

WE BREAK INTO POEMS LIKE GLASS

TOP 20 POEMS OF THE BRIGITTE POIRSON
POETRY CONTEST (BPPC) APRIL / MAY 2021



Edited By
BRIGITTE POIRSON
KUKOGHO IRUESIRI 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)
A Pandemia of Poetry (2020)

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INTRODUCTION

The April-March winners have churned out outstanding pieces about the glass ceiling - including many who did not make it to the winning list, but may break this other ceiling another time. The theme invited them to deal with touchy issues, namely sexism (a close relation to racism), stifling social norms, dependence or stigmatization, as well as opposition, emancipation or equality, under various angles.

Rising above prejudices, the poets have aired their views in original lines liable to make societies move an inch further towards justice. A general acknowledgement of "The Female Man", according to Joanna Russ, may then be looming in the horizon. Well done.

Brigitte Poirson
May 2021

APRIL/MAY 2021 WINNERS



ZAKIYYAH DZUKOGI is a published Nigerian writer. She authored her first book, *My Book of Poems*, aged 10. Zakiyyah is the winner of the Nigeria Prize for Teen Authors, Poetry 2021. Her 2021 poetry collection, *CARVED*, emerged 1st-runner-up at the maiden edition of the Prize in 2020 as a manuscript. Zakiyyah is a member of the Hill-Top Creative Arts Foundation and a certified accountability ambassador. She has works published or forthcoming in several Nigerian and international literary platforms and has featured on several literary panels.

IFUNANYA JULIET OTTIH is a Nigerian writer, poet, storyteller, content creator, copywriter, public speaker and researcher. She has her works published in the Nigerian Students Poetry Prize (NSPP) 2020 Anthology, *Kalahari review*, *Youth Magazine* and was longlisted for the 2020 PIN Annual Food Poetry Contest. She is a 2018 finalist of the World Youth Essay Competition (WYEC).



HUSSANI ABDULRAHIM, a Pure Chemistry graduate from Usmanu Danfodio University Sokoto, is the winner of the 2019 Poetically Written Prose Contest. A semi-finalist for Boston Review's 2019 Aura Estrada Short Story Contest and shortlisted for the 2019 ACT Award. His works have appeared at Boston Review, 20:35 Africa, Praxis Magazine and elsewhere. He believes that words have the power to heal the world of its numerous ills.

MAD COLOUR

ZAKIYYAH DZUKOGI, 1ST PRIZE WINNER

I have suffused with colour
words within a thin voice
sizzled by the cinnamon
dense under my tongue.
We may be pawns
in our own parcel
of today's maybe,
cold dreams and swears,
and as glasses
we break into poems
like an already cracked egg
doffed off from a wailing flower.
Give a smack
to tomorrows' scrabble
which gleams
like a coloured plate
in the half of a night.
Between the teeth
of the earliest mornings
are frowns we left
in the middle of night,
fumes that stink only in the mornings.
If we hadn't heard voices
when the doors twitched,
we wouldn't have known
the demons in our paintings
are real.

THE HEELS WILL CLIMB

IFUNANYA JULIET OTTIH, 2ND PRIZE WINNER

At Amanze, a girl is cast into oblivion,
Her throat turns to ashes when she tries to puff clout

On the forehead of a boy. She dare not raise her hand in public.
A snail she is in multiflorous wrappings –beauty, purity. -

So she must crawl beside doors and in a wall with blurry letters
So as not to impede the vigour of the boy.

In this place, Abuoma tries to flush her dreams down her father's throat,
Munches the name that has saturated her in a languorous mist
And washed her skin with the same dream as the boy's.
She treads on the alley with him and raises her eyes when she speaks,
But she is branded "*ashawo, onye iberibe, nwaanyi agaghi alu, ome ka nwoke...*"

She sniffs them all in, but refuses to be blank,
And instead chants this hymn along with them,
Her hands clenched onto her dreams, strolling gradually into her own tide.
She knows she will have to learn to live here where her steps will be mocked,
But is poised to reject every badge of shame.

