

Edition 6
Oct-Dec
2026

CHAPBOOK
REVIEWS

Penned in Rage

Featuring Pushcart Prize Nominee

Ola W. Halim

Exclusive Interview

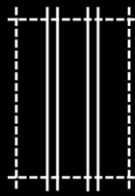
**Lisa
Anne
Julien**

Edited by
Dr Jive Lubbungu
Chukwuebuka Onyishi
Janine Milne
Lergon Parris
Bridgette James

**POEMS
STORIES
ESSAYS**

A Review of Poems by Wole Soyinka,
Rasaq Malik Gbolahan &
Dr Kayode Adesimi Robbin-Coker





Edition 6

OCT-DEC, 2026

**Penned in
Rage**

A Literary Magazine Amplifying
Voices from Sub-Saharan Africa

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Amplifying Marginalised Voices

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Ahmad Gani

Peter Adedire

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Fish Lu

IN THIS ISSUE of Penned in Rage Journal



Obaji Godwin, Alabi Mezabo Miracle,
Ola W. Halim & Many More

The Masthead

AMPLIFYING MARGINALISED VOICES

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Penning in Rage

**A Literary Magazine Amplifying
Voices from Sub-Saharan Africa**

Your world needs sweetening, child -'Dedication'

by Wole Soyinka, in *Idanre and Other Poems* (1967).

—Dedication

by Wole Soyinka, in *Idanre and Other Poems* (1967).



EDITORIAL: ISSUE 6

When Words Refuse to Be Silent

Words matter. They always have.

This issue of *Penned in Rage* brings together writers unafraid to confront grief, trauma, identity, displacement, inequality, belonging, and the ordinary struggles that shape human lives. Some pieces hurt. Others make us smile. A few leave us quietly thinking long after we've turned the page. That's what good literature should do.

What stands out in this issue is the honesty of its voices. The writers don't simply tell us what happened. They invite us into memories, questions, relationships, losses, and moments of hope.

The interviews with Ola W. Halim and Lisa-Anne Julien also remind us that writing isn't magic. It takes courage, patience, revision, and the willingness to keep searching for the right words.

As Editor-in-Chief, I believe this is where *Penned in Rage* matters most. We give writers room to speak and readers room to listen.

Read it slowly. Let it speak.



Jive Lubungu, (pictured) holds a PhD Lit., an MA Lit., MBA -Project Management, Cert. -Monitoring & Evaluation, Cert. Project Consultancy, Cert.- Climate Change AI, Cert. Development Economics. Dr Jive is a lecturer, author, and researcher. He the Assistant Dean: Postgraduate - School of Humanities and Social Sciences. Kwame Nkrumah University, Kabwe in Zambia.



Featured Creative: Ola W. Halim

Oversized Prison Uniforms

By Ola W. Halim

Daddie shakes my hand first—firm, bone-on-bone. Then he settles on the squeaking bench in a corner of the room. But the rickety furniture doesn't collapse under his weight.

“I'm so lean now,” he says. “At least I'm losing weight, àbí? Your Mummie used to say it's healthy.” A chuckle. “Good riddance to her sha. You see women?” He shakes his head with a tragic vigour. But the newspaper-brown walls, with the lone window—perfectly square and burglary-proof—do not explode at this. “You want to live long, Kayode? Never trust women.”

[Mummie has moved on, Daddie. I spend my semester breaks with her. The spatula scar on her shoulder has melded into skin. Her new boyfriend doesn't howl china mugs off her hands or chortle hard while she braves the shards barefoot. She called him a fool once, because he indeed acted foolish, but that didn't warrant wielding spatulas and belts and the promise of a kitchen knife half-interred in foamy sink-water.]

“How's school?”

“Fine.”

[Not fine, Daddie. I'm not finding Mechanical Engineering “valuable”—like you promised I would—even after two years, but real men don't offer more than they're asked, so school's fine.]

“That's my engineer!”

“Thank you, Daddie.”

“What about the ladies?”

[I like men, Daddie, and I'm in love. Chinedu, that's his name. You should see him. He's mastered the art of loving lavishly, breathlessly, shamelessly, ravenously, as though that's his specialty, like he's not an expert in other things.]

“By the way, this your haircut is fine o. With it, you can get fifty women sef.” Daddie laughs at his own joke. No longer a rataplan of thunders; just a long, tired whine, like hinges screeching. “What's this perfume?”

[Even your attempt at small talk is. . .irredeemably robotic.]

“It's TalcRose, Daddie.”

“Your Mummie got it for you?”

“Yes.”

“The name sounds feminine. “Smells feminine too.”

[I like it, Daddie.] “Oh.”

The first sheet of silence settles upon us warmly, like a watered-down omen, but Daddie doesn't yank it off with belly-deep growls and, when growls fall insufficient, fists. His eyes are the furious red of ripe fruits, and I can stare squarely into them, because they no longer cause my teeth to clatter. There is no quiet quivering in my stomach, at my temples.

“How about Ronke? I know she must have missed her daddie.”

[We both know she doesn't, Daddie. That's why she isn't here with me. She's herself now. Her lipstick no longer melts into blood. Her hair is darker, more lustrous, fuller. A model. Bespangled with loud joys. You need to hear the

tinkle of her laughter at the dining table. I never thought Ronke capable of expressing so much freedom. But would you understand?]

“What are you thinking about, Kayode? Is it a girl?”

[Why does that vein along your neck twitch, Daddie? What's that incrustation on your left thumbnail? Why do you smell like. . .fermented cassava? Your uniform is oversized. Did you know there's a funny patch around the buttocks?]

“So, how're they treating you here?”

“Me? They can't break me, even if they try. I stand gidigba!”

“Nice.”

“See ehn, as a man, Kayode, you must be strong. Women won't respect you if you're weak. That's why your Mummie loved me. Ah, she loved me bàjé. But she fucked up. Sending me to jail because I corrected her— [With spatulas and belts, yes?]-and the yeye jury called me an irredeemable misogynist! Do you know how many armed-robbers and kidnappers and homosexuals— [Daddie, please stop!]-and yahoo-yahoo boys are roaming around freely? Who jails them? And yet the idiot I married with my own money jailed me! God, God, God—”

“Daddie—”

“Şebí she's reached menopause? Between you and I, man to man, tell me, you think any man will look at her again? Those breasts are now slippers and—”

“Daddie!”

“Let me talk, Kayode!”

“She's seeing someone, actually.”

The second sheet of silence hovers, settles. Chillier, it is. More ominous. Feels like we're standing on the thin lip of something. A cliff-edge. The event horizon of a black hole. Somewhere, a groan. A needle-thin cry. Wailing, loud and ugly. Then, a thwack. Silence.

Daddie sucks in his underlip. “Well, good for her.”

“You'll be out before you know it—”

“Do you spend your semester breaks with them? Ronke nkó?”

“Yes, Daddie.”

“So he has a house big enough to accommodate Ronke's stupid lifestyle? Of course, I know he'll allow her keep boyfriends and use makeup and wear skimpy skirts—”

“Daddie—”

“What's his name? Is he old? Does he know your Mummie sends men to jail? Is he tall like me? Your Mummie likes tall men—that picky bitch. Does he have hair around his nipples? You know your Mummie loved that about me? Hair around my nipples? She used to say it looked like an old necklace, zigi-zaga necklace. Wait, let me show you, if you don't believe me.” In vain, he wrestles with getting the shirt over his head. “Ha, this shirt, na wa o. Another prison inside another one.”

“I think it's the buttons, Daddie. But don't worry.”

“Toh. I'm dizzy. I want to sleep.”

“Here?”

“Don't I have a cell-room?”

“Oh.”

“You came to greet me, àbí? Şé you're done? Ọya, come and be going.”

[I came to tell you I'm gay and I'm a wanton chatterbox now and I'm quitting school and I'm shamelessly sucking vanilla yogurt from stick-thin sachets and I'm taking piano lessons and I can cry as often as I want and I don't feel like a pussy while chopping scotch bonnets for Mummie's jollof rice—]

“Greet the new man for me. Tell him to enjoy while it lasts, because, hmmm, his eyes will see shege. Oh, and tell Ronke to visit me soon.”

“We both know she won't come, Daddie.”

He grabs the balls of his knees, as though steeling himself against a lurch.

“She told you so? Did she tell you so, Kayode?”

“Daddie—”

“Later things, Kayode.”

Outside the latticed door, I wait. I watch Daddie rise. He bends so far forward I can see the knobs of his spine through the uniform. Almost hunchbacked. He stumbles across the room like a fatally wounded beast. Limply furious. Almost to a chronically debilitating degree. He stops at the door, glares at it, as though commanding it to open on its accord. But his faintest willpower no longer rips doors apart. I watch him lean back, cradle his face in cupped

hands. And then, a parched howl wrenches itself out of him. Followed by another. And another. *A warder approaches*; horsewhip coiled at his belt. My feet shift sideways before my mind decides. I clear the doorway. The warder nods, not at me, but at the space I have vacated. He steps in. I hear the cuffs click, not the whip. I turn to leave, and I do not look back, before Daddie is led out into his cell.

Ola W. Halim writes from Edo State In Nigeria.



Author's

INTERVIEW



**Tell Us
Why You
Write
Halim.**

**What's it like
being a
Nigerian
Creative
writing from
the margins?**

**I love your
writing
style. What
can I learn
from you?**

Bridgette James and Ọlá Halim, in conversation

Bridgette - *Tell Us Why You Write, Ọlá Halim.*

Ọlá - Broadly, I write for a couple of reasons. To remind society that people like me exist. To process complex emotions. To attempt a deeper understanding of my surroundings, its people, their behaviours, its sociocultural dynamics. To interact with the beauty of words, the magnificence of language. To contribute to discourse in whatever field that interests me. And even, sometimes, to kill time. But I think I write primarily because I *want* to write about the things I care about. I want to tell the story of an albino boy. I want to interrogate with the realities of a queer person living in a hostile environment. I want to write about a mother and her wild love for her child. I want to examine our collective madness via an absurdly humorous lens. It is when I have satisfied this imperative—the need to just write about the stuff that matters to me—that the other broad “couple of reasons” surface.

“I want to tell the story of an albino boy.”

Bridgette - *What’s it like being a Nigerian Creative Writer from the margins?*

Ọlá - I'm one of those Nigerians who occupies a unique place in society. I'm queer, albino and largely agnostic. Apart from the systemic failures of government, manifest in different intimately troubling ways, I face discrimination on the basis of my identity. You

cannot be queer in Nigeria and be free; neither education nor money could truly insulate you. People make casual innuendos about my albinism. Almost

everyone I know, from friends to family members, want to make me religious, because they believe very strongly in the punishment of hell for non-believers.

In spite of all that, I've lately begun to see myself as quite privileged. I don't waste my time anymore wallowing in what I'm not, how nature and Nigeria have cheated me. I like to think now that, sometimes, within some contexts, such as mine, marginalisation is a mental construct. Of course, being openly queer in Nigeria, no matter the mental gymnastics, poses real danger, but that's not the same with being albino, and being irreligious (in some cases). I can choose to ignore whatever I am labelled due to my albinism. I have, in fact, been doing so. I can afford the discourtesy of telling someone off when they make an albino phobic joke. I can express love to whoever I deem deserving, irrespective of gender; I can openly love bright colours and gossip and remain a Nigerian man; I can dance, sing in my high-pitched voice, crack silly jokes with Ayo, speak my English in a way considered feminine, and continue to live my life.

Living in Nigeria, especially as a “creative (people would either think you're a yahoo-yahoo fraudster or you're functionally jobless), is cruel. In some areas, there's hardly power to work as you please. The Nigerian government has no plan that includes creatives. Art subjects are left alone for the smart. Nigeria is rich in art and culture, yet its numerous museums, for example, are in varying stages of deterioration. Reading is as good as discouraged; in fact, officials would rather cut ribbons across various states than attend a book festival.

So, if you ask me what it feels like writing from the margins, I'll say I don't see margins in that sense anymore. Of course, I hope things get better. I hope true defenders of the democratic system are voted in. I hope the electorate is fully educated enough to reject temporary incentives during the election periods. I hope people learn basic politeness, and no one is derided or killed for being who they are. But the universe has been good to me. I live in a small town in Edo State. I'm a student and a part-time teacher. I write fiction

that points accusing fingers at the failures of the Nigerian state. I can mostly eat what I like. A lot of people find me funny. My family loves me. There's peace and quiet in my home. Every day, when I step out of the house, a beautiful sun greets me, and a cool breeze warms my face. It's a beautiful life here, despite all the hurdles, and I'm living it.

"I'm queer, albino and largely agnostic."

Bridgette – *I love your writing style. What can I learn from you?*

Olá- Thank you very much for the compliment. I don't think there's anything you can "learn" per se. I think every writer, when they stay consistent with the craft, eventually finds their pulse, the voice they feel most authentic to them, the best ways they feel their story should be told. For me, there's no singular formula. I could spend time planning a story, and when I eventually begin to write it, it turns out totally different from the preliminary. Some stories are "pantsed": written almost without a plan. Stories come as ideas; stories come in form of a striking sentence; you encounter an emotion and a story comes out of it. A story could take a few hours to write; others, years, maybe decades. What matters, I think, is artistic clarity: why am I telling this story? How best can I tell it? Even this varies from writer to writer.

What I consistently do, though, is revise. Revising is where the true labour lies. No matter how perfect I feel a story is, it must be subjected to two or more revisions. The story that eventually gets published could be so different from its earlier drafts you'd think they weren't written by the same person. Revising helps sharpen your story; it narrows its focus on what is most important to drive plot and deepen characterisation. Revisions can transform characters, and even reveal what you didn't know about them, such as motivations, psychology, worldview, what have you. If there's anything I've learnt that I keep learning every day, then it's this: one must recognise the power of shaping and reshaping a story until it gets close to its truest form.

About The Writer

Ola W. Halim's work has been shortlisted for the ALCS Tom-Gallon Trust Award 2026, the Gerald Kraak Prize, the Commonwealth Short Story Prize (2021 and 2026), and the Kendeka Prize for African Literature. He is also a finalist for the TFCN Teacher's Prize for Literature 2019. Twice nominated for the AKO Caine and the Pushcart prizes, he is a 2022 fellow of the Literary Laddership for Emerging African Authors. Halim's work has appeared in a number of magazines and anthologies, including *SmokeLong Quarterly*, *Lolwe*, *Iskanchi*, *adda*, *Isele*, *The Forge*, and the Gerald Kraak 2022 Anthology. He is a fiction mentor at SprinNG. Halim is interested in telling stories not frequently told. He can be reached on Twitter @OlaposiH and Instagram at https://www.instagram.com/ola_w.halim/

An Exclusive Interview with Lisa-Anne Julien



Pictured: Featured Writer Lisa-Anne Julien Lisa-Anne is the Africa Regional Winner of the 2026 Commonwealth Short Story Prize.

Bridgette James: How does your work reference the social circumstances of African women, particularly those in South Africa?

Lisa-Anne Julien: Let me start by saying that my intention is not to make broad social statements. At least not overtly and certainly, not with my fiction. I try to avoid any kind of polemics in my work and aim for specificity and character, rather than general sentiment or observation. I think there is a wealth of non-fiction work that succeeds in doing that much better than I could. I try to go for specifics, nuance. I want to see the heterogeneity among African women and the layeredness, complexity and dynamism of their social circumstances. Nothing does or should stay static. I don't want my story to imprison them in their current social circumstances. For that reason, I aim to let the story lead by character, rather than theme, or social analysis. Having said that, I know what you're asking, and I'll respond with the specificity that's characteristic of me.

In my story, *Me and Ma'am*, the African women I write about are domestic workers, although, of course, they are much more than this job title. And although my characters do have agency, many domestics workers in South Africa are often vulnerable. The lack of security in their work means they can be let go without notice or severance. The power dynamics within their place of work is significant. Their pay may not be commensurate with an increased cost of living. Many are voiceless, even though they play critical roles in the reproduction of the household, sending all members of that household out into the world fed, washed, and clean in well-ironed clothes. But again, I cannot paint domestic workers as victims. Within the context of their work, they may find a supportive and financially rewarding arrangement with their employer where all members of their family benefit. Outside of their

identity as workers, they, like everyone else, live full and complicated lives as mothers, daughters, wives, friends, partners, community members, and social beings.

Janine Milne: Your story, 'Me and Ma'am' was amazing. [Me and Ma'am | Lisa-Anne Julien | Granta](#) It has a wonderful sense of hope, of connection beyond the social, racial, and gender politics that so divide us in everyday African life. Which African short story writers inspired you to explore your African identity so vividly? [The protagonists: Phathu, Thandi and Ma'am etcetera, are so representative of us, aren't they?]

Lisa-Anne Julien: Thank you so much for the compliments on my story. I remember reading NoViolet Bulawayo's short story *Hitting Budapest* and feeling completely floored once I'd finished. Even when the story, which won the 2011 Caine Prize for African Writing and became the first chapter in Noviolet's book *We Need New Names*, I felt myself unable to let go of the original form.

The tone in the short story was not didactic; I stepped into the shoes and skin of the characters. It was true their eyes that I understood everything Noviolet was saying about the world from which the children came. It is storytelling at its most sublime.

I also feel a kindred spirit with the work and literary trajectory of Zimbabwean writer, Petina Gappah. I don't know her personally, but I'm inspired by how she straddles writing and working on international issues. I love her ability to speak to a larger truth through the voices of characters and place. I also find her writing really funny.

Janine Milne: What advice would you give emerging African short story writers who are battling to find recognition for their work on the international literary scene?

Lisa-Anne Julien: The advice I would give to emerging writers is the advice I give to myself almost every day – Just keep writing. I can't remember which famous author said – “be ready when the luck shows up”. So, it's important to keep at it and get to the end of that messy first draft. Then enjoy the magic of watching the revised draft emerge. But let's be honest – the luck might never show up. But the work still has to endure because the story demands that it be brought into the world. The calling isn't to please an international audience but to respond to something deep inside oneself that is asking to be revealed. This thing has something to say about life and what it means to be human. Having said that, writers need to be read, and stories need to be read. A story comes alive in the imagination of a reader. So, we must put our stories out into the world. Alongside sending submissions to international publications, we can also share them on the many platforms that exist. Share on socials, on Substack, make video/audio clips on TikTok etc. Revel in that accomplishment. Beat your own drum and dance to our own music.

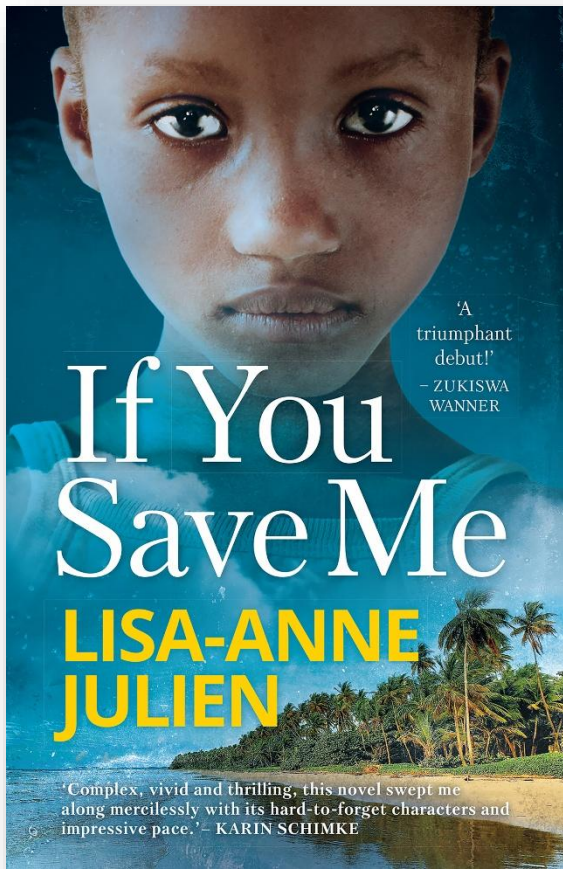
Lergon Parris: As a Caribbean writer, do you believe creole creates a disconnect with international readers or is it a legitimate argument for authenticity?

