

"...this anthology boldly marks a before and after moment in  
the African literary tradition..."

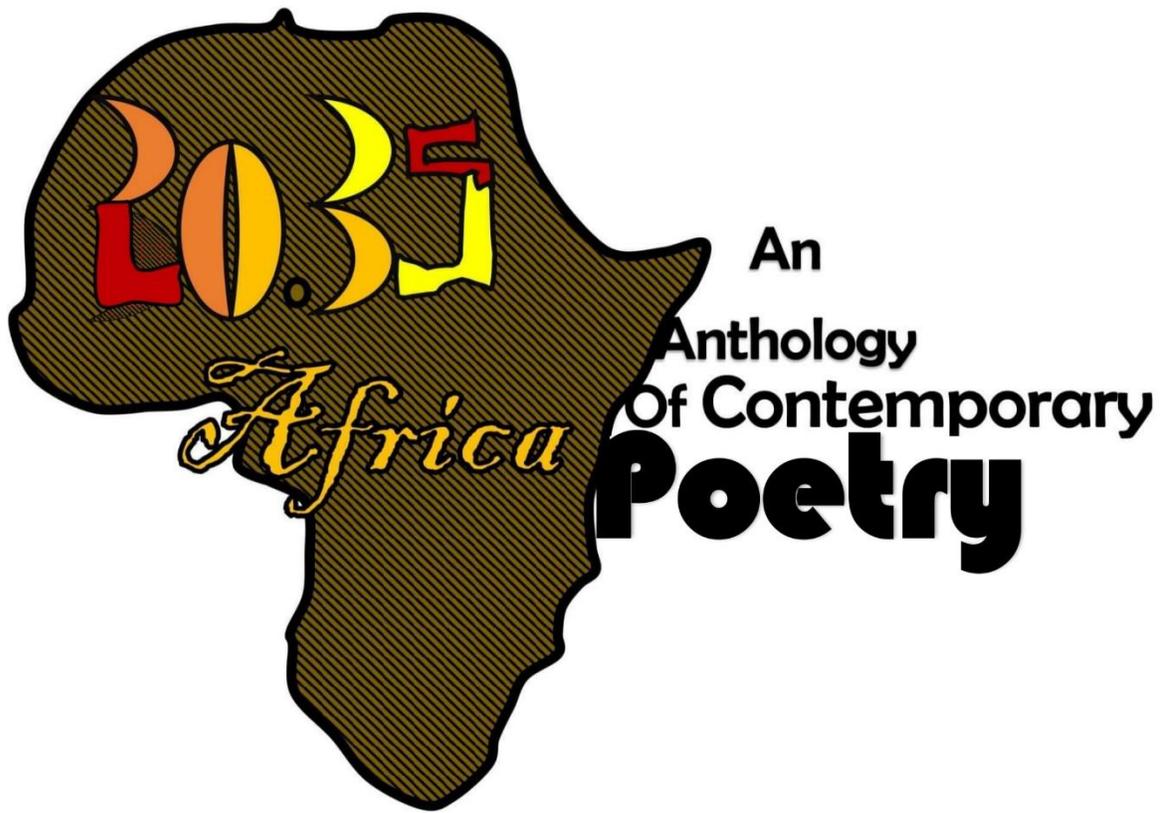
Mukoma Wa Ngugi, author of *Nairobi Heat & Logotherapy*

20.35 Africa

An  
Anthology  
of  
Contemporary Poetry

GUEST-EDITED BY:

Safia Elhillo & Gbenga Adesina



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# 20.35 Africa

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*20.35 Africa: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry*

is dedicated to late Ugandan poet and writer,

**Joel Benjamin Ntwatwa, a.k.a. NEVENDER**

*I mean, look how you make your steps  
As though you were ascending a throne...*

*See, you're a poem in a person, right from your body to your spirit...*

– ‘The Poem You Are’

“In *20.35 Africa: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry* we see the august breadth of an African poetics that dominates the space of intersections; intersections of geography, language, gender, faith... The poems gathered here are insights into the possibilities that take shape when we bridge our cultural specificities with a dedication to craft and aesthetic vision. These poems reach well beyond the continent and her diasporas and into the intimate spaces of every reader who encounters them.”

– Matthew Shenoda, Professor – Rhode Island School of Design and author of *Tahrir Suite: Poems*

“With poems ranging from interrogations of the nature of borders and the legacies of colonialism to questions of nationhood and ethnicity; reflections on gender and identity to legacies of personal trauma and national violence, the editors of *20.35 Africa: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry* have taken care to select a wide variety of themes and voices that reflect the myriad experiences of young African writers coming of age. The best poetry awakens language to distinct possibilities before unimagined; here, with lyrical language both hauntingly visceral and evocatively imagistic, these young African writers do just that.”

– Hope Wabuke, Professor – University of Nebraska-Lincoln and author of *Movement No.1: Trains*

“The poets here are in love with words and the fractured worlds they live in. The poems are at once sublime yet political, global but rooted and contradiction is the border they call home. The publication of this anthology boldly marks a before and after moment in the African literary tradition and it leaves me feeling humbled, lucky and blessed to be a witness. “

– Mukoma Wa Ngugi, Professor – Cornell University and author of *Nairobi Heat & Logotherapy*

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>		viii
<b>From the Editor-in-Chief</b>		xii
<i>After Suicide</i>	<b>AKPA ARINZE</b>	1
<i>Clothing</i>	<b>AREMU ADAMS ADEBISI</b>	2
<i>And I've mastered the art of receiving handouts because I come from this place</i>	<b>AMA ASANTEWA DIAKA</b>	4
<i>old things</i>	<b>MICHELLE ANGWENYI</b>	5
<i>Tender Crow's Feet</i>	<b>J.K. ANOWE</b>	7
<i>Reincarnation</i>	<b>AFUA ANSONG</b>	9
<i>A dream in English</i>	<b>LILLIAN AKAMPURIRA AUJO</b>	11
<i>Revision</i>	<b>VICTORIA ADUKWEI BULLEY</b>	13
<i>♣ I Mourned What I Could Not Name</i>	<b>YASMIN BELKHYR</b>	15
<i>A Long Sky</i>	<b>THATO CHUMA</b>	16
<i>Thirteenth</i>	<b>NICA CORNELL</b>	17
<i>Acacia</i>	<b>MALAK EL-QUESSNY</b>	18
<i>Ten lessons in bleeding</i>	<b>SARAH GODSELL</b>	20
<i>Let Me Go</i>	<b>KAREN JENNINGS</b>	22
<i>When They Ask What My Name Means</i>	<b>GLORIA KICONCO</b>	24
<i>Silver Spoons</i>	<b>LYDIA KASESE</b>	26
<i>Moon Houses</i>	<b>DOROTHY KIGEN</b>	27
<i>Federal</i>	<b>LIYOU LIBSEKAL</b>	28
<i>and these are eyes</i>	<b>ASHLEY MAKUE</b>	29
<i>Genesis</i>	<b>NKATEKO MASINGA</b>	30
<i>Prodigal Son</i>	<b>CHESWAYO MPHANZA</b>	32

<i>Poem to be read from Right to Left</i>	<b>M.E. MUSTAFA</b>	34
<i>Asphyxia</i>	<b>TARIRO NDORO</b>	36
<i>I Watch You Transfigure</i>	<b>KECHI NOMU</b>	37
<i>Last Night in Tawargha</i>	<b>SALAWU OLAJIDE</b>	38
<i>Loneliness</i>	<b>ROMEO ORIOGUN</b>	39
<i>When My Mother Speaks of New Edition</i>	<b>OLATUNDE OSINAIKE</b>	40
<i>Folktales</i>	<b>CLAUDIA OWUSU</b>	42
<i>Be(coming) home to myself</i>	<b>DAAD SHARFI</b>	43
<i>Turmeric</i>	<b>ALEXIS TEYIE</b>	44
<i>The Dead Bodies' Artist</i>	<b>EJIOFOR UGWU</b>	46
<i>Fragile</i>	<b>VICTOR UGWU</b>	48
<i>Driving Lessons with My Father</i>	<b>TRYPHENA YEBOAH</b>	50
<b>Contributors' Bio</b>		52

## Introduction

The poems we have curated in this anthology are electric, unruly, charged with desire and melancholies. They are intensely private yet quite magically find a way to be communal. There is a borderlessness to the poems, not just of geographies and identities but also of sensibility, syntax, style, subversion of the white space and awakening of previously submerged subjectivities. The emotions stretch and carve a place for your specific protagonism. There is vastness, generosity. We were particularly drawn to the private poignancy of the voices. African literature has always been defined through the political and postcolonial, but this generation of voices turn inward toward interrogating tyranny of the intimate space. The private climates are called forth and lyrically examined. Categories are destabilized, and new freedoms emerge. Voices of women and queer people dominate the firmament and the men here mostly pursue a reimagined masculinity. Tenderness. Vulnerability. The embrace of intimacy, and ethical solidarities.