THE GHOSTS OF SIX CHIBOK GIRLS MEET AT A BANQUET

HUSSANI ABDULRAHIM, 3RD PRIZE WINNER

Prologue: We had despair for tea,
a dessert of melancholia,
and wine glasses filled with ruthless memoirs.
Our bellies are rounded...

Girl #1: Grief was the noose that set my mother loose
after me. There is no soul in our house now.

Girl #2: How do you place a bouquet of tears
for your love submerged in a mass grave?

Girl #3: Three men with the eyes of my father
took me into the dark;
My screaming did not stop them.

Girl #4: I had a bastard who'll probably lay lands to waste;
My eyes were sealed before I could touch him.

Girl #5: The night we became thorns,
I listened to the madih nabawi of a renowned Sufi,
I prayed,
Bullets answered.

Girl #6: How I wish I could hug my mother once more,
and croon of my deep affection.

Epilogue: Let's sleep now. Let's sleep.
What more can we do?.

WINDOW SHOPPING

BAYOWA, AYOMIDE

As long as we know our place, our men are side mirrors.
But you see, from the other side, where they don't believe
in darkness, as we do,
their men are supremely fused sand, soda, and lime,
from which our women get these starchy slurs.

But you see, from the other side, where they don't believe
in darkness, as we do,
they make a dummy of our women and view them by glasses
of stagnant things all-dressed up to promote napkins-on-sale.
Ages may pass- that they won't move nor outgrow the show glass.

From which our women get these starchy slurs:
mammy- with sons unbred to run a Grand Theft Auto
matriarch- androgynous, with their men's bones to teeth,
welfare mom- of a dozen mammary glands and puppies support claims.

They make a dummy of our women and view them by glasses
like the firmament does to the sea by a racial Karman line.
Research says unfed genes hinder height growth
so that the theory doesn't enable our women's upward mobility.

I don't have to, these comparisons draw themselves-
on a one-by-a million-inch joist of nailed martyrs.
Of a brown woman so gorgeous that she moulders in crumbs-
of boys imagining an invasion of figurines in whatever market.
Of something weak. Nasty like dandruff or deadly like sickle cell.
Of high heels not tall enough to reach a cupboard's top.

I don't buy that this is what being free from cliché
should be all about.
& how won't they see all women this same way?

A RANDOM WISH OF GLASS-BREAKERS LIKE ME.

TESTIMONY AKINKUNMI

She was shiny dark with a few shy excursions into orange.
Her hard-earned results were a taboo breaker.

All she desired was to be a caveat in a male's temple,
To become a priest of excellence, dressed in skirt.

But to be burdened, to be a trailblazer was something new.
A threat of female blood for bounty disturbed her dreams.

/

This is my dream, let me show you.
It is a bright random wish of glass-breakers like me.

And yet our hands might not reach the ceiling
With this chivalrous glaze glass it has possessed.

All we must do is speak Words that shake foundations.

/

I needed her to know being excommunicated once was enough.
Twice a taboo. Thrice, she had committed a verboten.

Yet her army grew stronger, ever nearer to the glass ceiling
Their weapons weren't iron, but the legendary glass-breaker.

/

Let us join like tributaries, our union genderless
And with words and actions bringdown this artificial sky.

Don't watch the floating feathers. Flow to our core.
For it will trick you into thinking we are also feathers.

/

Together, we fought on the raised altar.
Our words a blend of missing parts

//

And we shredded into pieces the corporate ceiling.
Burying it forever where it cannot rise.

QUEEN OF KINGS

AKOR AGADA NATHANIEL

This brave mother has always been a spider
Whose spinful slips spurs her to strive harder
To climb the apex of life's ladder as a people builder,
Setting the pace rather than settling down as a spectative cheer leader.

Like the super eagle, she conquered her pains to count her gains,
Breaking the crazy clouds to beat the roaring rain,
While the world wondered how she climbed the tallest mountains
To stand where gods became waterfalls praying to be born again.

