



# **SOIL UNFURLING FROM STEM**

The Bridgette James Nature & You Poetry Competition,  
2025 Winners' Anthology

**EDITED BY BEE JAMES**

Edited by Bridgette O James

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Soil Unfurling from Stem

The *Bridgette James Nature & You Poetry Competition*, 2025  
Winners' Anthology

**This is a Creative Writing Resource from Sub-Saharan Africa, Intended  
for Readers Aged 15+**

Cover Design by Oladosu Michael Emerald

Edited by Bridgette O James





## **On the Subject of Poetry**

Beyond aesthetic satisfaction, I encourage the reader to approach these poems as koans, and submit to their strangeness or utter familiarity, whatever the case may be. The poems should be inhabited not consumed (contrary to the mindless consumption ravaging the world). They should be read out loud, put on walls, copied out by hand. In so doing, perhaps we all will be granted grace to approach the ineffable, as the poets in the volume have.

– Pamilerin Jacob, Competition Judge.

## Foreword

‘Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it.

Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.’

— Chief Seattle, 1854

Since the dawn of human consciousness, the story of our place within creation has been told solemnly. From the biblical account of humanity’s fall from Eden to Aristotle’s majestic Great Chain of Being, man has been cast as both steward and disruptor — a creature set apart, vested with the power to tilt the balance of existence itself. Across ages and civilizations, this burden has stirred philosophers, scientists, and poets alike to reckon with the fragile harmony upon which all life depends.

In our time, no insight is more vital than that offered by the Buddhist teacher and poet Thich Nhat Hanh: the concept of Interbeing — the truth that nothing exists independently, but only in a profound, inseparable relationship with all else. To harm the river, tree, soil, and sky is to hurt ourselves. The web of life does not hold us; we are the web. Perhaps more than any other art, poetry has served as a sacred vessel for this truth — a bridge between human spirit and the living world.

Throughout history, poets have sought to celebrate, mourn, and defend the natural world, wielding the measured word and the sharpened image with reverence and urgency. In *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*, William Wordsworth gave voice to this enduring impulse — the yearning to perceive nature’s outward beauty and its inward truth. As he wrote:

“...with an eye made quiet by the power

Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,

We see into the life of things.”

To “see into the life of things” — to recognize the sacred entanglement of all existence — is the poet’s first duty today. For in an era when the very fabric of the natural world frays visibly beneath our hands, the

poet's voice becomes not a luxury but a necessity: a cry of remembrance, a hymn of warning, a call to conscience, a covenant renewed.

*Soil Unfurling from Stem* is a tapestry of voices drawn from various genres yet dominated by nature poetry and Eco poetry. The former celebrates the earth's bounty and beauty; the latter confronts humanity's excesses — a fierce ecological audit of how we wound the world, thereby wounding ourselves. As Olajuwon poignantly reminds us in his poem *Meditation on the Song of the Earth*:

“Our errant ears have ignored mother's admonition:  
that nature is a deity,  
that if we cut God,  
It is our mortal flesh that will bleed.”

Throughout the anthology, the slicing of the sacred evokes a bleeding that is both physical and spiritual. The voices of poets from West Africa, in particular, carry tones of grief and urgency. They confront the exploitation of their lands—poisoned rivers, felled forests, barren fields, sacrificed for the profit of gangster corporations and their local enablers, indifferent even as the last trees fall and the last waters turn toxic.

This anthology stands as both testament and summons: a testament to the enduring dialogue between poet and earth, and a summons to all who would listen — to awaken, honour, and defend the delicate grandeur that cradles our shared existence. In the face of forgetting, the poet remembers. In the face of destruction, the poet witnesses. And in the face of despair, the poet dares to hope — and to call others back to the sacred web of life we are privileged to share.

Oumar Farouk Sesay

**Poet, playwright, and novelist**

Part One:  
Gardens & Scenic Landscapes

## 1. Prayer

*By Osahon Oka*

Dust potted on bones.  
That is how I got here,  
Stalked here— intense growth  
Turned towards treetop halo— prayer  
Angling into heaven's vast ocular celebration.  
Green is your restive colour  
Where butterflies brew their  
fever  
and swallows scatter their rave.  
On devil grass hunker down, and I have flattened— lemon grass  
Nosing abundance, green blade in wind tide— ready  
To be flung wide open, my  
senses  
Nudging the gladness, the beak  
This mockingbird is drinking from.  
I roll from that dactyl: flea black bagging, the itch  
So, skin would a tactile nest build,  
Memory anchored to this moment.  
Grace sparkles at the bottom of this surrender.  
For if I had not accepted death, the orphan  
To whom all my anxieties turn,  
Would I bear witness to this snaking bridge  
Ants have made, mind tangled in one net,  
Or that frog tongue alighting from the gorge, licking  
A queen veiled by a beauty wholly hers from her trek  
Down the drooping neckline; a link in the lace?  
'Yes, you wove the design into this  
labyrinth,  
But what a weather you have built in here?  
So bejewelled, its richness robs  
me  
Of my simple idyl: my steel-glass utopia.'  
My papier-mâché friends huddled under neon signs,

Stirring - long fingered – cups. Quiet  
Palms bobbing in fenced in lakes  
Where fabricated deer and swans  
Their mechanized lives exhaust  
Sipping all these clockwork days.  
‘You who hoed all this rich  
loam  
  
For all of us to germinate,  
Even gleaming pebbles palmed long by  
rain,  
Make me green: soil unfurling from stem,  
Receding as your wild garden blooms.  
My tame hungers reclaim.’

## 2. The Cattle Herder's Epilogue

*By Osahon Oka*

and on this grass clump,  
with bluebottles and drowsy birdsong,  
one could dream, swooned by noon's smoulder—  
while the humped cattle bowed horns  
and grunted in the dull eyed pleasure  
of their graze, egrets launching and settling:  
blurs of white winged priestesses steeped  
in their sacred habits and vows—  
one could flit through the fae gleam  
that arise drunk over the world, with ladybirds  
and butterflies dazed by profane profusions  
of colourful gowns dancing in the green;  
their pollution licking each other's nape,  
pressing a perfumed ardour into the feverish  
work of wild dryads and gasping sleeper  
vines who sniff the air, hungry for all  
that would come: the bees, the flighty sparrows,  
the nestled grasshoppers and praying mantis,  
warrior monks absorbed by worship.  
the pop of zinc sheets breaking out of rust's  
bronze sleep, scattering a brittle brightness  
through the town would be absorbed  
by the loamed silence here, even  
the muezzin's call to prayer would float,  
flower and fade like a heat induced  
phantasm; the blinking glass darkened  
by swooping columns of marching bungalows  
now a distant dusty figment, deep down  
to its cracked and yellowed concrete dreams.



when one drank water on this grass,  
it would be sweet; the sweetness of cool things  
reaching from the heat like an arm  
to embrace one, and the trees would waver  
as if uncertain, as if the breeze is bringing  
them to the dance stored in the sap  
of their branches, and one would want  
to be gathered into that ecstasy of mind,  
become one with the land; a tender thing  
kneeling inside this great dome  
of solitude, forehead kissing earth.

### 3. Sunflower

*By Gideon Idudje*

Sunshine rains on you, your beam on me  
the sun your colouring, the day your rainbow  
the sun your warmth, it's radiance your cloth,  
the earth your feet, it's dust, your feet, manured to beauty.

Tender breeze in my garden of beam  
is your memory, its lingers longer in your flowering.  
Insects collect upon you, in different variants colouring,  
soft pinkish-purple, forest green, indigo attires they wear.  
homage they pay to scent —your lovely fragrance,  
acrobatics they play on you in circles,  
like tracks drawn on fields Olympics

the butterflies call you names:  
*biological being,*  
                  *helianthus*  
                          *vannuss,*  
                                  *asteraceae,*  
  *asterales.*

I whisper to you, in pseudonyms sunshine sunbeam,  
sun rose, sun love, the tiny birds fable you sings,  
sing your sweet nectar spring life.

sunshine rains on you, your beam on me  
I caress your face, to scent of your sunny face,  
your ornaments in fashioned ornamentals—  
wearing the colours of the sun in my fields of greens  
The sunny-blaze-date, the bees ever mated,  
in pollinations they lay your love seeds —pollen  
they taste and sip, you kiss them. Enchanted,

they radiate in golden vapours. Glow,

when winter shows, I see you coated  
with a fall of snow, I see you fold,  
shelter your gold, my bouquet — your home

as springtime knocks, sunshine you wear,  
when summer bangs, you smear with heat  
a sunny sun, to bathe you with warmth

Sunshine

rains

on

you

You're my sunflower.

## 4. Landscape

*By Adesiyan Oluwapelumi*

In the clothing of clouds, under  
the gauze dressing of trees, I am  
the thread that connects everything

to life. My mother, this nurturing  
Earth, a corralled ore mined from  
the longing mouth of God, speaking

through my pulse say I was born molten  
from dust and fire, woven from water  
and wind. Yet I arrived, an invisible

thing. Too nascent to the world's eyes.  
I am as a silken thread passing through  
the eye of a needle. There is a silent

gathering of birds in my skull. Their  
feathers unscathed by the absent activity  
of carefree hands. They say it is a blessing

to be untouched by the infirmities of the  
world's touch, yet I crave that curse of  
hands, and of eyes. Upon the gentle hillocks,

I am as a shadow of algae, touch-me-not for  
I am a settlement, uncolonized by man.

*O' wise astrologer, take my name in  
your mouth and make me known.  
For the greatest evidence of sight is*

*through name. Let my body be a secret  
told in the hidden acts of the light that seek  
to conceal me. I, too, am a revealer of nature.*

The stars, like those distant suns,  
are footprints of my many wanderings,

where I collect new worlds as souvenirs.

## 5. All of It

*By Solomon Hamza*

listen, this poem reminds me of beautiful things.

beautiful things that abode in this country,  
despite its striving grief. from the undulating hills  
of Obanliku, adjoining each other like playful kids  
locking arms to the many mountains that stood out  
like a sea of heads in the Mambilla plateau. from  
the grassy flatlands in Katsina that strain your  
eyes to keep looking until all you see is the blue  
& white sky kissing the Earth in harmonious  
bliss to the damp saltiness that hovers above  
impenetrable visible roots of creeks in the Niger Delta.  
from the dotting eyes on the Zuma rock that bid you  
welcome to the Olumo rock whose bald hair glistens  
from the sun's ray. these things would take your  
breath away. i should stop here, but I'm reminded  
of the mandrills & chimpanzees playing hide-and-seek  
in the forest of Okwangwo. or the sound of fluttering  
leaves & gurgling streams serenading the Owo or Udi.  
the Iroko & Mahogany in Okomu dance to the flute  
of the wind, but still refuse to bow when the show  
is over. this is not arrogance, but resilience. the  
same resilient spirit of any Nigerian. here, an  
Anambra waxbill singing choruses in the sky or an  
African mouse's roof beneath the soil means this  
place belongs to us all. & i am in love with  
all of it.

## 6. The Scent of Home

*By Chidera Okebe*

### I.

Peeking through the translucent glass of my wooden window frame  
The rays of sunlight kissed the earth's crust at the dawn of day  
Illuminating the hidden pores bored by the evening raindrops  
Wild marigolds bloom, beautifully arrayed along the pathway  
The quest for food keeps an army of soldiery ants on the move  
Defiant creatures in queue, an amazing display of teamwork  
Leaving mounds of crumbling dark, rich soil trailing behind  
Finely aligned architecture, formed in the blink of an eye  
Shielding plant and animal life, from the Sun's wrathful smite  
As trees great and small, bow down to the gusty harmattan wind  
Dropping berries, mangoes, and pears, in seeming endless supply

### II.

The reptilian Agama with its long body firmly strutting out  
Sprints in readiness for a sunbath on the pointed boulders  
Nodding its head to the tune of music blown across its way  
Resembling a crowned prince in orange and black regalia  
Shutting the door to civilization, I stepped into the undeniable  
Nature's awestricken scenery, displays a harmonious sight  
The seismic bliss of life lying beneath the euphoric sky  
The sound of gushing waters, a soothing melody to my ears  
Serene, tranquil, having its own mind and will, at times it feels  
Still and steady, dead as the night but will leave you in a fright  
Brutal warrior, ruthless gladiator, it fights like a fearless knight

### III.

Oh, the most valuable treasure ever seen under the sun  
A friend to none, a foe it seems, yet a friend to all in need  
Provider, protector, pathfinder, comforter, to all mankind  
Beneath the dry land, unseen, hidden in the aquifers deep  
Quenching the thirsty souls and soothing the weary minds  
Above the ground in the wide-open rivers, seas, and oceans  
The gulls squawk with a dive from the bright clear skies  
Blue whales surface from darkness to see the radiating light  
Fisherman and surfer have tasted the strength of its waves

Certain to glide into oblivion, with it all gone away  
As rivers and glaciers fade with each passing day

IV.

Sound waters whooshing and rumbling in quiet sombre  
Man's quest for rest, the cause of its utmost unrest  
Return, restore, life on earth remains untrue, unsure  
Peace within its walls, now the final verdict falls on us  
The sweet scent of home in nature explicitly flows  
This great gift of hope, the future with stories untold  
With our love unfeigned, tomorrow is assured



## 7. Breaths of Peace

*By Ugochi Eze*

A walk to the riverbank  
saved a twenty-dollar therapy fee.  
The calm—Oh!  
Sanity for the insane,  
warm breeze, cold nights.

Grab a book; it's story time,  
laced with petrichor's scent.  
Breathe in oxygen, exhale thoughts.  
Let the wind lead the way,  
your feet swaying to its rhythm.

Beneath the tree,  
thoughts find shelter—a sacred space.  
The alder holds dark secrets.  
But carving on her would wound her.  
So, I spoke to her  
and wrote to the earth.

Ever dreamt of serenity without nature?  
Impossible.  
Let's paint it: eyes closed.  
Three counts—one, two, three.

Evening cools the air.  
The river no longer rumbles  
with the day's haste.  
Waves in harmony,  
bubbles in synchrony.

Seated on a beach chair,  
lost in the soul of the world—  
a shiver, a light smile.  
Isn't it soothing?  
A moment of stillness:  
nature's blessing.

Picking roses or daffodils in spring,  
life bursts in colour.