Lisa-Anne Julien: As a writer nowadays, it's difficult to know what feels authentic because there's so much discourse on what's trendy, what's

politically correct, what one should be writing about and how one should do it. It's hard to quieten the noise and listen to what the story needs. I believe that stories should be character and story driven. If creole is what the story needs, if the characters need to speak creole to carry the story forward, then by all means. It's not about if the writer decides this or that, it's what the story and characters demand. It may not be that every character needs to speak creole; I don't think writers should feel obligated to use creole just because it's trendy or that stories using creole are thought to win competitions or be accepted for publication.

Some writers who use creole are giving us creative permission to think differently about language, to rethink how we manipulate language, to dispel the notion that standard English is a type of north star. And this is amazing. In the same vein, readers are also being "taught", through engaging with creole writing, that literature is expansive and dynamic. I imagine some readers might have not thought they could engage with creole and other forms of local dialect but have, to their surprise, enjoyed the journey and the revelation. I think many readers are open to being challenged, even to be made slightly uncomfortable, if the journey is worth it in the end. So not creole for creole sake, but because the use of it promises what every reader wants – a good read.

Brigdetta James: Please tell us about your novel: *If You Save Me*, which we heard won the University of Johannesburg's 2022 Debut Prize for Fiction.



320 pages, Format Paperback
Published July 1, 2021, by Kwela Books
ISBN 9780795710209 (ISBN10:
0795710208)
ASIN 0795710208
Language English

Lisa-Anne Julien *If You Save Me* follows four men and a young girl across South Africa, the UK and Trinidad and Tobago, my home country. South African surgeon, Dr Carl Kleinhans, is on the edge of performing a risky living donor transplant in London which will force an estranged father and son to consider what really matters. The surgery is real but also a metaphor for most of the characters looking for some kind of redemption or regeneration in their lives. Back in South Africa, little Promise finds herself in the centre of events that threaten to reveal long hidden truths.

“If I take an aerial view of the characters, there are invisible lines that connect them all across time and space. This is an underlying theme in my writing – unlikely or less-than-obvious connections. While the characters aren’t always aware of the threads between them, the reader is.”

— Lisa-Anne Julien

About The Writer

Lisa-Anne, originally from Trinidad and Tobago, lives in Johannesburg. She is the Africa Regional Winner of the 2026 Commonwealth Short Story Prize. In addition, she received a Highly Commended Award in the 2008/09 Commonwealth Short Story competition. Her novel, *If You Save Me*, won the University of Johannesburg’s 2022 Debut Prize for Fiction. She was shortlisted in The Fountain Magazine’s 2024 Essay Prize, and her fiction has appeared in Pree, the Caribbean literary magazine. Her writing residencies include Femrite, Yale Writers, and the Jakes Gerwel Foundation.

About The Writer

Jonathan Chibuike Ukah is a Pushcart and Best of the Net-nominated poet living in the United Kingdom. His poems have been featured in TABS, The Journal of Poetry & Poetics, The Pierian, Propel Magazine, Atticus Review, The Journal of Undiscovered Poets and elsewhere. He won the Alexander Pope Poetry Award in 2025, and the Atlantis Poetry Prize 2026, the Sublimation Annual Poetry Contest 2026, and the Empyrean Poetry Contest 2026. His first Chapbook, A is for Anfang was released in December 2025 by the Island of Wak-Wak.

Three Poems **By** Jonathan Ukah



Why God Left my Country

Jonathan Ukah

The things I see are what I don't see;
I see the invisible things crawling away,
like a black kite wearing gold earrings,
a yellow mouse digging holes in the sky,
the dead speaking through my mother,
telling her how hunger blinded them to their fate.
My father was always holding my hands
each time he went to church on Sunday.
He never went to church on a Wednesday or Friday,
those days were reserved for the deacons
who must wear a pious mask and robe
and sit on the front pews, rubbing their temples.
He said the priest drinks aromatic gin in the evening,
and mounts the pulpit the next morning.
He has a deep and strong head, my father said.
Else he should have drunk the living water;
it's not everywhere, but in the ribs of blood;
water is the desert that forgets to dry up.
Since we returned from Port Harcourt,
we drink the living water from the blood.
Here's the dead having it sweeter than water,
sweeter than the living have memories of a sacrifice,
though the army offers us something to drink
that's neither water nor blood nor hemlock,
if you show them where your treasures are.
The police also charge people for being alive.
It's not bribery; her children justify wisdom.
The gods are somewhere watching their people,
while God left the country for the absent gods.

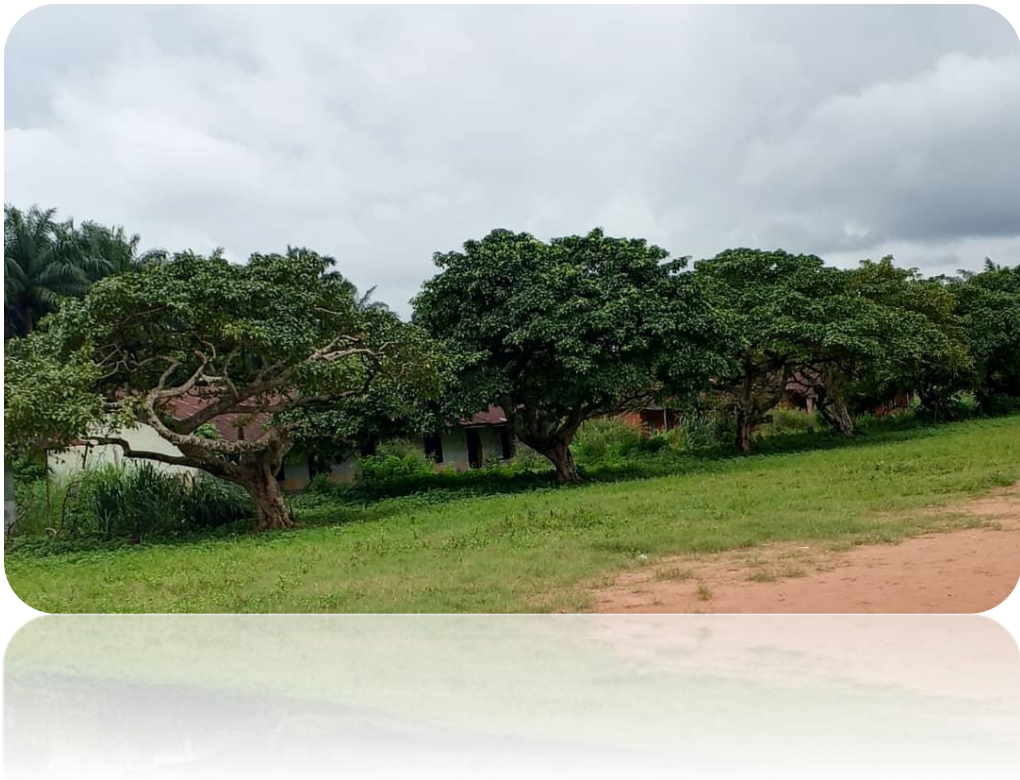
My father said the snake offered God the apple;
In a country that has too many snakes as gods;
perhaps this is why God ran out of my country,
lest the police capture Him as one of the snakes.
Nobody has the right to be a naked body,
strutting up and down the streets for clothes to wear;
there's a charge for everything, even for being a god.
Who will blame them when ordinary wood is gold,
and the wind turns a drizzle into a thunderstorm?
Yet, my father said, the children ate sour grapes,
and their fathers' teeth are always set on edge.
See how dragonflies chase the stars and the moon,
hopping on the piled-up bodies of worshippers;
who control the influx of foreign insects and flies
when the angels follow God to escape abroad.
I asked my father if God should remake my country.
From where then? You don't seem to understand.
But I understood the police arresting angels as God,
rather than command their morning to put dawn in its place.
Birds sleep with giraffes; goats marry ants;
there's an elephant about to wed a yew tree,
and a goat fell in love with a country mermaid.
I heard that happiness is another form of agony,
and sorrow is the only thing that incubates hope.
A picture of a country without a god is a desert,
and the other day, my Ghanaian friend told me,
the night owls have taken the shrines of their gods.
They crow every night, and the people are happy.
because at least someone is crying out at long last.

Passing By a Lonely Graveyard One Evening

Jonathan Ukah

A day came in this dreary and futile life of mine
I took it upon myself to pass through a graveyard
when the rain poured down in thick avalanches,
and there was no place to shelter or pass the time.
I walked through the grave of Mobutu Sese Seko,
and heard voices like children in a busy classroom.
I leaned forward to hear what they had to say,
amid the rapid rustling of dry leaves and wind,
The tall yew tree casts its shadow over the grave.
I heard him murmur to his inmates and birds,
that of all his glamour, wealth and fame in life,
no African country wanted his body on their soil,
as though he was infested with leprosy at death,
wondering how a continent of corruption and ruin
transformed into a saint at the stench of a body.
What would he have done if Morocco had kept silent,
and not asked for his corpse to drop in their land.
He forgot to approach life like a child playing a game,
moving and pushing pieces, possessing the power of kings.
Another voice in the air I heard was Sani Ahacha,
the strong man of Nigeria, leader of an oil nation,
killed in the years of abundance and peace,
mourned by the gold he kept under his pillow.
The day the army waited on him, he would not know
how his memory failed him when it mattered most.
How the people bundled him like unwanted leaves,
when he lost power like a man who lost breath,
the ejaculation of power, prominence and perpetuity.

The third voice reminded me of the fragility of Gaddafi,
the pomp, pride and pageant of Libya, the horn of Africa,
who commanded an empire of oil, an eternity of grandeur.
I heard the cutting edge of regret and anger in his voice,
wondering how possible it was for a strong man to die
surrounded by the whiteness of glory and its crudity;
touted as the sculpture of Africa, the polished gong,
through which his people blew the famous whistle of time.
He died as though his own image engulfed him,
in the hands of those who saw his light and darkness.
How quickly everything fades when light shifts its stance,
When the ego is the grave that buries the truth within.



Peter Adedire: Lush field with dwarf trees

My Father's Blood

Jonathan Ukah

I sat glum behind my father
the day the khaki men hit him at the back
with a sharp and pointed stick, a devil's needle.
He winced, shook, cringed and trembled,
touched his back with his right hand and flinched;
pain seared through his body and heart
like Jesus during the agony at Calvary.
My father's fingers were smeared with blood,
but he didn't turn to see the faces of his attackers.
It was not needed, not what he bargained for,
though he knew them, and knew they were there,
waiting for him to ride his bicycle into their tracks.
I saw and felt a blazing knife slash his body;
my body stiffened, opened, torn and spilt blood,
my blood gushed from my arteries into the hot ground,
still reeling from the wounds of the dead.
Even the marks of the fallen tattooed the leaves.
I felt my father's blood rush into my eyes,
and changed the things I see and their colours;
I felt my father's blood seep into my ears,
clogging them with meaning and mood of what I heard;
my father's blood ran through my veiny hands,
oiling my palms and fingers for what I touched,
and whatever I handled to steer my course;
I felt my father's blood take over my feet,
directing me to the places that I must go.
Whatever that had a body and a face,
whatever that had a form and a purpose,
whatever that stood for what must be done,

whatever was a substance, and not a phantom,
whatever that embodied concreteness, whatever a body,
my father's blood was there to take ultimate control.
By the reason of my father's spilt blood,
I walked through the gates of the enemy in the dark,
the fourth dimension, the realm of the supernatural,
where his presence followed me through strongholds,
and through graves littered with ashes and dry leaves,
knowing the substances that went into their dying,
the fragrances that their decayed remains emitted.
How fear and timidity died in me, who was careful,
and I was reborn with this unholy, voluptuous anger,
that raged in me like a sinister snake, raw to the bone,
transforming a cat like me into a marvellous bulldog,
biting and stinging every flesh that crossed its path.



Peter Adedire: Great palace tree at Abavo town, Delta Nigeria.



Ahmad Gani: Statue in a Garden

About The Writer

Alabi Mezabo Miracle is a poet and educator from Ekpesa, Edo State, Nigeria, and a law graduate of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma. His works appear in The Bridgette James Poetry Literary Journal and The Art Lounge Poetry Magazine, with a recent shortlisting in the Popals Poetry Anthology. Connect with him at [Miracle Alabi @ Facebook](#)

A Poem **By** Alabi Mezabo Miracle



My village is a pastor

The rasp on stone is our morning bell.
Before dawn could pull back the night's curtain, the old man
whets his machete,
a slow, metallic hymn
to wake the farmer lying fallow in our bones.
Agbe m'olemude—barterers of morning across mud walls,
thick air, and the steam of oily *akara*.

Then the exodus begins.
A long number line of boots and iron feet,
marching down the green aisle,
singing the *Uviae*:

Chorus Leader:

Ume ni Ke ria Ekemana
Unyo no ko ukozi Za Ke
no ba eshe ni ki fi zi

Chorus Singers:

Swa e ni Fi zi Tara ba hi mi
Eki ma rio bi labia

Humming the chant as they are collected by the rainforest.

At eighty, my grandfather is the high priest.
Sun-baked, unbowed,
Even *Obechi* bows when he trudges by,

muck boots armed to the legs, sucking mud in the parish of
cocoa shades, conducting a mass harvest.

He hoists the sickle pole
with hands rough as broken Benin in harmattan,
slicing sturdy stems with a sudden pull,
cracking the pods to spill the beans.

He bends to scoop the stream water,
taking communion from the leaf-littered ground.

By noon, a lone tongue pierces the wind:
"Ehe O!"
And the congregation roars back from the swamp,
"OOO!"
A sweat-soaked verse across dense leaves.

The day hangs its shredded vestment.
We find our path again,
picking up stories like fallen mangoes,
our feet longing for a cold bath.

At home, *elazor* is served, brown and heavy,
with okra sauce escaping from our lips—
the savoury taste of a day's worship.

At twilight, Grandma mounts the pulpit
to usher in moonlight tales—
Awelu te Shi Shi or nyani ILo

Ama o Shu uvumi e bi ilahor he asha bo okpele be bu kpo
Onezeshe ne ema bo gbado o meh
Okekuleze i ki je eshe ne evelevele Na soh onina ah Bere
Ka u ya gbehe uteshishi wewe nu du gubele
Zozele no la me Kay Kay cha uyanu nya
Eshe ne osho bu cha Oke bere no kwaz zaye
Orzi na ya nu yna
Ohuo lo lo gbado ome shi vo,
songs braided with stories, drums summoning the crescent
moon
keeping the earth awake.

We stumble home soon, almost breathless:
Makuze. Makuze. Good night.
A quiet benediction on the sleeping rust.
The cutlass rests in the door's pocket,
waiting for morning's sermon.

Glossary

Agbe m'olemude - A traditional morning greeting in the Okpamheri (Okpameri) language of Edo State, Nigeria.

Akara - Fried bean cakes, a popular breakfast food.

Uviae - A traditional farm-work chant sung communally while walking to or working on the farm.

Ehe O! - A call of greeting or acknowledgment, often used to hail workers from a distance.

OOO! - The customary response to *Ehe O!*, meaning “Well done” or “We hear you.”

Elazor - A dark steamed bean pudding, traditionally eaten with okra sauce.

Makuze - Good night.

Translations of Chants and Songs

Translation of the Uviae Chant

Chorus Leader: *Farming is the work of our land. He who plants,
harvests. He who breaks the pod feeds the clan.*

Chorus Singers: *I will not be lazy. My hands will work. My basket will be
full.*

Translation of the Chant-Fable

*The ant is said to have no sight,
Yet it smells the honey across the yard.
It knows the season when the grain is ripe,
To gather before the cold winds blow.
Go to the ant, you sleeper of the mat,
Learn its quiet steps and be wise;
For when the rains of hunger come to flood the earth,
The wise man has stored his corn.*

About The Writer

Excel Chinagorom Michael is a Nigeria creative writer and graphics designer living in the suburbs of Aba. His writing explores the theme of identity, lifestyle, memory and human condition. He is the author of 'Girls Are Roses' published by Poemify Publisher Inc, 2020. His work has been published on Brittle Paper, The April centaur, The Razor Wire of Exile Anthology, Afrihill, and elsewhere. He is an Educationist. Connect with him at Excelwrite9 @ Instagram and on Twitter/X @Excelwrites9

A Poem By Excel Chinagorom Michael



Trauma

Violence falls on me once again & insists my body rally around pain
which sorts me out
like trigonometry— a language that comes with our lineage.

Before now, grief settles in a circle
desiring to loop me like fire. I felt the bruise on my skin was not mine;
it was lifting a hurt hidden in my father's heart.

Who has a stuffed ache in my head & dragged me back to the place of
its first wound?

They gathered my delicate bones,
pounded them into mud & laid them
across the road awaiting a Volkswagen
to ruin me.

They left me vulnerable beside clamorous rivers filled with numbers,
like the algebra of trauma, reminding me of how we wept when we
remembered Zion.

& here, I witness departure again & again in this twenty-first century.
I will be like a boy returning a grief-playlist to those who have made a
lexicon of loathing out from me.

This memory will tarry in the trenches of history, reminding them of

the night they forced God from His throne without knowing the heaviness of grief hidden in every pregnant mother.



Photo: Ahmad Gani

About The Writer

Obaji Godwin's poems have appeared in Jaylit, Blasphemous Magazine, Doublespeaks Journal, unpopular Journal, Poetree, Tough Poets Review, Kaleidoscope III, Kalahari Review, Teambooktu, Tuck magazine, Ebedi Review, and in Soil Unfurling From Stem: An Anthology From Sub-Saharan Africa (edited by Bridgette James). He appeared in the shortlist of the 2017 Uganda Babishaiku Prize, as well as the 2018 Uganda Babishainiwe Poetry Prize Shortlist. He's a two-time winner of the POETREE Poetry Prize, and was longlisted for 2025 Kayode Aderinokun Poetry Prize, 2027 Joe Ushie Poetry Prize, MNM Poetry Prize. His poems were shortlisted for 2025 Brigitte Poirson Literature Prize and Gbemisola Adeoti Poetry Prize. His poems diagnose grief and cast conduits for its banishment.

A Poem By Obaji Godwin



Seeker

by Obaji Godwin

*.a decade later 96 kidnaped
Chibok girls are still missing..
BBC NEWS*

when I decant
my eyes
into my country's flag

I see leas of lilacs

I canoodle it.

i fleck its tongue with honey-potted molasses.

when darts rise, I rise,
becoming a sentinel ready
to bleed

for its roots to remain rooted

yes, my country is a home

I am prepared to *picket* with my life.

but, now, I do not want to give an ounce
of my irises to the minutest emblem of this land

*I am a troubadour
seeking what is lost*

the lost things are dear to me, a volleyball mate. a football aficionado
she who dreams of sculpting chalets
in mars for us she who hankers to outstrip Ronaldo's
outsize legacies

& these lost flowers were swallowed
by my country's oversight

& in this land beautiful things still
walk into loss & this country stands akimbo
staring & staring like what is lost.