This is an exciting, transformative time in African poetry—largely thanks to projects like the African Poetry Book Fund and their corresponding prizes and publication opportunities, who, with the sheer number of African poets they publish, allow us to have a different sort of conversation around African poetry. Just as there is no singular performance of African identity, there is, increasingly, no singular, absolute aesthetic requirement in the African poetry of today. The poems in this anthology add to the living, electric archive in this conversation. We believe that even this relatively small selection of poems demonstrates the boundlessness of styles, concerns, experiments, and curiosities present in today's African writing, today's emerging African writers.

I (Safia) grew up Sudanese in diaspora, first within Africa, then on to Europe and, finally, America, where I've spent more than half my life so far. While so many markers of my identity shifted—my nationality, the language I acquired for my race, my

language—Africanness remained the only constant, the only identity that survived across borders because of the multitudes it was able to contain. And this was true of the literature, too, and the way it shifted and expanded over the years, across generations: first in its freshly postcolonial concerns, in conversations around leaving and returning, and then, as diasporas continued to grow, works on both sides, by those who stayed and those who left and never returned. All engaging a breadth of curiosities, increasingly unbound by rigid requirements of theme and subject matter, all increasingly experimental and inventive. All African—a unifying identity that did not succumb to the violence of borders.

I (Gbenga) grew up mostly on the continent. But to be African is to be translational, ancient modernities intersect on your body. Even now, I take my global sojourns simply and complexly as an investigation of oceanic destinies bodies like mine have encountered for centuries. For every one of the nations in Europe or in North America I have entered, there was a history and a box waiting for my body. Long before I arrived, I was anticipated. Cultural memory teaches me then that I have kin and communities through ethical alliances, blood, diaspora and imaginative solidarities. This anthology in a way is a seal of that community.

I think now of two books in my childhood and early adulthood that were ports of transport: *The Poetry of Black Africa*, an anthology of poems edited by Africa's first Nobel laureate in Literature, Wole Soyinka, and *West African Verses*, another anthology edited by Donatus I. Nwoga. Those books were my first introduction to global Africanness. I see the books even now through the eyes of memory: one brown and beige, the other yellow, both frayed at the edges from much thumbing. I committed many of those poems to memory. I was fascinated by the multiplicity of joys. Africanness in those poems was a complicated thing. A thing in flux and of the spirit. An ethical center

beyond a geographical one. An open door as against a rigid wall. It is to this multiplicity that I trace my aesthetic lineage.

So many identities, in this world cut up by borders, are intended as borders themselves—defining oneself as one thing in order to differentiate oneself from another, from what one is *not*. And while so many identities are, in this way, directly caused by what one isn't, limited to opposing the opposite of oneself, Africanness is expansive, is boundless, is entirely defined and redefined within itself. We decided this would be central to our editorial vision.

The poems in this anthology are individuated, each the voice of a charge. Lines from Akpa Arinze's "After Suicide" have followed us around: a low, persistent voice of ache and trembling. After reading that poem, something in us shifted:

*When you died mum moved your bed,  
I took your place.*

*It was not difficult changing the television channel  
from Keeping Up with the Kardashians to Black-ish.*

*At night your dog kept barking,  
we thought it was learning to accept the heat.*

The double sabre of direct speech cadenced with rawness and much vulnerability affixed a quality of truth to the poem. This is a poem that will live with us for a while.

Michelle Angwenyi, in "old things", took this mastery of elegy forward:

*You fold everything in the grainy velour of your birth: strings, coins, matchsticks,  
green soda bottles —  
returning to the intangibility of time.*

*left behind, as you walk away, the last I see of you is your photograph. an obliteration yet your substantial form, this fading away into its own...*

J.K. Anowe, in “Tender Crow’s Feet”, complicates a desire that is African, and utterly human, and thus rescues it from the jaws of invented fears and shame. In Afua Ansong’s “Reincarnation”, we felt “*a continuous reverberation of light wings.*” Daad Sharfi, in her inventive poem “Be(coming) home to myself”, foregrounds us in this project of fluid citizenships:

*At the end of the night,  
I peel this country off my skin  
I peel the other one too  
I undress until I can call nothing but this body a home.*

The question of language and linguistic destinies keep bobbing up to the surface of the sea that this project is. In Yasmin Belkhyr’s “& I Mourned What I Could Not Name”, this line stood out and stung us with its ache: “*They beat our tongues smooth*”. The “*they*” of the poem is a lyric indictment stretching across histories and cartographies. Lillian Akampurira Aujo, in “A dream in English”, became even more direct:

*I am stumbling over the tongue of my father and his father  
before him I am falling*

These poems in entirety have held us and rocked us and ruined us like a hand of mercy.

Feast!

**Safia Elhillo & Gbenga Adesina**

***Guest Editors***

## **In Poetry: Contributing Agency to a Thriving Generation**

I was an undergraduate when I first noticed the visibility gap between fiction and poetry in contemporary African literature. I'd wondered a lot why, as a student of English and Literature, nothing in my entire course work involved contemporary African poets; all I knew of African poetry at the time were colonial-era and postcolonial works. The concerns of the poets of that era were so quaint they hardly resonated much in me. I wanted voices that investigated issues of my time, voices that may be about the personal or universal but relevant to my understanding of questions of my age. In the second year of undergraduate studies, with a juvenile zeal, eager to fill the void I'd felt with contemporary African poetry, I'd once suggested to a friend that we compile an anthology similar to the Norton anthologies of literature when we graduate. He probably knew the scale of such project—that it would require experience and an involvement larger than just zeal—and he told me so. But the feeling I had then was true, only that it needed to be better understood, which would happen by the time I was done with university.

In early 2017, after graduating in the previous year, I was in Nsukka ready to have the first try of an idea I'd carried for some years. I arranged a meeting with two of my poet friends, Chisom Okafor and D. E. Benson, both of whom were as excited about the idea as they were encouraging of it. We drafted the first plan of what would later become *20.35 Africa: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry*, and then contacted Laura Kaminski, Managing Editor at *Praxis Magazine Online*, and Wale Owoade, Founding Editor at *Expound*. Both were interested, Laura showed such kind, selfless involvement in the project even though the idea we'd presented to her was full of clumsy plans. She took us straight down the hard way, uncompromising with her truth, which eventually proved phenomenal toward the achievement of the project. It took a year of back-and-forth correspondence with Laura and Wale, working on the project proposal, for us to

modify the initial idea we had so that it became worthy of the quality of people we wanted to be part of it. In the last days of December 2017, we contacted Safia Elhillo and Gbenga Adesina to guest-edit the anthology; it didn't take them more than four days to say yes.