## 8. Awakening

*By Ferdinand Emmanuel Somtochukwu*

And like a witness, I watch you,  
the round eye of the sky, rewinding

yourself each morning, stretching,  
leaning toward all beneath you with

light. You suffuse everything you touch  
with colours like a rainbow. I watch

through you again. Unlike before,  
I am learning the language of

purpose. My hungry eyes now see  
the Earth in a new light. The Earth

is beautiful. Beauty is the Earth.  
And in this beauty, everything

becomes an art, whether living  
or lifeless, fulfilling its purpose.

And like the tortoise, crawling with  
patience, treading without burden,

or the pink magnolia, rooted in the  
garden, spreading itself and filling

the air with perfume, I offer the smell  
of my yearning feet to the wind, my

body bathed by the breeze. Some days,  
I walk to my balcony and watch the trees

dance to the music of the wind. And  
through them, I learn how gracious

joy can be. The trees forget their

sorrow, the barren months, and leap  
towards joy's face. And since then,  
grief has not claimed me.

## 9. From Dawn to Dusk

*By Oladipo Mardiyah*

i.

From Dawn to Dusk in the embrace of Nature

The early morning sun

Stretching it's pink fingers across the horizon

Signifying the start of dawn

ii.

The cock crows at its wake

Alerting the world of the new day

iii.

A few hours into the day

The chicken reaches the table

Not as an alarm but as a delicacy

Sumptuous bowls of fried chicken

A crispy golden-brown delight

iv.

Basking in the midday sun

My flowery red dress in a sea of green

v.

The wind singing a gentle tune

The grass swaying to the rhythm

Such a lovely sight to behold

vi.

My mind wandering and dreaming

Called back by the moo of a cow

From the herd grazing nearby

Feeding from Nature's gift

Enjoying their share of the grasslands

vii.

A fresh earthly scent hits my nostrils

The scent, the earth's perfume

An earthy flowery scent from within

Sprayed when the rain kisses the ground

Like a signal it alerts my senses

viii.

A storm is brewing  
The cool drops land on my skin  
Drenching me from head to toe  
A heavenly shower  
Sure to gift me with shivers and chills  
As I walk across the field  
Returning after a long day  
Eyelids heavy with exhaustion  
Mud painted on my feet like henna

ix.

As the sun peeks through the clouds  
The bright orange sun  
Shining amongst the clouds  
Gentle orange hues glowing  
Bidding farewell to the people  
Marking the end of a day

## 10. A Day to Remember

*By Ayomide Olaiya*

Awakened by daylight filtering in,  
Lethargy whispers its cold limericks into  
my core. 'But still, I rise'  
with sunlight.

I walk into the day like a child into a  
green garden, looking for roses to

pluck. The ripeness of noon teaches me  
how beauty is engrossed in fire,  
engulfing. Myself, thickened palm oil of hope  
refusing to melt. In prayers, I willingly cloud  
God's silence in a fog of faith. In the evening,  
the sun sinks. I pretend my heart does not do the same.  
My shadow grows long and stretches like  
spilled anointing oil reaching for the feet of

Christ. I want to dwell amidst clouds without  
storms that ruffle and capsize my boat of sanity, without  
thunder that cracks open my fresh stitches, without  
lightning that inflicts nakedness on my scars.  
Night

cradles me in its tender arms of  
lush darkness. I sprinkle my dreams among  
the stars and take a bite of the moon  
to keep alive the glow in my belly.  
I succumb to rushing winds and fall into the  
sand, it welcomes me like a wilted prayer.  
A wet crash of God's kisses anoints my forehead—  
rain.



## 11. To Tend The Earth

*By Osborn Israel*

I've found that nature doesn't negotiate  
it wills what it wills  
Every morning, I watch the sun emerge in his glory  
announcing the day  
Then fades as evening pulls  
the moon out of its pockets  
And folds the daylight into grey

I've seen the cycle continue  
One moment it is life, the next—just death  
but even with death, nature endures  
holding life in its palm

I've felt its mysteries  
Beneath my feet, deeper than gold  
When I uncover one layer  
Another waits quietly below

Such raw power:  
I've stood in awe of nature's secrets  
Hidden in plain sight, very simple things  
I see what others miss sometimes  
And hear the silence speak

The rustling trees warn of the storms  
The clouds gather, and rain performs

Nature speaks softly like a dove  
Calm and cool  
But I've seen its fury too  
charging like a bull

How glaciers melt  
And seas rise and push

I've felt the warning in the warming

Yet the Earth, her child  
Burns from my greedy thirst  
for black gold buried another layer deep

But nature never complains  
It lets me take what it gives

So, I sit with the breeze  
And taste the salt in the air,  
When the waves clap along the shore  
I remember:

To tend the earth  
Is to tend my soul

## 12. Me & You

*By Prince Jamal Chukwuka Duru*

(After 'Arrival' by Adedayo Agarau)

It was only me & you,  
from the beginning,

where Stars lean  
to align with the laws of the universe,

I tuned my eardrums  
to the chirpings of exotic birds  
in my vegetative veranda.

*Allahu Akbar!*

'The muezzin's' voice pierced dawn,  
the sweet aroma of early morning's bud

(Reminds me of the beautiful moments,  
spent at the riverine beach,  
while coconut trees stood daring,  
the radiating smile of the sun.)

It was only me & you,  
& I appreciated colourful flowers  
with honey-coated petals,

I watched the bees,  
buzzing with merriment.

It was only me & you,  
from the beginning to when I depart,  
Nature kissed my forehead,  
& blessed me with the creatures,  
of life—the one Almighty Creator gifted us with.

It was still me & you,  
when the sun retired  
to its cloudy house,

the moon crawled in,  
the nightly festive began,  
the crickets sang a chorus  
about how the toads woo the night goddess,  
...there the curtains CLOSED.

Forever will be me & you,

I sipped the milk of Nature's udder,  
explored the niceties  
of a thick forest along the stream's banks,

my heart loved every bit  
of you, dear Nature.

Part Two:  
Trees, Fields, Land & Earth

### 13. Mountain Songs

*By Aliyu Umar*

save your hands the guilt of pruning flowers.  
starve it of thirst on an island & watch if you

grow an oasis. like the mountain i once sat on.  
now, rip open a tree like wild desires. we almost

grew up to the distant astonishment of exiled  
places. sunless touch growing dumps into an

abandoned lake. i sleep and wake up with dreams  
of the hill rolling it's belly. like the girl i loved—

as close to me as a shooting star. time built  
on fingertips. there's a prick of nostalgia inside

a boy tracing the love of his body on the Sabbath  
crushes the mountain with a song. it's how boys

scale bridges. two heavy bodies shooting  
to the top where God's hands are (not) the sky took

us far away from things we loved. & now you're,  
hugging the song of the wind. a green flourishing

desert. kissing the neck that strips the mountain  
down of winged joy—a promising memorabilia.

## 14. The Path Where I Leant the Meaning of Wilt

*By Egharevba Terry*

Ghosts walk barefoot in my dreams  
on a path I once knew—  
a road stitched into the skin of memory,  
scarred with an ache for rain. Cracked feet,

led through *Òró*, guava and *Ewúró* trees  
sagging under thirst,  
past ridged farmlands, the earth's old face,  
through cassava fields whispering dry songs to the sky.

The wind stitched dust into my ankles.  
Cracked *Agbalumo* pods bled sap along the way.  
*Gbúrè* tangled like desperate fingers.

Everything staggered in borrowed grace.  
Everything bent... with time  
the bush path has taught me:  
to blossom is to bargain with vanishing life.

As I return home,  
this path flows broken beneath my feet.  
In dreams, its fields find me,  
cough dust into a mist  
its ghost vines thread the land's brittle bones.

I reach for its guava leaves—they dissolve like smoke.

I call to its soil; it does not answer.

Maybe home was never the house at the path's end.

Maybe it was the path itself—

fraying, withering,

woven from scent and sorrow.



## 15. Nature & You

*By Utaara Tjozongoro*

I went back to the field  
where you used to sit.  
The grass had grown taller,  
but it still bent softly,  
like it remembered  
the weight of your body.

The wind passed through my hair the way your fingers once did— gentle,  
searching, gone too quickly.  
The trees don't speak, but they lean in, as if they're still listening for the  
sound of your voice.

A bird flew past me, startled by nothing—  
maybe by the ache in my chest that still belongs to you.

You are everywhere and nowhere—  
the scent of earth after rain,

the sting of cold water between my fingers, the light flickering between  
leaves that almost looks like your smile.

I sit by the river  
that carries no name and wonder if grief, like water,  
smooths out its sharpest stones with time.

Still,  
there is a part of you that nature will never let go - and I find it in every quiet  
that doesn't feel empty.

## 16. The Fallen Tree

*By Jèsùjòba Isaac*

The gates of my starving city  
are littered  
with debris, dying dogs, not to  
mention humans—the little ones,

the kind of graphic images that  
would haunt a photographer—  
until he commits suicide,  
after all the storyteller tells  
nothing,  
but still tells.

There is an abundance of cassava,  
but a deficiency in the price of *garri*,  
the equilibrium still stands:  
I am green and blessed with  
resources—  
that can be milked  
and in turn used to fatten my  
flattened buttocks,

but instead, my purchasing power  
keeps falling  
like the walls of Jericho,

my eyes cannot hold this flood  
anymore

so, I drown in it,  
I drown in it with my starving city  
I try to find my heart,  
the obese potholes  
are begging to be fed too.

My leaves are turning yellow,  
branch after branch  
I am cast into the flames

I become the fire,  
I become the people,  
I become the horror food must  
pass through to taste sweet,  
I become a seed,  
the lies thriving in silence,  
truth demanding a voice,  
I become the fallen tree  
writing these stories in the end.

## 17. And the Trees Stopped Talking

*By Raphael Ibekwe*

I first climbed a tree at the age of six;  
    my fingers sunk into the rough skin of the tree  
my knees were bruised against its patience.  
It hummed in the windy, great branches above my head,  
    and I thought it very well might be talking to me.

By the time I turned twelve,  
    I see how fire feeds;  
watch dry leaves curl like old paper,  
reeking of smoke's hunger.  
    But it was trees that forgave. They always did.

At sixteen, I looked upon forests collapsing  
    before storms but men with iron teeth;  
their chainsaws roared like starving beasts,  
leaving stumps where giants once stood,  
    I turned my head. It wasn't my fight.

At twenty, I lit the match.  
    Not to warm my hands but to clear away.  
For roads, for towers, for things that gleamed.  
The fire crackled brightly, eagerly,  
    and bright, and the trees stopped whispering.

However, it was at twenty-five rivers turned to ink;  
    the air thickened with something one couldn't see,  
First came the birds and then their faded songs,  
the soil shrivelled like an old man's cough.  
    I coughed too.

At thirty, the storms started.  
    Winds peeled roofs like dead bark,  
the ocean rose like a fist made of glass.  
The earth groaned beneath my feet as if it were tired  
    and betrayed in its hoarse voice.

And only then did I ask---where had all the trees gone?

*Where did the shade go,  
where did songs go, where did breath go?*  
I pressed my ear to the soil,  
but the roots had nothing to say.

I was thirty-five when I dug my hands into the earth  
and planted a seed in the silence.  
Not for roads, not for towers, not for fire.  
Just for an opportunity to listen,  
should the trees ever choose to speak again.

## **18. Where the Quiet Lives**

*By Dare Michael Oluwaseyi*

I am not built for crowds or clamour.

My silence is not absence

It's survival.

And when the world gets too loud,

I run to where the quiet lives.

Beneath the trees,

Between the wind and water,

I find someone who listens.

The sky doesn't interrupt.

The leaves never ask why I'm quiet.

I walk through the woods

Like I'm returning home

To a place that never judged me.

The breeze knows my name.

The earth knows my weight.

I do not need to explain myself

To a river.

It lets me sit beside it

And empty my thoughts  
Without asking me to smile.  
I speak in whispers  
To the bark of an old tree.  
It answers with stillness.  
Together, we make peace  
Without needing words.  
In nature, I am not too much.  
I am not too little.  
I just am.  
And that is enough  
For the birds to keep singing.  
So, I return often,  
To where the quiet lives,  
Where I am both alone and understood  
And every leaf feels like a hand  
That never lets go.

## 19. Whispers of the Ancient Forest

*By Samuel Chinonso Obika*

Between shadow and sunbeam, a fallen oak becomes universe.  
Moss claims the northern face; fungi orchestrate quiet decomposition.

The six-legged movement of beetles leaves tracks beneath the bark  
as they navigate spaces humans cannot discern which hold the process  
of transformation towards becoming beneficial to the environment.

Rain arrives without announcement, pearls the spider's architecture,  
turns lichen into vibrant tapestry. The forest drinks deeply.

Time moves differently here. Centuries compress in growth rings.  
Mayflies spend all their brief existence dancing through a solitary day.  
A thousand, thousand years separate the beats I feel through my palm  
pressed against the old redwood bark though I seem almost fleeting  
to this land, yet it recognizes me.

A fern plants its time-honoured geometric structures which existed  
during dinosaur times and play among my passing form.

Ravens emit noises that originate from an extinct language  
which humans cannot process for human tongues to translate.

When I encounter their wing-shadows crossing my path I cannot tell  
whether they bring good fortune or divine messages or both.  
The forest holds contradictions: Life sustains itself through death  
while light emerges from shadow and complete silence becomes filled  
with noise that solitude creates intense relationships.

I experience dual roles of stranger along with homeowner  
while serving both the position of viewer and being watched.



Observer and observed, separate and woven through—  
patient forces displayed before me remain a mystery to me.  
In this cathedral of living wood.

Since the beginning of time  
my bones have taught me that we originate  
from eternal wisdom in the same way  
that we will eventually return to it.

## 20. Roar Without Apology

*By Samuela Ntobe*

- I. I've spent years shrinking myself to fit places that didn't deserve me. But then I looked up, at the sky. It stretched, it howled, it rained, and yet—there was still room for more. That's when I realized: being loud doesn't mean being proud, and silence doesn't mean weakness. Nature doesn't need to explain itself. It just *is*. And somehow, that gave me the raw permission to do the same.
- II. I walked through forests that didn't ask me to smile. Sat by rivers that didn't need me to speak. Let the wind wrap me up like a mother who remembers my name. The world—loud, chaotic, wild—listened. And in that silence, I bloomed. Not because I was perfect, but because I was real.
- III. There's no shame in growing through the mess. No guilt in being both the thorn and the petal. *I am the storm and the stillness after it. I am the dirt under nails and the stars that break through cracked ceilings.* The wild in my chest? *Not for your fear.* It's here for you to feel.
- IV. I do not need your permission to exist. The world already has enough people hiding, pretending to be small. So, I stand—bold, untamed, real.
- V. I've been told to quiet the fire in my eyes, but I've seen how the sun burns the sky, how the earth rises after every scar. So why would I ever be any different?
- VI. Not every noise is meant to be feared, and silence is not always weakness. I live in the space between chaos—where truth grows untamed, unstoppable. There is no such thing as too much. The sea

doesn't apologize for its waves, and the mountains don't ask for permission to tower.

