



SOIL UNFURLING FROM STEM

An Anthology
from
Sub-Saharan Africa

EDITED BY BRIDGETTE JAMES

Penned in Rage, Nature & You, Anthology, 2025.

‘and on this grass clump,
with bluebottles and drowsy birdsong,
one could dream, swooned by noon’s smoulder’

Source - Osahon Oka: *The Cattle Herder's
Epilogue* (2025)

Penned in Rage, Nature & You, Anthology, 2025.

Soil Unfurling from Stem

A collection of Nature Poems from Sub-Saharan Africa

**This Creative Writing Resource is Intended for
readers aged 15+**

Cover Design by Michael Emerald from Nigeria

Edited by Bridgette O James

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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

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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.

Penned in Rage 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,

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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

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

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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. Death Calls

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.*

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

3. 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,

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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.

4. **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:

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“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.

5. 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.

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Look at your hands—
they hold the next chapter.
So, plant something.
Now.

SAMPLE

6. When the Earth Speaks

by Ngozi Chionna

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.

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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.

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Let us become the village
that remembers the child,
and the mother that bore us all.

SAMPLE

7. The Fallen Tree

By Jè̀sùjòba 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.

8. **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

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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

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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

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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

9. **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

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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

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Shutting me out of Nature's kitchen where rich food is served

Thus, leaving me eating myself dead on a heap of adulterated food

10. 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.

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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.

11. 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 /

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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 /

12. 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,

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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 C02 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?

13. **Flume of P-Quills**

By Obaji-Nwali Segun

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 a bread tucked in 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 woods 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.

14. 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.

15. 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,

Soil Unfurling from Stem: An Anthology from Sub-Saharan Africa

To where the quiet lives,

Where I am both alone and understood

And every leaf feels like a hand

That never lets go.

16. The Moabi

By Josiane Kouagheu

the moabi's tears

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

Soil Unfurling from Stem: An Anthology from Sub-Saharan Africa

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

17. **The Woman I killed**

By Ozichi Anyinam-Uzo

*When we grow past these concrete walls
May we still adorn you like it's our call.*

[Source – *Song for My Mother Dancing in Front of the Mirror in Our Room* by Theresa Lola, 2025.]

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.

18. **Roots in the Rain**

By Justice Kingsley Owchondah

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.

Soil Unfurling from Stem: An Anthology from Sub-Saharan Africa

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.

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. 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.

21. 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

22. **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.

23. **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.

24. **Earth Bleeds**

By Rachael Oimage

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.

25. **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.

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. **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 doting 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 mean this
place belongs to us all. & i am in love with
all of it.

28. **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

29. **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.

30. **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.

31. In Honour of a Plea

By Uloma Ofole

Sometimes, my tangelo plant of barely two years
sends me messages.

New leaves turning yellow & dropping
tender leaves chewed out of their branches
expressing its thirst or discomfort so simply.
Urging me to give it water or rid it of caterpillars.

I got a message today
but not from the tangelo plant
a broken wing left for me on the ground—

under the tangelo plant.
A tiny craft no larger than my pinkie
as light as air & folded like a hand fan.

I held it between my fingers, at its tippy ends
& as gently as I would a fragile gem, pulled—
It did not break. But fanned out

Bright yellow at its bottom
Pitch black in the middle
& transparent-grey at the top.

A message encrypted unlike the tangelo's.
I looked —
closely at the colours.

How they progressed seamlessly upwards telling of a journey
How within its seeming outward fragility, hid a survivor's strength.
How the message was stages in colours speaking from the bottom to the top,

*We eat the leaves to live
We live to earn our wings
We earn our wings to fly.*

I am looking at my tangelo plant
Several new shoots standing naked
Their tender leaves gone
But I will let that message pass
 I will let the caterpillars feed
 In honour of a plea
 colourfully crafted for me.

32. **Between the wind and sea**

Stephen Ivwighrehweta

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.

33. **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.

34. **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.

35. **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.

