

Outsider



The 2026 Bridgette James Poetry Competition
Winners' Anthology

Name to Be Revealed – May 31st

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

**This is a Creative Writing Resource from Sub-Saharan Africa, Intended
for Readers Aged 18+**
Contains Strong Language

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‘What I do remember is running from bullies on horseback,
or hearing the engine roar from their motorcycles.’

— ‘Horseback’ 2026, by Ethan Bramwell

Foreword by Judges

(insert text here)

This collection features the thirty best entries submitted to 2025, *The Annual Bridgette James Poetry Competition*. The theme was "outsider"— an individual who does not fit in, feels marginalized, or observes society from the periphery.

In his poem...

In her poem...

In his poem...

DRAFT

Part 1:

Christe Eleison

1. Theophany

By Marvinci Bobbylex-Oduali

Before I knew myself, the world knew me.

Already had pejoratives for something

I could not yet name: I was *fag*— the butt

of every joke, *homo* when I did not measure

up. And *boy-girl* when no one could decide

what I was, what I was trying to be. And how

could they? When there was a pasture

raging through the wilderness of my body—

sheep where there should have been wolves.

And where there should have been teeth,

a river-mouth full of goodness, refreshing.

So, how could they? When I was an entity—

free from the consequence of my member

down there. As in, who knew how much

power an appendage could hold over the

soul? How much the part can outgrow

the whole— the parasite, the host— turn

around and render it meaning-

less. As in, what am I without the weight

between my legs— *who* could I possibly be

outside my biology? And should I be culpable
for my dysmorphia? You should know
that I did not ask to be subdued. That I am
but a victim of this flesh and its failing,
flailing arm. Unlike you who stand guard,
try to keep me confined from behind
the bars of your prison— you should know
there's no vessel that can contain God.

2. *Onye Iro: Litany of Exile*

By Nmadi Bryan Ndiolo

Trauma tutors the eyes in pain's parlance. These eyes—incontinence capsules, thinking themselves skies; observing penance for sins they're innocent of. Mother loved to lick her own tears before the last one fell. She said: *when grief breaks the body like the Eucharist, the eyes—acolytes—woo white wine from the wounds*. It's true what Vuong said: *your mother is only your mother until one of you forgets*. Replace *mother* with *grief*. I swear, I have seen enough grief to christen my eyes 'Jordan.' I tiptoe into memory's numb nucleus. & my hands, sieves, sift through its membrane for mirth. I find grief greening. Memory: a wound without signposts. Teenhood whittles me down—Father standing at the epicenter, scourge stretched across my back. Homophobia is short for the home of phobia. & to be born queer is to be born questioning. Because my heart is a black hut, blood-bright with hurt. Father, if you
you must hate me, at least pretend to love me. I—trauma's begotten son, sun-shunned.
Manhood, & trauma resume their lessons in my eyes—re-baptising my mirth-filled face,
same way Father baptised me— a bastard—because I loved a boy more than I loved him.
& he whipped & whipped & whipped me till I learned the fluency of my own weeping.
This was my Second Sorrowful Mystery: The Scourging. Forgive me, Father, but I see
no sin. & to birth a bastard like me is to first have sex. I was fourteen & my desires—

garden-green. Hands, hunger-heft; loins electric with wild want. It's a sad thing:
the way language labours in complicity. *Onye iro* is the Igbo word for enemy.
Onye iro is the Igbo word for outsider. See how language—the cradle of exile
names my father enemy. & I, outsider. My eyes, the Nile narrating denial.
For what else has God gifted this boy but the river refusing retreat?
Since both Fathers have Ishmaeled me, O, tell me:
who will touch this boy who loves boys,
& call him holy?

3. Queer

By Tshegofatjo Makhafola

i am the ghost of my father's pride.

the scum of his testicles.

a mirror distorting his reflection.

a wish refusing to hatch into a man on his terms.

his prayer floating below god's ears.

i am the fig tree he curses. the fruitless. an apple far from a tree.

i am what his eyelids turn to shovels to bury with every blink

when he is drunk,

i am dead to him.

i am the tithe he delivers to church every sabbath.

i am last night's memory stuck between the pastor's teeth.

i am his after nine o'clock secret he gargles with repentance.

a corinthians six verse nine transgression.

his six nine freak and a sputum he ejects before the gospel.

too sinful for the sermon, too sweet for the sermoner.¹

i am a sin indigestible in the belly of a temple.

i am the puke of this place.

a prayer miscarried from my father's lips.

¹ Glossary

i am what's hidden in my mother's mouth.

what she whispers to god.

what holds her knees hostage to the floor.

i am the kite tied to her umbilical cord

when my father is a hurricane,

i am pulling away and paining her.

i am what turns her into a double pan scale on a dining table

with marriage and her love for me on opposite sides.

i am the shame she piggybacks and what her humming amors

when a hallelujah stretches like a bow from my father's lips.

every sabbath,

i am the dart opposite to the pulpit.

i am the after-church murmuring.

a rumour bulging inside my mother's throat.

i am her silence.

4. **The priest's litany**

By Alabi Miracle Mezabo

Oredia is a defector. She has crossed
into a country of nine days
where the sun is a bruised orange
& the sky a heavy mushroom haze

Her Priest—Here, the alien—
entreating...

but she is proofing numb
a dough of spirit scorched
in the kiln of a lover's passing

Kyrie eleison

Lord have mercy on this stone

Christe eleison

for the spirit is dross

I offer the Host to a mouth of shale

She is stone-still

deaf to my litany, my God, the very Bulbul that once whistled back the wind

Where is the firefinch that fired her marrow?

I try to hold her

but my hands slip/ like mist

against hardened-steel

I die— this death—every day

a father drowning in the air she no longer breathes

She sees not the face

nor the ochre-hum of my voice

offering Grace—she once called it

She has buried her charred-jewel deep

fissures threading a darker path

at the borders of the breath

Her lover rests

She grinds & glides slowly

No backward glance.

Part 2:
People & Place

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5. The Etymology of Homesickness

By Janine Milne

Once, they knew homesickness
that bloody fist of longing—
could kill you.

They diagnosed it as *nostalgia*
from the Greek words *nostos*, returning home,
and *algos*, pain. It had a place in the medical books,
an illness that could bring feverish dreams, palpitations—
imagine it, labelled in ink:
a hypochondria of the heart.

Once, it was a malady of soldiers, rootless
on savage soil, their bodies a Babel,
torn by the razor wire of exile.

Now, this *returning-home pain*
is no longer listed in the medical texts.
It's a sigh over a snapshot,

A melancholy for the bodies you once filled,
lovers good as buried—

But not for all of us.

Not for those born feet first from the stars
and flung headfirst into planet Earth,
on an orbit that only moves us further

out. Strangers to their native tongue,
betrayed by inchoate longings,
like an accent no one can place.

I've been outside of my life for years.
These are not my people,
though their language is mine,

Like a changeling,
I remain strange to their knowing.
When I say go, I mean don't leave me.

Where is my cure for this?
Give me my opium, leeches,
my warm, hypnotic powders
to cure me of the look in your eyes
that says *I don't love you anymore—*
I do not know you.

Save me from this lonely gyre
a cureless ache that unspools me, endlessly,
from belonging.

6. Horseback

By Ethan Bramwell

Growing up in a little town, post-apartheid, you tend to see things.

People stare, but they sneer under their breath.

I grew up in the midst of change.

My parents moved there to teach, leaving the city behind.

When my mum resigned, the local paper Die Burger wrote her up.

I remember very little from that time.

What I do remember is running from bullies on horseback,
or hearing the engine roar from their motorcycles.

I was angry enough to test fences, to eye fruit that wasn't mine.

My stepdad's hand was heavy, and my mom saw enough.

I remember the day I left.

My dad's teaching had taken him in a different direction years before.

I moved in with him, leaving it all behind.

The city saved me.

My mum let me go so I could learn discipline,
and find my voice.

What stood out, was that as a young boy growing up in a small town,
I knew I was destined for more but didn't understand what more was.

That young boy grew up and I became a man, chasing my dreams
all the while stumbling along the way.

I broke my arm ice skating and got side-lined at home,
with nothing but time to think about what matters.
I read about a poetry competition, and I dream of entering.
I'm a boy with an outside chance,
a boy who doesn't belong near something as fancy.

I've only entered two other contests before.
In the end I will enter. Deadline being the end of April.
I'm already behind because I've just seen it and April is nearly finished.

7. What Privilege

By Brett Anderson

seven percent of the people in my land look like me
so I must be standing somewhere on the fringes, right?
hoping someone will notice me
hoping someone will throw the ball to me
hoping someday there'll be a call to me
hoping against hope some chips will fall to me
just a lonely little leaf drifting along
on this torrential wave

feels strange then that when I lift my hand to my head
it feels like i am the one wearing the crown
that when the majority dare to lift their eyes
to take a glimpse of me
they're looking up, not looking down
that i, or people who could be mistaken for me
have all the money
and all the land
and all the positions of power
eating out of my hand

“What privilege?” i ask, with an entitled chuckle
as Phumeza passes me my morning coffee
before continuing with her job of cleaning my house
I think of the ridiculousness of it all
as I cast my eye on Chibale through the window
who is busying himself in my garden
making sure everything is neat

i am entitled to spend time thinking about that question

as Tinashe (*God is with us*) fills my car with petrol
not thinking for a second that he will never own
any one of the vehicles he dutifully feeds
for just about enough money
to spill some scraps on to the dinner table

and it starts to gnaw at me
so much so that i miss the greeting from Cebile (*rich*)
as she packs my luxury coffee and leg of lamb into separate bags
to make enough for her family to enjoy some beans tonight

'how dare they accuse me of privilege'
i am right angry now
as I dive into my socials to make my wrath known
but all this has made me quite tired
and so I flop down on to the couch and reach for the remote

8. **Homeland: Together We Sit and She Tells Me a Story**

By Nailah Tataa

What does it mean to live on land that is stolen? She asks me

She follows the scars on my body where the biting blow of colonialism made its mark on my Black skin

Where the sting of oppression has made my skin tough too

I trace her own scars seeing where the chiselled hands of whiteness cutaway her people

The violent excavation of culture and spirit

And we are silent, reading each other through our wounds

Who are you to this land?