Our vision is to annually compile a collection of poets—the relatively unknown, the budding, and the established—between the ages of 20 and 35 years. We are aware that the concept of contemporary poetry could be variegated so we brought it down to age, to publish a specific generation of this wider period in African poetry. We also look to accessibility, which is why this anthology is available for free downloads online, even though the quality is high and would command monetary worth. Our desire to contribute to the community of Africans—writers and readers—who are engaged with poetry is towards the goal of engendering growth, not making profit.

There was an all-round willingness from people to be involved in this anthology, from the poets who contributed poetry to those that contributed blurbs. We received over 400 submissions (apart from the solicited contributions), which started coming in from the very day we made the call for submissions. It had felt bitter-sweet because we needed only about 20 poets from this large number. We were eclectic in deciding who contributed to the anthology. Every poet we solicited either blurb or poetry from was researched. It was an effort, but the Brunel International African Poetry Prize would release their 2018 shortlist and Cheswayo Mphanza and Michelle Angwenyi, both of whom we'd earlier solicited works from, would be there, confirming their quality.

This issue includes 33 poems, each by a different poet resident on the continent or in diaspora. Each poem is a testimony speaking in its own right to issues common to most young people of African descent. Whether they are personal or political, affecting a troubled mind characteristic of the psyche of our generation or given to asceticism, in the business of love or indifferent to it, experimental or traditional, each of the poems

have in common an attention to poetry as a form of art. We had paid attention to artistic quality in selecting only a few from the submissions we received.

The 20.35 Africa team is a five-man group of four Nigerian poets and one visual artist-writer: D. E. Benson, ‘Gbenga Adeoba, Chisom Okafor, Osinachi. Above all external support, publishing this anthology would have been in no way possible without the contribution of these immensely talented teammates. My gratitude goes to Laura Kaminski, who was unreserved with her knowledge in assisting us through the foundational stage of this project. And Wale Owoade, as amicable as he was helpful to the best of his ability. Safia Elhillo and Gbenga Adesina are two beautiful people. Their level of involvement is more appreciated when one thinks about the density of their schedule; to agree to guest-edit this anthology without any benefits shows true supportiveness. It is an honor to have Hope Wabuke, Matthew Shenoda, and Mukoma wa Ngugi say true words about this anthology. I also appreciate the people at *Frontier Poetry*, Commonwealth Writers Foundation, *Praxis Magazine*, and *Enkare* for publishing our call for submissions. The editors at *Brittle Paper* have been welcoming of our idea and work from the day we’d contacted them. We at 20.35 Africa owe them our collective gratitude for trusting our initiative.

Contemporary African poetry is not yet where it needs to be, but everything that is happening now—the various institutions that are working for the growth of poetry from young Africans—shows an uplifting from a former place of comatose. We at 20.35 Africa remain devoted to creating yet an extra module of poetic expression for young Africans.

**Ebenezer Agu**

***Editor-in-Chief***



## After Suicide

Akpa Arinze

When you died mum moved your bed,  
I took your place.

It was not difficult changing the television channel  
from *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* to *Black-ish*.

At night your dog kept barking,  
we thought it was learning to accept the heat.

We wanted happiness, you wanted flowers.  
& when the chrysanthemum germinated

you asked if I had ever thought of losing something,  
I said *no*, because denial eases the pain.

I once lost my ping pong ball, it was found in your chest.  
We are always wanting what we can't have.

At the prom, I pretended I was you just to dance  
with Judith, the one that never looked at me.

This night I write your name first  
& *I can't*... all over the paper

Hoping you won't be found in me.  
The leaves scatter, decomposing.

## Clothing

### Aremu Adams Adebisi

Because my body is a country, a water confluence,  
and a country is me and I am me with flesh and bones.  
Because when we trace the marks on our faces and palms,  
we find dust and ash in a rule of tussle between humans and jinns.  
Because when I wear the Sari— either the Ghagra or the Pavada,  
I let the Pallu drape over my shoulder freely, carelessly,  
or tuck into my waist, stretching towns from Nepal to Tamil.  
Because, 2, the Hanfu explores curves, tied with a Sash around the waist,  
and the Kimono finds straight lines appealing, influenced by the Hanfu,  
sharing an origin of drawings and designs— two hands that applaud.  
Because when I put on the Sherwani, with the Sarong patterned  
around my waist and the Tembél Hat almost covering my face,  
I find a wedding in Rajasthan, moving my feet to the Khmer dance,  
with delicious Hummus and Falafel dancing down my throat.  
Because the Keffiyeh holds two races in one, a black and a white,  
and the Jallabiyah, a long tunic garment, says in purity is peace.  
Because when I attempt to wear the Boubou, the Pagne or the Danshiki,  
I find myself ravaged in tribes whose hearts are as pure as honey,  
skins like iron, and eyes as valiant and aging as the eagle's span.  
Because the Buckskins and the Poncho have a long history  
that cuts across the Andes people and the Native Americans,  
and the Huipils of the Tlapanec people is a hundred panels in one.  
Because when I wear the Sarafan with a Beret and a Klomp on my feet,  
I see myself a Matador at the Eiffel Tower, overlooking the Red Square.  
Because the Kilt, the Lederhosen and the Smock-frock have me  
reminiscing on great warriors of the past, knowledgeable men

who once donned the wears for the unification of humankind.

Because Gakti is of the Sami people who are the people of reindeer  
and the Tapa cloth can be used to decorate walls and for poetry,  
and also sing the Tonga, sip Fiji's Kava drink and the Samoan Vaifala.

Because clothes do not betray the thread, the yarn and the spindle  
and do not negate the body when they cover its nakedness.

Because either good or worn-out, white or black, loose or fitting,  
an apparel or a homespun, they are all made from animal skin.

**And I've mastered the art of receiving handouts because I come from this place**

**Ama Asantewa Diaka**

I am hungry for a love my country cannot afford.

I want a love

that will buffer my mistakes even before I commit them

A love that has mapped out the possibilities of my existence

and made room for each one of them

A love that doesn't need me to clamour to identify as black too

just so I can swim in the opportunity pool

A love that doesn't need me to be well versed in articulating

how high I am on the needy Olympics scale to be deserving of support

A love that doesn't even need me to have an archive of pain

to be worthy of inclusion

I want a love

that doesn't need me to work like there's two of me

in this body just to be visible

A love that doesn't require me to be

both pregnant and doula

trying to pull a nirvana out of my ass just for being different

I want a love

that doesn't require me to be ridiculously multifaceted

in order to have a fraction of an equation at being equipped for survival

A love that doesn't wait for another suitor to sing praises of my genius

before recognizing my worth

Or worse, only after I'm dead

I am hungry for a love my country cannot afford,

the way white lusts for a backdrop to outshine

**old things****Michelle Angwenyi**

pulling at both sides of a miscalculation: your penchant for old things,  
old fabrics faded at their centres, heavy brass jewelry and leather strings that  
schoolboys, you included, would collect for no reason; Nairobi city pamphlets and giant,  
giant mirrors —  
that had been granted the ability to double both space, and time —  
they all fall away. now,  
endlessly exposed, now and again, and especially then when we  
stood, at ocean's edge, morphing in and out as the waves, asking for the day's compensation:  
*knowing full well this is what it means to love.*

not anyone's idea; not even an idea, to begin with.

whatever it is, from the harshness of the morning's first gritty coffee,  
through which we swallowed the previous night's fists, and indigestible,  
days-old Kiswahili sayings, we pretend to be okay, even having forgotten how,  
or more importantly, when, to read, or what it means to look at each other  
without the words between us.

some sort of primer for forgiveness.

you fold everything in the grainy velour of your birth: strings, coins, matchsticks,  
green soda bottles —  
returning to the intangibility of time.

left behind, as you walk away, the last I see of you is your photograph. an obliteration yet  
your substantial form, this fading away into its own  
resolution, both reminder, and that which it reminds us of. another old thing.

and another, one we've both known, carried around like sin — [and like sin in its duality of weight and lightness]:

you are not dead, but you have never been much alive; and  
not alive, either.

