

# PENNED IN RAGE

EDITION 4: JANUARY - APRIL 2026  
POEMS, STORIES & ESSAYS.



Edited By  
Bridgette James & Onyishi Chukwuebuka Freedom  
Cover Art by Philasande Musawenkosi Ntombela

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# **Penned in Rage**

**A Literary Journal**

**January – April, 2026**

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**Bridgette James & Chukwuebuka Freedom Onyishi**

**Cover Art by**

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## **Penned in Rage Literary Journal**

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**Theme: Sing Me to My Bones**

There are moments when the world does not merely blind us with light but overwhelms us with an absence of recognition, care, justice, and even the very paradigm through which we might grieve. In this fourth edition of Penned in Rage, every voice gathered here emerges from that very space—individuals who have dared to deploy their ingenuity to confront the invisible, speak through what has been silenced, and insist upon being heard. They move and stand to render visible the overwhelming power of grit, the transformation of endurance into language, and the

courage required to live with histories that refuse to be forgotten.

It is nothing short of a rare and lucid wonder to encounter the way Abubakar Auwal opens this edition, casting language itself as both wound and fire. His metaphors conjure a world in which loss, family, and mortality intersect, reminding us that poetry—like every other story, even when fractured and saturated with grief—still retains the capacity to awaken, and to effect monumental change. In reading his work, one feels the breath of memory, the tenderness of mourning, and the quiet boldness that our voices can endure even when the world has sought to still them.

As he writes in *The Metaphor of How We Render the Anthem of Broken Clouds*:

“sing me to my bones / & I shall breathe fire to firefly  
the next flight that may water us into flowers.”

Osahon Oka’s The Age of Content interrogates how visibility, attention, and empathy operate in a world inundated with information. Through his essay, he examines the delicate tension between witnessing suffering and the verisimilitude through which it is rendered for spectacle, revealing how grief, tragedy, and human vulnerability are too often transformed into content. In his words: “Nothing ever happens but there is instantaneous publicity everywhere,” and later, reflecting on our desensitization: “They did nothing but watch. After all, it is content.” Oka’s work

compels the reader to reckon with the human consequences behind viral narratives, by demonstrating that courage and compassion can live on even when attention itself is commodified. His essay reminds us that seeing and naming what is often ignored is itself a form of resistance—and that witnessing is inseparable from care, reflection, and the courage to act.

Msendoo Rachel Tarter's *Scars and Stars* guide us through landscapes of intimacy, trauma, and resilience. Her poetry captures the invisible labour of surviving betrayal, heartbreak, and confinement, by revealing the glimmers of strength that come from what was broken. Each line signals the weight of living, the beautiful insistence to rise again and again, and

the capacity to shine despite the cracks still waging venoms.

Owen Lwanda's *The Pariah's Resume* bears witness to displacement, and the agelessness of hope in a world that often refuses to plant back the uprooted in our midst. Survival here is measured not in abstractions but in unambiguous memory, and through the small acts of claiming existence where it has been threatened for centuries.

In his work, the vulnerability of a young refugee becomes universal—a mirror through which we recognize the courage demanded of those who navigate lands and systems that are not their own.

Abraham Aondoana transforms anger into understanding. His words demonstrate that fury, when met with reflection, becomes a language of care. Anger itself becomes a lens through which pain is acknowledged, histories named, and endurance cultivated. In his poetry, the destructive power of rage is transmuted into insight—as a means of navigating the world without surrendering to it, and as a dual method of carving meaning from the chaos we inherit.

Uche Chidozie Okorie examines the interplay of systemic inequities, oppression, and identity, reminding us that resilience is not only personal but collective. His poem carries the weight of both the individual and the community, showing how survival itself constitutes an unyielding claim to presence,

human redemption, and dignity in a world that often denies all three.

Majekodunmi O. Ebhohon's *The Janitor of the ICC* further elevates this moral weight borne by those who clean, observe, and preserve truths in spaces where acknowledgment is rare. His poetry demonstrates that endurance often takes the form of invisible acts, that persistence itself is resistance, and that legacies can survive even when others fight with hell to erase them.

Among many things this edition asks of us, there are certain imperatives that demand our fullest attention: to bear new witness and to feel, to carry the seed-like weight of stories that have stubbornly endured, and to remember that poetry—literature at its most daring—is eternally destined for both resistance and remembrance. It summons us to confront what blinds, obscures, and threatens us, and to insist upon clarity, attention, and presence. Because in this collection, poetry does more than articulate suffering; it maps endurance, fearlessly reckons with injustice, and celebrates the courage required to persist in



spaces that would rather silence us. By this glory, we find not only endurance but the marrow-deep reminder that we are still here—still speaking, still singing, still resisting. As you move through these pages, let these words reach you as they would across histories, across places still full of silence and mild grief. May you hear in each line that same call to endure, the insistence to rise, and the courage to sing yourself—your truths, your memory, your greatness again into your bones.