Her question lingers in the air

Heavy and full, like a raincloud ready to empty its contents on me

And I do not move, letting the grief swallow me

Until I cannot tell if I am still crying

Until I cannot tell where my pain begins and hers ends

I am a stranger, I tell her. Displaced and afraid of what that means.

Together we sit and she helps me peel back the lies of the land.

What does it mean to be on this land but not of it?

Land that is misshapen, mangled, and misrepresented

A land that I could never call home but yet welcomes me despite my strange energy

What is home to those also displaced?

Those who still walk and see the ruins and ghosts

Who vacillate between worlds and move towards a perilous future?

To me who washed upon these shores

Who am I to this land?

Who am I to this land?

I greet her with a mere semblance of an answer, and she offers her wounds for me to trace

They are still fresh, but her voice is unwavering and strong as she tells me her story

And she tells me about her homeland

Then I tell her of mine

How strange to find kindred family here across the seas

They who have helped me find truth in lies told by thieves

Our resilience echoed in each other

Our strength feeding our bellies to help us make it through the next day.

Together, can we make this our home?

9. Spectator at the Border of Massacre

By Michael Excel Chinagorom

I spat on the world from between
my teeth, shouted at monsoon flatulence
from between my lungs, I questioned
the choices of living amputated in a country filled with a whirl of chaos, reels of
danger.

What cruel nature offers from a nebulous strike had left them festering.

The wind came & dragged them out to perish urgently,

the rain came, dousing all their fortune,

then near the rumble of thunder at distance,

frightening the street & everything in it.

I stood still & watched how my blemished body reacted in defence of justice.

It's flat, unfortunate at the rickety rattle of the musket, the whole *Eziama*
community was reconfigured with firing.

I am powerless to the repositioning caused by the armed men.

I wish I could teach the victims how to conduct a precise attack in the enemies'
camp.

I saw tears, I saw hell, I saw bodies crumbling like chalk. I witnessed a boy bum-
walk

a blind woman to take cover behind the wall.

& I cursed the day God robbed me of early birth.

There are many bodies over gravestones
too numerous to count, they are more than the millimetres of my age.

Between dead bones in the sand & furious winds,
between the insistence of hunger and a troubled stomach,
between wheels of danger & cold firestorm,
between gunshots & fleeing people,
I spat on the world from between my teeth.

10. Hymn for a Headless Silhouette

By Imole Olusanya

When my folks say my house may throw stones,
I thought heaven would wash away the plaster

sealing it whole, until it bared the jagged
bricks underneath—that they would fall,

piercing my feet. That they would drop heavy
on my neck, too much to bear, shrinking me

into the forgotten. I would not mind
if it were heaven, or the wind,

or a roofless body that took the harp
to sing me a rough ode. But no, the walls

do not sing me the songs of away.

These bodies that walk these rooms with me do;

the bodies that share my name. When the roof
covers my head, their tongues furl its spread.

My feet thread the same ground as these bodies
but my head does not. My head sings

the songs of away. What is left of me
on this painted wall is a headless silhouette—

I was long gone before I knew. But why
is no one good enough to be true?

A familiar body names me a silent killer because
silence is rare currency; they say to snuff the fire
roasting your bones without charging at the one
holding the matches, is to stand as a poised
arrow. I can see the body whose head furls
the roof. I see the body that swells the room.

And if I carve a place for myself, manoeuvre
the pit and look away from the tongues

clawing at my spine, and refuse to tell the trees
and the wind about what fickle angels
these bodies are, they say I am
the body with horns rooted within.

DRAFT

11. Beloved Country

By Zizipho Godana

I arrive carrying a passport that does not remember me.
The ink insists. The paper nods.
My name sits there like a guest who stayed too long.

Before I had bones, my mother had borders.
Before my first cry, she had already been translated
into a language made of waiting rooms and numbers.

I inherit her leaving.
I inherit the echo it left inside her ribs.

She teaches me how to answer questions
that are not really questions.
Where are you from?

At school, I draw maps that refuse to include me.
The teacher corrects my spelling of a place
my tongue still aches to pronounce.
I learn silence faster than multiplication.

My grandparents live inside stories that end abruptly.
There is always a door.
There is always a knock.
There is always a sentence that breaks in half.

I grow up in a country that feeds me,
blankets me in its weather,
lets me walk its streets without knowing my mother's fear,
yet keeps a small, careful distance.

They say I am lucky.
I practice agreeing.

At home, my mother folds the past into ordinary things.
That spice meant survival.
This song means grief.
I eat, I listen, I swallow both.

Sometimes she speaks of return,
for us to see those blue skies once more.
I do not tell her
I have never seen that sky,
never learned how its light falls on a face.

My body becomes a border I cannot cross.
Inside it, two countries argue violently.
One claims me through blood,
the other through breath.

I stand in between,
learning to belong without ownership,
to carry a place that has never carried me.

Part 3:
A Vessel

12. Stranger Danger

By Denoo Edinam Yawo

This body. spacious. empty.

I have filled with music.

The music now, in the empty space,

rejecting the contours of aloneness, has baptised me into God,

now with his hands,

me, closer to him than he is in this body, has tuned

the music into/crumpled milk leaking/from my right/

breast,

has turned

the diagnosis into/corvette tyres scraping/ against the white/

the black ink sashaying/ like a bullet trespassing/ against the will of a body.

I, now God, look for

the damp spaces between/the doctor's hesitant words, find/ the opening and

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into the orange areola, fill the lactiferous ducts, with stale foreign prayers,
command

macrophages to

engulf native tongues into memory. The thoracic walls echo with mutations.

They beckon for answers into an open

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n:

when did you first notice the symptoms?

*on a scale of one to ten, with indifference between the answer to your
prayer,*

is God residing in this breast still?

The scalpel is a light house/excising God of small glory/, into a petri dish/
waiting for the end to come.

13. Water Jugs

By Ukachukwu Victor Ikechukwu

All the skins I saw
were decomposing in the catacombs
Limp as the promises of my father
Or cryptic maps of lost roads,
Does a seed not rot to raise a green banner?
This skin is melanin,
an "overdose" of pigment,
whose slurring only silences in the grave.
Tell me: can a snail outrun death without its shell?
The first time I stood here,
a spring toad in the heart of summer,
I last remembered the scent of fresh water
through years of discerning—
so different from the cup of salty sea I'd gulped—
and yet, the rugged thirst of dehydration remained.
I miss the walking on hard outcrops,
the sense of unruled living;
snowfall writes a different law here.
I know water and wine,
one is tastier, the other is new

and I know these jugs: shattered
the broken gathered in the broken.
Like a limping dog beaten into a vague life
for a mirage of comfort.
"Don't Touch a Bird Here," The sign reads
"Or You Will Pay for Its Wings."
It might fly maliciously into your pot of stew,
like a proud owner demanding its due
it sits heavy on the scale.
Skins hold no water now
no breaking of birth-waters
only wine, splendid wine,
that will never quench the thirst
of the rotting skins in the catacombs.
I stare now, only from windows,
standing at the threshold of welcome,
as the hourglass pours by,
at the bottled waters, like hot dogs in a showcase
missing the years I choked on plenty.

Part 4:
Identity

14. Raw/Rou

By Yuwinn A. Kraukamp

Something is missing from my language. A word torn from my throat. A phrase
confiscated

from my history

a sound or a sacred name

scythed from my mother tongue

as I searched for this pre-colonial vernacular (*taal*)

for this unvoiced veritas between you and me,

I Googled the words you threw at me on the day you left. You said I speak too
white. Not the real

raw Afrikaans our people were born with

You said my language is as soulless as my identity

my identity as pale as my complexion

So I traced your words back to their linguistic roots

back to the indigenous speech we spoke without sound

I reopened words like wounds we could've unsaid. I relived conversations we
could have survived

And in each one, we're speaking two different languages

Two voices, reciting two different poems
one hungry mouth to swallow the corpse
of every dead dialect we failed to keep alive.

I carried the words you carved into me on the day you left, into every room like
scars on my skin

Like something raw

And did you know that in Afrikaans rawness (*rou*)

has two different meanings: blood-red

cut open, uncooked meat

But it also means grief. It means mourning. The sort of loss you suffer that's so
deep, so unending

it becomes a second language you instantly

know how to speak

when a mother loses a son, then the word raw

is instantly fixed to her name: *roumoeder*

rawmother: blood-red, cut open

Her rawness comes to life in every vocabulary. Every memory voiced with salt—a
primal language

we all learn to speak.

I still struggle to spell God's true name without autocorrection. I'm still missing
something, I know

I'm still not fluent in the English language

But I know all the white words: *fuck*

Fuckup. Freakshow. Failure

I feel every word changing shape inside my mouth

every time I say them out loud: reminiscence turns into regret. Faithfulness turns
into fear

eyes turn into tongues, sight turns into voice

our language turns into an emergency line

with no answer, no service

yet still I speak; honestly and painfully, in your tongue and mine. As if you would
ever speak back.

DRAFT

15. Invocation

By Taofeek Ayeyemi

ona dori apata // o dori apata pin

The path runs into a rock & closes.
This juncture leads nowhere,
but everywhere leads here— this cave,
this hatchery of terror.

My arm shivers under the weight of twelve padlocks.
I flounder into a roofless house
with no balcony,
no veranda, no curtilage.

To run into a door is to run into the sky,
and to run into a window is to fall
into an ocean. I, a boy finding where to
offload his father's last fear & hope.

Each time my fear erupts,
the world flees, only my shadow stays.
Today, my shadow flees me; I leave
cowries on its footprints;

my mouth opens into God's ears:
May I not end here. How does one escape
a windowless, roofless room
that opens into the sky?

I hit my feet on a root knot and fall over
a bag—my chest pierced by a bunch

of twelve keys, and I began to feed them
to my twelve padlocks.

I pluck the sun
& suspend it
above a dark room.

The path runs into a rock & opens up.