The first time she made her first billions,
Her fame travelled far, overwhelming other lionesses living in other
bourdillions.
Two or more tabloids even claimed she slept with some drug barons
That sold her soul to Satan, the head of all demons.

She knew that her successes made enemies and drove many nuts
Because a huge percentage of people hate what they are not,
A star sparkling with Ngozi Okonjo's grits and Samia Suluhu's guts
Re-writing the narratives bedevilling a gender robbed of her rightful spot.

Her battles still rage like wrestling winds spiking her very being,
But she has since evolved into that queen of kings,
Distilling doubts in the daring dreams of today's darling teens,
Building heaven in the weirdest hell the world has ever seen.

THE WORLD NEEDS YOU

OGEDENGBE TOLULOPE IMPACT

I

Who says women are only weaker vessels
And cannot rise to the echelon of success without testicles?
I swear, in my country there are many riding at the pinnacles.

Who says feminism is a threat to leadership
And that a woman cannot captain the power ship?
Believe me, Ngozi Okonjo Iweala has unzipped the locked lip.

Who says sexism makes a man superior in gender
And that a woman cannot sit on the throne of power?
Hear me, Samia Hassan now governs the affairs of Tanzania.

Wait, have you ever listened to Oprah Winfrey,
To a phenomenal woman blossoming in fragrances of beauty?
Perhaps you can tell why the caged bird sings in Maya's poetry.

ii

You see, in our world today the narrative of servitude is changing
As women in their regimens now break the glass ceiling
Which hindered many promising female folks from rising.

And while voices filled with flaws of feminism fill the air,
Kamala Harris is up there at the helm of U.S political affairs
Leading and inspiring the world with her unique flairs.

Like an eagle, Judy Smith also soared to the peak of prominence,
High above the vengeance of hatred and resurging turbulence,
Breaking limiting barriers and annihilating life's depressing sequence.

III

So arise today and intoxicate your heart with courage,
Casting fear of failure and dread of downfall into bondage!
The world needs you too; don't wait till you are stricken in age!

Shut off the noise that comes from your past failure and defeat
And open the ears of your mind to hear the beat of great feat!
The world needs you now; rise up and break the limit!

TO BE CHRISTENED A NAME THAT BELONGS TO A GIRL

BLESSING OMEIZA OJO

What the clergy preaches withers before dropping on my heart.
He is teaching eternity and I am hunting the Lord's voice
for what he calls the ladder women can't climb
or boys christened a name believed to be for girls.
My father named me Blessing, a constellation of God's gift.
My HOD, unlike my father, doesn't see me as a blessing.
He calls me a hermaphrodite, of faux skin and shape.
And I won't enter his office if I don't grow hips and breasts.
I mean it when I say my name is a border to dreamlands.
A man, faceless, thinks of a curvy girl on hearing my name.
Under a signpost, I watch the sun set in a brewery.
The gatemen says oga is expecting a woman whose body
is a country, whose body is a map to somewhere beautiful.
It's funny how female folks are weaker vessels, unfit to chair
a man's world, yet strong enough to breeze in where men can't.
To be christened a name belonging to a girl is to be bisexual.
And I've tried everything except morphing into a girl the man wants.
I believe, yes, someday, I'll behold God in the form of a man.
I am walking my eyes through the gathered cloud for Him.
I want from Him only the first hailstone that'd break this glass ceiling.

MIGRAINES

SHITTA FARUQ ADÉMÓLÁ

I begin this poem with a cough. A mole
will find pathways in the spaces of my head,
and survive. I'll dry my skin with fire
and name it a new style of smiling. In this type of poem,
a bird is broken in the wing and bruised.
History says there are worms in its cage
that do not levitate joy into its mouth.
I narrate my autobiography with dark songs.
Like this bird, I am a pendant on the neck
of a mad man, dangling towards perdition,
Towards a salvation that does not satiate.
This is how I hold my tongue for the miracle of
writhing. My head aches each time a boy calls me
'leper'. I give my body a new name,
and a new grave. I teach myself how to smile,
although crying is what we worship, a ritual for the gods, here.
I am a banana peel. a waste water. I am not always
the fulfilment of my mother's sweet wishes. this poem
is where confession pours like rain. I won't say a little word less.
I am a cloth dangled on a shark's teeth;
the cold of a gentle night. I shiver. Mind me not, this is what our body
becomes when we are served the meal of a wizard.
I am a castaway in my fatherland. a regurgitation,
a slippery river. This is a poem where God will pour himself
from heaven, and tell me to write more poems, boy.
You do not know which will heal you.

