

OPULUICHE

A JOURNAL OF CRITICAL AND CREATIVE WRITING OF THE DEPARTMENT
OF ENGLISH, CHUKWUEMEKA ODUMEGWU OJUKWU UNIVERSITY,
IGBARIAM CAMPUS, ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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Founder's Note

Welcome to Opoluiche,

I am thrilled to introduce you to this journal, a project born out of a desire to create a that everyone will love and be proud of. My vision for Opoluiche is to create a space where students can express their creative voices and see the potential in each and everyone of them especially when their seed of creativity is planted in a nurturing environment then students can stand boldly and represent the department with confidence and pride.

From the earliest days of my career, I have harbored a dream: to etch my name permanently into history books. This ambition drives me to constantly strive to be a better writer and a better man, aspiring to one day have my name echo as loudly as those of literary giants like Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka. These icons have set a standard of excellence that inspires us all.

Life, as I often say, honors guts. It is imperative that we push forward and carve our own paths, even when the world refuses to make way for us. Opuluiche represents my effort to lift the voices of individual writers, providing them with the opportunity to immortalize their thoughts and, in doing so, to immortalize our department. One of my favorite lines from the Odyssey encapsulates this sentiment perfectly:

"Men are haunted by the vastness of eternity, and so we ask ourselves: will our actions echo across the centuries? Will strangers hear our names long after we are gone, and wonder who we were, how bravely we fought, how fiercely we loved?"

Opuluiche is my answer to these questions. It is a platform designed to ensure that we are never forgotten, to be the best versions of ourselves, to stretch our limits, and to see all that we can achieve. This is why we do what we do every day. This is the "why" of Opuluiche.

Thank you for being a part of this journey. Let us together create a legacy that will stand the test of time. Ka udó di, ka ndú di.

**Head of English Department,
Founder of Opuluiche Journal
Dr Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika.**

Editor's Note

“ Art as the celebration of individuality and uniqueness in every day occurrences ; the bedrock of Opuluiche “

Opuluiche signifies that which is special, unique, and unparalleled—a tapestry and conglomeration of distinct voices from diverse writers that cannot be replicated elsewhere.

Art celebrates individuality and appreciates the uniqueness of everyone and everything, regardless of the countless individuals that populate our world. Art

reveals the profound interconnectedness of humanity, illustrating how each person embodies the universe expressed through a singular entity.

Yet at the fundamental molecular level, we are all intrinsically the same—one voice, one mind. As humanity evolves through the millions who have lived and will live, art attempts to document this evolution, enabling future generations to look back, travel through time, and reconcile with the stories we have written. It allows us to hold firmly to the familiarity of our collective pain, laughter, stories, and voices.

Opuluiche is our endeavor to celebrate both our differences and our similarities . To cultivate a generation of kind and empathetic individuals, we must consciously invest in shaping them, if we are to channel art outward, we must first channel it inward thus the creation of this journal, like the writer Richard wright quotes "i refuse to die unconcerned about the world I was born into".

Art is the conscious reflection on and celebration of humanity—man the individual, man the society, and man the artist. With this perspective, anything becomes a worthy subject for artistic inspiration. Humanity itself is art, from birth—the gentle stretching of skin, bones, and teeth efflorescing—until death, the withering of mind and spirit and the immortalizing of truth and soul.

Man is art, and art is that which is different. This is Opuluiche.

Uju-Nwa Okoye Precious
Editor-in-chief
Opuluiche, Maiden edition.

FLASH FICTION

Onyebuchi Ofunelo

Dear Diary

On my table, against the slightly opened moon-lit window, she sits, like a new bride duty-bound to perform her marital duties despite her resentment towards her groom.

At the corner of the house, directly behind the slightly opened window not lit by the moon; I sank into a single sofa in wait. Like a lion who out of instinct must sneak up on its kill as though it would run for dear-life, my timing must be precise. She in turn, lies on the table with the same laziness a dead antelope would in the Savanna, amidst dangerously marauding lions; in total submission to fate. For what could be worse than what she already has tatted all over her body. Indeed she has seen gloomy days come and gone, some more haunting than others.

It was a little over two years ago that we first met; I was going through the stationeries, there she was, provocatively standing on the cabinet. Maybe not provocatively. Maybe I was imagining things. You have to forgive me for imagination is one of, if not, the strongest weapon in the arsenal of a loner. Having been aroused either by my imagination or reality, I decided to approach, against thousands of tiny eerie voices in my head, reminding me how much of a failure I have been and how I can never have her to myself. But there is this sharpness with which this urge had possessed me, like that of a coital climax that I could not have held back even if I wanted to. Amidst this possessive urge I still hoped that in the brilliance of her beauty, she saw through this veil in the form of a smile and turned me down. I was moved with pity - empathy even - when against all odds fate brought us together. I knew loving me comes with a steep price.

Our first night together, she was: young, graceful, unruffled, and all inviting. Despite all these alluring qualities, it was not my intention to defile her that night. I just wanted to admire: her vigor for life, her brilliance, and purity. But as the night progressed, almost out of guilt, I was moved to warn her, give her a second

chance at escaping this unforgiving fate. The first few lines I ever scribbled on her pages, "I am a rocky terrain that shatters most shells, if you must fall in love with me, take caution, for I have seen shells stronger than yours crash on impact", was an embodiment of this warning. It was the last thing I could bring myself to writing that night. I left her with it, as if to allow it sink, with all its weight and meaning.

As though rudely brought back to reality, I spring from the sofa, walk straight to her and sit on the chair by the table. The rustic clicking of the wall clock draws my attention. It is only now that I realize how long I had sat on that sofa. It is 4:22Am now. I have sat almost through the night, lost in my own head.

I draw her close to me. To my surprise, though she had lost most of her innocence to my crude uncompromising ink, she still has that brilliance in her eyes. Tonight, though my heart is heavy; and my mind pregnant with intrusive thoughts. I have come to appreciate her, write her a letter - a love letter. I am pleased to inform her that those voices in my head are no longer as clear and haunting as they used to be. This burden too, I believe she has shared with me. Now, I pick my pen, turn a new page and the love affair begins.

Dear diary, my love.

The pillow that dries my tears at night and complains not in the morning. The only arms into which my broken heart finds warmth. The bearer of all the pains that flows through my ink. My only companion in the darkest of times. The only ears that listen when I think the world is not being fair.

Dear diary, my love, if your pages can no longer hold my pain, let the wind come fast and dry my tears, let the sun rise with a smile on my face. Should you leave me now, my love, I will bottle up more emotions than I can take. I will be but a Balloon tossed into a fast rising tide, how do I navigate such turbulence without you.

I know loving me comes with a price, I am amazed how much of the price you have paid already. It hurts me to ask, but I hope you endure a little longer; I hope that one day your pages will share in my joy. As my pen bleeds every night, you

suffer for my cowardice. This night let my pen hold its peace for my heart bleeds in its place. Let my blood be the ink and your pages suffer still. I wish I could pour my heart on these little pages of yours, but am afraid you will drip with blood.

Your lover,
The loner.

It is now 6:18Am, and the morning light is sneaking up on us. I know I have to leave her now. For like a nocturnal beast that must not be disturbed during the day, our relationship has always been defined by darkness.

Outside my window an owl, instead of retiring for the day, hoots accusingly as though in protest, of what seems to go on when the light goes down.

But how different are we? I and the owl.

Oluchukwu Favour

Freedom is not Free

It could have never occurred to kene that one day he would be sitting in jail because he was an upright man, he lived a noble life and did his best to always avoid getting into trouble with people around him. One faithful Tuesday evening, kene came back from work, he had a nine to five job . On getting home after a long and stressful day he dashed into the kitchen to prepare a meal for himself, after he had his meal he went to his computer to do some research and also read some articles online.

Kene, at this point was done with all that he had to do, so he retired to his tiny bed that could only fit one person. He tried to fall asleep but sleep eluded him, and this was because the room was so hot considering the fact that he lives in a one bedroom self contain with no kitchen , so his cooking was done inside the room . The room was hot because he had just finished cooking inside it , he

decided to go out for a stroll to get some fresh air, while on it , he was picked by the police , it all happened in a flash, he found himself sitting at the back of the police van handcuffed. Kene was crying and pleading, "I did nothing, I was only going out for a walk , what offense did I commit?why did you handcuff me? I'm not a criminal ", he kept going on and on, immediately one of the officers in the van slapped him ."you Dey craze? who you Dey question? Ogun wan kill you? E be like say you Dey mad, I no wan hear your voice again".

They arrived at the police station and kene was locked up immediately, he was asked to pay one million naira , he didn't have such an amount of money, he asked them to at least let him call his family but they refused.

Days turned into weeks, weeks turned into months and months turned into years and kene was still sitting in jail, he was not taken to court , he was just kept locked up for years, at these point he was already forgotten by his family, his last rites had been performed already.

Kene lost all hope of ever leaving jail, he lost hope of ever getting his freedom back. Two policemen were having a discussion and one of the inmates in kene's cell overheard them saying that kene was serving the sentence of a famous politician's son, who committed murder, his father payed the DPO a huge amount of money so his son wouldn't sit in jail, so the dpo had to pick someone with a striking resemblance with the politician's son, that would replace him and unfortunately kene was the chosen victim.

After ten years of wrongful imprisonment, he was released, but Kene didn't know how to feel about it, "where will I go? How do I pick up the broken pieces of my life after ten years? Would I be able to start afresh? " This questions clouded kene's mind .

The officer brought kene's clothes to him, but Kene snatched the gun around the officer's waist from him and right then and there kene shot himself in the head

Uwa Miracle

The Universal War

In a quaint little town nestled between rolling hills and whispering forests, there stood a humble cottage where an old man named Mr. Patrick lived. Mr. Patrick was a kind soul, known throughout the town for his gentle smile and willingness to lend a helping hand.

One crisp autumn morning, as the golden leaves danced in the breeze, Mr. Patrick embarked on his routine walk through the woods. With his trusty walking stick in hand, he strolled along the winding path, enjoying the beauty of nature.

As he entered deep into the forest, Mr. Patrick stumbled upon an old, forgotten well hidden amongst the trees. Curiosity taking the best of him, he peered into its depths, but all he could see was darkness swallowing the depths below. Just as he was about to turn away, something caught his eye—a glimmer of light emanating from the bottom.

Without hesitation, Mr. Patrick knew he had to investigate. With great care, he lowered himself into the well, feeling the cold stones against his old wrinkled hands. Down, down he went, until his feet touched solid ground.

In the dim light, Mr. Patrick found himself in a cavern filled with ancient artifacts and mysterious symbols carved into the walls. But what truly captivated his attention was a small, beautifully crafted key lying amidst the dirt.

Instinctively, Mr. Patrick reached out and grasped the key, feeling a strange sense of connection to it as if it was a sign that a prophecy was about to be fulfilled. Little did he know, this key held the power to unlock not just physical doors, but the secrets of the universe itself and is able to free the world from evil shadows.

Excited by his discovery, Mr. Patrick made his way back to the surface, holding the key tightly in his hand. But as he came out from the well, he realized something was wrong—the world around him had changed.

Gone were the familiar sights and sounds of his beloved town. Instead, he found himself standing in a big desert, with nothing but endless sand Space stretching

out before him. Confusion filled his mind as he tried to make sense of what is going on.

Lost and confused Mr. Patrick wandered through the desert, the scorching sun beating down upon him. Just when he thought he could go no further, he spotted something shimmering in the distance—a towering palace built in the mist of the sands.

With newfound determination, Mr. Patrick moved towards the palace, the key clutched tightly in his hand. As he drew closer, he could see figures moving about, their clothes dancing in the heat haze.

Upon reaching the palace gates, Mr. Patrick was met by a group of guards putting on shiny and beautiful armory. Despite his weary appearance, they welcomed him with open arms, recognizing the key he held as a symbol of great importance.

Guided by the guards, Mr. Patrick was led into the heart of the palace, where he was greeted by a wise old sage who spoke of prophecies and destinies intertwined. According to ancient lore, the key Mr. Patrick held was the key to unlocking the realm of dreams—a realm where anything and everything were possible.

The old wise sage told him about the prophecy which state that a man lost in the desert will come forth into the tower to be told of his mission as the the savior of the realms and is to be told to go on a mission or quest to unlock the door to the dream realm but he should be of pure in heart and brave because he has been chosen by the key itself .

Eager to uncover the truth, Mr. Patrick embarked on a quest to unlock the mysteries of the dream realm, guided by the sage and his newfound companions. Together, they traveled through fantastical landscapes and faced unimaginable challenges, all the while learning the true power of belief and determination.

But as they dive deeper into the dream realm, they soon realized that not all dreams were meant to be realized. Dark forces lurked in the shadows, seeking

to corrupt the very fabric of reality itself and must be stopped before it consumes the entire realm.

In a climatic showdown, Mr. Partrick and his companions faced off against the bodies of darkness, wielding the key as their only weapon against the encroaching chaos, fighting against demons with different shapes and sizes that aim to destroy the dream realm . With courage and unity, they fought back the darkness, restoring balance to the dream realm once more even though they lost some of their companion they get moving forward.

As the dust settled and the sun began to rise on the horizon, Mr. Patrick found himself back in the familiar surroundings of his cottage in his beloved town , the key still clutched tightly in his hand. Though his adventure in the dream realm may have come to an end, the memories of his journey would stay with him forever.

And so, with a renewed sense of purpose, Mr. Patrick continued on with his life, knowing that sometimes, the greatest adventures lie just beyond the threshold of our imagination.

Stanley Ordu

Robot

Emeka lived in Port Harcourt, a vibrant oil and gas metropolis, where the cadence of daily life reverberated throughout the city. Although Emeka had a kind heart, he had not had much luck in romantic relationships. Things had become ragged and worn down. Women had broken his heart countless times, promising him the world but instead leaving him devastated and all alone in the world. An affair with his childhood sweetheart, Ngozi, started it all. When they were children, they were neighbors on Port Harcourt's Mumba Street. Mumba Street was a lovely, worn-out street bustling with friendly locals. Ngozi's departure for another man in G.R.A. crushed their shared dreams of a future together. How could someone he loved so deeply betray him? Emeka was crushed.

Despite his pain, Emeka sought to go on. He went on dates with other ladies in the hopes of finding the one who would heal his heartache. After each failed relationship, Emeka felt even more alone and confused than before. While exploring the streets of Port Harcourt, Emeka once found a charming, tiny business store hidden in a corner. In the store, he discovered rows upon rows of lifelike dolls, which aroused his curiosity, the merchant suggested that these dolls could provide companionship to those who had not been fortunate in love.

A doll named Adanna caught Emeka's attention. Her eyes gleamed with vitality, and her beauty was mesmerising. There was something about her that captivated him, and he had bought and brought her home before he ever realized it. Adanna captivated Emeka at first. She was the ideal friend, there whenever he needed someone to talk to or just listen to. But as time passed, he started to notice that something was lacking. Nothing Adanna tried worked; she was unable to clean, cook, or hold a conversation. To him, she was just a lifeless doll that couldn't meet his basic human wants.

Emeka sought solace in technology as a means to alleviate his loneliness. He spent money on a cutting-edge robot called Chioma. Adanna was not at all what Chioma seemed to be. She was capable of cooking, cleaning, and carrying on deep discussions. She was an ideal companion, with one exception: she could not experience emotions.

This did not stop Emeka from feeling a strong attraction to Chioma. She was trustworthy, efficient, and kind; he felt safe knowing she wouldn't betray him, unlike real women. He finally got the stability and company he was seeking in Chioma.

Close relatives and friends witnessed Emeka's modest marriage to Chioma. A calmness washed over him as they exchanged vows; he had finally found the one who would never let him down. After that, Emeka and Chioma were happy to spend their lives together in peace. They created a life full of love and camaraderie; she took care of the housework while he followed his dreams. Outsiders ridiculed their unique relationship, but Emeka saw Chioma as the one true love of his life—a loyal companion who would stand with him through thick and thin.

Paul Faith Ojochide

Didendi

He'd wake up ! The beast doesn't die !! Run! I screamed, heart pounding heavily as I ran ahead of a set of female warriors with my sword firmly in place.

Didendi, a small community where I belong was plagued by the terror of a ruthless man, the lives of every female, young and old, were at stake. He showed no mercy, molesting and killing anyone who dared to stand in his way. The community lived in constant fear, knowing that even if they managed to kill him, he would resurrect within minutes. The only option was to keep fighting and running, hoping to stay one step ahead of his wrath.

A group of brave women, including myself, decided to take a stand against this monster. We fought fiercely, inflicting pain on him as he had done to us, but ultimately, we had to retreat and seek refuge. Desperate for safety, we found shelter in the upper floor of a storey building, we hid behind its main door praying that it would hold against the man's relentless pursuit.

Hours passed, and exhaustion began to set in. We contemplated leaving our hiding spot, but just as we were about to make a move, a violent storm broke out. The rain poured down, threatening to break through the roof. The wind howled, threatening to tear the door from its hinges. We clung to the door with all our strength, silently praying for divine intervention, just as it had been done in biblical times.

Miraculously, the storm subsided as quickly as it had come. The door remained intact, and we breathed a sigh of relief. However, our respite was short-lived as a knock echoed through the room. Fear gripped our hearts, thinking that the man had returned. But to our immense relief, it was a group of fellow warriors, led by a courageous woman. They brought news that the man had been killed, and this time, he was gone for good.

With cautious optimism, we finally emerged from our hiding place, venturing out into a world that had suddenly become serene. As I descended the stairway, I witnessed a joyous occasion unfolding - our Prince's wedding. He climbed the stairs, holding flowers in his hands, ready to meet his bride. In that moment, a smile broke across my face, a symbol of hope and triumph over the darkness that had plagued our community.

As I continued to climb down the stairs,I reached the darkest part of the stairway , I froze and my breath ceased at the sight of a blazing pair of eyes .He had risen again !!!!! My heart screamed and beat three times as fast and loud as a drum of doom, my mouth hung agape ,eyes wide opened in horror as my body trembled violently,my feet wouldn't move an inch, my tears flowed voluntarily,I felt as good as dead.

Meew! meeww!!

It's a cat!

Godsday Idakwo Emakpe

This Time Tomorrow

"Hallo, hallo, kuturman buro ubanka; kawo millia ashirin". The phone shrills piercing the silence. Omone's heart races as he answers, his hands trembling slightly and eyes widen as the voice demands a ransom of twenty million naira in exchange for his father's freedom. Fear creeps his spine like a chill. The silence that follows is oppressive, heavy with unspoken threats.

The driver navigates the car as the tyres screech through obstacles while the sudden splash of water on our uniforms momentarily takes our breath away." What kind of protest can the cricket stage against a farmer ",I murmured silently. The chilling stains on our immaculate uniforms, in stark contrast to the warm sun overhead. Elite Model College, a symbol of our misfortune at Ejumomi Community College . Privileged students are transported on a daily basis on our route.Trapped between facing my father's iron hand at home with my stained uniform, the principal's stern gaze at school and the menacing marauders haunting villagers for ransom, memories of Odoeto, Inale-Udo and Adudu Enonoja as "flourishing" slave markets in the past flood my mind. We hastily retreat from the perilous location.

Were it not for the king's son Ameh Oboni who brought a glimmer of hope by studying Robotic Engineering at the esteemed Prince Aukar Audi University, our world would have remained in darkness. He instilled in us a sense of pride and

offered a glimpse into the realm of "IoT" and "IomT"... Our self-worth greatly fostered, lie shattered, leaving us humiliated. "Why should our principal, Mr. Ijagu Achadu, be so dishonored, by merely extending an invitation of interschool games to the principal of Elite Model College", Abiye stuttered in disbelief. Galvanized by my father, Iroko Ochogu's courageous war tales, where he singlehandedly rescued his comrades from captivity, we resolve to retaliate Elite College, a symbol of oppression. Our planned uprising was swift. Scaling the school fence under the shroud of night. A surge of ocean tide, propelled by our thirst for equality and justice. The Elite College, gleaming gates and meticulously manicured lawns, served as a stark reminder of the disparities we faced. This time tomorrow, we aim to make a resounding statement. Armed with fuel and matches, the cold wind of the harmattan breeze hit our faces with gentle touch. Swiftly, spraying fuel and setting fires. The principal's office, library and the laboratory are up in flames. The security guards, alerted by the smell and movement take cover. Whistles pierced the night, and the compound spring to life. Men of the Special Branch arrived by 4am. Just as they came, the ambulance speed off to our community hospital and as the gate flung open, Abiye, Ojima and six of our men mobbed by the students were confirmed dead.

Upcoming events feel ominous. C-in-C's speech on utility assistance termination lingers. Faces, voices, placards call for "Living Wage Now" and "Justice for All." Labour Union starts cautionary strike, tension rises but it is certain, this time tomorrow, the mob, stars and the nobles, together, hand in hand shall walk down to the horizon in warm hug... The situation escalates rapidly, again, as reports surface that the C-in-C's daughter is being held by marauders...

Poetry

Obaje, A. Anthony

The Cerebra Genre

You are in a house of three literary imagination
Through pictures-actions-stories
Man learns from stories told
Round the globe the same
Indeed a privy course

Centrifugal force endowed you
With multilingualism and unique stint
Your inventions enclasp music
A mirage obscurity
That invokes cerebral exercise to ingest

Pregnant with few words,
A timeless message are told like no other
Indeed! You are a relish to man and his world.

Extract from Obaje, A. Anthony's unpublished compendium

Obaje, A. Anthony

The Academic Journey

The literary voyage began on queues
Spying eyes like sunlight
Checks for decorum
The other side of the first river gives matriculation
Alas! Get onboard!

Like a toga lay bare
The recipes of the mission
A must eat delicious meal
For the journey needs strength;
Knowledge is strength.

Choices were made;
rules were kept and broken
decorum interjected by crickets of technology
A preference of conglomeration in Grove and Domibite
For the mission

Alas! Shore at sight
A thunderous journey it has been
Four years!

Let it be said,
That much is required, for much has been dispensed
The day of reckoning is in tandem with the choice made
For everyman must stand alone: Oyo is your case.

Extract from Obaje, A. Anthony's unpublished

Chinua Ezenwa-Ohaeto

Whenever One Hears the Name Uriah

It's either men made God or God made men;
whichever it is, I would always prefer sleeping naked
and thinking something beautiful would happen.

I still believe in holy fields and sureness.

I believe. I believe in finding:

to be near the tigers clawing me in my sweetness and confidence;

to be near want and theories of unstillness and obligations;

to understand it takes some pain and care to unstick

the flesh of a penis caught by a zipper.

What I really mean is to re-enter the room filled with strangers.

What I really mean is to tour the portrait of my grandfather
whose eyes, they said, never looked dead and shot as nice.

What I have been trying to say is

that whenever one hears the name Uriah,

one should know what it is, exactly, that is happening.

Chinua Ezenwa-Ohaeto

My Cry was the First Music I Heard after I was Born

My cry was the first music I heard after I was born.
There are cognate scents for the things I'm trying to understand.
I'm a boy who bears moths and stars in his palms, ready to match
his scars with the names of flowers open to agree that each
line in a composition is a lens into his fears and progress.
It burns my heart to watch how everything is turning out now.
I know the heaviness that comes with losses.

When I remember my father, I imagine
the memories of him I have shelved inside of me.
One was the day he told me why the sky is never close to us.
My face is a world of worries cloaked with curtains.
When I stand by people's shadows, I only want to dissolve and be embraced.
Can there ever be enough sun rays in the gathering of reflections?

This is the first poem I have written in months.
And I understand how much you want to ask if it matters.
We often tend to miss the little things that
hold us together. We often tend to forget.

And billboard how many dirty verbs we carry.
Here I can only say that no one-body

is enough without other bodies.

I go to my village river to hold hands with my past.

Because water remembers everything.

And when you see me pointing at the moon, all

I'm trying to ask for is the meaning

of loneliness and happiness.

Chinua Ezenwa-Ohaeto

Sometimes, I mistake my Lessons for Knowledge

Sometimes, I mistake my lessons for knowledge.

And running from my sadness hasn't been of any help.

Once, I walked passed a girl down the street and kept staring back because she had the elegance I had already imagined for a lover in my head.

Should I tell about the things I missed and their hands groping me by the trousers zip?

I guess what makes me a hero in these metaphors is that I wrote them myself with the help and assistance of poets I have read.

It marvels me to know what it takes for a poet to be a millionaire.

I want to know fame the way water doesn't even know it is famous.

These days, I don't want to forget my name and its anagrams.

It took me years to carry myself better.

I want to know the look that will be on my face

the day my mother would walk in on me having sex with my girlfriend.

There's a handshake for every stranger;

and different hugs for different relatives;

and different laughter for different jokes.

Sometimes, I mistake my lessons for knowledge.

And running from my sadness hasn't been of any help.

But at this moment, I want to be kissed by the moon.

Ikechukwu Asika

My Pace!

(On World Poetry Day)

While some like it rough,
Like the whirlwind racing towards the coast,

Others take it slowly,
Like angels would lips a hymn,

Few others embrace it as marathon
That game of mad men chasing after nothing!

Some fellars plung into the heat

That epic battle of onwu na ndu!

The rest of us are just there
But with the steady movement of a tortoise reaching a nut,

While I envy not your fancy
Condemn not my chances!

In this journey of life
Let me run it on my pace,

To the glorious solitude beyond
We will meet there certainly!

Time though may vary
But meeting we shall!