## Tender Crow's Feet

J.K. Anowe

because it holds the rest of the world like a secret  
 in the sense that when you pass through one  
 every eye is looking but untelling we name  
 it after a lineage—to come from a pedigree of women  
 who never enjoyed the sex but moaned anyway  
 i know a girl in the scene of the dream—a collector a nudist  
 a latebloomer of sorts running a forefinger over the index  
 of a facade to the outer corners of my eyes as though it is hers to unsculpt  
 as if to say—*i'll always see you as an answer...* barefeet we circumvent  
 the collarbone of the night like slowdance without holding hands  
 stopping every now & then to adjust our shadows like loincloths  
 i—with a bottle of valium she—the corkscrew until we arrive inside  
 ourselves & trigger the tripwire—a new artform showing how quick  
 we willingly default to self-destruct how but for one she exhumes all of my birth  
 marks & mental disorders till her feet begins to hurt the masochism evident  
 with every footfall every fingering of the stigma where the flower begins its bloom...  
 could we have known language to be a thing for the lost [insert question  
 mark] ask the men at babel no one knows how burdening it is waiting on the  
 universe to take your mother by her maiden name so you could grow  
 the nerve to complete the taking of your own life because like touching your  
 self in pagan places suicide is but one void telling another—*now i*  
*must leave this body & return from you* denying residues of god  
 family & love full custody hence we are quiet enough to be sudden to be  
 nothing until we mishappen... but what category of disaster is a body is a  
 country being what is it they say about dancing into your own story without soles  
 or nakedness as fireproof lord knows he let us come this far just so we

could feel us come apart   steadfast in slow [loco]motion   like rollercoaster  
passengers on a downward spiral while the country where bullets pass  
through every city like ghosts mistaking bodies for air   this city in retrospect  
of our wildly truant bones   chased our gust of ghosts  
from prairie to pavement the girl saying—   *you're falling again*  
as the sand beneath my feet   starts to quicken

**Reincarnation****Afua Ansong**

And

yes,

I died: a black swan and

woke,

sharp, in the skin of

Mitochondrial Eve.

A

shadow falls

on me like

a cold look and

suddenly my hairs rise, pupils

dilate and this almond-shaped amygdala

shivers. A continuous reverberation of light wings

flap at my face. This is absurd for on my wall, right down that American hall,  
stands a painting; a mythical conga bird

perched on a tree branch. Next to this, a picture of mother

(I am her photocopy) & I in Accra. I wake

to beads of sweat lined on my back and

copper collar bone.

On my wrist I latch, each day,

a crystal hummingbird. It plucks

nectar from fuchsia petals

as it ticks and talks the time of

my world where my niece's curled

upper lip and my cousin's small

nose are mirrors

of my grandmother's golden

face.

## A dream in English

Lillian Akampurira Aujo

I am stumbling over the tongue of my father and his father  
before him I am falling

into the calcified palms  
that bound them all  
in razor wire. every time  
I try courting syllables my tongue is cut

I cannot speak.

My memory  
reels back  
to when we were bats  
drifting in a white haze

tongues long unfurled  
from the girth of the mutuba tree.  
Never mind

that we wrapped our dead & covered our loins, still with her bark

yet somehow, our shame we left unclothed.  
earth sopping in bone-lava us burning us failing to decide

whether it was dirty whether it was a sacred purge.  
whether our soil should wash itself, and if so, with what. if the rain that fell  
was bullets with a mouth  
to eat out our souls?

We never decided. &

poison mushrooms sprouted questions

to jeer at us:

*Perhaps if you whisper to history like a man does to a woman  
she will lead you to where the spool of wrong started*

& when your children tongues un-maimed find you,

they will pulse & dance to the right lines



## iii. consolidate

in the year of our lord  
1471  
they came –

in the year of our lord  
2017  
i look for my language,  
still finding their hairs in it.

## iv. conclude

oh chulé! i stayed in portugal for a year and loved it. loved it. more than england, fam. patriot, who? water off a duck's back. two colonisers: one with better weather – what's the problem. the people were happy. it was hot. i stayed in bolhão. i'd go to the market and buy vegetables and come back to the apartment and make rice and stew. i do that when i want to feel at home. and you know i can't speak ga, but our word for onion is sabolai. right? and the portuguese word for onion? cebola. say-ball-ah. i love it. i love it and i hate it, and this year it happened again. this very january. mum played me a video of grandma singing a folk tune, and she told me that the word for 'song' in ga is lala. lala. as in, deck the halls with boughs of holly, fa-la-la-la-la can you believe that? and i was so happy to see grandma so alive, singing all these words – of which i understand nothing – see her clapping, all nearly-one-hundred-and-fully-bat-blind years of her, and even mum didn't know the story, she just translated the outline to me, which i don't remember now, but the whole time i could only stand there, i was just watching and thinking damn, this lala feels sad, this one lala sounds like a sorry song

## **& I Mourned What I Could Not Name**

**Yasmin Belkhyr**

They beat our tongues smooth.  
The kasbah shuddered and wailed.  
I teeth the language, pocked and bloody.  
The boys crashed into the sand: it welcomed them.  
In the rain, her hair was a river of petals.  
My grandfather spoke with a red tongue.  
A blade is a mirror is a blade is a wound.  
The men hauled their bodies from sea.  
The mountains vanish and took her too.  
When I return, the land spits at my feet.  
There is no shame in this, I'm told.  
The men crumbled into sand: I watched them.  
I spun in dust and gravel, nameless and red.  
Contrary to ache, I still know nothing of guilt.  
In our mouths, we bled then and bleed still.  
Her child had my hair and my eyes.  
There was only heat and forests of smoke.  
I know there is only light at the end.  
I know when it begins, it is dark.  
Contrary to wound, I still know nothing of defeat.

## A Long Sky

**Thato Chuma**

“If women could weave their pain  
It would be longer than the sky,”  
She began

My mother said  
I must hold the sun in my mouth  
For days too dark to live through  
For days that sound like mourning

She said  
To make a home for myself  
In my own heart  
To make this shrine  
which my spirit can drink from

“My child,  
Truth lives under your tongue,  
Learn to speak it”

We survive,  
Because our mothers survived.

## Thirteenth

**Nica Cornell**

Go slow-ly next time  
you are inside of me  
I am fragile, a deer  
of woven glass. Touch me  
as you would plait  
a child's hair.

Your fingers are large.  
My strings are thin.  
And when I am wet,  
like paper, I tear.

## Acacia

Malak El-Quessny

الله حيّ

Alive is god

In the vine that grows outside my mother's grave  
Enveloped in the earth she creates  
Seeping earthly light through the cracks  
Even now, she takes care of her plants.  
She feeds them.

الله حيّ

As I sit by her feet  
Our bodies  
Separated by warm earth  
You are a comforting breeze when  
I mention paradise  
As I read you His poetry  
And then write my own

الله حيّ

As the humming flies  
That hover like worker bees  
Dressed for a funeral  
An ecosystem  
Of life and death  
Sustaining cycles we learn  
To accept as our fait.



الله حيّ

As I leave the country  
And all I can think of  
Is how lucky I am  
To get to take you with me  
As we leave your grave  
And live.

الله حيّ

Until the day you get to take me with you.  
And show me the way.  
Again. And again. And again.

## Ten lessons in bleeding

Sarah Godsell

under my panties

I can bleed in secret, no one interfering in the hot

wet

blood stains enamel

but no one knows what the speckles on my cheerful yellow door

are from

intimacy with myself

the way I must touch myself,

gentle but firm, to slip the tampon in

I have layers of skin that hug me before I bleed. They cling to me even as I betray myself.

blood is better than noose. Scars better than red bath. I have never held a gun anyway.

Six.

I didn't bleed the first time. I didn't know then it was because it wasn't the first time.

Seven.