WOMEN SHOULD BE PRISTINE AND PROPER

AKINLUA MERCY OLUWASEUN

I envied my brother or perhaps his most-valued white ball,
For each time I asked to play with his white ball,
He'd shake his round head and say 'go play dress-up'.
I longed to kick it across his room to break father's glass cup
So he got blamed for it, while I got the last laugh.
A girl's got to be pristine and proper, it made me snort aloud.

Chima nodded like an 'agama' that leaped a laudable height
While his cleanly-shaved oily head shone in the sunlight.
Best in mathematic;, the head teacher reeks in pride.
A feat I never dared to dream even if I tried.
Father looked at me as usual and asked how many heads he got.
I see one but it's two, his and the headteacher's, but I speak not.

A drummer, I miss a beat, distort the flow, so I blush.
They rush at me, Alas! They never expected much
And fail not to make it known that I'd never belong.
In retreat, I stalk away, taking the sticks along.
'Drum with your 'Y', I mutter, trying to preserve pieces of my pride.
This destructive sexism ate us from within, so many never again tried.

Yesterday, in the Ife-Ugbo battle, Moremi in bravery roared,
Ending the siege on her people whilst men feared.
Today, in the W.T.O. battle, Ngozi broke limits despite all odds.
She arose damaging this glass ceiling, opening more doors.
Women wage war against systems reeking with entrenched patriarchy
Making equality seem like an overthrow of hierarchy.

The 'female' doctor, they still say,
Perhaps, tomorrow we'll be 'doctors' all the same.
We'll never rest till these ceilings are broken and many have risen.

OF SHATTERED GLASS CEILING

OYEDOKUN IBUKUN STEPHEN

My father's house is a museum of dead dreams
Where walls are adorned with a portrait of gleams.
There's an eagle eye that sees the future from a glass,
The Grey Hair that ensures living ambitions turn carcass.
"So, can anything good come out of Nazareth?",
I asked myself as I journeyed on Earth.

After several feats on the quest for a degree,
A Yes from a University sang me a glee.
I heard my department is a survival of the fittest
For there's a distinct glass which guards every test:
"No one can graduate with a first-class in the Department of English!"
I was close, but this custom I could not abolish.

I engaged in conceiving colourful ideas & yearning for uplift,
Swarm of creatives that till & toil on the pursuit to make ends meet.
But as we unleash the poetry craft in the community,
A precise glass of disinterest haunts our creativity.
Society lauds other forms of entertainment,
While poetry still crawls to maintain its attainment.

Pursuing the passion to push art to the mainstream,
And to flood its free flow like an alluvial stream,
This birthed a media thread to keep lovers of art abreast
With a focus on amassing a conquest & arousing society's interest.
Alas! A certain glass of inconsistency suppressed the initiative
And the brand dragged its feet towards being effective.

So like a David against a Philistine
I gathered stones of prayer & proficiency as my routine
And cast them till they shattered the glass ceiling.

FACING GLASS CEILINGS

AISHA MOHAMMED SADIQ

Scribbled words on rumpled sheets of paper,
Littering the floor for all to see,
My words laid bare for all to read,
As "the superiors" step all over them like nothing,
Like nothing _ these words call to no one except me and only me.