DRAFT

16. the origin of silence

By Ajise Vincent

& when you speak to the vicar
who composed the hymn sung at the lord's supper,
he will tell you about the emperor
who burnt dreams to light up his garden.
death illumining the present
as the moon shed tears of luminance

he will tell you of the epistles
of thirsty graves,
how the earth convulsed in haiti
& drank gore to cure its malady.

he will tell you of psalms from the swirls of water,
dirges of anonymous immigrants floating
on the loins of the mediterranean

he will tell you of the exodus of palestinians,
explosions taking refuge in the homes of mothers
whose eulogies to their dead sons
are exclamations too short to pass through their throat

he will tell you of the origin of silence:
the princes of sahel finding comfort
in the emptiness of coffins

17. Bohemian

By Audrey Neema

City lights flashing,
People rushing,
I'm sinking.

Cars buzzing,
Faces blurring,
I feel none.

Soulless city while the night walks,
Walks me to the doom,
Doom of being alien,
Alien with the same
skin.

But I'm in a different casket,
Casket of fear,
Fear of my kind,
My kind of people.

Sleepless nights,
Biting cold,
Screaming voices,
Head in the clouds,
I'm falling.

Speed running,
The city moves,
At light speed,
I'm but a turtle,
In its shell.

God save me
From humanity's
Tragedy
The pain of being an
Émigré
An intruder

In the devil's land,
A misfit in a consistent glow,
A misfit....

DRAFT

Part 5:
Detached & Isolated

18. The Free Man

By Chidebelu Emmanuel Nnazoba

At the edge of the circle
he stands—
not lost,
not waiting.

The centre moved;
he did not.

The compass spins uselessly
for those who need approved north.

He travels by older stars,
those no empire named.

That is why he appears astray
to the map-bound.

Exile:
freedom mispronounced.

The many search for themselves

in each other's noise.

He listens deeper.

Beneath anthem, oath, slogan,
he hears the naked note.

That note revokes the spell.

So they call him an outsider.

Yet often the one outside the circle
is the only one
not hypnotised by it.

Outside, he learns
exclusion equates to fear
of ungoverned presence.

They named him *outcast*
and called the boundary sacred.

But earth does not ostracise seed.

Rain does not segregate roots.

Only frightened men
canonise distance.

Beyond their circle,
scarred, silent, seeing,
stands the only free man.

DRAFT

19. A Stranger Under My Skin

By Rachael Ajisafe

I am myself only when the body agrees to tell the truth; otherwise, I am a careful translation:

a name answering to a life it does not fully inhabit, a voice, a late arrival in its own mouth.

And the truth is, I have never fit the architecture of my own being; I move through it like a guest,

afraid the walls might confess I do not belong, that I have been living in borrowed bone and breath.

They call me: *daughter, student, good girl*—titles worn like tailored garments, neat at the seams

but loosening in the spirit; for what is a self-assembled from approval if not a fragile house?

I have stood before mirrors and met a stranger fluent in imitation, smiling on cue,

while beneath her something quieter resisted—unperformed, waiting like a pulse.

And whose fault is it that I became this careful construction shaped by need?

That I learned to fold myself into smaller truths, filing down the edges of my becoming

until I was almost enough—always almost, never entirely.

There is a distance I cross daily—not of miles but of meaning—between the self I present

and the self that endures beneath presentation; like a ritual without reward, I return to it,

lifting the weight of becoming someone I cannot sustain.

Still, I gather fragments, attempt arrangements, call it self—though it slips, though it resists.

But underneath this performance, underneath a choreography of being seen, lies a presence that awaits:

steady as truth, patient as something that will outlive every version of me that is not real.

~ ~ ~

And one day I tire of the performance, of this private Sisyphus of self,

and I refuse the ritual: I do not rebuild what falls, I do not gather what refuses to stay.

I stand in the quiet ruin of all I have tried to be and listen.

And after that listening, something shifts—not into perfection, but into presence:

where I am no longer divided, where the distance closes not by effort but by release.

20. Veil of deceit

By Jonathan Ampofo

Here comes the wind,
chasing after our veils.
The plunder of the pearls—
it is like the haze the simoon brings.

Mothers clutch the grip of their hearts,
daughters mourn hazily,
like chants of agony.

There, the trail of tears flood
it is like the gush of a geyser of blood.

The dark earth,
which promised the fine buds of blossoming,
has spilled out venom, ignis, in its roots.

Veiled in delight,
and yet died in dismay.

There, the veils flutter in hope,
and yet it is our treasures
being burnt.

Our freedom is a distant dream, unborn.

On the battleground,
our bodies lie bare.

Where are the rights you promised us?
The safehouse you will hide,
the igloo where you will keep us
from the cold violence of the world?

You rained down brimstones on us
till we are scattered, forgotten debris.

Our song for liberation
is a heavy crime.

The innocent suffers;
the guilty flourishes

The women they claim to save
are the ones that decay,
forever victims of a vulnerability,
deceitfully waged in a dark light.

*And still, we rise—*²
our veils may flutter,
but our voices will not die.

² Glossary

21. A stranger inside a familiar face

By Ann Nziku

His eyes go blank-
not silent-
but absent.

Something hollow settles in his voice -
as if feeling has quietly left the room.
I watch him become a stranger
inside a familiar face.

This is not the man who raised me
bitter at the edges
Anger stitched into his breath
love buried beneath something heavier.
I wonder when he became like this.

I stand there helpless
as his words burn through the air
hands thrown upward
like he's ready for war.

I watch him loose himself
To the quiet violence of resentment

The same man who taught me how to love.

He breaks my heart.

Still, I look at him with remembering eyes
of softness
of a man who knew
how to hold the world gently.

We are still here, I want to say

we will find our way back.

I will be your hero

Just like you've always been mine.

He breaks my heart but still,

I love him

I will always love him

through every version

of whom he becomes.

22. Journey of Truth

By Mariam Yussuff

In a home full of familiar scents,
the usual sound of a steady breath becomes strange.

The atmosphere turns cold;
the laughter that calms the spirit, evokes it.

The identity that subdues my existence lies in wait—
it trips in motion, combing every inner city with its claws,
posing existential challenges.

Affinity unites us in an eternal illusion;
visible growth stalls in reality,
imbuing every moment with a false truth,
scarring every heart with it.

I am ready for afternoon, but morning holds me hostage.

I rebel against morning, yet afternoon harbours me not.

So I stand still in concession, letting nature lead.

Lead my body—not my soul.

23. The Girl Who Asked for a Pen

By Halima Raji

For Aisha, and every daughter like her

At ten, I knew the weight of a book—
not the Qur'an board, but a story with pictures.
My mother laughed: "*Debbo ndoggu? A debbo?*"
But she tied the yellow scarf—a gift for my tenth birthday—
the blue dress blooming like a small sky.
I wore it fetching water, grinding millet,
pretending the hem was a blackboard.

At twelve, I whispered to Baba: "School."
He spat. "*Pulaaku is your school.*
Modibbo teaches boys. You learn to knead, to birth."
My sisters' eyes like dry wells,
no *alkalam* in their fingers—only firewood.

At fourteen, a man came. Sixty-five.
His smile—a cave of goro-stained teeth.
He laughed like a donkey coughing.
"She will do," gripping my wrist—
the hand of a man never told "no."

The wedding was small. Men nodded,
their laughter stones in a metal bowl.
Women sullen-faced, wrappers tight as sealed lips.
I wore my yellow scarf and blue dress—
the only brightness in that room.
My mother did not weep. She had wept once, for herself.

He whisked me off on a donkey before sunset.
No romance. Just goro on his breath
and a hut with a low door.

Now I am a mother of six.
The youngest—her collarbones like question marks.
At night, I trace letters in the dust: One, two, three.
I teach her. She will not wear a yellow scarf to an old man's hut.

I vow that: my children will attend school.
Especially her, the fragile one.
Let them call me *nyibe*—rebel.
A mother with a pen is more dangerous
than any old man with goro in his teeth.

24. A Spiritless Eureka

By Toluwanimi Hannah Ajayi

Brava! They applaud,
as they toss their flowers,
as they rise in ovation.

A genius! They cry,
as they compare their notes,
as they nod in rapt approval.

The greatest! They fawn,
as they revel in rhyme,
as they are bewitched by scheme.

Virtuoso! they bellow,
as they choke on the lexicon,
as they drown in grandiloquence.

And I shrink,
hunched beneath the pallid cast,
words dead on my parched lips,
weakened by inadequacy,
bereft of doubt—

Seule.

DRAFT

25. The Monster Home Made

By Mosimiloluwa Dorcas Kupoluyi

The journey home begins three days before the road.
It starts as a metallic taste,
like rusting fear on the tip of my tongue.
By the second day, it is in my body,
settling in my chest like harmattan dust.

A chatterbox once said to me,
"You don't go home because you don't have a happy home."
I laughed along with her -
a laugh that trips and dies too quickly.

She was right.

I hear footsteps before reaching the door,
a heavy *'hmmph'* from the sitting room
rolling like thunder, clearing its throat.
I have mastered these moods like a forecaster.
I still get rained on, but I see it coming.

On this side of the road, I am still myself.
Something shifts at the junction before home.
When the conductor shouts "*Ò wá! Ò wá!*" into smoke,
the danfo jerks through traffic.
Yet all I hear is that groan waiting at home.

I go because she is there,
her hands carrying what she never named,
her body a record of every year she stayed.
I go because the young one is there.
his laughter is still brave enough to challenge the walls.
When I leave, his laughter follows me to the gate and stops there.

In the mirror, I look for the girl who left.
I find instead something I recognise - the sitting room in my shoulders, the silence
in my jaw, and the hands that shaped this house.

I am still learning
whether to call her mine.

DRAFT

26. The beauty salon

By Kauser Parveen

The beauty salon
is an island of freedom
away from the public gaze
away from oppressive rules and regulations
designed to control women like me.
This space serves a purpose:
the cutting
shaping
curling
straightening
braiding
twisting of hair
the application of makeup
eyebrow shaping
interrupted only by the call for prayers.
These safe spaces are hidden
These safe spaces are needed
These safe spaces enable women to be employed
These safe spaces exist because other public spaces have been closed
The beauty salon is a place where creative lives and survives

27. When I Was Alone

By Oratilwe Mahlangu

The marigold mornings

made me warm,

I waved goodbye to Mama-

I was green and free.

The marigold sunsets obscured

into gloomy purple mornings

I rubbed my chapped hands together

I was brown and without glee.