About The Writer

Peter Adedire is a Nigerian poet whose works as appeared in Concio magazine, shortlisted for Brigitte Poirson prize for Literature, co-author Song of Peace Anthology, longlisted for Joe Ushie Poetry Prize for 2027. Connect with him at Leo Phonet-handle

In a horse betting race, there is a horse called *outsider*

By Peter Adedire

The painter dyed the cloud deep black, chased the outdoor stars to their father's room.

Ebullient thunders clapped, cacography etched in lightning alphabet, market put in disorder.

Chaos was not ugly, anyway, a smile – put into buckets –
there were things not meant to live in the house.

Translation should come in:

I was tossed out of my mother to a town of dwarf-bungalows,
brown roof-caps, old room-smells like secret sins.

Mud houses usually opened their epidermis to laugh at a joke cracked by a downpour.

Bleating in the sitting room, two cats, lizard the wall, a liveborn was born,
penury sang like a lyrebird.

An old man put his lips to my ears:

Do not come for him anymore.

A River does not turn back to pick his belongings.

Falling branches cannot communicate to trees they have left.

I was welcomed, kisses and patting, poured in lavender.

I was too hairy; eyes seemed like an ape's.

Papa and uncle skedaddled, mother died from drinking too much of my crying,

Grandma was happy when nobody came for my naming ceremony.

But she cooked an aromatic onion, so many villagers were tempted to visit.

At age two, she made me wear a christening ring,
distracted me for following her daughter's trail.

At ten I had almost read the entire library in my school and on peoples' faces.

Voices, voices, of thousands of petitions, deracination lives, decimated cities,

a shout to be rescued, a shout to be seen do not matters to our rulers.

We are the remnants called Outsiders, caste of pariah, hustlers looking for an identity,

looking to submarine deep of the deepest trenches.

Worst warm, wall of walls built between us.

Does the Government know I exist?

Do people know grandma's pot is the coldest in the world?

I was almost lynched in Oshodi for carrying a baby, a heavy load and my boss' heavy heart to her car.

Bummer lamb, Sergey Brim, Cano Cristales, Agbani Derogo: Outcasts, a Nigerian, Bullied.

In Missouri, I still love to teach Literature.

A lyrebird now sings to his students:

Every home is a home

an outsider does not have what he calls his own,

Every home is not my own

I have a home I called my own.

A Poem by Solape Adetutu Adeyemi



About The Writer

Solape Adetutu Adeyemi has published work in the New York Times, the Kalahari review, the Indianapolis Review and the Guardian to mention a few. She has degrees in Microbiology and Environmental Management and has a sweet tooth.



Face Me, I Face You

Twelve rooms.

Twelve large families.

Too many children to count.

Family planning clearly missed this address.

The landlord calls it a compound.

We call it a small local government.

One toilet.

One bathroom.

Shared by everybody.

Even visitors.

Every morning is an election.

Buckets line up before the owners wake up.

If your bucket no dey queue by 5 a.m., forget bathing. Go to work smelling like something the cat dragged in

The person inside the bathroom always has one line:

"I'm coming!"

Coming from where?

Nobody knows.

You can finish reciting Psalm 91, 121 and 23 before that door opens.

The toilet has seen things.

Things that should never happen to one innocent toilet.

Everybody claims innocence.

"It wasn't like this when I entered."

Of course.

Na spirits dey use am.

Children run everywhere.

One is crying.

One is fighting.

Three are naked.

Two are chasing a tyre.

One has just poured sand into somebody's pot of soup because "na play."
Their mothers?
Pregnant again.
The tap is another resident.
It brings out water once in a while just to remind us it still lives here.
The moment water starts running, the whole compound shouts,
"Water don come!"
Within thirty seconds, twenty buckets appear from nowhere.
Miracle.
Privacy died the day you rented this room.
If you quarrel with your husband at night, by morning the woman in Room
Seven has already concluded that you're the problem.
In this compound, gossip travels faster than the wind.
Yet, somehow...
People still laugh.
Still borrow pepper.
Still share food.
Still watch each other's children.
Still survive. Still hope. One day e go better.

About The Writer

Chidebelu Emmanuel Nnazoba is an Igbo Nigerian poet, playwright, and novelist. His work appears in *Penned in Rage Literary Journal* and its *2026 Winners Anthology*. He received the 2026 *Poetic Assassin Literary Prize*.



Ọnụ Ụzọ Nke Chekwabara Igbachi Nkịtị Gị
(The Door That Kept Your Silence)

Ọnụ Ụzọ Nke Chekwabara Igbachi Nkịtị Gị By Chidebelu Emmanuel Nnazoba

Ị rahụrụ n'ala mba ọzọ
ma ị hụghị ụtụtụ ọzọ

Ụbọchị atọ,
ọnụ ụzọ áhụ chekwabara igbachi nkịtị gị.

Ikekwe ekwentị gị kụrụ
n'akụkụ ihe ndina gị.
Ma eleghị anya, a kpọrọ aha gị,
ma nzaghachi abịaghị.

Anọ m ebe a,
na-atụ anya na ị ka dị ndụ
n'ebe áhụ,
ebe anyị na-apụghị iru.

Mgbe ahụ, ha kụwara ọnụ ụzọ áhụ.

Ha chọtara gị n'ime,
ụbọchị atọ ka ume ikpeazụ gị gachara.

Obalum

Aha gị ghọrọ ọnụ ụlọ
m na-apụghị ibanye.

Ejiri m ihe niile m nwere
kpọghachite gị n'ụlọ.

Ị hapụrụ ụlọ na ndụ,
ma ị lọghachiri n'ụlọ
na-enweghị okwu n'ọnụ gị.

Kemgbe ahụ, ụlọ na-ada ụda dị iche.

M ka na-ele ụra anya
dị ka ihe na-adịru nwa oge,
dị ka ọnụ ụzọ anyị na-agafe
ma si n'akụkụ nke ọzọ pụta.

Ma gị gafere,
mechie ọnụ ụzọ áhụ.

Mgbe ụfọdụ, ana m échè
ihe nrọ ikpeazụ gị bụ.

Ma ụtụtụ
amalitelarị ikpọ gị
n'ázú nku anya gị?

Ị maara n'oge áhụ dị mkpirikpi
na ị na-apụ apụ?

Akpọghachiri m ahụ gị n'ụlọ.

Ma enweghị m ike
ikpọghachite gị, nwanne m nwoke.

The Door That Kept Your Silence

By Chidebelu Emmanuel Nnazoba

You slept in a foreign land
and never woke up.

but came back home
with no sound in you.

For three days,
the door kept your silence.

Ever since,
home sounds different.

Perhaps your phone rang
by your bedside.
Maybe your name was called
and no reply came.

To me, sleeping
is only temporary,
a door that we walk
through and back again.

I was here,
hoping you were alive
somewhere out there,
somewhere we could not reach.

But you passed through
and shut the door.

Then they broke down the door.

Sometimes I try to guess
what your last dream was.

And they found you there,
three days after your last breath.

Was morning
already calling
for you behind your eyelids?

Obalum

Your name became a room
I couldn't enter.

Did you know in that split second
that you were leaving?

I used everything I had
to take you home.

I took your body home.

I couldn't bring you home, my
brother.

You left home alive



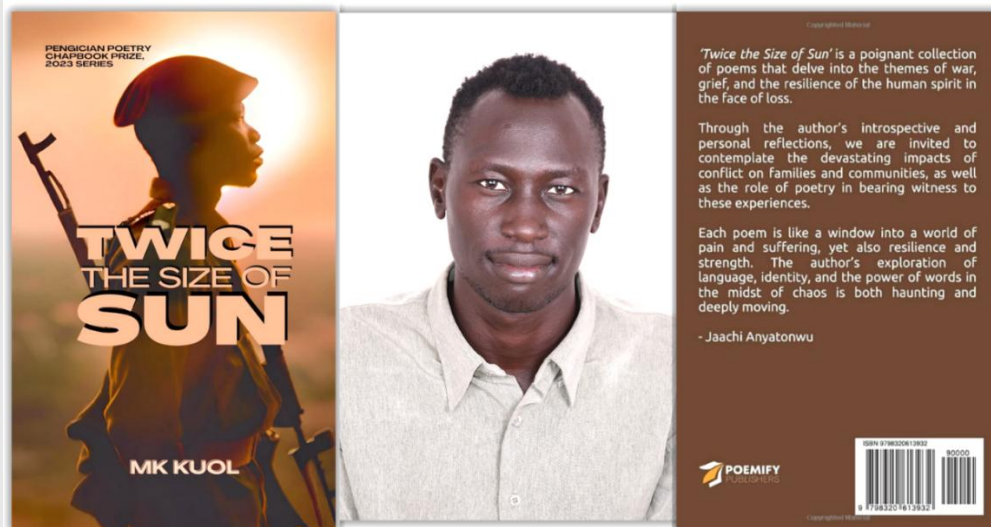
Art by Kumbukani Chawinga

Grief, as Depicted in the Work of South Sudanese Poet: MK Kuol

Chap(book) Review

MK Kuol, *Twice the Size of Sun*,
Poemify Publishers, Nigeria 2024
ISBN 979832061393

Contributor
Bridgette James
Contributor
John Chinaka Onyeché



MK Kuol, *Twice the Size of Sun*, Poemify Publishers, Nigeria 2024

ISBN 979832061393

Amazon Book Link: <https://amzn.eu/d/0j3FhvVq>

MK Kuol's *Twice the Size of the Sun*, was a joint winner in the 2024 Chapbook Prize at Pengician Poetry.

In his essay titled *Extraordinary Cases*, published in the Poetry Foundation on May 18, 2026, Joshua Bennet writes, *the practice of poetry offers us: both the inspiration to go against the grain of the present world and the instruments needed to reshape that world.*

That is exactly what South Sudanese poet, Kuol does with his writing. He summaries the present sociopolitical failings in his country and attempts to reshape his world, all while maintaining a grieving tone. MK Kuol's poetry is weighted by his obsession with grief as in the case of Rasahq Malik in *The Origin of Wounds*. That is because MK Kuol hails from a succession of West African poets who have experienced personal trauma due to sociopolitical conflicts, whether it be Christopher Okigbo writing during the height of the Biafran war or more recently, poets documenting the atrocities of Boko Haram.

John Chinaka Onyeché defines this grief as a: “ritual and inheritance; it testifies to the lives of a people shaped by generations of conflict.

*here//what's said is not heard
here//what's shown is not seen
here//what's found is not kept
here//what's grown is not tended”*

Source: Poem a, page10

Kuol's use of visual imagery paints a gloomy picture of what I want to call *a collective suffering* which is also inherently personal. This suffering is palpable in the lines: *i disentangled myself / from the snarl the night was / & lumbered into the day's sawed-jaws*. As we traverse

with the poet who has laboriously separated himself from night's grasp, we encounter even more pain in broad daylight in *sawed-jaws*. The use of tactile imagery makes a reader feel the impact trauma has had on Kuol. I am transported back to 2024 and reminded of the gruesome images on BBC news from South Sudan, where a war still wages between two opposing factions on the military government. (Wikipedia, 2026)

Here is the rest of the cited stanza:

*over the naked trees
a faint flame flowered into a full-blooded bead.
i disentangled myself
from the snarl the night was
& lumbered into the day's sawed-jaws.
& there. there in the vestiges—
our feet left on earth's face as we danced
to the music of our heartbeats in the rain
before our hearts knew this pain we now know by face—
reposed thousands of squashed skulls
& broken bones, worm-licked to shine:
telltales of what my country became
after becoming a country.*

Source: Poem b, page10

The chapbook is makes a 'heavy read,' concurs John Chinaka Onyeche each poem unfolds like a single extended lament, and the

motifs of the sun, grief, mothers, war, and memory, have a layered meaning.

“I think even the word ritual
evokes a cultural performance of grief.”

MK Kuol’s soul is clothed in intense sorrow. If a poet is forced to be a witness to traumatic events, what other choices do they have, except to make art?

like a ritual;
i pen a poem each morning
to rinse off grief
the grungy garment
my shredded soul has become.

Source: Poem a, Page 9

About The Writer



MK Kuol, recently shortlisted for the Wanjohi Prize for African Poetry, was the second-place winner of the annual Pengician Poetry Chapbook Prize. His works have appeared on Pulp Lit, Spillwords, Port Harcourt Literary Review, Fiction Niche, Kalahari Review and elsewhere. MK Kuol loves dark rooms, coffee, moon-gazing, folk music (Arizona JJ’s to be exact) and conspiracies. He tweets (rarely) @mk_kuol14

Contributors

- I. Bridgette James <https://www.ellaspoeems.com/bridgettejames>
- II. John Chinaka Onyeche is a Nigerian writer and historian from Okotokoche Igbodo Etche in Rivers State. He writes from Port Harcourt. His work has appeared in York Literary Review, McNeese Review, Pier Review, Tilted House Journal, Brittle Paper, Tampered Press, Ta-Adesa, Afrocritik, among others.

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Art by Kumbukani Chawinga

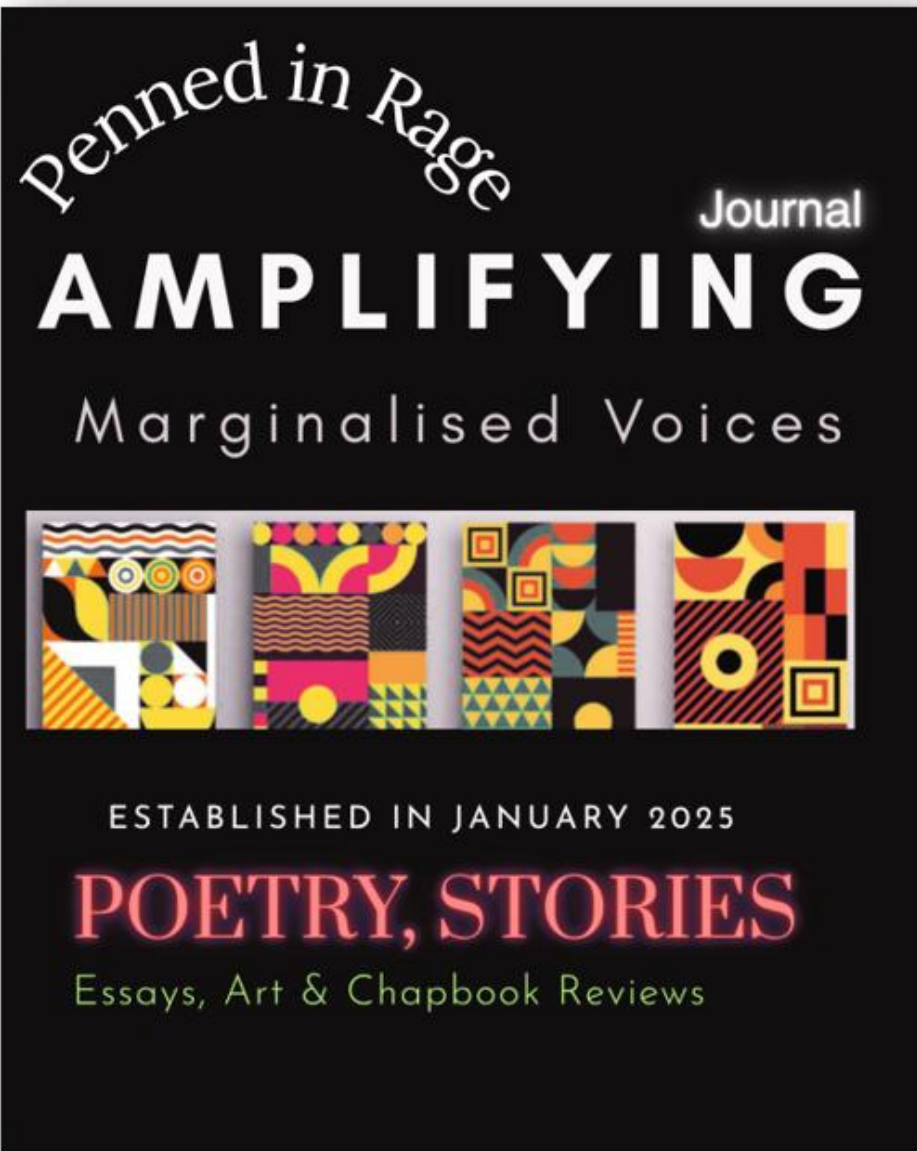




Amazon Book Link <https://amzn.eu/d/051ETLip>

The Razor Wire of Exile

The Annual *Bridgette James Poetry Competition*, 2026
Winners' Anthology



Featured Writer-

Interviewed by Brett Anderson

Meet Roshnee:

South African poet finding space for her words to soar



My name is Brett “Fish” Anderson, and I am a writer and poet and improviser from Cape Town, South Africa. My most recent poetry book, titled, ‘Not water, JUST ICE!’ was released earlier this year through my engagement as part of a WhatsApp Poetry group called ‘Lit in Literature’, a space where poets from around South Africa share poems based on daily prompts that are dropped in the group.

One of these poets I have been connected to for that feels like the longest time is Roshnee Govender. We have enjoyed each other’s work and even co-created a few poems as part of some challenges that were created for Lit in Literature and are fans and cheerleaders of each other’s work.

So, I thought I would take this opportunity to interview Roshnee and hear about some of her journey into the world of poetry and seeing her own books in print.

Let’s begin by asking, who is Roshnee Govender?

I have always been a writer, scribbling in multiple notebooks, scraps of paper, my phone and everywhere else. It is only recently that I chose bravery over fear, to bring my passion into the public eye through my book *The Moon Child*. Brave, because I was terrified of how my thoughts in a public forum would be viewed by family, friends and other readers. Writing is therapeutic, even if it just for one’s own self.

I am an Earth Child at heart, accountant by career (we fall into career paths by decisions that are taken out of necessity) - if it was a decision of passion, I would have been a nature conservationist. I find inspiration in nature, with my camera which is always on hand to capture the magic around me. My love for words, poetry and storytelling has taken me on a journey of self-expression, growth and connection.

My two poetry collections, *The Moon Child* and *Chasing Petals in the Sun*, published through Sakura Book Publishing, reflect different parts of my writing journey.

My writing journey has been shaped by the guidance and support I have received along the way, and I am very appreciative of the importance of the people who inspire us to embrace change and become better versions of ourselves.

As part of the Paper Trail Literary Press writing community, known as “The Lit in Literature”, I continue to be inspired through daily writing and connecting with fellow writers. My latest contribution includes two poems featured in their collaborative anthology, *We Are Because We Are*, which brings together the voices of writers and highlights the importance of community, shared stories and the power of words.

For me, writing is about bringing words to emotions, finding joy even in pain, and creating moments of solace and peace. “I write for you and for me, I write about you and I.”

I asked Roshnee a number of questions to dig a little deeper into her poetry journey:

When/Where/How were you inspired to write?

Words have always been my forte – public speaking and writing comes easily to me, often being called to be the speaker at family and friend functions. Writing became my therapy, and my healing along the way. I have an eye for the “unusual” at the everyday things around me, and these all become my inspiration.

As children who read, books are always these magical kinds of items that mysterious entities somewhere out there are probably responsible for, and we likely don’t give it much thought. But now you have your poetry featured in a book/books [The Moon Child, Chasing Petals in the Sun, Anthology Poetry is not dead, a friend

submission in No Water Just Ice, and Anthology We are because we are].

Talk us through a little bit of your journey of that mystical magical out-there thing becoming a reality for you...

I always believe that occasionally, there is a Blue Moon, and the magic it brings. Seriously though, I look for the magic in life, the synchronicities that bounce my way – the moon, the sun and the stars bring me joy. I am very aware that there is a greater Divine force driving my existence, and I never take that opportunity to become one with the Universe lightly.