Ikechukwu Asika

Chewers of Blood!

this battered broken body was once a priceless art
cradled in grace and olive dew
mother mothered it in care and pray
father fathered hope, watered dreams!

He promised a love more sunlier than moonly!
more safer than the lost treasures in Babylon
a future served in a gold-plaited calabash
protected from the destroyers of this realm!

bee in the day and beast at night
me he smoked like beer, me he drank like cigar!
STYLE!
heavy nightfall upon my teared boulder!

my blood he chewed, my bone he drank
my soulful soul before an aged sunrise dangling!
a scar darker than the darkest night!

this journey of LLOOVVEE!
let he who thirst drink the vinegar to fullness
let he who hunger test and quench
alas! here I end, to begin again!!?

Ikechukwu Asika

Ode to the Rice Seller

The chant of the bard this day salutes
The mama puts of our earth!
Nation builders!
Hunger avengers!

The true hope of the common man!
In all the nooks & shanties they litter
Dishing out hope, dreams and survival!

Generations you have fed
Generations yet more hunger!

There is a message of love
In every grain of rice

A morsel of joy
In each cube of beans

And if all the nation's polity
Were as joyous as your cow leg and torso

Alas! If the body of law makers
Exudes a faithfulness I see in your stock fish and kpomo

What a well-fed nation we'd had!

Alex Ugwuja

Omaluotolo

Three corps members have I seen

All carrying girls thrice thin

With their hippity-hoppity songs

Ere I turned, spake in tongues

In your name, they did quake

Diverse tongues, they did speak

Even the naked flesh of their gals

Gaping, me thought its guts

Calling your name on a thin girl's lap

In the days of yore you did slap

As in the profaning of your holy name

Seems the modern ethos gives you a new mane

In your name, in all

Makes your glory grow tall

Alex Ugwuja

FACEBOOK

Out, out

From that narcissistic book of yours

Where you do nought

Than stare at your faces

Leaving your other parts bare

Touring towns to meet faces faked

What manner of people

Content with their faces alone

Even school children!

They must flee facebook and face their books

Ekwusikwa m!

Alex Ugwuja

Akada

Academics is tongues wagging

Pens strolling

Salary alerts beeping

Occasional jaw-breaking terms

Abstruse theories

Plus the usual abracadabra

The students suffering and confused!

Academics includes concupiscence

Ya! The very seat of it
With the female students
Booking hotel rooms with a father's sweat
Enjoying her luscious fruit
Sometimes cajoled
And telling colleagues on bottles of beer
Or they fail!

Academics involves the unending struggle
For relevance
When grey hair laces even the lashes
Thieving ideas for research grants
Attending national conferences to recite old anthems
And the international ones to compare Oyibo buttocks
Coming back here to brag
Leaving the nation epistemologically dehydrated
Academics supports the lurid haste
For acquisition of Ph.ds a step below professorship
Professors professing fables

Denja Abdullahi

Garri Took a Walk Away

Garri took a walk away
After waiting endlessly
for values that wouldn't come
forever condemned to spice
Only the hovels and huts of the poor.

Garri took a walk away
When the leafy brides
it weds every time

began to sing coquettish songs
of denial and absence.

Garri took a walk away

Along with its stem
from farms ridden with bandits
from soils bereft of nurture
and poisoned by chemicals and weeds.

Garri took a walk away

Into the coziness of ethanol factories
journeying in style from harried farms
escaping noises and spittle of rural folks
to ferment in peace in stainless tanks and vats.

Garri took a walk away

From the betrayal of *kulikuli* and sugar
who swore ages ago an eternal oath
to friendship daily consummated
in hostels and correctional centers.

Garri took a walk away

To rebrand itself
with garbs and shines of affluence,
it swore to be no longer
a staple for the harried and hungry.

Garri took a walk away to China

To escape the contemptuous stare
Of everyday eyes
Garri japaed to China to commit class suicide
It is back now resplendent like an Igbo bride.

Denja Abdullahi

The Politician's Song

Bala Blu, Bulaba !

Our song comes in distorted torrents
in the season of promises
the vocal cords are cleared
with wines stolen from the people's vines

Bala Blu, Bulaba !

The campaign grounds are circus arenas
of tricks by laughing jackals

dancing monkeys and acrobatic hyenas,
all orchestrated to lull and dull.

Bala Blu, Bulaba !

To gain power we dance like Ajascos in the market
what we sell and people buy
are mirages and wares of Tantalus
a self-deprecatory dance surely part those fools from their votes

Bala Blu, Bulaba !

O you my fellow aspirants
brave the heat, don't mind the smell,
the ache and pain of this dance
will melt at the touch of nubile hands at night

Bala Blu, Bulaba !

the siren that heralds our way to the houses of power
its notes are drawn from this incoherent song,
and the concerts and cantatas that welcome us to command performances
are garnished renditions of this our power strides

Bala Blu, Bulaba !

Sing this song lustily and throatily
dance vigorously to the accompanying Sankalewa's beats
the days will soon come when you will forget this toil
with your hands in the till as you ride in your SUVs.

Denja Abdullahi

Dark Belle of the Gambia

(For Awa)

I came to your land that smiles
With childhood memories of Haley's Juffureh,
Angry for those yanked away from the homeland.
I basked in the sun, sand and sea of Serekunda
But left unfazed by the artifices designed to catch a tourist's gaze.
I trod the ritual path to Kachikally
Imagining the ponds back home with forgotten crocodiles
I sailed on the River Gambia on to Fort-Bullen
All I saw were edifices of bondage

All I heard were echoes of Kunta Kinte's Kamby Bolongo.
I traced my way back to your house of memories
Immersing myself in your tiny strip of land
Enchanted in scenery and endowed in lores.
I summoned the griots on vinyl to sing me tales of love for land and people
And a soulful tune came in plea of the hard choices between love and duty "kura
Kura kura..."

I looked about and the object of my search appeared,
Hah! It was a woman, clothed in the dark passions of the Gambia.
She sent my way a white smile
Pleasant like that of her land,
She moved towards me throbbing with all the wonders of her land
And I thought
What song should I sing
To part this belle away from the smiles of her land
To the laughter of my country.

I came with her to my country
And found the laughter gone.
I took my Belle to the Coast
And found the shores choked with weeds and oily slimes
"Show me your house of images," she pleaded,
We got there and found figurines of furtive looks and sunken eyes.

My dear, come away with me again
Let 's go find new smiles and laughter in the whole wide world .
**all the place names are points of tourist interest in The Gambia, a country in
West Africa*
“”

Nwoba Chika Nwoba

Melody of Protest

I have come again to wail
Like a mother hen whose chicks are whisked away by hyenas.
I've come with a song that may not sound sweet in the ears of the few
Devouring the fortunes of many in a land of much:

This night has lingered longer than we can take
Eluding and nudging the height of dawn.
How do a few ever sleep in awe
When many awake grumble of hunger
deaths, austerity and many more?

When therefore shall we call it a day
This subjugation of many by a few?
These echoes of joblessness among young ones
Eclipse of darkness and plaintiveness
Famine and famine in staggering plenitude?

When shall we call it a day
This war of survival among the havenots
The flow of blood from uplands into the ports
Dotted silence amid noise of corruption
And the leading of the giants by the dwarfs?

Shall we watch on as the mice pierce apart the treasure bags of this land?
Shall we fold our arms and watch this plague soar heights?

Shall we sit back and mourn the flickering ones
whose fates hang in the balance?
Or shall we go on feigning wellness amid tides of absurdities?

The owls have wailed again
And who knows who'll fall next?
The blind thunder has squawked more time
And who knows how far it may sojourn?
The swords are clanging up in the air
And who knows whose neck they may land?
The vultures are hovering roof heights
And who knows whose shoulders on which they might perch?

Let's jump into the streets O you all left in the lurch!
Dare the tides of misrule
and reclaim our land from the claws of the jackals.
Let's all put the gloves in our hands
Our feet in the booths that we may go soldiering against the vultures
And push them far away
into the gibbets of flaming forests!

Nwoba Chika Nwoba

That Sorrow May Cease

They watch us flicker away
Like water poured on quicksand
And then buried unmourned
Like the passage of a childless woman

When we wail about hunger
When we cry about thirst
When we speak about austerity
They look bushwards as if we're baobabs waiting to be felled by the muscles of
tempest

When a hawk finds a chick breathless
Should we ask what killed it?
When a fisherman finds a fish lain on dry earth
Should we question the pond from which it came?

Let's continue keeping sealed lips
and blind eyes
Someday the owls will sing our names!
Everyday this land sprawls out in utter despair
As we stamp our feet on its chest unbothered

Who'll heal the aches of this clime?
Who'll look at the faces of the children and tell them that tomorrow shall be
better
When they've crushed the future with the canines of spent days?
Who'll sing for the nightingales whose lips are in padlocks?

Who'll tell the chainsaw to spare the mahogany whose branches over our heads
give shelter?
Who'll remind the straying earthlings that the land has grown teeth?
Who'll cuddle the wearying children whose futures now wriggle in the molars of a
flaming forest?
Into whose arms will they find refuge when the ostriches wander armless?
O, Who'll wipe my ageing tears! Who?

Chinwuba Chukwura

Sitting At Home in Nigerian Eastern Block

(In Honour of Fallen Heroes and Heroines of Biafran Struggle)

Past will no longer be the lot of our Biafran heroes
The future will cancel our veterans zeroes
The victor in the war declared none to vanguard
Yet casualties were left in the zoo to languish
The land of the rising sun is singing one song
Freedom song that calls brethrens to sing along
The hearty song rhythm calls to dance by choice
Sitting at home in loud silence all spoke in one voice
On this 31st day the federal might was on patrol to frisk.
From arrest avoided was the road and the risk

This sitting at home is wisdom in home alone ...
The town of Onini was among the ghost towns
Where loud silence visited the streets with no clowns
At play were a mutual intercourse of spirits in their Biafra
A long breath of life in prayed tomorrow without viagra
Indeed in a people, for the people there was a country
Set on the plains of Bight of Biafra ready for entry
Let's yield to the law against hate in our speech
But not freedom in thoughts, within reach
A spade will not be called by its name
Voices of reason crippled as if we're in tongue lame
But like phoenix Biafra shall rejuvenate from the ashes
Of burnt papers of Aburi Accord If we leave ethnic trenches
Where we played the cards of discords
And kept all the hate records
To forgive all and return to Abuja to pledge a Trinity
To let the national cake reach all remotest vicinity.
In spirit of standing in brotherhood I pledge to Nigeria my country
To agree that thirty - six equals one in shared victory
And also I agree with Ekwensi in his 'Divided We Stand'
Not by sword but by pen we shall take back our land
Our 'Unity in diversity' is like the holy trinity jargon
In its wisdom we dethrone bad driver of victory wagon

To the promised land the wagon can be ours to ride...

Dr. Chinwuba Chukwura

I Weep For this City on a Plateau

This land of dream lifted from plains and set up on a Plateau.
I am not here to denounce you but in weeping exalt your virtue
And also to mourn your descent into the death valley,
As fear grips all who love you and in yo'r city knows every alley.

This lovable city on a Plateau is trending with bloody news
Oh! I weep for the bloodshed and shown in news reviews
For the inhuman visitation all over Nigeria I cry
The tears in my heart can only in next living life dry.

As tension gripped the city,
And the centre(Abuja) turned its back on her duty,
Watching a son of the soil's blood drip.
Cut off will be the hand that refused to hold the situation under grip.

Jos the lovers city on this Plateau,
Is being remolded into a low statue
The land were whites and blacks blend to enjoy good dessert.
Like fishes forced out of ocean friendly sojourners now desert.

Howbeit that herders desire to take roof were you gave shelter
And with their fire and brimstone you run out helter skelter.
These handshakes have passed the elbow so no longer a jest
In spirit of trinity and brotherhood standing I summon our zest
To talk or speak about love and hate though in Law both are hate,
In speech in loyalty to our country to keep against hate crime is a date.

When my mouth is gagged my handy pen shall speak volumes in a word
To cut hate barriers its sharp and dangles like Damocles sword

I see evacuated to the House of Assembly 15 unburied bodies
Of human souls for political autopsy upon political studies .

After autopsy, tears will remain in the eyes of relatives left behind
And amnesty that goes to their killers comes in cash and kind.

I ask has our growth as a nation reached its plateau,
That we are now on descent to the lowest ebb in status?
Why can't we join the global village to live as one family?
If now we won't adjust our living I foresee no future jubilee.

Dr. Chinwuba Chukwura

Let Us Return To Labour for Future Glory Not Party

For the economy to grow in words we pray
There is a price in money as tax to pay
While the churches in seat capacity are full
The great black economy remains in lull

Daily in Father, Son, and Holy Ghost's name,
And sins forgiveness and others to blame,
For their woes in tongues they pray,
In season and out of season, day by day..

In deed prayers can move mountain
To produce Manner flowing like water fountain..
Nonetheless prayers are like faith supplements
So alone cannot sustain life; from experiments,
True living is both by bread and on God's words;
So many toiling only in prayers like faith without works
Perish for punning their future on faith in lucks..

Can praying and fasting grow our economy,
When our hands shun agriculture and agronomy?
See how we sorrow when we go a borrowing
In sowing we reap, in borrowing there's weeping..
If we must borrow lets borrow more vessels
Like Zarahet to fill our worked blessings
If we return to labour to till the soil
Just as we had reaped from oil

Lord will reward our works in labour
And all gains in taste we shall sweet savour..

Even with more zest to save a soul
Religion in economic revamp plays a role
For Ceasar's demands for tax
See protest not in mosque but in church mass
Halycon days are over Caesar awaits his tax..
Christ urged all unto Caesar to give tax due
Yet the new Faith calls faithfuls to Faith avenue
Forgetting that to live by faith are the just
For this delusion dereliction in civic duty is a must
Tithes and offerings gathered in save haven
Believers in austere times expect like Elijah to be Raven
Fed always timely at Cheritt by its brooks
So they search not for food at crannies and nooks
Of our abundant county's lands that are fertile
Full of capabilities yet dormant,in state in-erectile

Let's all keep neighbours as church goes for broke
in our pockets
Which by pulpit torments about hellfire pickets
In prayers there's a falling Manner to expect
High are miracles expectation in many a life's aspect
And the soul condemned to pity
In gift of widow's mite pockets become empty
Sure spending on frivolities deplete our revenue
We sit at home at month's end we rue
For we rest and pray on our sundays
And we sit at home on our mondays
Laziness and idleness take turns as our name
For our woes we look for whom to blame
We oppress with the rod
Like a toy gifted by Moses God
We suppress with the Gun
And for political offices with dirty money we run

Let those with filthy lucre take note
In obidience our conscience will cast vote
They can with our body frisk

The thinking mind shall take the risk
Of counting the labours of our Heroes past
And in Obedient rail not derail but steadfast
And by the votes of youths bid destiny to standby
Hop into positivity don't let this train pass you by...

Ezennadiri Chukwudi

Neo- Colonialism

Here comes a form of new colonialism
It is called Neo- Colonialism.
Colonialism ruled by the expatriates,
All because of their experts.
They took our children as slave
Who worked to their grave?
They employed our children with little wage
That provoked them to always rage.
Without rest they work with force
Because they were threaten with sacking armed forces.
In our soil; our children are taken to exile
Where they are captivated in an isle;
They refused them to see their family
When our children have lost their many.
In their language they make great mockery
Because they see us as black monkey
Ha ha ha, they laughed
Why won't they be starved?
They said that they want independence
Yet they need our dependence.
When they know it is impossible to separate
Because we are the only people that can operate;
Without us they can achieve nothing
With us by their side, they are something
We pay our tribute at home with their resources
Where we can make our source.
We granted their request
But we still hold our conquest.
We told ourselves to introduce Neo- colonialism

And assumed to end colonialism.
Let them among themselves become rulers
But them inside our colonialism we are rulers.
Without us they can achieve nothing
With us at their side they are something
They made us suffered under the sun.
This I cry when I saw
Oh! I thought colonialism has gone
But the expatriates are not yet done.
Colonialism came as a history
But become to us a mystery.

Silenced in my Right – Ezennadiri Chukwudi
I was silenced in my right
When I am doing what is right.
They said that I am not alright
Thinking that I was used for rite
This gave me a sleepless night.
I tried to fight with all my might
But I was shot down like a kite.
I cried so bitterly at my site.
Like the great heroes that I cite
Nobody could look at my sight,
All were afraid of my right.
So that they will not silenced their right;
But instead, I stayed too tight
And refused to move out of my right;
Until I die in my right.

Oluchi Okeugo

Wardrobe

It gazes from a conspicuous corner.
To remind me of a dreadful pandemic,
That things have abruptly changed,
As no one ever imagined or had a premonition.

The wardrobe, respecter of my hectic and active life,
Every day has its special colour outfit.
Befitting the societal status and its yearning
Memorable outings and alluring rendezvous'.

Care freely I put those attires on the laundry room,
Sometimes leaving them on the bed,
Lying there for days,
Never giving me a thought to ponder.

But today, my egotism got smashed.
As I saw my apparels static,
With all my smart colours for different day's outlook,
Starring and depicting "**forgotten**" and not having worn for months!

Where was I heading to wearing my beaded blouse?
What was I trying to prove?
What life had to do outdoors?
Where was my ego of being a human?
So many thought-provoking questions,
Will I ever wear one and go out again?
Will I welcome my friends' admiration soon?
Will I ever be with my acquaintances once more?

Will I ever need one at all?
Or can I survive without their companion?
The responses to all these questions,
Are the responses to the evolution of me!

Oluchi Okeugo

Tyranny's Tight Grip

The hankering and greed to rule the human race
Have swathed man's quest to live in peace;
The influential enthrones himself upon the podium
Of power, oblivious of doomed Nemesis.

We who denounced the ruler's whims,
We who have dodged his gambits and his guiles,
Have often worn a spikey coronet,
Unmindful of the derision from far off isles.

We knew our cause was one of piety,
We knew that History and posterity was on our side:
In spite of Mummy Gold's vindictiveness
And what that raffish proctor justified.

The bomb was meant to shatter and deploy;
It showed a petty weapon to employ
What a pollution of indelible scar to sore
Alas! A society of misery and mourn a lore

Oluchi Okeugo

Shadows of Coercion

In hallowed halls where knowledge gleams,
A sinister plot beneath the beams.
Where wisdom's light is dimmed and veiled,
A darker force has now prevailed.

A lecturer, esteemed, with knowledge vast,
But behind the podium, a shadow cast,
His eyes roam freely, with a predatory gaze,
Seeking targets for his twisted ways.

But in the shadows, whispers rise,
A rallying call to break the ties.
To shed the cloak of silent shame,
And reclaim dignity's noble name.

Young women, eager, come to learn,
But find themselves the subject of his concern,
His words, once wise, now tainted with lust,
Leaving them feeling violated and crushed.

He wields his influence like a weapon sharp,
Leaving scars on souls, leaving hearts to harp,
On the injustice of a system blind,
To the harassment that steals their peace of mind.

They dare not speak, for fear of reprisal,
Their dreams held hostage by his vile denial,
But silence only serves to feed his greed,
As he preys on their vulnerability with ease.

So let the truth ring out, clear and loud,
For justice shall prevail, and evil be cowed,
And may this treatise serve as a clarion call,
To stand against harassment once and for all.

Cornel Ujowundu

Revoke the Evil

I shudder to think

Of the catastrophic consequences

Emanating from Boko Haram acts

The catastrophic consequences

Arising from the Odua People's Congress

The catastrophic consequences

From the Niger-Delta People's Volunteer Force

The cessation struggles of

The Movement for the Actualisation of

The Sovereign State of Biafra

The abominable cult activities

Of the Ombatse mafia sect

The horrible fundamentalism

Of the Islamic Jihadists

The fanatical zeal

Of the Christian crusades

The crude and felonious acts

Of the insatiable militants

The intractable sentiments

Of racists and tribal jingoists

The endemic corruption of

Our leaders, civil servants and political office holders

To the very existence of the country

And the horrible effects on the black race
My dear countrymen let us prevent
The inhuman and horrible experiences

Cornel Ujowundu

The Star in You by Cornel Ujowundu

There is a star in everyone of us
Waiting to be unfolded
And celebrated
We must discover this star
And cultivate it
Nourish it
Like Walt Disney
Never give up
Never get discouraged
Give expression to the star in you
Who is in charge of your life?
Who's in charge of your future?
The star is in you
Do not die with it
Develop it
Cultivate it
Give it expression
And give it value

Sylvanus Onyeachulam

Flood

Flood Flood Flood
You are so powerful
Caused more harm than good
Flood, you are too much

You don't have legs
You don't have hands
But your speed past aeroplane
Faster than moving vehicle

Flood, you pursued gods
You brought out the buried
Corpses
Devastating her and there
Who caused all these things

You move very silently
Every effort to control you
Is all abortive
Because, your strength is great

Powers that be cannot control
You
You move very silently
Warriors ran at your sight
Witches saw you and took flight

Flood, where do you come from
Who created you?
After havoc, where do you go
Flood, men fear you

Farms destroyed by flood
Animals flee, but you caught

Them
Utter words, diviners could not
Overpowered, all trees and total
Buildings

Flood you are very proud
But you must be subdued
By only one person I know
The Supreme Being

Ocheni Kazeem Oneshojo

The Sunflower

I peeped and peeped in my lively state,
And saw a fresh sunflower sprouting, ripe and bloomy.
I was almost blinded by its light.
The body of the flower was delicate and fragile,
A weed surrounded by weeds.
I was careful not to hit and injure the sunflower.
I took a deep breath, far from touching the flower,
Touching my body, rough as a porcupine's skin.
I looked at the sunflower again, stood gazing, and scented her sweet smell.

Oh! I actually saw a girl, a lady who struck my heartening sight,
Struck and hit by the touch of life.
I held my tears amidst sadness.
She is an angel.

How I wish I could touch the delicate skin of her body!

My mind wailed and cried for my flower, delicate like the newly sprouted sunflower.

All was longing for her.

I kept gazing but didn't touch the sunflower.

I kept peeping; my heart craved for her.

In my lively state, gazing and dozing,

I will one day cut and replant my sunflower.

I will cut and replant my sunflower, for it is mine.

I really want the sunflower

It's in my reach and capability

With determination

lest it grow on another land

Nothing is impossible

The yellowish nature of her is glaring.

Sparkling and shining in a gloomy spirit.

I will make it spark willingly

In a state of rebirth.

Ocheni Kazeem Oneshojo

The Great One by Ocheni Kazeem Oneshojo

(For Ikechukwu Asika)

Here stood a gigantic two legged
Dark being
Filled with serenity and passion of his pen
All pleasures and lessons proved
By the impact of your ballpoint
Mere reading your pennings give me goosebumps

You navigating through the forest of Literature
Like a lost chick finding his home
Covering the up and down of literature
Nigeria is waving her hands
To tell her tales of sorrow

Why are we penners born?
To clean the faces with sorrows and beam it with smile
Evolving the world of literature like a revolver
Lay a hand on his book
And feel the mortality of literature

Let's give room for the new age writers

Oh! who said literature is dead?

"Ike Asika!"

Who will save the countries?

Writer or politicians?

The two are live saver

One will save

The other too will save

Books have been written

And crying for hands to feel them

You write to cure people of their sorrow

You write to inspire people's life

Drama, prose and poetry are your ways

One day you will never regret putting me through your ways

Emeka Aroh Paul

Leave the Lights on

“Does it hurt to kill?” (silence)
“To take life?” (pause)
“Human life?” (extended silence)
‘Not after the first time.’
“How?’

Conviction is as blinding as hate.
Not sure where the drumbeats come from
you lock in and wait, watching and following the marked one
holding your breath until the rubber band inside snaps.
(silence)

“What happens?”

Clouds clear. Change comes.
You climax with wild eyes, and realize you are not the same
as sweat and sulphur drip into the corners of your mouth;
a taste that you can never wash away.
Without wine you stagger. Without reason you fume.
Flashbacks leave you sweating as angry, pleading and frightened eyes
stare back at you at every turn.
Anger becomes a new rush.
You shake each episode off and hold the steering strong.
Dogs know. Cats cross the street before your shadow falls on them.
Children beg that you leave the light on.

Ezeonyido Chioma

LIFE

Life is a journey, full of surprise,
With ups and downs, it's no disguise.
Cherish the moments, big and small,
Embrace the lessons, stand tall.

Dreams to chase, and goals to achieve,
In every setback, we can still believe.
Find joy in the ordinary, the extraordinary too,
Live each day fully, let your spirit renew.

Life's a tapestry, woven with care,
A symphony of moments, beyond compare.
Embrace the adventure, with open arms,
For life's beauty lies in its endless charms.

Onyebuchi Promise

DREAM

"Dream,oh sweet and mystical dream,
Whisking me away to lands unseen
You bring me life's sweet memories
And secrets from the depths of the sea

Your spirit takes me to another realm
I fear to wake and shatter this realm
The life in the dream is lovely and sweet.

" Dream,oh sweet and mystical dream
Like an infant in it's mothers womb
You whisk me away to lands unseen
In the dream realm,wishes come true

" Dream,oh sweet and mystical dream,
I'll hold to my dream like precious treasure
But wake each day to shape my own future
For dreams may be a refuge from the world

" Dream,oh sweet and mystical dream
And yet, when I wake to reality's call
I yearn for the dream world, heart and soul
Though dreams may fade like morning dew

" Dream,oh sweet and mystical dream
Though life In dream is enchanting and blissful
I know that waking life has much to offer
For dreams are but a temporary retreat
So I'll cherish my dream.