Breaking that invisible shield, that condescending barrier of acceptance,
Shards of glass laid as traps, we stepped on them once,
Ah! What a lesson we learnt, I can still feel the prickling sensations of their mockery.
Because I am different or choose to be,
all the noise these "superiors" create have found a way to deafen my own.
My ideas and reasons echo as shouts and screams, all overshadowed and unheard, like nothing_
Like nothing _ these words call to no one except me and only me.

I make use of their exclusionary and unfair remarks and make them my own.
I coat them with the truth and stand on them with my heels.
I am no Cinderella that gets a happily ever after
because I know facing glass ceilings comes at a cost.
A cost of bravery and confidence and so backing down is not an option,
As I scribble my words and walk up to "the superiors",
I hand over my truth; my voice and I command their presence,
Everyone disrespected, excluded and biased,
To listen and hear something_
As something, these words call to everyone including me...

IN OUR HOUSE, WE DON'T BEAR OUR NAMES

OJO EMMANUEL

Father pulls the trigger like Sherlock Holmes every devotion:
"Who gave Adam the bile to eat?.....
I planted a heir, did not "barter" for bride price."
How does hunger roar on a filled stomach?
Cussed by father's sigh, circumscribed at birth.
Freeborn with clipped wings, bodied in cliché fate of a girl.
Nurtured, natured & penned to the mastery of the other room & kitchen.
"A world where flight to paradise is a birthright of boys alone".
Brothers glow with pen and books ,no sweats.
But I swing swords and shields to claim my birthright
From devil's eyes that see me ripe for infant motherhood.
Or old hats, 30 pieces of silver, my future in servitude.
Because the future is slim fitted to places tabooed for my legs,
Weaved to things my hands cannot hold or do,
Burdened with a cross too heavy for my head which silence crucifies.
I'm a bird longing to flap its wings with blithering strength
To sing freedom songs into every lock lost behind time.
Say, strength is no synonym of man either.
The world chants requiems against the "white kneel on black neck",
But I fight alone for a familiar strange space on this vast podium;
A scalding cold war, a making that must know her place.
My childhood hankering is a pulpit of libations with the blood
Of Nwanyeruwa and handwritings of Anne Frank:
To live outside the chains sown into my shadows
Because I wear wrappers and not knickers.
In our house, we don't bear our names,
We are factory blueprints of other generations alone.

MY GLASS CEILING

AISHA LINAH

It is the bag in me
That generates fruits in nine moons
And see to the rise of a tree
Which breaks through my flesh with rigour.

It is my kind of love
Which I express in saline streams
That run across my visage
Mistaken for height of weakness.

And the two poles
In between which Kings lie
And nourish their hearts
Are where they find solace and hope.

It is not about my race,
But the run I race
Amidst chaos and peace,
And the peak I can reach.

PARADIGM

JOSEPH HOPE

My hands are tied to my mind,
and my mind to an aged paradigm.
The stairs are broken—
The less privileged cluster on the middle floor
around the broken stairs,
looking for a way up.
The gap widens like cancerous cells
spreading across a system.
We walk in circles, following the same pattern
we met, like dumb sheep
that've been fed the wrong pasture.
And who said we can't cross a river
because we don't have fins?
The soul is genderless and race-less
and that makes humans the worst:
Many things are unfeasible
because humans said so.

HEART OF A WOMAN

BLOSSOM OKON UMOREN

She has the right to cry, for she's a woman sad and alone.
For the better half of her life, hate is all she's been shown.
She sits in the dark, tired of running from the fears that control her.
She waits breathlessly, afraid that her demons might engulf her.

"Men are superior", she's heard over and over.
She's inferior and therefore weaker:
The ghosts from her past torment her each night,
Sapping all her inner strength and replacing it with fright.

Although as a child she had dreams,
She feels her life has fallen apart at the seams
And tries to find her feet
In a world that's ruled by beasts.

She's human too, and she deserves
To be treated like one by the men she serves,
But in all of life's situations she's vulnerable,
And the world thinks she is incapable,
This very world which gave her a cold welcome
On the day when into it she was come.

