stings our eye the same,  
as if the country they are running from is a place at the core of our heart,  
as if it is our grandmother who stays back home and prays?

Can we say that a noose around the neck of one man is a chain  
that locks all our necks together? Can we all stick our bodies together  
to wait for death when he pushes the stool off?  
Can we call his death our death? Can we say his story is ours too?

Rabbee, all the children that came to face their killers,  
can we say we are their fathers now? Can we listen for their scream?  
Can we say that our children would scream the same way, then fall  
silent the same? Can we own the scream and the silence that follows it?

Can we move beyond putting ourselves in  
People's shoes? But rather let the shoe be our own too?

## MAN CAST INTO THE IMAGE OF FIRE

IBIKUNLE AISHA

His voice is the roaring fire  
Spewing from a dragon's mouth,  
Sizzling your slender soul.  
His voice is the crackle of fireworks  
Illuminating the light living within.

His touch is a fire brand  
Searing scars on your skin.  
His touch is warmth wafting from the fireplace,  
Painting fiery butterflies on your skin.

His gaze is a smoldering flame  
Caressing the contours of curvy maidens.  
His gaze is a lingering spark of  
Love living in the wideness of his stare  
Where you find a home.

His dreams are infernos.  
A blazing, brash, bush fire.  
His dreams are embers  
Waning, a withering, wispy thing.

A man is liquid metal cast  
Into the image of a fire.  
A man is conflagration on a leash  
in all its gory glory.

## WHERE WE GO WHEN WE FALL ASLEEP

ADENIRAN JOSEPH

we go there, from here  
to nowhere, from somewhere, we lift there  
to somewhere, after here, back then, from here  
we carry our guts there, from here, to there  
as we trace back our hands to nowhere; with this  
dream, from here, to there; while there, we crash  
into pieces of little imperfection, from there, we run  
to somewhere, still there, mother said, we are off, from there:  
father said, we are off-alive here, but we are still breathing  
from there, sounding like drums hitting towards the marketplace  
we are still here: vibrating to the rhythm of mother's shout, from there  
we place our hands on our chest, from here, naming bodies,  
from here, when we sleep: we go somewhere, from there, it ends here—  
nowhere.



## WHO I AM

### AKOR AGADA NATHANIEL

I prefer speaking out instead of eating silence as a balance diet.  
It is time to beat overgrown babies that backbite  
With words from a pen that refuses to be quiet.  
The path of the contrite is constructed with laterite.  
I have nothing to do with the holiness of a hypocrite,  
Because I always look inward to break my granite.

My name is Agada, the David who killed that bear  
When Cowards drank deadly chemicals ending their existence in fear.  
Shouting my worth for the world to hear  
Is an incantation for any foe threatening with a spear.  
My desire is to impregnate every itching ear  
For enchanted eyes to shed no single tear.

Balak's bounties can never buy me like Balaam,  
Because I see myself as a living Adam,  
A blessing like the Kainji dam.  
Callous critics may bleat like a crying ram,  
The world may call me William or Mallam,  
I am fulfilled to know who I am.

My Pen ministers to warring men playing with knives.  
Let it be recorded in the archives,  
For tomorrow to buzz tales like beehives,  
How a mortal man came to save lives,  
Sticking words in the anus of time that still thrives  
On human beings, until they reach afterlives.

## EPITHALAMIUM FOR THE WATER SPIRIT BRIDE

HUSANI ABDULRAHMIN

Were the tears and dirges of mourners chrysanthemums  
hailing on your lush coiffure and lilac laurels  
leaguings at your feet, while you headed to the harmony room  
with the souls you stole?

Were whimpers of mothers a feverish buzz of talking drums  
as you went to the sacred ground of marital vows  
via a retinue of tilapia-toothed vassals who eagerly offered  
their throats to veil the blade of your glory?

Are you the offspring of Oba and Osun's fallout advancing  
their mission into tributaries where mothers, who whisper  
your name behind closed doors like a dreaded rebel — a mark  
of terror in the hearts of tendrils who autograph earth with first  
footprints – long, with outstretched arms, to groom their incursions?

Is the Creole of love in the water-world deception  
a coded migraine-tongue, while the stampede of mournful voices  
wreaks havoc in the medullae of men?

Were you the mastermind of shipwrecks of vessels  
to whom black backs were sold to rhythms of clanking chains  
after washing bloody hands at the attenuation well,  
as a spite spat on the green greed of cursed souls?

Were the clashing currents, after the deluge, your loving hands  
pulling the boys we lost underneath to floating castles  
bejewelled with corals, oyster shells and shark teeth?

You, who've tied knots with these souls, what more  
do you want with sloughs of boys whose mothers  
now cork sleep in bottled vigils of tears and grief?