<https://ellaspoems.com/general-9#editorial-chukwuebuka-onyishi>

## 1. The Metaphor of How We Render the Anthem of Broken Clouds

By Abubakar Auwal

my father's name is the cnemial anatomy/ i landed my bones on. i mean a synonym for the stories /that hold water and turned me into a flower/ & the haven of crippling solace; a tale chewing/ its ribs. the flowers. the monsters. the demons. / & tales that consume the mountain, god buried his /toothbrush for the nighthawks, for the fire singing /to define the history of sky. i remember the first morning /we rendered the anthem of dying clouds above/ the ridges we buried our names in. i remember the heaven /in my dreams. i mean my brother's; the one he kissed the lips /of death with. i mean my sister's; a simile for how the dawn broke/ into a whispering night, in between the slumber of gods./ you only taste the bitterness of everything that used to be sweet, /the day you dreamscape your breath in the warmness /of four walls, voices shattering into the box of mourning,/ lovers chewing their tongue

to curse their gods./ i mean the night mother found  
solace in sensing how/it feels to be naked. *oti ya*  
*werey* is never a synonym /for the name she deserves.  
but, tell me what name deserves/the slave that invades  
the throne of his lord? sing me to my bones /& i shall  
breathe fire to firefly the next flight that may water us  
into flowers.

## 2. Theoretical Constitution of Broken Metaphors

By Abubakar Auwal

yesterday, when i mirrored heaven  
from the sanctuary of water—  
a man swirls to recount the constitution  
of how god pencilled the first oath that dug his hell.  
& we're a broken syllable of fire & we're  
a tale of butterflying smoke  
groping from the burnt beards of time  
that finds solace within a virgin sea;  
i watched his tongue fall, sloppy & we died  
squashing the clouds like broken asteroids.  
along the path we pocket the time,  
a fire dragon was born & we fetch water  
from the blossoming flowers on our palms.  
when next the gods electro magnify their tongues  
& time paused/ grey men slumbered to count

the intoxicating angels that forgot past their  
wings are meant to/ (for) fly/ (flying);  
we're metaphors of dead lullabies within  
the index finger of atomic theories.

### 3. Scars and Stars

By Msendoo Rachel Tarter

First, you sang that nursery rhyme over and over again  
Till the rhythm became a lullaby in your heartbeat  
Which she leaned on and fell asleep.

You went on to paint a sunny day while outside  
it rained.

It will never be cloudy or gray, you said, if you stayed.  
Promises not made are not broken, yet she carried  
cracks

Believing not broken will be promises made by you  
Which would fill gold in her gaps.

A bowl she became to whatever you dished

It was sometimes hot. Sometimes cold

And it spilled into her eyes. Blink. Love is blind. Blink  
At the edge of losing her twink you said

You can still shine. A little gloss here and blush there  
Stars never die.

When eulogies sound like love letters  
She couldn't cry.

Wished upon herself for you but you already bought a  
horse.

Burn the calories.

She obeyed and you rode away.

Returned when her sweats smelt of thriving and glowing  
with glory.

Take a bath became drowning in a tub.  
A bathroom you turned to Titanic.

And acted Jack. She rose from the depth  
Such height! You called 9-1-1.  
She came crashing.  
Crashed under the Lagos bridge.  
It wasn't London bridge falling but you cried my fair  
lady  
Stretched your heroic hand and broke her points.  
You are too sharp.  
Still her bluntness injured you.  
She became a nurse for your wounds.  
Tagged and dragged her negligence.  
The court is your relation and the case resonates  
with only you.  
A cell she is kept in, yet she asks for a phone  
To ask if you would come home tonight.  
The judge's words were like lyrics from a romance  
poem.  
Now the chains on her wrists make her giggle.  
She keeps requesting to be blindfolded and led to the  
room  
Where she can lay with you.

## 4. The Pariah's Resume

By Owen Lwanda

*(A refugee child stands before a table of uniformed men, paper trembling in hand.)*

I folded my résumé inside this plastic bag.

The sea parcelled me here with no envelope.

I'm twelve – but I've had some experience.

**Objective:** to find a country where people  
don't run when thunder strikes.

**Education:** I was taught by crumbling walls  
What lasts after everything collapses.  
I have a certificate in grief management.