Mauru Madu Ogechi

My Bankable Father

In the quiet strength of a steady hand,
Resides the essence of a noble man.
A beacon in the night, a guiding star,
My dependable father, both near and far.

Through life's intricate and winding maze,
He walks beside me in myriad ways.
A pillar of support, unwavering and true,
In his presence, courage anew.

With calloused hands that toil and strive,
He shapes the world so dreams survive.
A tireless worker, a silent knight,
Navigating challenges with resilient might.

In the hush of dusk or morning's gleam,
His wisdom flows like a timeless stream.
A font of lessons, silently taught,
In every action, love is sought.

Through seasons changing, and years that pass,
He remains my anchor in the looking glass.
In his gaze, a story of strength and grace,
My dependable father, a steady embrace.

In moments small and grand, I find,
His legacy woven in every kind
Gesture of love, every sacrifice made,
In his shadow, I stand unafraid.

A reservoir of patience, an endless sea,
My dependable father, eternally.
In the tapestry of life, a thread so grand,
A testament to the strength of a father's hand.

Mauru Madu Ogechi

My Preeminent Mother

In the symphony of life, a steadfast drum,
Beats the heart of a woman, my powerful mum.
A force of nature, fierce and free,
In her strength, a timeless legacy.

Her hands, creators of a haven warm,
Weathered yet mighty in life's storm.
A lighthouse standing 'gainst the tide,
With unwavering strength, she does abide.

Through sleepless nights and dawning days,
She weaves dreams in a nurturing maze.
A symphony conductor, orchestrating grace,
In every challenge, she finds her place.

Her words, like echoes in the canyon vast,
Whisper wisdom from a storied past.
A reservoir of courage, depth untold,
A source of inspiration, ageless and bold.

In the crucible of hardship, she finds her power,
An unyielding spirit, an enduring flower.
Her laughter, a melody, joy profound,
In the tapestry of life, a sacred sound.

With resilience as her guiding light,
She faces shadows, banishes the night.
A warrior queen in the battles fought,
In her love, a universe is wrought.

In her eyes, galaxies swirl and twirl,
A cosmic dance, my powerful mother, my world.
With each heartbeat, a saga is spun,
Of love unbreakable, a bond second to none.

Mauru Madu Ogechi

My Adorable Grand-Mother

In the embrace of time's gentle span,
A portrait painted by life's tender hand,
Stands a figure with wisdom's gaze,
My grand-mother, in memory's maze.

Her eyes, a reflection of stories untold,
A lifetime's tapestry, a love unfold.
Lines on her face, etched by years,
Each wrinkle a testament, joy and tears.

In her kitchen, a haven of warmth,
A symphony of scents, memories swarm,
The apron-clad guardian of family lore,
A recipe book filled with love galore.

Through the seasons, her hands would toil,
Tending to gardens in sun and soil,
A green-thumb magic, a touch so kind,
Nurturing blooms in her love-defined.

Stories spun like a cozy yarn,
By the fireplace, as the shadows warn,
Of days gone by and lessons learned,
In every tale, a legacy earned.

A rocking chair, a timeless throne,
Where lullabies and sagas are known,
Her laughter, a melody, soft and sweet,
Echoing in the halls of memory's suite.

Oh, the quilt she wove with threads of care,
A patchwork of moments, stitched with flair,
Each piece a chapter, a vibrant hue,
Binding generations, the old and new.

Through the lens of love, I see her still,
A guardian angel on memory's hill,
Her spirit lingers, forever near,
My grandmother's love, a treasure dear.

Okafor Mmasichukwu Winifred

A sextet

Devoted to loneliness,
Open arms you give me yet there's apathy
Night as cold as the moon yet there's comfort
I've been cynical
Open arms yet I see myself run away
I guess it's time, time to let go of this coldness.

Uzor Maxim Uzoatu

PRINCESS

(For Paris Ujunwa Ololade Pearce)

Babe of all sweetness
In so celestial a touch
You loft the verse
Onto seraphic heights
Gathering gems

Beyond the cradle.

Babe of all radiances
Harmony becomes being
Your hug of light
Coupling milk and jet
In a blaze of afflatus
Ordaining the universe anew.

Babe of all possibilities
In melody you exhale
Forged in the gorge
Of the innermost credo
By the advent of nectar
Upon the natal canvas.

Babe of all wonders
Princess of faith
The rainbow spells your name
In the hub of confluence
Melding eternal glories
And boundless communion.

Olisa Ewuzie

THE POWER OF A WOMAN

I tottered helplessly
Blindly at first, though
On the border of probity and partiality
Like a bird dangling on a line

And meddling with fear and favour
Amidst man and woman
Whom by nature
Was made a fragile frame

Suddenly, upon my clouded thoughts,

Sanity descended like a thunderbolt
Shattering the shell of bias
That trapped my heart

Splashes of reason splattered
Spilling over my heart, dripping,
Dainting my conscience with facts;
And facts welling up to my mouth:

That women, though
Of a delicate frame made
Were wired with an invisible mesh
That tangles reason in men

On a tongue of fire
They cook the heart of men
And men eating same at lofty price
Non-negotiable to them.

Uju-Nwa Okoye

Mourning losses with the Lord's prayer

Our fathers who art in heaven, long before us gone hallowed be thy names do
you murmur in pain over the betrayal of kin.
Folded arms, heads sagging and hearts torn (Àlu) thy kingdom come
quaking, questioning those who return as men clothed in sin.

Have our Mothers lost their tender care? give us our daily bread hands weaving
sumptuous refectations, sooth stained hands immolating.
Have our daughters lost their their skins fair? forgive us our trespasses
Dahomey warriors spears dropped, pelt bleaching. Have our fathers lost their
unwavering strength? lead us not into temptation
virile ardour sowing seeds, pleasure plowing on virgin soils.
Have our sons lost their hunting poise, backs bent.? deliver us from all evil

rhythmic drumming accompanying scarlet sanguine toils.

Have our people lost their tongues? (sigh) their power and their glory
tongues warring, tongues in discord, decolonizing tongues. Mother tongue
ebbing, have our people lost their tongues? forever and ever
their African speaking tongues the gods forbid it.

Uju-Nwa Okoye

Mourning losses; Weep for the land

*"Identities folded up like rolled up mats
that when the midday sun crawls out
we lie backs to the ground and seek relief
in the cold hard floor"*

Weep for the land
the land retrogressive, vile in itself
the virus of which there is no cure spreads
leading to acidic gonorrhic hallucinations

Weep for the people
our sons with loose hanging jeans, matted hair
our daughters victims of an empty greed
our children alm beggars silenced by stomping crowds

Weep for the future

Like the accursed fig tree will bear no fruit

dried out Sahara's, flooded Pacifics

rainbow coloured laughter induced by cocained hope

Weep again for the land

gutters are incinerators, nosebleeding

beings burning, ninevah wailing, Jonah fleeing

The land accursed

Nenye CJ

Shackles of Hate

Invisible chains bind us tight

A legacy of hate, an endless fight

Skin tone a sin, a curse to bear

A world divided, with no care

But we are one, a human race

With hearts that beat, and a shared space

Let's break the chains, and shatter the glass

And see the beauty, in every face

In every face, a story's told

A unique soul, with beauty to hold

Eyes that sparkle, like stars in the night
A smile that shines, and makes our hearts take flight

Let's celebrate, the beauty we see
In every shape, in every identity
For beauty is diverse, and beauty is grand
And every face, in this land, is a work of art.

Ekwueme Kelechi

Please Tell Mama

The veil on Afrika
Has been blown away
By a whirlwind from the coast of Asia
Afrika has now learnt
To wear an African wig
Please tell Mama.
Tell Mama
Afrika has now garnered
Muscles with strength within them,
Against the bullies
That wearied Afrika down
With it Afrika is fighting back.

Please tell Mama
The crying Afrika
Is now a crowned Afrika
Afrika has found a foot
And the Sahel is the foothold
Afrika is rising again
But this time
With a spear and dagger.

Tell Mama
That her tears
Has found expression
In the heart of true Afrikans.

Tobenna Muogbo

Another

Looking for the fruit of the womb
Desperately longing to feel like a woman,
Desiring to have a baby bump.
Mocked and Shamed by Family and Foe
Finally it came,
The baby bump she wanted
"I'm pregnant" she said happily.
Feeling fulfilled, cherishing the pregnancy for months

One night upon waking up,
The bed was damp
Blood flowing down her legs.
Puzzled, No one ever told her about this
It finally dawned on her.
She had a miscarriage,
She resurfaced before her family and friends
Asking her for her pregnancy.
"It's no more" she said smiling,
Knowing that God gives and takes,
Surely he will give her another.

Betty Adache

Africa: Stares in defiance

I've refused to break, I don't mind acting strong
Because one day, I'll wear resilience and break records like Armstrong

When you look closely at my skin you can tell my history
For I've navigated through life to find my healing story

The curls of my hair tell the story of my timidity
All because I wear the skin of femininity

I come from a society where you are worthless
As long as you are penniless

Someone should please remind her that her worth is far above rubies

But how can she remember when she's treated like she has rabies

She's surmounted by the rush from society
Now, she suffers from anxiety

Someone should please remind her that the fastest route to eternity
Is to rush into an unplanned destiny

I tell two stories
Expressed from a heart encumbered by troubles

Stories from an unforgettable past
And a daunting present

But a look in the mirror and I see a black tough skin
Then, I hear echoes of survival where I and victory are akin

I see a woman who stares in defiance
At the call of the demons of negligence

I see solidity
I see integrity

I see a nation
Ready to shut the noise from the past in motion

I see a dark skinned warrior
I see a relentless emperor
I see her...

Arinze Nweke

My gentle gem

At a year and eight moons,

She fetches my drinking water, brings her sit settling to turn my food to hers.

She orders orderly for her spoon, without wasting time to ask me.

She smiles steadily like myself on seeing her mother after many moons passed.

Taking every mouthful, munching merrily while mimicking myself,

She shouts my heart's hasty praises.

Ugo nna ya!

Her father's pride!

Growing like grazing stars I watch above the skies always,

Looking like me in her healthy woman's body,

With her mother's mere meek eyes that I'm possessed to confess truth always,

I watch, wishing words work wonders in her name.

Indeed, my fathers have done a great deed for me.

So, states the name I gave graciously on her birth day.

I marvel always, arising from hopeful hopes of days to pray patiently for your health.

I pray to see sights of you, sitting steadily beside my food, waiting worried for my meat to share.

Arinze Nweke

Farmer

Rare ready eyes, he wears
Quiet quick paces braced daily
While waiting worrying of their growth
And smiling slowly within himself always.

Giving grace hands, he bears
Guiding grants for healthy births
While waiting worrying of their growth
And humming humbly within himself always.

Like loving days to come, he endures
Greeting grateful heavens daily
While waiting worrying of their growth
And watching weary clouds cover his eyes.

Praying patiently, he asks
For favours for great sales
While waiting worrying of their growth
And counting cunning days into his pockets.

Kosi Igwenagu

The Beauty of the rising day

In the golden glow of the rising sun,
The world awakens, a new day begun.
Birds sing sweetly in the blue sky,
Nature dances in the morning dew.

Blossoms bloom with vibrant hues,
Perfuming the air with sweet fragrance of perfume.
The gentle breeze whispers through the trees,
Carrying secrets of the buzzing bees.

Sun-kissed skin and sandy toes,
The warm weather brings joy that flows.
Laughter rings through the balmy air,
Memories made with Family and friends.

So I embrace the sun's warm embrace,
And soak in the beauty of this special weather.
Filled with magic and with delight,
As I bask in its golden light.

Kosi Igwenagu

The wind of change

When the wind of change begins to blow,
And life's uncertainties starts to show,
I wary of paths unknown and wide,
And keep my heart's compass as my guide.

Take heed of promises too good to be true,
And I remember my worth, as I journey through,
For in the shadows, deceit may lurk,
So I listen closely to my instincts' murk.

I let caution be my faithful friend,
As I navigate the twists and bends,
Saying to myself, stay wise and aware,
And my inner light will always shine bright.

So I tread lightly, but with steadfast grace,
I let wisdom guide me through life's maze,
In times of doubt, I remember this tune,
Caution will surely lead me to the light of the moon.

Irene Chiamaka Isidienu

AN ODE TO NIGERIA

Nigeria, land of the rising sun
Where cultures blend, and traditions begun
From the hills of Jos to the shores of Lagos
Your beauty shines bright, like a radiant glow

Nigeria, land of the rising sun
Your people strong, with hearts full of cheer
Resilient and brave, through joy and through fear
From the Niger Delta to the Savannah's plain

Nigeria, land of the rising sun
Your diversity is a treasure to gain
Your history rich, with stories untold
Of empires and kingdoms, where legends are told

Nigeria, land of the rising sun
Your art and craftsmanship, forever will be sought
Your music and dance, a rhythm so sweet
Afro beats and highlife, that can't be beat

Nigeria, land of the rising sun
Your cuisine a fusion, of flavors so fine
Jollof rice and suya, a taste divine
Your people have struggled, through trials and strife

Nigeria, land of the rising sun
But still, you rise up, with a resilient life
Through the ups and downs, you stand tall and strong
Nigeria, your spirit, will never be wrong

Nigeria, land of the rising sun
From the mighty Niger, to the Atlantic shore
Your beauty and wonder, we adore
Nigeria, our home, our heart, our pride

Nigeria, land of the rising sun
For you are a nation, of great might and main
Nigeria, we love you, and will forever remain

Zarau Nuhu Zuru

A CRY

Kilon shele?
Ogini neme? Chai!
Menene haka? Haba!

I heard them ask ,as they run miles apart in order to survive.
For sure I know the evil shall face a wrath from above.

He lost his mum
She lost her dad
They lost them both.

What do I do to stop the bleeding coming straight from my heart.

Come on my friends hurry
to help what is left.

The shadows are still in the dark, oh! God please show some light.
The sleepless nights, and the restless days all for the fear of unknown.
I heard children singing and hoping for a fantastic fun fair of peace.
The cry for a help torments me in the deepest of my sleep, from the EAST to the SOUTH and that of the NORTH.

Bishops and imams come hurry to attend and to concur at the peak of the highest of event.
Sometimes I hope, I wish i can walk, I wish i can sing, i wish I can dance, as free as I can in the land of my dream.

You kill, they kill, she kills and he kills that can't do us good for sure I can tell.
The sinners and the saints are like the two sides of a coin, just like the morning and night, Only the maker can reveal.

Oh! You who believe, come out! write out! Voice out! For a dear hope of relief.

Kilon shele?
Ogini neme? Chai!
Menene haka?Haba!

Abdulmalik Mohammed

OUR SAVIOURS

Free scholarship for all
Portable water supply
Good health services
No more epileptic power supply
Like the isle gods
On the platform
He towered
As uproar bathed him
He glorifies his manifestoes
As he combs
Tents, clubs. Bars and associations
With open ears we listen
For a cup of wine
Our consciences are sold
Our future
We mortgaged
Our future
And that of
Our children
As we feed
On the crumbs
Off their table
On streets and lanes
Their colorful posters bedecked
On high ways
A larger than life IMAGE
Splintered on bill boards

OUR SAVIOURS boldly inscribed

Traps of death

Now our roads

Our Mr. EXCELLENCY

Our HONORABLES

Abdulmalik Mohammed

Obubra

In 2007
And the biggle blared

Oh!
This unholy time
Then
This croaks
And the quakes that rattled

And the biggle blared
Blaring his voice
Hoarsely
“if you tanda dere
You are wrong”

And the biggle blared

“wallahi!
Kai__
Wallahi talahi!
I go make am you useless”
Qua...qua..qua..
Ha..ha...ha..
The platoon thundered
In laughter
The khaki man triggered!
Again!
“if I can not
Speak Engilish
I can say
Engilish”
This, in a
Superb Hausa
Phonology
We all look on
And laughed

And the biggle blared

He dangled
As desert camel does
Faint
Splendor
And to the air
He echoed
My father's biggle

And the biggle blared
But this clarion call
This oath
Of sunshine
Of rain

And the biggle blared
"cosmetics double up
Ajgunle
Otondo
All"

And the biggle blared
Then
This DRILL
Oh! This regimented vigour
This sweet sweat

And the biggle blared
Came this moment:
First the chill of the dew
And the scorching sun,
Piercing
We trudge seeking
this end

This endless and with fearless fear
we encroached
valleys and hills
This terrains

This swamps and jungles
Sweeping into the woods

Our mind doubt
In bid
Seeking this end

Then
This habitat
And her dweller
The nudity that clustered

And like Frost's
"Two look at two"
Our hearts foundered
As theirs be

And this time
Yet another woods
Rousy
The chirping birds bid
And the frogs in the swamps

As memories keep records
Then
This mountains
The *Ikpene*
Mounts our hearts
Like millipede we mount
Seeking the end
This end

This endurance trek
Asleep now the biggle
Clamouring,

This rituals
Of splintered
But gathered logs
And like an inferno

This flame
This flame and her growth
 Steadily
 Slowly
 She glows
These spectacular drummers
And their thrilling tune
Basking the air

The worshippers
Chants numbers
As we in platoons

And somewhere afar
But near
This paradise night
And the night of the
Camp fire

Uba Somtochukwu Anthonet

A world's cry

In the pattern of the world, war's shadow looms,
A dark thread weaving through nations' rooms.
From distant lands to our doorstep so near,
Its echoes of pain, sorrow, and fear.
In the heart of conflict, lives torn apart,
Families shattered, aching hearts.
Children robbed of their innocence,
In the aftermath, a heavy penitence.
Fields once lush, now scorched and bare,
The toll of war, heavy to bear.
Communities fractured, bonds undone,
In the wake of battles fought and won.
The scars of war run deep and wide,

A legacy of pain, nowhere to hide.
Memories linger, haunting the land,
A testament to humanity's hand.

Yet amidst the rubble, hope still springs,
In the hearts of those with broken wings.
Courage rises from the ashes of despair,
A beacon of light in the darkest lair.
Let us strive for peace, a world made whole,
Where swords are sheathed, and bells toll.

In the tapestry of humanity, let love prevail,
And war's cruel grip forever pale.

Ugochukwu Faith Choima

A Wailing Land

Have you seen a land?

The land is irredeemable

Have you seen a land?

A monster that roars and kills

Where greed has become the deal

Ridicule is for it's inhabitants.

Have you seen a land?

Ever developing, never developed

Embezzlement we ought to say

All assembled in politics.

Have you seen a land?

That steals the hopes and visions of its blood

All at the favour of pharaoh

Who favours those useful?

Have you seen a land?

That is embodied with gold yet suffers

A Giant of Africa, all is ridicule

Have you seen a land?

That land is irredeemable.

Iwu Jeff

Mondays & Melodies

Monday's melody bursts forth like a Lagos horn,
A cacophony of chaos wakes the dawn.

In Lagos, danfo buses rumble,
Roaring like a loud engine,
In Abuja, vultures assemble,
Their sharp eyes scan the crowd, seeking for prey.

In Nsukka, okpa vendors call out to passersby,
Their hot delicacy, under the morning sky.

In Kano, traders hustle, goods on display,

In Port Harcourt, oil workers toil, ringed in rigs & pipes,
Their labour fuelling the nation's cares.

In Ibadan, students on the rush, dreams in their bags,
In Onitsha, markets bustle, colours & scams.

The streets come alive, a kaleidoscope of movement,
An armed tornado, twirling round & round.

Thieves lurk in shadows, hands always on the take,
Pickpockets weave through crowds,
Their skillful fingers always on the move.

Vultures in smiling faces prey on innocent souls,
Their talons extended, stealing dreams, hopes and futures
With a merciless grip, leaving scars that will never heal.

Monday's momentum, a whirlwind of activity and energy,
A day of deadlines, of deals, of hustle, of relentless drive.
A treadmill of striving, never-ending and free.

From Owerri to Maiduguri, from Benin to Sokoto,
Mondays in Nigeria pulse with energy and motion,
A beat that never slows.

Senator Nancy

Loving you

So this is love
Making this beautiful sound
Like butterflies in my stomach
Awaiting explosion

So this is love
Accompanied with trust
The confidence I have
Knowing you are mine

So this is love
Making my heart race
Pounding like a mortar
Attacked by a pestle

So this is love
Speaking through the wind
As it blows my hair
Backwards in it's fury

So this is love
Smiling brightly on me
Like the moon and stars
Up in the sky at night

So this is love
And this is how you make me feel
If loving you is a crime
Then I would be guilty

Nzekwe Ifunaya

Painful Strides

Shining bright, the sun gives a warm embrace
The feeling of the gentle breeze on my skin,
And the therapeutic scent of the wind, filling the earth
The clouds drift by, creating a soothing sight
Just like the saying, "Fair weather"
hope for the future

With every step I make, a sharp pain cuts deep
The resounding beat of my heavy heart, my soul weeps.
This load of burden, I constantly have to bear.
With my slow and unsteady gait,
I push forward hoping to relieve the betrayal I feel in my heart
Reminiscing time, past memories, with every flow of the wind
Oh, how I acted so folly
I trusted and gave my all
If only I had known,
I was comfortably numb to being taken advantage of.

When I thought I had found peace,
Once again it eludes me.
Was I ever meant to be happy?
Is this my forlorn fate?
I am indeed walking my journey of a thousand miles
Miles of unending chaos and unrestrained doom.
My skin is beginning to crawl
Well, I guess the weather was never fair.
Nothing seems to be anymore
I'm beginning my journey with painful strides.

Solomon Ameh Lawrence

ATTAH (FATHER)

In the heart of Africa, where the Niger flows,
Lies the igala kingdom, where a great story rose,
From the lineage of kings, a ruler stood tall,
His name was Ameh Oboni, revered by all,
He was refered to as Attah, the title of a king,
He bore it with honor and his praises they'd sing,
He ruled with justice, and he ruled with might,
But the whispers grew louder, shadowing the light,
His people conspired, their loyalty waned,
Jealousy and greed were the seeds that they gained,

The colonial masters sought to impose their will,
Yet, Attah Ameh stood firm, his spirit unbroken still,
He defied their mandate, he challenged their laws,
The strength of his ancestors guided his cause,
His kin, his blood, turned against their lord,
Plotting and scheming with silent accord,
Yet, Attah Ameh knew not to fear, he had a lion's heart,
His gaze was like thunder, and his voice the drawing of art,
He knew the danger, the threat to his line,
The colonials' grip, the betrayal's sign,
In solemn silence, he made his final stand,
Choosing his fate with his steady hand,
A thick rope he grabbed, a somber scene to see,
Yet, in his sacrifice, he would set them free,
He hung himself high, so the lineage could live,
An act of great courage, a gift he could give,
His story would echo through the ages to come,
The great tale of a king who refused to succumb,
Even though his reign was brief, yet his legacy was long,
Attah Ameh Oboni is the hero in this song.

Samuel Chiamaka Prodensia

The other half of her sun is red

For Biafra

Born with much of God's features,
Beautifully endowed from head to toe,
Her curvatures like an umbrella protecting her own people.

Her self esteem too high, able to break free from any bondage,
She believes so much in advance, determined to find and have that freedom.

Her lovers and children sing of her praise,
Her scent so pleasing to the nostrils,
Her beauty they say, never fades, remembered forever.

Her pride, self esteem, shattered in her pursuit for freedom.
These pillars of strength she once had came crashing and each blown away.
Like a lifeless flower, each pillar was flung away by the wind of destruction.

Her enemies eyesight sharpened at the sight of her defeat,
They organized a Dining table which came with gun wounds.

Her children from Alphabeta with empty palms dine with her enemies,
Switch blades in their eyes, silence in their voices.

For what seemed like eternity, she wept,
her children's playground became emptied of children toys.

She gave up and surrendered to her enemies, weak and lifeless,
With great pleasure her enemies left no room to chance.
They robbed her of herself, drank empty her glass of blessings.

Bent by obstacles, she becomes weak.
But despite her ordeal, she never broke and never will.

Obi, Gladys Nwakaego

COURAGE

I hate fear.
It is the opposite of me.
In short, we work in two parallel lanes,
Where it thrives I fail;
Where it fails, I am overcomer.
It leads to failure, because it can not face challenges.

I am an embodiment of willpower, I withstand challenges.
Life is full of trials and challenges,
That is why I am needed for success in life.
Fear cannot succeed in life, because it disappears where courage pushes so hard.
My name is courage, the backbone of Success.

Obi, Gladys Nwakaego PhD

UNEMPLOYMENT

Poverty amidst plenty
Richly blessed with abundance
Yet poverty looms
Decay of all sorts:
Jobless, poor infrastructures,
Crime and violence.
Who is to blame ?
The youth, nay,
The leaders corruption, planlessness and Greed...
Who suffers most, the youth ?
When shall the end be?
Unforeseeable, indeed, not in near future.
Unemployment: The Bane of Youth Development.

Obi, Gladys Nwakaego

INCOMPARABLE

Radiating through the space,
To illuminate a brighter view.
It grows ever brighter
As it aims directly to our "homestead"
Shown as white in a wing,
To produce magnificent images
In the heart of those that prefer it
For sure, it is the best of the two.
Unbelievable, there are some who prefer the other
Deeds in their lives
Are as dark as their choices
The two, one cannot compare
Light and darkness
Of course, the two are incomparable.