36. Even Sadness can Paint a Beautiful Picture

By Funminiyi 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?*

37. **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.

38. 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.

39. **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 insomniac 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.

40. **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.

41. **The Bridge**

By Timileyin Adepaju

I

The sky twitches its skin
And the cloud gather 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.

42. 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.

43. **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

44. **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.

45. **What the Meteorologists Say**

By Fortune Elejo 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.

46. 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.

47. 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.

48. **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?

49. 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.

50. 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 hands
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.

51. 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.

52. 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.

53. 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.

54. 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.

55. 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.

56. 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.

57. 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.

58. 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.

59. These Feet Are Not Too Feeble to Fly

By Clement Abayomi

A memory of being mauls
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.

60. *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

Penned in Rage, Nature & You, Anthology, 2025.

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.

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.

Penned in Rage, Nature & You, Anthology, 2025.

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.

Penned in Rage, Nature & You, Anthology, 2025.

‘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' makes good use of 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.*

Penned in Rage, Nature & You, Anthology, 2025.

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).

Penned in Rage, Nature & You, Anthology, 2025.

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

Penned in Rage, Nature & You, Anthology, 2025.

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

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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.

Penned in Rage, Nature & You, Anthology, 2025.

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

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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

Penned in Rage, Nature & You, Anthology, 2025.

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) 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 came third in The Annual

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Bridgette James Poetry Competition, 2025. He is presently studying English at Lagos State University.

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.

**Falcon
Meek**

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-Nwali Segun is a Nigerian poet.

David Meme was shortlisted in The Annual Bridgette James Poetry Competition, 2025. He is a Nigerian spoken word poet and storyteller whose works blend

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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 Owhondah 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.

Jésùjoba 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 Lubungu 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

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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 *icefloeypress*, *Olongo*, *Àtéléw*, *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,

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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 a poet, essayist and Publicity Secretary. 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

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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 Omage 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.

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Uloma Ofole is a Nigerian poet.

Stephen Ivwighrehweta is a 19-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*

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Tears on Earth's Tongue (Authorpedia, 2019), and was shortlisted for the Eriata Oribhabor Poetry Prize 2020.

Funmini 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 Achive*, *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.

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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.

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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.

Abioye Mahsudat 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

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software engineering at JPTS/Joint Professional Training and Support, in Nigeria.

Gideon Idudje was born in Midwest Ughelli-north and bred in Lagos, Gideon Idudje 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.

Innocent Tarojacho Ojo was shortlisted in The Annual Bridgette James Poetry Competition , 2025. He is a young Nigerian Page poet, Spoken word artist and Social entrepreneur. His works seek to promote the need for maximal personal development as a means to overall societal development.

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 Sàngó, the god of thunder. It comes from the saying, ‘our lord did not hang.’

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I also wish to acknowledge the contribution of a poem by Dr Kayode Robbin-Coker, an Oxford University graduate.

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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.

Penned in Rage, Nature & You, Anthology, 2025.

‘and on this grass clump,
with bluebottles and drowsy birdsong,
one could dream, swooned by noon’s smoulder’

Source - Osahon Oka: *The Cattle Herder's
Epilogue* (2025)

Penned in Rage, Nature & You, Anthology, 2025.

Soil Unfurling from Stem

A collection of Nature Poems from Sub-Saharan Africa

**This Creative Writing Resource is Intended for
readers aged 15+**

Cover Design by Michael Emerald from Nigeria

Edited by Bridgette O James

Penned in Rage, Nature & You, Anthology, 2025.

Penned in Rage Literary Journal

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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

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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.

Penned in Rage 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,

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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

21. 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

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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.'

22. Death Calls

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.*

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

Penned in Rage, Nature & You, Anthology, 2025.

23. 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,

Penned in Rage, Nature & You, Anthology, 2025.

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.

Penned in Rage, Nature & You, Anthology, 2025.

24. **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:

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“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.

25. **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.

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Look at your hands—
they hold the next chapter.
So, plant something.
Now.