My diploma is the bullet wound beneath my ribs,

**Work Experience:** Two years of hunger management.  
One year searching for water that wouldn't taste

Of drowned children.

Assistant to loss since age ten.

Internship in digging my father's grave.

Remembering faces without photographs.

**Skills:** I can sleep anywhere a shadow fits.

I can thank someone for letting me exist

Briefly near them.

I can run while carrying the smell of my mother's hair.

**References:** My isolation can attest:

I'm a frail outsider

And no one can contradict it.

**Signature:** Ink runs out, but my pulse signs for me.

Attached in this résumé – are the scars on my skin

## 5. What Anger Learns When it Stays

By Abraham Aondoana

Anger arrives

taking it to believe that it will burn down the house.

It stands in the doorway,

membranes the numerals in the walls,

changes its mind.

It has been taught

to shout,

to be ungrateful,

to be dangerous.

No one taught it how to stay

without breaking things.

I watch it sit beside me,

hands shaking,  
teaching to be long-suffering.

Learning that fury  
can also be a language  
for care.

The body has histories.  
that knock instead of speak.  
There are wounds  
that want acknowledgment  
more than revenge.

Sanity debunks fury where it hearkens.  
It does not disappear--  
it sharpens into clarity,  
into refusal,

into the courage

to say:

this matters,

and I am still here.

## 6. Go Home

By Uche Chidozie

One beautiful spark,  
Shining in the smiles of those who had breakfast—  
*Oh*, this beautiful light—  
Lost her fluorescent in the crude theatre  
Of a careless doctor,  
And was deported to the so-called cemetery.  
This soul, draped in borrowed glamour,  
Could not raise dollars  
After the naira crashed,  
Like a Dana Air flight.

The perverse love imposed  
By an echelon of Vikings upon our virginity  
Has left us bruised and scarred,  
And you wonder why no hibiscus  
Grows in our hearts.  
They have stolen our blackness  
And made the world believe  
There is no diamond in charcoal.  
We axe the digging from summer

To the deepest spite of winter,  
And Gilead massages with Indian balms—  
Could not realign our bones;  
Pain only reshuffled.  
A death I paid for with taxes,  
So Caesar's city never runs out of glow.  
For all the pedals I burn  
To hook this place to a rocketing civilization—  
No medals,  
Not even a status on Times Square,  
But—  
A resounding gloat,  
Floating, loathing...

Go home now.

Go home.

## 7. The Janitor of the ICC

By Majekodunmi O. Ebhohon

On the marble floor,  
a sequin from the gala  
lies beside a discarded draft  
of the minority opinion.

My mop is a blind tongue  
licking the temple clean.  
I empty all the bins.  
In the one from Chamber Three,  
a coffee cup, a spent lozenge,  
and six pages of transcript  
where the word *mass grave*  
appears fourteen times.

The night-shift guard nods  
from his glowing hive of screens.  
He sees the ghosts I push ahead of me  
with my yellow bucket.

They are not his business.

His business is the living,  
the ones with badges.

I know the sound justice makes  
when it leaves a room:  
the exhale of leather chairs,  
the click of a million euros  
in locks. I hear the voices  
taped to the acoustic panels;  
a woman naming names  
in a language my mother spoke.

I dust the bench where they sat.  
The wood drinks the polish  
and gives back only  
my own face, dark and swirling.

At dawn, the recyclers come  
for the paper. The pulping plant  
is downstream. I think sometimes  
of the words dissolving,  
*command responsibility*  
*& proportionality*

becoming a grey mush,  
a new blank page  
waiting for the morning memo,  
for the next indictment,  
for the next gala's invitations  
to be printed on it.

I do not read the documents.  
I touch only their shells.  
My fingerprints are on everything,  
even the verdicts.  
They are small, perfect whorls  
no one will ever lift for evidence.

I turn the key in the great door.  
Behind me, the hall of voices  
hums in the air-conditioning dark.  
Ahead, the bicycle path,  
the rain, my city,  
which asks me nothing  
of what I have cleaned,  
and to which I return,  
carrying nothing

but the smell of lemon  
and the faint, metallic taste  
of a word I will never say,  
a word that sits in the bin  
of my throat,  
untranslated,  
waiting for collection.

## 8. The tongue we never lost at sea

by Uchechukwu Onyedikam

The civilization of a People lost...  
in hell upon the arrival of a strange man  
whose idol described our traditional  
practices as the evil bedevilling us —  
and the roadblock on our way to  
his father's house of many mansions!