Their shadows were

hazed by the halos,

I gazed

I was solitary and could see it.

The skies became sullen

and threw up in torrents.

What did I know about the labyrinth of love?

I was grey like tree bucks

I could not penetrate their spherical love
I could not even be a tangent to their sphere.
What did I know about the hyacinth of the above?
I was below and couldn't see.

I went over to the shore
and watched the sand slowly making way to the sea.
Aquatic life seemed peaceful and charming, but I would not survive
if I could bring her back, I'd see the marigold mornings, I'll be green again
except I'll be grown.

28. This Goliath Was a Victim

By Nas Jolaade

The sitting room rearranges itself around my father.
Not visibly—no chair displaced, no curtain persuaded—
but when he enters, language lowers its voice,
syntax slackening, clauses withdrawing their teeth.
My siblings revise themselves mid-sentence,
like soft-mouthed custodians of ellipsis.
My mother, archivist of measured silences,
asks if he has eaten and absents herself before his hunger can testify.
She apprenticed us early with her patient grammar of her pauses,
the way his name attenuated in her mouth
into something negotiable, almost past tense.
She made of absence a lineage,
and us, descendants, we inherited it fluently.
He was never loud. That is the indictment—
this soft, unprovable crime.
No doors battered into confession,
no crockery declaring war—
only a man who departed to earn,
and returned, dutiful, travel-worn,
with offerings mistranslated by distance:
biscuits collapsing into their own surrender,
a shirt too bright for my brother's practiced refusal,
a perfume my mother leaves unopened—
a glass-sealed ambiguity clouding the dresser,
fragrant with all that will not be forgiven.
Outside, he sits on the low wall.
From the window, I enumerate him—
minute by thinning minute—
the way my mother tallies her deficits.
How evening annexes his outline.

How even the street dogs renegotiate their barking
into something like reluctant kinship.
How I, faithful to instruction, do not.
And him—
unhoused in our grammar,
unconjugated in our mouths—
still knocking

DRAFT

29. Gaps, spaces and fences

By Isah Qulsum

I am a creator of gaps, spaces and fences
and I make sure to carry them with me
everywhere

At the end of shared laughter
as I search for someone
anyone's eyes
to hold mine

In the hand I do not extend
to receive love

In my voice that falters
and never leaves
confines of my head

On my back
that's hunched like the question mark
each of my choices bears

I am a gallery

refusing exhibition

when viewers look closer,

I retract inside me

and create gaps, spaces and fences

and I make sure to carry them

with me

everywhere

DRAFT

30. Invasive outsider's aroma

By Jive Lubbungu

It did not knock.
It arrived—
a hush inside breath,
a stranger dressed in air.

At first, nothing.
Then unease.
Then absence.

It moved without touch,
entered lungs like prayer,
left a silence
that would not settle.

It woke the healers
into endless nights,
where shadow was studied
and the unseen named,
while the world waited
between fear and faith.

From Wuhan it travelled—
a question without language,
rewriting maps
without ink.

It reached the powerful—unready,
the ordinary—unguarded.

Even the certain
began to count.

On African soil,
we listened differently—
reading it in wind,
in distance,
in prayers louder
than breath.

They named it COVID-19,
as if names could hold it.

Its aroma was disruption—
of breath,
of closeness,
of being human.

Life thinned.
Distance became duty.

It lingered—
in memory,
in the space between us.

No longer stranger,
a mirror remained.

31. Alone and Happy

By Joanita Richter

like the whispering wind
and the cactus in the rainforest
I am seen as a cloud of nothing
shunned by so many
still I flourish being alone
this armour of isolation
gives me independence
where I can rewrite the narratives
my courage will continue to burn like a flame
the rose grew from the concrete
that rose is me

32. In Search of Another Ending

By Abdul Samad Jimoh

Father is the man who fathers a bloodline.

An identity I wore for nine years.

Darling was the appellation that
clung to my frame as though

I was a lover. But the feelings
ghost into the other. And I spare

no glance for the woman
and the world behind me as I

press the pedal, speeding into
the falling night. But no matter

how I try, my memory will never erase
the woman and the *pictures* I thought were mine.

The woman dosed me with *darkness*.

The woman I met inside a flourishing light,

a garden wreathed with beautiful flowers.

The woman who hushed every beauty

around her. The woman

my avid gaze couldn't leave untouched.

She said my tree yielded the fruits.

One.

Two.

Three.

But couldn't have thought they were her secret walking.

The upshot of what she hid

from me

and from the whole world,

until the dawn arrived, peeling off the veil—

until a child's *weather* exhumed the roots.

The discrepancies.

The genetic mismatches
between the three dreams
and me, the *lodger*.

We reached the twist; we hit the last dance,
not by death, not together anymore.

I embark on this lonesome journey
in search of another ending.

33. A bathroom is a logical place to hide

By Linda Sparks

A bathroom is a logical place to hide
if you're a woman hiding from a man.

There's a toilet,
a bath maybe.

What more could you want?

Reeva Steenkamp on her knees

Reeva Steenkamp dying

Reeva shot four times

hiding from a man.

I know why she was hiding.

I come out because he says it's fine

but he lies and can't take an illusionist defeat

And it does not matter.

Because no one wins in the end—

there is only destruction.

34. I am a foreigner in my body

By Neo Samunzala

I lie sprawled on the bathroom floor, helpless and tired
My stomach cramping, intense pain and loud growling, my head spinning
And my mind racing
My heart pounding violently, it is hard to catch a breath
No rhythm at all

Thudthu thud thud t thud t hud th th

I try to breathe, breathe in breathe out breathe in
Suddenly I feel sleep slowly stealing my strength and I try to fight it
Breathe in - suddenly a sharp pain jolts me, it is so intense the spasms make me
dizzy
I twist, I groan, I groan and twist, I try again, I groan and curl up in a foetal
position
I wince and grab my stomach, perhaps I can pull it out.
Or grab that pain to make it stop.

STOP.

Make it stop.

I cannot breathe; the pain is so intense it feels like I'm dying
my stomach does not like me.
I cannot remember when I passed out, or how long exactly
Time always seems to stand still during these episodes.
I wake up to my mother shaking me and talking all at once
I cannot hear the words exactly, but I groan
and jolt to the toilet seat, the explosion continues for more time I can manage to
count
Once, twice, thrice. I try to relax, then another explosion, another---
I lose count.
Tired, I whisper, too weak to say the words.
Spouts of dripping saliva and the bitter taste in my mouth, bucket –
I murmur

My mother understands and grabs it from the corner of the bath.

It all comes out. Once twice. The third
time: just water.

I am an alien in my own body. I live with an internal fear. Even just a bite can
cause havoc.

My stomach fights what I eat, like an antidote fighting poison, the anxiety ripples
my mind.

I ponder on *how other kids could eat anything without any occurrences.*

Why am I like this? It's like I don't belong in my own body.

My heart beats like it doesn't want me to live:

THUD THUD T HUD TH THUDTHUDTHUD th th THUD
like it doesn't belong to my body.

I stumble to the living room to get a rest, everyone looking at me with pity and
confusion

because how can one get sick from food? I feel alone, no one can really
understand...

Just lie down, perhaps you ate too quickly, I hear someone say softly.

I yield and let sleep cuddle me.

This is who I am, I don't belong to my body.

35. I came here dyed with loss

By Blessing Ojo

It walks the mouths of men that I came dyed with loss.
That abysmal baptism of nerves before habituation.
I peroxide my life for the pleasure roofed for children
at their parents' feet, & nothing but more desire,
more living pockets in my body, in ravenous silence.
Fuck afrobeats. I prefer songs that enter like knives.
I listen for names buried in the rhythm. & this is
how I know that I've been blue-penciled out of grace.
I know ray-florets taunt me: *open your bones boy,*
 --round & purple--shinning is never your thing.
Speak serpent, where do I--an English Lavender budding
inside solitude--belong in this planet of woes?
In all my years of experiment, I'm nowhere near the harp
& tambourine, nowhere near the song & its miracle.
In my childhood, the children in the neighbourhood
who owned bicycles paused until I passed, so they could ride.
They must have been told that I fell out of their wheels.
I'd go for a worn-out tire's cruise under the same blue sky.
That one of them called me a bastard only made me
a wrongly classified noun. I have dissected my life
for the schwa in it, fixed the leakage in my lungs before
reopening my mouth. & it must have stung them knowing
I can do anything but beg to belong somewhere, not even
to a poem. There's a telling about late November nights
in which a child in brownish-white singlet & pant
stays outside in the cold during masquerade outings.
I called him an apprentice masquerade or a harmattan child
until I learnt the folklore was also a prophecy about me.
& what fries my heart is the knowing that no matter
how I fur my cat, it'd remain a cat meowing into dearth,

into the yellowness of a sphere, against the knife
halving the sphere unequally, against the slog of survival.
I don't know why I now remember that my cousin
once served my meal with *kpomo* thin like my smile.
That she slapped me for dying in her mother's heart,
a perfect punishment for space theft. There's nothing
you'll tell me, an orphan is an orphan-- a kind of identical
synonym. Bereaved of bread & water.

36. Scarf of Stigma

By Phyllis Oniopusaziba Akpoti

It began with broomsticks
heaped like slaughtered goats
fit sacrifices
to usher in a new cycle
for canes and horsewhips become water
on the backs of witches

Then father's voice
thundered across the rivers
and like lightning striking
the centre of my core
it stamped itself into forever

“Suffer not a witch to live.”

It burned into my soul
with eyes hot as the sun
carved into my spirit
the naked mark of rejection

Then the “merciful” way was chosen

to be chained with the others outside

to be made drunk on anointing oil

fastened to the *ebelebor* tree

with the *olili* I cut for play

broomsticks burning vengeance into my back

to hunger for nothing but the why

A decade ago

the *ebelebor* tree was felled

the mango trees

welcomers of returnees at the riverbanks

uprooted

the land stripped naked

to appease the god of the preacher

and water walked in

to make us fishes

its borders like the terrifying talons of a witch

“Delivered” travelled through the town

wearing the scarf of stigma

Now they wonder why we are strangers
on the ground that swallowed our cords

They made us strangers

and today they cry

DRAFT

37. Close, but aloof

By Celestine Kenechukwu Onah

Forlorn

I am hollow like bone with no marrow

I am drained dry

The marrow in my *thigh*

has gone afar

and I walk with a forgone star

A heart with no air

A mind with no soul

A body with no host

I live, a *barren home*

How did I get here?