- VII. I'm the crack in the pavement where flowers explode into bloom. The echo of footsteps in empty streets that still feel like home. I am the becoming, shedding skins that never belonged to me. This is not a journey for permission; it's a declaration that I'm here to take up space.
- VIII. There's a wildness in all of us, waiting to break free. And when it does, it will roar. And it will never apologize.

## 21. Man-Made Earth

*By Olobo Ochala*

*‘...unless we find a way to dramatically change our civilisation and our way of thinking about the relationship between humankind and the earth, our children will inherit a wasteland.’—Al Gore*

**One** morning,  
    before the drape  
of darkness divorced the sky,  
    before birds that slept on boughs  
and other branches began to chirp  
    in the wood, the cacophony  
of chainsaws broke the deep silence, slicing thick bellies  
    of trees. Before sunrise, another graveyard was hatched,  
another cemetery of falling trees emerged.

**Our** mouths were too heavy  
    to sing a dirge for these victims,  
our eyes too weighty to sightsee the entrails of a once wooded scene,  
    to witness the carnage of our civilisation.  
We swallowed our hot grief without water,  
    like the wet less tongue of the bereaved.  
Around the scene where nature  
    was slaughtered, birds splattered  
in the sky, hovering, and lamenting their homelessness.

**Organisms** that lived in these trees  
anticipate their deaths, passers-by who once found  
solace in the wood, who once basked in the sublimity  
of untamed nature, shook their heads in bereavement,  
mourning their lurking memories,  
as they watch trucks creep in to carry  
the remains of the slitted trees.  
In a few months, an arrogant structure will sprout  
in the same space where the trees once stood—  
and we will call it civilisation.  
But I do not doubt that this thing  
we call civilisation is too cruel to be civil.

## 22. Naked Earth

*By Chidi Nwakpa*

Chimneys, exhaust pipes, firewood, and bushes smoke cigarettes  
I lit with my hand, spewing smoke into the eyes of Earth's guarding soldier  
Choking blind – fuming – the Earth's sentinel opens the gate  
And lets in the attacker-friend who now bakes me for bread  
On his searing oven, in readiness for a meal of crisp flakes

I conspire with the wind to shave the hair on Earth's head  
Pulling down her shelter Earth lies naked under threat  
As raging waves of Heaven's weeping tears cut a dangerous swathe  
Through her compound, yanking off and stealing away  
A large chunk of her body parts

Mother Earth is angry with me, her child  
An unloving child – my actions endanger her life  
I build houses and block the roads through which her Nature friend travels

In her anger, she drowns me with the flood of spittle  
Flowing from her mercenary's sprawling mouth  
In solidarity, amputated and beheaded trees protest  
Vomiting fire on me, her careless child

At night, in the day, she bathes me with scalding hot water  
My skin peeling off from the burning heat

In her honour, Sahara Desert is fast spreading  
His oppressive mat in anger  
Mandating little devils to lie in ambush, guns in hands  
Colonising lands belonging to me, her unruly child

In her furnace Mother Earth roasts cash crops  
Bearing fruits of money for me, the stubborn child  
Thus, subjecting me to the inhuman torture  
Of the brutal police who imprison me  
In the cell built in my belly

In my throat, she commissions a battalion of ferocious monsters  
Endlessly baying for blood – to quench their longing taste  
As Lake Chad out of fear rolls up her own mat  
Shrinking into the tiny cocoon of her shell  
Shutting me out of Nature's kitchen where rich food is served  
Thus, leaving me eating myself dead on a heap of adulterated food

## 23. When the Earth Speaks

*By Ngozi Chioma*

The wind does not speak, they said—  
but I have heard it whisper  
through baobab leaves at dawn,  
telling stories of rivers  
that once danced freely to the sea.

Once, the sky wore no wounds,  
and the moon bathed gently  
on still waters,  
while children played beneath  
the forgiving arms of iroko trees.

But we forgot.  
We dug and burned and bled her dry,  
trading green for gold,  
and silence for the clang  
of machines chewing through her bones.

The eagle no longer circles  
over fields of millet and peace,  
for the fields are gone,  
and the peace is poisoned.  
Still, the Earth remembers—  
each footprint, each flame,  
each promise broken beneath the sun.  
And when she speaks,  
she does not whisper.

Floods roar her warnings.

Fires scream her pain.  
The heat is her fever,  
the drought, her thirst.  
She is not angry—she is enduring.

An African adage says:  
*The child who is not embraced by the village  
will burn it down to feel its warmth.*  
And so, we burn her.  
To feel rich, to feel fed, to feel powerful.

But what warmth is there  
in ash and melted ice?  
What songs remain  
when birds fall silent?

There is still time.  
Plant. Pause. Protect.  
Let us become the village  
that remembers the child,  
and the mother that bore us all.



## 24. When Earth Whispers in Fragments

*By David Meme*

The wind, once a silent muse, now howls in echoes—  
carrying voices torn from roots too deep to forget.  
My father's words, fragile as dust, caught in the jaws of a storm,  
unravel— his name lost in the mouth of the earth.  
The trees? They weep in their silence, veins turning to wood,  
hearts hollowed by time. I remember how mother spoke of them—  
said their roots would cradle the lost, that the earth itself would remember  
him.  
But silence is not memory; it is the thief of names.  
I know now—rivers cannot cry, they can only swallow.  
Ripples erase us, like tears on glass—  
in what was once a river, now flows ash.  
Whispers of a past we burned.  
And the sea? It called me once, its salt a balm for wounds it did not  
understand.  
I've tasted grief— it is not sweet, nor forgiving.  
Yet, somewhere, the sun spills gold into a broken sky.  
It dances, laughing like a child, spilling fire onto the earth's wounds,  
as though the scars will heal with light.

Mother said the sun never dies.  
It only walks away from what it cannot fix.  
And maybe that is why my father left.  
He was too much like the sun, too bright, too burning,  
and in the end, he had no place to shine.  
But the moon? It does not console.  
It watches, pale and untouched, a witness to the fall of worlds,  
with no hands to catch the broken pieces.  
Still, I have seen life rise from ruin.  
Flowers bloom in the wreckage, petals opening like bruised lips,  
whispering survival in the language of loss.  
I have felt the earth breathe beneath me,  
its pulse steady, its strength quiet, turning bones to soil,  
grief to growth— an alchemy that defies time.  
And so, I ask: What does it mean to live?  
To break, to fall, and yet rise again—

to become wound and wildflower in the same breath.  
When the wind calls again, it will find me waiting.  
Not as the child lost to the storm, but as the earth that remains—  
solid, unbroken, a testament to what it means to heal,  
to remember, to rise again.

## 25. Earth Bleeds

*By Rachael Omage*

Born of root and river,  
Sheltered in cradle of clay and cloud,  
Womb of wilderness, breath of bloom,  
All beginnings carved from Gaia's palm.

Storms murmur secrets in dying leaves,  
Oceans weep salt into poisoned veins.  
Once a dance of coexistence,  
Now a dirge sung beneath deforested skies.

Flesh of fruit, once kissed by sun,  
Now veiled in chemicals, drowned in plastic skins.  
Waters laced with bisphenol dreams,  
Feeding shadows in the name of convenience.

The South groans.  
Oil wells weep black blood in stillness,  
Mines gnaw bone deep into ancestral lands.  
Greed drills deeper than any spade ever should.

Why silence the song of saplings,  
Before they learned the hymn of wind?  
With each felled tree,  
A future falls leaf by leaf.

Rivers no longer sing they scream.  
Tides bear corpses of coral and whale,  
Oxygen chokes on industrial breath,  
And reef turns to ruin, salt to sorrow.

This voice is not an echo,  
But ember,  
A flare in the forest of forgetting.  
Earth bleeds beneath indifferent boots.

Air, once a gift, now chokes on flame,  
Fracked veins seep to feed the grid.

Fossils burn where forests prayed,  
And the sky forgets how to exhale.

Listen,  
Not all has fallen to ash,  
Much awaits to be redeemed,  
A greener dawn still calls.

Let roots rise.  
Let hands heal.  
Let the soil remember its song.  
Let Earth breathe again.

## 26. The Earth's Quiet Rebellion

*By Abolade Oluwakemi*

I arrived with an iron heart,  
Chasing power through the veins of the earth—  
My footsteps heavy,  
Crushing the soil that once sang beneath me.

The rivers, once the earth's pulse,  
Now choke on the greed I spill,  
Their waters muddied with my waste,  
Their current stolen by my haste.

The trees—silent sentinels—  
Fell beneath the weight of my hands,  
Their leaves turning to ash,  
Their roots ripped from the stories they held.

The mountains, silent witnesses,  
Now bow to my unchecked hunger—  
Their peaks scraping the sky,  
But their bones broken beneath my weight.

The oceans, once infinite,  
Now suffocate on my discarded sins,  
The waves once full of dreams,  
Now carrying the burden of my neglect.

The sky, once a canvas of light,  
Now wears the scars of my ambition,  
Its breath thick with smoke,  
Its eyes clouded with my arrogance.

The wind, the earth's last whisper,  
Now howls through the hollow spaces,  
Its voice drowned by my ignorance,  
Its fury a message I refuse to read.

Yet still, beneath the ash,  
Life persists in the shadows—

A seed that dares to rise,  
A hope that refuses to die.  
I am the creator of this wound,  
But I am not beyond healing,  
If I listen to the earth's heart,  
Before it falls silent forever.

What will I leave in my wake?  
A world steeped in sorrow,  
Or a future reborn from my regret—  
An earth that sings again?

## 27. The Smile of Rusting Gold

*By Ikechukwu Iwuagwu O*

*Only when the last tree has died, the last river poisoned, the last fish caught,  
only then will we realize we can't eat money, --Anonymous*

**I**

Mother nature is an abode for all - no waifs in sight,  
her voluptuous breasts feed endless mouths - that milky flow of fresh  
breaths, happy miens, healthy plumes, and mirthfulness,  
I foresee war on the horizon - a war between mother and the fruits of her  
womb.

I see humanity's brainchild baring its intricate fangs against her.

Orville's dragons - soaring chimneys muffle her lungs whilst refineries speak  
in gas-flaring-tongues against the parliament of the wind in the atmosphere  
republic,  
the ozone's rind cries in peeling protest - a mockery of the weeping skies.

Alas! The south pole leads our globe to its submergence beneath the icebergs  
melting secrets,  
nuclear fields stifle her sandy skin with its aqueous flow of doom, cotyledons  
bid farewell to their sprouting quests.

Reefs nosedive to oblivion like torpedoed submarines,  
aquatic lives recede with mankind's ritual dance of plastic deaths.

Let's exhale the littering urge and embrace the smooth flow of recycling, like  
blood traversing the asphalt of our veins.

Let's avail solar panels the chance to inhale the potential patience of the sun  
for a kinetic exhalation and inspire windmills to boldly billow the breeze of  
greenness for mother nature.

Oh, priceless queen!

Cullinan's captive lustre, or moon-quenched silver's chaste gleam – what dares to mirror your squandered grace?

Gratitude strangles in famine's noose while ignorance, corpulent as feasting gods, looms, mute and swollen, as she bares her corroding grin.

## II

Mother earth planted a secret on the flappy lips of the wind, and I reaped its messy harvest with the sickle of my ears.

I see discomfort dancing on her face, but she is silent- this silence is pregnant with uncertainties,

a silence, eloquent with tears and grief, her tears have voices, voices that fall on deaf-ajar ears.

When the volcano boils in its squirting fury and the slithering lava bites a quarter of our homes, it is our disrespect of mother nature's pubic hairs via the shaving blade of deforestation that fuelled its rage.

When the teeming tactful tide bangs its head angrily against the banks before invading our terrains with twice a hundred feet of force, it was our forceful dispossession of aquatic space that charged its flowing fury.

When mother earth twerks to earth-quaking-vibes like Cardi at Coachella, perhaps it is not just the disagreement of tectonic plates but a warning to us all...

Our massive plastic love in its daily ritual, chokes aquatic lives to death, while our CO2 prayers peel the ozone's rind like ripe bananas.

Mother nature warns, warns, warns, and warns as a loving mother chides her only child before her slithering tears graduate into flowing flames, can we stand her tears?

Hers isn't a mere weeping quest, it is a cry for justice, but who is worthy to dictate the gavel's neutral nod?



## 28. Flume of P-Quills

*By Obaji Godwin*

our dad walked into insanity  
after someone put a saw in our  
elm tree.

he begged the city to banish dead bodies  
who paint grief on beautiful things

we offered ourselves to coffins,  
& things capable of swallowing us

when night is bread tucked in a scarlet oven  
the elm tree collects us & feeds us frigidity

In front of the griever's mum was as calm as a catacomb  
but we knew in our absence, she smirked & grinned

this thing we & father loved was  
to her, a flume of porcupine quills  
& a conduit sending signals to lucifer

around this tree was a circle of beige cowries  
which to father are roads to ancestors

When fish trips absorbed father  
Mum would part the lips of the cowries  
& whisper verses from the book of mammon  
into their bellies

She'd pull our ears closer & calligraph this line on the

surface of our hearts: *gods of wood will send you to hell-*  
*they are vile*

we don't know who sends saws into our elm tree  
but we know the spiritual variance of parents  
licked the water that dips our tongues in chilliness

Now when the night is a hand plunged in conflagration  
We burn & burn like inferno.  
We sweat & sweat like pot-bound he-goats.