Our proverbs, story, folklores  
are too heavy to flow through  
a pen — and sustain its grasp  
on blank papers relaying beauty  
of ancient tongues passed down to  
one generation to another —  
breeding a lifetime of vast richness  
with its myth intact; strong, bold

This cultural teachings wears  
its name on the sleeves of our  
long-held old belief —  
a mystery that rolls itself up in words  
and syllable that apprehends  
the magical sound of our language  
and the tribes that draws footpath  
on our skin... to keep our truth  
and heritage hidden away from the wild

Aboard the slave ship chanting our songs  
unrelenting in the presence of agony —  
a world STOLEN and sold to another world  
for the ILL bargain of superiority — yet  
our history never died on our lips.

You can trace the stars... and search  
for the moon in our locks.

## 9. Gallery



**Painting: *Untitled***

**Courtesy of the artist; obtained in 2025.**

## 11. Happiness Is Selfish

By Gargi Sidana

Happiness is a selfish choice — mere bits of trial and error. A cauldron of peace that hung above the zenith. I fail to find things on tracks or subway, alleys or along the walking corridors. A chiselled way to smile back at none other than moist feelings.

I trench the tunnels of sheer sadness — I'm the host. There, I saw a flickering child smiling through the curls of her lips. There, I witnessed happiness smiling back at me chasing joy from nowhere.

I call it once, twice, thrice and so on..... But it went to dead ears. It has become a tradition or ritual to walk towards the smiling but sodden face. A smile is the next pain to happiness. Sorrow follows sorrow, pain follows grief, but happiness follows none. It's a one-man army clutching shiny armour of grace in its hands.

I called off my meeting and surpassed back through that grey tunnel where joy lingers. Folks thought I was some kind of psychopath who does nothing but search for darkness through that tunnel. That tunnel has become my home. I gave it a name — 'Patrick Calling'. It's an enchantment of shallow kindness that peeps through the beige walls.

I almost jump/ scream my lungs out when I observe a tiny silvery gleam of happiness. It's like Patrick calling me — Unfulfilled desires.

Desires wear a skirt and crop top of attitude; bow her head and flash a dream. Dream to the realm of pristine, bountiful nourishment of laughter. Happiness is standing poise, calm and falling in my arms.

There, I stumbled a bit but found my way through the door of cheeriness.

Contentment is a choice, a slippery lounge of light where light meets its godfather. Godfather bends the trapezium reality into shape. Shape moulded in colossal of fatal bloom. Bloom to radiate half-boned truth between sadness and contentment.

They are both sides of a coin, flipping from the edges. Edges or widths of baggage poured down on oneself.

"Happiness is a cosmic reaction to external stimulation."

## 12. The Age of Content

By Osahon Oka

“A revolutionary age is an age of action; ours is the age of advertisement and publicity. Nothing ever happens but there is instantaneous publicity everywhere.” — Søren Kierkegaard, “Existentialism”, p. 4.

When Kierkegaard wrote the above, the world as it is at present did not yet exist. The industrial revolution had begun not too long ago; however, paper and ink were still the vehicles by which intellectuals and their ilk disseminated and acquired knowledge. Gutenberg's printing press had opened the doors to mass printing of written matter, thereby giving writers in Kierkegaard's time access to a larger reading audience. This access to more readership exploded with the introduction of the world wide web to the public in the 90s. Today the dissemination of information and knowledge to a far larger audience is possible for anyone who has an internet-enabled gadget, whether a cell phone or personal computer. With this surge in the availability of knowledge, there has been an equal surge in the need for entertaining content. In this new age, the term ‘information overload’ is a common expression. Anyone

with an android phone can become an authority on anything and everything.

The introduction of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (now X) and TikTok having given the public the platform to be visible and be heard has also created a world where people are free to express themselves, where creatives can create without traditional gatekeepers denying them access to an audience, financial rewards for their creativity and even the tools to create with. It feels democratic as if we have become fortunate to sit with our clan's people in taking decisions that would bring about the growth and development of our community. We feel like we are contributing something to our world and in many cases, we are.

However, over the years, concerns have been raised over the proliferation of fake news. In fact, some years ago, the then President of the United States accused social media platform: Twitter (now X) of being filled with fake news. This same accusation led the Nigerian government to ban the use of the X platform by the citizens of the country. It had become a worrisome issue, enough to deny the public its right to express itself,

a right many cultures across the world have held and still hold to be sacrosanct. The harm that fake news can inflict on the individual cannot be quantified but this is a tip of the iceberg.