Head wounds bleed. A lot. My foot held steady on the accelerator driving you to hospital.  
me, in between you and bouncers.

me, wondering if you knew you were raping her or not.

My mom dropped a stone chess board on her toe.

It was the first time I heard her bleed. The first time I saw her swear.

I wanted to see her bones, too, not believing, really, that something had pierced her silence.

Nine.

Blood in black and white photographs tastes metallic. Like death. Those Photographs in That History lesson, waking the skulls in the back of my head.

I am not in control.

ever

## Let Me Go

**Karen Jennings**

Let me go,  
away from here.  
I'm sick for the sea  
for grey water made to foam  
on shore, for gulls, and  
whales calving, the stink  
of harbours, a fisherman's false cry.

Let me go,  
homeward  
to the mountain's grip,  
the accent of fynbos, of  
vineyards verdant-bright  
gathered on the slopes. I need  
the crush of grapes and earth,  
the comfort of a view.

Let me go, please,  
let me return  
to the places of my birth, to my  
childhood, and more.  
The streets in which I lived and  
the gardens where they're scattered, all  
my family but me.

Where they've mingled inexactly, taken up  
by foliage in various degrees,  
those straggling whispers pruned  
to silence by my absence,  
by my failure to come home.

## When They Ask What My Name Means

Gloria Kiconco

a placeholder until I return

*I don't remember*

a theory I'm testing for practicality

*who named me it's*

a way to keep existence from coming into existence

*a name so common*

a chemical component

*you could pull it out*

undercoating so I don't crack on the surface

*of a crowd. at home*

dilapidated buildings in Kikuubo

*it is not at all special*

a hammer pulled back for precision

*except when it is*

solitary confinement in Kyebando

*mine and only my*

a middle finger pulled on Colfax Ave

*mother keeps it*

an oath

*on her tongue. it*

pre-big bang conditions

*means gift or talent*

an impressionist oasis

*I'm not sure. the*

stroke mark in a dystopian painting of a picnic

*translation is so*

a hallucination. a queer delusion

*easily lost, like so*

an obsession with the smell of paper

*many maiden names*

a life vest. a swallowing wave.

*this side of patriarchy*

## Silver Spoons

Lydia Kasese

The loss of our jobs has made us soft with caring.

It has humbled our tongues

and taught us to ask

*how are you today?*

in the places where frustrations/silence/deadlines used to lie.

The new woman at work asks me what my plan is,

*if i have a plan, i laugh and say i have no plan.*

My parents are my plan.

I will go back to them and leech onto their success.

*What will you do?*

She looks down and murmurs

*i cannot go back to my parents empty handed.*

*I am their success.*

I think i wear my privilege a bit too loudly on some days.

I forget we do not all come from milk and honey,

silver spoons and golden eggs.

## Moon Houses

**Dorothy Kigen**

I burnt my finger on the last blunt  
Watched the henna vine around my ankle  
Wonder if it'll taste grassy when he kisses it  
If the salt will wash away before he sees me  
If he'll find the sand in my cracks

I read Derek Walcott on a bed of Lamu Green  
Saw the scenes pixel in the typewriter ink  
Poems stolen from the Internet to spread open on my screen  
Island words for a shadow clear sea  
Woke up at 3 to bring myself in  
From the shelter of the stars and the whisper-woven wind  
Daybed turned nightbed turned  
Starbed fronds of Milky Way  
Seen again for the first time  
Though it's not like I went anywhere in the in-between.

## **Federal**

### **Liyou Libsekal**

I watch him pace in his bored-blue fatigues and  
furrowed boots, a wild-haired stray for a shadow

the day about to set, he exhales  
and the world is all fuzz and old songs

it begins and ends at the hills of Addis Ababa

and when he rests his AK on his shoulder,  
weaves it into himself—skin, spine, steel

he's a shepherd with his herding stick

the old tune still on his breath.

**and these are eyes****Ashley Makue**

through the lens	an infant beholds colour
dew for mother	sunset fire and blood
is father	blue grey for distant escarpment
pink tongues are words	and swords
her skin is august	soil is home
wind carries brown	over the border
river is the border	sand is at home
sand is lost	loss is black
the infant is also black	cloud is god
to know is white foam	white foam over pink tongue
when grandmother dies	sun turns everything brown
makes everything home	land and skin
both without god	love is blood
love stains memory	love stains god
and dad is home	red white purple rainbow
makes infant black	makes infant foam
turns foam to dew	cloud too makes dew
sun unmakes dew	dew is not home
dew foams over pupil	and infant beholds the colour of homelessness

## Genesis

### Nkateko Masinga

#### I

The entrance to the chapel  
has a mosaic on its floor

mosaic means *fragmented pieces forming a picture*

Mosaic means *of Moses*

Capitalisation of a letter turns fragments into flesh

#### II

The Word says

*Let us make man in our image*

The Word says

*Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return*

#### III

I met Moshe in August

the month when everything settles  
except the dust

August means *eighth month*

august means *respected*

Capitalisation of a letter says respect comes with time

#### IV

I told my fragmented man:

*I am not god*

I told my fragmented man:

*I am not dust*

*so I want to settle*

*with you*

#### V

On our wedding day

I found him face-down and shattered on the floor of the chapel

On our wedding day

I held dust in my hands

#### VI

You cannot say men do not live up to their names

## Prodigal Son

### Cheswayo Mphanza

It's the foolish innocence of Sili in the film that gets to me.  
A bare-footed girl on crutches walking the streets  
of Dakar selling newspapers. Dubbed: *La Petite Vendéuse  
de Soleil*. After earning 10,000 francs, she buys

her grandmother a parasol. When I am asked "have you  
been back home yet?" I think of Sili laughing at me  
before asking "What do you have to give Lusaka?"  
and "Haven't you lost the language?" Which means

to lose everything. My eyes moving between the subtitles  
on the screen and Sili's mouth twisting between French  
and Wolof. When the jealous street beggars take one  
of Sili's crutches, she yells *Nous continuons!*

And adorns yellow sunglasses, performing a crazed dance  
while singing a French song. The beggars confused,  
not sure what to make of Sili's act. The intimacy of language  
I'm severed from. Or you could think about Diouana,

*La Noire De...*, who leaves Dakar for France, but returning  
becomes a sort of shame. I share Diouana's ambivalence  
to the idea of home. So what then to make of her suicide  
in the bathtub? The window open to a view of the

Champs-Élysées. A Senegalese mask she places over her face.  
The knife at the side with blood stains. The burden  
of France serving as a post-colonial trauma, but I'm still not  
sure what my relationship to America or Zambia means.

A white Frenchman, Monsieur, finds Diouana and returns the mask  
to Dakar, but a boy chases Monsieur with the mask.  
Haunting him to the point where he can't shed Diouana, or Diouana  
can't shed him. In this sense, I see Zambia and America

not as places of distance, but a reminder of the self-transformation  
or the condition for the immigrant and native:  
Sili's broken legs in a barefooted dance on a dirt road in Dakar,  
Diouana's death in a porcelain bathtub in Paris.