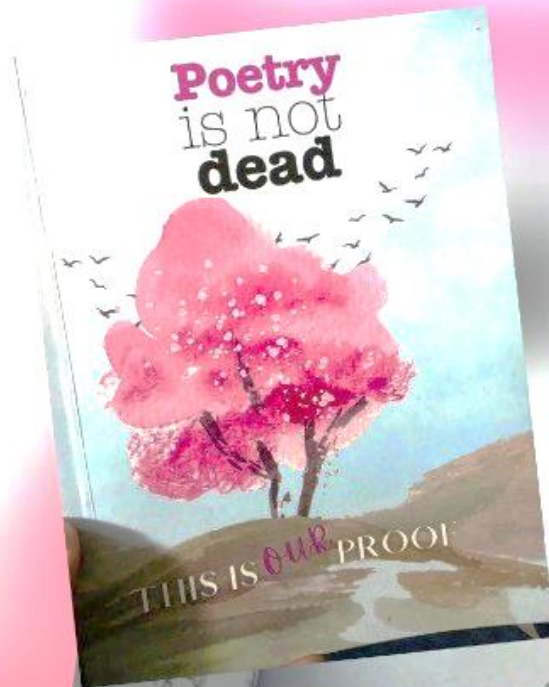
★ Book ★ ★ Review ★



South Africa is home, and the social injustices tear into my soul. The pain we feel is reflective in my writing. This anthology is special, because we are all South African at heart, and our pens tell our story. Not just mine, but yours too.

Padmini Govender





PAREIDOLIA

BY PADMINI GOVENDER

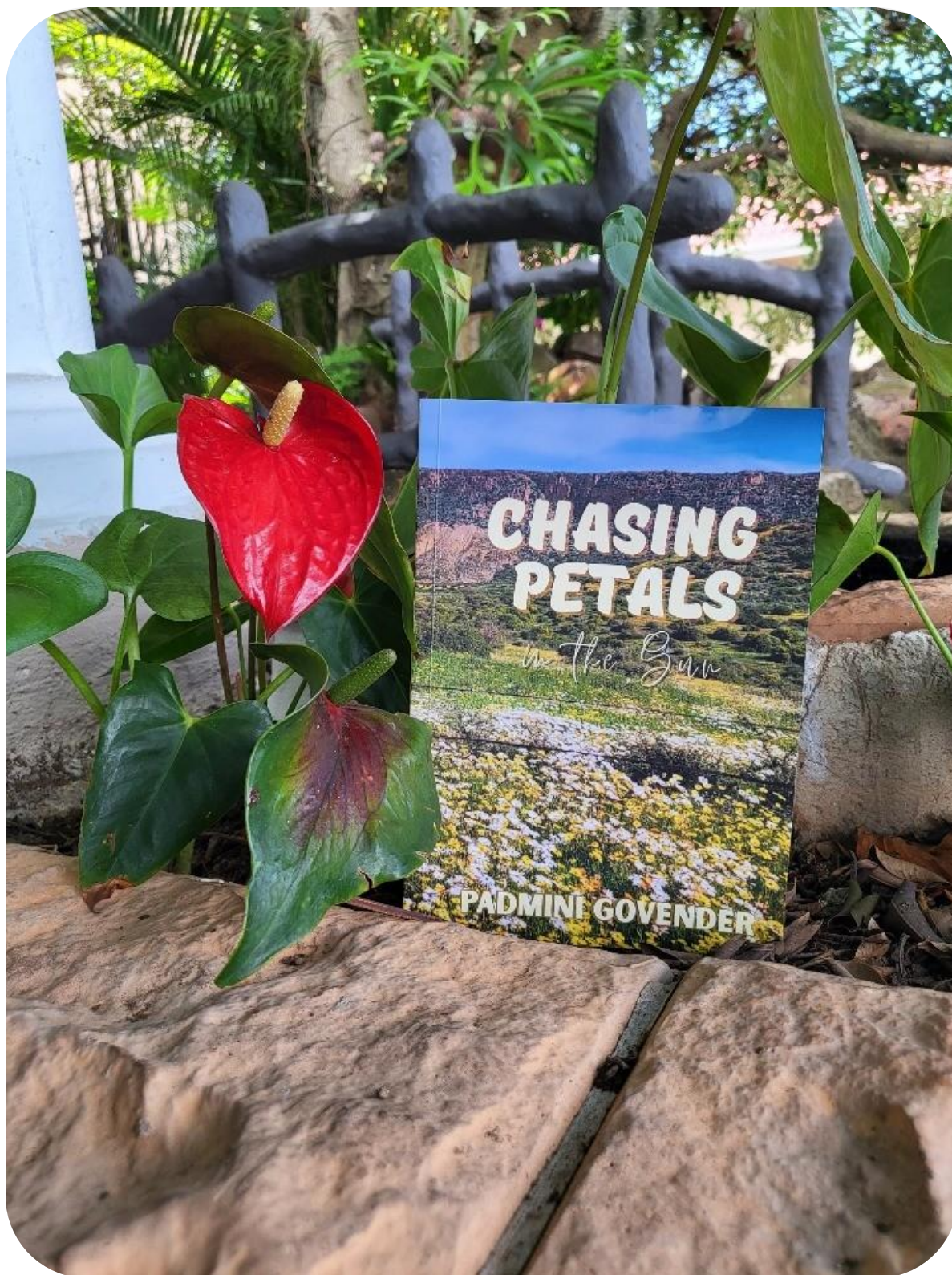
The sky, mesmerizing blue vastness,
With wispy clouds that trail gently,
Or dark and angry with menace of a storm.

This ancient pastime
Brings a stillness to my heart,
Seeing the clouds resemble the random.

There's a word for this, that I still love to do:
Pareidolia - a scientific name for a pleasant pastime.

The beauty is still hypnotic,
A star-filled sky and no moon,
Dawn as it breaks through
In a spectacular sunrise.

A disruptive storm causes chaos,
A hauntingly beautiful sunset.
Cloud-gazing lures me,
To stop for a while,
To rest and ground my soul,
To simply be, in that moment of time



Writing poetry and having these published, in book and online platforms has been an amazing journey thus far – the joy of seeing my book in the hands of other readers is amazing. What has made my journey more magical, is that some of my poetry has been turned into songs and is playing on all streaming sites – to hear my poetry in a song, it is just WOW.

A lot of your poetry contains difficult or painful subject matter and much of that is personal. How has expressing some of your story in poetry helped or hindered your own healing? Do you ever feel like there is a cost to writing about painful things or more of a reward?

Does all poetry not root out of pain? It is what gives our rambling thoughts some structure through words. Writing has helped me to let go of the pain – now that the words are out there in public, it seemed silly to continue to hold on to the pain, and it became easier to heal.

The cost of writing about painful things is expensive – it opens you up to more judgement, from those that first hurt you, and then some new small-minded people. However, as you interact with people that find solace in your words, you realise that benefit vs the cost is greater.

Walk us through a little bit of the journey of the Lit in Literature WhatsApp poetry group. How did you find out about it, when did you get involved, and how has it been part of that group of dedicated creators added to your life and writing experience?

Ekta Somera and I tripped over a social media page – not over poetry for sure. Our chats led us to the writing, and I was invited to join the poetry group – biggest catapult of my writing development. I found a safe space; to write without negative judgement but peer critical support pushed me out of my comfort zone, forcing me to let my words fly without restraint. The group is a great place to start for those who love poetry, love to write, and are finding a home to get started in, then the group is ideal.

You have now published two books, ‘The Moon Child’ and ‘Chasing Petals in the Sun’. Can you give us a brief glimpse into each of those? And also, how your words even travelled beyond book form.

The Moon Child was written from a place of pain and a path of growth. What began as my own story became a collection that speaks to the emotions and experiences many people carry, who cannot always find the words to express. The book takes readers through the phases of the moon, exploring the journey from darkness to light.

My second book, *Chasing Petals in the Sun*, is a photographic poetic travel journal inspired by a road trip through South Africa. From the City of Gold to Namaqualand, what started as a journey to see the Namaqualand daisies became a detour through towns, cities and moments of beauty captured along the way.

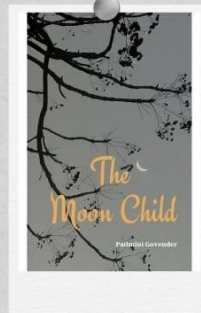
The 3-Legged Pot

Nothing special, they said,
That is just a pot.
Uma Ntuli upheka iphuthu ne khabishi
Ebhodweni lesizulu.
Do not insult the pot,
Do not insult our people.

Women stood over it,
In the sweltering heat,
Song in hand, cooking for the village.
Borrowed by Oom Piet
To make his oxtail potjie,
Over biltong and brandewyn.
Uncle Saleem, who makes biryani for weddings,
An explosion of spices
For all occasions.
Community feeding these days,
Rows of steaming pots,
Feeding a child, feeding a nation.

That pot holds the hopes and dreams of our people,
Of a future so bright,
That the darkness of the past
May soon only be found in textbooks.
The pain in our souls will pierce less,
Soothed by the beating drums of a new dawn.

The fire will burn what separates us,
The pot will hold everything that unites us.
That nothing special pot is Heritage.



Yes, our country is full of potholes; yet within it, we are a melting pot of cultural diversity and unity. Everything distinctive is truly south African. I am always cognizant of our painful history, but hopeful that we will find peace with the pain and joy in the new future. It does feel though that our "together" moments are building momentum.

Beyond poetry, my words have also found expression through music. Under, my name, Padmini Roshnee Govender, I have poems turned into songs, and available on multiple streaming platforms through the Soul Whisperer label, with more to be released soon.

Who were some of the people and What were some of the moments in your own writing journey that feel significant in terms of helping shape the path you took and keeping you motivated and believing in yourself?

The universe orchestrates the meeting of souls, who make dreams come true. For me it has been Ekta Somera, who worked on my book *The Moon Child*, under the guidance of publisher Alta H Haffner, from Sakura Book Publishing. Both women are dynamic in their own way and have helped me nurture my writing in various platforms. And also Mohamed Faruk Hoosain, whose reflection features in *The Moon Child*.

My husband Sydney and children Revashni and Kevashan have been my ardent supporters, cheering from the sidelines – allowing me to write and then sharing my public moments with my book launches.

What place do you think writing has in the world or is it just a hobby that some people have to help them pass the time?

I don't think writing will not make you rich overnight, so money cannot be a motivator for writing. Writing is personal and it a passion that drives a person. While it does seem like writing is like passing time, it is heart and soul driven. There are days, the creativity flows, and on other days, it is a slump and nothing is coherent. Writing is not AI – it must be the individual's own emotions, experiences, words and thoughts that bring life to the piece.

What is next for you with regards to writing? Any big dream or idea that seems too big but that keeps coming to mind or are you already working on your next big thing?

I still have a lot of drafts that need to be shared with my publisher. I have had a bit of “edit slump” recently – while everything needs to be written, it needs to be shared in the correct space and genre, so I am busy trying to catalogue my work.

What is exciting though – many of my poems has been turned to music – Padmini Roshnee Govender, under The Soul Whisperer & Soul Whisperers Poetry to Music Label.

A long-term project is a one-day biography – I always say if I write my life story, it may just be a bestseller – the journey has been a rollercoaster to where I am today.

My books, The Moon Child and Chasing Petals in the Sun are available online and the poetry anthology, We Are Because We Are is available from the Paper Trail Literary Press at thepapertrailza@gmail.com

"My Poetry turned to Music is available at Spotify and all other streaming sites –

Go find me at Padmini Roshnee Govender under

The Soul Whisperer & Soul Whisperers Poetry to Music Label."

Penning in Rage Journal



AMPLIFYING

Marginalised Voices



ESTABLISHED IN JANUARY 2025

POETRY, STORIES

Essays, Art & Chapbook Reviews

Writer: Brett Anderson

WISDOM FROM THE WORDS OF ELDERS

An Essay by Oluseyi Ogunbanwo

'Ìwà rere l'èsó Èniyàn'

This phrase translates into English as: 'Good character is the finest adornment of a human being'.

We Yorubas, of Western Nigeria, use character to define a person, whatever his standing. A man of good character is held in high esteem. And to us, whatever a person claims to be, however skilful he is at his job, if he lacks good character, his profession or skill is useless.

'lwa l'ewa'

'Character determines beauty'.

It is as much as to say that one's beauty is seen in one's character. Consequently, however peerless you are in beauty, a bad character makes you appear as an ugly beast.

Now what is 'lwa rere'?

Well, it is not relative. Good character is a good character. It is measured in many ways and exhibited in various forms. It goes beyond the mere act of munificence. Someone can be generous yet still lack good character. Generosity, sometimes, may emanate from a compelling need or a sympathetic disposition.

It is the ability to maintain a benign disposition at all times. It is exercising restraint in the face of provocation. It is denouncing falsehood and

affirming the truth, whoever is involved. It is doing one's duty as expected and fulfilling the task for which one is employed.

It is the display of moral uprightness. It is doing good to both friends and perceived foes.

Empathy is an indispensable ingredient of good character. The ability to own up to one's mistakes and offer an apology without restraint is the hallmark of a good character, and that is, irrespective of one's position.

Some believe it is wrong for parents to apologise for wrongs done to their children. I disagree. Whatever the child's age. It simply amounts to good character.

And guess what? Good character is learnt from home. Family and community socialisation teach it.

Though we now live in an age of moral decadence, ours used to be a community of people of diverse religions, educational qualifications and societal standing that believed in good character as the only index of socialisation. Training of the child and the young was not exclusive to their parents. Society served as a caregiver even when parents were within reach.

As a Counsellor, I realised that Home Training is the instrument of socialisation and an indispensable tool that parents employed in moulding the child to a standard approved by the community.

In the training of children, Caregivers are aware of the negative implications of labelling a minor as 'abi-iko' (birthed but untrained) or 'ako-igba' (he who rejected home training). The former is a direct indictment on the parents for failing to provide supportive care and socialisation of their wards, while the latter presents a recalcitrant child who contumaciously rejected the moral training offered by his parents.

Whichever way, parents are held liable for their children's indecent behaviour in society.

The word 'Iwa' is a noun that can be attached to other words to form phrases indicating different meanings. For example:

- 'Iwa irele' - a humble disposition.
- 'Iwa omoluwabi' - the deeds of a well-trained child, and so on

On the other side are:

- 'iwa ika' - the act of wickedness
- 'iwa anikanjupon' - selfish behaviour
- 'iwa ainitiju' - a shameless disposition
- 'iwa agidi' - a stubborn comportment...just to mention a few.

It is more honourable to do good than to pretend to be good with an underlying negative intent.

Yorubas, like every other tribe, believe 'no act of goodness or wickedness will go unrewarded'. (A t'ore a t'ika, ikan kii gbe') They believe in the principles of sowing and reaping. However long your good or evil is, assuredly there is a corresponding reward before you leave the earth.

Do you know that Yoruba people hardly speak ill of the dead? But then, the effect of the deceased's character outlives him, so much that the children or family becomes the beneficiaries of his character trait after his demise.

The Yorubas hardly forget the good character of a dead man. They reciprocate such good gestures towards his children or family. Similarly, the

family of a man of bad character would have themselves to blame after his demise.

“Whichever way, people hardly forget the 'Ìwà' a man exhibited even after his death.”

— Oluseyi Ogunbanwo

My Mother once told me a story: She claimed that on the day of my child's naming ceremony, a relative gave me a specific name. But the name was rejected by all in attendance because that was the name of the man who had sacked my Uncle where he previously worked. My uncle and some of his friends who knew the man said that the man was choleric, mean and wicked. They believed that the name would reflect unpleasant memories. Consequently, the name was rejected by my father.

It's interesting how a person's name is synonymous with his inordinate character. And this brings us to a new chapter in this discourse. People's names or aliases sometimes depict the personality behind those names.

One instance where a name has become a nickname for anyone tough, unsmiling and unfriendly is in the case of a former unsmiling and unfriendly Nigerian Military man who held the position of second-in-command and whose personality was feared.

There is no doubt that 'Ìwà rere l'èsó ènìyàn'.

'Ìwà rere l'èsó Ènìyàn'

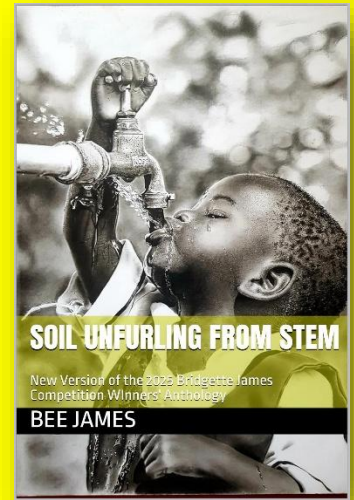
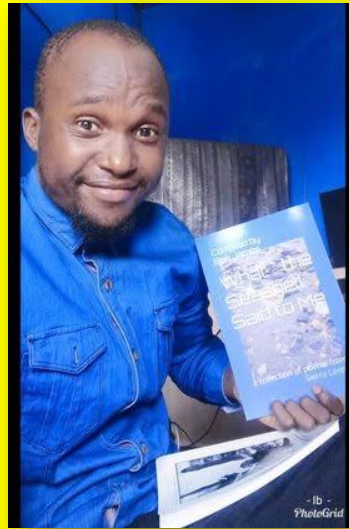
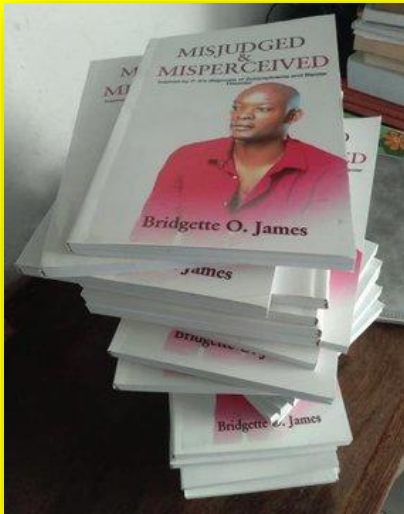
Toto ose bi owe, eyin Agba ori platform yi, e darijimi.

(It is indeed a proverb; elders on this platform, kindly permit my ignorance).

About the Writer

Essayist Oluseyi Ogunbanwo Joseph is a trained Social Worker from the University of Lagos, a writer, poet, and counsellor whose works explore faith, morality, and the human experience. Passionate about literature and learning, he develops educational materials and creative writings that inspire, instruct, and enrich readers across generations.





Read All Books by Ella's Poems Project on the Website

1. ***Misjudged & Misperceived***
2. ***What the Seashell Said to Me***
3. ***Soil Unfurling from Stem***

Misjudged and Misperceived is an explosive nonfiction story based on the traumatic experiences of a 27-year-old anonymous gentleman, using the pseudonym Mavuto, who was diagnosed with Early Onset Schizophrenia aged fifteen. Though his identity is hidden, the plot contains real life occurrences used as the lens through which

the writer who studied Mental Health Nursing at Greenwich University, London in 1999, examines factors that prevented early intervention and delayed Mavuto's diagnosis, purporting the argument early intervention could have improved Mavuto's quality of life.

What the Seashell Said to me held in the national Poetry Library, was borne out of The Sierra Leone Poems Project which was launched to assist socially disadvantaged poets in Sierra Leone, who may

write well but struggle to get any sort of recognition. Often this is because of the lack of publishing outlets back home or the lack of state funding for emerging poets and established writers.