How did this landlord become a tenant

in his house, his own tent?

How did the owner become

A wandering stranger?

A guest not welcomed

A voice with no echo

A stranger in my own skin

I dwell where I do not belong

I have lost touch with reality

and slipped away

from happy nights.

I have long gone

from the man I knew.

I am ...

like an *empty tomb*

A body living on the *outskirts*

A song with no *melody*

Yes, a *walking dead*

DRAFT

38. My Illusions & The Truth

By George Zulu

My birthday is in a few months. Reminiscing on what I have achieved seems to be my shortest dream. The echoes in the archives of what I once was, genetic alopecia. Gone are my glory days. It takes me forever to even watch an episode of my favourite show. My sinful eyes desire a taste for a little more than the motivation I hear. How does a child become a man where the guidance is music? Make a home when you were raised from a broken one. *Carry your own*. That's how we live, like we have it figured out but we have a million questions. Therapy heals the mind, but what heals the soul? Even when you heal the scars remind us all. I read a post saying "if men stopped attacking women, women would be safe" I pondered on the thought for a bit; I realised that men should always stick up for women and girls because they need our protection. I cried like a baby when I read about a father impregnating his own daughter. I have lived a generally hard life. But my struggles have been provision. My perspective has changed, now I approach everyday like a blessing.

39. Audience of My Own

By Benjamin N. Amakobe

I don't remember myself
the way a self should.
But if I could,
I really would.
I don't have a clue
what I liked,
what I hated,
or
if my favourite colour was really black.
I don't remember,
because you can't remember
what you never knew.
It's impossible
for a ghost
to make memories
and I suppose I could make up
any number of amazing things about myself,
and pretend they are true.
No one would know
but me
that I made it all up
just to try to get to know myself.

In the end,
I would be no closer
to knowing myself.
Maybe one day,
when I finally meet me again
I will ask
all the important questions
I think a self should know
about themselves.
Maybe then
I would be closer
to knowing
the self I never had.

Part 6

Narrative & Traditional Poems

40. We are Tired of Burying

By Victoria Kerubo

Funerals here arrive with a juicy story.
Nobody works,
just cries about lost things.

Last time, Ma' Mokaya was caught.
Mid-transformation
_half woman, half cat.

They burnt her alive.
The pastor prayed.
So her soul wouldn't fall all the way to hell.

Baba's dead.

Food tastes better with grief.
I slaughter two goats for the guests,
save soup for my toothless brother.

My dry eyes summon squints
from across the mud hut.
Failure to cry is akin to Ma' Mokaya's witchcraft.

So I peel open my mouth,
retrieve the fat scream
swallowed decades ago.

Back,

when they tore me away
from Baba.
Flung me to mission school.

They shaped my mouth around foreign letters,
I refused! Each sound bruised my throat
as it strangled its way out.

Baba was good,
even when
he clobbered my brother
_left him with two punctured teeth.

I watched each fly then land gently.
tossed them on the thatch roof
to grow back faster.

Everyone's screaming.
We throw soil.
One eye sheds tears,
the other scans for the next victim.

We crave the sound
of factory machines.
Anything, but screaming.

41. Coronach on Easter

By Adegoke Adeola

*Man stabs four children to death
at Kampala daycare after posing as parent
April 02, 2026.
—The East African News*

all praise to you, lord of all worlds, pure.
in this world, there's a disease
where man eats man to survive.
they bite off the skin of their kinsmen when they starve.
we learned to live with people of disease,
to pick bones, bury partial remains.
some learned reinterment,
finding fragments of their loved ones in different streets.

they learned hope in the prophecy of fire,
bíná bákú a fi éérú bojú.
but this disease now thirsts for the blood of juveniles,
this place harvests children's innocence
and guts their future.

may your name be praised, lord of all worlds.
in this world, we bask in the euphoria of broken things:
broken homes, broken schools, broken limbs,
ripped hearts from broken bodies, broken boys, broken girls,
broken songs, broken system, broken poems like this one.
who will cure us of this madness?

this world is a dubious merchant,
it takes, it takes, it takes
till there's nothing left to give.

i don't know how children in other worlds live.
maybe they chase birds in open fields.
i have read about the ones who play kabaddi, agalmata,
children of red light green light, ludo game, ojà alè,
children who pluck mangoes with stones,
children in penthouses, children in thatched huts.

may your holy name be praised.
when children in ggaba can play into the night,
when they can build sand houses,
when they can plant dreams when no one's watching,
when there are no bullets flying as they water it.

42. ...and they said: *Be Like the Porcupine*

By Hyginus O. Ekwuaz

They come in bearing folk wisdom...and the air leaves the room.

They tell me how the millipede's thousand and one legs always carry it away from kith and kin.... And they ask me: *Isn't the millipede accursed?*

Their world has narrowed to a single task: to claw me out of this brooding silence...

this deepening darkness: this isolation that has left no crack for anyone to slip through.

They talk about bonding: bonding among men...among animals...among birds...among fishes—but again and again they return to the porcupine.

The porcupine that is no outsider to his kind; the porcupine that has left his entire neck-region completely bare of prickly-pines for his brothers and sisters to have where to safely hold him to their heart...

They eye my coffee. Black. Laced. Black enough to blanket out the sun. Strong enough to knock death out of the dead.... They know about my cups of coffee at the cusp of day—and while I'm drowning in my cup of coffee, they continue throwing folk wisdom at me....

My demeanour, they say, is like the sign that screams: *Keep off!*

Even so. Social occasions wear me out. Talking is like swallowing broken glass.

I'm distant. I'm distracted. I'm distraught. Nothing, absolutely nothing, compels me into compliance. Not family. Not career. Not convention....

Can't they hear that rhythm that knocks with the gravity of a storm...
can't they hear that rhythm that tilts the floor under my feet...the whimpering
rhythm of hope's embryo etherized in the womb of despair—can't they hear it?

Can't they see? All this chaos...all this randomness...all this purposelessness
stretching out far and familiar—all say the skies are empty

all say there's no divinity up there throwing out a lifeline—each time

they've reached out for a lifeline; haven't they grabbed a handful of smoke?

Can't they see? Caught between two opposing storm fronts, we're in many
differing ways holding tight to the railing of our sinking ship.

Can't they see? We're all castaways in this vast wasteland in the belly of the beast.

In deep-bruised silence and all alone I must dredge to the silt bed of this wasteland
for that silence that can repair what sound and fury have broken to shards....

They who have come telling folk wisdom like beads of the rosary:

they cannot hear that sound that summons termites to the dinner table
they cannot hear the hammering on the coffin nail

they don't know I'm the coffin nail...they don't know I'm the coffin
they don't know I'm inside the coffin—gnashing my teeth
and raising my middle finger at the Great Absence in the skies.

Let there be light! —and there was darkness!

It is finished! —hasn't it *always* been finished!?

What do they know—they who're here deriding the millipede
and chanting the ballad of the porcupine: *what do they know?*

43. Olamichayin Akulijele

By Ocheni Kazeem Oneshojo

Olamichayin Akulijele,³ my father said you can
turn my sorrows into laughter as I seek betterment.
My father learned to seek laughter from you,
While I watched as saliva spurts out from
his mouth onto your scraggy body.
My father's life is a local white gin
produced to serve as a libation to the gods:
His mornings, afternoons, and evenings a litany of losses.
So, I am open to the wisdom of saying I denounce bowing to you.
I want to have a life first before I watch it fade away while
bowing to a god who listens to my pleas or not.
I want to have a wife, a son, and a daughter,
to teach them what my father may not understand—
That some gods are meant to be deserted,
while some are meant to be worshipped.
Olamichayin, give me the grace to denounce you.
Tedu ojo, let peace and freedom come my way.
Though my father fell while pouring libation to you,
I don't want to fall while worshipping you, so I won't.
It has been long since I saw spit spurts, and prayers muttered in
silence to you. It has been long since he muttered prayers in
silence that sounds unanswered even before
you receive echoes in the air.
I want to love someone who will accept
my unbelief, brokenness and my loneliness,
to worship God deep in my bleeding
heart without the fear of witches, wizards adding salt to it,
to live, and live without the fear of forsaking you,

³ Glossary

Without the fear, of making it up to you.
Olamichayin, I want to live without the fear of being
broken by losses, wealth, health, and longevity.
I have figured out how much of life is possible without your presence.
I promise not to speak ill of you to people because
you are a small deity my father worships and cherishes.
But I refuse to succumb to bowing and pouring libation to you.
Olamichayin, forgive, forgive me
for you have forsaken him, and I have forsaken you.
Forgive me, and I will forgive you, too – Olamichayin Akulijele

44. Buy a Casket for Dorcas

By Chiamaka Ogiji

I like to start my tale like my grandmother would under the tree with children my age- five, four, three and eight listening as she told us what Mbe did to the elephant. Her stories made me feel big. So, I will start mine like hers. Coughs! *Gee nti, e nwere m akuko i gwa.* You will have to say *Gwa ya ka mkpuru obi anyi wee nwee onu.* When I used to have a body that dreamt of being clothed in Gucci, hertunba, Vekee James, Dior, I used to think that was a dream only meant for children like you with a routine: Drivers picking you up at 4pm, sleepovers, tea parties, dinner at 6pm, spa dates, ivy league schools' applications, business class plane tickets. When I used to have a body, I thought the world was meant only for people like you: fathers in sweet-smelling deodorised offices, wearing suits and shaking hands with government officials. When I used to be like you, I believed my story was a side piece in a larger agenda: the hungry-looking child brought from the village to the city to be saved. That's why Madam hits me with a cooking spoon sweeping my future into the far end of impossibility. Now, I stand outside this body, between purgatory and heaven, my life unfolding in a line, sieving through the before and now of my unhappiness. I still find myself screaming when I see Madam- her shadow chases me now even when I am an mmuṛo: her voice makes me fear my own peace. If you witness life from where I am you will see that humans have plenty of linens- hate, sabotage and wickedness. While I shout to God in heaven hoping I am his favourite ask your mother to buy a casket for me and put my body in it, put the ragged clothing she gave me and the two slippers for my baby brother. Tell her to send my body to my nne, she will know what to do with it.