## Poem to be read from Right to Left

**M.E. Mustafa**

*(After Merwa Helal)*

school english an to went i

saying

*\*aye aye*

with agreeing

arabic my of eraser the

name my of letter first

meme like sound

joke a become i

me forgetting history my

leaving

*\*tongue twisted*

behind

stranded foreigner

home own my in

people 3 become i

*\*mustafa*

leave to begging

holes for looking

cage imaginary an in

mustafa

hiding

accent thickened

count to how learning

to meaning

back go

time this maybe

your into walk will you

\* ؟ welcome home

//

\* ابي ابي

\* لسان معوج

\* مصطفى

## Asphyxia

Tariro Ndoro

*Then I go to my brother  
And I say brother help me please  
But he winds up knockin' me  
Back down on my knees*

—Sam Cooke, “A Change is Gonna Come”

suffocation is  
a metaphor for breathing under water  
for holding the world on your shoulder, woman  
there is no rest for the living, the dying, the dead in  
black skin and blacker dresses//life is tough but you're still breathing  
bleeding, pain, love, suffering on black skin, black ache – labored fifty years to  
retire on nothing// headline on friday's paper says there was a riot// downtown  
officer fires two warning shots, two are dead, thirteen injured, I wonder  
did he count the number?// uh –uh, cicero, tongue in cheek weaved  
false truth asphyxia is// believing the lies so we can sleep at night  
truth is triggering is nowadays// so is saying something  
different from men are trash when  
sister shows her bruises//  
no one is safe here  
Anymore

## **I Watch You Transfigure**

**Kechi Nomu**

Because days become  
un-demarcated,  
I have not learnt to master echoes  
or afternoons like this  
where we recall the years of earthworms slipping into our skins  
from slush. Making dragonflies  
dance the circus on empty clotheslines.  
I have been teaching myself to never forget our list  
of minor tragedies.  
In this house of dead bulbs  
limp against walls.  
After each visit, the minutes before you walk up the footbridge  
and I watch you transfigure through metal rails into a cloud  
of bodies in friction.  
We hug to rob each other of mishaps that do not belong here.  
Like '99. The year we see just how tender the world becomes  
in an aftermath  
of first times: rains; fires; much later, bombs; but rains first.  
For days afterwards, we watch through open roof, the sky  
leak its content on our floor:  
The scar it leaves behind.

## Last Night in Tawargha

Salawu Olajide

Last night, just like many nights  
under a blue shed, a blue horror was going on.  
Whatever happens to the characters in a story remains in it,  
Brecht calls this alienation effect.

You want to spell love  
so you tell your brother,  
Abid, not to return home  
to become a ghost in the middle of Tripoli.

*Hear the songs of the wind and how people become  
black-skinned carcasses in their home.*

The Tripoli council is a council of wild birds  
picking bones of boys with jack-booted faces.  
Since 2011, definitions of things have changed  
for humans and for the birds.

## Loneliness

### Romeo Oriogun

I do not want to write how lonely  
a car parked under the rain  
in a deserted road sings,  
but I've been on this road for ten years,  
searching for a boy to translate the sweetness in my language;  
searching for a door out of the fear sitting in my throat.  
Nothing is constant; birds die & are reborn as clouds,  
leaves go into the earth to become songs,  
yet my love is passed down as sin,  
nailed to a wall in a city where my body  
is full of strange men begging to live,  
nailed to balls of fire falling from the mouths  
of preachers shouting in fields.  
At night I sit in silence to hear my body  
mingle with the stars in darkness.  
I know how loneliness sits in a deserted town  
and plays dead songs from parched lips.  
I know how a body enters itself  
to hide desire behind sadness.  
I've been sitting for a long time,  
waiting for a boy to heal the confusion falling in my heart.  
The rain keeps falling & I don't know  
if the birds rising in my heart  
is my body saying it's alright to love  
this wildness walking into a city on fire.

## When My Mother Speaks of New Edition

**Olatunde Osinaike**

Partly because my stepfather-to-be three counties away  
texted her good morning and partly because the radio  
announced the reunion tour happening this upcoming spring,  
she is giggling with that laugh in her voice that is  
recognizable even through the other end of a phone call.

Yes, that one. The one where you can tell there are  
dimples making golden creeks of light on their face  
and that excites you. To be hitched to a forever  
that can appear unconsciously, without a halo on  
the third finger of your hand, without worry of this

being a redundant exercise. Lately upon waking up,  
I drink almost the daily allotted amount of water that is  
needed by the body to flush itself of toxins. Mostly  
because I am thankful to be without the penumbras  
of stress. Mostly because I remember my whiskey

hangovers, the stamina it takes to rise anew and  
unflinching from the evening's pretenses. Mostly because  
tense is what we tend to be when we do not tend to  
our needs. And a good night's rest isn't something she has  
referenced since I was ten and we made family errands

out of her telling me to grab allocated ziploc bags full  
of pennies near her purse to walk in and pay the cashier

for the gas we would need to get home. When I ask her how  
she slept last night, she responds *oh you know, the usual*  
so I serenade her with her favorites while pinching myself.

## Folktales

### Claudia Owusu

i am from blanket parachutes made out of midnight storms & city lights guiding 5 o'clock rush hours whether i like it or not, there is a rift on my tongue the size of a knife cut & every language i speak is born broken and jagged around the edges. at night, i sing myself into a terrain of my mother's absence where the desert sand wants to sink me into its nameless mess. i am a long line of women, holding onto each other within arm's reach, panic shut deep into their chest, a muffled beating that we turn into music: [*anansesem sisi o, sen so ara*] my grandmother was a baker. thick white hair falling like a broom at her feet my grandmother used to bargain with the night a loaf for daylight, a parcel to keep the shadows kept. my grandmother used to sleep on a bench for her back pain, warding age away with her miswak sticks and holy oil. and i, i am the learning. the city skylines and hard air, an engine beating life into a folded room. i am the remainder. the sneak in the shut eye. the thing you stay behind for out of force.

## **Be(coming) home to myself**

**Daad Sharfi**

At the end of the night,  
I peel this country off my skin  
I peel the other one too  
I undress until I can call nothing but this body a home  
I choose absence of  
I choose border less  
I do not make boundaries of my being  
I become porous  
And always,  
Always  
Ready to welcome you back.

**Turmeric****Alexis Teyie**

And then peeling the turmeric,

I said, as a girl-

boy, I came upon a little dirty-

grey bird on the way home,

so I picked up the knot of

feathers and slid it into my tunic

pocket.

He said, that's odd, so I nodded,

and kept working on the gnarled

thing, but he didn't stop there; no,

now he says, you know, I don't know

if you know this, but turmeric is good

for your complexion— yes, I agree—

and goes well with most curries, of

course, and what you definitely couldn't

know is that it's perfect for your period

pains— the man with the brittle coastal

accent on Citizen TV says a four-year-old girl was

raped

and her body found in a forest— good for colds,

cancer, diabetes. I say, right, best for unexplained

rashes, for demon possession— and in this moment,

a turmeric root is being pulled from the earth, and who knows

how long it had lain there, that jaundiced thing, killing no one;

certainly a few years less or more than four—

for depression, for three AM ennui, for midnight cravings,

impotence, bankruptcy, shitty luck, and broken marriages.

I drop hunks of the turmeric's skin into the sink,

mbalam mbalam, and so then he says,

grow up, just fucking grow up, and I think— but don't say—

what if I, for some vague devilish reason, somehow grew sideways,

like this ginger rhizome here? Instead, I ask, can you change the channel?

**The Dead Bodies' Artist****Ejiofor Ugwu***(for Aleppo)*

Ogodo paints dead bodies,  
they are now many in his gallery:  
he has used lungs of fireflies, and  
the vulture whose bald skull had been  
bored into by dead flesh moths,  
he leaves a large expanse on his canvas  
to accommodate the network of brain wires that  
was left, gushed out, after the work on the granite,  
he holds it up and  
nods, shedding tears as he always does, to cure  
seizure pains in his body – he unhooks the  
over-one-hundred-years old tortoise left in  
his brain since the last Easter, since  
the zoo was given to vegetarians;  
the elderly tortoise has left strings  
of tears on her cheeks, for him to paint;  
again, he has gathered all the used bullets in Aleppo  
and untagged the names on them,  
the names are highly flammable that  
they catch fire from his brush,  
he turns over the ashes from the  
burnt names, and uses it to fine-brush the tears  
which the tortoise had shed in his mind.  
The tortoise, the vulture and the fireflies have  
gathered into one body to name him.

The scrap collector pays for his  
pain-relievers and his other sins;  
he overdoses, to  
vaccinate the seizures: sets out a long day to  
paint from all the mass burials he has attended.