A few weeks ago, the former heavyweight boxing champion, Anthony Joshua, was involved in a terrible car accident that claimed the lives of his two friends. The aftermath of the accident flooded social media in minutes. Every page and account across social media platforms had something to say about the events of that sad day. Opinions flew from left and right, many rife with misinformation. Conspiracy theorists had a field day. The Nigerian public noted for its religiosity and superstition had so much to say about divine intervention, while the champion stood in his shorts before the world, bloodied and traumatized.

For a lot of content creators, the concern was not the emotional toll the accident had on Anthony Joshua, his family and the family of his late friends. Their concern was not on the nuances of the Nigerian situation which ensured that there was no emergency response team to help the accident victims. They were not necessarily concerned with the driver's driving skill or if the car was

roadworthy or the road was vehicle worthy. Their focus was mostly on being the first to spread the news of the accident, having and sharing opinions whether factual or not about the cause of the accident, the reasons behind the champion's survival, back stories including his recent fight with Jake Paul, etcetera and it gets disgusting soon enough. Some content creators alluded to ritual sacrifices; some blamed him for coming to Nigeria in the first place; some persons even contended that he had been marked for death for refusing to participate in a humiliation ritual which involved giving Jake Paul room to pummel him to pulp in the boxing ring. The man's grief, the heaviness in the hearts of his late friends' families did not matter. All that mattered was the likes, follows, comments, endorsement deals, that such a viral topic can generate for the creator's page.

In the videos of the car accident that flooded the internet, a crowd gathered around the crushed vehicle and the police escort vehicle that Anthony Joshua was led to. Almost every hand was holding up a phone, recording and commenting. It baffles the mind that Kierkegaard can be so right about an age that does nothing but concern itself with instantaneous publicity. The happiest people on earth at the scene placed the dissemination of the tragic incident to the wider public as

a far more important concern than providing solutions to the situation that went beyond praying for Anthony Joshua's wellbeing. People took pictures and recorded while the man suffered. There is the possibility that the need for fresh content supersedes the need for empathy or grace. It is quite possible that we can only grasp how lucky we are to be alive through the lens of a camera and in giving thanks, denigrate those who have died or who are grieving the tragic passing of their loved ones.

When things happen, sudden and tragic, it is hoped that there will be someone or people who care enough to see your humanity and put you above their fears, biases, needs, hates and superstition. At least that is the ideal. Life however is never ideal and humans, fragile as we are, and as often as we seek the ideal in film, in writing, in art, in philosophy, in religion, seem to lack the will to live an ideal life.

On TikTok there are certain content creators sharing what they say is a social experiment. One of these creators dresses up as a homeless mentally disturbed man and goes about begging for food. In one video, a woman picked up a stick and beat the man with it while people watched. Just because he begged for food. Only

one other woman came to the man's rescue. One! This is not random. The same mob, mindless and blind, that gathered around Anthony Joshua with their phones out recording, stood idle as well while that woman beat up the supposedly mentally disturbed man.

They did nothing but watch. After all, it is content.

This brings to mind the refrain in Niyi Osundare's poem, 'Not My Business':

*What business of mine is it  
So long they don't take the yam  
From my savouring mouth?*

While the context of the poem does not necessarily correspond with the conversation here, it is a finger pointing to the desensitization of the public to pain, sorrow, even joy. Everyone minds their business as long as it has nothing to do with them or their loved ones. They cannot help much but they can have insensitive opinions and go on to share it for mass consumption.

In due time, the accident will go stale as news or content. Some other pastor will be alleged of sleeping with his congregation, another husband will be caught being abusive to his wife, another wife will be caught sleeping with her husband's best friend, another homophobic supported murder will be encouraged across the timeline; artistes, actors, politicians, pastors, Muslims, Christians, ethnic groups will be trolled and dragged all over social media and content creators will create; narratives ill-conceived and dangerous will be disseminated and Anthony Joshua's grief will become truly his own.

And the sage asks: *are you not entertained?*

13. If you come to my country Mambas will swallow you

By Obaji Godwin

*Gunmen attacked a local mining site in central Nigeria, killing “many security personnel” and abducting some workers including four Chinese nationals....*

*In November, Chinese authorities issued a travel advisory warning their citizens and companies against travel to “high-risk” areas in Nigeria*