Despite the scars she cannot erase,
A light in her heart shines
From a flame that burns away her fears,
Laying a foundation for hope's rays.
And in that light she finds
Renewed strength with which to dry her tears.

GLASS CEILING

NWAFOR HILLARY

I have tried to purge
This desire, this urge.
This will be my last act! I vowed.
But yet again, I am wowed.
I know of its side effects.
Even on my body, I see its defects.

I have tried many therapies.
If you know any, tell me please.
I savour its ecstatic feeling.
But now, I want emphatic healing.

Foods like fruits and vitamins.
For nutrients, it's a vital means.
But in my case,
The norm has lost its place.

It's difficult to be pretending,
When death is impending.
To function, I need this drug.
Without the d, I'm just a rug.

This habit, I want to halt.
But stopping has proven difficult,
Like leaving a secret cult.

I am in search of an answer.
Before it consumes me like cancer.
This is my glass ceiling.
And there is no point concealing.

WHEN YOU FEEL MY ORGANS DEFINE WHO I AM.

OLANREWAJU OLUWADAMILOLA MARVELOUS

Again, as always,
the voice became bold,
as evident as a glossy piece of art for display.
It had the awareness of a legendary statue across the highway,
the strength of the wind tossing north and south for pleasure,
pulling gently to my ears and humming in a convinced tone,
'how dare I dream?'

You must have thought when the cerebral circulation is in motion,
my arteries deliver less.
You must have felt my heart pumps weirdly.
You became used to the holy reads,
visualizing lesser ribs to overcloud drop points,
and of course my mind to be less cooperative to trains of thoughts.

Who says the balls on my chest connote delivery?
Who feels your broadened voice can illuminate the world?
Who will break this glass?
Its reflection is ceiling me away!

I will break the glass!
You, who can't see beyond the makeup,
can't pierce my skull to see the potentials it's housing,
can't view my brain at its peak,
I'm more than the facials,
wider than the appearance,
deeper than this look.
I've had the glass broken,
just today.

TO THE BOY I SAW IN THE GARDEN TODAY

AIYEJINNA ABRAHAM O.

Looking through society's broken lens:

it is as oxygen to you, to sew
your weaknesses and pains into a robe of

muscles, mannequin yourself in it, s t r e t c h
your lips into a pink crescent & act normal.

Don't spell it to them that inside,
you're a yolk, trying hard to un-cook

from the heat of depression. They
won't crack it, rather they'll complain

about your shell being too brittle.
["why you dey do like woman?"]:

they want you to wear rock as colour.
If she assaults you, lumps on you &

makes you fill the hOle, don't deliquesce—
even your parents translate forced sex

as a masculine active verb. I empathize
that you were the object in the sentence—

they'll call it a metal-barked reptile's tears.
& accuse you of drowning her in the sea

if she knots a noose around her neck.
That's not all, they will want you to be

that tough nut with a sweet lake sleeping
in it; always breaking into you to taste you—

still, not wanting you to be too hard—but
I saw who you truly are in the garden today:

an overripe mango hanging—
you could plummet in fall or spring... or none.

CRACKS IN THE GLASS CEILING

AKINRINADE FUNMINIYI ISAAC

"I may be the first, but I won't be the last." Kamala Harris.

I can't breathe; my airflow is restricted,
I feel a strange spectre is holding my head
And pressing my neck against the ground.
Every scream I make comes with no sound.

Like a tiger, I want to bounce off the walls,
The more I leap, the more countless the falls.
In the labyrinth, I seek out artificial wings,
The more I search, the more the thorn stings.

Everything near me is a potential danger.
In my skin, I become a familiar stranger.
Every step I take leads to a block,
A block that restricts me from life's luck.

I fall many times to rise to fall again,
This I do till I rise above my pain.
This land is a spectre that chokes lad and lass,
And one must strive to break this ceiling's glass.

This is my story; same story on a thousand tongues,
Tongues tamed for rising to right the wrongs.
Tongues bridled for trying to find a voice,
A voice that will give the world a better choice.

Dear Reader,

Thank you for reading this chapbook.

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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