## THE VISION SONG

AJAYI MARY AYOBAMI

People wonder how my visions believe in me.  
I am not a decorated writer.  
Nor am I molded to hold the entire writing world  
In my hands.  
But when I start to sing my song,  
They think I am a gong.  
I sing.  
Resilience is my South, North, East, and West.  
It is my morning, noon, evening, and midnight rest.  
I marry myself to opportunities never guessed,  
To can-do spirit, never-give-up snippet,  
To see my vision in a magnifying glass,  
And beat reality drums for my song.

I run into obstacles,  
As many as possible.  
Vicious vision stalkers swarm around me  
Like battalions of soldier ants.  
They tap my pressure walls.  
They warm up the cold fibres of uncertainty in me.  
I sing.  
Failing may be part of the process.  
Uncertainties may be in excess.  
Hopelessness may be running wild.  
Confusion may flap my wings.  
Yet I make myself impregnate tenacity,  
Wink at the stick-to-it spirit,  
Embrace always-try spirit,  
And perform a positive, spirited dance  
For my song.

## MA'S PRAYERS AS RECIPE FOR HEALING

ABUBAKR SADIQ

This poem opens in Grandma's eyes.  
On tv, a boy kneels on the ground above his dead mother.  
Grief folds deep into his face; we mistake it for his birthmark.  
Grandma curves her palms into twin crescents,  
whispers litanies on them till her lips parch into deserts.  
In her prayers, life crawls back into breathless souls in Beirut.  
We unmeet two women burying body parts of their children.  
Tears roll back into their eyes; beams break from the hems of their faces.  
We unsee a man get burned for wearing his melanin out too loud.  
Our tongues learn a language without a word for gloom.  
We misname our sorrow. It crimson into joy on our cheekbones.  
We pray into the night, until blue devils cleave from our spirits.  
The world gathers in Grandma's hands to stitch its bruises.  
Our fingers squeeze laughter into our mouths.  
We bend like shadows in midnight sun.  
She straightens her palms; they melt into water.  
Grief unfolds from the boy's face, and mirth swells in its place.  
A boy runs to hug a woman on the ground.  
Her mouth narrows into a prayer.  
This poem opens into a nirvana in my grandma's eyes.  
Like our search for happiness, this poem is without an end,  
this poem is without an...

## WHERE ARE WE HEADING TO?

### OYEDOKUN PENAWD IBUKUN

Life is but the shade of a palm tree.  
We get gold from any waste bin.  
Along the line of fist fetching feast,  
We trade the map for milk and honey.  
Our world now falls apart in different routes.  
But please, where are we heading to?

My father bears no name in your lineage,  
So you deny me a land in your village.  
Before you open arms to give me an embrace,  
You must withdraw to check the color of my race.  
I remember how Adisa was unable to marry Flora  
Just because he is the synonym of church rat.  
We forget that, no matter our diversity in color and cowry,  
With dust we were made, to dust we will decay.  
So, where are we heading to?

Lads and lasses now feed on enmity.  
One is to retain his father's name far and within;  
Another is to end it up in her head's kitchen.  
So Victoria will drop out for Victor,  
As if she is not also of a brighter future.  
We drive off her career like a car,  
Forgetting both genders have humanity to bear.  
But if life's puzzle refuses to balance these two,  
Please, where are we heading to?

Until this race of life places unity over diversity,  
Until we see humanity before differences,  
I ask, where are we heading to?

## LAST BREATH TO MY DAUGHTER'S QUERIES

FATIMATU IBRAHIM

Voyeurism guffaws at the pauper,  
Callous moguls feed on murder,  
Eerie dudes munch on muff,  
What else would an inebriate author do?!  
Pardon me, my fairy fille.  
Hedonism waded into mayhem,  
Wit rummaged the miasma, but couldn't discern.  
I gave you the role of a villain,  
For I was treated as an alien  
and cast out for being an alienee.  
Pardon me, my fairy fille.  
Agony licks my mirth,  
Queasiness douses me into aphasia,  
Comeuppance throws me into throes,  
What else would an inebriate author do?  
Pardon me, my fairy fille.  
Society made me an author, and I gave you the role.  
Pardon me, my fairy fille.

1. *Fille: Daughter*

## PRAISE FOR LAGOS

ABDULBASEET YUSUFF

This city rouses before the sun blinks its eyelids  
and takes its bath before dew licks the blades  
of the elephant grass in the backyard.

This city wakes to the roaring of yellow danfos  
and yawns before the muezzin's cry pierces the sky  
from tall, pointy minarets.

This city pours into the streets like an avalanche,  
like a colony of ants marching on a  
sugar trail. This city is for fervour.

This city makes Babel bow to its rainbow of dialects  
and paints Saturdays into crackling carnivals  
of agbada and ankara, peppered beef and highlife.