.....*Aljazeera*

if you come to my country mambas  
will swallow you/ you will turn to  
cadaver & rift to bits / say I am  
an unpatriotic junk / a countryman shunting  
his own country into the gullet of infamy  
/ frog me/ dump me on thistle-filled arroyo  
/ quill-potted lash plucked from hades?/ pick  
it / whorl it round my torso & tug me into  
the coop of magma / scythe me to gravels/

mince me to shards/ the graveyard I gagged  
I'd gag & re-gag; if you step into this  
nation chasms of rotten sepulchers will  
collect you / I'm not a boor nudging his  
country into the terra of mortification / I'm not  
a parazonium contrived by foes to pillory the  
continent's giant / but my land, this country,  
has quaffed barrels upon barrels of blood /  
this scenic lava has pulverized too many  
hearts & look at her, she still glides about  
looking for craniums to pulp / but don't dip my  
country in slurs / she's moldering / she's  
cascading into inferno / she's turning people to  
necropolis / she congregated unarmed  
protesters & forced cemeteries into their  
throats / she asked a beautiful dream to cleft  
his own belly with blunt knife , plunge his  
incisors into the rib & rip it off / she's  
thinning our patience with fire-faced blades / but  
don't cast my country tirade-teethed pewters /

like a good nation she willingly poured her powers into trammel & offered herself to her citizens / to be led/ to be picketed / & to be structured / but the leviathans that should be her sentinels poured her borders into the fists of brigands/ the marine that should smother her blaze magnified it to hydra-headed conflagration / kleptomaniac countrymen re-cast her to graveyards transmuting people to sarcophagus/ oversea merchants take your wares to another land dragons live here / & we are incapable of taming them/ if you step into this country gulch will gulp you / we don't need more deaths / we don't need more international news in which we are catacombs & cannibals/ the thing killing us is the moneybag of our corrupt lords/ when they are ready to be selfless / when they are ready to kill the monsters birthing behemoths we will alert you.

## 14. Solicited Book Review



### Every Little Thing That Moves

#### Existence as Migration in One Word:

#### A Review of Oladosu Michael Emerald's "Every Little Thing That Moves"

In the full spectrum of living are vicissitudes, the double-edged sword of surviving. In the full spectrum of survival is another coin of hopes and grief. A poet's grip of either or both manifests in

elegies—limping through the hopes of breakthrough and transcendence, or the grief of mourning the leaves shed in the season of memories.

In his seminal collection of incisive catharsis, Oladosu Michael Emerald reaches out to the portion of the soul left of our tired, yet optimistic walk of life with semantic inductions of “migration”. In this rhetorical rendition of everything that eventually leads us *home*, you’d be exposed to the waves and currents of “moving” through the soul of a pensive wanderer.

The author took the bold step of representing the rest of the world in the clamour for partial resistance against homelessness and desolation with questions like: “*Is that how people become refugees?*”, in *When Home Became a Barrel of a Gun* (Line 8), and partial acceptance of this existential detachment from this *home* that we all covet: “*I am a part-time occupant on earth, part-time son, part-time*

*student of life's never-ending lecture... ”, in What Do You Do For a Living? (Line 3).*

My interpretation of the aforementioned poems corresponds with the core theme of “home” as either a place to begin a journey from, or a place to enjoy while on the long road, or a place to settle, as a body with or without a soul. To settle without a soul (eventually) is the source of the grief that shoulders the pungent words of mourning in this emotive collection.

This grief is the bottom layer of the poet’s surface expression, leading us to a series of tragic poems in this collection that partly redefine the celebration of modern African literature with a universal socio-political and psycho-analytic outlook.

I suppose the author is being mild by not dragging us deeper into a nihilistic abyss, by diluting the ocean of words with reasons to hope and remain alive in expressions like: “*to name a thing is an*

*attempt to save it.*" in the poem of the same string of words as the title, which further corroborates the line that referenced his grandmother: "*The vowel in your name means restoration—without it, your name/sounds empty.*" in the opening poem *Exi(s)t* (Line 7-8).

To justify the preceding, Emerald lays his hands on certain names for the ambiguity of resurrection and internment using the alchemy of memories. In one of the most sentimental poems that struck me in my most vulnerable corners, *Someone I loved Became a Flower That'd Never Grow (for China)*, the author goes thus: "...You didn't die/ You just wanted to see how loved you are...The last time we heard from you/ the doctor said you'd come home soon/ Was he talking about where you originally came from?" (Lines 13-14 & 19-20).

Emerald's potent usage of memories as both metaphor and symbolism are another prowess that

will stun a reader. As someone with a slight leaning towards nostalgia, I particularly concede to poems like the ironic *Forgetting is the Orchestra of Grief*, and *The Silence that Screams Your Absence*, due to their synthesis of grief through the porous texture of amnesia and recollection, respectively, when there's a mild trigger lurking somewhere, waiting to catch you unawares, and reawaken your trauma.