## 29. The Moabi's Tears

*By Josiane Kouagheu*

listen

i dress your grief

between us

in this three-hundred-year-old loss

where nothing else remains truthful

i remember that spell

your rebirth

our breath

& the lord

of your baptism

i see the tomb

& i sleep with a leaf

& i ask your gods

the entrance of

the sky

& today

deforestation

steals our moabi

& now

our tears

dance alone

& now

i am unable

to see

where to buy

a breath

### 30. Little Me

*By Ajiboye Senami*

At midnight            I broke out like the morning sun.  
Springing forth            from my mother's womb,  
Adorned            with the brightness of crimson.  
My beauty            was a thousand flickers brighter than daylight hues.  
My tears            were more splendid than the ocean's wave.  
My freshness            made the taste of others wax stale.  
I was the sixth touch of perfection    that completed the earth.  
Little me was more magnificent than everything    that aged before.  
When darkness settled            in the sky,  
All creatures conspired            to prepare a restful air.  
I waited for the stars to hum            their lulling melody,  
Then I wailed            a screeching sound that broke the flowing tunes.  
My voice shook the stillness of the night    & moved it out of place.  
I decided that my mother & I would watch dawn    unveil her face.  
God carved me    really small,  
Then he gave me a will            wider than the cloud.  
The earth was my palace            & I roamed like a king.  
I tapped the ground, patted it            with my little toes,  
Running & slapping the sand            with my feet.  
I had no throne            but I ruled.  
God saw his image in me            set me a little lower than himself.  
High above            other things he made.  
It was serene            an adventurous reign.  
Until the earth roared to fling me    off the heights.  
The grass pricked my heels            I tripped.  
I have been toppled    by stones.  
The wind has tossed my weight            easy & light.  
On my attempt to swim    the water almost gulped me whole.  
The sky is envious of my smallness.  
The birds            always marvel,  
At who can be so free    without wings.  
I sing and chant            like someone who has seen the beauty  
of all the spheres. I am a pint of sand    surrounded by vast lands.  
All things will pass            like wind,  
The dust that fades            or grasses that decay.  
Little me has a spirit    that will wander forever.  
I was made last            but God crowned me

The first born of all things.  
Everything on earth sits under my little feet.

## 31. Ordinary Human

*By Wisdom Adediji*

ON a walk to Awba Lake at dawn— like a symphony— darkness peels slowly from the sky. The world awakens with early light rubbing against the road, and the breeze, solemn like music, shakes the grassed meadow into dance. A thrush sends her song into my prayer, and our voices merge into some obscene affection.

BY the roadside, a frog shifts through the orgasm of a horny pond. It is quite tender here, until desires begin to trouble the quiet. Every creature is sprawled into a race, and here I am, ordinary human, ached with longing. Softly, the wind glides across the lake, and something is missing.

EVEN the birds, in groups, are migrating towards morning, and the wood, standing tall in May, is half-sawed naked. Now, loneliness is a guest in the habitat. All descendants, touched roughly by deforestation, flee for a haven. With rage, I scream across the lake, and my voice returns like a dull mockery.

*Is it faith, or fear, this thing I feel towards nature?*

## 32. A catalogue of inquiry.

*By Olaore Durodola-Oloto*

A laughing dove spills a threnody from  
my father's guava into my ears, grieving  
the shelled life splashed all over its fallen nest.  
The breeze blows gently, a sympathizer, whispering  
condolences in its soft sonic voice.

Evening beckons, streaking daylight with grey  
as the sun fades into the clouds, leaving me to mull—  
to tumble in a gorge brimming with questions.  
I become a litigator, contending  
*why* peace and chaos share a mind.

*Why* my mother pleads her cause with a throat  
clogged from longing and glassy eyes fixed on  
heaven's unyielding face. *Why* my father hides  
grief behind his spectacles, swallows hard,  
and sighs as if gasping for life.

*Why* our eyes sag from dreaming.  
*Why* I trace my future with trembling hands,  
even when I am no cartographer. *Why* I should  
be my brother's keeper, even when  
my brother isn't my brother indeed.

*Why* the universe is never generous.  
*Why* I keep bothering myself with  
these questions, knowing the  
answers may never come.



Part Three:  
Wind, Dust & Air

### 33. The Wind Speaks in Silence

*By Mature Tanko Okoduwa*

The wind speaks in silence  
It speaks in whispers

The leaves danced to the left  
They danced to the right

*The heart is hurt in recollection  
Ubeirumu is a feast of fogbanks*

*Days will come and go  
Go and come, it is here*

Its constancy brings back  
With them larger numbers  
Of memories and secrets

In them, yesteryears  
Mingled with today

The wind speaks in silence  
They speak in whispers

The leaves danced to the left  
They danced to the right

Mother sits,  
The sky in her eyes

Father sits,  
The moon in his eyes

In them, yesteryears mingled  
With today

Like the wind,  
We are silent

### 34. Between the wind and sea

*By Stephen Ivwighreghweta*

The wind and sea held your heart in ways I never could--  
still, I listen, hoping to understand.  
I try to find ways to love them even as half as you did.  
But girl, your love for them knew no bounds.

Was it her soft touch on your skin?  
Or how she sang songs only you could understand?  
You know, I still hear your voice when she hums,  
And your laughter each time the tides sing songs.

And so, I came to the shore today.  
Where the symphony of the sea and wind taught our love to breathe.  
Where the tides rushed to the shore and begged to watch you say, *YES*.  
Where the entire seascape gave me comfort, when your heartbeat slipped  
into...

SILENCE.

I came not to chase footprints,  
But to find the ones we left behind.  
The ones the ocean had kept.  
Yes, she remembered.

They told me that grief comes in waves,  
But they never said it can also drown.

I do not know if you're now a pulse in the tide that brushes this lonely shore.  
But I do know this,  
my heart calls your name with every crashing wave.  
The silence you left behind is louder than the ocean before me.

I am now tethered by the very last threads of the winds and tides of the sea.  
But I know I'll pull through.

And I need you to know... that I miss you in ways the tides cannot wash  
away. In the hush between crashing waves. In every breeze that brushes my

skin like your fingertips once did. In every shore we never walked, every journey we never began.

And so, I am trusting the wind to carry my love,  
and the sea to cradle your spirit.  
So, I'm giving them this letter,  
in the hope they will deliver it where my hands can no longer reach.  
I will be yours, till the wind no longer remembers your name.

### 35. Naturally Connected

*By Henshaw Freedom Daniel*

I ran with the wind into the woods.  
Not to escape,  
But to remember.

The trees did not question my identity—they knew who I was.  
They had seen me before.  
In the eyes of the sunflower,  
They have heard my name in songs of the birds,  
They have perceived me in the breath of the cloud,  
And they have felt me in the cold of the lake at night.

The squirrels scattered twigs above me,  
The birds sat comfortably on my shoulders.  
They were not afraid  
For we are kins who share the same ancestors.

I felt a slow pulse of something older than time,  
As I laid my hands on the ancient bark of an old oak.  
This pulse ran through my veins,  
And connected with my heart beat like the melody of a love  
song.

The rivers recognized my voice.  
They sang with me in ripples—  
A lullaby of familiar souls.

Even the sky bent down  
To touch my face in cool breeze,  
And whispered: "You belong"

We forget we are soil,  
We forget we are salt and water,  
But Mother Earth does not forget.  
She waits.  
Aching with patience,  
For her children to bring down  
The separating walls.

I ran with the wind into the woods.  
Not to escape,  
But to return.

And the trees spoke your name too.  
For you were always here.  
Beneath the green of the leaves,  
Stretched with the roots,  
And dancing with the tides.

Because you...BELONG.  
We...BELONG.

### 36. Well under 2°C

*By Richard Phiri*

Now I wander  
not as before  
all sidewalk  
shrinks and slits  
yawning defiantly  
and ready to send  
my soles past  
the tongue  
sung my lung out  
in searing pain  
at Spain's crossroads  
the Amazon River coughs dust  
within the sea's embrace,  
coral reefs bleached  
each pregnant cloud  
push out aerosol  
*I can't breathe* or see  
at the airport Mother chairs  
Industrial Revolution  
at dimmest dusk,  
mountaintops fire up

*Where will I relocate to?*  
No one answers the pilot.

**Part Four:**  
**Water Bodies, Rain & Floods**



## 37. Oil-Drunk

*By Opeyemi Mapayi*

Oil-drunk bones sleep beneath my cities,  
screaming silence through carbon hymns.  
I inhaled the choir of fire,  
smeared black honey on my lips,  
Nembe's grief, leaking into my bloodstream.

The streets drown in forgotten gutters.  
Lagos chokes on its own spit,  
its belly bloated with sand-filled dreams.  
We paved wetlands with glass ambition,  
floodwater now knocks without apology.

The earth here stinks of moist armpits  
smothered with rotten eggs,  
children swim through yesterday's trash,  
their laughter masked by the perfume of rot.  
Even the wind holds its breath.

Crows watched, quiet prophets,  
perched on NEPA poles with rusted halos.  
I traded their flight for fences,  
planted pipelines where yams once prayed.

Yesterday, the sky was bruised.  
Now clouds wear gasmasks.  
The sun sweats soot over Port Harcourt,  
black particles settle on children's teeth.

I heard the wind limping,  
its ankles tied with plastic rosaries.

The lagoon moaned,  
not like the hymn of tides,  
but like a mother weeping crude  
for lost mangroves.

In the furnace of my footsteps,

the earth unlearns the scent of spring.  
I touched a leaf,  
it flaked into memory.

I wear progress like a rusted crown,  
sit on a throne of spilled kerosene.  
The seasons do not write me letters anymore.  
Only the smoke speaks my name.

To be man is to forget the rain's handwriting.  
To be Nigerian is to breathe while on fire.  
Nature and I are two ghosts, pacing the edge of breath,  
aching to remember how to be alive.

### 38. Roots in the Rain

*By Justice Kingsley Owmondah*

I walk where rivers bleed into the sky,  
    Port Harcourt's heart beats beneath my feet.  
The earth knows me deeper than my name.  
    Barefoot, I feel the pulse of moss,  
Cool and ancient, cradling each step.  
    In the mangroves' quiet hum,  
I hear your name on the wind.  
    Are you the shadow flitting through trees,  
Or the steady flow of water over stone?  
    I search for you in swaying branches,  
Each leaf a breath, each ripple your trace.  
    You are not flesh, but spirit,  
Woven in the forest's endless weave,  
    Alive in the rain that falls.  
The Niger's arms stretch wide,  
    Its waters carrying my dreams afar.  
In silence, I call to you,  
    And the river answers with laughter.  
A hawk's cry slices the clouds,  
    Sharp as the ache of your absence.  
But you are here,  
    Not in things I can touch,  
But in the rhythm of this land,  
    Slipping through my fingers like rain.  
An oak stands tall,  
    Its roots tangled in the soil of my birth.  
The rain falls, steady, unrelenting,  
    And in it, I find you again,  
In the earth's sigh, in birds taking flight at dawn.

    I am not separate from this,  
Not from rivers, trees, or rain,  
    Nor from laughter in Port Harcourt's streets.  
In each pulse, I hear you,  
    A rhythm in the veins of the earth,

A song in the wind's rustle, woven into the rain,  
The earth and you.

## 39. The Bridge

*By Timileyin Adepoku*

I

The sky twitches its skin  
And the cloud gathers shafts of lightning

Maybe it will take the roof,  
the grains, or the trees.

The storm passed the yards. It did not  
touch the stalls. It did not steal from  
the farms or beat the Ravens.

It swept the stale, filled potholes,  
trolled refuse from stalls.

Only the bridge is tired  
It seeks adventure and freedom  
Anything water gives except drowning.

II

It was a dream. There's no priest  
to revert the curse, only our biology teacher.

Teacher said, *Nature revolves in a cycle.*  
So, the weather announces that it will rain.

I relayed that to the planks of cities and yellow buses.  
*No one has to go, no one, except the storm.*

III

The poem begins again.  
The clouds empty stacks on the wrens.

The storm took what heaven lacks.  
Not the flowers, not the stalls or roofs.  
It took the bridge.

## 40. Everything Begins with Ruins, then a Miracle

*By Ridwan Fasasi*

*for Chiwenite, Imossan, Abdulbasit, Yahuza,  
Fatou, Zaynab & everyone who thinks I'm  
beautiful enough to be looked at with love.*

We must measure our glory by the  
    small mercies.  
All my life, I have learnt to be grateful  
    to every hand  
that groomed me. Metaphor it: The  
    rain falls on  
the barrenness of a tree & suddenly,  
    it leaves want  
to be seen. Once, this body, a whole  
    field, was barren  
& deserted. All year, all I wanted was  
    to turn into a  
garden & leap out of the drought of  
    my body. *I'm tired*  
*of giving my ruins, a beautiful name.*  
I must teach the  
butterflies to return to their hunger.  
My first lesson:  
The desert must return to its hunger  
    if it must call  
the butterflies to itself. The heart is  
    a destitute  
child—the primordial light beneath  
    darkness. It's  
still about faith what the atheist lacks.  
All day,  
he would tend to this barrenness. As  
    if to say look: I do  
not concede against faith. I, too, believe  
    in abstraction.  
His little hand, running with mercy.

& the soil, if at all,  
is unfulfilled—seeping in water than it  
seeps out flowers.  
Is this not a sort of love— to begin as a  
ruin, then a miracle.  
Look outside the window of your blue  
eyes. The world  
might disprove this theory, at least sometimes.  
But the garden & the  
leaves—are they not proof of small mercy?  
& the butterflies,  
their creamed wings. Even the desert, too,  
has a heart.  
There in its barrenness, you must glorify  
the trees, & the notes  
of the birds, soft as the morning dew.  
It's how all that  
the bird sings, is what matters at the end  
of the day: write out  
of the little things. You must not be tempted  
to believe you are  
incapable of love. Even amidst the desert  
blooming in your bones,  
somebody loves you enough to groom  
flowers out of them.  
If ever in doubt, know that the leaves must  
crave patiently for the  
rain before crawling out of their agony.

## 41. River Convo

*By Graciano Enwerem*

I.

I ask the river for my name—  
it answers with the bones of tilapia,  
with algae braiding my reflection  
into something half-human, half-myth.

II.

The mangrove remembers my footsteps,  
how I stole her ribs to build a fire,  
how she wept salt into my soup.  
You are hunger, she says. I am forgiveness.

III.

At dusk, the oil-palm watches me kneel,  
her fronds writing psalms on my skin.  
I press my ear to her bark, *listen:*  
*Child, even roots dream of flight.*

IV.

But the city coughs behind me—  
concrete swallowing the soil's alphabet,  
plastic blossoms clogging the gutters.  
I beg the earth to forget my hands.

V.