Penned in Rage, Nature & You, Anthology, 2025.

26. 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.

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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.

Penned in Rage, Nature & You, Anthology, 2025.

Let us become the village
that remembers the child,
and the mother that bore us all.

27. **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.

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28. From Dawn to Dusk

By Oladipo Mardiyah

x.

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

xi.

The cock crows at its wake

Alerting the world of the new day

xii.

A few hours into the day

The chicken reaches the table

Not as an alarm but as a delicacy

Sumptuous bowls of fried chicken

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A crispy golden brown delight

xiii.

Basking in the midday sun

My flowery red dress in a sea of green

xiv.

The wind singing a gentle tune

The grass swaying to the rhythm

Such a lovely sight to behold

xv.

My mind wandering and dreaming

Called back by the moo of a cow

From the herd grazing nearby

Feeding from Nature's gift

Penned in Rage, Nature & You, Anthology, 2025.

Enjoying their share of the grasslands

xvi.

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

xvii.

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

Penned in Rage, Nature & You, Anthology, 2025.

Returning after a long day

Eyelids heavy with exhaustion

Mud painted on my feet like henna

xviii.

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

Penned in Rage, Nature & You, Anthology, 2025.

29. **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

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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

Penned in Rage, Nature & You, Anthology, 2025.

Shutting me out of Nature's kitchen where rich food is
served

Thus, leaving me eating myself dead on a heap of
adulterated food

30. **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.

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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.

31. **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 /

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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 /

32. 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 C02 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?

33. **Flume of P-Quills**

By Obaji-Nwali Segun

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 a bread tucked in 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 woods 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.

34. 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.

35. **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,

Soil Unfurling from Stem: An Anthology from Sub-Saharan Africa

To where the quiet lives,

Where I am both alone and understood

And every leaf feels like a hand

That never lets go.

36. The Moabi

By Josiane Kouagheu

the moabi's tears

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

Soil Unfurling from Stem: An Anthology from Sub-Saharan Africa

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

37. **The Woman I killed**

By Ozichi Anyinam-Uzo

*When we grow past these concrete walls
May we still adorn you like it's our call.*

[Source – *Song for My Mother Dancing in Front of the Mirror in Our Room* by Theresa Lola, 2025.]

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.

38. **Roots in the Rain**

By Justice Kingsley Owchondah

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.

Soil Unfurling from Stem: An Anthology from Sub-Saharan Africa

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. 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.

40. **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.

21. **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

23. **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.

33. **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.

34. **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.

35. **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.

36. **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?

37. **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 doting 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 mean this
place belongs to us all. & i am in love with
all of it.

38. The Scent of Home

By Chidera Okebe

V.

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

VI.

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

VII.

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

VIII.

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

39. **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.

40. **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.

41. In Honour of a Plea

By Uloma Ofole

Sometimes, my tangelo plant of barely two years
sends me messages.

New leaves turning yellow & dropping
tender leaves chewed out of their branches
expressing its thirst or discomfort so simply.
Urging me to give it water or rid it of caterpillars.

I got a message today
but not from the tangelo plant
a broken wing left for me on the ground—

under the tangelo plant.
A tiny craft no larger than my pinkie
as light as air & folded like a hand fan.

I held it between my fingers, at its tippy ends
& as gently as I would a fragile gem, pulled—
It did not break. But fanned out

Bright yellow at its bottom
Pitch black in the middle
& transparent-grey at the top.

A message encrypted unlike the tangelo's.
I looked —
closely at the colours.

How they progressed seamlessly upwards telling of a journey
How within its seeming outward fragility, hid a survivor's strength.
How the message was stages in colours speaking from the bottom to the top,

*We eat the leaves to live
We live to earn our wings
We earn our wings to fly.*

I am looking at my tangelo plant
Several new shoots standing naked
Their tender leaves gone
But I will let that message pass
 I will let the caterpillars feed
 In honour of a plea
 colourfully crafted for me.

42. Between the wind and sea

Stephen Ivwighrehweta

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.