Part 7:
Demarcated Margins

45. Margins

By Damilola Oyedeji

i. outside the main body

ii. outside the limit

iii. a measure or degree of difference

~ Meriam Webster Dictionary

Everything outside my body is excessive.
Everything on and inside it, too. The multiplex
of my eyebrows. The timbre of my voice

escaping their lispy lip doors. The tilt
of my belly is more than a tilt. It's the moon,
round, but it weighs more than a circle. I'm a circle

of desires my body will not permit. The first doctor
I see tells me, *you will be fine if you do not grow
fat*. Shamefaced before a mirror, I pinch the skin

of my belly to let out the air. Hissing back
at me are strings of cysts, not air. Hissing back
is my sister's voice note, *you need to lose weight*.

Hissing back are the blue stories of uterine bodies
in my lineage. Pink fibroids linger in my aunt's grave.
One lonely breast in my step-grandmother's.

Everything inside me is blue, is excessive,
is blue, for what is the naming of a body
set outside the margin?

When the radiologist slips an IV into my left
cubital vein, he thrusts a ball into my right palm

and says, *squeeze this if it starts to hurt.*

I play guess-what with the MRI machine
as it tries to uncover what is excessive inside me:
a triple beep for a warning, an unending screech

means terror, the soft *breathe in-hold your breath-
breathe out* command is a lullabic dirge. I sway
into a small dream in which I'm standing outside

a threshold. It's empty inside because no one
is normal. Everyone is only acting. Every voice
I hear is blue and outside the margin. Every body,

blue and outside, too. Hands, blue from hiding
their blue bodies. Mouths, blue from biting
others blue. I dig my right fingers

into the squeeze ball. *It hurts.*

It blues. Every body hurts.

Every body is blue.

46. I arrived early, as always

By Magauta Nicole Sapho

I arrived early, as always,
and saw it waiting — the middle seat. I sat. Braced for fate.
A book snatched from my hands. Confidence cracked like chalk.
Gabotse Wena Ga o tsebe selo — you know nothing. Words made for me. Words
that bludgeon.

My pen skids. Palms slick.
Wood-smell sharpens. Judging. How did I forget hydrogen?
Thought scatters. I cannot focus, cannot anchor.
I tell myself: I'm here to fix my life,
but underneath, I'm here gripping a knife. Their laughter carves: you don't belong.

I stare at my unbonded carbon, shamed. I torch it in my skull,
but the taunts keep unspooling me.
Still, I continue.
I know I don't belong here —
I'm here for my sake, not their applause. I steel myself, try to exist.

The x stays unsolved. Their eyes slide past me.
They crown the other learner.
I smile — a hollowing smile. "A lady must be smart," they say,
judgement glazing their eyes, tar in their tone.

By sunrise I'm here again.
The middle seat, still warm from yesterday. My mind is fraying:
would I last?
Footsteps close in. Heart drums.
I dam the rain inside my ribs.
And I ask: do I belong, or am I just a stray outsider, gnawing at a door
that won't open?

47. Numbers, From the Outside

By Ishaq Isa El-Qassi

They said *grief should be brief*,
cleared before the next post.
So the dead came quietly
names first, then nothing,
dust brushed off
like an inconvenience.

Faces flattened
until they'd passed
as numbers on a screen.
On X, Instagram and Meta,
somewhere a woman learns
not to remember.

They call it strength.
They call it what it isn't.

She's told the ground closes faster
if you don't look.
From the outside,
it almost seems true.

A spokesman returns,
voice steady:
"Security has improved."
A boosted post,
nudged along by the algorithm,
already leaning the wrong way.
Words cannot stand guard.

But language carries no smell.
It doesn't come back for bone.

In Kondo, now off the map,
children count differently:

a father gone,
a brother cut mid-sentence.
They don't write it down.

And we stand outside it,
even when it's ours.

Memory is a risk.
Keep it light. Portable.

They will call this peace
until numbers stand
where bodies were.

DRAFT

48. Grasping Steam

By Victoria Amune

I see them,
heads bowed as if
paying obeisance,
lips parted over paper.
Eyes glistening like
sun-touched water.

My mind's fingers
try to grasp their
adoration over a few words,
but it disappears like steam,
always out of reach.

Surely,
It's the disease of joblessness.
This is a symptom.

But sometimes,
I wonder if it's contagious.
If I could catch it too.
Perhaps,
only then would I understand.

49. I hold God through my mother's hands

By Henry Opeyemi

I hold my mother **in a love** forbidden by God,
wrecking righteously through His touch of absence.
In memory's quiet garden, I pick a flower dying
of beauty, I could carve my mother's face from it and
give the Lord in exchange for mercy. When I was younger,
to love a thing meant to love it with its ruins, to hold it until
light breaks out of it, to carry it all across the world, blemished.
I need this love to erase the pain, but my mother's love is insufficient.
My mother—a lethal, practising perfection. I am my mother's
first defect, the product of her first orgasm, drenched in deformity.
The stretching of my beauty heaved toward denial. If you ask for
my fruitfulness, I will show you the glitter of my impurities,
meek as a dove, bright and white. Once, I stretched my hands
into the wind in search of a lover, my mother's hand met mine
instead, caressing me with all the love I never had. Is my mother
the love of my life? Perhaps love is not a thing I am allowed to
find outside her body. I baptised my rejection again. As a poet,
rejection is a kind of love you must learn to accept. I milk out all the
darkness that my hands could not turn to light. My hands, too,
carry my ache jealously, shielding my reproach into an attempt to
resurrect a moth from a hurricane. The world is too cruel for my
mother's love, but she won't listen; her love serves as a crucifix
for both the thief and the messiah. Am I truly the messiah? How can
this love come with a cross? The lingering of a **gloomy** wound. The
love purges me, bares me in the hoovering of creation. The **love of hurt,**
the arrival of my wandering. In my dream, a girl kissed me without
my mother's consent. I woke up in a river, my mother, washing the girl's
iniquity from my body. She said: Ọmọ Olórún nì wá, a kò gbòdò tí ọwọ́ sínú ẹ̀sẹ̀.
We are children of God. We must not dip our hands in sin.
I waited for the Lord at the end of this love, offering him a cross for another
crucifixion, to die again on His right hand, my soul seeking His kingdom.

50. Wounded

By Mercedes Ovis

A man once said,

Child,

the joy of words lies in their wholeness

in speaking a meaning

exactly as you hold it,

in an intimate embrace.

But words are useless, Sisters,

especially sentences.

They don't stand for anything.

How can they explain how I feel

here where I lie strangled

a body in a lover's bathroom-

his ending clean,

mine unfinished.

The coward!

No courage to own the deed.

My words forever trapped in my mangled throat

~~yes-~~

~~no~~

~~beaten~~

~~pain~~

~~alone~~

~~it hurts~~

~~so it is~~

escape

~~trapped~~

You love me you said.

No one

can have me other than you.

Hollow words,

all silenced long before this fateful hour.

Words are useless, Sisters,

especially sentences.

They don't stand for anything.

How can they?

How can I breathe joy into them

when joy-life itself-

was the first taken?

51. Chasing Dreams

By Chiemeziem Everest Udochukwu

I am at the track but the track
is a corridor, institutional green,
the kind with shoo-ins
who lobbied for head starts.
The race is already on.
I am in it. I can feel my legs,
the particular joy of speed
returning to a body wearied
of asking permission first.
But the corridor keeps
erecting doors and each door
requires a form filled out
in a room I can't find my way into.
The official holds my papers,
an X-ray under fluorescence,
reading a label in the document
that only *training* lets one see.
The form requires a witness
who should not resemble me.
I know this corridor.
Infinite- it does not end.
But there is a finish line
so I run door to door.
The forms multiply in my hands,
in the manner biases
block-set into barricades
So I open my hands
and let the papers go
I run the length
of what remains
and the tape
sunders
across my chest
and I wake up

still running,
still not looking back,
the corridor behind me
full of discarded proofs
waiting for the witness
who will never come.

DRAFT

52. This Poet Is a Banker

By Terry Egharavba

This poet crucifies himself on the cross of a suit,
nails the hand that holds a pen to a borrowed desk,
bends his spine to balance other men's profits.

Survival is folded into a Windsor knot,
starved into the shape of something presentable.

I did not ask for this gift,
like Odewale, cursed before first breath.

I did not jump up and say Mo gba.

But it came. And like an Ifa priest

I am bound to this deity,

Èlẹ̀dàá that ties my shadow to a pen.

Àṣẹ, even here, even in a suit.

The drifter seeps.

From the dark behind the sternum,
a stain that spreads without my blessing
slow and sweet, the way rust claims a nail.

I cannot close my ribs around it,

It has already tasted air,

Daily, when the last signature releases me,
the one I drowned in the suit stirs,

hook in my throat, cramp in my chest,
my hand moving before I decide
the cut begins its own sentence.
Ìyà is the ink.

In this country a poem is a well
dug in a city that only drinks oil,
So I feed my hours to the god that keeps the lights on
and sign each poem with a name
the suit never knew,
Akòwékòwùrà, ẹni ìwé kò lè bọ

Glossary

1. Sermoner - an archaic noun used humorously or derogatively to refer to a preacher.
2. 'And still I rise' - a famous quotation from Mary Angelou's poem with same title.
3. *Olamichayin Akulijele* - an Igala deity my father worshipped. He left my father's prayers unanswered before he died. The name literally means "my life is a life of joy and laughter." Tedu Ojo is an Igala sentence for "I beg you in the name of God." The Igala are the predominant tribe in the Northern Central region of Kogi State, Nigeria.