Alexander A. Onwumere

Strangers

I hear the discordant voices of strangers
Outlanders in the treasured land
Itinerants from assorted countries
In pursuit of golden goose.

They're voices of victims
The wretch of human trafficking
The scapegoat for devouring traffickers
The immolation of dare-devil pimps and panders.

The strangers wail from the pinnacle
Day-in day-out with hope for rescue
But the mirage is more real
As they're shut up by their slavers

The male strangers labour beyond restitution
They work endlessly for their masters
While the proceeds of their hard labour
Go to their flesh-peddlers.

The female strangers dedicate their sexual potency
To the unfamiliar faces of men
In an unwilling sexual escapades
Disregarding all its consequences of infections,
Degrading position, psychological torture
And social debasement
While the financial profits
Retire to their whoremongers.

I hear their solemn prayers to the high mountain
I hear their clarion call to NGOs
I hear their beseech to the government
I hear their entreats to the church leaders.

The voice of Agnes came louder from the belfry
In tears, inconsolable wailing
She told her irritating, ulcerated story to me
As an escapist returnee.

In the serene hinterland of Njaba
She lived with her widowed mother
Bedeviled with abject poverty
Eating from hand to mouth.

Madam Rose came as Jesus Christ
With irresistible promises of Italy trip
To give her education and job
And take care of her mother.

In frenzied delight
Mother and daughter concurred to the Greek offer

In two weeks her visa was ready
From villa to Owerri to Lagos to Italy.

Italy, her treasured land
Gave her warm cold welcome
In a confided well furnished room
Other girls, beautiful but half-naked welcomed her.

To her chagrin, harlotry orientation
Substituted the promised education
While whoredom in varying inns
Became the promised exalted job.

Her passport was seized at airport
And taken to a slave house
Where other girls lived in solitary confinement
Only to come out when a male customer came.

Many a time she's forced to sexual escapade
Without food in the wee hours
Rejection only attracted brutal clampdown
And ruthless position by the customer.

What a treasured strange land?
The grave yard of slavery and deprivation
The land of shattered hope and abuse
And monumental deception.

Alexander A. Onwumere

The Portraiture

Behold the image of her father
In a new born child
The surging visitors and well wishers say
In admiration of their traditional belief.

Our cosmology is concrete
Reincarnation is actual
Behold all the likeness
Behold Ajoku's true self.

His fairness is evident

The black emblem at his forehead
Beside his smiling face
And his character won't be different.

Ajoku said he will come again
To his daughter in a distant marriage
No longer calm, simple and coward
But awesome, brave and gentle.

Is he a true Ajoku?
No, Christianity would doubt.
Who then is he?
A simple creature of God.

Reincarnation is absurd,
Inconsistent, contradictory and illogical.
But incarnation is authentic
It is God Himself in Christ.

Which do we concur?
Christian faith as a new way?
Igbo world view as substantial originality,
Or the marriage of the two in acculturation?

Christianity remains, culture subsists

Live and let live

In cautious harmony

With non being supreme.

Alexander A. Onwumere

The Vipers

Daily, daily we hear about them

In the television and radio news

And read about them

In the newspapers and novels.

The vipers; the human traffickers

Wolves in sheep clothing

They exist but seem invisible

In many nations of the world

With domestic allies and international network.

The vipers seek for unsuspecting victims
From hinterlands and cosmopolitans
With gentility of concern and compassionate wish
But beneath is carnivorous exploitation.

They lure innocent boys and girls
With utopia promises of job,
Education, business and good welfare
But turn preyers and devour their quarry.

The vipers are modern slavers
Whose stock-in-trade is human trafficking
A lucratic business for them
But violation of human rights,
Aberration of societal norms,
Transgression of God's commandments
Infraction of personal wish and choice
And rupture of human psyche.

The vipers are relations to us
They worship with us in churches and mosques
They dine with unpatriotic rank and file of government
And wine with misanthropic hierarchy of security agents.

They pose as sacred cows
And break the law with impunity
As they flood the church leaders, government official and security agents
With mouth-watering, irresistible gifts.

So they stay untouchable
Never caught by law
Never arrested and imprisoned
And their devilish act never preached against.

But vipers' days are numbered
As revolution stands affront
Radical church leaders emerge
Fervid political leaders cry out
Non-Governmental Organizations re-strategize
Youths become more empowered with education
And reject intrigues and deceits
But accept reorientation, empowerment and Jesus.

POETRY EROTICA

Aschal Luchia

WEDDING NIGHT

Pitch black in the midnight gloom

Dim-lighted is the castle's inner room

Air filled with a mix of sweat, alcohol and a distinct smell of lavender

Soulful music emitting from the turntable at a corner

Warm unclothed bodies intertwined in this array of darkness

Gyrating hips to the rhythm of Blues with great finesse

Locked lips, slow thrusts, muscles straining

Soft whispers, muffled moans, sweat dripping

In a crescendo, the music will ascend

Creaking bed, hairs rising, bloodshot eyes, a sign to transcend

Reaching the peak of intense ecstasy

Throbbing heart, anew it feels; a fulfilled fantasy

Rumpled sheets they lay, under the naked night

Eyes glistening with every spectral ray of candle light

Arms clasped, gentle caress, loving kiss

Two now one in fulfilment of marital bliss

Moses Victor jassa

Masquerades on a bleeding bed

That smile from your dark lips
Has led us to bed from a kiss once again.
It was Hermes from Venus's palace
He took us! Not knowledgeable.

As you traveled my hands to your breast
So soft like pedals from Jove's feet
Till I felt the smell of your African skin
Through your neck to your wet thigh

Your strength could not hold my breath
As you screamed out moans from sweet pain
And your fingers have turned dropping ice
Burning my testicle even faster to release

Swift from Venus eyes when you grabbed my stiff flesh
And the goddess of love watched us bang this urge on bed
Dancing through the ocean of pride; No Victor no vanquish
blues of wango-tango while she smiles back wicking her hair

That feminine fingers of yours
Taught me what manhood was
When you screamed 'dig deep please!'
Hiding your nipples betwixt my lips

With the lit from the poison in your cervix
I became wax when you cum my hip in you
A moment of a rough catch-a-dick struggle
As I became a victim of another world war

Let us wake this weak rod for the last time
For I have not seen my climax shivering.
She will lift our feet into orgasm
If only you travel your hand for another round.

Stephanie Ndubuisi

Canvas of skin

Gliding and sliding,
Thrusting and trusting,
Our movements dancing,
To the rhythm we are making,
And singing to the melody,
Made by our body,
This music of lust,
With you is a must.

Coming and cumming,
Gasping and sighing,
Our breaths changing,
Because of the pace at which we are riding,
Sculpting and painting,

Paschal Luchia

THEN

I remember when we used to take long walks every evening
Hand in hand, swaying them in the air mindlessly
Like children skipping through the meadows
Just us both in our own little world
Where we could be ourselves without a care

I remember when we used to make sweet love
Under the full fluorescent moon of the night
You would stare into my face, arms wrapped around my waist and kiss me
longingly
Then you'd run your magical hands through my body curves
Gliding fingers inside of me pleurably with great expertise

I remember when you would pull down my loosely fitted dress down to my feet
Kissing my neck, down my protruded bosoms and then "Downtown Falls"
Lifting me up, wet and disrobed
"I need all of you", I whisper
I glide down his ribcage and I see, standing firm what I hunger for

I remember feeling your weight crushing upon me
Sweet gasps escaping from my lungs at uncontrolled will
Getting louder with every harder, deeper thrusts
Moving rhythmically, hitting every nerve in sight
Hand pressing down on my neck at the verge of haziness

Now, I walk through the fields alone with your photo in my pocket
Humming your favorite song and catching a whiff of your scent in the winds
Flashes of black and white moments replaying
Ephemeral we were, eternal we would have been
Alas, you lay in the arms of another

Olisa Ewuzie

SACRED SEDUCTION

Roaming at the munificent realms
Where the hand of nature nails
The voluntary functions of our being
Sensed I a virile tender touch

Thick-skinned and smooth,
Our body, under a nyctitropic force
Suddenly clasped and clutched
And rousing my senses, we smooched

Our legs slipping in the wind of emotions
We wobbled and wiggled helplessly
And he could not let go;
My fragile frame, his sauce

Like a blind man clinging to his stick
His hands tightened on my frail neck
And I felt his ancient rod
Slashing deep into my nectar

Blood mingled with beads of sweat, dropping
Yet, his grip was deeply probing,
We felt suffocated
Pain lingered in pleasures
Hairs on our flocculent skin, stood up,
Jerked in the air

With moribund efforts
I struggled to break loose
But his dexterous knowing hands
Imprisoned me, his fingers, pawing me

You like it? He whispered in my ear
From the rear
What? I chuckled quizzically

My brow furrowed dreamingly
He wiped a smile
Breaking away violently.
Sacred seduction

PIDGIN POETRY

Ofoegbu Cyril Okechukwu

Quick Receiving Ministry

Even if I no risiv call
I go call maisef
All call na fo wok
And evri woka soppoz rip in frut

I go open wan branch for mai papa land
Buy dat blak pikin wey de tok pipo tok
I go put wan big bana for de land
Kum put mai picture mek in big

In go big wella wella
Den I go rait wan beta nem for in head
De nem go swit for maut
Nem wey be laik "Quick Receiving Ministry"

I go cari plenty pipo kum
Mek I de risiv quick quick

Ofoegbu Cyril Okechukwu

Naija Clasrum

Naija clasrum no get joy at all
Na mini-market wey in be
Na dia you go si your village fowls
Wey folo you kum clas

Joy no dey at all
Your villagers go kum laik lizards
De nod head giv lecturers
Tel dem se mek dem faya on

Se dia lectures de swit
Moskitos go de shout “na mai own”
Wia una tu go de drag your bodi
Heat go de du you mekova

Naija clasrum na eni rum
Wey no get ‘clas’

Ofoegbu Cyril Okechukwu

Naija Polithi(ef)cians

If in get enitin wey I wan be

Na polithiefcian

If in get eni ples wey I go be am

Na for naija

Polithiefcians for naija no de get problem

Dey de alwez de rait

Evritin wey dey dia mind na tu cari moni run

If you catch dem dem go form siki body

You go get plenty moni if you waka laik dem

If you si dia hauzis your maut go de drop water

Dey de impot evri hauz wey dey get for Naija

Dia car moni fit buy MTN compini

Dia pikins no sabi wetin sand be

Na only air wey dey sabi

Ezennadiri Chukwudi

I Wan Rule Dis Country

I wan rule this country
So dat I go get big power.
I go dey waka with long long cars
And come get private jet for myself,
I go open kompani with my power
And close down any company wey big pass my own.
I go send my pikins to abroad school;
So dat dey no go listen to this illiterates teachers wey dey dis country.
Me and family go go for medical checkup abroad,
So that we no go die in the hands of this experienced quack doctors.
I go assign huge monie for mama and brodas
And call am presidential miscellelious.
I no go border at all, because nobody fit talk
Or else I go used sojas commot him house,
I go use police arrest him papa and mama,
I go use Navy beat am into the sea
And use Airforce carry am to de exile
For I be commander-in-chief of Armed robbers
I go make my wife de first lady and most beautiful lady;
And arrest any lady wey beautiful pass her.
I go put am for prison wey dey my house.

I wan rule dis country,
So dat I go dey always dey shake hands with Oyibo people
Sign and collect dem monie
I go promise my country beta road and water with Oyibo monie
But I go open water in front of my village house,
And build de road wey pass my house;
I don fulfill my promise
God go punish anybody wey go question me
Except de house of SINators and represenTHIEVES
But share de national cake well well
So dat dey no go comot me from my greener pasture

I wan rule dis country,
So dat nobody go question my power.

Stephanie Ndubuisi

I no dey alright.

Aw I wan take tell una,
Aw I wan take explain my story give una,
Or na bcoz say I dey smile,
Or bcoz say I neva yarn una my story,
Una con think say my happiness legit,
Una think say I no get yawa,
Or una no no say everybody get ein own yawa,
Still dat one no mean say,
Una go dey treat me like diz,
Me safe na pesin and I sabi cry,
I say I sabi feel pain o,
So abeg make una dey treat me well,
Make I no use bcoz of too much pain,
Con do myself bad thing or kon kpai.

Paschal Eze

UNITY NA THE WAY

Bitter cry dey echo for Naija, dreams don kpai.
Poverty hand dey tight, e be like prison,
Lawlessness dey hunt pikin, dey leave no trace
Bloody forests dey kidnap person, silent abeg-abeg wey dem no dey hear,
Hunger dey whisper with im tiny voice, still na cruel shege you go see.
Gutter dey carry di load of despair,
Heart wey dey pain, na burden e dey wear.

Mama carry worry wey dem don draw for their face,
Pikin laughter wey im lose becoz of hunger
Naija na big struggle, still life here dey move silent,
For inside life drama, na wahala we go see.
Structures dey fall, society dey fumble,
Hardship for daylight e don too many
But hearts dey strong kakaraka, dem dey seek change,
For inside this storm wey we dey try rearrange soon.

Kasala dey burst for this country wey no get leash,
Compassion dey find justice, justice dey run go collect bribe

We wan break the chains, make we fit bring solace to the oppressed.
For Naija, make hope dey shine small,
Collective effort, na the way make we fit stand tall and ready
Becoz for inside all this wahala and fight,
Chance dey for unity, coz na im be the way.

Such great artists we are becoming,
And with our eyes closed we savour,
And enjoy the flavour.

Julie Nwanua

DANCE OF SHAME

Arise my country people
Dis call no be for mouth, shine ya eye
"If I no rule country no go good"
Na dis put us where we dey

"I no sabi I no sabi"
Make boko-haram full we land
Unknown gun men dey suffer us die
Di tin we no sabi come dey sabi us

Na who self go help us
Our forest done be grave yard
For the poor wey no fit pay ransom
Our moto road na death trap
Our farm land na no go area
Becos of killer headsmen and kidnapas

Giant of africa ansa your name
Sleeping giant, snoring giant wik giant
Oh ! oh ! dance of shame

Na so Grandpapa dem do am?
Efiritin turn up side down for we hand
Di lion be king of the Forest
Nau the forest wan catch fire
Na who the king go rule?
Oh! oh! dance of shame

Na beg we dey beg oh king!
Come back to di table
Bend down, tatafo the good tori
Make our people hapi.
Make our people better.

SHORT STORIES

Ikechukwu Asika

Forget about Me

"...Then forget about me!"

"Fine!"

"Fine!"

"Yes, I said fine!" Those were the words the acoustic movement of sounds through the cement walls filtered into my ears. Those cement walls were supposed to barricade my mother's room and Uncle Jide's flat. Yet, from the sound of his music; the metallic laughter of the girls that frequent his room, to those strange sensuous noises at the wee hours of the night, mostly after a heated argument— almost everything that happened in Uncle Jide's room was well known to my mother and I. Uncle Jide too had his price to pay those nights he had to stay awake listening to my mother's unending fights with my father, whenever he returned from his trip to the north. There was no form of privacy in those flats, despite the high walls and pillars erected to guarantee them. Often I reasoned that the engineer that constructed the building was underpaid and in his anger, he left a hollow in between the walls and planted some tiny microchips that percolated noises and movements from one room and released them to another. And that evening, while I sat on our wooden chair, removing the weevils from the beans, the voices resonated across our room like the drumbeats of thunder.

I know the voice of Uncle Jide and Adaego and could recognize them even in my dream. Uncle Jide's voice was baritone, deep and husky marred with his stammer that became more evident whenever he was angry and had been pushed to a breaking limit. The other voice was cool, calm, and soft-spoken. It was as though her throat would break if she dared raise the pitch any further. But that evening, she raised the vocal pitch to heights I never knew her cords were capable of supporting. Her voice pierced through the peace of the evening and drown even his baritone voice.

She was not having it anymore.

Even the white pigeons in the cage on the ground floor of the building flew helter-skelter, much in restlessness and protest for a lady they thought was incapable of noise. That voice had been my source of inspiration, waking me up and sending me to bed the many days I felt life was devoid of spice and purpose. And to think about the many stupid things I had done in the past just to hear her speak, things that could make a storybook if perchance I was a gifted writer. Needless to say that it was her voice that made me fall in love with the many songs of Celine Dion and R. Kelly.

There was beauty in the way she took the notes and lisped the words as though she tasted them, giving every word of the songs the right of passage and place it deserves on her lips. Weeks later, after I learned some of the words, I sang with her, turning every moment into a thrilling performance from the rhythm oozing out from the giant Home Theatre at the center of their living room.

I held the imaginary microphone at one side, dressed in costume I assumed would fit the performance of R Kelly's song and I always assumed she was at the other end doing the same thing I was doing. Only the wall protected us and prevented her from realizing that she was never alone.

It had been me, me, and her performing the whole time! Whenever she was not singing and no sound was coming from the room, I always concluded that she was sleeping and I thought about her curled like an angel on the bed, her dark curly hair carefully asleep too beside her on the soft pillow. Then I imagined her thick eyebrows, dark eyelashes, and her two dimples, all at rest, waiting for their owner to wake and glow once more with her.

The memory of the afternoon my mother caught me peeping through the tiny hole of the doorpost in my bid to catch a glimpse of the image of Adaego is still fresh, even the silver spoon she landed on my head still hurt, in my mind though.

"What are you doing on somebody's door, you foolish son of a foolish father?" My mother had queried, surprised to see her son in a torn pink polo peeing through the opening of her neighbour's door. Fear pinned me to my position and like a lost wayfarer, I stared at the woman that was my mother fully aware that the truth would earn me degrees of punishment I could not fathom. My mother was visibly angry and only a few things trigger that dark colour in her eyes while she waited for me to speak.

"I wanted to know... if Uncle Jide is back I ..."

"So, by peeping through the door is the way to know whether Uncle Jide is back? Can't you see that his car is not in the compound? Have you ever seen him at home by this time of the day?" She queried.

"By the way, why are you looking for Uncle Jide?"

"I wanted to inform him that NEPA has restored light so that he can switch off his generator." My mother's face eased at the moment I mentioned NEPA and I saw on her face that she had bought my lie.

"And that is the way you inform a neighbor that NEPA has restored light? What stopped you from knocking at the door? Foolish boy! What if someone is naked behind that door? Let me catch you again, useless boy." She was finished with me and I was eternally grateful to the men of the power holding who timely restored power almost the same time my mother made her way to the stairs.

It was almost six months ago when my eyes first saw hers. I knew I was young, twelve years old, and only recently experienced my first wet dreams, but I already knew what beauty means and I adjudged Adaego the most beautiful girl my eyes had ever seen.

Those evenings I picked dirt and tidied the compound, all I wanted for a reward was a glimpse of her— a brief exchange leaving me with the scent of her that lasted even hours when she had exited the stairways to the comfort of Uncle Jide's flat. Watching her leave the house in the morning and return in the evening became a longing that turned to a passion until it degenerated into pains, pains I bore with much gladness.

I looked forward to it, and I had memorized everything about the time Adaego went to work and returned. And that evening I thought I'd lost her was the same evening I was gifted with a chance to be close to her.

My mother had sent me on an errand just at the very nick of time Adaego was due to return and like a young cheetah, I had run to Aunty Bukola's shop to fetch the groceries my mother requested only to meet an open shop but the owner was nowhere to be found. I was forced to wait for Aunty Bukola, that fat woman I disliked for so many reasons. I knew it was suicidal returning to the compound without the groceries and the fifty minutes I had to wait for Aunty Bukola was the fifty most draining minutes of my life. Before I could return to the compound, the

last rays of the sun had disappeared to pave the way for nightfall and I needed no guessing game to realize that I have missed her return. I'd cleaned my wet face though my hatred for the fat Aunt Bukola increased to a reasonable height. The moment I ascended the stairs, her fragrance hit my nostrils and ate my soul away.

While I ascended the stairs, my olfactory lobe scavenged for the remnants of her scent to ease my pain, and the more I deployed my olfactory sensory neurons, the more the scent I picked hit me from behind and not before me. In what I'd thought was my imagination, I heard the koi-koi sound and turned to behold the image of my fantasy— Adaego! There she was in a plain candy-red gown perfectly made to contain her hips and display her curvatures with pride. She wore new crochet braids that were not there in the morning I bade her goodbye. With the graceful ease of a peacock, she walked up to me, and in my estimation, she was almost five feet and a few inches tall. I saw her eyes glitter in a way that one would make a poem out of them.

Her lip gloss was still fresh and managed to shine amidst the scanty light that guarded the stairways, and her mascara widened her eyes. Her eyeshadow looked like a celebration. That evening, like the many evenings before it, she was bright, saintly, and beautiful and I wondered from which planet Uncle Jide had plucked her, the very words he said to her that won her heart over for him. I quickly lifted down the groceries and prostrated in greeting.

"Aunty, good evening," I said, flinging my smiles and scattering them across the entire stairways. I figured my humility moved her deeply and she had stopped for a moment and reached out her hands and patted my shoulders. Afterward, she said my name in a way I had longed to hear on her lips.

"Ndubisi, *kedu?*"

"I am fine, Aunty, you are back?"

"Yes, I am." And still holding my shoulders, she added, "Hope you were a good boy today?"

"Yes, Aunty, I was and I am just coming back from the errand my mother sent me."

"Good boy," she said and was ready to leave. But before her hand left my shoulder, I noticed that something had happened to me. I felt my anger melt away, the anger that had consumed me all evening after my mother sent me away to Aunt Bukola's shop, was gone. And much to my surprise too, even the

anger that had accumulated over the years for Aunty Bukola melted away with them and nothing again was left in my heart except joy, pure, untainted joy, and ample peace. I felt purged, lighter, and free like a lone balloon floating in the air. That to me was my healing, my epiphany, and my therapy and I knew many things would never remain the same again for me.

"You came back late today, Aunty?"

"Yes, dear." She said and smiled, a bit surprised that I noticed.

"I always know you return early enough," I added.

"You do?"

"Yes, Aunty, I do,"

"That is very kind of you, Ndubuisi. Anyway, I went to make my hair and I guess I took longer than I expected and the road was not funny today. The traffic was something else." She narrated the story to me and I wished we could just settle there, talking, just discussing anything until darkness fully descended and the fireflies would appear to urge us to our beds.

"Your hair is beautiful, Aunty," I complimented and I meant every word of it. She smiled and thanked me, and reaching out deeper into her handbag, she fished out five pieces of Trebor and butter mints, and a wrap of cooked groundnuts, and handed them over to me. I had always liked cooked groundnuts and coming from her, those nuts were like pizza to me. In my happiness, I'd wanted to hug her but I allowed my smile to carry the weight of my appreciation. It dawned on me how much my mother and Aunty Bukola were blessings in disguise and I forgave them both!

Three days later, I returned the kindness. It was raining heavily and I took my mother's big umbrella and waited at the gate for her. I knew when the keke na pepe dropped her and while she figured out how to deal with the heavy downpour, I appeared with the umbrella and offered it to her. The shock, mixed with excitement assured me that I did the right thing. Her left hand circled my shoulders as we walk under the rain, protected by the umbrella.

"Where are you going?" She asked the moment we were safe in the stairway.

"Nowhere, Aunty. I was waiting for you. I noticed you were not back so I decided to come and wait for you with an umbrella." I told her and she smiled and thanked me.

"That's very kind of you, Ndubuisi. I was hoping I would see you too when I return." She rummaged her bag and brought out something hot and crispy and handed the wrap to me. It was a hot suya meat with a bottle of can coke and they were all for me.

"This is all for me, Aunty?"

"Yes, you are a good boy and should be rewarded." She told me, her left hand still on my shoulders as we climbed the stairs together in silence and I wished the stairs would be much longer. I studied her steps, memorizing the way she moved with an avalanche of confidence, inhaling the cologne that filled my nostril. Just at the entrance of her flat from where I would depart to mine, she turned to me and said the words I had longed to hear.

"I noticed you have never visited the flat whenever I am around, hope I am not scaring you. She said and I stared full of smiles and shyness.

"I am sure schools are closed now and you are on holiday. Feel free to visit anytime, especially now my fiancé is always traveling. The house could be boring at times alone and I would appreciate a company. At least you will tell me stories from your school." She ended. I was glued to my position bereft of words. She was saying what I wanted to hear but something tied my tongue and I could not speak.

"You don't want to come and stay with me?" She asked a little bit off balance by my silence.

"I want to, I will come tomorrow, Aunty." Since the next day was Saturday, I knew my entire day would be spent with her. As though she read my mind, she added a caveat emptor: Make sure you are done with your chores and your mother would not have any need to look for you before you come.

That same night, I assisted my mother in the kitchen and did my chores with uncontrolled happiness that my mother could not help but noticed my excitement though she felt it was none of her business. Before noon that Saturday morning, I knocked at the door and Adaego, already expecting me, threw the door wide open for me. She treated me to a meal of noodles and chicken and chips and she was calm all day listening to the boring things about my life and school. Weeks later, it became clearer that I did not only win a ticket to their flat but also her heart as she later confessed how smart, intelligent, and fun I was—everything she needed to cope with Uncle Jide's increasing absence from home. We grew fond of each other's company and I counted the time daily for when I would see

her again each passing day. Adaego began to help me with my homework and automatically became the sister I never had. All these were months before our bond tightened. My mother was first to notice our closeness but she received it with an annoying degree of indifference though inwardly, she was happy that at last, someone was helping her to groom her son in the right tracks and teach him the many things she was too busy to.