## Fragile

Victor Ugwu

i understand how  
clocks work with  
bodies; my  
sister

would tear her thigh with razors

& force orange juice  
inside.

i like to watch them  
heal  
for her to cut them  
again.

~

in my house,  
we threw things we wanted:  
my mother her left leg.

~

my father's body was simple,  
it had a lack my body carried into

water. He once said angels  
are bright brown amplifications

of

broken

selves.

## Driving Lessons with My Father

Tryphena Yeboah

My mother's voice makes you  
Think of past wars  
When she tells you to stir the soup,  
It's as though she's teaching  
You how to hold a gun  
When she tells you to clean the room,  
It's as though she's training  
You to pack for the day you have to run

I turn twenty-three tomorrow  
And I still know nothing about love –  
Only that boys carry knives under their shorts  
And they'll cut deep if I try

I am beginning to look more like a woman  
My breasts shake on bumpy rides  
And I hold them like I would a child –  
Afraid they might fall off my chest  
And unto the ground  
Driving lessons with my dad are  
Nothing like I've ever known  
He says imagine the wheel is a long dance  
You turn and spin on your own  
Until a hand reaches out from the crowd  
Red means stop – take him in.

Does he make you want to become

A child again?

Or does he steal away your dreams?

Yellow means get ready –

Take in a deep breath.

Choose love, choose love.

You only live once.

Green means go –

Pull him in and give him a dance

Of a lifetime

## Contributors' Bio

**Ama Asantewa Diaka** is a poet, writer and performing artist from Ghana who is currently pursuing an MFA in Writing at the School of Arts Institute in Chicago.

**Afua Ansong** is a Ghanaian American writer, photographer and dancer. A 2015 & 2018 BRIO (Bronx Recognizes Its Own) recipient and a 2017 *Callaloo* Fellow, she writes about the challenges of the African woman immigrant in the United States, exploring themes of transition, citizenship, and identity. She is currently working on a mixed genre project that explores 60 Adinkra symbols mythicized to have been created by King Gyaman Adinkra of Ivory Coast who was captured by the Asantes of Ghana. Her chapbook *American Mercy* is forthcoming with Finishing Line Press. Her work can be seen or is forthcoming in *Prairie Schooner*, *Frontier*, *Newfound* and elsewhere.

**Akpa Arinze** is a twenty-two-year-old Nigerian genderqueer. They have work in *Saraba*, *Transition*, *New Contrast*, *Sou'wester*, *Brittle Paper*, and elsewhere. They are the author of the poetry pamphlet, *City Dwellers* (Splash of Red).

**Alexis Teyie** is a 24-year-old, nonbinary Kenyan writer and feminist. Her poetry is included in the Jalada 'Afrofutur(e)s' and 'Language' issues, and the *Black Girl Seeks* anthology; short fiction is in Short Story Day Africa's *Water* anthology and GALA's *Queer Africa II* anthology. Her work is also featured in *Omenana*, *Q-zine*, *This Is Africa*, *Writivism*, Anathema's *Spec from the Margins* anthology, HOLAA's *Safe Sex Manual*, among others. Alex co-authored a children's book, *Shortcut*, and published a poetry chapbook, *Clay Plates*, with Akashic Books through the African Poetry Book Fund. She is a poetry editor and co-founder of *Enkare Review*. Alex also works out of Nairobi as a researcher.

**Aremu Adams Adebisi** is a Nigerian author of works distinctively aesthetic in forms, shapes and in components. His products cut across each genre of literature which he writes to proffer answers to the endless questions of life. He seeks to find depth, peace and tranquility in poetry while his prose often is punctuated with happenings around him. He believes in the sight and feel and sound of literature. Once he said literature is a social-science whose application only is of art. He can be reached on Facebook at Aremu Adams Adebisi and on Instagram @theantagonist\_\_

**Ashley Makue** (25) is a South African writer and facilitator. She is the Current State of Poetry South African National Slam champion. Her debut collection *i know how to fix myself* was released in April 2017 by the African Poetry Book Fund as part of their New-Generation African Poets chapbook box set: *Nne*. Her work has been included in multiple journals, including *Pain* by Icelandic Vala Press, and *Botsotso*. She has recently been longlisted for the Sol Plaatje European Union Prize, and was selected as a finalist for the 2018 Sillerman Poetry Book Prize.

**Cheswayo Mphanza** was born in Lusaka, Zambia and raised in Chicago, Illinois. His work has been featured in or is forthcoming from *New England Review*, *American Literary Review*,

*Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *elsewhere*. He has received fellowships from the Bread Loaf Writers Conference, Hurston/Wright Foundation, Callaloo, Cave Canem, and Columbia University. A recipient of the 2017 Hurston/Wright Award for College Writers, he earned an MFA at Rutgers-Newark.

**Claudia Owusu** is a Ghanaian Writer studying Creative Writing at Otterbein University. She is 21 years old and she currently lives in Westerville, Ohio, where she is in her third year of undergraduate school. Her work has appeared in *Quiz & Quill*, *Otterbein University's Literary Magazine*, *Wusgood.black*, and *Ohio's Best Emerging Poets: An Anthology*.

**Daad Sharfi** is a 23-year-old Sudanese woman who grew up in Muscat, Oman before moving to Chicago, IL. She recently graduated from Yale University where she studied Economics and Ethnicity, Race and Migration. As an Afro-Arab and American Black woman who calls multiple cities her home, Daad is interested in translation, identity-construction, migration and the African diaspora. She is currently serving as a fellow in the Coro Fellowship in Public Affairs where she conducts research on socioeconomic disparities along racial lines and is also involved on an immigrant inclusion initiative in Pittsburgh.

**Dorothy Kigen** is a 31-year-old female-identifying Kenyan with a sensible day job and a life-long love of the written word. Years of intermittent writing have left a trail of her blog posts, timelines, and at least one niche Tumblr scattered across the Internet. She intends to consolidate what can be salvaged into a manuscript. Her interests include feminism, literature, and pop culture.

**Ejiofor Ugwu** is the author of the chapbook, *The Book of God* (APBF/Akashic, 2017). His poetry and short fiction have been published in *Guernica*, *African American Review*, *Drumtide Magazine*, *The New Black Magazine*, *ELSEWHERE Lit*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Sentinel Nigeria*, *The Kalahari Review*, and *The Muse*, a journal of creative and critical writing at the University of Nigeria. He is an MFA student of poetry in the Creative Writing program at Syracuse University.

**Gloria Kiconco** is a 27-year-old, female, Ugandan poet, essayist, and zine-maker based in Kampala. Her poetry has been published by *Brittle Paper*, *Lavino*, *Sooo Many Stories*, and *FEMRITE*. Her personal essays have appeared in *The Forager Magazine*, Doppiozero's *Why Africa?*, *Writivism*, and *adda*. She was a correspondent for Commonwealth Writers (2015/16). In 2016, Gloria premiered *SOLD OUT*, her poetry zine project at LaBa! Arts Festival. She is currently serving on the editorial team for *START Journal of Arts*. Gloria performs poetry regularly around Kampala. You can follow her work at [otherandelse.wordpress.com](http://otherandelse.wordpress.com).

**J.K. Anowe**, Nigerian-born poet, is the recipient of the inaugural *Brittle Paper* Award for Poetry in 2017. His chapbook, *The Fracturing*, is forthcoming from Madhouse Press in 2019. He lives, and writes from somewhere in Nigeria.

**Karen Jennings** is a 35-year-old South African author. She holds Masters degrees in both English Literature and Creative Writing from the University of Cape Town, and a PhD in English Literature from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Her debut novel, *Finding Soutbek*, was shortlisted for the inaugural Etisalat Prize for African Fiction. In 2014 her short story collection, *Away from the Dead*, was longlisted for the Frank O'Connor International short story competition. Her memoir, *Travels with my Father*, was published in 2016, and this year her poetry collection, *Space Inhabited by Echoes*, will be launched. Karen is working on post-doctoral research at the Federal University of Goiania, Brazil.