This city defines defiance – the woman selling akara  
watches, smoke in the eye, suits and neckties endure the pelting rain,  
listens to a conductor bellowing destinations like anthems.

This city is a sanctuary for dreams,  
a city of sea, salt, sweat and songs,  
of swagger and savvy. This is Lagos:

a city of buzzing bazaars and of the bizarre.  
Show me the ocean that can drink this city's fire,  
show me the drum that can silence this its beat.

This city blankets the sun in nightly clouds  
and watches the Atlantic heave in somnolence.  
This city! This Lagos! Èkó ò ní bàjé <sup>1</sup>

1. Èkó ò ní bàjé — popular Lagos saying meaning "Lagos will not spoil"

## SEASON RATTLE

### NKET-AWAJI ALPHEAUS

The tree that wants  
to retain her old leaves  
is nascent to the volition of the season.

Cuddled under nature's breast,  
it will rattle a monotonous rasp  
for the requiem of withering.

But here, veiled in the ritual,  
butterflies scour where to nestle  
as Wuhan wind rasps their wings.

We are averse to slaking desert roots  
with an antidote irrigation,  
without beetles for mulch.

Cankers furrow the bowels of trees,  
whilst power-wilted boughs  
Are riven by synthesized squalls.

Frail-rooted flowers fall  
off winds wafted from China  
and wind-milled in the mind.

The tree and the soil  
sway in season's syringe-edge,  
oblivious of who rattles who.



## ACOLYTE

ILIYA KAMBAI DENNIS

I am a cup  
Of gods and divinity.  
I pour libation and drips with dexterity,  
Stretch from the tinge of love  
Curated by fire.  
My mouth gulps water  
Down the streamline of essence;  
Laden. Soft. Silky. Milky.  
I am not a child, only an instrument  
Of gods and divinity –  
Truthful. Chaste. Subtle.

I am a kindergarten.  
My belly is full of names and memories  
Of loving children searching for space  
Between the shadows of nothingness,  
Transcending beyond closed vacuums.

I am a river  
Travelling to places of sweetness and stings  
To fend flowers,  
Only with a few kisses.

I am a prayer  
From your mother's lips  
Whispering through your ears,  
Tickling your skin  
In your nightmare.

## ALHAMDULILLAH

OLAJUWON ADEDOKUN ABDULLAH

Because women in veils speak too loud to be heard,  
your daughter, Haneefah, ties her burqa the right way,  
spaces over mouth and eyes closed.  
So when she hears your neighbour mutter ojuju,  
she can pray that the sun sets before it's whisked off her face.

Black is too distressing for painted women.  
She wears white,  
a netted jilbaab flowing down to her ankles.  
But before she drops the bomb in the market,  
in the crowded mall,  
someone who knows the smell of burnt bodies  
will yank it off her.

Dead bodies dance in my paintings these days.  
Sometimes I want to draw a plane tucked under a jilbab,  
but there are no canvasses big enough  
to house burning twin towers  
or a man hiding guns in his beards.

Alhamdulillah, that I do not have to translate this.  
Alhamdulillah, that your daughter learns this before my sister does.  
So when I bury her head in my chest to muffle her cries,  
it's because the language of masquerades is different from yours

### Notes:

Alhamdulillah— All praise is to Allah, All thanks is to Allah

Ojuju— Masquerade

Burqa— A veil Muslim women use to cover their faces

Jilbaab— Flowing gown Muslim women wear

POLISHED WORDS

SAMUEL OLAWALE OGUNYINKA

Sir,

you have the right  
to keep talking  
because

every words  
left unsaid  
shall be  
used

against you  
in the law  
of court-ship

now  
move on  
run your mouth and  
never you try to act boring

you are under her-rest.

## MAGUMERI

OLAEWE DAVID OPEYEMI

With every fresh piece of news, our eardrums  
get thicker with wax. Calloused by sediments

of calcium that would have once wrecked them to slivers.  
Bloodshed is losing its dread,

mourning the colours that once made it crouch  
on the cover pages of newspapers, and renounced

its pertinence to a land getting immune to blood rituals.  
Yesterday, Magumeri crept into the news again,

like Metele. Like Kukawa. Like Baga.  
Mutated militias, technically defeated, stormed the village

and left tongues sour again with tales of destruction.  
The land was littered with heaps of ashes:

a mother swam out of her body while racing to wake her son,  
a father's head was detached from his neck;

By the fury of the gun, a harvest of boys relinquished  
to replenish a dwindling reservoir,  
girls were forced to service the killers of their fathers.

I heard the sun was ashamed to shine in the morning,  
children search for the headgears of their mothers  
under the rubbles bequeathed by bombs.

Elsewhere, everyone goes to the streets,  
unperturbed. Ears deflect the news of terror like lead shields.

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

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