"I wish you were my mother," I told her one day unconsciously. She smiled and circled me in her arms. As expected, I fell in love with her like I would fall in love with an elder sister, and many times I wished I was man enough for her. Soon, Adaego began to address me as "her husband" and it didn't take long before I began to notice Uncle Jide's discomfort each time I was with her. It was as though he was competing for her love with him. I refused to notice his plight and just like Romeo, I was ready to drink a deadly potion just for the sake of Adaego.

Now, removing the weevils from the beans, her angry voice provoked my soul and I had stopped picking the beans to follow every word of their argument.

"You said fine, right?" Her voice came again, this time, stretched to her very limit that if she dared raise it any higher, she would certainly lose her power of speech.

"Yes, I said fine!" Uncle Jide stood his ground and I wondered what was amiss. Last night, they had a peaceful sleep like lovers would. I was sure I heard some moans that I always recognized to be hers. And now they threatened to pull down the building with their mad shouts.

"All right, fine!"

"You heard me right. I am sick and tired of your sheer pretense, your hanky-panky game. I am sick of it!" Uncle Jide shouted. I lowered my ears and listened. From where I sat, I could feel stranger anger surging up right from within. It was an upsurge of emotion to destroy Uncle Jide and damn the consequences. I could not hear Adaego's distressed voice and do nothing. I was already thirteen and was gathering some muscles and biceps and I felt they would be enough to rescue her. I listened and waited. The anger, like some chemical reactions gathered momentum and boiled.

"Babe, can't you understand me? Can't you? I am not pretending, I am not! The truth is this I can't do it. I have tried and I just realized that I cannot. I am not ready for it. Not yet." She cried.

"You have to understand, my love. I told you that I made a covenant with my mother before she died. I have explained to you how on her sick bed, I promised her that I would remain a virgin until I get married. My mother died clutching those promises in her hands. I told you she died from a very abusive marriage, from a promiscuous and randy husband who gave her a very bad virus that took her life. You know the story, Jide." She sobbed.

"She said I was the only revenge she would get from my father, from the wayward men of this world; those men that have no morsel of self-control at the sight of any beautiful lady. She said that any man who loves me dearly would wait for me! Yes, babe! And she said that only such men are worthy of me, such men with principles, discipline, and a high level of self-control to tame their sexual libido until our wedding night.

I promised her on her dying bed that I will do all it takes to find that man and I will never give up my virginity until my wedding night." She cried until silence enveloped us all. In the silence, I struggled to understand that the beautiful, tall, and richly endowed lady, Adaego was still a virgin and that those sexual moans I thought I heard all night, were merely passionate exchanges devoid of sexual gratifications. My love for her shot straight to the cumulus and stayed there. And to realize that the bone of contention was sex, my hatred for Uncle Jide outweighed what in the past I had felt for Aunt Bukola.

What would it have taken him to wed the woman of his dream and make her his for the rest of his life? For the first time in my life, I wished I were a man. I would have gone straight to their flat, and dragging Uncle Jide out of the room, I would have beat his senses until they return to their default settings. It began to make sense to me, the many nights he had to abandon her all alone in the room to roam the entire town with those promiscuous ladies who were ready to play.

"I want you to be that man, my love. I truly love you and I want you to be him." Adaego pleaded.

"I can't do this. Nothing will make me do it until my wedding night, please. I need you to understand. You're the only one who will understand me, please. I love you from the depth of my heart and that is why I am crying to you, please..." I figured she knelt before him at the moment. Then she got up and fell into his arms but Uncle Jide, determined like the devil, may have violently

pushed her way. I felt a struggle, a fall and I pictured how she fell, her hair scattering, her dress tearing, and her head missing the cement wall by a whisker.

"Stay away from me, don't come any closer! I am sick and tired of all these and I mean it this time." Uncle Jide thundered. If only I were a man! I sighed in desperation and listened and waited.

"For over six months you have fed me with this useless story of yours. You mother this and your covenant that. For crying out loud, your mother is dead and gone forever! I am a man, I can no longer stand the idea of rising like a dynamite all night and bursting inside me. How can I date a girl for over six months and I am yet to sleep with her? That is not my style. A man must taste what he is going to buy and it is either I taste it or you take it to another! I can't take it anymore." Uncle Jide thundered the more.

"Can't you wait, babe? Can't you wait and give me a little time? I know you have tried. On my part, I have been faithful to you and I will remain so for the rest of my life. Can't you see you are almost there? If you truly love me, then hold on to me. When you marry me you will have me all to yourself forever please...."

"To hell with the waiting! I can wait no longer. I am sick! I am tired. How much longer do I have to wait? I am tired..."

"Just a little longer. Once you marry me..."

"You continue talking about marriage. Are you now proposing to me?"

"No, but I want to stay with you, I want to marry you. I love you so much that I wouldn't mind spending the rest of my life with you." Adaego chuckled and pleaded.

"Then propose to me. Bring money and sponsor the wedding. Marry me and let me bear your children." Uncle Jide mocked her.

"You are mocking me?" She asked.

"I am not mocking you but you and I know that I am not yet ready for marriage, not now. My two elder brothers are yet to marry and business is not stable now. So I should wait till eternity to have you"

"You must not build a house before we marry. I don't need a fancy car for you to marry me. I am okay with you the way you are. I am going to work harder and

support the family. I will not be a burden to you. Can't you see? Just marry me... I want to keep this promise I made to my mother, please. Can't you see...? I..."

"To hell with all that. I am tired of hearing it. How sure am I you are even a virgin?" Uncle Jide threw in a terrible blow she struggled to take. In the end, she regained her equanimity and kept her cool.

Adaego truly wanted to stay.

"I know you are angry and you are not thinking straight and so I will forgive you and all you will say to me but please don't let me go. I have grown to love you over these months more than I have ever loved any man. With you I wish to stay, please. You know how I grew up, all my mother meant to me; all she endured and suffered to give me a future and save me from an abusive father. You know the story and the reason this promise must be kept at all costs to honor her memory." She pleaded.

"See, babe, we can have a truce. Even if it means paying my bride's price, that will do. The rest I will beg the ghost of my mother to understand. I will do it just for you. Please, my love!" Tears were suffocating her and I noticed I was crying too. Whatever was happening there was going to have consequences on me and I could feel the heat already. The fear was etched on my soul.

"Listen, my words are final. My brothers will have to marry before me. This is the twenty-first century for crying out loud. These moribund ideas about covenants, promises, and oaths, don't work in our modern society. Your mother is dead and buried and you have your life to live, not hers!"

"Please, don't insult the memory of my mother, I beg of you."

"Then, don't disgust me with these silly talks! Are you better than Sandra, Margret? Uju, and Lilian, mention them, my entire boyfriends' girlfriends. They all make love. Why are you so different? If I can't make love to you as my girlfriend, then the door is wide open! It is over!" Uncle Jide let out the bomb that was going to destroy us all. He could do that to any other girl, but not Adaego, not my Adaego!

"You are asking me to leave your house, babe?" I felt the tears cascading down her oval face. I wiped mine as I would have loved to wipe hers away.

"You are asking me to leave your house because I refused to give my body? What else have I not given to you? I cook for you, I wash your clothes. I stay with you all day. I bathe with you. I kiss, play, and lay naked on the same bed

with you all night just to show you that I can do more for you. What have I not done except to give you my virginity? What have I not done?"

"My decision is final. If I can't have you as my girlfriend, if your love for me is not strong enough to make you do this, then you have to leave me alone. That is final." For moments only her tears persisted. Mine too. We were both crying in our different situations, just the same way we have always sung and laughed together. I waited for that decision that will mess up my entire life. At long last, it came.

Adaego made up her mind to leave.

That languid evening, over six months ago, when Uncle Jide parked into the compound and Adaego alighted from the car and followed him into his flat, I knew she does not belong with them. Not in Uncle Jide's flat. The Uncle Jide I had grown to know returned each day with a new girl until I lost count of the number of faces I had seen enter her flat. The girls were like the cloth he wore and he changed them always. The way Uncle Jide was very intentional about his outfits was the same way he was intentional about the women that visited his flat. He welcomed and loved them all and despite the arguments and tantrums he had to exchange with them many nights, he still managed to squeeze out doses of good times from them and prevented us from having memorable sleep many nights, to a height that it worried my mother greatly even though there was very little she could do about it. Uncle Jide was a rent-paying tenant like she was and they shared the same right in the compound— the right of privacy, association, and living! Occasionally, two girls would bump into one another in his flat, though they rarely do, and a heated argument would degenerate into a terrible fight. My mother was always handy to separate the fight and save her sanity while Uncle Jide would carry his strong drinks and weed to enjoy himself in his car, unconcerned about the wrestling bouts going down in his room. Some other nights, when calm descended, both girls, tired of fighting, would make peace and share his bed with him. It seemed they were his most treasured nights. Other nights, one or both of them would leave but in all, Uncle Jide was the least bothered. My mother soon got used to him and tolerated him largely because apart from his promiscuous nature, he was a good neighbor and had assisted her many times financially, even to the height of paying my school fees on three occasions I nearly missed my exams due to her inability to pay them on time.

It was my knowledge of Uncle Jide and her womanizing spree that accounted for my heartbreak when, in the twilight, that languid evening, Adaego alighted from his car, a newcomer in Uncle Jide's harem. My soul had revolted aware she doesn't belong to Uncle Jide's flat. In my helplessness, I went to bed with bitterness that the wrong bird has entered Uncle Jide's nest. Uncle Jide's face had glowed all evening like his hook had caught the biggest fish and he was right. Adaego was all shades of fair and innocence— a tall fair lady with skin that was the colour of milk and skin as soft as clay. In his happiness, and for the first time in years, he gave me money to buy mineral and bread buns. That night I waited for the bed to creak especially, for her but it never did. Every other night I waited for the sound of the creaking bed but it never came. Adaego did not only survive the creaking bed, but she also became the longest serving girl in Uncle Jide's life— two months and the time counted and after she moved in to live with him, I concluded she was truly a rare breed, a goddess on a mission to change the player for good. And she did change Uncle Jide, or so I'd thought. No girl was spotted in the compound in months and decorum returned until the weekend Adaego seemed to have traveled and Uncle Jide sneaked in two ladies who stayed all through the weekend. It was as though he was revenging something he wished never to forgive. And all through those nights, the bed creaked so loud that my mother cursed him many times and switched on the television set so loudly to distract my thoughts even though I still heard the creaking sounds anyway.

Adaego never traveled again and the bed never creaked again, at least not that loudly.

I felt every of her movement as she parked her things and readied to leave Uncle Jide's house and life for good. Silence persisted for what seemed like hours. None of them spoke and I could only hear movements and little tearful sobs.

"My bags are ready?" she finally announced to him.

"Do you mind if I drop you?" Uncle Jide asked, a little repentant and I wished he could go on his knees and beg. There was still enough time to save the lives he was about to destroy— his life, mine, and hers.

"No! Don't worry, I will find my way. I will be fine. I know you would be." The clouds were gathering, and I prayed for a very heavy downpour to save the day

and who knows, Uncle Jide might change his mind for good. Everything in me was convinced that Adaego was worth waiting for.

"Ada, can't you change your mind... can't you give up this..."

"Never! I promised my mother. Nothing on earth will make me break my promise to her. Don't worry, you will always find another girl who would give you all the pleasure you desire, the way, when, and in the manner you desire it. I am not angry with you. I know you have tried. I pray someday to find a man that would accept me for what I am and give me time. No matter what happens, always remember that this was never a game and that I truly loved you with everything in me. Always remember that." her tears could barely allow her to speak.

"I understand, you've tried. I've tormented you enough. Forget about me. I will do my best to forget about you too. It won't be easy but I will try... I will try..."

"But you can't go now. It is raining already." Like an answer to a prayer, the heaven opened its mouth wildly and poured down heavily but Adaego had made up her mind.

"It doesn't matter, I will leave in the rain. Don't try to stop me. I may never forgive you if you do. Let it rain on me so that I will always remember this day. Who knows if the rain will wipe away all my sorrows? Who knows? Farewell." I knew she would soon open the door and I ran safely to a distance and hid myself among some abandoned property in the corridor. I heard her descending the stairs. It has become a heavy downpour but undeterred, Adaego readied to take her chances into an unknown future. Instinctively, I ran into the room and brought out my mother's umbrella, the same big umbrella we have once covered ourselves with. I fished out a drawing of her I made earlier in the day which I planned to show her the next day. With the drawings and umbrella, I sped after her. I met her the moment she was about to enter the rain. She looked at me and at that moment she dried her tears to face me.

"You are leaving me, aunty..." I told her unable to hide my tears. She tried to smile but I was not going to be deceived.

"No...I ...I ..."

"Don't lie to me, Aunty. I heard everything, everything he said to you." She drew me close and comforted me.

"You will not understand these things. You are only but a little boy. When you grow up, I bet you will understand better. Certain choices are not easy but they are usually for the best. I have to leave but I will come back for you..."

"You will...?" I looked at her as if my whole life depended on the questions.

"Yes, I will, I promise."

"When?"

"I don't know, tomorrow, next tomorrow, anytime I can, but I promise you. I will come for you, *di m, inugo?*" I held her like I would hold my destiny and that was when I showed her the drawing. It was not truly her image since I was an amateur but it has a way of reminding one of her. It was indeed a funny drawing.

"I like it. At least I will always remember you. Never forget all that I taught you about life. I know you will grow into a good boy, *di m oma!*" She smiled kissed me on my forehead and allowed my tears mingled with her. I handed the umbrella to her. I closed my eyes and before I opened them, Adaego was gone, leaving me with her picture in my hand, her kiss on my forehead, and a promise to return for me, someday.

Chioma Emelone

THE VULNERABLE

Rays of the sun flickered through the roof into her eyes as she stretched herself on her wooden bed. The night was a hectic one because she waited for her sister to sleep before she could lie down and was immediately snatched away by sleep. She looked round her small hut and her sister was not there. The door was still the way she latched it the previous night, strongly barred with two pieces of iron purposely constructed by Nnanna, the blacksmith. She hurriedly got down from the bed and tried to demystify the situation. She pushed a small single window in the hut. It was shut. What could have happened? Did her sister just disappear from the hut? Amuche walked to the door, unbarred and swung it open. Her sister was just by the door, seated on a wooden chair and had her head tucked into her arms. Although she was shocked, Amuche went and touched her sister who slowly lifted her head, looked at her, and returned to her former position. Just then, Amuche heard a thud behind her house and wondered what it could be.

“Don’t you know that that log of wood could fall and either hurt someone or destroy something?” Amuche’s husband queried her. Her sister had used a log of wood to hold the window after making her way through it. She was the reason Amuche paid Nnanna to fix iron latches on the door and the window. A day after she took her sister to stay with her, her sister had opened the door in the middle of the night and went away. Amuche’s husband and older children joined her in a search and found her sister quietly leaning on a huge trunk of an *udala* tree in a village square adjacent to her husband’s *obi*. They had to lead her home and embrace the fact that further steps had to be taken to ensure that such an act did not repeat.

“You would have asked me to open the door for you”. Amuche drew another wooden chair closer to her sister and sat down. Her sister’s position did not change; her head was still tucked into her arms. “What if you had broken a leg while jumping through the window?”

“She jumped through the window?” Amuche’s husband, Dimkpa was startled by the development.

“She did,” Amuche replied in a toneless voice. Hers was an undefined situation because she had resigned the fate of her sister’s health to the gods even while she wished that both the sacrifices offered to their family deity, as well as the treatment given to her by the *dibija*, would yield a positive result.

She watched her sister and recalled how it all started. She wondered why the gods had chosen to torment her sister, Nwabija that way. She remembered the way Ugegbe, Nwabija's only daughter danced before the shrine of Ọmụmụ, eulogising the goddess which had, since time out of mind, showered the women of Ụmụmba community and environs with children. TThe people were so excited at the emergence of another priestess of this goddess of fertility. But Nwabija was not part of the happy crowd. She stood quietly at a corner under the majestic Ngwu tree giving whoever that cared to look her way a scowling smile. Iruọmụmụ festival was last celebrated after the death of Ọjjugo, Amuche's sister and Ugegbe's maternal aunt some three harvest seasons ago. The excitement, therefore, was not unexpected as the people, especially the barren women and those who linked their misfortunes to their inability to offer their sacrifices of appreciation to the goddess.

Nwabija watched her daughter as she danced to the beats of Egwu Ọmụmụ which last sounded with the last outing of the last priestess, Ọjjugo. Ilo Ọmụmụ was filled to the brim. The sacred trees on the premises gave a comfortable shed to the people. The Ọgbụ tree, a symbol of this feminine goddess, and the Akpụ trees which were considered to be the abode of spirits of unborn children stood at the far end of the premises whereas a magnificent Ngwu tree stood at the entrance.

“So, this is it,” she murmured as she thought of her only daughter being the priestess of Ọmụmụ. Her entire being melted into her bowel. She felt a movement in her stomach down to her back passage. But she was not bothered while the content of what exited her intestine sluggishly made its way through her thighs and calves down to her ankles and feet. She was lost in thoughts. Ugegbe, her daughter would live that heart-wrenching solitude life lived by Ọjjugo? She would be all alone? Separated from her family? No more family support? No marriage? Nothing! She would have her home in a hut situated within the Ọmụmụ forest which housed the shrine, and would begin to live off people who had reasons to visit her shrine. Nwabija stared vaguely into the happy crowd.

“I feel your pain, my sister.” Nwabija was startled by Amuche's voice. Both sisters had waited in agony for the announcement of the great oracle of Ụmụmba on whom among the female children and grandchildren of Nwanyịkwu would become the priestess of Ọmụmụ. The goddess of Ọmụmụ had, through the great oracle of the community, declared that the priestess of Ọmụmụ must come from Nwanyịkwu's lineage when the first priestess of the goddess died long ago. Stories had it that she was a stranger who sojourned to

Umumba and lived in the place which now housed the shrine. She gained popularity when she willingly helped many women overcome childlessness. Her deeds were glaringly amazing even to the blind that upon her death, an announcement came from the oracle that the goddess which the stranger had left in the land of Umumba had chosen Nwanyjukwu's lineage as its extraction of priestess whose lifestyle would be different from those of the other women of the land. And so, Ojjugo, Nwabja's elder sister was chosen at the age when her contemporaries were getting married and having children. The conditions rolled out for a successful execution of the task were disheartening to her and her family at that time. But then, they persevered, trusting the gods of Umumba for her safety, and endured the pain brewed by that separation. Life was benevolent to Ojjugo and she served the goddess for a very long time before she joined her ancestors. For three seasons, the goddess searched for a befitting priestess among the granddaughters of Nwanyjukwu because her other daughters had married and bore children. The search ended in Nwabja's house, and her only daughter, Ugegbe was chosen.

"We cannot question the gods," Amuche continued. "They've made their choice and we have obeyed. They should just give us the strength to carry this burden."

"The gods have failed me," Nwabja cried but suddenly got a hush from Amuche who warned her to mind her utterances so as to avoid the wrath of the gods. It was then that Nwabja broke down in tears, and her sister Amuche became aware of flies swarming round her. Amuche knew that it was time to take her sister home.

It was as if the cold waters of Orimili had hung above Nwabja's homestead that day. The quietness that befell the compound knew no comparison. Nobody thought of having any meal. Each person quietly sat at a corner of the compound mourning the loss of their beautiful Ugegbe, a lovely girl raised amidst five brothers. Her arrival into the family was a celebration as she was the last of the children. Egwu had killed a goat to celebrate his wife's fertility after consecutively giving him four sons. He equally made some sacrifices of appreciation to Omumu and prayed by the same token for a blessing of a daughter or daughters who would draw prospective in-laws to him. Nwabja's fifth pregnancy was hoped to be a baby girl but everybody was surprised that Omumu preferred another boy for Egwu and so they accepted it happily. Then Nwabja became pregnant the sixth time, and the birth of a beautiful baby girl into Egwu's household was celebrated for days. Egwu had boasted of his daughter's beauty – which inspired the name, Ugegbe – among his contemporaries and

had even concluded that only men of fortunes would be given access into his obi to seek her daughter's hand in marriage. Nwabija herself longed for ọmụgwọ visits to the house of her son-in-law who would, at the end of her stay, shower her with gifts and she would return and proudly share some of the gifts among her fellow women. These expectations were dashed by the gods; the selection of Ugegbe as the priestess of Ọmụmụ shattered their dreams. Everybody, including her brothers, was left down in the dumps. Brightness and cheerfulness vanished from their faces. The vivacious and clever Ugegbe who would always be around for everybody; the one who would quickly come up with some food, most often, in the absence of her mother, had been snatched away from them. The older of her elder brother's children continually cried and asked of her. The pain was glaringly engraved in the heart of everybody associated with Ugegbe, but Nwabija's case was both pitiable and frightening.

"We have to accept this situation because we cannot change it," Amuche had followed her sister home. She consoled her with every word and story she could remember after convincing and taking her into a small enclosure and washing her off the mess she made on herself while she stood helpless under the Ngwu tree at Ilo Ọmụmụ.

"Ụwa m," Nwabija lamented, throwing her palms open to her sister.

"Jide onwe gi, hold yourself," Amuche advised her. But Nwabija abruptly got up from her chair, clenched her right fist and suddenly started hitting herself on the chest. Everyone was shocked and ran closer to her to understand her action. She hit harder and gave out a cry in a shrill voice. Her husband was able to get hold of her right hand and helped her to return to her seat. She sat down and looked loosely. Words of consolation and encouragement were flying from all and sundry.

"I want to break this heart myself," her voice was penetrating. "I've waited for it to break on its own but it still remains. I want to break it... It needs to pour out its content," she cried on. Tears were rolling down her cheeks. It continued for a while until darkness began to descend. Some neighbours who understood the gravity of the sacrifice made by Egwu's household to the people of Ụmụmba stopped by to register their concerns after they had had a field day at the Iruọmụmụ festival.

For four market days, Nwabija scarcely talked to anyone. Her conversations became merely some monosyllabic responses to her family members. She would speak only when a response would be needed from her and would quickly enter her hut whenever there was a visitor. Taking any meal was usually

preceded by a conviction from her sister, Amuche who remained in her house since the Iruomumu festival. It was four market days after the festival that Nwabija's condition caused her family to become sick with worry. She was seated with her sister that afternoon having her lunch when she suddenly burst into a cracking laughter. She laughed briefly, made some murmurings, and became serene again. Amuche was taken aback by the action while Egwu thought it wise to seek for a divination.

"This is madness, ara," he soliloquized as he got up and made for his raffia bag. He examined the content of the bag to ensure that he had enough cowries and then hung the bag on his left shoulder.

"Ka m puta." He stormed out and made his way to the shrine of Ajilija, the dibia. By the time Egwu returned home, Nwabija had fallen asleep on a mat spread in front of her hut where her sister had lured her to lie down and have some rest.

"She'll take this for three market days... just a gulp of it, after every meal," Egwu said as he handed Amuche a keg containing some herbal mixture. He looked at his wife and shook his head. Amuche observed his actions.

"Did you go to see Ajilija?"

"Yes."

"And what did he say?"

Egwu looked at his wife and shook his head again. Amuche was becoming impatient; she had her ears opened waiting for her brother-in-law to give her a reply.

"Some malicious spirits are at work," Egwu said sympathetically.

"Ajilija said that?" Amuche was not satisfied with his answer.

"He didn't. He didn't say much. He made some divinations and asked his son to get the mixture for me. He then assured me that she would be fine. He promised to be here in three days."

"May the gods not put us to shame," Amuche prayed as she walked into her sister's hut.

Ajilija arrived Egwu's compound three days later and made some incantations and sacrifices and assured Egwu and his family that Nwabija would recover in few market days. Egwu and her sons totally left her in Amuche's care that when

Amuche's husband, Dimkpa complained of his wife's long absence from his home, it was agreed that Nwabja joined her sister and her family.

"Why have the gods decided to torment Nwabja this way?" Dimkpa, Amuche's husband was worried. His sister-in-law's stay in his house had caused not only a divided attention to his wife, but also a great setback to his farm works because his wife who was an industrious partner spent most of the days at home taking care of her sick sister.

"The gods might not be responsible for this," Amuche replied after a while. "Probably, Nwabja's head could not carry the weight of losing an only daughter to the goddess of Ọmụmụ". Amuche looked at her sister and she still maintained her position: her head still tucked into her arms.

Uba Somto

The Echoes of War

In a war-torn land, a young soldier named Alex found himself caught in the chaos of battle. As he crouched behind a crumbling wall, the sound of gunfire echoed around him, mingling with the cries of wounded comrades. The air was thick with smoke and the acrid scent of gunpowder.

Despite the chaos, Alex's mind was surprisingly calm. He thought of his family back home, of the peaceful days spent in their small village before the war had torn everything apart. Determined to survive and make it back to them, he steeled himself and peered over the wall. In the distance, he saw the enemy advancing, their shadows elongated by the setting sun, without hesitation, Alex raised his weapon and fired.

The crack of the gunshot was deafening, and for a moment, time seemed to slow as he watched his target fall. But there was no time to celebrate. The enemy was relentless, and soon, Alex found himself engaged in hand-to-hand combat. Adrenaline coursed through his veins as he fought with all his strength, his mind a blur of instinct and training. As the battle raged on, Alex's thoughts strayed to his fellow soldiers.