About Contributors

1. **Ajise Vincent** is an Economist based in Lagos, Nigeria. His works have appeared in *Jalada*, *Ake Review*, *Saraba*, *Bombay Review*, and *Birmingham Arts Journal*, among others. He is a recipient of the *Eriata Oribhabor Poetry Prize 2015* and *Akuko Poetry Prize 2022*. He loves coffee, blondes, and turtles.
2. **Ann Nziku** is a 24-year-old Nairobi, Kenya based poet whose work explores on themes of identity, vulnerability and emotional resilience. Her other poems 'Hope lingers' is published on *borderless journal* and 'little things' in the anthology *ocean of words*.
3. **Abdul Samad Jimoh** is a writer and a lawyer based in Abuja, Nigeria. He's drawn to literature that delves into the complexities and intricacies of human existence. His work has appeared in *Lolwe*, *Writer Space Africa* and *Reedsy*. He is the winner of the *TEBEBE School of Writing Challenge 2024*.
4. **Adegoke Adeola** is a journalist, political commentator, and poet whose work engages themes of gender identity, equality, race, and violence. His writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Novel Afrique*, *Caucasus Journal of Milton Studies*, *Kind Writers Literary Magazine*, *Literanation*, *Praxis Magazine*, and *BN Magazine* among others.

5. **Alabi Miracle Mezabo** is a Nigerian poet and educator based in Edo State. After earning his Law degree from Ambrose Alli University, he transitioned into the classroom, where he teaches English and Literature. His writing is informed by both the rigor of legal study and a passion for literary analysis.
6. **Audrey Neema** is a Kenyan writer.
7. **Benjamin N. Amakobe** is a Kenyan literary scholar, poet, writer and educator aged 23 with passion in the power of the pen. He is currently a student at The University of Kabianga, Kenya pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Education. He has published literary works with various anthologies including "Wheelsong Poetry Anthology 7" and others.
8. **Blessing Ojo** is a Nigerian poet based in Abuja, where he spends most of his time teaching creative writing, crafting poetry, and guiding children to literary and art festivals. His poems have appeared in *Frontier Poetry*, *The Shallow Tales*, *Cón-scìò*, *The Poetry NND Column*, *The Deadlands*, and elsewhere. He coordinates the Hill-Top Creative Arts Foundation, Abuja. He is the recipient of the 9th Korea-Nigeria Poetry Prize (Ambassador Special Prize), the 2024 Eugenia Abu/Sevhage International Prize for Creative Nonfiction, the 2025 Golden Award for Art Administrators, and the 2026 Visual/Experimental Poetry Award.

9. Chiamaka Ogiji writes from Abakaliki. She is Igbo-Ibibio. She loves to read and is sometimes completely lost in books, if she weren't busy chasing her dreams of becoming a lawyer, she'd be in the Caribbean sipping coconut water and writing stories if her account balances properly. Her works have been published in Odd magazine, Kalahari Review, Shuzia Campus, Reformers of Africa, The 7th Chinua Achebe Anthology. She was longlisted for the ZODML prize and the Blessing Kolajo Poetry Prize 2024.

10. Celestine Kenechukwu Onah is a graduate of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. She grew up in Enugu, in the Eastern part of Nigeria. She is a lover of literature. She is 24 years old and though has written many poems, has only been published once.

11. Chidebelu Emmanuel Nnazoba writing as Deb Angel, is an emerging poet from Igbo, Nigeria, whose verses weave culture, emotion, and imagination into compelling art. Rooted in African heritage, his poetry explores identity, resilience, and human experience, crafting lyrical expressions that resonate deeply and celebrate the beauty of words.

12. Chiemeziem Everest Udochukwu's work has appeared in EVENT Magazine, Flash Fiction Online, The Evergreen Review, Lolwe, Peatsmoke Journal, Efiko Magazine, Naira Stories, and elsewhere. He won the EC Michaels' Short Story

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13. Damilola Oyedeji is a Nigerian poet, essayist, and literary critic. Her work explores intersectional discourses of Black bodies experiences. Damilola is the author of the forthcoming chapbook *Blue Scapes*, with Thirty West Publishing House, PA. A Best of the Net nominee, as well as recipient of the 2026 William Walker Excellence in Critical Writing Award, the 2025 Robert Henigan Critical Essay Award, and the C.H. Gelin Graduate Fellowship Award, her works have appeared in LLIDS Journal, Lolwe, Orange Blossom Review, The Shallow Tales Review, Brittle Paper, The Nigeria Review, Talon Review, Belfast Review, Poetry Journal, the Spring Writing Fellowship 2023 Anthology, and elsewhere. A past fellow of the Spring Writing Fellowship herself, Damilola mentors emerging writers in creative nonfiction through the Spring Writing Fellowship. She is a PhD student in Creative Writing at Texas Tech University and holds a master's degree in English from Missouri State University.

14. Denoo Edinam Yawo is a Ghanaian poet/writer, community builder, researcher, and creative strategist with a soft spot for stories that heal and disrupt. She is

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15. Ethan Bramwell is a 31-year-old poet, entering his third poetry competition. This entry is especially meaningful as it honours his late father who passed away last April.

16. George Zulu is from Lusaka Zambia.

17. Halima Raji writes about the inner worlds of African girls for whom a classroom is a dream, and a dowry is a destiny. Her work explores how tradition, poverty, and gender collide to close school doors—and how the desire to learn survives in whispers, in folded cloth, and in mothers who refuse to pass on the same sentence. She believes poetry can hold both the wound and the vow.

18. Henry Opeyemi is a writer, storyteller and a performance poet, who wants to someday sell out the 02 Arena as a performance poet. He is the author of two poetry chapbooks 'Autopsy of Old Fractured Wounds' (Ghost City Press 2024) and 'The Volume of Constant Screams' (Cat Courtyard Press 2025). His work has appeared on Poetry Column-NND, Ghost City Press, One Poem Only, Voice of Africa Literature and elsewhere. When he is not writing, he is teaching hearing impaired kids how to play chess.

19. Hyginus Ekwuazi is Nigerian. He has published five collections of poetry and won multiple ANA Awards: [2007; 2007; 2008; 2010]. He has been longlisted for the Nigeria Prize for Literature [2009; 2017; 2024]. He was the Director of the National Film Institute, Jos, the Managing Director of Nigeria Film Corporation, Jos. He is now a Professor of Broadcasting & Film at the University of Ibadan and an adjunct professor at Pan-Atlantic University in Lagos.

20. Imole Olusanya Imole Olusanya is a Nigerian writer and poet exploring themes of self, family, and society through memory, satire, and everyday life. His pieces have been featured across several literary platforms, including Oriire, The Poetry Journal, The Kahalari Review and international anthologies.

21. Isah Qulsum is a Science Laboratory Technology student at Nasarawa State University, Nigeria, discovering the world of poetry.

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- 23. Janine Milne** is a Literature and Creative Writing graduate from UNISA. Her poetry has appeared in Sol Plaatje European Poetry Award anthologies and Stanzas and won the 2017 MacGregor Poetry Prize. She has published short fiction in Short Sharp Stories, Bloody Parchment, and Lemonwood Quarterly.
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- 25. Jive Lubungu** holds a PhD Lit., MA Lit., MBA in Project Management, Cert. - Monitoring & Evaluation, Cert. Project Consultancy, Cert.- Climate Change AI, Cert. Development Economics. He is a lecturer, author, and researcher and an Assistant Dean at the Postgraduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences in Kwame Nkrumah University, Kabwe, Zambia.
- 26. Jonathan Ampofo** is an eighteen-year-old Ghanaian poet.
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30. Mariam Yussuff is an English Education student and a prolific poet focused on nature, peace, and emotional vulnerability. Mariam's work has been featured in *Poetry and Art News*, following a published interview in April 2026. This consistent creative practice aims to capture the subtle and complex truths of the human experience.

31. Marvel Essien is a Christian and performance poet, raised in the Southern part of Nigeria. Her artwork is an intentional blend of faith, control, and memory. Her work interrogates the sacred—where it heals, where it wounds, and what it leaves behind. From personal and inherited narratives, her poetry ignites beauty in mundane things.

32. Marvinci Bobbylex-Odual is an emerging poet from Rivers State in southern Nigeria. Co-winner of an 'Honourable Mention' in the 2025 *The World in Us* writing competition, he has works published or forthcoming in *cataloguing poetry magazine* and *La Rotonde Review*. He tweets @marv1nci.

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34. Mosimiloluwa Dorcas Kupoluyi is a 19-year-old published author and spoken word artist from Lagos, Nigeria. Her work features in the 2026 *Lady Dynamique African Anthology*. She is a Gold Award Winner of the Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition 2023 and studies Geology at the University of Lagos.

35. Mercedes Ovis is a poet whose work explores gender-based violence, relational trauma, memory, and survival. Through intimate and unsettling imagery, her poetry examines the body, language, and domestic spaces as sites of control, fracture, and resistance. She is the author of *A Monologue of Love and Madness*.

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37. Neo Samunzala is an Information Systems analyst who lives and works in Francistown City, Botswana. She loves the art of creative thinking, writing and reading. Her poem, 'My lover appears,' in *Silhouettes of Love* by Abdulafeez Adesokan from Lagos, Nigeria. 'Love's tale' poem is featured at: www.poeticous.com

38. Nmadi Bryan Ndiolo explores the body as a unit of expression— grief, music, language, faith, trauma, identity and othernesses. He has been published in New Orleans Review, The Shallow Tales Review, The Kalahari Review, and Konya Shamsrumi. He tweets at @mirrorofbryan and grams at @firelord_bryan.

39. Nas Jolaade studied at the University of Ibadan. His work has appeared in Bracken Magazine, New Nottingham Magazine, WriterSpace Africa, Brittle Paper, Poetry Sango-Ota, Okiti Literary, and others. He was a finalist for the 2024 Kofi Awoonor Poetry Prize. He tweets @thejolaade.

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41. Oratilwe Mahlangu is a South- African young woman from Cape Town and is currently a student at the University of the Western Cape. Growing up, she always knew that something in her had an urge to create stories and poems. She finds joy in the unknown world of words.

42. Phyllis Oniopusaziba Akpoti is an emerging writer from Nigeria. She is interested in using literature as an expressive tool for saying the things her tongue may be timid to express. Although she is currently unpublished and still honing her skills, she continues to make efforts to get her voice out there, daring to speak her truth in the best way she can.

43. Rachael Ajisafe is a 2nd-year law student at Olabisi Onabanjo University and an award-winning writer. She's won the Witsprouts Storytelling Prize and placed in the Eriata Oribhabor Poetry Prize, ZODML Poetry Prize, and Framefest Abuja. Her work appears in Lounloun Magazine, and she's passionate about inspiring others through storytelling.