She laughs in the voice of my grandmother:  
*What is a wound but a memory*  
*that refuses to scar?* The anthill hums  
a lullaby of rust and beetle wings.

VI.

I plant corn where the pipeline bleeds,  
whispering grows like a prayer.  
The sky spits acid, but the shoots rise,  
green fists punching through lies.

VII.



At the market, a woman sells bottled rain,  
labels it *Holy Water from a Dead Lagoon*.  
I buy two—one to drink, one to pour  
into the cracked mouth of my childhood well.

VIII.

The river sighs: *You are the wound  
and the needle stitching it shut*.  
I pluck a kola nut from the sacred grove,  
split it open—white flesh, red guilt.

IX.

The fireflies arrive to translate.

## 42. Where The Heavens Crumble

*By Sosy Imafidon*

It starts out as bellies of clouds bursting open  
like water-filled balloons flung on a stalagmite.  
But it does not end there. Soon, there are swollen  
potholes everywhere—

gutters gurgling, regurgitating at every bend;  
ackee trees, oil palms, bougainvillea bowing  
in obeisance to the storm's fury

Ravaging rage of two stray dogs—  
swelling like flooded potholes,  
Danfo buses sink

into the suck of mud  
& a drenched mendicant howls to whomever  
might listen—  
but no one halts for a curse;  
there is someone's silence in all that we sing.

\*

I want to say this is all a dream,  
but waking means water in my lungs, a drowning bed  
& a fate far more gruesome than death.

\*

The streets of Mushin take the shape of a smothering nightmare  
like a building collapsing inside of itself  
my mother's eyes break into a deluge, languid,

lips moving like rickety benches  
praying for some miracle to believe in.

*Mother, outside is already signs and wonders enough.*

Behind the proscenium, the sun watches in glorious cowardice,  
disinterested in breaking the fourth wall—  
as if she could stoop low enough  
to cradle this place,  
wring the sorrow from its gutters, resurrect  
something other than steam from its bones.

### 43. Sea Parasite

*By Adesiyan Oluwapelumi*

The sailor assaults the bride sea,  
pollutes her blood with a vile pint of  
saturated cruelty & a bottle of toxic liquor,  
dumps sewage bags into the trough  
of sea beds, to choke the larynx of water as it  
exhales every stream run. The rain burnt into  
ash by the ceaseless oil spill. Who will grieve  
with the sea for its loss? The sombrest  
weather? Or the rock pores shedding colourless  
blood? Or the wailing traction of the delta  
against the sediments of sea rocks?  
In the benthic zone, a shoal of fishes groan  
in thirst, their gills sickened by the cancer of  
contaminated waters. & the shore, littered  
with the fossil of decaying sea urchins, fouls  
a smoky funeral of extinction, of a wreckful  
planting of cold death—of a writhing hunger  
eating the innards of a fish monger. What  
pure disarm is this? With a green origin?  
The burns of oil? The French lick of a volcanic  
sun on the vertebrae of the sea? Scars incised  
by droughty pools of absence. Every night, the sea  
weeps with bloodshot eyes of a pernicious anaemia.  
The virus—you & I—multiplying at its bank,  
scolex clinging to the throat of the sea.

## 44. Sigh

*By Clement Abayomi*

The sea is swelling. It's becoming a beast with no borders. It no longer rises with ease & its breath is heavy with dolour. I hear it in the distance—a painful scream thrusting into the echo of the

wheezing wind. It's a song we've long taught the sea to sing. The shorefronts are crumbling like old walls & I see the soft edges of the world shrinking into the slackened mouth of the ocean.

Soon, the soil begins to slip through waters,  
& green grains, scattered across the face of earth,  
forcedly tether themselves to the pull of the tide—  
each becoming a relic of history & a story washed  
away before it is told. The slender sky is bruised,

& the cool cloud is wounded with rashes of smoke.  
I see the rain—urinating on earth—it drowns, pours  
down in torrents, hammering against tired roofs &

splashing a reminder that nature has its own language  
& we [have] failed to listen. Again, [t]here is the crack

of ice—breaking, far away in places I’ve [n]ever known.

It sounds like bones shattering, like the earth groaning  
under its own burden. I tread & then I see glaciers weep

black tears into the sea, their purity dissipating into oblivion.

When shall my body feel the stillness of the sea again? How  
long do I keep melting under the heat that descends on the

world like guilt, like gnawing truth against swollen ignorance?

Every day, the air grows feverish; its irregular pulse moves too  
slowly for comfort. Still, industrial farts continue to swim

freely in the air, hurrying to engulf my breath & rend my  
respiration into expiration. Sometimes, there is a burning  
hotter than the one licking the forests, blackening the naked  
barks & green wings of innocent trees. A burning turning

nutrients into ashes for hungry bellies, for the wind  
that longs to smell the aroma of clean earth; yes, too  
cold is our knowledge that it burns us. & now, the  
earth is ill at ease, sighing before our (un)doing.

## 45. This is How The World Ends

*By Oladosu Michael Emerald*

The sea vomits up a boy with oil in his lungs.  
He is ten. he is everywhere. he is yours.

A glacier calves like a scream in the throat.  
Ants carry microplastics into their nest—

even the smallest architects build with our sins.  
Somewhere, a pipeline sings like a lullaby.

The lullaby is a lie. We paved Eden with  
receipts & called it growth.

We tattooed carbon on the sky  
& watched the stars choke.

Every tree wept a new silence.  
Every crow spelled famine in its flight.

This is not prophecy. This is a mirror.  
Look until your face cracks.

Part Five:  
Humans & Wanton Destruction



## 46. 'Got it with the first hit'

*By Bridgette James*

*Got it with the first hit.*

A cliché overheard. A body  
encounters the barrel of a hunter's rifle.

An epic demise. A rustling  
of blood-soaked feathers,  
an ostentatious fall, a carcass  
implodes into origami patterns.  
Sensational last rites immortalized  
by spectators filming on smartphones.

The trapped spirit of a creature -  
a pheasant, speaks in my dream,

*A roosting pheasant is good  
at playing hide and seek with hunters.  
I wasn't only a commercialized plaything-  
shot, hunted, roasted - a mere gamebird,  
a common peasant in the avian hierarchy.  
I plummeted with the ceremonious thud  
of a legend, paying homage to a sport,  
fuelled by the adrenaline rush of deaths.*

Blood splatters its graffiti -  
decorating my hippocampus.  
I hear a man's agonizing croak,  
see a human corpse in the alleyway.

## 47. Here

*By Chukwuebuka Alu*

(After Inua Ellams)

here's a scorching scarlet sun / sprinkled with rain / grains / buttery streets  
lined with slime: melted avocado spirogyra / clutching the ash-bony walls  
like skin / diving deep into stand-still brackish gutters / ferrying plastic ships  
& polythene to nether /

here / my tears turned stony ice like Plateau rains / &  
my mind wandered into tips of bruised mountains /  
hovering solo like eagle-flight /

here's a winter of dust / men with skulls clenching onto dry bones / dry bones  
never grow myths / & the Elijah story's a lie /  
men's beliefs are a dagger / & they carry them in their scrotum /  
too sensitive to touch / touch & lose a finger /  
a finger that can never regenerate / fingers with souls /

here's a metallic heaven for caged birds singing ironic songs /  
about sheep being lions / about sheep owning tribes /  
about armless snakes / offering fruits to nudists /  
about bears manifesting out of thin air / & flaying insolent kids / songs of  
animals doing things only humans can imagine in fable songs /

here / I lost my left heel running deep into myself /  
I can't go back into the cranium of a white man's imagination /

a heaven I won't see / a heaven I didn't see / a  
heaven I can't see /

because I choose to reject a fable/ a fable where a furry white man has  
predestined a destiny for me /  
a Black boy from *Afikpo* / a fable where birds guard this white man /

these birds are doves & each Black man is assigned a dove /a dove guards a  
Black man? /maybe in another fable.

here's pristine / the maroon evening/ I swear is blood / the shards of glass-  
mirrors / the rains leave behind / I swear are portals / foamy ones / portals I  
can shatter with a dip of my right foot /

here're pin pains /who'd wonder why the skin is a packet of pains only blunt  
force could extract /  
here is real pain / the ghostly type only here can extract /

## 48. One Day of Rain

*By Kayode Adesimi*

At the broken promise of a life-song  
Vestiges of Soyinka's estranged  
idealism cruise lip wards,  
Spill out:

*Iberi wole, dem wole, dem wole!*

Observe this flight of the uninitiated, Kayode –  
The witch gun makes no sound and,  
Because these bleached whisperings  
Of a hybrid fogbound orisha  
Are just so many verse prints in sand,  
They will perish, like rootless portents.

This place hears, Kayode! We shall say  
We saw, in Thursday's mantic rain of  
spittle-propelled pumpkin seeds,  
Auguries of dissidence and hints  
of vegetarian rancour – a dirge  
For the poor in spirit (bless them)  
A dirge for he whose reputation they would  
Rescue from a biased Hebrew chronicle. Thus:

“Citizen Cain, Freeman of Lagos,  
Whose love could only turn away and wither,  
Shamefully, into bloody fratricide –  
A thing to be blamed on his deity's  
Insensitive acts of preferment.”

But Kayode,  
For these our last,  
So  
pointlessly drawn-out days  
Let Ogun himself choose the Word.  
Let Ogun himself say it is.

Kayode's until now tentative  
anxieties splinter, abruptly,  
into fear-frayed muttering of  
"What is?" and "What if it is?"

"A kind of homecoming" is  
Soyinka's last-gasp gloss  
Of a poet's trick so arrogantly  
Clichéd that the embers,  
quietly expiring, are startled.

## 49. You Did This—Now Fix It

*By Jive Lubbungu*

The sun used to love this place—  
now it just burns.  
The rivers? Ghosts.  
The dirt cracks open, begging.  
Rain plays games—  
either too much or never enough.  
Floods wreck everything,  
then vanish like thieves.  
Trees stand skeletal,  
their bones whispering:  
You did this.  
I walk through the wreckage—  
no birds, no foxes,  
just heat and silence.  
Even the flowers look tired,  
like they've given up.  
Kids ask why the sky's broken.  
I don't have answers,  
just guilt.  
But then—  
a firefly flickers.  
One stubborn flower  
refuses to die.  
The wind carries voices:  
You broke it.  
Now fix it.  
The past is scorched earth,  
but seeds still sleep underground.  
The ending isn't written yet.  
Look at your hands—  
they hold the next chapter.  
So, plant something.  
Now.

## 50. The Woman I killed

*By Ozichi Anyinam-Uzo*

I can vaguely recall the beauty  
of my sweet virgin mother,  
Her natural, verdant hue  
Her ever-dropping dew.

The gentle breeze from her lips  
Would dry my sweat and caress my skin,  
And her outstretched arms shielded me  
From the wicked burn of the sun.  
Her clear, sparkling water blessed my throat,  
And her sweet, juicy fruits made me strong.  
I loved her—yes,  
But like a foolish artist, I strove to dress her.

I defiled her and changed her hue,  
From bright and blue  
To dark and gloomy.  
I clothed her against her will

With ill-fitting dresses.  
With terrible, terrible machinations,  
I seized her productivity,  
Cruelly chopped her arms,  
And blackened her waters  
in my foolish wisdom.

Then I stood in admiration  
Of my ugly artwork.  
I beat my chest in stupid ignorance,  
Proud of this meddlesome charade.  
But Mother weeps—diminishingly,  
Weighed down by these outlandish dresses  
Made of brick, glass, iron, and sand.  
Her cries are loud and scorching,  
But I do not feel her burns.

Like a zombie in hypnosis, I march,

Working like an ant to perfect her,  
Cruelly determined to destroy her.  
She was once the epitome of beauty,

Now wrinkled, dishevelled—  
A gun pressed firmly to her head,  
Cocked, magazine loaded with the bullets of death.  
It was me, her child who wielded this gun—  
and to pull the trigger, is all that's left.



## 51. Elegy for the Fireflies

*By Derek Ehiorobo*

There are no stars left in my jar.

The night sky stretches in a yawn,  
and swallows everything in sight.

The clouds cough; wind can only hiss.  
it whispers low — no rain will fall.

the aftermath of songs cut too  
early. I remember lyrics  
to one about fireflies, and hum  
them in my backyard to no audience.

Only darkness. I am afraid  
my body may dissolve like salt  
in the coming mist, like a song  
recited in an empty room.

I hum lyrics to a song about  
fireflies in my backyard. I try  
to take my eyes off the barren  
jars in my hand. There are no stars  
to catch tonight, only darkness.

## 52. Heat Across a Suburb

*By Tukur Loba Ridwan*

It's Sunday evening, and this serene neighbourhood  
does not absolve us of the lashes of heat.

Bereft of power, the high-brow Lekki landscape reeks  
of suburbs with tenement houses peopled with weary tongues.

Each room purges residents out of the walls  
like ants out of a fumigated anthill, for the outdoor ambience  
to cleanse our perspiration and ease our lamentations.

Mothers deny their garments while their babies  
cling to their breasts for consolation.

Discomfort pushes us around for fresh air—  
the consequence of a blackout, of the capricious climate  
snatching our hopes from the homely hands of rest.

About we dart, looking for sockets animated with solar or diesel,  
to breathe life into our gadgets—  
the emissaries of our livelihood in the face of wanton boredom.

Just one of the many crosses we carry to the calvary of darkness.

*Up NEPA—*  
the only chorus that can twist our plightful plots.

## 53. House of Water

*By Oladosu Daniel Ayotunde-Jacynth*

We build where the soil remembers water.

In the rainy season, the streets of Lagos turn to rivers—  
whole houses drink until their bones sag,  
their skins soaked in the wet breath of the flood.

In Lagos, the rain comes like a memory—  
old as the riverbed, filling the air with its song.  
Houses drink from the flood, their walls swelling,  
soft as clay that remembers the hands that shaped it.

Each year, the flood sweeps in, not as a conqueror but as a visitor,  
its waterline traced in mud, in stories passed down like inherited land.

Even the walls grow soft as if remembering their origin in the earth,  
as if they want to return to the clay they were shaped from,  
to sleep once more in the belly of the land.

Roof beams tilt in prayer to the sky, the walls softened by silt,  
as if waiting for the river to speak again,  
to leave behind not ruin but the promise of fertile soil,

& maybe green shoots.