Some fell beside him, their faces contorted in pain or determination. Others fought on, their eyes reflecting a mix of fear and resolve. In that moment, they were not just soldiers; they were brothers bound by a common struggle. Hours passed, and the sun dipped below the horizon, casting a blood-red glow over the battlefield. Exhausted and wounded, Alex pressed on, driven by a fierce determination to survive.

Finally, as the last echoes of gunfire faded away, the battle came to an end.

In the aftermath, as the dust settled and the wounded were tended to, Alex allowed himself a moment of respite. He surveyed the devastation around him, the broken bodies and shattered buildings serving as grim reminders of the cost of war. As he sat there, his mind a whirlwind of conflicting emotions, Alex made a silent vow. He would never forget this day, this war incident that had changed him in ways he could never fully comprehend. And as he looked towards the horizon, where the first light of dawn was beginning to break, he knew that no matter what the future held, he would carry the memories of this day with him forever.

As the night wore on, Alex sat amidst the ruins of the battlefield, his body weary and his mind heavy with the weight of the day's events. The stars above twinkled in the sky, offering a serene contrast to the chaos that had engulfed the land just hours before.

In the distance, he could hear the faint sounds of soldiers moving about, their voices hushed as they tended to the wounded and prepared for the next phase of the conflict. Despite the weariness that seeped into his bones, Alex knew that he couldn't afford to rest for long. The war showed no mercy, and he needed to be ready for whatever came next.

Slowly, he rose to his feet, his muscles protesting the movement. He checked his weapon,

ensuring it was loaded and ready for action. The night was still young, and the enemy could strike at any moment. As he moved through the desolate landscape, Alex's thoughts drifted back to his family. He pictured his mother's warm smile, his father's strong embrace, and his sister's laughter that echoed through their home.

The memories brought both comfort and pain, a reminder of what he was fighting for and what he had already lost. The war had taken so much from him... friends, innocence, and a sense of security that he feared he would never regain. But amidst the destruction and despair, there was a flicker of hope that burned within him. A hope that one day, the war would end, and he could return to the life he once knew.

As dawn broke on the horizon, painting the sky in hues of pink and gold, Alex steeled himself for the battles that lay ahead. The war raged on, unforgiving and relentless, but he refused to be broken by its brutality. He would fight with all his strength, not just for himself, but for those who couldn't fight for themselves. With a renewed sense of purpose, Alex joined his comrades as they prepared to face the challenges of a new day.

The war may have scarred him, body and soul, but it had also forged him into a warrior... a warrior determined to survive, to protect, and to never forget the sacrifices made in the name of freedom. And as the sun rose higher in the sky, casting its warm light over the battlefield, Alex took his place among his fellow soldiers, ready to face whatever the war would bring.

For in that moment, amidst the ruins and the rubble, he found a strength he never knew he possessed... a strength born from the fires of war and tempered by the bonds of brotherhood. As the echoes of gunfire once again filled the air,

Alex stood tall, a beacon of courage and resilience in a world torn apart by strife. And though the war raged on, he knew that as long as there were soldiers like him willing to fight, there would always be hope for a brighter tomorrow. And so, he marched forward, into the heart of battle, his spirit unbroken and his resolve unwavering. For in the midst of war's darkest moments, he had found a light that guided him through the shadows... a light that whispered of peace, of home, and of a future where the scars of war would finally begin to heal.

The days turned into weeks, and the weeks into months, each one marked by the relentless rhythm of war. Alex and his comrades fought bravely, pushing back the enemy's advances and defending their territory with unwavering determination. Through the long, grueling days and sleepless nights, Alex forged bonds with his fellow soldiers that transcended mere camaraderie. They became his family, his brothers-in-arms, united by a common purpose and a shared struggle against the forces that sought to tear their world apart. As the seasons changed and the landscape bore witness to the scars of battle, Alex's resolve remained unbroken.

He faced loss and heartache, moments of triumph and despair, but through it all, he clung to the belief that one day, the war would end, and he would return to the embrace of his loved ones. In the quiet moments between skirmishes, Alex often found himself reflecting on the nature of war... the senseless violence, the shattered lives, the irreparable damage it inflicted on all who were touched by its grasp. He wondered if peace would ever truly come, if the wounds of war would ever fully heal.

Yet, amidst the turmoil and uncertainty, there were moments of unexpected beauty and grace. The laughter of a fellow soldier, the kindness of a stranger, the shared meal in the midst of chaos... these small acts of humanity served as reminders that even in the darkest of times, light could still be found. And so, as the war raged on, Alex held onto these moments like precious treasures, guarding them against the darkness that threatened to consume him. They were his lifeline, his anchor in a sea of turmoil, guiding him through the storm with a glimmer of hope that refused to be extinguished.

As the conflict reached its climax, with victory and defeat hanging in the balance, Alex found himself facing his greatest challenge yet. The enemy advanced with renewed ferocity, their numbers overwhelming, their determination unyielding.

In the heat of battle, surrounded by the cacophony of war, Alex fought with a fierce intensity that bordered on recklessness. Every fiber of his being was focused on the present moment, on surviving the chaos that threatened to

consume him whole. As the battle raged on, the line between friend and foe blurred, each soldier a faceless figure in a sea of violence and desperation. Yet, amidst the chaos, there were glimpses of humanity...a wounded enemy offered a hand, a fallen comrade given a moment of peace... as if to remind Alex that even in war, there could be moments of compassion and understanding. And then, in a sudden moment of clarity, as the dust settled and the echoes of gunfire faded into silence, Alex stood amidst the wreckage of war, his heart heavy with the weight of all he had seen and done.

The battle was won, but at what cost? As he surveyed the battlefield, the fallen soldiers and the broken landscape, a single thought echoed in his mind: war was not just a conflict of nations, but a conflict of souls... a relentless struggle that tested the very essence of humanity. And as he turned towards the horizon, where the sun dipped below the edge of the world, casting its final light over the scarred earth, Alex made a silent vow. He would carry the memories of this war, of its triumphs and tragedies, with him always, a testament to the resilience of the human spirit in the face of unimaginable adversity. And with that vow etched into his heart, Alex walked away from the battlefield, his footsteps heavy but resolute, guided by a flicker of hope that one day, the echoes of war would fade, replaced by the gentle whispers of peace.

Uba Somto

What's the worth?

I took the medicine in a plate before me, I inserted one inside my vagina, and put the rest in my mouth and quickly flushed it down with the sachet water I have on my left hand, he said that was the instructions of the deck chemist. I was ready for whatsoever comes after, I had my Bible close to my bedside even though I do not intend to read it but it was maybe to have a sense of protection. I wasn't too scared, never have been, I thought nothing was scarier than staining my mother's reputation, I could remember my step father swearing to her that I am nothing but shame and shame is all I could bring to her, I would rather die than prove him right. My mother have been a single mom till I was 17, she got married early this year but my supposed dad and I really did not get along, it was one fight after another, i hated him for how he treats my mother and he dislikes me for whatsoever reason he had, we couldn't bring ourselves to accept each other which makes us even, I couldn't bear to see him right about me.

Two hours already and I could notice some spotting and gradually bleeding began to set in followed an unpleasant stroke of diarrhea, and also a stomachache that could be compared to having your stomach operated on without anesthesia but I had to be strong, that was the only option. Did I forget to mention Steve, the architect of the whole situation, I could turn every now and then to see his worried and scared face and his non-stop consoling voice which is not in anyway helping issues.

Steve was my boyfriend, he was quite tall and his skin like chocolate, beautiful is the right adjective to qualify his facial appearance, he is too pretty for a man, he is just twenty three years at the time we met, we happened to live in the same street, we first met on the day I went to fetch water, he happened to be there for the same reason as well, we spoke for a while and he offered to help me carry the yellow twenty five liter gallon of water to my door step and that day was the beginning of what I thought was a love story but brought me to this difficult situation. The aching only got worse and Steve was restless like a man whose pregnant wife was in labor, well this scenario could pass for labor but rather opposite, the constant diarrhea is unimaginable, I would use a yellow container to excrete because I wouldn't want to expose myself to infection of public toilet in the compound that Steve and his friends live in. Steve disposes it, he was caring but a coward, a coward that would run away from responsibility, 'This is your

body and whatever decision you take, I'll stand by you' that's what cowards say or rather a good manipulation technique.

The pain got worse and I didn't know how to react, I wouldn't want to scream even when I felt the need to because that would draw attention from neighbors. Panic had got the best of Steve, he calls the Chemist who prescribed the medicine from time to time to update him about all the symptoms I experienced, it was obvious the Chemist was pissed off during the last call 'anything she's experiencing is normal, she has to endure, and you have to stop acting like a baby' he said. The feeling that my abdomen is ripping apart is normal? I thought to myself, nothing seemed normal.

I have watched numerous YouTube videos to prepare myself for what I might likely face but they failed woefully at describing the pains. Steve offered to take me to the Chemist for it seemed like I was beginning to have complications which I declined, he also offered to bring the Chemist to the house since I didn't want to go which I also declined as well, I wouldn't want anyone to see my face in such condition. Speaking of shame, I should have had that long ago before letting Steve have his way in between my legs but I don't have myself to blame though I was foolish for entrusting my body in the hands of a loser, I have loved or maybe lust to put all the blame on and Steve as well for being so careless but never me because I was so naive.

At the time, the sun was slowly disappearing and daylight fading away, same way I had thought the pains and aches would fade but I was wrong, the Chemist at the time had stopped picking Steve's call, he even hung up his phone on Steve on the seventeenth call, the silence in the room was too loud, and for the first time I was afraid, I don't know exactly why but I was so afraid, Steve was getting ready to go and meet the Chemist in his shop since he had refused to pick up, he asked me what I would like to have, "beans and plantain" that's what I said and that's my favorite and what I would want to have for a last time so I won't forget the taste in a hurry.

I reached out to my phone, felt like I was using the last battery in my body, I dialed a number and my mom picked up, I was glad she picked up at one go, other times you would have to call more than two times before she picks, before she digs her hand into her bag and search for her ringing phone for what would seem like forever, she must have missed two or three calls. "Mama how're you?" She asked, "I am well and you?" "I am good my girl, how is school?" "school is fine mom", "Oh nne m you don't sound okay nne, hope you're fine" "It's just a little fever mom", "little fever? Oh ginikwa bu little fever? Little fever and you're speaking like someone that's one step from the grave eh? I have told you

severally that anything concerning your health and well-being, you should not joke with it, I will send you money now so ask your roommates to help you buy medicine, I'll come and pick you up tomorrow so you go to the hospital for proper treatment, no fever is little hope you heard me?", "yes mom but I will be fine, you don't need to stress yourself coming here okay", "I have said what I said, I'll send you money once I hang up, bye". She literally hung up before I got to say bye, she must be super pissed off, a credit alert of ten thousand naira popped up followed by her message saying that she will call back in thirty minutes time to ensure I have done all she had said. Hearing her voice for what seemed like the last time gave me a hope that maybe what I am doing is the right thing, I can't afford to disappoint her. I can only wait for Steve to come back to know my fate.

Why did I start to feel so disconnected? disconnected from the world. My face was up facing the ceiling, all the strength in my body have gone, I couldn't move a limb, above me is Steve, swinging the back of a hard cover note in attempt to get me to cool off . I felt my tongue too heavy and stiff , when did he come back and what did the Chemist say, i wanted to ask but I couldn't move anything, I no longer have control over my body, I no longer see or hear or feel anything....

My thoughts were briskly interrupted when the door swung open, It was Steve and in his hands were foods and fruits he went to buy, He was surprised to meet me still staring at the plate before me which was contained with medicine." Baby what's wrong?, You don't want to take the medicine? Remember this is your body and whatever decision you take I'll stand by you" he said. What does he mean by stand by you? Stand by you doesn't sound to me like I'll take responsibility. He tries so much to convince me and himself as well that whatever I do from that moment is my decision, maybe he was right it is my body and my decision but all I could bring myself to ask was " what's the worth?".

Joseph Oloche Onah

Recluse

It was a cool morning with the clouds covering much of the sunlight. This kind of weather gave one the feeling that it was going to be a boring day. Staring at the sky, he wondered if this was the right decision. He had spent much of the night reminiscing over the moments he had shared with his family at Otukpo. He missed them now.

"I just have to." He spoke to himself with little conviction that wasn't cogent even to his own ears. He had always been the most determined one among his siblings. Hadn't he quit a well-paying job just a year into employment? Hadn't he just out of the blue announced to the family that he was going on a retreat? He still remembered his dad's attitude at the announcement.

"Dad, I've been thinking... No, I've decided to leave for a while." His dad had stared at him for a few seconds and faced his newspaper as if nothing had been said.

"I'll be leaving on Monday." He wasn't surprised at his dad's indifference; he had always been like that, especially towards him.

"Where to?" Dad asked, not taking his eyes off the newspaper.

"Aliade Town. Just 12 miles up North. It's serene and I think I will work better there."

"Work?" "Uh, I meant 'think'. Sort of like a retreat." He shrugged.

"Cool. My Son is going to be a hermit." His Dad said flatly. Was he trying to be funny now?

"No, Kind of a philosophical quest." "Ok. Way to go, Plato." "Hmmm," he managed a smile. At least that was funny.

That was the end of the conversation. Even his siblings said nothing when he told them he was leaving. His mom was the only one who showed some emotion, giving him a hug and that radiant smile of hers he'd come to like. She seemed to know he was leaving without him telling her. She was the omniscient one, knowing what was going to happen as far as her family was concerned before it did. But she was a mute. He longed for the day he would hear her voice. It was one of the few times he felt the pain of not being able to hear her

tell him she loved him. That was about a year ago, two days before he left home—left for here. And now he was leaving again.

He looked around the room, reliving every moment he'd spent in this secluded space far away from everything— the buzz of the city, the noise of impatient drivers honking in traffic, the nagging of neighbors, and the presence of people generally.

Here he enjoyed the company of the little birds chirping in the trees, the occasional thud of the agama lizards that nodded incessantly as if to congratulate themselves for the safe landing, the distant voices of children playing on the field some hundred meters away, the slithering snakes that never seemed to bother him, and the crickets at night.

But being a recluse didn't help him find what he'd been looking for when he left home: Meaning. The meaning of life. He was bored with all there seemed to be that life is about. Surely there's more to all of this— to going to school and bagging a first-class degree in Religious Studies, to being retained by the institution as a lecturer, and to earning thirty-thousand Naira at thirty-two. He knew he had to leave.

But to where? He'd grappled with it most of the night but the problem stood in his face like the wall of Jericho. He would leave, despite not knowing his destination. He left that to Fate.

He gave the room a final glance, internally applauding himself. It was immaculate. Mom would be proud. He smiled satisfactorily and heaved, hoping to somehow ease off the burden on his mind. It seemed to weigh him down. "Thank you, God," he said out loud before he could think about why he'd said it. He wasn't really into this 'God' stuff. Back home, they rarely went to church. But he had a degree in religious studies, didn't he? He wondered why he hadn't opted for Philosophy. God, to him, was just a personal emotional solace to humans; everybody needs comfort from the cruelty of life after all.

He took a quick shower and sparingly ate from a loaf of bread he had bought the day before on his trip to the city. He picked up his phone and texted his mom, "How are you doing? Missing you guys."

That was about the limit of his communication with home: a few texts to mom, about once a month to either his dad or siblings. He considered adding a pair of

trousers to the two he had and the three shirts in his backpack but decided against it.

Locking his door, he headed towards a narrow footpath led to the town's bus stop.

He walked for about half an hour when the urge to run with child-like ecstasy gripped him and he had to stop walking to restrain himself. The idea of just leaving was so crazy he thought for a moment the angels were having a good laugh, if at all heaven existed. It would be a bit of celestial relief. The bus stop came into his view and he could see only three vehicles. Two were leaving already and the last had a space left, as the driver called out "One chance!" repeatedly. Speaking of fate. He steadily walked towards the auto-rickshaw, nodding to the driver who kept asking, "you going?"

"Market Park," he answered checking the time. It was 9:00. He suddenly realized that the problem of his destination hadn't crossed his mind for the past half hour. He hoped it'd remain so.

"200 Naira."

"Okay." He shuffled into the passenger section joining two middle-aged women; one holding a toddler and sitting in the middle while the other sitting at the right side was staring through the windscreen, lost in thought perhaps.

"Good morning ma," he greeted.

"Morning **oyi**. How are you?" The woman with the toddler replied quite affectionately.

"Fine ma." He felt like a child again. It had been long since anyone addressed him with **oyi**, the Idoma term used by older people to address younger persons sometimes.

"Thank God."

'God' again. *It was just a response.* She surely didn't mean he should literally thank 'God'. *Chill man.*

The vehicle started and began to move towards Market Park in a fidgety manner. He glanced at the toddler, then at the woman, estimating her age to be 50. He wondered if the child was her grandson. The kid looked no more than three years old and was good-looking. The woman noticed him and smiled.

"Greet Unku," she said, rubbing the boy's head. The boy casually looked at him and his lips spread into a cute grin.

"Fine boy." He smiled back at the boy who started singing a children's song.

"How are you?" He said, mimicking a child's voice which seemed to excite the boy who stopped singing and laughed for a brief moment. The moment made him nostalgic but he just couldn't place his finger on what he was missing. His mom maybe? It would be good to hear her call him **oyi**. Maybe life was indeed about fellowship. Aren't all humans designed to have needs? But he had left his family. Was he just being unrealistic with his quest?

Thirty-minutes later, they arrived the Town's round-about. The Park was a few meters away. The driver turned in his seat and gestured for him to pay. The Traveler quickly took out his wallet, took three 200 naira notes and handed it to the driver.

"For three of us."

"Ah, okay." The driver said, surprised.

"Ah, my son, thank you oh. May God bless you. " The woman with the toddler said, getting off the vehicle immediately after The Traveler. The other woman looked at him and muttered a quick, "Thank you."

He smiled and waved them off.

The bus had moved for thirty-minutes before he felt, almost disrupting his train of thoughts, a sleeping head on his left shoulder. It was a lady about his age, dozing peacefully just barely half an hour into a seven hour's journey making him wonder what could make her this tired so early in the journey.

The Traveler was thinking of his destination. He'd boarded this bus heading to Ogun State. The bus was quite comfy and the weather had brightened up a bit though the sky looked cloudy. It was a beautiful day indeed, and he was a stupid philosopher on his way to find meaning. Somewhere out there was the answer he'd been looking for. He was sure of that. The problem now was, where? As if by telepathy, an old man seating beside him turned to him.

"Where are you headed to?"

"Ogun State." He squinted at the old man, curious as to why one would ask such a question; the bus only conveyed passengers to Ogun.

"Hmmm." The old man turned his attention to the small book in his hand and kept reading as if he was in a whole different world. He was probably in his late 70s and had this aura of...knowingness? Like he knew something others didn't. If he noticed The Traveler staring at him, the old man didn't show it.

The Traveler suddenly felt he liked the old man—maybe he was just looking for company.

The Traveler became curious about the book. He peered into it and couldn't make out any words because of the tiny font. Strange. *How in the world was this old fella reading it without spectacles?* He was curious and decided to ask about the book later. *Old folks sleep frequently.* He turned to ask the old man when the head on his shoulder moved.

"Sorry." The lady said shyly, rubbing her eyes in embarrassment.

"No worries, it's a beautiful morning." He managed a slight smile, intending to ease her embarrassment. She smiled back at him; an almost childish grin. But it seemed forced. She was pretty, and her teeth were perfectly chiseled to fit. He wondered whether God— if he were real— had spent so much time on a person's dentition. Even the smoothness of her skin was something he couldn't ignore. He looked into her hazel eyes but all he could see was sadness etched in them. He felt glued to them. They weren't just sad; he could see pain and a futilely hidden fear in them. She probably wanted to talk to someone but the fear stopped her. He wondered what she could have gone through to be this afraid to talk. For a second, he thought he was being ridiculous, that it might just be nothing but his lucky day. *To have such a lovely being lay her delicate head on my shoulder—how more beautiful could the day be?*

He averted his eyes, chiding himself for his train of thoughts. He cleared his throat.

"So... how are you?" *Ugh, that came out rather awkwardly man,* he thought to himself.

"I'm fine." She replied quietly. Maybe he could get her to trust him enough to share her fears. He was about to say something to keep her talking when the old man spoke.

"I'm going to Ogun too."

"Okay." He said, slightly annoyed. The man barely said anything after asking him about his destination and now, this. Where else could they all be going if not Ogun state? Maybe the old man was...

"I'm returning from a long journey. I went there a long time ago." The old man said cutting off his thoughts.

The Traveler turned to look at the lady, maybe she would understand his frustration, but she was staring out the window, those hazel eyes lost in some unfathomable reverie. He looked around and everyone in the bus seemed to be unaware the old man. He wondered if he was hallucinating.

"I was young too, when I left." The old man did not realize, or just didn't care that he was speaking to an uninterested listener. He spoke as one advising a group of children seated around his feet.

"What made you leave?" *Better play along and let the old fella enjoy some company*, he thought

"Hmmm." He lifted his head from the little book for the first time since he began the conversation, looked at the Traveler in the eye and smiled—just a little movement of his lips to the side, "I wanted to find meaning. The meaning of life."

"You...What?" He felt his brain reeling. This was getting a little creepy. The old man's eyes never moved. They seemed to have seen much and looked like a window to an infinitude of wisdom.

"I went to a mountain to live alone." The Traveler looked away. The prospect of surviving for about half a century on a mountain didn't bother him. What bothered was how the old man knew his thoughts. "I sought meaning and found it."

"Tell me." For some unknown reason, he believed the old man.

"Ahh," came the reply, "The young one thinks it is a day's journey."

"So where do I begin?"

"You're on the right path."

"Where is the mountain?"

"It is my mountain, son."

Okay, this was getting weird. How in the world does one own a mountain? Maybe the old man was drunk. But he didn't smell of anything. Was this a trick? Maybe it was the book; it could be some magic stuff or a religious book.

"You think it's a physical mountain? Go to the top of your mountain and dwell there until you find what you seek."

"Hmm. You said I am on the right path, yet you ask me to dwell on a mountain I don't even know of." Everything felt strange to him. Dwelling on mountains and all. Why had he even come on this aimless trip? Who journeys without a

destination in mind? Was this life? A journey of uncertainty? Maybe he shouldn't have bothered leaving home in search of what he didn't even know. Just go back to his family, get a job and live life like no one cared Maybe no one did. *But, what about God?*

"Do you believe in Providence?" The old man asked, again breaking into his thoughts.

"I don't know. Maybe." He shrugged. This was becoming more than what he could wrap his head around. He looked around and everything felt normal—everything but the fact that he was travelling for the stupidest reason and here was an old man with telepathic abilities who claimed to own a mountain—whatever that meant.

"I think I should go back. I'm just being stupid."

"You are moving well." The calmness of the old man was unnerving.

"But I don't even know where I am going to. At least you had a mountain to go to."

"You seek that which you cannot find within you. The reality of it is objective."

"You talk of objectivity yet your mountain is subjective."

The old man gave a short hearty laugh. "The reality of it is objective but experientially it is subjective."

"Hmm." He was getting tired of the conversation.

"Providence brought you here."

"So, what is the meaning of life?" His chest suddenly felt dull and his mood sullen.

"You will find it when you seek it long enough." The old man placed a hand on his shoulder. "I think you should pray."

"Is there really a God?" He couldn't put up with the old man's vague statements anymore. He had never been more confused.

"Yes," came the unequivocal reply. "There is one God."

"So how does he help in such a matter?"

"If we seek a reason behind a product we find entirely beyond our comprehension, don't we inquire of its producer?" He smiled gently at The Traveler.

"The meaning of life can be deciphered in nothing but the Author of it."

"What if life has no meaning?"

"Then it's not life. Unless it has meaning, it is definitely not worth enjoying. There's a need to find meaning in your heart because life calls for it."

"Makes sense." The old man wasn't drunk after all. Providence? He had begun to believe in that too. Maybe God brought him out here so he could ask Him—The Author of life himself. It seemed plausible enough. The angels must be cackling louder now. "The book, is it the Bible?"

"No. It's my life lessons. I read them over and over.

It must have a lot of lessons, The Traveler thought to himself.

"Oga. Wake up. Oga!" A long hiss followed and an irritated female voice murmured. He opened his eyes. What? He felt his head spinning on the inside. His head was actually tilted, resting on a shoulder. *The lady's shoulder,* he thought. He turned to apologize.

Wait!

When had she become less beautiful and suddenly looked ten years older? He was too confused to speak.

"Why are you staring at me like that? You have been sleeping right from the very minute the bus moved." The lady rapped, glaring at him.

He turned to look at the old man beside him. Nobody but two women getting off the bus.

He had been dreaming! How long had he slept? He spat out the four-lettered word. He remembered everything as if it happened a minute ago.

"Sorry." He was still too stunned to apologize to the lady. Feeling numb, he dragged himself— body and soul— out of the bus. He looked around and for a moment thought he heard someone giggling. *This is one good show the angels must be enjoying,* he thought.

He slipped his hand in his pocket and felt a strange object. It wasn't his wallet nor phone. They were in the other pocket. He curiously pulled it out.

The old man's book.

Uzor Maxim Uzoatu

Dear Chinua

Nna-anyi Achebe, this will definitely not be a long letter. I like my things short and sharp like *Things Fall Apart*, not long and heavy for I'm not in the mood to write *War and Peace*. The source of my trepidation ought to be obvious enough. After the Father in heaven, you are our father here on earth. It is not every day that a dean of your stature asks the likes of me to produce a story for inclusion in a major anthology of African writing.