33. **Roar Without Apology**

By Samuela Ntobe

- IX. 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.
- X. 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.
- XI. 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.
- XII. 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.
- XIII. 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?
- XIV. 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.

- XV. 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.
- XVI. There's a wildness in all of us, waiting to break free. And when it does, it will roar. And it will never apologize.

42. **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.

43. **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.

44. Even Sadness can Paint a Beautiful Picture

By Funminiyi 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?*

45. **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.

46. 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.

47. **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 insomniac 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.

48. **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.

49. **The Bridge**

By Timileyin Adepaju

I

The sky twitches its skin
And the cloud gather 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.

42. 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.

45. **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

53. **Lost Connection**

By Nwaobilor Vincent Chukwuebuka

II.

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.

54. **What the Meteorologists Say**

By Fortune Elejo 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.

55. 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.

56. 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.

57. 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?

58. 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.

59. 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 hands
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.

60. River Convo

By Graciano Enwerem

X.

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.

XI.

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.

XII.

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.

XIII.

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.

XIV.

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.

XV.

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.

XVI.

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.

XVII.

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.

XVIII.

The fireflies arrive to translate.

56. 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.

57. 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.

58. 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.

61. 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.

62. 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.

63. 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.

64. 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.

65. These Feet Are Not Too Feeble to Fly

By Clement Abayomi

A memory of being mauls
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.

66. *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.

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' makes good use of 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 Christopher 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 Iruesiri Samson Poetry Prize and first place in the Visual Verse Autumn Writing Prize, 2022.

Kayode Adesimi (Robbin-Coker) 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 came third in The Annual

Bridgette James Poetry Competition, 2025. He is presently studying English at Lagos State University.

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.

Falcon

Meek

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-Nwali Segun is a Nigerian poet.

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 Owhondah 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.

Jésùjoba 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 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 *icefloeprress*, *Olongo*, *Àtéléw*, *PoetrySango Qta*, *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 a poet, essayist and Publicity Secretary. 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.

Uloma Ofole is a Nigerian poet.

Stephen Iwighrehweta is a 19-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.

Funminiyi 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 Elejo 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.

Abioye Mahsudat 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, Gideon Idudje 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.

Innocent Tarjacho Ojo was shortlisted in The Annual Bridgette James Poetry Competition , 2025. He is a young Nigerian Page poet, Spoken word artist and Social entrepreneur. His works seek to promote the need for maximal personal development as a means to overall societal development.

Glossary

12. *Agbalumo*: is Yoruba for African Star Apple — a bittersweet native fruit.
13. 'Big Lights and Thunder' references these paintings:
 - G. 'Bread Moon' by Ester Partegàs, 2023.
 - H. 'The Flamingos' by Henri Rousseau, 1907.
 - I. 'Apache Fire Signal' also called 'Man on Horseback' by Frederic Remington, 1891.
 - J. 'Mayflower Pilgrims' 1844 is a painting by Robert Walter Weir.
 - K. 'The Crucifixion of Jesus (at Golgotha)' by the School of Duccio, created between 1308-1311.
 - L. 'Redemption Valley' by John Wynne Hopkins, 1944.
14. *Ewúró*: Bitter leaf: a hardy plant known for its resilience and medicinal bitterness.
15. *Iberi wole, dem wole, dem wole* is translated as: The uninitiated flee, they flee, they flee!
16. *Gbùrè*: 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).

17. Golgotha is the hill on which Jesus was crucified.
18. *Òró*: is Yoruba for the Baobab tree: a massive, drought-resistant tree symbolic of endurance and memory.
19. *Ogun*: a powerful orisha ; god of iron, war and metalwork.
20. The Moabi, a very large African Tree.
21. Rosemary Chukwu is a famous Nigerian gospel singer.
22. *Ubeirumu*: is one of the names of Yorùbá Ẹ̀ṣàngó, the god of thunder. It comes from the saying, ‘our lord did not hang.’

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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.

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