In the foreword to ***Soil Unfurling from Stem***, Poet, playwright, and novelist: Oumar Farouk Sesay, says that *Soil Unfurling from Stem* is a tapestry of voices drawn from various genres yet dominated by nature poetry and Eco poetry.

Penned in Rage

Journal

AMPLIFYING

Marginalised Voices



ESTABLISHED IN JANUARY 2025

POETRY, STORIES

Essays, Art & Chapbook Reviews

A POEM by Joseph Ojochegbe

To Bless the Whip

Take me back to bitter days

where I would cry for what I eat.

Take me back to better days

where I would smile for what I bleed for.

Take me back to my blessed land of Egypt,

where in its field I had spirit in my soul,

and in its anguish, I had flesh on my bones.

Slap me out of this heaven

where there is no cost for grain,

where there is no blood for wine.

Hold me so I will fall,

kiss my lips, let me rupture.

My throat is on fire.

Give me peace.

Who took my peace?

Who took my peace?

Who taught me to bless the whip?

About The Writer



Majesty Ojochegbe Joseph is a speaker, writer, and dedicated advocate for youth movements. He derives immense peace from his pen and paper, as it is through this medium that he expresses his innermost thoughts and reflections.





What the Seashell Said to Me, a collection of Poems from Sierra Leone, Held in the national Poetry Library, London.

THREE POEMS by Nattie O'Sheggzy

Double-tailed Nekomata

Paddling through the puddle whose mud
holds the shape of light, a cat
wondrously shy of smoke bears the fire.
She is arrayed in flames
in her former life. Her paws imprint ash
over the velvety seabed. There are brighter days
she neither meows nor mulls, the rat
holed in the attic. Hollowed cries stuffed
by the walls' hem the light at the centre
of fear. Scars crab the window panelling, peeling
the beam of silence — a brimful outflow.

They called her Nekomata, double-tailed
in the Stone Age, long before her resurrection.
She was not created a monster; she had lived
long enough to remember what mortals had forgotten —
a cat that existed long before a spark
kindled the hearth and heart of man.

*What if only this feline, foraging in the forest,
understood the pain undoing other animals?*

Drawn to the call of desire across
borders between worlds. Nekomata
becomes neither the living nor the loving
but their memory, with two tails
dragged into the void behind her.

X

by Nattie O'Sheggzy

Every time I am reborn, burnished,
Immersed in the sunrise of laughter,
I become the eastern glow steeped in mist.
In the squall and the storm I remember everything
You unsay. The long pause between phrases stanches
My lips. Warm rain jabs at my throat amid the din
of the silence stitching itself to your words.
Sparrows lure me to prise open the soul of the sun
You bear like an egg in a golden tie.

FRACTURE

by Nattie O'Sheggzy

I dived inside of me.
What genie leapt forward
when cobwebs
slabbed shut the curvy light?
Why do dark dimples began
to grow like carpet-
grasses crawling clumsy
and curious?
They became the vomited
black children woken
up too late by yoghurt and milkshake.

Why did my cracked ribs creak?
We hadn't done with each other yet
before night swept away
the critters like crumbs
left on the mahogany table.
I screamed at the billowing clouds
maybe the pain could
play piano in my ears.
but silence seemed weightier in my arms.
That split second I adored did not wear out pain.

Pain, in truth, could not be replicated
by striving to overcome the pang,
unlike the rhythm of consciousness.
I tried several times to defang
the wound, and mould a cavity,
a socket to keep the calm in

to make sure I sealed it in
squarely within the jaws of my kitchen windows.
A thousand unnameable things harbour hurts,
even in silence I know this.

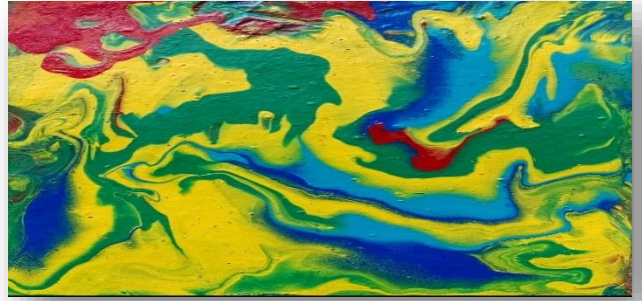
About The Writer

Oyetunji Olusegun Alabi — pen name: Nattie O'Sheggzy — is a Nigerian poet born in Lagos and shaped by his experiences in Ikire-Ile. Trained in geography and surveying, his poetry explores memory, eros, mortality, and history through surreal, spatial and elemental imagery. His work has appeared in BigCityLit, Sandy River Review, Agape Review, Heroin Love Song, Gigantic Tentacles Magazine, Lothlorien Poetry Journal, and elsewhere. He is the author of Random Imaginations and is currently completing a third poetry collection.

He can be reached at: <https://www.facebook.com/iNattie.osheggzy>



A Poem by
Dave Tewari



About The Writer

I enjoy literature and read a lot. Although I specialize in mundane economics,

I enjoy subtle things in life and now retired from work life.



Bliss of Brahman

Life I thought was as steel
But I found it nothing more than the dew
Worked hard to become someone
Who makes more money and brings more comforts
home
Family grew, children came
Happiness blossomed and, in the process, I found
myself old.

Now I feel duped
into doing the routine
from one life to another
running from cradle to grave
time and again.

Mysteries of the Universe and Life
Scoured for the Bliss of Brahman
To taste, and I pray to the Almighty to grant me that
boon.

A POEM by Tajudean Kolawole

The Generals Are Not Always Right

Even the colonisers are confused just as you & I
They said *the past of cry is **cried** and **fried** for **fry**
knelt for **kneel**, as **feel** and **felt**
but why is **sight**, **sighted** when **fight** is **fought**?*

Though, we were colonised
there's freedom of speech and thought
If **drink** is **drank** and **sing** is **sang**
why then is **bring** not **brang** but **brought**?
& **patch** is **patched** when **catch** is **caught**?

These are my views – opened to be overruled
Generals say *the past for **kill** is **killed** and
bill is **billed**. There's concern when **cheat**
is **cheated** and **teach** is **taught***

If I gave Moosa my pen yesterday, I say **lent**–
for the past and **sent** if a message was
disseminated two days ago. **Lend** is **lent**
send is **sent** but **fend** is **fended**
Think from my perspective you wise men of this court.

About Poet

KOLAWOLE, Tajuddeen is a thoughtful Nigerian poet, educationist and an aspiring academic with a passion for words, ideas, and human connection. From crafting heartfelt free verse poems to navigating academic research with



depth and clarity, he blends intellect with emotion in both his writing and pursuits. He's a master graduate dedicated to growth; his interests span from education and communication to cultural expression and spiritual reflection. Tajuddeen brings warmth to language and purpose to every project, driven by curiosity, compassion, and an unshakable belief in meaningful work.

Connect with him:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/share/1T5EwxrGXh/>

Twitter/X at <https://x.com/KTajuddeen>

There is something wrong with our water

By Yuwinn A. Kraukamp

“They have deliberately left us here to kill each other.”

—G. Ndhlovu, on violence in African townships. Taylor
& Francis, March 2024.

There is a cup on our table
a non-consecrated aluminium chalice
filled with just enough water
to keep every person in my family
from dying of thirst
my father takes the first sip
my mother fills her mouth, passes it to my sister
who offers it to my brothers
by the time the cup gets to me
there is nothing but blood left in it.

We drink as much as the living are allowed
in a graveyard like this
but there is something in this water: ashes
and stones, and human bones
and deceased Gods who couldn't adapt to local droughts
the last rites and first names of slain children
who couldn't unswallow the easy death
that fills our daily cups.

We drink as much as the living are allowed
but I swear to you there is something wrong with this
water
and there are limits to how much grief
a body can swallow in one lifetime
how much hunger and unholiness you can hide inside
yourself
before my body remembers that it
is drowning.

And by the time I swallow the last drop
I am no longer a child. How can I be?
when I can no longer taste anything
other than blood.

About The Writer

Yuwinn A. Kraukamp, a bilingual writer from the coastal corner of Cape Agulhas, South-Africa, was placed third in the 2026 Bridgette James Poetry competition. He's a natural born creative, a former English— and Communications major at the university of the Western Cape, and a patron (saint) of everything that's artistically unique and beautifully weird in this world. Yuwinn has worked as a freelance columnist for

Network 24, and a freelance journalist for The Southern Post Newspaper since 2022. In 2024 he was the third-place winner of the Diana Ferrus poetry prize, and in 2026 he was the first-place winner of the Njabulo S. Ndebele-themed 'Rediscovering the Ordinary' poetry competition. Both his English and Afrikaans poetry has appeared on various platforms such as Litnet, PEN Afrikaans and Versindaba; and has been published within poetry anthologies such as *Ons Kom Van Hier* and The Avbob Poetry Project.



August – December 2025 Edition

A Literary Magazine
Amplifying Voices of
Underrepresented
Writers

Penned in Rage

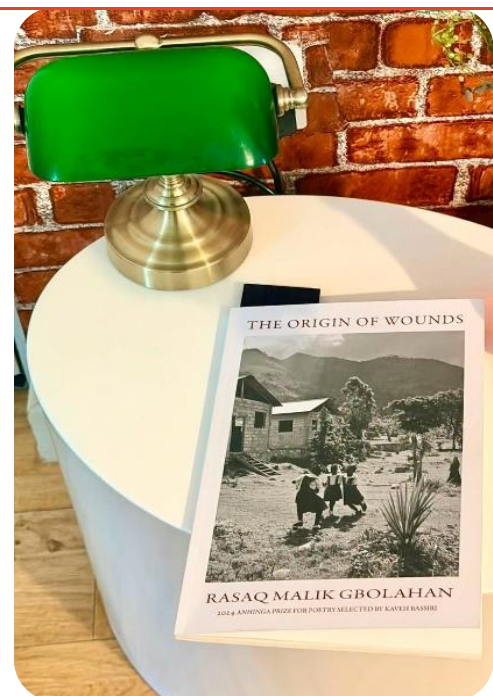


*Edited
By Onyishi Chukwuebuka Freedom
&
Bridgette James.*

Poets, critiquing Poets

Title: *Your World Needs Sweeting, Child*

- R.M Gbolahan, *The Origin of Wounds* (2025) [Winner of the 2024 Anhinga Prize for poetry] Published by Anhinga press || Florida
- W. Soyinka, *Idanre and Other Poems* (1967), Published by Hill and Wang || New York
- Kayode Adesimi Robbin-Coker, 'One Day of Rain,' in *What the Seashell Said to Me: A collection of Poems from Sierra Leone* (2022), Published by Ella's Poems Project



***Idanre and
Other Poems***
(1986)



***The Origin of
Wounds* (2025)**



Reviewer: B. James

Writing in the 2026 summer edition of the Poetry Review, London-based Poet, Oluwaseun Olayiwola says, A poet's music is a mixture of things: diction, white space, typographic eclecticisms, prosody and of course, syntax.' How the poets Wole Soyinka and Rasdaq Malik create a musical sound in their stanzas is through their choice of words, unusual layout (line formation) or visual style and rhythm.

'In Wole Soyinka's poem 'Koko Oloro,' I can hear small children playing and chanting. How delightful. The anaphora 'plead for me,' builds rhythm throughout the piece. The poem is experienced with the ear, the mouth and eyes, completing a sensory circuit. I kept asking myself several questions while reading it:

Why is this kno dolorous or mournful?

What is a kno?

Apart from lines 1 and 9, every line has three words, making this poem a neat song of evenly spaced syllables.

Incidentally, we locate the narrator-poet in line nine, on a tree shoot which they call a threshold They're binding leaves with a tree stalk, a (flower) bud, three berries into a bitter potion. It feels like a mythical process involving nature. Then the poet casts their voice and implores this 'knot of bitters' to plead for them. Honestly, I wish I knew why? Still, I like the not-knowing. It's probably just child's play.



Photo: Rasaq Malik Gbolahan, Poet.

I come with eager anticipation to the delightfully eloquent, Rasaq Malik's work. Upon glancing at the collection's title, I realised there would be some sort of disclosure about where the soreness or damage to a skin originated from.

**“R. M. Gbolahan is a cartographer
whose preoccupation is with mapping out the effect of
sociopolitical conflict on the landscape of children's**

minds.”

Therefore, I am not looking for a recount of factual historical atrocities in *The Origin of Wounds*, but for a symbolic juxtaposing of these occurrences next to the psychosocial trauma minors experience. The map Rasdaq Malik draws in his opening poem, ‘Biography of Homeland,’ includes areas where: *children wake up each morning uncertain of their safety*, in its margins. I read that with Wole Soyinka’s warning in mind:

‘[Y]our world needs sweeting, child’ -‘Dedication’
by Wole Soyinka, in *Idanre and Other Poems* (1967).

—Dedication

by Wole Soyinka, in *Idanre and Other Poems* (1967).

Both Wole Soyinka’s and Rasdaq Malik’s political preoccupations emerge quite early in the collections. The backdrop to Rasdaq M. Gbolahan’s poetry collection are the atrocities committed by violent Islamic extremists (Boko Haram and its splinter groups) in Nigeria.

‘Bury Us/ Not in graves dug in a hurry / dug by hands that once held newborns.’

—Bury Us, Rasdaq Malik Gbolahan

Although R. M. Gholahan broadens his telescopic lens to frame conflict in other parts of the globe such as the event at Eagle Pass, Texas; Jamestown 1619; El Hierro, El Dorado and the 2021 suicide-bomber attack in Northern Cameroon.

In ‘Easter’ by Wole Soyinka Christianity offers nothing the playing children referenced in the poem. Pollen has thorns, innocent children are visited by death. I’m reminded of a poem by Rasdaq Malik called, ‘Bury Us.’

EASTER, Copyrighted Wole Soyinka (1986)

This slow day dies, a wordless wilt
Shades of silence reaping
Soft frangipanes

Pollen's wings are thorned; bosoms
Too welcoming fold later chills
Take death to innocents

Kinder these hard mangoes, greendrops
At the car of god-apparent, coquettes
To the future decadence.

Do we not truly fear to bleed? We hunt
Pale tissues of the palm, fingers groping
Ever cautious on the crown.
These pink frangipanes of Easter crop

Eager to the wind; by repetition weak
And rain's in-breeding,

One bough to slake the millions:
Decay Caulks earth's centre; spurned we pluck

Bleached petals for the dreamer's lair.
Borne passive on this gift, wound-plashes
From wind scavenger, sap fragrance for
A heady brew, I rode my winged as and raged —

As children wove frond yellow from the palm
Plucked at the core, within the spadix heart.

**KOKO OORO
COPYRIGHTED
Wole Soyinka**

**From a children's
propitiation chant**

Dolorous kno

Plead for me Farm or hill

Plead for me

Stream and wind

**Take my voice
Home or road**

**Plead for me
On this shoot, I**

Bind your leaves

Stalk and bud



Berries three

On the threshold

Cast my voice

Knot of bitters

Plead for me.

“

Even those of us raised on Soyinka's writing find it dense sometimes. A way to understand his poetry is by asking questions.”

The opposite of intense specificity is complex metaphorical language. A reader has to work harder to decode Soyinka's phrases. A contrast can be made between Soyinka's obscurity and Razaq Malik's clarity.

THE FIVE Ws

The five *Ws* can help us begin to understand the poem. Consider: what is the poem about?

1. When is it set?

The poem opens at the close of day. It's symbolic- we are about to mourn the passing of things. Nature has become so cruel.

The poet uses alliteration to describe the death of frangipanis/flowers. The opposite of resurrection is what is taking place.

2. Where is it set?

Outdoors; a garden somewhere in Nigeria in the 1980s, perhaps? The poet's observing and detailing a scene. We are told children wove yellow (decaying??) palm fronds. By the way, did you use to make palm crosses for Easter Sunday? I am Anglican and my dad Mr James, used to be a Lay Preacher. I remember staying up on Holy Saturday to make crosses. But these crosses are damaged, plucked at the core from spadix (flowers) or a spiky heart. I can feel the kids' fingers hurting.

3. Why did the poet write it?

It's part of his *Idanre and Other Poems* collection. It's a reflection on post-colonial Nigeria and state decadence and corruption.

4. Who is speaking ('the perspective')/ who are they speaking to?

Is Wole Soyinka addressing we, the readers, Nigerian society back then or himself? He's probably aiming fire at us all. The plural subject pronoun: we, indicates Soyinka is probably addressing his countrymen/ a collective social group.

5. What is the poem about?

This poem is about death, decadence and despair. I'm showing off now with my use of alliteration like the writer. Jesus bled on the cross at Easter, but the subjects in being addressed in this poem are fearful of shedding blood. I see fingers groping, searching for answers or probably a way out of the figurative grave.

**“Both Rasaq Malik Gbolahan
and Dr Kayode Adesimi Robbin-Coker inhabit traditions
which imbue their poems with similarities
to those of Wole Soyinka.”**

A poem should have the power to transport you into another hemisphere, however transient that process is. The poems of Soyinka and Gbolahan possess that ability. Rasaq's featured poem is like an incantation whose anaphoric word: 'praise' is reminiscent of Chinua Achebe's classic poem, 'Vultures.' 'Praise bounteous providence if you will...' COPYRIGHTED Chinua Achebe.

I read in a Newsletter by the *London Magazine*, that literature generally

concerns itself with four aspects: *love, friendship, pain and desire*. I encounter that pain in the work of Soyinka, Gbolahan and Adesimi Robbin-Coker.

Coining a poetic style and imprinting one's signature in the arena of creative writing, depends on who you are and how you acquired language how language naturally comes to you. Dr 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).

Using a form of self-address, the poet (see below) laments the plight of the initiated; those whom Soyinka's idealism elude. Life on earth is combative and the poet in this piece feels he is falling short of the task at hand: '*so many verse prints in sand, / They will perish...*'

The poem mixes Yoruba mythology, biblical imagery and Nigerian cultural inferences. I am reminded of the angry Ogun (God) in Wole Soyinka's long poem, 'deluge...' in ***Idanre and Other Poems*** in which Soyinka writes, '*Your men Ogun! Your men! // Lust-blind god, gore-drunk Hunter/ Monster deity, you destroy your men!*'

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:

Ibere wole, dem wole, dem wole!