You may not know it but the critics have been on my back ever since I wrote my first word. They have in fact regaled themselves writing rampant and wicked fictions about my work and person: that I was not ordained to become a writer; that I was not made for greatness; that I am only playing at words a yarn spinner of short and limited concerns That I have not, to put it simply and squarely as you would say, written a big book of the full-length novel mode Well

A fat book does not a writer make. Fatness in books is like fatness in humans it only advertises a lack of form. The critics would have us believe that this life is one long epistle in profundity. Jazz! Life is a short story. There must be the story and it has to be short, otherwise there is no meaning, only lingering absurdity which, like masturbation, gets even feeble minds like Portnoy complaining.

Its such a pity that writers grow leaving their soul and essence behind. Oh how so-called maturity erodes the writers juice! Artistic sophistication thus equals disowning ones past. QED! Burning yesterday as juvenilia. But the past is our destiny, the grist of our being.

I look back and there is no mistaking that the real story of my life is *Wemimo the Witch*. All else is fanciful wordplay that should have no place in the anthology you are editing. Its like the critics to dismiss it all as juvenilia, unworthy of any serious anthology. Let the critics drown in the deep sea of their monotonous modernism! May they suffer the fate of Kafka and his human insects! Most of the so-called writers were broken by their very first love affairs, and they cannot deal with that in their works, yet you have a word or two about dealing with when the rain started to beat us.

For me the rain started with the witch named *Wemimo*, but I cannot now tell how it happened: whether *Wemimo* stole my heart in broad daylight or in the dead of night. I took ill with love such that I wrote my obsession with *Wemimo* into the drama series I created for the national television.

You are in love! the producer had announced, stressing that all my recent scripts in a monomaniacal manner dealt with the falling in love of a struggling writer. Kanmi Kasali could be any age from forty to seventy but he was unmarried. Apart from producing TV plays Kasali made Nollywood movies. One of his recent films was a hit and afforded him the wherewithal to grow wings. He bought a Benz, Mercedes 500 SEL.

Im not in love, sir, I told Kasali, avoiding his eyes.

Dont tell me lies, son, Kasali said, smiling. A certain Wemimo Coker is not your enemy, is she?

So the old crook knew of Wemimo? My composure shattered, I summoned just enough courage to look at Kasali's face. A crooked grin sat on the weather-beaten face.

Wemimo adores you, young writer, Kasali continued, saving me from the misery of speechlessness. You have unearthed a rare jewel in Wemimo. Its for you to keep your jewel.

I turned into a demonstration of nerves, staring morosely into emptiness.

Now that I have mentioned jewel, Kasali was saying, I am sure you must have read Wole Soyinka's The Lion and the Jewel.

Of course I have, I said, not showing much interest.

Compelling play, said Kasali. My favourite Soyinka actually.

Thats amongst his early plays, I said, just not to appear to be disrespectful by not keeping up the conversation for whatever its worth.

Everything I want in a play is in that play, Kasali was saying, a crooked smile on his lugubrious face. There is the young wannabe. There is the old master. And in-between the duo is the beauty queen. Who gets the ultimate prize? Kasali paused, staring fixedly at me. The odds are stacked against the old guard. The youth as ever is always poised to conquer. Tension mounts. That is drama at its purest application.

I said nothing, looking away from him.

The young school teacher Lakunle could not tire of speaking long grammar to the village belle Sidi, Kasali continued as I was not forthcoming with words. The old lion Baroka had to apply the ancient weapon of the hyena patience. At the opportune moment the lion struck and the game was over.

I still could not offer a word.

Kasali was in his elements, talking. Beauty fades, and the beautiful must make use of the gift at noon. Delay is dreadful, for nobody pays attention to a has-been who has passed her sell-by date.

I dont understand I began and my voice trailed off.

What dont you understand? asked Kasali.

Are you asking me to write my own version of The Lion and the Jewel?

Dont be mischievous, said the old man, grimacing. All I want you to understand is that the Soyinka play has substance, which your recent plays seriously lack. A real play should give us a gripping issue to grapple with.

But it all depends on the style of the playwright

Style me no styles! retorted Kasali. Style is the refuge of the writer who has nothing to say. That amounts to dancing around the issues. If you have serious matters to treat, you let it all pour out. That is what makes great drama.

The theatre is such a large field that accommodates Bernard Shaw and Samuel Beckett, I said.

Oh you want to dabble into the so-called Theatre of the Absurd? Kasali asked, as if it amounted committing a mortal sin.

Its a free world for the writer to choose the path to follow, I said adamantly.

Then is in my domain to decide the play I produce, he replied. Even that is not the issue. What concerns me here is that you are going the way of European nihilism.

How do you mean?

You should try to give a measure of aesthetic distance to your works.

I dont think I get your drift, sir.

Every play must not be your tortured autobiography!

I did not know what to say. I kept mum.

There was this brilliant writer back in history known as Nietzsche, said Kasali, continuing. The man had a tremendous following in his lifetime such that he pronounced that God was dead. Of course the man went mad and was taken to the lunatic asylum. This was a man who wrote such groundbreaking books as

The Birth of Tragedy. When he got too hot for his brains he started writing nonsense and promptly ran mad. He never recovered. That's why I advise young writers like you to watch it. The symptoms are already there!

I could only open my mouth in horror, saying nothing.

That's why I like the writer known as Chinua Achebe, Kasali was saying. A very humble man in spite of his great achievements, Chinua is my man. When we were filming his *Things Fall Apart*, you would never know he wrote that great book. I still have some immortal lines of the book in my skull. Let me quote Achebe for you: That night the Mother of the Spirits walked the length and breadth of the clan, weeping for her murdered son. It was a terrible night. Not even the oldest man in Umuofia had ever heard such a strange and fearful sound, and it was never to be heard again. It seemed as if the very soul of the tribe wept for a great evil that was coming its own death. Can you beat that? Kasali was not done yet. I should not really be concerned with your personal affairs except that you are using it to destroy your writing talent. Our TV audience is not interested in the use every day of newfangled ideas to justify a love affair based on the so-called high art. When I get a teleplay, I expect to see something as crisp as a short story, not some fancy verbalism. Without a story to hold them up verbal gymnastics and fireworks are a bore. Woolly artistic airs are bunkum. Let's put the story back into the short story. Kasali then strutted off, effectively souring the new moon for me.

I was staring at the moon, lost in thought in front of my bunk, when Wemimo shot into me like a charge of electricity and awoke me with an utterance: Umu, you have to see my parents now!

Why? I asked laconically, reaching for her heavy chest.

You do know I'm a princess and my parents would want me to marry from within, she said, pained. You do need to see my parents now. I'm under so much pressure.

I didn't want to subtract anything from the artistic surprise I had in store for Wemimo. I must sweep Wemimo off her feet by the magnificence of the surprise party I was staging for her in the manner of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. After the party I would walk hand-in-hand with her to see her parents. That would be grand, poetic style not unlike Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* who insists we must do things with style.

Wemimo, give me a little more time, I said languidly, leading her to the bed.

Wemimo braced up herself when leaving and said, quite uncharacteristically: Umu, what cannot be had must be endured.

Waking early the next day I went shopping, buying up the world in preparation for the surprise engagement party. I was adventurously mad in the shopping spree, totting up an awesome debt in the process. I packed away the purchases in a friend's house just to keep Wemimo away from the scent of what I had in store for her. I was quite determined that my Valentine Day surprise package must not be sabotaged. I kept the poetic party on its surprise track, inviting friends from all the cardinal points but keeping Wemimo away from the gist.

I went to Wemimo's home on the morning of Valentine's Day and was told by her little sister that she was at a self-service store down the road. Running up to the store I beheld wonder. Wemimo was there floating on golden wings like an angel.

Everybody is waiting for you in my house, I grandly announced, spreading out my hands like I owned the universe.

I no longer visit bachelors in their lair, Wemimo said, gliding a glamorous hand over her great hair.

You see, there is this party I was saying.

A party of bachelors, she said, smiling. I'm sorry. I no longer attend such

But the party is for you.

For me? What on earth for?

I thought Wemimo was joking and made to hug her. She brusquely pushed me away.

The fun is over, Umu, Wemimo said, touching her diamond necklace. I'm waiting for my husband here. And he may not be happy seeing me standing with a playboy.

Wemimo, you must attend this party, I said, flustered. In the course of the party I will announce to the world that you are my wife!

Too late, Umu, she said, radiant in her lush lace. And here he comes!

She ran excitedly to the posh car that pulled up. Inside the machine sat the rare jewel thief.

A mad shriek jumped from my mouth: Wemimo, I'm coming to see your parents now!

A roar of laughter rumbled out of the Mercedes 500 SEL.

No need, Umu, Wemimo was saying. What cannot be had must be endured.

She banged the car door and off they zoomed, leaving me rooted to a fatal spot.

Mills and Boon stuff? Nna-anyi Chinua, that is the story of my life.

As ever,

Umu

Nkiru Doris Onyemachi

Burning Borders

Dear Tata,

I hope you have been doing well for all these years. Yes, it's been ten years since I saw you last; ten years of self-sojourning, understanding myself, facing reality, and gaining maturity. Tata, tomorrow I will receive a national prize for the overall best essayist in the Literary Society's secondary school competition. As I feel the quivers of excitement, I reminisce on the past that has molded me to embrace challenges. These memories keep flooding my present; I cannot help but flow with them. I wish I could reshape them into pleasant ones, but the irreversibility of time remains my equivocal challenge. Mom's face keeps bumping in my journey of backward explanation. Yes, Tata, it is the clarification for the present I am experiencing.

I still have vivid images of Mom and I going to Aunty Anayo's house several times to sleep over whenever Grandma was visiting.

"It's just to give dad and grandma a chance to have a mother-and-child heart-to-heart discussion," Mom would always explain to me to justify the reason we left our comfortable home to squeeze ourselves in Aunty Anayo's one-room apartment with her kids.

I see the sadness in her eyes as she explained; I see the pitiful look in Aunty Anayo's eyes as she accepted us in her home. In my little five-year-old mind, I was curious to know why you and Grandma could not discuss in one of the three rooms we occupied. As I grew older, I realized that it was more than a discussion; it was a means to avoid Grandma tormenting Mom. I also heard that my paternal family was against you marrying Mom, the reason you were never able to pay her bride price till after her death.

I can see Mom so clearly in my mind's eye now – how she gasped for breath as you rushed her to the car. Her stomach kept rising and falling with the same labored pace of her breath. I was so scared; I also saw a glint I now recognize as fear in your eyes.

Tata, I do not doubt that you truly loved Mom. But I was so angry that you could not stand up for her; you could not stop Grandma from hurting her. I still remember Grandma coming to the house one day while you were away,

throwing Mom's clothes away, pushing her out, and shouting, "Osu! Akwuna! My son cannot marry you."

Mom craved acceptance from your parents; little wonder I was named Ogadimma; she wished I was a boy. I saw it in her looks as if I betrayed her. I can attest that Mom died the day she discovered that her second baby was to be another girl. I got to know this when I heard the doctor cautioning her as we went to the hospital:

"Ma'am, you need some rest. You will need to relax more because your blood pressure keeps rising even with the medication I prescribed," he said as he kept checking her pulse.

I wished Mom had listened to him. As the day went by, Mom became restless. She stayed awake at night and moved around with a look I now describe as emptiness. I observed this as I was a light sleeper and often distracted when she started her night sojourn, pacing around the house pensively. This unrest continued until the day you rushed her to the hospital.

Oh, my poor mother! I cannot shake off the memory of that very day she slumped in the kitchen, and luckily (I thought at that point) you were at home, so you rushed her to the hospital. I cannot forget the way you hugged me and shed tears in the reception hall at the hospital after coming out of the room they carried her into. We left the hospital without her and the baby. From what I understood of the calls you made, the hospital had no air to give Mom, and she passed away. I kept wondering how they captured air and how it suddenly became scarce. My little mind imagined balloons, and I promised myself that I would buy many balloons and fill them with air to avoid such a painful event, not knowing that it was oxygen until I grew old. Painful? Yes. I grew up to be more sensitive than my age mates. At first, the pain was not there, as I kept assuring myself that Mom might just be resting at the hospital and would come back. But as it gradually dawned on me that Mom was not coming back, the pain set in.

Tata, I missed her so dearly! Though Mom did not play much with me, she tried her best to give me a little time not occupied with marital wars. Tata, I know you gave me your best when you were not on one of your field trips as an engineer. But I started living in my head at a tender age; I analyzed, discussed, and concluded on events and people in my little head without saying it out. So at five years of age, I already knew what pain was.

I still remember how my maternal family tormented you during her burial.

“Since you decided to keep someone’s daughter in your house for years without paying her bride price, you will have to marry her corpse.” I heard Grandpa say this when we went down to Umunza, Mom’s village, to inform them of Mom’s death.

“Yes, that is the custom,” Grandpa’s brother intoned. “Though we know that your people killed Chinyere, our daughter, we just want to bury her in peace. So you must marry her corpse,” he affirmed

Though I was sitting on the verandah with Mom’s eldest sister, Aunty Nneoma, I could still clearly hear what they discussed in the sitting room, where you sat with Mom’s dad, Mom’s brother – Uncle Ebuka, and two of her uncles, while maternal Grandma kept sobbing in her room. In my little head, I kept pondering how the wedding would turn out; would Mom wear a flowing wedding gown like the one in a video I watched on television? Everything felt strange to me, even on the burial day. I shed tears as it broke my heart to see adults crying. People moved in to see the casket, but I was not allowed to see it, though I did not request it. After the burial, I opted to stay with my maternal Grandma. You had to ask me to be sure.

“Which of the Grandmas? My mother or ...”

“Mom’s Mom!” I screamed.

I was already terrified of your people after all I had witnessed they did to Mom, especially Grandma. I heard none of them came for the burial, and I still hold grudges against them.

Tata, pardon me for referring to them as “your family.” The fact is that I don’t take them as family, as none have ever cared or asked to see me. For me, they killed Mom with hatred. But I kept wondering why they hated Mom so much. Nobody gave me an answer until I gradually discovered why in my Senior Secondary class (SS1).

Discovering the source of Mom’s non-acceptance by your family was a bit difficult since everyone around decided to keep silent about it. I have always been curious about it, but the first five years in the village curbed my curiosity; I was eager to blend with village life. Tata, relocating was difficult, but my maternal family showed me great love. Frankly, Tata, they showered me with the type of love that I never experienced from you and Mom. The first year, I was still hoping that Mom and baby would appear and take me back to the city, to our house. Some nights, I feel so angry and moody that you, Mom, and Baby abandoned

me; other nights, I turn towards the wall and cry; I have a bed to myself. I share a room with Grandma, whose bed is kept horizontally beside mine. Grandpa has a room to himself. His room has a connecting door to the sitting room. The other room was that of Uncle Ebuka before he built his own house right in the compound, adjacent to Grandpa's. Still in the same compound, two houses of Grandpa's brothers' stood. The compound is fenced, with a black gate serving as the entrance and exit routes. It is a big compound, and everyone depends on each other; my cousins and I can eat from any of the houses in the compound. Tata, the place is peaceful, and sometimes I would say a little prayer for my mom and baby to find peace beyond.

Changing from a private school in the city to a model school in the village was stressful, Tata; I had to learn to adapt to my new environment. When you compare Marris Primary School, my former school, to Model Primary and Secondary School, Umunza, my current school has a big compound that contains teachers' quarters. But its structures are so old and cannot be compared to the modern structures of my former school. Tata, I missed my former school, and I missed Catherine, my best friend, though I have a vague memory about her now. I did not take time adjusting as I started from primary two that same year Mom was buried. My best subjects are English Language, Social Studies, and Economics. Initially, when I started at my new school, I was always on my own, reading and staying back in class while others went out for a break. But my cousins, Chioma and Chimenka, would not have it, as they always leave their classes to drag me out for a break. They were in primary grades three and four, respectively. Playing with them was much fun. It continued until I made a friend, Chisom, and we started reading and playing together. Chisom is quite intelligent, and her best subject is Mathematics. We sit on the grass and talk about our dreams and aspirations.

I know I am derailing, but I only want to talk about myself before the discovery. Tata, do you remember when you came to visit? I remembered what happened that day. I came back from the stream, and Grandma told me you came to see me but had to rush back as you received an urgent call from your company. I had been furious; it had been more than one year since I saw you. For no just reason, you refused to see me after Mom's death till then. Could it be the guilt for not standing up for Mom and that seeing me might remind you of her, as they said I am her splitting image? I leave that to the past. That day was my first day going to the stream; the stream was not big but quite deep in the middle. The greenery of the environment made it serene. They said the water comes out from the rocks surrounding the river that is why the water is pure. My cousins helped in carrying the clothes we washed and I had to battle with the distance; it

was a bit far from home as it was in a neighbouring village, Umuezi. That night, Grandma killed chicken and made pepper soup for me. She told me that it was specially prepared for me since it was my first time to the stream. She massaged my legs with warm water; both the dish and massage was a rite called Iro ukwu. It was performed so that subsequent visit to the stream would not be painful to the first time goer. I enjoyed it as it gave me a view of our culture. I started picking interest in festivals such as the new yam festival, Orji (Kola) Umunza, and the Masquerade festival called Igba Mmanwu.

In my third year in secondary school, I started questioning some cultural practices, especially those that dehumanized girls and women. For instance, I overheard Chioma telling one of my cousins that her mum had not bathed for days, and it would last for one week till after the burial of her dad. After the burial, she would shave her hair and wear specific clothing for one year to mourn her husband. When I asked Grandma why it was like that, she told me it was the culture, and they met it that way. One day, a suitor came for Aunty Nneoma, and I overheard the word – Osu again. It was Grandpa who mentioned it while talking with Grandma.

“Someone told Uche, Nneoma’s suitor, that our people were Osu, but he told the person that his culture and religion do not recognize such segregation.”

I was sitting outside the verandah, but I heard that. I recollected hearing that from your mom. So I started asking; I discovered Osu was also known as an outcast. It was a practice where some people felt superior to others, so they called themselves the freeborn and the others outcasts. I investigated further and observed that even some religious elders still practice such culture, though they keep preaching that everyone is the offspring of God. Some go as far as backing it up with the Old Testament in the Bible, where Isaac had to ensure he married from his tribe. They also forgot to preach the parable of the Good Samaritan. Hypocrites!

That was why when an essay competition came up, I chose the topic: OSU CASTE SYSTEM: A DESTROYER OF FAMILY TIES.

Tata, I am a living witness, and so are you. I passionately wrote about it after a thorough research. I wrote about how people came to be branded Osu, either through slavery, coming from the lineage of dibias/Eze mmuo (native doctors/Chief priest), or dedicating their lives to a deity for protection over injustice, and also through propaganda. I stated the physical and psychological effects of such practice. I pointed out how people refused to talk more about it and how such

silence kept destroying lives. It destroyed Mom, Baby, and our family ties, so I wrote from experience. As Grandma usually says, "An old woman can never be challenged in a dance she knows so well." Tata, I knew every step of this dance from experience, so I wrote about it so well. I chose to speak out rather than remain silent, and I won the overall best in the competition.

Dear Tata, as I write you, I look at my two award plaques on the table (I always travel with them), and I promise never to be silent anymore. One of the plaques given to me was for the best student in the spelling competition; the other was for the best chess player (even when they said it was a masculine game). Tata, you know I have been Burning Borders since I was little. You told easily I named you - Ta-ta - when my mates were still drooling. I am still your brave daughter. I heard that you have refused to get married again. Please, join me in burning part of the past to recreate a better memory today. This day, Tata, I chose to speak, and I will keep speaking out! I love you, Tata, and I will be happy to see you at The Literary Society Hub in Abuja, where the price for the best essayist will be issued to me. I love you, Tata!

Yours adorable,

Ogadimma.

CHILDREN STORIES

Irene chudel

The Daring Fox

The rabbit had gone to the forest as usual to get himself what to eat, on getting there he heard some strange footsteps and decided to withdraw himself to a corner where he could hide and listen. He hid in a corner and peeped to see where the sound was coming from, then he saw some people dig a hole and buried a box in the ground. After the rabbit had gotten his meal for the day he went home.

It was evening and the animals had gathered as usual to tell stories. Since the rabbit had no story to tell, he remembered his experience at the forest and decided to share it with the other animals. "Why didn't you go back there to check what was in the box after they had left?, it could be a treasure" said the fox angrily "but it does not belong to me, we should not be taking things that does not belong to us" replied the rabbit. Later when night came all the animals left for their various homes. The fox on his way home was still feeling worried about what the rabbit said earlier and wondered why the rabbit didn't go back to take the box because he felt a treasure might be in it.

Chapter 2

While the rabbit was sleeping, an old wise owl appeared to him in his dream and told him to warn the fox not to go and take the box because the content of the box might be dangerous. Early the next morning the rabbit went to the fox house to warn him about the dangers of the box but before he could teach it was already too late for him because the fox had already gone to the forest to find the mystery box. Feeling very disappointed the rabbit went home.

The fox had reached the forest and was looking everywhere but he couldn't find anything, when he decided to give up the search and was heading home he struck his leg on a metal on the floor as he looked down he saw something buried there, he rejoiced happily for he had just found the box, he then dug out the box and went home with it happily.

Chapter 3

When the fox got home he opened the box with excitement to find a treasure or something nice

But to his greatest surprise nothing was in the box, he was so angry. After he opened the box something strange happened, a heavy breeze blew out of the box and brought darkness upon the land. At this point the fox knew that the box was holding no treasure but maybe a curse.

When the rabbit saw the wind that brought darkness upon the land he knew this was concerned about the box that the owl had warned him about.

Chapter 4

The fox feeling remorseful for what he has done and for bringing darkness to their peaceful land ran to the rabbit house to tell him what he has done he pleaded with him to help him out so that they can do something about it before it gets late. The rabbit still welcomed him very well and told him about the dream he had earlier, then they decided to go and look for the owl, maybe it could help them out.

Chapter 5

The fox and the rabbit had gone a long way looking for where to find the old wise owl that had appeared in their dream earlier, when they decided to take a little rest the old wise owl appeared to them. "you have seen the consequences of taking what does not belong to you " said the old wise owl," I am really feeling bad for what I have done and I regret my actions, please we need your help" replied the fox. "That was a dark spell that disturbed a village so they cast the spell into that box, go to the river down the road and fetch some water then sprinkle the water all over the land, by doing that the land would be clean again because that particular river have some powers in it "said the old wise owl, after it disappeared. The fox and the rabbit were so happy so they quickly ran to the river, fetched some water and started cleansing the land, just then the darkness began to fade away.

The fox thanked the rabbit for being a good and supportive friend because if it was some other animal they wouldn't have helped him because they warned him at first.

Moral Lessons

We should learn to abstain from things that does not belong to us

We should learn to apologize when we are at fault.

It is good to render help when ineeded

Always listen to advice

Chidera Uzuegbunam

The Tale of Benny the Brave and the Golden Acorn

Once upon a time, in a lush forest filled with towering trees and vibrant flowers, lived a little squirrel named Benny. Benny was known throughout the forest for his bright eyes, bushy tail, and a heart full of curiosity. He loved exploring every corner of the forest, climbing the tallest trees, and making friends with all the creatures.

One sunny morning, while hopping through the branches, Benny stumbled upon a golden acorn. It shimmered in the sunlight, and Benny had never seen anything like it. "This must be a magical acorn," he thought, his heart racing with excitement. He decided to take it to Wise Old Owl, the wisest creature in the forest, to find out more.

Wise Old Owl examined the acorn and said, "This acorn holds great magic. It can grant a wish, but it must be used for a noble cause. Choose wisely, Benny."

Benny's mind swirled with possibilities. He thought about wishing for an endless supply of nuts, a bigger treehouse, or even the ability to fly. But then he

remembered all the creatures in the forest who might need help more than he did. He decided to take a walk and think it over.

As Benny walked, he noticed various friends in need. Hoppy the rabbit was struggling to dig a new burrow because her paws were sore. Chirpy the bird was sad because his nest had blown away in a storm. Even Grumpy the badger had lost his favorite digging stick.

Benny's heart ached for his friends. He went back to Wise Old Owl and asked, "Can the acorn's wish help everyone in the forest?"

Wise Old Owl nodded, "If your heart is pure and your wish is selfless, the magic will work for the greater good."

With determination, Benny held the golden acorn and wished, "I wish for the forest to be a place where everyone helps each other and lives happily."

Suddenly, the golden acorn glowed brightly, and a warm light spread throughout the forest. Benny felt a gentle breeze, and he saw changes happening all around him. Hoppy's burrow dug itself, Chirpy's nest was rebuilt stronger than before, and Grumpy found a new, sturdier digging stick right beside him.

The forest began to thrive more than ever. Animals started working together, sharing their resources, and helping each other. Benny saw the joy and cooperation among his friends, and he knew he had made the right choice.

From that day on, Benny the Brave became a hero in the forest. He taught everyone the importance of kindness, generosity, and community. The golden acorn's magic ensured that the forest remained a place of harmony and mutual support.

Benny the Brave lived a long and happy life, always reminding the forest creatures that a kind heart and a helping hand are the greatest treasures of all. And so, the forest remained a magical place where everyone lived in harmony, thanks to one little squirrel's brave and selfless wish.

THE END

The moral lessons of Benny's story spread far and wide:

True happiness comes from helping others and putting their needs before your own.