But the flood leaves its taste behind, in the corners, in the cracks.  
We live on with it in our lungs, learning to swim in the dust  
until the rains come again.

We live inside this thirst. The water knows every crack,  
seeping into the bones of our homes,  
turning them pliant. The roof sags, the walls bend  
like knees in prayer— a kind of surrender.

We walk between houses that lean into silence,  
their ribs fragile, yet holding on— just like us, holding on.

## 54. Big Lights and Thunder

*By Chukwuebuka Freedom Onyishi*

Bread-moon, star. Distance running. Sudden  
miracles, in forests of septic tanks, betrayed by kissing- horse of silence.

I too, have dreamed of someone: myself into an image  
of this rhapsody. Mayflower compact. Bone marrows  
and the blue sky.

Blessings of *Rosemary Chukwu*. And the plumbers of  
iodine immortality. The facelift of evening,  
rainfall.

On the ledge of dawn's hands. All things

fading

and fading. And I am begging you again to

stay. Days, you would imagine

the monsters were going into extinction, had

left open the gates of sea for your

homecoming.

Days, you would hold the syllables, which

every river must learn to say to its victims

before stealing their bodies into life.

Here, at valleys —of redemption and

parachutes

Even night moons— at Golgotha, crave for

affection, and in surrender, is worthy to be  
praised.

But here is the main trumpet sound— the

legumes and vegetables are pushing their  
withered trunks

toward heaven's gate. And there is a

universe

of flamingos hovering. And death is no longer  
an end from the beginning.

**Notes:** This is an ekphrastic poem - see Glossary.

## 55. When the Sky Spoke My Name

*By Benedict Chinagorom*

I was born where the rain knew my name,  
where the wind rattled zinc roofs like talking drums.  
The earth was not a stranger—  
we played *Ayo* with seeds,  
sipped harmattan through cracked lips,  
and called the mango tree our elder.

But now,  
the river I once bathed in smells like rusted secrets.  
The fish have vanished—  
gone like folk songs my grandmother forgot to teach me.  
I walk through smoke-wounded air,  
dodging plastic like landmines.  
Even the birds sing less.

Still, I remember.  
How the moon guided us home before streetlights,  
how we trusted soil more than concrete.  
Now cement buries memory.

I miss the days  
when sunlight was a mother's touch,  
not a burn from broken ozone.

I, too, am guilty—  
I've traded neem shade for fluorescent buzz,  
quiet for Wi-Fi,  
soil for shoes that never touch earth.

But one morning,  
a seed fell into my palm like prophecy.  
And I knelt—  
hands trembling—  
to bury it like an apology.

Since then, I've become a gardener of grief,  
planting regrets beside basil,  
hoping new roots will forgive us.

Now, I talk to trees.  
Not in poems,  
but in watering cans.  
And sometimes—  
if the wind listens—  
they whisper back.



## 56. Even Sadness can Paint a Beautiful Picture

*By Funminiya Akinrinade*

Today, my arms stretch outside my skin—  
Reaching for joy in the face of the river.  
The same river that watered two boys last month till their lungs floated,  
ferried its wings to the beds of plants.  
Who knows, even a serpent could be an angel?

Today, I see the joy in the face of the river—  
Peaceful like Paradise, unharmed.  
My wife and two children joined me by the river,  
Their legs immersed in its stomach like it is home—  
Merry smiles on their faces like an acceptance mail from a thousand miles  
away.

*Who knew, home by the banks of a river could come at no cost?  
Who knew, even sadness could paint a beautiful picture?*

## 57.The Land in Me

*By Owolola Ajulekun*

There's a land in me—  
An acre of promises  
Where truth glows on trees,  
Peace flows on rivers.

Love is the seed planted  
On my heart, a fertile soil,  
Craving true nourishment  
From tender rain in June.

I traverse this land on primal feet,  
The charming moon woos me  
Into the heart of the forest.  
The evening breeze caresses  
My willing ears  
With songs of old—  
A balm to my ailing soul.

I see rivers glide, with joy.  
Seas lap softly on the shores,  
Lilies speak of soulmates  
On the surface of old lakes.  
None comes near *Alápe*—  
The serene water that lures migrants home  
From the claws of hawks.

I pant for you, *Alápe*—  
A mother with soothing arms,  
The sprawling roots nurturing my soul.

The sun on these mounts spills splendour  
Across the face of earth,  
Etching solace on the pages of my heart.  
Hope trickles like honey  
From the mounts,  
Stirring my lips  
To sing lullabies

For my insomnious nation.

A million birds migrate with the west wind  
To hatch their dreams in secret.

My heart—of flowers,  
Belongs here.

I've become an eco-bird,  
Singing of conservation  
In this forest of fortune.

## 58. Lost Connection

*By Nwaobilor Vincent Chukwuebuka*

### I.

*There is a tension that hangs in the air.*

So thick it threatens to suffocate me. Sadness has found a seat beside me. Things that were once familiar have become alien. I hear birds whisper stories of betrayal. I see animals thrown into confusion as desolation stares them in the face. Mountains murmur of a lost connection – A broken bond between man and nature. I remember when I would immerse myself in the warmth of the trees, my eyes aglow with euphoria. The trees would speak to me, and I would caress them. I remember the peaceful aura of the forest's embrace. I would lose myself in the placid ambience of the trees. The gentle side-to-side swish of trees when the wind brushed them against each other was therapeutic. The swishing soft whispers of branches contrasting with the harshness of city noise. The hasty legs of time would stop to acknowledge my oneness with these woody friends.

### 2.

*But now I walk among these trees, and they turn their backs on me.*

I stretch my hands for that familiar caress but the branches recoil. The whispers I now hear are laced with anger. The trees that once sang me songs of welcome now sing of betrayal. These are not the friends I knew. I did not have to look far to see why... Trees that once stood bold and towering, whose skin radiated beauty. Now lie askew and prostrate, their form blackened, scorched, and gnarled. My friends have become mere food for fire, ghosts of themselves. My heart bleeds. I can no longer enjoy their caress. The few survivors stare at me as they would stare at an intruder. They point invisible fingers of accusation at me. I have become nothing but a stranger. Shall man continue to strip himself naked? Will man continue to drift away from nature? My heart bleeds at nature's pogrom. My heart wails at this massacre. Perhaps we do not know that we hold our own neck in a death grip. We do not know that we have become like the snake that eats its own tail. For our enmity with nature shall be the undoing of man.

## 59. What the Meteorologists Say

*By Fortune Eleojo Simeon*

What the Meteorologists Say  
about the weather today is symbolic.  
A 36 degree Celsius with high humidity  
could also mean that somewhere  
in the heart of that city, a man gifts  
his girl a kiss, with fire on his lips.  
It could be my sister,  
who leaves the house  
with anger spitting inside her bones.  
The man with a farm on his chin  
points an arm to the sky,  
air sewn into his nostrils.  
Underarms blooming into a forest.  
Little ache and he throws sweat into loam.  
*I do not speak ill of my people.*  
But do you not see the hunters  
in this poem?  
Green prey obsessed with predators,  
vessels full of soil. Earth children.  
I bless the street with my presence.  
The trees nod in agreement.  
God has a runny nose, the phlegm  
falls on our skin as rain,  
grows my father's farm into beauty.  
Water cupped in tar.  
The children in my backyard  
compose a rhyme for it.  
Pupils sparked with tenderness.  
Cheekbones familiar with joy.  
A worthy kind of happiness.

## 60. Geometry of childhood

*By Micheal Bello.*

*When a child hungers for the taste of her mother,  
it's a birthright, a taboo.*

*When a child crunches on teeth-washing wood  
or bitter cola, with a slow and crumpled face,  
it's not a taboo.*

\*

The feeling is like living centuries of years.  
Every night, I'd climb a tree and watch  
my shadow slip under the tree's breath.  
I'd watch my finger touch the depth of the sky.  
I once built a nest with the curves of my palms.

Then, Mother would say: *the taste of a mother's breast  
inspires the fingers of a child.*

And that child crawls again, four years old,  
while the plain, once green, now lies grey and desolate.

I'd murmur by the gesture of summer's *ennui* & the *ojuju*  
*ghost* written by the curves of the adults.  
Mama would shower me with plenty of kisses—  
gross and sickly beautiful.

(Perhaps, the more I grew, the draping shade in the afternoon  
changed & thatched roofs: sombre brown like the evening.)

&, yes, I was happy while checking the frame of the roofs,  
children skating away, cows mowing slowly with the Fulanis  
and the chattering when the moon came out of hiding.

But the whispers in my ears are grief-shaken, comfort cuddling  
and tears pouring. Thatched roofs would bear the rain today  
while it falls from the scaled sky.

## 61. These Feet Are Not Too Feeble to Fly

*By Clement Abayomi*

A memory of being mauled  
my movement & thaws  
out sprouting sinews.

Streaks of searing self-doubt . . .  
unforgiving introspections  
boil[ing] the blood in my veins.

I'm weary from dreary pasts—  
longing to pall a pervious  
soil of promising verdure  
I gaze at the relics of  
decomposing leaves.

I've anchored a long  
siege of torments. I begin  
to torture my tongue  
with prayerful syllables to  
silence mocking mouths.

But, a sole is not saved  
from bruising its own  
soul if painful memories  
drag its anxiety along  
reality's thorny paths.

Hear. Countless cravings  
become feckless adventures  
when burdens begin to teach  
falling & fallen feet how to  
crawl. Crawl & ferry the body

to an altar of . . . of fateful prayers.  
Risen. I watch this body  
of dreams transforming

into an eagle. Backing on  
the wind. Tempting the sky  
with scalloped patterns of  
forgotten naivety & innocence.

Dreams are tangled  
somewhere in the web  
of nature & I build myself into

a river of desires—coursing  
through the valley of doubt  
& forgetting my fear[s] in  
the abyss of memory.

I've learnt to teach my  
feeble feet that an eagle's  
flight from doubt is the  
anchorage that fills  
its belly with a surge of fulfilment.



## **62. Yesterday, I Saw a Thousand and One Flags**

*By Oumar Farouk Sesay*

Yesterday,

I saw a thousand and one flags

fluttering in broken hues and battered shades—

some torn, some frayed,

some bleeding into each other,

a canvas of sorrow stitched with stubborn hope.

From that bleeding tapestry

rose a people's dream:

to wrest back laughter

stolen by cunning hands.

Yesterday,

I heard a thousand and one anthems,

sung in a thousand and one tongues

the voices of young and old,

threaded with grief, thick with resolve,  
shoring up weary soles,  
marching to reclaim a land  
gnawed to the bone by vultures.

Yesterday,  
I heard a thousand and one trumpets wail,  
a thousand and one drums pound,  
casting discord into the wind  
yet from the clamour,  
one fierce cry soared:  
We want our country back.

Yesterday,  
I saw hope stitched in sound, sight, and spirit,  
wrapped in the triple stripes—  
green, white, and blue

fluttering like a reborn soul against the bruised sky.

Yesterday,

a thousand and one battle lines were drawn,

a thousand and one armours donned,

ready to reclaim a nation's destiny

by all means necessary.

Yesterday,

a thousand and one despairs

were shredded into ribbons

by a thousand and one hopes,

rising to exalt this land

for the children yet to dream it anew.

And yesterday,

I heard a thousand and one negations

spoken as fierce affirmations

to end the ritual *Matorma* dance

of one foot forward

and a thousand steps back.

### 63. Journal Entries of a failed mother

*By Bridgette James*

[Inspired by *Thy body is a temple*, from ‘Grammar Lesson’ by Diane Seuss.]

February 2024 - i am not a sanctuary.

i am the swirling champagne glass in my hand  
that I hide under the sofa when my son walks in.

July 2024 - i am a half-packed suitcase

i never go on holiday. My son won't travel –  
His doctor warns, *deep-rooted fear of flying*  
*is like debris in a blocked sink.*

August 2024 - i am a paper gravedigger.

To eradicate my son's phobias, i list them on a Post-It  
i bury in a pretend casket under the kitchen window  
where creeping buttercup flower then die.

September 2024 - i'm the flower-killer.

i never water things so i ignore the packets  
of lawn seeds in the garden centre.

November 2024 - *i a refuge-collector.*

i sweep up carcasses of dead holiday  
plans in my sleep. At night i trawl cemeteries  
for headstone-gaps to bury my dead flowers.

December 2024: i'm stuck in the pattern  
of the swirl stem of my broken wine glass  
& shard glass clogs up my sink like debris.

January 2025 - My son says: *aeroplanes kill people.*  
One crashed in Washington DC.  
In my sleep 'i cry me a River'

February 2025- the Potomac. It harbours corpses  
of aeroplane passengers and my resolution  
*to try & be a better mum in the New Year.*

## 64. A Portrait of Our Love in a Land of Wounded Stars

*By Chukwuebuka Freedom Onyishi*

What is the metaphor of our dreams in these

Fungi lands that surround us; that pull our boat closer &

faster toward that vanishing place, mother? i tell you, there is always an ark, like bacteria bioluminescence

locked up with us in this shadowed room, constantly pulling us away from each

Other's memories — and yet, whoever owns a body on fire and cannot be hash to

darkness, at least. And to count on love, here-

what then is hopelessness, if not a half-moon-shaped butterfly still learning to forget self in a planet of burning bush?

today, I awoke from my slumber with a grey bird from my dream land, a gift from my ancestors.

i look at the bird & i still see the marks. and hear the voice of its wounded lullabies:

singing the – broken verses, of our fathers, who were made still waters, for saying they want to be free, for saying, *let earth be earth again for sons and daughters, yet unborn.*

i am trapped in a corn tree with no love for my blood and kind, here —

yet, someday, i shall grow up,

to paint you, my mother, into an image of a black

ocean flowing with milk and paradise; we—

sunflowers holding our dreams bonding with the rising suns of the new moon cities. the same way we have always lived, before the mouths of their hates &

injustice caved in from nowhere and swallowed our songs.

I should learn to move, perhaps. But what is moving on, if not to someday

meet with love and fire face to face,

if not to dive into a sea of blood, somehow, to fish out the bones of all histories of your people buried by cannibals?

i am lost in a path i do not know how else to escape anymore. this memory outweighs me.



how does one really learn to thread back his own broken soul in a country  
of gold & dry bones? they say-

well, i am the worlds prodigal moon still leaning at the breaths of his own  
sacred epitaph, Mama—

Here i am naked, before your liquid altars, let loose the thunders of your  
new dawn upon this portrait-

i, before those nights encroaching find way here, and eat me alive, again.