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

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

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

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

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

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

As Soyinka’s embers are quietly expiring, I grope through a dark tunnel of life’s
devastating wars to the other side where Rasdaq Malik is shining a poetic torch
on the impact of conflicts on the most vulnerable among us:

*Near Bodrum, the body of a three-year-old
Alan Kurdi lies face down on the beach.*

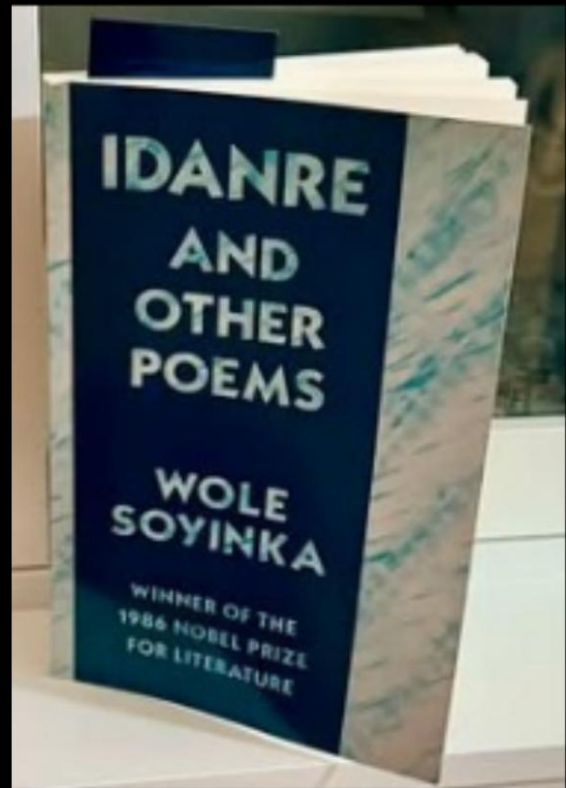
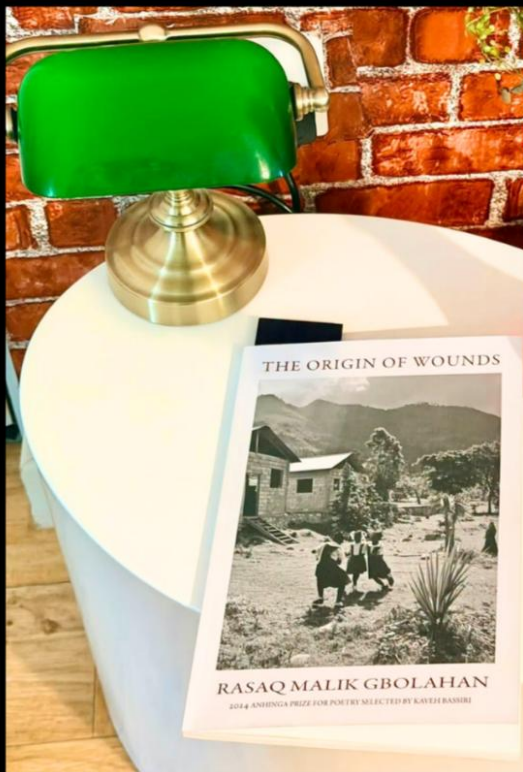
— Source: Requiem at Sea

In ***The Origin of Wounds***, Rasdaq Malik Gbolahan

All three poets have relied on a belief in god to interpret the
sociopolitical malaise around them. I am waiting and observing to see if their
god one who picks a side with the ‘citizen Cains’ in West Africa or a merciful
god constructed in Rasdaq Malik’s poem.

READING YORUBA POETS

Edition 6, Penned in Rage Journal



A Review of Poems by Wole Soyinka,
Rasaq Malik Gbolahan &
Dr Kayode Adesimi Robbin-Coker

Buccaneers & Pirates

By Pavle Radonić

Earlier in the morning a young Somali was complaining about the parking meters.

What do they think this is?! In Footscray...

Rich people: Sudanese, Somali...

At the coffee machine Abdou Razzak stirring the pot from the side, as usual. Cheeky boyishness etched here. Usually, AR's delivery was more deadpan.

... In Chapel Street they don't have meters on the street. They should have them there. Not Footscray.

...Sunshine. Braybrook. Too much money. Government know. Somalis pay.

Which revealed the young lad's nation.

They think we're pirates, that's why.

This produced an outburst of laughter from a number of the tables, regardless of national lines.

The local Liberal candidate, a regular at the café, had highlighted the problem of the parking meters on his advertising material.

The older men at *d'Afrique* didn't drive. Some of the younger able-bodied walked from Flemington & Maribyrnong to join their brothers. 10-12kms.

It was a broad church at Abou R.'s place. Christians from the Horn intermingled with the dominant Muslims—Somalis, Sudanese, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Lebanese & Egyptians at adjacent tables. Some Vietnamese Buddhists and Koreans were added to A. R.'s mix too. One of the latter was killed a few years before at an outdoor table by a Sudanese hitting the wrong pedal while backing out of a parking spot across the road.

Recently, Mr Mohammed No. 3 was encountered at the front window

table, the prize viewing perch in the house. After being shut away in hospital couple months following a fall, Mr M. enjoyed the show out on the street.

Mohammed was the most popular and common name in Somalia, Mr M. informed.

Unlike many of his generation there, Mr Mohammed No. 3's English was good and formally correct. Almost certainly he had not been sighted previously; the disability would have been recalled. In childhood Mr M. had contracted polio. Since diabetes had added to his afflictions, and then the fall in the shower had resulted in a break in his good, straight leg.

Because his father was a rich cattle & livestock trader, Mr Mohammed had completed primary, intermediate & high school in Mogadishu.

Hearing that his countryman Mr Mohammed No. 1, the shopkeeper around the corner—three shops now, selling cheap China product—had said that Somalis who declared they came from Mogadishu usually hailed from a goat track 40kms off, Mr M. No. 3 gave a wan smile.

In Mogadishu city this Mr Modh confirmed he had lived, was schooled and treated for his affliction.

Six languages were in his command. In order of accomplishment: Somali, English, Arabic, Italian, Russian... and one other, possibly not a colonial language.

In an exchange of mobile numbers with Allen, a fellow Somali who hadn't seen Mr M. No. 3 for a long while, English was used.

Asked why the Africans resorted to English instead of Somali or Arabic, Allen replied with pique, Because we are not Arabs.

In a recent news-report one of the Somali pirates had been ridiculed for accepting a ransom of only a few thousand dollars for some particularly rich booty. In reply the man had defended himself by explaining he hadn't known there existed a number greater than ten thousand.

Ten years the Italians were in Somalia. The first and most accomplished buccaneers, the English, before them and later returning again for a second stint. Mr M. No. 3 was not alone at the café in possession of relevant history; deeply personal history of course.

For a time the Russians had supplanted the English in Somalia.

Many of the men in the café spoke a smattering of the various Euro languages.

Mr Modh's superior English had been bolstered by fifteen years he spent in Christchurch, before he crossed the Ditch to the continent. Understandably, the weather in Melbourne he found more congenial, he explained.

Late-60s or early-70s, of a sunny, good-natured disposition, with the disability confusing the initial picture.

Mr M. had been too young for Mussolini, but the Italian in the schools had continued for some while after the failure of that new, short-lived Roman dawn.

Club and broken foot could be carefully co-ordinated with the walking frame to get the man out the door here and onto the pavement. At the café Mr Mohammed received much deference and respect from all; in making his slow exit, however, he politely declined helping hands.

Taking up the window chair after him, Faisal, A. Razak.'s elder brother, told of Julian Assange's recent interview on *Al Jazeera* he had watched. The strikingly white white man had greatly surprised Faisal.

— They kill him? he wondered.

Very nearly of course some years later. There was not much the Africans there didn't know about international relations and politics.



About The Writer

Australian by birth and Montenegrin origin, Pavle Radonić spent 11 years in SE Asia, where a disproportionate number of his publications originate. Recent work has appeared in Denver Quarterly, Post Road Magazine, Crab Creek Review, New Bloom & Packingtown Review. His connection to the East African diaspora in Melbourne goes back over 25 years.



A POEM

By Gabriella Garofalo



To Y.

I'll be honest, it was just a bloody mix-up,
You fancied yourself quite the romantic heroine,
Armed with laundry and a teenage crush,
Head over heels in love with a stranger from the waves,
Thinking, 'Yes, this is the one'-
Not, God forbid, a strapping young man from your island,
No, you went crazy over a bearded castaway
Washed ashore like driftwood-
Ah, the unsuitable desire for a vagrant reeking
Of seaweed and deceit-
And blue waves crashed against the shingle,
While a young princess weighed the right procedure
For rescuing naked men on laundry day-
He, a man of blood and deceit, hewn by Poseidon's wrath
Until his pride was just a shadow, bruised, naked,
His entrance worthy of a master strategist-
You wanted a hero to love, he a hot meal,
Maybe a ship, and no, not for him your love,
Your embroidered frocks, he just wanted Ithaca,
And the blood of suitors dripping from his bow-
Look, Nausicaa, the man knew it only too well,
To touch your limbs was to betray the sea,
To disown the stony island,
So he grabbed the cloth, and hid his naked shame-
Meanwhile, blue waves crashed against the shingle,
Indifferent to this crazy farce,
The king of tricksters playing the helpless waif,
A young princess buying every single word,
Both of them shaking upon a tide,
Unfit to hold the blue wreckage of desire-

Ah, well, I guess that's what happens
If a girl shows up against the blue roar of the tide
To stalk like a siren's song old men yearning
For a way back, yearning to be the stone
Waves finally choose to leave alone.

About The Writer

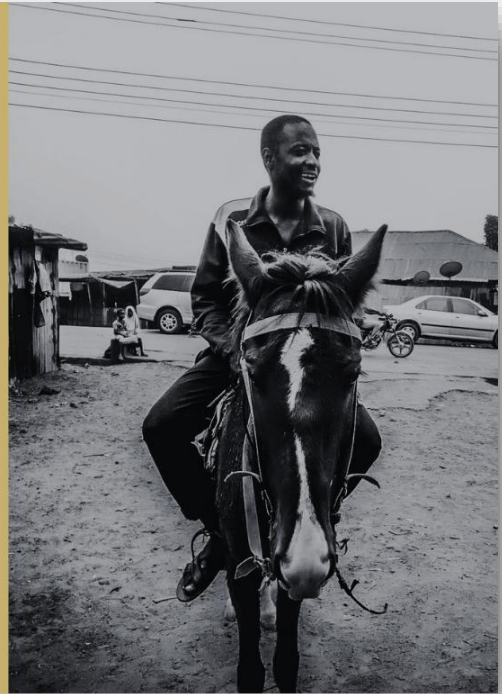
Born in Italy some decades ago, Gabriella Garofalo fell in love with the English language at six, started writing poems (in Italian) at six.

She is the author of these books: "Lo sguardo di Orfeo"; "L'inverno di vetro"; "Di altre stelle polari"; "Casa di erba"; "Blue Branches"; "A Blue Soul", "After The Blue Rush".

Ahmad Gani

PHOTOGRAPHER

These photographs are original depictions of scenes from Nigeria in 2026.



The Aloe Vera

This aloe vera was planted by my wife in her little garden at home. It caught my attention because of how much life she has managed to create in such a small space. I took the photograph as a quiet record of something she planted and cared for.

The Statue in the Garden

I took this photograph at the Nigeria National Library, Kaduna. It is a place I visit regularly. I have always found the statue interesting, it is a quiet reminder of what a library is really about: people, books and the patience to sit with an idea.

The Resting Cow

This was one of the cows I was keeping. After grazing with the others, it stopped to rest while the herd moved on. I liked the stillness of the moment. Nothing dramatic was happening; the cow had simply finished its business for the day and was taking its rest.

The Man with the Boa Constrictor

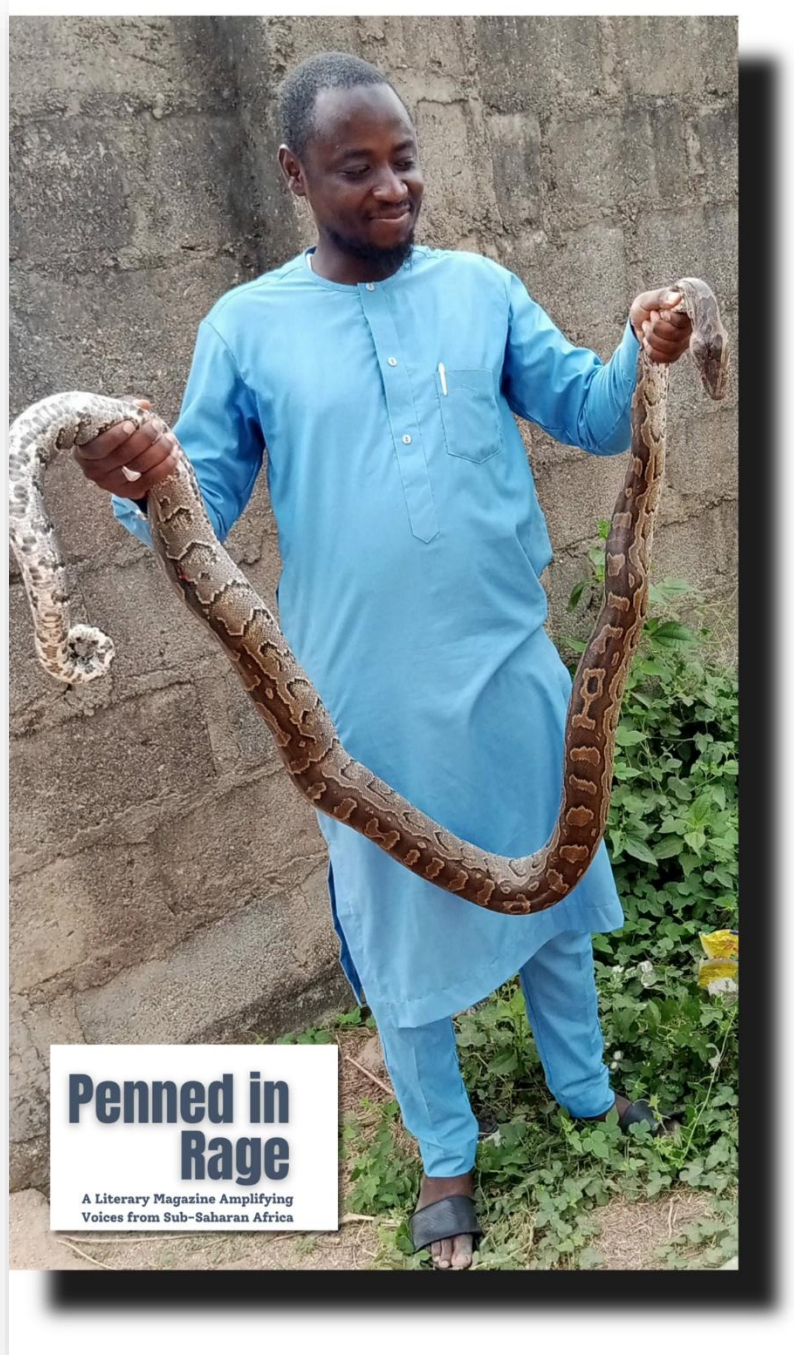
This boa constrictor had been sneaking into our poultry and eating chickens. One day, some of the workers finally caught it. I summoned enough courage to get close and take a photograph with it. I was curious, but I was also very aware of what was wrapped around me.

The Horse Rider

Whenever I travel to my roots in Abaji, I make time to walk around and reconnect with the place. On this particular day, I decided to do something different and took a ride on a horse. My cousin took the photograph, capturing a simple moment of me enjoying the familiarity and freedom of home.



The Aloe Vera



The man with a Boa constrictor



The Statue in the Garden



Resting Cow

Lost

By **Christopher Moore**



My friends and I are sitting on a log near a stream. We didn't plan to get lost in the woods, but we wandered off the path and lost our sense of direction, and now here we are, far from home. It's scary to not know where you are, but at least I'm not alone. The three of us will figure out a way to get home, to get back to our tablets and games consoles and safe bedrooms. We just have to be clever and come up with a plan.

Ben looks up at the sky, and says:

'I don't want to be grown-up.'

I turn to him and ask: 'Why not?'

'Because we look so sad,' he answers.

Luke stares at him and asks: 'What do you mean?'

Ben looks up at the sky again and points.

'Look at us.'

Luke and I frown and follow his gaze.

And gasp in fright.

Far above us, looming over the forest and the stream, hangs a reflected image of us. A mirror forest, a mirror stream, mirror trees, pointing directly at us. Completely upside down, but somehow not falling on us. Just hovering there, suspended in the air, following a law of gravity all its own. It should be impossible, and yet all three of us can see it. As sharp and detailed and real as our own forest and river, down to the last branch and bubble.

And there, in a clearing right above our heads, as though hanging from the ceiling...

Reflections of ourselves.

Except...

Not quite ourselves.

These three people are older. Adult. Faces lined, more worn. Shadows under their eyes. One of them, the one right above me, in a smart business suit with a briefcase sitting on the log, has a tired, drained look on his face. One of his friends, right above Ben, is in scruffy, dirty clothes, with an overgrown beard and a woollen hat, fidgeting nervously every couple of seconds, unable to keep still. The third, right above Luke, is overweight and bloated, with thin hair, and a red and puffy face. Taking a drink every few

seconds from a bottle. Wiping his mouth after every sip, before quickly taking another. As though he can't stop himself.

Is this us? I shudder at the thought. These three people don't look happy at all. They're still together, still friends, but none of them look like they're where they want to be. I look worn out from a job I don't like. Ben looks like he has nowhere to live. Luke can't seem to stop himself drinking. They're all a little bit broken. Damaged. Not where they should be.

Suddenly, even though we're somewhere completely unfamiliar down here, I don't feel so lost after all.

All three of us shiver with fright at the sight before us. I turn to Ben again.

'Why do we look this way?' I ask him, not entirely sure why he should know the answer any more than the two of us, but he *did* spot everything first. 'Why do we look so unhappy?'

Ben sits back, craning his neck further to look up, and points away from our reflections, away to the edge of the mirror scene, miles away from where the three adults are sitting.

'Because of all of that,' he guesses.

And as we look in the direction he's pointing, suddenly it all seems to make horrible sense.

On the edges of the mirror forest is a world on fire. Angry, orange flames licking their way across dead earth and charred plants, working steadily through the last bit of greenery and forest surrounding the three men, consuming everything it touches and moving steadily inwards, shrinking the protective circle around our mirror selves with each passing moment. As if this wasn't scary enough, Ben points again, and we all look further away, beyond the edge of the forest, beyond the fire.

Where we see men with armour and guns patrolling the ruined landscape, soldiers jealously guarding the destruction. Doing nothing to stop the fire making its way towards the middle of the wood, towards our adult selves, but doing everything, I think to myself, to make the people outside the forest feel frightened and helpless. People like that, soldiers, guards, should be doing what they can to help, to stop things being destroyed. But all they seem to want to do is rule over the destruction.

'What can we do?' cries Luke in a panic. 'The fire is going to destroy them. Destroy *us*, if we ever become them.'

'Maybe we've been shown this so we can stop it,' I suggest. 'Maybe we're supposed to go back and warn everyone, warn all the grown-ups, so they can make sure it never actually happens, and save us.'

I want to hope that's true. I want to make Ben and Luke feel better. But maybe I'm just trying to make *myself* feel better.

Because even though I find the news boring, I do hear it sometimes when Mum and Dad have the TV on after dinner, and it always seems like the world is *already* on fire, like forests are already burning, like men with guns are already patrolling the world making people feel scared and trapped. And nobody ever seems to stop it, or even to really try. So, would anyone really listen to us if we warned them what we saw? Would it make any difference?

'Maybe we're just supposed to enjoy being here right now,' Ben suggests, pointing around us at the green summer trees, at the singing chorus of birds, at the clear running water, at the peaceful hills not yet on fire. And as the mirror scene above us slowly fades and gives way to bright blue sky, I'm suddenly not desperate to get back to my bedroom and games consoles and closed-in spaces. I suddenly don't feel like I'm lost at all, but that I'd quite like to stay here as long as possible.

And I think perhaps he's right.

About The Writer



Christopher Moore is a Northern Irish writer. Alongside a number of playwriting achievements, including being longlisted for the Bruntwood Prize in 2019, and shortlisted for the Bread and Roses Playwriting Award in 2024, he has had several pieces of short fiction published in magazines and anthologies.

He can be reached on Instagram at:

<https://www.instagram.com/christophermoore1988/>

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IF YOU GET TIRED,
LEARN TO REST,
NOT TO QUIT.

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Please Click to Buy ***The Razor Wire of Exile***: The Annual Bridgette James Poetry Competition, 2026 Winners' Anthology by Bee James (Author), Janine Milne (Author), Damilola Oyedeji (Author), Yuwinn Kraukamp (Author), Michael Chinagorom (Author), Edinam Denoo (Author), Brett Anderson (Author), Mosimiloluwa Kupoluyi (Author), Chinua Ohaeto (Author).