44. Taofeek Ayeyemi "Aswagaawy" is a Nigerian lawyer, writer and author of a full-length collection "Aubade at Night or Serenade in the Morning" (FlowerSong Press, 2021). A BotN and Pushcart Prize Nominee, his works have appeared in

Lucent Dreaming, Up-the-Staircase Quarterly, FERAL, Akitsu Quarterly, Banyan Review, Conscio, Agbowó, and elsewhere. He won the 2021 Loft Books Flash Fiction Competition, and 2nd Places in 2025 Octofest poetry contest.

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

46. Toluwanimi Hannah Ajayi is a Nigerian poet.

47. Tshegofatjo Makhafola is a South African poet, writer, and award-winning spoken word artist based in Johannesburg. Known for exploring themes of Blackness and queerness, he won the Poetry Africa and Windybrow slam in 2023. His work appears in publications such as *New Contrast*, *Poetry Potion*, and *bath magg*, often highlighting deep, emotive storytelling.

48. Victoria Amune is an emerging writer and poet from Nigeria. She studied English language and Literature in the University of Benin. When she's not working as a teacher, she's either reading or writing fiction and poems. She aspires to write words that would reach hearts all over the world.

49. Victoria Kerubo is a writer and architectural designer based in Nairobi, Kenya. Her writing gravitates towards the absurdities of life. She currently experiments

with different poetry forms. Her work has been featured in the Kalahari Review, Writers' Space Africa, Afrocritik, African Writer Magazine and elsewhere.

50. Victor Ukachukwu from Ebonyi State, Nigeria. He writes in simple language with philosophical depth. His works explore the human condition as a moral duty, memory, and personal growth, using everyday experiences to examine how choices and responsibility define human existence. This is his first time participating in The Annual Bridgette James Poetry competition.

51. Yuwinn A. Kraukamp is a bilingual writer from the coastal corner of Cape Agulhas, South-Africa. 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.

He became a member of the Jakes Gerwel Foundation's network of authors and artists, after participating in a writing fellowship in the Eastern Cape in Oct-Nov 2022. In that same year, he was one of two South-Africans whose writing was honourably mentioned and celebrated at The Future Feminist Awards in California. His writing focuses on political transitions, moral complexity, loss, grief, trauma and rebirth. A variety of his short stories have been published in magazines such as Huisgenoot and Kuier, and within collections such as the Short-Sharp-Stories anthology and FicSci. In 2024, he was part of a science-meets-creativity workshop hosted by the University of Stellenbosch and the South-African Research Chair; where he produced climate-change fiction that was published in an oceanic-research anthology in June 2025. In October 2025, he participated in a writing residency alongside six African writers at the Johannesburg Institute of Advanced Study (J.I.A.S), where they explored the political roles and responsibilities of poetry and short stories.

52. Zizipho Godana is a writer from South Africa. She holds a BA in Psychology and Criminology from the University of South Africa. Her passion for writing originates from my deep love of cinema. Her writing can be found, or is

forthcoming, in *African Writer Magazine*, *Writers Space Africa Magazine*, *West Trade Review*, *Frontier Poetry*, and *Brittle Paper*.

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Alphabetical List of 50 Poems in Collection

1. A bathroom is a logical place to hide by Linda Sparks
2. A Spiritless Eureka by Toluwanimi Hannah Ajayi
3. A stranger inside a familiar face by Ann Nziku
4. A Stranger Under My Skin Rachael Ajisafe
5. Alone and Happy by Joanita Richter
6. and they said: Be Like the Porcupine by Hyginus O. Ekwuaz
7. Audience of My Own by Benjamin N. Amakobe
8. Beloved Country by Zizipho Godana
9. Bohemian by Audrey Neema
10. Buy a Casket for Dorcas by Chiamaka Ogiji
11. Chasing dreams by Chiemeziem Everest Udochukwu
12. Close, but aloof by Celestine Kenechukwu Onah
13. Coronach on Easter by Adegoke Adeola
14. Gaps, spaces and fences by Isah Qulsum
15. Grasping Steam by Victoria Amune
16. Homeland: Together We Sit and She Tells Me a Story by
Nailah Tataa
17. Horseback by Ethan Bramwell
18. Hymn for a Headless Silhouette by Imole Olusanya
19. I am a foreigner in my body by Neo Samunzala
20. I arrived early, as always by Magauta Nicole Sapho
21. I came here dyed with loss by Blessing Ojo
22. I hold God through my mother's hands by Henry Opeyemi
23. In Search of Another Ending by Abdul Samad Jimoh
24. Invasive outsider's aroma by Jive Lubbungu
25. Invocation by Taofeek Ayeyemi

26. Journey of Truth by Mariam Yussuff
27. Margins by Damilola Oyedeji
28. My Illusions & The Truth by George Zulu
29. Numbers, From the Outside by Ishaq Isa El-Qassi
30. *Onye Iro*: Litany of Exile by Nmadi Bryan Ndiolo
31. Olamichayin Akulijele by Ocheni Kazeem Oneshojo
32. Queer by Tshegofatjo Makhafola
33. Raw/Rou by Yuwinn A. Kraukamp
34. Scarf of Stigma by Phyllis Oniopusaziba Akpoti
35. Spectator at the Border of Massacre by Michael Excel
Chinagorom
36. Stranger Danger by Edinam Denoo
37. The beauty salon by Kauser Parveen
38. The Etymology of Homesickness by Janine Milne
39. The Free Man by Chidebelu Emmanuel Nnazoba
40. The Girl Who Asked for a Pen by Halima Raji
41. the origin of silence by Ajise Vincent
42. This Poet is a Banker by Terry Egharavba
43. The Monster Home Made by Mosimiloluwa Dorcas Kupoluyi
44. The priest's litany by Alabi Miracle Mezabo
45. Theophany by Marvinci Bobbylex-Oduali
46. This Goliath Was a Victim by Nas Jolaade
47. Veil of deceit by Jonathan Ampofo
48. Water Jugs by Ukachukwu Victor Ikechukwu
49. We are Tired of Burying by Victoria Kerubo
50. What Privilege by Brett Anderson
51. When I Was Alone by Oratilwe Mahlangu
52. Wounded by Mercedes Ovis

Shortlisted entries

1. BR 360184: Ancestry and Borders
2. BR 587470: Buy a casket for Dorcas (Ezenwa-Ohaeto Prize + YP Category)
3. BR 634572: The creature's lament (Young Person Category)
4. BR 842519: The Free Man
5. EB 856421: The Girl Who Asked for a Pen
6. BR 286741: Horseback
7. BR175981: Margins
8. BR 130656: *Onye Iro*: Litany of Exile
9. BR 638241: *Onye Obia* (Ezenwa-Ohaeto Prize + YP Category)
10. BR 238570: Raw/Rou
11. BR 804693 Spectator at the Border of Massacre
12. BR13804: Stranger Danger
13. BR 18458: The Etymology of Homesickness
14. BR 79228: Theophany (Young Person Category)
15. BR 824690: The priest's litany
16. BR 716845: What privilege

Longlisted Entries

1. **EB 775284:** A Spiritless Eureka by Toluwanimi Hannah Ajayi - **Nigeria**
2. **BR05503:** A Stranger Under My Skin by Rachael Ajisafe- **Nigeria**
3. **EB 804257:** Against My Will by Oluseyi Ogunbanwo Joseph - **Nigeria**
4. **BR 360184:** Ancestry and Borders by Ojo Olumide Emmanuel - **Nigeria**
5. **BR 587470:** Buy a casket for Dorcas by Chiamaka Ogiji (**Ezenwa-Ohaeto Prize + Young Person Category**) - **Nigeria**
6. **EB 681539:** Give me the ministerial seat by Hannah Ojingiri - **Nigeria**
7. **BR02134:** Homeland: Together We Sit and She Tells Me a Story by Nailah Tataa - **Kenyan Diaspora**
8. **BR 286741:** Horseback by Ethan Bramwell - **South Africa**
9. **BR175981:** Margins by Damilola Oyedeji - **Nigerian Diaspora**
10. **BR 130656:** Onye Iro: Litany of Exile by Nmadi Bryan Ndiolo - **Nigeria**
11. **BR 638241:** Onye Ojia by Bill Nwonwu (**Ezenwa-Ohaeto Prize + (Young Person Category)**)- **Nigeria**
12. **BR 43019:** Out of Chaos Comes Beauty by Mutinta M.J Haandili AKA Tintahepps -**Zambia**
13. **EB 120693:** Outsider/ I was there but wasn't there by Jimoh Aishat Olamide- **Nigeria**
14. **BR63217:** Queer by Tshegofatjo Makhafola - **South Africa**
15. **BR 238570:** Raw/Rou by Yuwinn A. Kraukamp - **South Africa**
16. **BR 804693:** Spectator at the Border of Massacre by Excel Chinagorom Michael- **Nigeria**
17. **BR13804:** Stanger Danger by Edinam Denoo - **South Africa**
18. **BR 634572:** The creature's lament by Olivia Caldeira (**Young Person Category**) - **South Africa**
19. **BR 18458:** The Etymology of Homesickness by Janine Milne
20. **EB 856421:** The Girl Who Asked for a Pen by Halima Raji - **Nigeria**
21. **BR 804257:** The Monster Home Made by Mosimiloluwa Dorcas Kupoluyi (**Young Person Category**)- **Nigeria**
22. **BR 824690:** The priest's litany by Alabi Miracle Mezabo - **Nigeria**
23. **BR 79228:** Theophany by Marvinci Bobbylex-Oduali (**Young Person Category**) - **Nigeria**
24. **EB 569841:** Uninvited by Azeez Abiodun - **Nigeria**
25. **BR 716845:** What privilege by Brett Anderson - **South Africa**
26. **BR 842519:** The Free Man by Chidebelu Emmanuel Nnazoba - **Nigeria**

27. **BR 348670:** Congress of Voices by Dylan Mapfumo (**Young Person Category**) - Zimbabwe
28. **BR 856972:** I hold God through my mother's hands by Henry Opeyemi - Nigeria

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Outsider



The 2026 Bridgette James Poetry Competition
Winners' Anthology