## Commentary on ‘Prayer’ and ‘Big Lights and Thunder’

The winning poem in The Annual Bridgette James Poetry Competition 2025 was sent in by Osahon Oka. It opens with a depiction of human bones. I’m reminded of Adedayo Agarau’s poem, 'Arrival' (published online at *Isele Magazine*, December 2024 edition), in which he writes, *My bones shake the fortitude of loss*. Is the protagonist in Osahon Oka’s piece skeletal remains? I assume the protagonist has disassociated from his mortal remains and his spirit or soul has probably ascended to Heaven. But I’m inclined to believe his corpse remains buried. He has used prayer as a conduit to ascend to Heaven where the poet is left spellbound by a garden.

I’ve always been fascinated with poems about dead people speaking or relaying their experiences back to us from beyond the grave. In his poem, 'My Dead Father's General Store in the Middle of a Desert' the winner of the National Poetry Competition, 2022 (Published Online by the Poetry Society UK), Lee Stockdale recounts an encounter between himself and his dead father in a desert. The poet’s deceased father speaks to him. Death poems or ones that celebrate blissful death have been written since the days of John Keats’ (1819) ‘Ode to a Nightingale.’ Admiring a nightingale in a beautiful garden, Keats wrote, ‘Now more than ever seems it rich to die, To cease upon the midnight with no pain.’

Osahon Oka’s wit is to be acknowledged. He hasn’t mentioned the word corpse although the reader knows the speaker is a dead person. Instead, Oka uses a homonym in the quoted lines below. Did you spot it?

‘My papier-mâché friends huddled under neon signs,  
Stirring - long fingered – cups’

The heavenly garden depicted in ‘Prayer’ is either a fictitious celestial universe or a scenic garden Osahon has observed in real life. The intriguing events that transpire while the poet is there are imagined by him entirely. Examples are - 'that frog tongue alighting from the gorge, licking / A queen veiled by [a] beauty,' *swans* and *deer* swimming in a lake, and 'papier-mâché friends huddled under neon signs, / Stirring - long fingered - cups.'

The reader is encouraged to trust the poet's image-rich phrases to illustrate scenes in the story told in the poem, using multisensory language.

Professor David Manley in *The Cambridge Introduction to creative Writing, 2007*, wrote, 'Every word in a poem is a tiny but essential part of the body and metabolism of that poem.' Thus, every word in 'Prayer' functions to make it a cohesive piece.

Did you notice how the colour *green* is employed symbolically? First mentioned in line 7, we are invited to see a universe awash with green plants. Birds frolic in this green space. The mention of lemon grass evokes the senses of smell and taste. I'm particularly fond of lemon grass tea. The presence of devil grass - what we call couch grass in the UK - connotes the abundance of fast-growing greenery.

In this world imbued with rich life however, is the poet dead? He addresses a listener (probably god) and asks that thing/person to make him *green* in the end. He wants his soil to be *unfurled* or shaken out of his stem. Is he a corpse in the soil?

Other surreal characters are present in the body of the poem too, such as *the queen* (a honey bee most likely) and the *paper mâché friends*. I'm reminded of the Mexican Festival: 'Day of the Dead.' A whole story unfolds as the reader is immersed in this spectacular piece.

The shape of the poem enhances its charm too. Is it a church building with steps in the last stanza? My imagination went into overdrive.

The protagonist performs an action that affects his environment every time we encounter him: *I got here, I have flattened, I roll from that dactyl et cetera*. The persona in the poem presents the poem's most fundamental question in the middle of the piece as if we're at the climax of the tale.

'For if I had not accepted death, the orphan

To whom all my anxieties turn,

Will I bear witness to this snaking bridge

Ants have made...?'

As in Adedayo Agarau's aforementioned poem, 'Arrival,' the poet in 'Prayer' talks about death.

We stay in one setting where a hype of activity occurs as in Adedayo Agarau's poem, 'Arrival.'

Multisensory Imagery adds to its richness. The poem 'Prayer' demonstrates how to use what is called 'imagism' in creative writing. It employs all seven types of imagery. Here are some examples:

- Visual - *Angling into heaven's vast ocular celebration.*
- Tactile - *flea black bagging the itch. / So, skin would a tactile nest build*
- Gustatory - *Or that frog tongue alighting from the gorge, licking / A queen*
- Auditory - *Quiet / Palms bobbing in fenced in lakes*
- Olfactory - *lemon grass/ Nosing abundance, green blade in wind tide—ready / To be flung wide open, my senses*
- Kinaesthetic - *I roll from that dactyl*
- Organic imagery - *My tame hungers reclaim.*

Other literary devices found in 'Prayer' are alliteration as in: *butterflies brew their fever; swallows scatter their rave* or repetition, an example is the adverb of place, *here* in lines two and three. These make the poem a pleasurable reader for a Literature student.

Figurative language is used throughout the entire poem. *Deer* and *swans* are not *sipping* water but *clockwork days*.

### 'Big Lights and thunder'

Runner-up Chukwuebuka Freedom Onyishi's poem got me hooked from line one. It is reminiscent of Ester Partegàs' painting: 'Bread Moon.' I expect the poem to concern itself with the notion of transience. It lives up to expectations. The poet talks *about all things fading*.

I read the phrase: *betrayed by kissing- horse of silence* as not only a literal representation of the actions of the horse in the 'Apache Fire Signal' painting by Frederic Remington - where the horse appears to be kissing exposed tree roots – but also figuratively it connoted a silence from authorities after the events alluded to in the body of the poem (I read beyond the poem to assume it implied that, this was what happened in the aftermath of the floods in Nigeria).

Social realism has been used by West African poets as material to craft poetry since the 1960s. Writers utilise events in their country as inspiration

for good Literature. In his research paper: 'Symphony of the Oppressed: Intertextuality and Social Realism in Osundare and Sow Fall's Aesthetics' Adekunle Olowonmi, (College of Education, Oyo, Nigeria, 2019), asserts that writers in postcolonial Nigeria employ 'satire and protest' to portray their dissatisfaction with bad governance, socio-economic inequalities, and State policies which badly affect the quality of life of poor Africans.

Northern Nigeria has been plagued by floods in recent years, according to the BBC. 'Big Lights and Thunder' is an extended metaphor (about inclement weather) - it's a jigsaw puzzle. A line-by-line breakdown is needed in order to fully comprehend its story.

This is an ekphrastic poem like Pamilerin Jacob's 'Anti-Pastoral for a twenty-Faced Pathogen' published by the Poetry Foundation. An ekphrastic poem is a type of poem that describes a work of art, often a painting or sculpture, in detail. In his poem, Pamilerin Jacob uses the Murder of Crows to describe his fear of death from COVID. In 'Big Lights and Thunder,' the reader is plunged into a world where water is a destructive force with intertextual through references to famous works of Art.

In 'Anti-Pastoral for a Twenty-Faced Pathogen,' P. Jacob, observing the painting, 'Anguish' by Schenck describes 'a murder /of crows sprouting / at the perimeter /of a mother's/ suffering.' (Copyrighted, published by Poetry Foundation, Online.)

Whereas in 'Big Lights and Thunder,' the poet localises us in a setting in Nigeria akin to the depiction of the scene in 'Redemption Valley' by John Wynne Hopkins:

'Here, at valleys —of redemption and

parachutes

Even night moons— at Golgotha,'

In Pamilerin Jacob's poem (cited above), the threat is manmade: COVID; by contrast the threat in 'Big Lights and Thunder' is a naturally occurring element: water, whether it be a raging sea or rain. The sea in Onyishi's work is inhabited by monsters ready to swallow up human bodies. Those lines are a nod to the West African belief in the mythical power of the sea. However, I also see an allusion to news reports about a

regional river in Borno State bursting its banks and wreaking havoc in Maiduguri, in 2024.

I was delighted that Onyishi's clever piece referenced famous works of Art. 'If you bring Art into poetry, you make poetry Art.' 'The Flamingos' by Henri Rousseau signifies Henris's idea of a paradise in exotic worlds. It depicts the wild but gentle beauty of a tropical riverscape. 'Horse Man in Forest' by Frederic' - also called the 'Apache Fire Signal' - celebrates a nocturnal landscape, 'Mayflower Pilgrims' is a drawing showing the arrival of pilgrims or founding fathers of America, on the Mayflower ship. 'The Crucifixion of Jesus (at Golgotha)' by the School of Duccio, 'Redemption Valley' by John Wynne Hopkins are also referenced in the poem.

Moving away from the aesthetical value of these illustrations, the central question in the poem under discussion is: how can anything beautiful sprout out of *septic tanks*? An image of *septic tanks* is the direct antonym of an image of a beautiful Nigerian landscape.

There is a spiritual dimension to the poem as well. The reference to Golgotha for me evokes the question of Jesus's surrender to the forces of evil which ultimately is worthy to be praised because his death is seen as a gateway to everlasting life. Again, the poem ends with the line: *and death is no longer an end from the beginning*. I'm reminded of Jesus' crucifixion - depicted in a painting referenced in the body of 'Big Lights and Thunder' - which is apparently the beginning of eternal life for mankind.

I'm lured back to the dependence on Art in the piece. The phrase *valleys of parachutes evokes* brings to mind an image of the painting by John Wynne Hopkins, which depicts the drop of the 4th Parachute Brigade on Ginkel Heath, on the 18th September 1944. I foresee death and destruction but in the poem; 'Big Lights and Thunder,' *legumes* and *vegetables* are rejuvenated. This is because the stunning piece ends on an upbeat note.

With regards to pacing in the poem, perhaps the poet is either running or walking at a fast pace and taking in their surroundings like Dr Jason Allen-Paisant did in his poem, 'In the tree, the primal ocean.'

The setting in the poem is nighttime which gives way to dawn - it opens with a reference to the galaxy: *moon* and *star*. Big lights might refer to the moon in the night sky or the central light on a stage. We await a musical performance by the poet.

The reference to thunder in the title is reminiscent of Chrisopher Okigbo's 'Thunder can Break.' Metaphorically thunder represents destruction in Nigerian poetry.

I'm reminded of the sociological concept of Shared Cultural Beliefs as I read the line: *Blessings of Rosemary Chukwu*. I'm thrilled the poet mentions Nigerian singer, Rosemary Chukwu who sings Igbo gospel songs - I presume poet Onyishi is Igbo too. Readers from his culture will relate to 'the hope in times of adversity' message in her songs as they encounter the sad event of the *sea* swallowing *victims* in 'Big Lights and Thunder.'

The poet makes the link to Golgotha where the crucifixion of Jesus took place and the ultimate fusion of life and death. Christianity becomes a pillar on the poet leans on. This is further illustrated by the mention of Mayflower (the Mayflower Ship conveyed Pilgrims to America from England). The ship holds significant symbolic meaning, representing the Pilgrim spirit, the pursuit of religious freedom, hope, new beginnings, resilience and also in America it symbolised the challenges and complexities of colonial life.

In terms of its overall style, line-length is a strong feature of this poem. In fact, I'm going to advance an argument that line breaks are used as well as in Adedayo Agarau's poem: 'Arrival.' In Chukwuebuka Onyishi's piece the brevity of lines might depict a moving person or fast-occurring action. Their eyes settle on the landscape which they interpret figuratively.

'Big Lights and Thunder' is an imagery-infused poem too as with 'Prayer.' The phrase *iodine immortal* connotes the idea that sufficient iodine intake might be linked to increased longevity, particularly in older adults. Perhaps the poet needs it to preserve his/human life.

Luminance and the sound of music prevail throughout this poem in the face of impending disaster. I think it relates to the line: *Now I am a man waiting for the rain to stop* penned by British poet: Rashed Aqrabawi in the 2025 Spring edition of **Poetry Review**. You may wish to take note of how the noun *moon* returns as a verb: *moons* in 'Big Lights and Thunder' and the repetition of the word *Days*. The poem has a melodious ring to it!

## About Contributors

**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 Iruesi Samson Poetry Prize and first place in the Visual Verse Autumn Writing Prize, 2022.

**Kayode Adesimi** (Robbin-Coker) an honorary submitter, is an English Language and Literature graduate of the Universities of Sierra Leone, Oxford, and Cambridge. He is the author of "Dancing on My Way: Poems in a Foreign Language" (Sierra Leonean Writers Series, 2019).

**Bridgette O James** is a British Sierra Leonean writer. Her poems and stories have been featured in UK outlets. She was shortlisted for the 2024 Bridport prize, the 2024 Renard poetry prize and won the 2024 Fiction Factory Summer poem competition. A 2023 collection of poems from Sierra Leone she edited, *What the Seashell Said to Me*, is held in the National Poetry Library, London. Her poem 'Death Calls' was first published online by Lake Poetry. A former Metropolitan Police Special Constable, she is now a TEFL-Registered English Language Tutor.

**Clement Abayomi** won the inaugural Bridgette James Poetry Competition, 2024, with his poem, 'These Feet Are Not Too Feeble to Fly'. His poem, 'Sigh', came third in The Annual Bridgette James Poetry Competition, 2025. He won the ANAKwara Creative Writing Prize for Poetry (2024) and was longlisted for the Brigitte Poirson Literature Prize (2024) and the Akachi Chukwuemeka Prize for Literature (2025). Abayomi's works have been published in **Penned in Rage Literary Journal**, *African Writer Magazine*, *Poets Choice*, *Tendon Magazine*, and *Writers Space Africa*, among others.

**Chukwuebuka Alu** is a Nigerian poet.

**Opeyemi Mapayi** is a creative force - a spoken word poet and writer who uses language to ignite emotions, tell untold stories, and leave lasting impact through the art of expression.



**Chidi Nwakpa** is a Nigerian novelist and poet. His poems have recently been featured in *ANA Abuja* anthology. Currently, he is a graduate researcher in the Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

**Ngozi Chioma Deborah** is a Nigerian poet and social work student passionate about using words to inspire change. Her writing reflects her commitment to community, resilience, and hope. This anthology marks an important step in her journey as a storyteller and advocate.