**Kechi Nomu** (b.1987) is a poet, culture writer and film critic. She is a Brunel International African Poetry Prize finalist and author of *Acts of Crucifixion*, chosen by Kwame Dawes and Chris Abani for the African Poetry Book Fund Box Set and Akashic Books. Her poetry has been accepted for publication in *Inter|rupture*, the *Bangalore Review*, *Enkare Review*, *Rialto Magazine*, *Expound* and *elsewhere*. She co-curated an interview series for African poets between 2017 and 2018.

**Lillian Akampurira Aujo** is a 32-year-old female poet and fiction writer from Uganda. She is the winner of the Jalada Prize for Literature 2015 and the BN Poetry Award 2009. Her work has been published by the Caine Prize, *Femrite*, BN Poetry Award, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Revelator Magazine*, *Sooo Many Stories*, *Bahati Books*, *Jalada Africa*, *Transition*, *Omenana*, *Enkare Review*, and *Brittle Paper*. Her poetry has been translated to Malayam, and is set to be taught to Grade 8 students in the Philippines for a Contemporary African Poetry class. She has been a mentor in the WritivismAt5 Online Mentoring program.

**Liyou Libsekal** is an Ethiopian poet living in Addis Ababa. She won the Brunel University African Poetry Prize (now the Brunel International African Poetry Prize) in 2014. Her chapbook, *Bearing Heavy Things*, was part of the 2015 African Poetry Book Fund's New Generation African Poets series. Her work has appeared in *Elsewhere Lit*, *Expound*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, and other publications.

**Lydia Kasese** is a Tanzanian writer, poet, columnist and media director. In 2016, her first poetry chapbook, *Paper Dolls*, was published by the African Poetry Book Fund as part of their Tatu collection. In 2017, her short story, 'My Mother's Project,' appeared in the Caine Prize's anthology, *The Goddess of Mtwara*.

**Malak El-Quessny** is a 25-year-old Egyptian neuroscientist who grew up and lived in Egypt till the age of 18 then moved away from his family, to the US, to attend college. She is presently a PhD student at UC Berkeley.

**Michelle Angwenyi** is a Kenyan, from Nairobi. Her work attempts to investigate time and memory, and is inspired by childhood, dreams, and music from all over Africa, particularly from the seventies and eighties. Her poems have been published in *Enkare Review*, and she has fiction forthcoming in Short Story Day Africa's *ID* anthology. Michelle would one day like to

write something about birds. She is currently doing an MPhil in Zoology at the University of Cambridge. She was shortlisted for the Brunel African Poetry Prize in 2018.

**Nica Cornell** is a 25-year-old South African writer and contributing editor for the Africa Matters Initiative. She has been published in *The Times; Africa, the UK and Ireland: Writing Politics and Knowledge Production* (in press); the *South African Foreign Policy Review* (in press), *Botsotso* and *Aerial 2012*. She has published on *The Good Cemetery Guide*, *The Good Men Project*, *The Frantz Fanon Blog*, *Mobius: Journal of Social Change* and *Kalahari Review*.

**Nkateko Masinga** is a 26-year old woman from South Africa. She is a published author, a member of the Golden Key International Honour Society, a TEDx Speaker and a 2018 Mandela Washington Fellow. Her poetry is published in U.S journal *Illuminations* and is forthcoming in UK pamphlet press Pyramid Editions in 2018. In 2015, her work was shortlisted for the ‘Respond’ Human Rights Poetry Award 2015/2016, organized by the United Human Rights Student Network. In 2017 she was a finalist for the 4th Crystal Ruth Bell Residency in Beijing, China. Email: address: [nmasinga07@gmail.com](mailto:nmasinga07@gmail.com)

**Olatunde Osinaike** is a Nigerian-American poet born to the West Side of Chicago, Illinois, USA. He is a 23-year-old male, still learning and eager nevertheless. An alumnus of Vanderbilt University, his most recent work has appeared, or is forthcoming, in *Apogee*, *HEArt Online*, *Hobart*, *Glass*, *Anomaly*, *Puerto del Sol*, and *Columbia Poetry Review*, among other publications. You can find him online at [www.olatundeosinaike.com](http://www.olatundeosinaike.com).

**Romeo Oriogun** is the 2017 winner of the Brunel International African Poetry Prize. His manuscript, *My Body Is No Miracle*, was a finalist for the 2018 Sillerman First Book Prize for African Poets. His chapbook, *The Origin of Butterflies*, was published in 2018 by Akashic Books and African Poetry Book Fund. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Brittle Paper*, *Expound*, *LAMBDA*, *Afridiaspora*, *African Writer*, and *Prairie Schooner* among others. He is the author of *Burnt Men*, an electronic chapbook published by *Praxis Magazine Online*, and was a Fellow of Ebedi International Writers Residency. Presently, he is a fellow of W. E. B. Du Bois Research Institute Fellow at Harvard University.

**Salawu Olajide** is a twenty-seven-year old poet, and writes from Ile-Ife, Nigeria. His poems have appeared in *Transition*, *Poetry City*, *Soul-Lit* and so on. He is a 2017 Pushcart Prize for Poetry and Best of the Net Nominee. He is a fish eater and Amala boy.

**Sarah Godsell** is a 32-year-old woman, born in Johannesburg, South Africa. She has lived in Joburg all her life. She is a historian, poet, and teacher. She has been writing since she can remember but began performing in 2009. She has been published in journals nationally and internationally, such as *Poetry Potion*, *New Coin*, and *Illuminations*. Her debut poetry collection *Seaweed Sky*, came out in 2016 and was a 2018 HSS awards fiction finalist. She believes in poetry and history as activism, crucial world building tools. Although often pulled down, she consistently and stubbornly chooses Up.

**Tariro Ndoro** is a Zimbabwean storyteller. Her fiction and poetry have appeared in many journals and anthologies including *Afreada*, *Fireside Fiction*, *La Shamba*, *Kotaz*, *The Kalahari Review*, *Moving On and Other Zimbabwean Stories* and *New Coin Poetry*. Tariro obtained her Masters in Creative Writing degree from Rhodes University and subsequently took part in a digital exchange programme for poets and photographers. She currently resides in Harare, where she spends too much time reading.

**Thato Chuma** is a Motswana singer, poet and writer. Her poetry has featured in literary magazines such as *Saraba Magazine*, *Brittle Paper*, *Strange Horizons*, *Words Dance Publishing*, *Firewords Quarterly* and other literary publications across the globe.

**Tryphena Yeboah** is a Creative Writing Teaching Assistant at the Ghana Institute of Journalism.

**Victor Ugwu** was born in 1996 in Onitsha but lives in Minna, both in Nigeria. He is the author of *Rhythms*, a collection of poems (Polarsphere, 2016). He writes, cooks, and he is a profound lover.

**Victoria Adukwei Bulley** is a British-born Ghanaian poet and writer. A former Barbican Young Poet, her work has been commissioned by the Royal Academy of Arts, in addition to being featured on BBC Radio 4. She was shortlisted for the Brunel University African Poetry Prize 2016, and is a fellow of the acclaimed UK mentorship programme, The Complete Works. Her debut pamphlet, *Girl B*, is part of the 2017 New-Generation African Poets series, edited by Chris Abani and Kwame Dawes. She is the creative director of *Mother Tongues*, an Arts Council England -funded exploration of poetry in translation, captured through filmmaking, in partnership with Autograph ABP.

**Yasmin Belkhyr** is a Moroccan writer and editor. She is the author of *Bone Light* (African Poetry Book Fund and Akashic Books). She is the founder & Editor-in-Chief of *Winter Tangerine* and Honeysuckle Press. She also writes for the TED Blog. She splits her time between New York City and Amherst.