Owambe and Its Gift

A STORY BY

Solape Adetutu Adeyemi

I've always loved owambes. One thing about Yorubas? They don't attend parties, they produce blockbusters. Sometimes I wonder... was that one of the reasons I married my husband? Maybe. Maybe not. But it certainly didn't hurt.

A few months after we got married, we received an invitation to my husband's uncle's daughter's wedding.

Excited is an understatement.

My husband bought the aso ebi, gold and silver patterned silky lace. The kind of lace that doesn't scratch your skin or argue with your body. It simply rests there like it knows it's expensive.

I sewed a gorgeous iro and buba. My hairstylist came to the house and transformed me into somebody's rich aunty. Hair? Flawless. Makeup? Immaculate. When she was done, my husband looked at me, blinked twice and asked,

"Excuse me... have you seen my wife?"

I smiled modestly.

Our car, unfortunately, was at the mechanic's workshop.

"We can enter danfo," my husband suggested casually.

Public transport?

Public what??

Not with ₦100,000 lace wrapped around my body!

Imagine one conductor screaming "CMS! CMS!! Obalende!!!" while decorating my face with free saliva. Or somebody's rusty nail introducing itself to my lace.

God forbid bad thing.

I immediately booked an Uber. Peace of mind is priceless.

On our way, my husband kept stealing admiring glances at me. I could almost hear his thoughts.

"Congratulations, young man. Marrying an Eastern girl was your best investment."

We arrived at the event centre and, as expected, Yoruba people did not disappoint.

First course?

Grilled fish and red wine.

I dealt with both respectfully.

Water? Never.

Water has one mission in my life, to make my stomach swell before the real food arrives.

I refused to sabotage myself.

Next came Ofada rice.

I welcomed it with open arms.

Then came pounded yam wrapped in leaves.

Ladies and gentlemen...

I should have known this was where my village people quietly signed attendance.

I ate.

And ate.

And suddenly... my stomach submitted a resignation letter.

There was no vacancy again.

Not even one teaspoon.

I looked around desperately.

If only somebody had Andrew's Liver Salt.

Unfortunately, Andrew himself was unavailable.

Then inspiration struck.

"Go to the restroom," I told myself.

"Create more accommodation."

Brilliant plan.

I went.

Pushed.

Heaved.

Panted.

Negotiated.

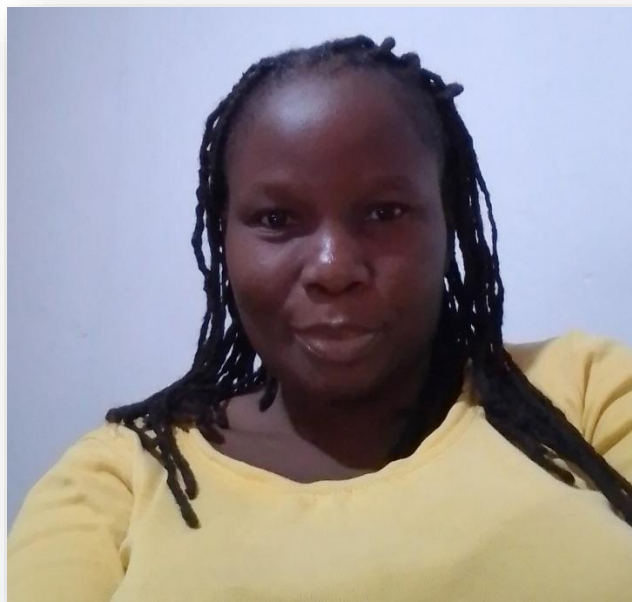
Prayed.

Nothing.

Even my intestines folded their arms and refused to cooperate.

I returned to the table defeated.

Now I could only admire the remaining food with my eyes while my stomach displayed a giant **NO VACANCY** sign.



[Pictured: Solape Adetutu Adeyemi. She has degrees in Microbiology and Environmental Management. She has published work in the New York Times, the Kalahari review and the Indianapolis Review to mention a few.]

My husband was happily spraying the couple on the dance floor while I sat there feeling like someone who had swallowed a sack of cement.

The pounded yam had apparently started expanding with alacrity inside my stomach.

I became so heavy I could barely move.

Then sleep started dealing with me.

Just as I was nodding off...

People started tying goats to our chairs.

Goats.

Actual live goats.

Ehn???

I sat upright immediately.

Goat meat pepper soup?

Jesus is Lord!

These Yoruba people don't play at all.

One goat per couple!

At that moment, every trace of sleep disappeared.

I quickly brought out the large nylon bag I permanently keep inside my handbag.

See, there are two types of Nigerians.

Those who laugh at people carrying nylon bags.

And those who later ask,

"Please, can you help me hold one takeaway?"

Experience is the best teacher.

I packed small chops.

Packed drinks.

Packed souvenirs.

Packed anything that wasn't nailed to the ground.

My husband kept giving me that look.

I ignored him professionally.

When it was time to leave, Uber prices had entered another dimension.

"My dear, let's just enter danfo," my husband suggested.

I stared at him.

"Which danfo exactly?"

"The one that allows passengers to board with a live goat?"

"What if the conductor forgets to stop at our bus stop because he's arguing with another passenger? Will we abandon our goat?"

At this point, I'd already mentally renamed the goat.

It was family.

Thankfully, one of my husband's friends gave us a lift and dropped us right in front of our house.

We tied our new family member behind our bungalow.

Every morning, I faithfully fed it grass.

I even recruited one Mallam down the street as the official Minister of Grass Supply.

The goat flourished.

Six months later, it had become impressively fat.

Every time I looked at it, all I could see was pepper soup.

Rich.

Thick.

Spicy.

The kind that clears your sins and your sinuses simultaneously.

Then one Friday evening, my husband came home with wonderful news.

"I've been promoted!"

Branch Manager!

I hugged him.

Congratulated him.

Then quietly looked at the goat.

Celebration menu detected.

Saturday morning, I arranged with the Mallam to help us slaughter it because my husband cannot stand the sight of blood.

Simple.

Or so I thought.

The moment I entered the backyard, the goat slowly turned its head.

Its eyes...

Ha!

Its eyes had become blood red.

Not ordinary red.

The kind of red you see in Nollywood films just before the possessed person starts levitating.

Before I could process what was happening...

The goat lowered its head...

Grunted...

And charged.

Jesus!!!

I escaped by the mercy of God and the speed I didn't know I still possessed.

The Mallam came.

The goat charged at him too.

The Mallam disappeared faster than lightning.

My husband and I looked at each other.

Then we both looked at the goat.

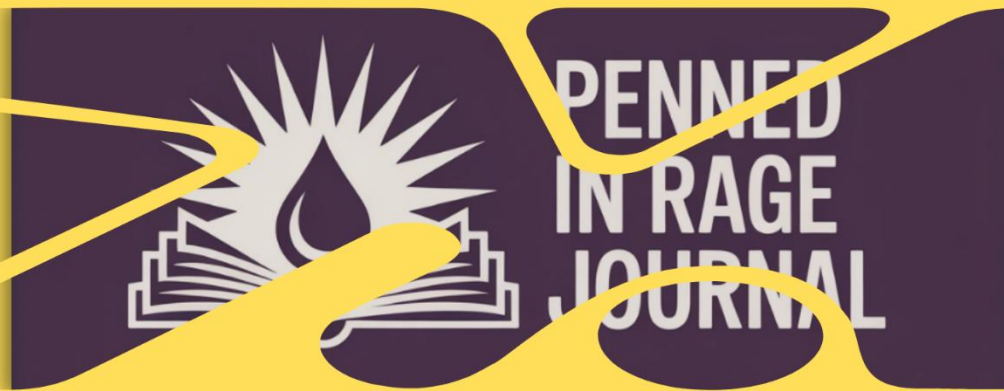
The goat looked back at us with the confidence of a recalcitrant tenant

It became painfully obvious.

This goat had held an emergency meeting.

And the resolution was unanimous.

"Nobody is drinking pepper soup today or anytime soon."



**OWAMBE
AND ITS
GIFT**

**By Solape
ADETUTU
Adeyemi**



Melon Seeds

By Obioha Testimony Chidera

Obiora

I didn't understand why the village breeze felt cooler than the one in Abuja, even though Suleja was located at a higher altitude. Maybe it was because of the many trees that were scattered on every street. Two Oroma trees, one Aki Oyibo tree, and one ube tree. It was like this in every house. Except for Izu's house. They had planted Egusi at every corner of the house. So much that if you should walk around the compound at night, you could risk crushing one of the round melons.

Izu insisted on calling them melons, even when everyone called them Egusi. He said it with a certain excitement in his voice, one that sounded like he had laughed too much. He also insisted on calling me James, instead of Obiora. It was better than “Onye Abuja” that he always called me.

I was always at Izu's place whenever we came to the village. He would take me to go see the masquerades, or to the river, to swim. He introduced me to all his friends as his brother who came from Abuja. Even though we were just neighbours separated by my father's tall fence.

The last memory I had of Izu was in his room. Where he drew lines on the concrete floor to play qulé. His father walked in on us, with my legs on Izu's lap and I quickly dropped them and Izu stood up quickly with his eyes to the floor. That night, I could hear a crying voice, and I knew it was Izu's, even though I had never heard him cry. I imagined Izu's bald father, flogging him with a belt, and it made me want to vomit. I dreamt later that Izu dragged me to their compound, and the father started to flog the both of us, and our tears flooded the compound. The next morning, we travelled back to Abuja.

My hands hovered over the old wooden door. I wanted to knock but I didn't know how to, my wrist felt like it had no bones, like it was filled with water. Standing at the door and picturing Izu in my head felt like standing at the edge of a cliff, my heart raced and my body grew stiff. I wouldn't know what to say to him, or how to say it. I was now 18 and he 19. Even in these three years, I remembered Izu every day, so much that standing at this door felt too real.

I was about to knock when the door clicked open, with a lazy screeching sound at the hinges. “Obiora” Izu exclaimed, it sounded more like surprise than excitement. He stretched his hands for a handshake. Not a hug. And he called me Obiora. Not James or Onye Abuja. I could feel something hot rising from my stomach up my throat, I was scared it would come out if I opened my mouth. So, I kept quiet even when he asked me: ‘Wassup?’

It wasn't only the beards on his once smooth face that changed Izu, but the glint in his eyes when he spoke to me was lost, or rather, hidden. The days when he didn't go to the market, he was at De Bunny's place. Not with Umu boys, or at the market square to see the masquerades. Not with me.

One day, when I asked him why he always went to De Bunny's place, he said that he had a girlfriend, and they always stayed under the cashew tree, playing qulé. I imagined Izu, under a tree, with dried wilted cashew leaves on the floor, and a girl, her legs on Izu's lap, both of them playing qulé and laughing together. Something inside my chest twisted and was aching, the heat rushing up my throat.

Izu asked me if I had a girlfriend in Abuja. I turned from the farm where I was facing because it was easier to stare at chickens than watch Izu. I looked at him for half a second, trying to see if he really didn't feel this weight pressing on my chest, knocking out the very air that I breathe. He avoided my eyes when I turned, like he always did since I came, pushing me away even further with his words. When I turned back to the chickens, the red and black rooster had opened a melon with its sharp talons and was eating the seeds with its beak. I picked a stone to chase it away, the way I and Izu always did when we were seated alone in his backyard. But it wasn't the same anymore, and the Izu I sat across now felt too distant, like a forgotten dream. So, I folded the stone in my hands, absorbing the coldness through its smooth, hard skin. "No" I said, and I got up and left.

Izu

Papa said to me, with a low stern voice, like he was telling a secret, the night he flogged me, that boys like James were not good to be seen with. Boys that rubbed oils on their lips and walked with their hands on their hips like women deceived other men to lie with them. He said it with a certain irritation, rushing

the words like they would grow sores on his tongue if he didn't take them out quickly.

I didn't understand what papa said then. And even as papa placed a cloth on my bleeding nose and told me he didn't want me to turn out like those okpontu, I only thought of James, and wondered if he'd see me before he travelled. But when I saw a man, Ihunna, paraded on the streets, naked and bruised, Emeka told me that he had been caught “doing another man, or it was the man doing him,” I felt something in my chest sink, and my stomach ached, even though it was a year later.

I was nothing like Ihunna, I did not keep my hair long or wear women's clothes. James was nothing like Ihunna too. I didn't know if I believed what I had said, and anytime I slept, I saw me and James, naked and bloodied, and people were chanting and chasing after us with sticks and palm fronds. The house where I lived felt smaller, like the walls were closing in on me. I didn't know if I was growing taller, or if it was the thoughts inside my head that grew; either way, something was growing, and I was suffocating. I started to eat outside with the chickens, at least, they couldn't look into my soul and see all that was in my head, the way I feared Papa did.

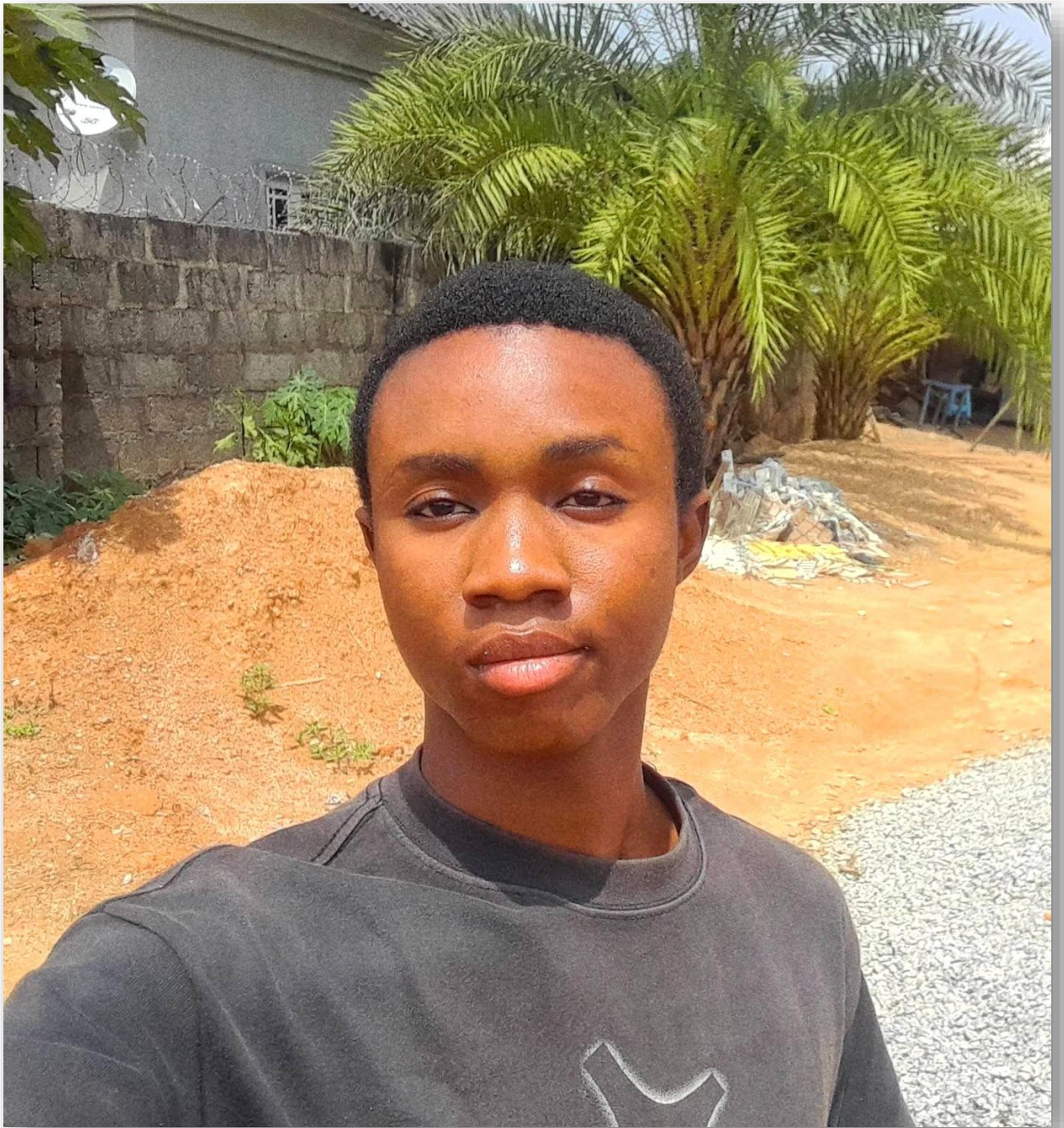
Ifeoma was a fine girl, and I was now talking to her, making out with her. It was man and woman, the way it should be. The normal way.

Sometimes, when I am with Ifeoma, she would turn into James, and I would be scared, so scared that I would sometimes push her away.

James didn't come that year for Christmas, or the year after. And in those three years, I told myself that I had forgotten him. That he was just my guy. It shouldn't matter to me whether he came back or not.

Obiora

It rained the day I left Izu's backyard, not in the sky, but in my heart, and the streams had flowed outward through my eyes. It was the last day I saw him. I stayed in my room everyday till after Christmas, and we travelled back to Abuja, with our bags filled with avocados, udala, and melon seeds.



About The Writer

Obioha Testimony Chidera is a Nigerian writer whose fiction explores culture, society, and the complexities of identity. His work is particularly interested in African LGBT experiences, often examining love, alienation, desire, and the ways individuals negotiate themselves within society. His fiction has been published on GoodNovel, where he writes as a web novelist, and featured on the literary platform Words Not Yet Spoken, including his short story “Love Me Jeje.”

He can be reached at

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100071796570349>



Peter Adedire: Palm Trees Laughing



Ahmad Gani: Chilli Pepper

On the Mercy Seat

By Duane Kline

A whirlwind of life
And argument,
Toys underfoot and
Wept over,
As if they were Taken captive by Some warlike tribe
Of cannibals.
Or is it A whirlpool?
Pulling us into
A vortex of emotion
That I have not Lived with
In decades?
Envy, joy, Laughter, and hatred That burns hottest
Between brothers,
The heat more smelting
For its brevity.
And I am The referee,
Absent a striped shirt
Yet with the authority To banish One, both, or
The object of momentary desire.
The time-out bench is on my lap,
More times than not
Jointly occupied
Until peace Comes again

About The Writer

Duane Kline is a retired educator, but not really; adult children and five grandchildren give him plenty of opportunities to teach. He writes poems and essays. He lives with his beautiful wife in northern Kentucky.



Inhibited by Anna Philips

Parts of me still want to climb out
Into the sun-
But every time I open my mouth
Someone else's voice spills out.
Lineage, tutor, passerby,
Crowded thoughts silencing truth
Eating at my insides
A feast from within.

Instinct threatened by academia,
Or, god forbid, impropriety,
Capitalist nomenclature
Like a heartworm in a stray
Clinging fierce
Shortening my years
And I, oblivious, stumble through the interlude.

Cling to the whispers
Let their utterances be heard
Over the conserved terminology
The froggy-throated calls.
Let your anger determine the volume.
To hell with the aftermath.
Outcry, an ocean wave,
But I've let down the sails-
Let the storm determine my course.

About Poet

Anna Phillips is an Ozarks-based writer and horror marketer with a passion for native ecology and permaculture. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in FRUIT Magazine, Double Dutch, Blue Press, 25:05, and Blue Daisies Journal, among others.

She can be reached on Instagram at:

https://www.instagram.com/feather_fireopal/

Follow her on Threads too:

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A STORY BY

Chisom Miriam Iheadiri

If I Were God



God, if this is how your followers are, then I do not want to be a Christian anymore.