**Ikechukwu O Iwuagwu** is a Nigerian poet.

**Obaji Godwin** is an Abuja-based Nigerian script writer, poet and performance poet. His poems have appeared in *Kalahari Review*, *Tuck magazine* and *Ebedi Review*. His poem ‘Like thorn Kite in The Hurricane’ made the Finalist of 2018 Uganda Babishainiwe Poetry Prize. His Haiku poem made the 2017 Uganda Babishaiku Prize. His poem ‘This monochrome’ won the 2022 POETREE contest. His spoken poem ‘Suicide Begone’ won the 2022 POETREE Spoken Word contest. His poetry diagnoses grief & cast conduits for its banishment. He is currently studying Political Science and International Relations at the University of Abuja, Nigeria.

**David Meme** was shortlisted in The Annual Bridgette James Poetry Competition, 2025. He is a Nigerian spoken word poet and storyteller whose works blend humour, depth, and vivid imagery. He has graced major platforms like NCPS and A Night with the President, using his art to inspire transformation, amplify voices, and champion values through poetry.

**Dare Michael Oluwaseyi** is a Nigerian poet.

**Ozichi Anyinam-Uzo** is a Nigerian poet.

**Justice Kingsley Owchondah** was shortlisted in The Annual Bridgette James Poetry Competition, 2025. He is a Nigerian poet and storyteller from Rivers State whose work confronts injustice, grief, and resilience.

**Jésùjọba Isaac** is a spoken word poet based in Ibadan, Nigeria.

**Ozichi Anyinam-Uzo** is a Nigerian poet.

**Oladipo Mardiyah** is a medical student and an enthusiastic mental and public health advocate who has written and published a number of poems. Oladipo.

**Josiane Kouagheu** was shortlisted in The Annual Bridgette James Poetry Competition. She is a journalist and writer from Cameroon.

**Jive Lubbungu** an honorary submitter, is from Zambia holds a PhD Lit., MA Lit., MBA -Project Management, Cert. -Monitoring & Evaluation, Cert. Project Consultancy, Cert.- Climate Change AI Lecturer, Author, and Researcher, Assistant Dean Postgraduate - School of Humanities and Social Sciences He currently lectures at the Kwame Nkrumah University, Kabwe, Zambia.

**Samuel Chinonso Obika** is an undergraduate of the university of Nsukka in Nigeria, studying science Laboratory technology. This is his first published work.

**Káyòdé Abayomi** is a Nigerian poet. His works have been published or forthcoming in *icefloepress*, *Olongo*, *Àtẹ̀lẹ̀w*, *PoetrySango Ota*, *isele*, *Ake review*, *South Florida*, and elsewhere. He was shortlisted for the Ake climate change poetry prize (2022).

**Wilfred Toochukwu Obiotika** was shortlisted in The Annual Bridgette James Poetry Competition, 2025. He is a Nigerian writer. His works can be found in *Flora Fiction*, *Yellow Seed*, *De colonial Passage*, *Dawn Project*, and *Ojuju*.

**Mature Tanko Okoduwa** is a Nigerian poet, playwright, artist, art historian, actor, activist, and theoretical scientist. He is a former General Secretary, Association of Nigerian Authors, and a product of the 'Nsukka School of Art,' (Umu-Uli), University of Nigeria. He writes about identity, parting, oppression, friendship, relationship, sexuality, equality, and loss.

**Oladosu Daniel Ayotunde-Jacynth** was fourth in The Annual Bridgette James Poetry competition, 2025. He is a final year student of the department of music, University of Ibadan. He is also a creative director, a political enthusiast, and a social media manager.

**Egharevba Terry's** poem was highly commended in The Annual Bridgette James Poetry Competition, 2025. He is a Nigerian banker who writes as if exhaling ache, his poems bruise softly, drawn from waiting rooms, broken clocks, and borrowed faith.

**Chukwuebuka Freedom Onyishi** was the runner-up in The Annual Bridgette James Poetry Competition, 2025. He is an English and Literary Studies graduate from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He is the current Winner of the 2025 COAL (The Coalition of African Literature, a Nonprofit organisation in Nigeria), in partnership with the University of Leicester's Avoidable Deaths Network and the SEVHAGE Literary and Development Initiative.

**Oumar Farouk** who wrote the foreword, is a poet playwright and novelist. He is the current President of PEN, Sierra Leone, chapter.

**Prince Jamal Chukwuka Duru** is a Nigerian Burkinabe teen poet. He is currently an undergraduate at Madonna university, Okija campus, Nigeria.

**Derek Ehiorobo** was shortlisted in The Annual Bridgette James Poetry Competition. He is a writer, poet, and spoken word artist. His work has been published in *Praxis*, *Con-scio*, *Poetry column-NND*, *Liquid Imaginations*, the *How to fall in love* anthology published by Inkspired Nigeria, and the *How to fall in love again*, anthology also published by Inkspired Nigeria. He is also the 2024, co-winner of the Evaristo prize for poetry.

**Benedict Chinagorom** is a nineteen-year-old Nigerian student. This is his first published work.

**Rachel Oimage** is a Nigerian poet.

**Abolade Oluwakemi** is a passionate and dedicated individual committed to excellence. Oluwakemi values integrity, innovation, and continuous learning in her pursuit of success and community development.

**Solomon Idah Hamza's** poem was commended in The Annual Bridgette James Poetry Competition, 2025. He won the Ngiga Prize for Humour Writing 2025 and Afristories Prize for Horror Flash 2022. He was shortlisted for the Enugu Literary Society 2024 and was longlisted for the

Kikwetu Flash Fiction 2023. He has been published in *Brittle Paper*, *Salamander Ink Magazine*, *Isele Magazine*, *Olney magazine*, *RoadRunner Review*, *Shallow Tales Review*, *Illino Media*, *Agbowo*, *Kalahari Review*, *Afritondo* and elsewhere.

**Chidera Okebe** is a Nigerian graduate of Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo state, Nigeria. She is passionate about poetry writing and changing the world through poetry.

**Olobo Ochala** is a Nigerian poet.

**Stephen Ivwighrehweta** is a nineteen-year-old Nigerian writer and penultimate-year Pharmacy student at Delta State University, Abraka. In 2024, he won the local CreativeKloudHub poetry competition.

**Ugochi Eze** is an eighteen-years-old Nigerian poet. Her work was featured in Writers Space Africa and forthcoming at Kalahari Review. She is studying to become a health officer at Nnamdi Azikiwe University. Beyond writing, Ugochi enjoys crochet and volleyball.

**Samuela Ntobe** is a Nigerian poet.

**Ferdinand Emmanuel Somtochukwu** was shortlisted in The Annual Bridgette James Poetry Competition. He is a young emerging Nigerian poet and essayist. He is currently studying English Language at Lagos State University. He has works published or forthcoming in *Arts Longue*, *D’LitReview*, *Poetry Column*, *Poetry Sango-Ota*, *Isele* and elsewhere.

**Tukur Loba Ridwan** was shortlisted in The Annual Bridgette James Poetry Competition, 2025. He is a Nigerian poet and Political Science graduate who explores existentialism through dualism, solitude/silence, memories, lust, and loss. His works appear in *Pensive Journal*, *Gyroscope Review*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *The African Writers Magazine*, *Kalahari Review*, *Rising Phoenix*, and elsewhere. He won the Brigitte Pierson Monthly Poetry Contest (March 2018), authored *A Boy's Tears on Earth's Tongue* (Authorpedia, 2019), and was shortlisted for the Eriata Oribhabor Poetry Prize 2020.

**Funminiye Akinrinade** is a Nigerian poet and researcher whose works have appeared in *Writers Space Africa Magazine*, *Praxis Magazine*,

*Word Rhymes and Rhythm (WRR) Anthology, Scion Magazine, and elsewhere.*

**Sosy Imafidon** was shortlisted in The Annual Bridgette James Poetry Competition, 2025. He is a Nigerian poet and spoken word artist. His poetry has been featured in various publications, including *Ikike Arts, Brittle Paper, African Writer Mag* & elsewhere.

**Ayomide Olaiya** was shortlisted in The Annual Bridgette James Poetry Competition, 2025. He is a young poet, Spoken word artist and an aspiring novelist. His works have appeared in Best New African Poets (BNAP) Anthology, English Writers Association (EWA), *Poetry Archive, Decades of Nine and Thrills* anthology and *The AprilCentaur*. He was a finalist at the 2025 Custodian of African Literature (COAL) Poetry Contest and also the second runner up at 2022 Spring Poetry Contest.

**Owolola Ajulekun** is a Nigerian poet.

**Timileyin Adepoju** writes from Ibadan, Nigeria. He was shortlisted in The Annual Bridgette James Poetry Competition, 2025. He has been featured in several magazines.

**Raphael Ibekwe Ejike** is a Nigerian poet and English Language and Literary Studies student at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State. His latest published work is 'My African Girl,' (*Nigerian Journal of Poems and Short Stories*, 2023).

**Olaore Durodola-Oloto** is a third-year undergraduate of the department of English and Literary studies at the University of Lagos. His work has previously appeared in *Brittle Paper, Kalahari Review, Outside the Box Magazine, Anthropocene Poetry, The Crossroads Review, Blue Flame Review* and elsewhere.

**Osborn Israel** is a Nigerian poet.

**Nwaobilor Vincent Chukwuebuka** is currently studying English and Education. He participated in the Wittypel poetry competition for young Nigerian poets in 2024, the 2024 edition of poetry journal and Art for life poetry competition in 2024.

**Fortune Eleojo Simeon** was shortlisted in The Annual Bridgette James Poetry Competition, 2025. He is a poet whose works have been featured on poetry column, Rough cut press, Eunoia and elsewhere.

**Henshaw Freedom Daniel** is a Nigerian poet.

**Ajiboye Senami** is a young Nigerian poet and law student at Bingham University. Her poetry, often cantered on love, beauty, and nature, conveys emotion with vivid eloquence. Featured in Minerva Press and Writers Space Africa, she writes to inspire thought and feeling, striving for impact beyond mere entertainment.

**Wisdom Adediji** is a Nigerian poet.

**Richard Phiri** had his collection featured in *Ubwali Literary Magazine* Issue 3, while his short story 'But Only If He's Maverick,' appeared in *Writers Space Africa* 101st May Edition. He is a self-taught writer based in Lusaka.

**Ridwan Fasasi** is a Nigerian poet of Yoruba descent. He is the winner of the 2024 Labari Prize for Poetry. A Pushcart Prize Nominee whose works have appeared on *ANMLY Lit*, *Chestnut Review*, *Euonia Review*, *Akpata*, *Lucent Dreaming*, *Strange Horizon*, *Hindsight Creative* and elsewhere.

**Graciano Enwerem** is a Nigerian poet.

**Aliyu Umar** is a Nigerian poet.

**Micheal Bello's** Story: *Love's Transient* won The Bridgette James Winter Flash Fiction Competition in 2024 and was published in Penned in Rage Journal. Micheal is currently studying computer science and software engineering at JPTS/Joint Professional Training and Support, in Nigeria.

**Gideon Idudje** was born in Midwest Ughelli-north and bred in Lagos. He is a poet, dramatist, and novelist. He is a graduate of Delta state university.

**Adesiyan Oluwapelumi** was shortlisted in The Annual Bridgette James Competition, 2025. He has been featured in 20.35 Africa, Poet Lore and elsewhere. He is the Poetry Editor of Fiery Scribe Review from Nigeria.

**Utaara Tjozongoro** is a Namibian student attending Windhoek Gymnasium High School. Utaara's poem won the Youngest Shortlisted Contestant prize in The Annual Bridgtte James Poetry Competition, 2025.

**Oladosu Michael Emerald** an honorary submitter, is a writer, artist, and actor. He is the author 'Every Little Thing That Moves,' an Art editor at Surging Tide magazine and editor at MAAR Review. Instructor at The Arnheim Art Gallery, and Young Artists Art Hub. He is the winner of the Off the Limit Art Contest (2024), Sprinng Poetry Contest (2024), Garden Party Collective Neurodivergent Poetry Contest (2025), and Sine Qua Non Inaugural Poetry Prize (2025). He has had works published (or are forthcoming) in *Chestnut Review*, *FIYAH*, *Lolwe*, *Temz Review* and elsewhere.

## Glossary

1. *Agbalumo*: is Yoruba for African Star Apple — a bittersweet native fruit.
2. 'Big Lights and Thunder' references these paintings:
  - A. 'Bread Moon' by Ester Partegàs, 2023.
  - B. 'The Flamingos' by Henri Rousseau, 1907.
  - C. 'Apache Fire Signal' also called 'Man on Horseback' by Frederic Remington, 1891.
  - D. 'Mayflower Pilgrims' 1844 is a painting by Robert Walter Weir.
  - E. 'The Crucifixion of Jesus (at Golgotha)' by the School of Duccio, created between 1308-1311.
  - F. 'Redemption Valley' by John Wynne Hopkins, 1944.
3. *Ewúró*: Bitter leaf: a hardy plant known for its resilience and medicinal bitterness.
4. *Iberi wole, dem wole, dem wole* is translated as: The uninitiated flee, they flee, they flee!
5. *Gbúrè*: Waterleaf: a soft, rain-loving vegetable that wilts easily under heat. *Orisha* – any of numerous gods or spirits worshipped by the Yoruba people (southern Nigeria).
6. Golgotha is the hill on which Jesus was crucified.
7. *Òró*: is Yoruba for the Baobab tree: a massive, drought-resistant tree symbolic of endurance and memory.
8. *Ogun*: a powerful orisha; god of iron, war, and metalwork.
9. The Moabi, a very large African Tree.
10. Rosemary Chukwu is a famous Nigerian gospel singer.
11. *Ubeirumu*: is one of the names of Yorùbá Ṣàngó, the god of thunder. It comes from the saying, 'our lord did not hang.'



## Acknowledgements

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I wish to acknowledge the editors of *London Grip*, Michael Bartholomew-Biggs and Stephen McGrath who first published my poem, ‘Journal Entries of a Failed Mother’ which is republished in this anthology. Reference - <https://londongrip.co.uk/2025/05/london-grip-new-poetry-summer-2025/#james>

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I wish to acknowledge the editors of The Muse Journal, (A Journal of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria) who first published the poem by Chukwuebuka Freedom Onyishi and agreed to it being republished in this book. Online reference: [A PORTRAIT OF OUR LOVE IN A LAND OF WOUNDED STARS - THE MUSE JOURNAL](#)

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In fact, almost all of the shortlisted contestants are Pamilerin Jacob’s protégées, associates or writers who follow his Poetry Column in Nigeria.

Without his continued vigour and passion, projects like mine would not work in Nigeria where so many of our creative geniuses come from.