Poems like these find a separate home for thoughts and wishes in the mind that harbours endless possibilities, even after the fact, after everything slips away from one's grip. Aside from these poems, is an array of stronger renditions with the global consciousness in mind, especially in the current age of geopolitical wars, migration conflicts, terrorism, and insecurity. You'll find your shared voice of collective grief in *Nature is Not Deaf or Blind*, *Oxygenation & Carbonation...*, *A Country Drowsy*, and *The Other Names of Home in a Desolate Country*.

Imperative is my acknowledgement of the satirical jab on the digital literary ecosystem: *A Call for Submission*. Being one of the most relatable documentations of our literary exposure through entries for publication and contests, I find this to be an anthem by which the ropes of (hopefully) winning a prize is learnt.

Not to mention the hint at our flawed humanity for “*immortalizing something beautiful*” by “*taking the life of something equally beautiful*”. This final poetic interrogation informs my deduction that we, common migrants of life, manufacture this grief for other migrants by stripping them of *home*, of life, and of every little thing that gets us moving, in what we deem as a zero-sum game.

In this finite locomotion of words from the “entry” of our existence to the “Vagrant of Ruins” that survive the bodies of victims in this existential war, Oladosu’s immersive pool of catharsis illustrated the

waves and quagmires that obstruct “moving” for many. Or why else would the waves tell a migrant that “...the shore is not your home”, if not for obstruction?

In this amazing collection of forty flowers of grief at the graveyard of memories, Emerald strikes us yet again with his precious gems, as usual. I read his poems and realize why he’s one of our finest literary voices in recent times. This collection cements my judgement!

## 15. The Passage

by Chisom Umeh

Urenne is dead. But I have to survive without her. For her child's sake. The boy is tugging at the hem of my wrapper beside me. I look away from the rock formation we have just ascended to reach the high ground and focus my gaze on him, Iwuora. He's distressed, crying. Seeing him like this stirs a deep well of sorrow within me. So, I lift him up and prop him on the crook of my left hip.

"Ebezina, nwa'm," I say as I wipe the tears from his gentle face with my thumb. "Don't cry again, my child. They can't harm us now. We have transported." My appeals don't soothe him and he cries even more. I want to cry too. Urenne, his mother, would have known what to say to him now. I was never a child

person, and I never lacked the spine to show it. Our mother knew I was likely never going to be a mother or be anybody's property purchased for a few shillings and kegs of palm wine. Whenever I expressed this, she always looked at me the way she looked at Papa's dirty wrappers just before she took them to the stream to rid them of their filthiness. Like, *Yes, you're covered in dirt. But it's not something I can't fix. Or time wouldn't fix.*

Maybe she was right. Because I watched the Nigerian soldiers invade our village and attack our people with the violence that breathed from their guns. I remember Papa shouting at me to go get Urenne and run for the caves. "Don't stop till you both

and Iwuora have crossed,” he said, eyes bloodshot, machete in hand. “I’ll protect your mother here.”

The gods have a sadistic sense of humour. Did they have to do all this violence just to punish me for my decision not to let a child come through my legs? Did they have to plant evil in the hearts of the soldiers to war with the entire Igbo land just so they could thrust on me the one thing I decided not to accept from them? Why visit my sins upon my dear sister? And most likely her husband who was drafted into the Biafran army.

Ohhh. I weep for all the blood that runs into the soil this day. I may have crossed and put the distance of time between me and this tragedy, but it’ll follow me even till I draw my last breath.

\*

They say the Ogbunike Caves have the power to transport. If you can find the right pathway and say the right prayers at the right moment, the Oracle of the Hills and Caves will guide your feet into a future time when the war is ended. When there is peace. I'm here now, having ascended the rock formations I now realize are man-made steps. There are groups of people standing around holding umbrellas and these little black bricks that they point at me and Iwuora and squint into.

“She just ran out of the cave screaming and crying,” one said in a twisted Igbo that took my brain ten long seconds to parse. What must have happened to the language across the decades? How far along

did the Oracle take us? “They’re travellers,” someone else says and the others gasp.

As a child, Papa used to take Urenne and me to the caves to learn their routes in case a day like this came. But I seemed to be the only one interested. Whenever he told us to go through the labyrinthine passages to meet him at the Nkido River, where warm water from the caves met the cold river of the outer chamber, Urenne often got lost, and we’d have to go back to find her crouched in a corner, crying. She hated the bats and couldn’t stand their squeaking.

I saw her hesitation as we ran for the hills from the village with Iwuora, amidst other villagers fleeing, the soldiers behind us. I took the boy from her to hasten her footsteps, but the dread slowing her down

was psychological. It was so smothering it almost trumped her survival instinct.