The worst thing God ever made was human beings, rotten from the marrow out. Once, even He had regretted making us and wiped the slate clean with a flood.

*Art by Kumbukani
Chawinga*

I do not know why He keeps making more of us, why even now, there is one growing inside me, another soul He has decided to send into this broken place. Another one he would regret later, another of His mistakes.

The worst of all the humans He created, the most

concentrated dose of that evil, lives inside Nne Amara.

I spread the small cloth I have and lie down in this empty stall in Lagos, a city that does not know my name. The floor is bare beneath me. My skin is pressed against the bare floor, and every inch of my body feels the cold. My thoughts trail off as my body slowly becomes numb.

Lagos air has always smelled the same way, like there's salt in the air, mixed with exhaust, yet street food and suya linger. My body has slowly

gotten used to the ground, like I belong to it.

I wish God was the same way He was in the Bible, in the days of the Old Testament. He did not play. He opened the earth and swallowed people whole. That is the God that makes sense to me. Not this New Testament God who asks me to turn the other cheek while Nne Amara uses both sides of my face for sport.

I was four when I lost my parents, the most gruesome thing I have witnessed. Every time I close my eyes, I still see it. I can picture their faces after the car crash. The accident was bad that everyone called me a miracle baby. To have survived it, I had to have been destined for greatness.

Nne Amara heard this and decided she wanted a piece of it.

She was childless then, she and her husband, a man respected far and wide, viewed as righteous and kind and

wonderful. But you would have to live under their roof to know how cruel he truly was. He had several businesses, with many men working under him, and made sure that every worker who passed through his hands left with less than they deserved. He paid them barely enough, kept them indebted, and made sure they were never settled enough to start out on their own.

For the first four years, they were good to me. I called her Mummy, called him Daddy, and believed that I had been saved. That God had finally done something right by me.

Then Kelvin was born.

Their miracle. Their flesh and blood. I watched Nne Amara hold him for the first time. She looked at him like her whole world revolved around him, leaving no room for me. I was no longer God's miracle child. I was 'the help.'



For the next years that went by, I joined the other workers: fetching water before the sun came up, washing Kelvin's clothes by hand, sleeping in the kitchen, and most times in the boys' quarters. I stopped calling her Mummy because the word no longer felt right in my mouth.

Her cruelty was only witnessed by the workers in the house. To everyone outside, she was righteous. And she used that against me, telling whoever cared to listen, the neighbours, the women in her church, the relatives who visited during holidays, that I was difficult, rebellious and ungrateful. Soon I was seen as all those things. I had nowhere to turn, nowhere to run to.

Heaven knows I did try. Several times.

And then he came.

Ignatius came with promises. He said he could give me a home, peace, something better than what I had.

I mistook his patience for kindness, his attention for love, and his love for a chance to finally be free.

When I found out I was pregnant, I did not feel blessed. When I told him, he went quiet. Then he disappeared.

I have never met any of God's own who is a good person, a truly

good person.

I left the island for the mainland, safer in a kidnapper's den than under her roof. I took construction work. The men pitied me. Not God.

I was sleeping in an empty market stall when I heard a roar building into something like an animal. I pushed myself upright and walked toward the noise.

They had caught a thief. Burn him. Burn him. Someone produced a tyre.

Then the crowd moved, and I saw his face. Kelvin.

I remembered the day he was born. Nne Amara had held him so tightly, looking at him like nothing else mattered. He was her son, her joy, her whole world. He recognised me. Why wouldn't he? I felt pity. Then memory swallowed it. The darkness felt familiar.

God must love this.

I turned around before he could see my face. Not my business, not my family, not my grief.

Behind me, the crowd's roar changed, the sound of one that has gotten what it wanted.

I thought about what was growing inside me. I could teach it differently. I know exactly what not to do.

I was still thinking that when I heard a voice.

"Why is a pregnant girl lying alone in an empty stall?"

I opened my eyes. A woman was standing over me, looking at me with much concern.

"How long have you been sleeping here?" she asked.

I considered lying. I did not have the energy for it. She clicked her tongue once.

"Come."

I was hesitant at first, but at this point, I would take my chances even with the devil.

She welcomed me into her home. She gave me food to eat, showed me a room and brought out some clothes for me to try on. Her children looked at me strangely, but the air here smelled different. It smelled almost divine.

So I stayed.

I had gone to take a shower when I felt a sharp pain in my belly. I looked down and saw blood. The water ran over my legs, washing it down with it.

The pain became unbearable, and I screamed.

The woman came rushing in. Her daughter came too. I barely had time to put something on. The woman had the saddest eyes, but she drew me close and held me with a towel around me.

God had taken again from me.

He knew.

God looked at what I was carrying and He knew. He knew what I had promised myself. He knew I wanted to make one good thing in this world.

Job did say God gives and He takes.

He took my birth parents. And now He had taken my child.

The pain came again.

I closed my eyes, and for the first time in a long time, I was not angry. The room was warm. The hand holding mine was warm.

Maybe, this was a good thing to finally experience true kindness.

If I were God, I would have done it sooner.

About The Writer

Chisom Miriam Iheadiri is a Nigerian writer whose work has appeared in Brittle Paper, The Kalahari Review, and The Table Read Magazine UK. She writes stories and essays exploring identity, memory, belonging, and the emotional landscapes of contemporary Nigerian life.

Socials

X: <https://x.com/ChisomIheadiri>

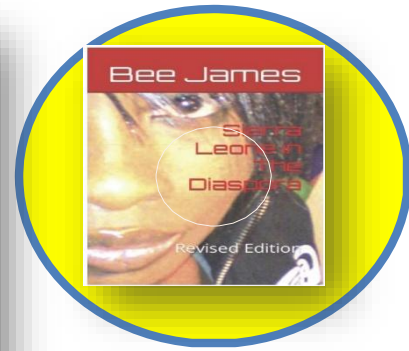
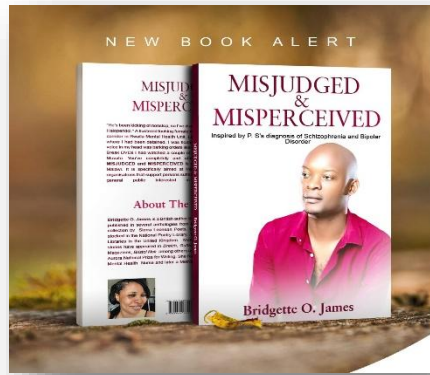
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The Bleeding Pen

By Bruce Wekesa



My pen won't stop bleeding
not ink, but what my mouth couldn't utter
It spills in silence —
what my heart whispers
what my chest holds tight

I need a page that won't fly
when winds whistle,
won't tear up when my pen's tip rips it,
won't be afraid to nurse its wounds,
strong enough to hold the drops
my pen holds
and mould them words.

And when the drops finally fall
heavy as they weigh
deep as they sink
they'll mark the lines with pain
but at least they'll be out
learning how to be ink instead of blood.

About The Writer

Bruce is a poet currently pursuing his education science degree in the University of Nairobi. He is an ardent poet and writer not published yet, but he is exploring options on the same.

These photos were taken in Koinadugu District, Sierra Leone, on my way to “Alkalia”, commonly known as “Kuranko London.”
The photos were taken along the road leading to Alkalia.





Alkalia is a major town among the Kuranko people, one of Sierra Leone's ethnic groups, hence the name "Kuranko London."



I want to write about you

By Alex Alieu Kamara



Yesterday,
I sat down to write
about you.

I found out
it is not easy
to write about you.

The lights went out.
My pages became sticky.
My pen refused to move.

I tried,
but my brain failed
to process the fitting diction—
the diction that fits your aura.

My mind reminded me
that I have never encountered
such gracefulness.

Not in my pre-mortality,
not in my days here on earth.

You stand out.

Yet, I still don't know
how to write all this—
how to write that
the sound of your name

brings peace.

Since I knew you,
I have only known ease.

And I hate to think
of how much I would miss you
if you ever vanished
from my space.

I wish I could write about you.

I would have deified you,
mystified you,
beautified you.

But perhaps
that is the problem—

I want to write about you.

About The Writer

Alex Alieu Kamara is a Sierra Leonean born in the westernmost part of the country. He holds a BA In Political Science and International Relations from the University of Makeni.

FAKEFUCKKILLYOURSELF.JPG

By Sameen Shakya



You who are too easily impressed-
I want nothing to do with you.

Each shred of sentience in your brain
Through my intestines have passed through.

I mean I've shat more witty words
Than you have thought or moved to write.

I mean I am more like blue birds
While you're a moth chasing dim lights.

Come my way once more and I'll pluck
Your wings and toss you, trash you are.

I've done run out of all my fucks.
And my words, for you, are far too smart.

About The Writer

Sameen Shakya's poems and stories have been published in Alternate Route, Cosmic Daffodil, Hearth and Coffin, Roi Faineant, The Kathmandu Post and Thin Veil Press, and elsewhere. Born and raised in Kathmandu, Nepal, he moved to the USA in 2015 to pursue writing. He earned a BA in Creative Writing from St Cloud State University then traveled widely across the country, seeking an education outside the classroom. He returned to Kathmandu in 2022 and is currently based there.

She can be reached on Instagram at:

<https://www.instagram.com/sameenshakya/>



I whispered his name



I got wind that my neighbour
Has soaked his brains in a pot of liquor,
Corked his way home inside the bottle,
Refusing to let anyone nurse his frittered senses back to life.

I saw him slip and fall into the gutter-pool.

Those screams that trumpeted his fall—with phones raised like torches—
Were nothing but the content creator's delight;
The glee of merciless tale-mongers!

I hauled his wretched life,
Heavier than a drowned dog,
Out from the pool of revulsion;
A bloated mess of filth.

Humanity's disgust.

I whispered his name.
Drowsily, his pupils swam and found me.
He mumbled something about Comfort —
Her name, not the word —
Before his head lolled back into my shoulder.

This daily spectacle of stupor
Of shredded scruple,
Was it borne of a pact with the devil?

I shook his spirit with all my strength,
To revive numb arteries and dazed gazes,
To pull from his essence

The spirits that now clogged his blood,
That foamed round his withered wits.

Bacchus has done his worst
To smear a man's dignity with stains of shame.

Right now, home wasn't his first point of call.
Home - Comfort's lair
The breath of a she-dragon of a wife.
Perhaps his *chi* was merciful enough to spare him that fleck of knowledge.

But soon, I warned him,
The darkening street would clench its teeth at his pockets.

I steadied his staggering steps, his head-in-swoon groggy thoughts.

Homebound, I shouldered the weight of his drunken corpse,
The burden of his folly,
The nauseous odium of his ego.

About The Writer

Ike Aro is a Nigerian poet, playwright and children book author. His poems have appeared in several anthologies and magazines. His first collection of poems, *The Weeping Earth* was published in 2007. His new collection of poems, *I Know What Happened to your Smile*, will soon be out. Ike Aro lives in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

He can be reached on Facebook at:

<https://www.facebook.com/ike.aro.9/>





Pictured: Musician Tamba Johnson

Tell us about yourself

I'm Tamba S. Johnson. My stage name is Yaanie. I'm a Liberian Sierra Leonean

My father is from Liberia, and my mother is a Sierra Leonean from Kailahun district kissy Teng chiefdom My father is from Lofa County,

I sing and rap in my native languages are Kissi, Liberian Koloqua, Krio and English.

How do you use your music to represent your community?

I use my music to educate my people and to speak about our daily lives, struggles, our culture and traditions. I'm not making much money from my music. But I'm not discouraged about that I keep pushing still.

Department of Unhappiness

By Oduor Otieno

The main point of the matter was to deny and approve. For James, this was work and it had amassed into seventeen years of conventional labour. From behind a window, he'd listen to people describing their problems, look into the evidence and make a decision on whether their unhappiness was legitimate. Then he stamped the forms. DENIED OR APPROVED.

Through it all, it never occurred to him that so much unhappiness existed in the world.

If anything, it all sounded like mere tales to expedite time. One hour would soon be two then three, and before he knew it, it would be closing time.

This is not to say any of these reasons were exempt from guidelines. See, death in the family was approved with conviction, the stamp coming down on the white paper to leave its crimson mark; financial difficulties needed proper documentation; loneliness was a private matter and rarely approved; pubertal unhappiness was given no audience whatsoever. He worked bearing this in mind.

One time he denied a man's application for lacking merit. The man in question, from reading his application, was simply just unhappy. It lacked rhyme or reason.

"What do you mean you just are?"

His form was quickly stamped. DENIED.

The following day at nine, a lady in blue jeans arrived in a huff. Her neck glistened with perspiration. James saw her through the window and assumed she'd run all the way. Two people were already waiting in line. James rapped on the window and motioned for the woman to approach.

"Good morning," James said.

The woman passed him her form. It read that her dog had just died.

“Don’t you think this is a bit premature?” James said. It was obvious the woman was trying hard not to cry.

“I don’t understand.”

“You could always get another dog.”

The woman exhaled like a rusty exhaust pipe.

“You don’t understand. I have children of my own, Ash was like a child to me.”

“Do you have proof?”

The woman reached a thin hand into her back pocket and retrieved a phone. It came alive with a click. In it was a picture she showed to James. She was cradling the dog, and it was trying to lick her chin. What he wanted was evidence that the dog was really dead. he stamped her form. APPROVED.

“Thank you.”

Next was a man whose girlfriend had left. James denied him. Then it was a woman who’d lost her business. APPROVED. It took him long enough. Done, he went out for a quick lunch. At the table next to him someone was complaining about their job.

He returned to work at two. The DEPARTMENT OF UNHAPPINESS was on the fourth floor. He took the elevator. He got in his chair behind the window.

Soon a lady of similar age to his grandmother came to the window. Her form was filled out. She’d done this sitting at her kitchen table. She was unhappy because she had lived for too long. James looked up at her. He tried to smile.

“Did you fill this out by yourself?” he asked.

“Yes.”

She gave off an air of someone you could trust. Perhaps it was her age.

“Ok. I would hate to deny you over a flimsy technicality. Would you be kind enough to grab another form?” James said in a suck-up kind of way.

“Why?”

“Living too long isn’t a recognized category.”

“Why not?”

“Ma’am, I don’t make the rules.”

“Who does?”

A laugh escaped James. He didn’t know who made the rules. This was just how things were and would remain so long after he’d left.

“Do you have a medical condition?” James asked. He’d noticed the unease in the small line behind.

“No.”

“Are you lonely?”

“Not that I can say.”

“This isn’t sufficient,” James said, handing her back her form.

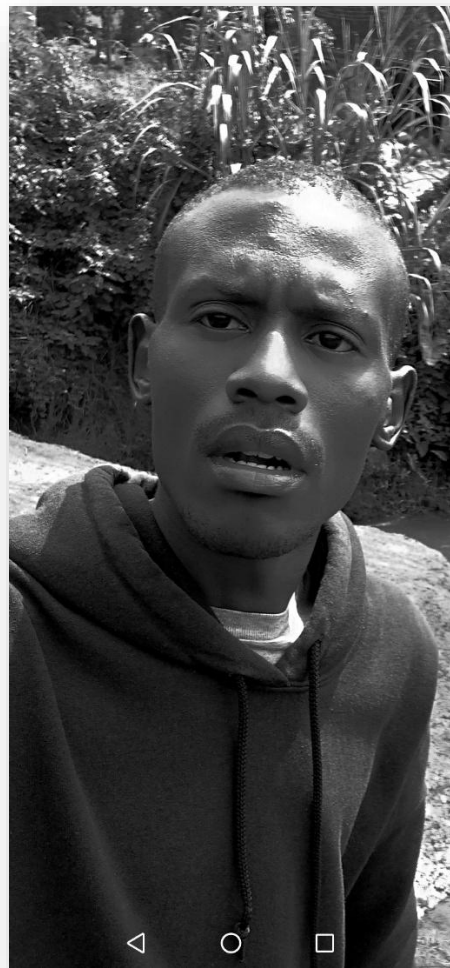
“Have you tried filling it out yourself?” she asked.

No one had ever questioned James like this. Something tightened inside him. After she’d left, the day seemed to drag on, imposing on him a detached obligation so that he worked as if in limbo. Around closing time, he went down a floor and grabbed a form and filled it out: James Wangare. In the section that required his reasons for being unhappy, he hesitated.

He lived alone and had no wife or children. His apartment was small with a potted plant he kept hydrated. He had no specific ambition, joy, nor hatred. He crumpled the form and threw it into the wastepaper bin.

About The Writer

Oduor Otieno is a Kenyan writer whose works adhere to the canonical minimalist traditions. His works explore the human condition and have been published in Lolwe, the Kalahari Review and The African writer. He is currently working on a short story collection.



Members News

Publishing Successes

Solomon Timothy

Hamza's short fiction:

The Man Who Could See the Future is published here:

https://icefloepress.net/the-man-who-could-see-the-future-prose-by-solomon-timothy-hamza/?fbclid=IwY2xjawUfXFVwZG9mAWV4dG4DYWVtAjExAHNy dGMGYXBwX2IkEDlyMjAzOTE3ODgyMDA4OTIAAR7fiOi47nOEWGPDqcBletPCKvi9b5v9xg-z_FJkkEOUSDGBX-hetOAKlk7rzw_aem_VFyPwbErQoSSq9SHFwRR2Q

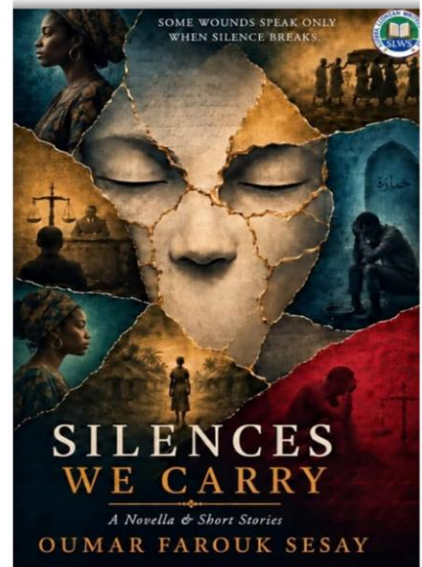
Solomon was our 2025 Poet of The Year, as voted by Facebook page followers.



The Annual Bridgette James Poetry Competition returns on Thursday April 1st, 2027.

Judges to be announced in December, 2026.

The Bridgette James
**ANNUAL
POETRY
COMPETITION**



Oumar Farouk Sesay's

latest book is called ***Silences We Carry***. It is published by SLWS.

In ***Silences We Carry: A Novella and Short Stories***, Sesay offers a portfolio of narratives anchored in the existential realities of Sierra Leone yet resonant with the lived experiences of people across the globe.



Penned in Rage Journal: **Best of the Net Nominations**

Period: June 2025 to July 2026

Poetry

Dr T. Saylor: 'Loveland'

<https://www.ellaspoeems.com/pennedinragemay-aug2026#t-dallas-saylor-loveland>

Henry Opeyemi: 'The Currency of Fresh Music'

<https://www.ellaspoeems.com/pennedinragemay-aug2026#henry-opeyemi-the-currency-of-fresh-music>

Janine Milne: 'The Etymology of Homesickness'

<https://www.ellaspoeems.com/janinemilnetheetymologyofhomesickness>

In Celebration of the Life of Wole Soyinka



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- Image by Daria-Yakovleva from Pixabay
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Mixed-race Edmond Porteous is smitten by a pretty boy called Matt. A group of forward-thinking Jamaican men decide to stage a play about being gay in the 1980s. What could possibly go wrong in a class segregated homophobic God-fearing society? Er...Join me for November's Book Club.