We were almost at the entrance when a shot rang out behind us and she collapsed. I ran back and crouched over her, trembling with sorrow and fear. As the blood pooled beneath her, eyes blighted by pain, she mouthed her last words, “Please take care of Iwuora. He’s yours now to protect.”

I was chanting the prayers as I ran through the caves with the boy in my grasp amidst other terrified villagers seeking safety from the huntsmen who call themselves soldiers. We could hear the shelling all around us, making the walls quiver.

Maybe it was the tears with which I said the words, that made the Oracle listen. Maybe they were satisfied that my fate had now been corrected and a child been forced into my grasp. Because I had said these words a hundred times before with my father and nothing happened. Whatever it was, when I came out the other side, the world had changed. Save for the murmurings of the strange tourists, it was now quieter. And I knew, I knew, I had crossed.

I am in a new place now with someone else's child in front of a strange life in which I am being made into a spectacle. Maybe other villagers were saved too and have been scattered across different futures.

But I cannot bring myself to be thankful in any sense.

I have this strong urge to defy the gods by  
leaving this child here and dangling myself from a tree  
with my wrapper. But what would I say to Urenne in the  
afterlife when I meet her there? How would I explain  
that I left her child alone to this ravenous world?

## About Contributors

**Abubakar Auwal** is a Pushcart Prize Nominee, is a Nigerian teen author of *Portrait of gods as Metaphors*, 1st runner up Nigeria Prize for Teen Authors. Winner, Artin Arena Poetry Chapbook Contest. He was the winner of *Splendors of Dawn Poetry* and Short Story Competition (February-April, 2023). Also, a finalist for BPKW Poetry Contest, AIPFEST24 Poetry Slam, PIN National Poetry Slam—25, NYTH Poetry Contest & long-listed for *Brigitte Poirson Poetry Prize*, *Akachi Chuku-Emeka Literature Prize*, *Blessing Kolajo Poetry Prize and others*. He has his works Published/Forthcoming with *Eunoia Review*, *Lolwe, Arts Lounge Magazine*, *The Carrier Bag*, *The MAAR Review*, *The Beatnik Cowboy*, *After Happy Hour Review*, *Naked Cat Lit*, *Iceflow Press*, *SUBNIVEAN*, *Cajun Mutt Press*, *Lilac Journal* and elsewhere.

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**Majekodunmi O. Ebhohon** is a Nigerian poet and playwright. His debut play, ‘The Great Delusion’, won the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) Prize for Drama, 2025. He writes from Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria NG, where he is equally working on his debut collection of poems.

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Owen Habel Lwanda, born in Kenya, studied Computer Science at Kenya Methodist University. He’s a poet and playwright; he has earned accolades at the Kenya Schools and Colleges National Drama Festivals. Owen draws inspiration from traveling and reading, bringing fresh perspectives to both stage and page.

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**Uchechukwu Onyedikam** is a Nigerian poet innovating bilingual Igbó-English haiku, featured in Amazon-bestselling anthologies *Petals of Haiku* (2024) and *Tranquility* (2025), archived in Japan's Museum of Haiku Literature. "Road to Damascus" is forthcoming in *Prairie Schooner* (2026); bilingual haiku and a commissioned critical essay forthcoming in *Presence* (2026). He tied unprecedently as winner in Lime Square Poets' 5-Word Challenge (2025).

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**Philasande Musawenkosi Ntombela**, is a 28-year-old South African singer and rapper, and visual director, and former Talent Scout from Durban. He is signed to Sony Music Entertainment and Stream cut, and Kiiry Beats Verscope Records, and Virgin Music Group. He released his debut mixtape titled #twitch featuring Lil Noodle and Kiiry Beats, and Matisse Tsoy, and Tony Wale, and Nate Will. His independent

record label is Price Planet Music subsidiary of Zojak World Wide, LLC. His debut song #reap features a beat made by Spanish producer Maxxozbeats. Philasande Musawenkosi Ntombela is affiliated with a Roc Nation/Equity Distribution signee: Tinashe.

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**Osahon Oka** won The Annual Bridgette James Poetry Competition, 2025. He lives in Nigeria. Osahon is an English Language and Literary Studies graduate as well as a Pushcart nominee, whose poems have appeared in journals and magazines. He's been featured in: **Sontag Magazine**, *Kinpaurak*, *Poetry Sango-Ota*, *Feral Poetry*, and elsewhere. His poems have won numerous awards such as second place in The Kukogho Iruesiri Samson Poetry Prize and first place in the Visual Verse Autumn Writing Prize, 2022.

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