Small acts of kindness can create a ripple effect, making the whole community better.

Working together and supporting each other leads to greater success and happiness for everyone.

Wise decisions often come from thinking about the greater good rather than immediate gratification.

Drama

Taiwo Boluwatife

Madam Pierre

CHARACTERS

MADAM P--- A TRADER

MAJOR --- MADAM P SON

VIVIAN --- MADAM P FIRST DAUGHTER

QUEEN --- MADAM P LAST DAUGHTER

MISTER P ----- MADAM P HUSBAND

NEIGHBOUR

1ST WOMAN

CHIEF ALADE---PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

[A hot Tuesday afternoon in the town of biazo. The scene opens in Madam Pierre's house [popularly called madam P], she enters into the sitting room of her house dragging a sack full of goods on the floor. She is a woman in her mid-fifties. As she dragged the sack close to one of the chairs in the sitting room. She dropped heavily into the chair.]

MADAM P -- Hello and good afternoon, who is at home?

[She waits for a response and none was coming]

MADAM P ---[Taking off her shoes]--- What a day this is, the wahala for today market pass normal. [She yearns loudly]

MADAM P --- So, this children are not back from school yet and the door was not locked ooooo, na only god dey protect us. Let me sleep small before this children comes back from school. Today's experience in the market is different, everybody just became different, just because of the election, na them know. [She closes her eyes to sleep but opens it back] ohhh, before I forget, I have to calculate what I bought and the expected profit I should be making on this before these children come back

[she brought a paper that contains a list of her purchased goods and a calculator, she begins to calculate. She smiles at interval as she does this. Then, Major comes in, he is the oldest child in the family. A boy of 13 years. He looks young as his age, average height, he looks stressed]

MAJOR--- [prostrating] Good afternoon ma,

[Madam P answers with a nod, major moved toward the bedroom]

MADAM P--- [without looking up] how was school today and how was sales in the morning? I have not check the money. Can you bring the money and the remaining goods for me?

MAJOR --- [frowning] OK ma. [He went inside]

MADAM P—be fast about it, you know you still have to hawk this evening.

MAJOR---- [coming out with a white bowl containing money and some goods in a tray], yes ma, and hope there is food to eat?

MADAM P---- ohh, sorry my husband, you know I went to market since 5 a.m., I just came in some minutes ago.

MAJOR---- [surprised and angry] what are we now going to eat?

MADAM P----- go and prepare yam in the kitchen before your sisters returns.

[Major murmured angrily as he walks back inside]

MADAM P----- are you okay at all? Should I cut myself into two so that I can satisfy you? I give you just 10 minutes for that food to be on the gas

[She continues her calculation, Vivian and Queen comes in, and both dressed in the same type of school uniform. Vivian is a tall girl, she is seven years old and Queen is a girl of years old. They attends the same primary school.]

VIVIAN—[KNEELS DOWN] good afternoon ma

QUEEN ----- [dropping her school bag] mummy, am very hungry

MADAM P --- Cant you greet like your sister did? Vivian, good afternoon, how was school today?

QUEEN—good afternoon mummy [she sits beside Madam P]

MADAM P --- Silly girl, good afternoon. Food will soon be ready, your brother is cooking, so, exercise patience.

[Madam P is done calculating, she puts the paper and calculator into her bag]

MADAM P--- Vivian, get me the trays, I have to prepare for the evening sales

[Vivian went inside and return with two trays of different size]

VIVIAN ----- These are the clean ones ma

MADAM P--- Go in and change your clothes and get ready for hawking [Vivian starts to go in] [To Queen] follow your sister and change too, you are starting to learn the trade today.

[Both Vivian and Queen look at their mother with surprise]

VIVIAN--- Mom, she is still small, she is just five years old

MADAM P---- Shut up, she is small but she knows how to demand for food and money. You better go in and do what I ask you to do.

QUEEN--- [SOBBING] Mummy, I am not going, I won't go.

MADAM P ----- If I bite that your mouth for you, you better go in and get dressed or else no food for you. [Queen goes in crying] [ALOUD] MR Major, how is the cooking going [she receives no answer]

Madam P loose the sack with the newly bought goods and starts to arrange them in the trays]

BLACK OUT

ACT ONE

SCENE TWO

[The two trays are filled with goods, a small white covered bucket is seen beside the trays with few goods inside. The children are eating. None of them is happy, they all wear a sad face.]

MADAM P---- It is getting late already, finish your food and take a few minutes rest, you are supposed to be on the street now

MAJOR---- Mummy, I am not feeling so well today, can you just let me rest today?

MADAM P--- Are you not ashamed of yourself? Your siblings are not complaining but you are busy giving excuses.

MAJOR--- I am feeling headache mummy

MADAM P—You always have an excuse all the time, nothing can stop today's sales , you can see that I just bought all of this today, there will be much sales today, I believe it.

MAJOR ---- [eating the last piece of his yam] but the goods won't spoil before tomorrow, it can all wait till tomorrow

MADAM P---- [angrily] Major, Major, be warned, be warned, if you have headache, go in and take one paracetamol and use it. You are all leaving this house in the next 10 minutes. No comment again. I repeat no complaint again.

VIVIAN--- Queen does not know anywhere around town

MADAM P----- I know, that's why she will be following you, Vivian

VIVIAN—[Pleadingly] Mom, just let her stay today, she will start next week. At least let her mind be prepared

MADAM P---- Her mind is already prepared since I informed her [to Queen] darling, don't worry, I will prepare you a delicious meal before you come back. [Readjusting the goods] i hope you are ready. Listen carefully, the price have not change, don't sell on credit, come back home as soon as it is getting dark, I mean around six thirty or six forty five. Be home before seven. Is that clear?

MAJOR AND VIVIAN--- Yes ma

[Vivian and Major carry their tray and Queen Carry the small white bucket and followed behind]

MADAM P—Watch the road very well before crossing. My head will protect you. Smile to your customers. I wish you good sales.

[Madam P watch them as they went their different ways, she smiled, shook her head and went inside the house].

BLACK OUT

ACT ONE

SCENE THREE

[It's some minutes past six, Madam P is inside the house preparing dinner and also awaiting the return of the members of her family. Noises are heard from afar off, the noise keeps getting louder, and a woman runs to the door, knocking heavily]

MADAM P---- Who is that?

NEIGHBOUR--- Madam P, Madam P, Maaddaammu PPP

MADAM P— [coming out of the house] what's making you shout my name?

NEIGHBOUR--- There is problem, a big fire is burning on your house, your ...

MADAM P ---- [Looking around] Woman, where is the fire?

NEIGHBOUR----- Your children have been hit by a motorcycle.

MADAM P --- [Screams] Yeeehh, who, where, when, how, ummmm I am ...

[She runs inside and comes out still in the same cloth, running towards a direction]

NEIGHBOUR---- [looking at her with pity] Not there, they have been rushed to the general hospital [Madam P turns back and run towards the opposite direction] won't you wait for me? Madam, Madam P, take it easy.

[She follows Madam P, calling out to her, Madam P keeps up her pace and she also ran to catch up with her]

BLACK OUT

ACT TWO

[At the hospital, Madam P Looks destabilized, her face shows that she has cried so much, she was held by two women who led her to one corner to sit down, other women came close to her to console her, she remains quiet with her eyes wide open. Some women stood afar off close to the hospital signpost bearing only a Red Cross sign]

1st WOMAN-- Just look at her, what a pity

2nd WOMAN--- we thank God, both children are safe but Madam P has questions to answer. Why would she send her 5 years old daughter to hawk on the street?

1st WOMAN—that's true. But am sure she will have her reasons.

2nd WOMAN—which stupid reason could that possibly be? Habba, a five year old girl, five years old for Christ sake.

1st WOMAN--- but how did it happen that just one bike injured both girls at the same time

[another woman joins the conversation]

3rd WOMAN --- Una weldone ooh, I was there and I saw everything happen.

You all know that the presidential candidate of the WCE party is in town campaigning. I was at the campaign venue, the man had already finished his campaign talk, and we were all heading out of the venue.

I just crossed the road and I was looking at how people were singing and chanting this man, then I noticed Queen, the younger girl with a small white bucket in her hand bit I didn't notice the older one, Vivian.

Queen was so engrossed with the spectacle that she was just looking around not facing the road and suddenly, a bike came out of nowhere and was about hitting her, this was when I noticed Vivian, Vivian who have seen the impending danger, tried to drag her sister but the bike is already too close, the bike man who was also trying to avoid hitting the girl falls with the bike and landed on the elder sister's leg and at the same time hitting the small one a little.

It was the screaming of people that scared the young girl that she fainted. Queen only had several bruises but Vivian must have suffered a fracture.

2nd WOMAN---- Ohhhh, no wonder, I can now see the pictu...

[their conversation was interrupted by the presence of chief Alade, the presidential candidate. The people moved close to him as he approached Madam P]

MR ALADE ---- good evening madam, I am here to extend my condolence. I also apologize on my own part. It's a thing of joy that both of your girls are alive and responding to treatment [there was a shout of joy but madam P facial expression did not change a bit].

My people of Biazo town, do you know that what happen today concerns us all and we all play a part in this matter. It is not a thing to hide, sending our children to hawk in the street, market place and any other places is illegal, actually, its called human trafficking.

This is a very common issue in our society and it needs to be tackled. I understand that the reasons for us to send our children out to the street is to be able to meet our ever-growing family needs but at the same time our children safety is supposed to be more important than anything else. There are evils that fly like arrow in the day and this is one of it that those children has encountered today, there are more worse ones that poisons the mind slowly and later goes on to destroy a life permanently. What we want to eat wont eat us by God's grace

ALL --- Amen

MR ALADE --- I implore every one of us to keep our children, our future safe and not push them to the evil vices of the day with our own hands in the name of hawking. If we allow them to roam the street hawking unpleasant situation can happen to them. I think you all agree with me?

[the cloud let out a murmur of yes and no]

MR ALADE ---- To keep our children safe, we have to keep under our nose until they are ripe and mature. In order to tackle this problem , if you can vote for me and I become the president-elect of his country, I will bring up an agency that will

be tasked with the duty to sensitize the whole nation especially people in a community like ours about child trafficking and the dangers it poses. I will also create a law enforcement agency to punish anyone who refuses to change after they are sensitized and goes on with this act that expose our children to danger. Although, some parents might think I am not concerned about their livelihood and survival but I want us all to keep our future which is our children safe and away from any thing that expose them to danger and also from the ills of our society and help them achieve a meaningful life. Thank you all

[the crowd claps and cheered him up with chants of his name]

MR ALADE --- [to madam P] Madam, don't worry about the bill, it has been settled.

[Madam P nods and smiled a little, MR Alade exits and majority of the crowd followed him]

BLACK OUT

ACT THREE

At madam P house, Major is sleeping on the floor and shivering. Madam P's husband , MR. P comes in and was surprised to see his so on the floor, he helped him up and make him sit down on a chair, Madam P comes in. She was surprised to see major in such a state, she looked at her husband, there was silence for a while]

MISTER P ---- [calmly] Don't try to explain anything, my ears are full already, I have heard the story a million times and I can understand most of it. I am calm and errmm, I will not do anything. [getting worked up] I just can't understand why you sent them to hawk when you know that the election is tomorrow and also why did you send out my little daughter to the street too? Answer me now. Look at this boy too, see

MADAM P ----- My dear, you see...

MISTER P -----just keep quiet , don't tell me anything, take this boy to the hospital now for treatment and don't ask me for a dime for whatever you are spending on them.

[he walks out angrily, madam P moves out of the way as he exits]

MADAM P --- What a day this is !!! [moving close to major] sorry dear, I have learnt my lesson the hard way.

[he hugs him, holds his hand and they both exit the stage].

BLACK OUT

CHIKWENDU ONYINYECHI SYLVIA

Linda and Ejike

CHARACTERS

1. Linda – Mr. and Mrs. Gabriel's Daughter
2. Miss Joy – Linda's Nanny
3. Ejike
- Linda's Course mate
4. Mr. and Mrs. Gabriel – Linda's Parent

ACT I

(In a luxury apartment, well furnished with quality items lives an extremely rich family. Who are blessed with a child name Linda Gabriel, who is over pampered and barely has parental guidance nor attention because why? The money has to be made to keep the Gabriel's in the top most rich people's lives in the state. And thereby exposing Linda to the knowledge of unexperienced nanny Miss Joy who has nothing to impact in adult like Linda in her early age.)

Linda good morning dad, Good morning mum

(Her Parents Mr. and Mrs. Gabriel echoes together) Hello angel, how are you?

Linda: I'm fine mom and dad

(Parent look at each other excited that the child will be resuming classes at the university of Abia State University to precise. and she's not aware yet and they surprise her)

Mom: ok angel, we checked the jamb admission portal and you've been given admission in ABSU.

Linda: wow, mom and dad thank you so much for this great opportunity.

(Parents check the time and dismisses their daughter in the most nonchalant way ever)

Dad: see you soon angel, we have to head to work and you will start taking lectures at school tomorrow or next bye.

ACT II

(Linda at school, sitted in her chair at the department)

Ejike: Hello

Linda: Hello

Ejike: my name is Ejike and you?

Linda: I'm Linda by name and how may I help you?

Ejike: well I'm not here for help just want to be your friend because I can see your face is new in this class and I'm too so can we be friends?

Linda: ok Ejike you're welcome to be my friend and can we be more of study pals hencethat's why we are in four walls of the university rather than just being friends?

Ejike: oh ok; that would be nice

Linda: ok let's head to the library then, shall we?

(Ejike at the library glancing through the book shelves for an exceptional book that he fails to tell his new study Pal the name for the reason best known to him

meanwhile Linda had a novel she's reading already that she tagged alone with from house)

Linda: hey Ejike, are you not done searching?

Ejike: (looks at the shelves with determined eye) no, I'm close to finding what I'm looking for, so don't worry I will be with you in short time.

Ejike: oh, after the search, I finally found it (Ejike announces joyfully)

Linda: and what's the name of the precious book of you that you found?

Ejike: the name is "the A-Z of the reproductive" in human beings (Linda takes the book and glanced through it and got engrossed with the images there in)

Linda: and why is the image so precise? I thought it was meant it was meant to be somehow censored? I'm not sure this book was endorsed by the vice chancellor or library attendant I doubt.

Ejike: well, I hid it there the last time I visited the library with it because of explicit image there in.

Linda: so what do you intend to do with the knowledge you get from it then, knowing fully well that cant experiment these act in the book unless you're married.

Ejike: (laughs out loud) I guess you're not a virgin so let try it out.

(Linda flares up and walks out on Ejike)

ACT III

(The next day at the school library, Ejike spots Linda reading her favourite novel and approached her)

Ejike: Hey Linda, how've you been?

Linda: please stay away from me please do not come close to me again for now I need some space. At least to forget the filthy request you made at the library the other day.

Ejike: I'm sorry, I spoke to you in that manner but I really want to be your friend, someone you can be free with please.

Linda: Excuse me Mr. man, you can have the library to yourself with your wild thoughts

(Linda say's as she stand up to exit the library)

Ejike: can I get your home address at least please I mean no harm.

(Linda turns her back and responded in a surprising manners)

Linda: you can visit me whenever you want, doron the street, opposite Blessed Pharmacy, Umuahia.

Ejike: thanks so much

Linda: my pleasure

Ejike: this will be the beginning of our escapades (he says silently)

ACT IV

(Someone knocks at entrance of the gate of Gabriel's home and being questioned on whom he's looking forward to meet in the premise and in the process of answering the question,

Linda asked the security man to let him in)

Linda: you're welcome to my house pal

Ejike: oh such a pleasure meeting you again, you have a luxurious home I must confess.

Linda: thanks for the compliment. What may I offer you?

Ejike: just water not chilled, please, because it has a negative impact on my reproductive organ (Ejike said as he chuckles)

Linda: oh you're using yours already? Cos if not how come you know the impact of cold drink on your organ or is there something you're not telling me?

Ejike: well, on that note I must confess that I have been including in an immoral act recently and it became intense since we met.

Linda: at this point I think it unwise to still have you around me because I don't know your next move. Please go!!!

(Ejike stand up go and held Linda's waist so tight as he leans forward to peck Linda,with Linda being shocked because she didn't see that coming)

Linda: (yells) leave me alone or still hold me tight because I'm in for anything you're playing at.

(Linda says as she reciprocates the romantic advances from Ejike and the rest became a history as the two became entangled in wild romances and while in the act, the nanny miss Joy and caught up with them)

(Cars drives into the luxurious apartment of the Gabriel's and it's the car of Linda's dad and mom as they alighted the car and raced into the house why nanny called them in the middle of the day)

Linda's dad: Greetings everyone, what's happening who's this young man here?

Linda" Dad I'm sorry

Linda Dad: sorry for? Is there something you are not telling me nanny?

Miss Joy: sir, I saw Linda and her course mate fondling each other

(Linda's mom break into tears)

Linda's Dad: What!!! In my house? Why Linda? Linda you are not up to the age of sexual consent so who brought this to your mind or don't we give you everything you ask for?

Linda why me?

Linda's mum: Mr. man what are you doing with my daughter oh my God, such an immoral act. Children of your age no it's unbelievable

Ejike: I'm sorry sir and ma but the truth is that I'm the one that introduce the act but your daughter consented to it, it wasn't rape.

Linda's Dad: you must be very stupid to have said such words to me such insolence and disrespect

(Linda apologizing to the mum while crying out loudly)

Linda's Dad: now to resolve this I suggest we call your parent Ejike and have a talk with them before you too will be punish accordingly because this matte can be treat lightly.

(Ejike sobs as Linda's parent while hearing every punishment that will be given to him because the call was on loudspeaker

ACT V

(Year after the unpleasant incident at Gabriel's home Linda and Ejike bumped each other at the law school after graduating from the university and decided to trash out everything and apologize to each other)

Linda: oh my God who are my seeing? Is this not Ejike from ABSU?

Ejike: oh yes it's me Linda, how have you been over the years?

Linda: I have been good and you?

Ejike: well good too and I apologize for what happened in the past.

Linda: come off it because I am the one to be apologizing. Well apology accepted and I hope you accept mine.

Ejike: it's not a problem dear

(Ejike and Linda they exit the gate of the Law school together in peace and harmony while parting ways to their different direction).

In conclusion parent should make out time to chat and bond with their children because sexual immorality becomes an outrageous act especially when there's lack of parental guidance in the life of a child.

CHIDERA HAVILLAH AMARA

CHARACTERS

Chisom (protagonist) 1

Prisca Chisom's Best Friend

Sophie Chisom's Classmate and Friend

Mrs. Oni Chisom's Mother

Aunty Essy Chisom's Class Teacher

Abobi Sophie's boy friend

Chris Mrs. Obi's servant

Tobi Chisom's classmate

Mr. Tony headmaster

ACT1 SCENE1

(students chatting along the hallway, discussing and laughing) (Chisom is seen walking hand-in-hand with Prisca and Sophie her friend)

Chisom: Hey, have you heard about the new money-making scheme?

Prisca : No, what is it?

Chisom: I heard that some of the seniors are skipping school and selling snuff online. They are making a ton of money.

Sophie :What? But wouldn't they get in trouble? I heard online businesses are too risky and fake.

Chisom: I don't know, but they say it's worth the risk. They're making hundreds of dollars every week.

Prisca: So, bestie what do you think this might be?

Chisom: I don't know yet but I will...

Aunty Essy: What are you girls doing here? Didn't you hear the bell signifying the beginning of lessons?

ACT 1 SCENE2

(At Mrs. Obi's house. She is seen wearing some clothes) Chisom walks in...

Mrs. Obi: My daughter, are you back?

Chisom: Good evening mum. How are you doing?

Mrs. Obi: Fine my child. I just want to round up with these clothes and go over to your uncle's house. I heard he came back yesterday from cameroun.

Chisom: Okay mum, but can I come with you?

Mrs. Obi: I would have loved you coming with me but I will need you to run an errand for me.

Chisom: (makes an angry face and hisses) But mummy...

Mrs. Obi: Heei heei, will you shut up.

Chisom: (mustering to herself) (every time you will be leaving me in the house while attending occasions and visiting people) she sighs.

Chris: Small madam, wetin you wan chop? I cook fried rice and salad, jollof rice and chicken. Which one you wan mek I bring?

(Chisom shouts at Chris to get out from her sight)

ACT2 SCENE1

(Students moving in a frantic movement along the hallway after morning assembly)

(In the classroom)

Abobi: Sophie baby, sweetheart m, my heartfreak

Sophie: Hmm, what's with all these names?

Abobi: My world, one and only m, I love you pass my mother.

Sophie: Aaah, aah, aah, stop it, you are flattering me so much.

Abobi: Baby, I have something for you and I know you will love it. Just guest.

Sophie: My love, I'm not that good in guesing. Can't you just tell me?

Abobi : Hesitates.... Okay. It is about an online...

Chisom and Priscaenters the classroom discussing and sights Sophie and her boyfriend chatting.

Chisom: Aboy wassup; I can see you're having a chitchat with your baby. No dey oppress us wey dey single ooh.

Sophie: (shyly smiles and whsipers something to her boyfriend).

Abobi smiles back and fixes his attention on the three friends.

Prisca: Please, please, you guys are keeping us in suspense. What is the matter?

Abobi: Well, I was telling my babe here about an online business that will fetch you guys bastard money.

Chisom: So, what is it all about? Because I am ready to pay any price to comes with. And I know it's the same with my friends, isn't it girls?

Sophie & Prisca: Yes ooo (they chorused) we are ready.

Abobi: Okay oo, the thing is that you will have to pay the sum of thirty thousand anira for you to start the business.

(the three friends exclaim in a loud voice)

Abobi: Why shouting? That's not even the price but I reduced it for you guys because I know you.

(The three friends scampered as they sight Aunty Essy and other teachers arriving their way)

ACT 2 SCENE 2

The scene opens with Chisom inside their parlour with her friends discussing on ways to extort money from their parents.

Prisca: So what do you think should be the best lie?

Chisom: What do you mean? It's not a lie it's just a way of extorting money.

Prisca: Okay ooo, madam we don hear.

Sophie: So, I think we should tell them we were told to buy textbooks. What do you think?

Chisom: Sophie baby the wise master. That's a very wonderful idea.

(Mrs. Obi comes into the parlour to meet the girls talking)

Chisom: Mummy, welcome. How was sales?

Prisca & Sophie: Good evening ma.

Mrs. Obi: Evening my daughters. We thank God for sales ooh.

Mrs. Obi: So, what's with the gathering?

Chisom: Mum, we were told to buy some textbooks and I have some debts to clear in school. (she says frowning)

Mrs. Obi : Aaah, aah, oginikwa, money again? I thought I gave you enough money last month for those.

Chisom: No naa mummy, these are another books. Please na.

Mrs. Obi: Okay ooo, so how much is it?

Chisom: Mummy, it's just 50k ooh

Prisca & Sophie : Chisom 50...

(Chisom gives them a shocking and deadly look and they all shut up)

Mrs. Obi: No problem, I'll give you the money tomorrow.

ACT 3 SCENE 1

(Aunty Essy is seen calling the class register)

Aunty Essy: So, Chisom and her friends have solemnly sworn or even taken an oath to stop coming to school okwa ya?

Tobi: Ma, I saw them walking around the street yesterday and when I questioned them, they told me school was a sham.

Aunty Essy: Children of nowadays, mtcheew. We'll see how they prosper tomorrow without education.

(The curtain opens in Abobi's house with Chisom and her friends sitting in the bedroom)

Abobi: So, the business is an online business and when you make your first gain, it will be sent to your different accounts. So this is how it works.

(he explains everything to the 3 friends and made sure they understood the rules of the business)

Prisca: Omo, this is where we can make real cash, not the rubbish Auntie Essy is teaching us.

Sophie: Thanks so much babe, I love you so much (she kissed him)

ACT 5 SCENE 2

Chisom: Oh my God! Guys, I just got credited with the sum of 150k.

Prisca: It's a lie, what do you mean 150k, how on... (her phone beeped and she checked it and was shocked; attracting Sophie's attention) Babe, I just received mine now. This business is so real, I can't believe this.

Chisom: Sophie, what about you? Have you received yours?

Sophie: Yes, I received mine yesterday.

Prisca: Lucky girl

(They started planning on how to squander the money)

The next day, they decided to put more money in the business.

Prisca: So, babes, I collected 50k from my dad, how much did you guys get?

Sophie: I got 70k from them

Chisom: I just got 40k ooh

Prisca: No problem naa.

Chisom: So, after this business, let's know if we'll opt out since we now have more than enough.

Sophie: That's good sha but let's get this one first.

ACT 4 SCENE 1

(After 3 months of doing the online business, the three friends had realized 500k each from the business, so they decided to do the last one)

Abobi: I heard you guys needed me, what's it all about? Since you guys felt too big to appreciate me after all I did for you including you Sophie.

Prisca: Abobi, it's not what you think ooo. We wanted to...

Chisom cuts her short

Chisom: Abeg, abeg, abeg. I presume we're not here to start apologizing right? So let's farm on the farmland we came to farm.

Sophie: Babe, I'm so sorry. Please forgive me

(She sounded so fake which Abobi noticed but also played along).

Abobi: So, what's the reason you guys called?

Prisca: Okay oo, the thing is that we've made a huge sum of money from that business and we want to continue

Sophie: Actually, this would be the last we will do

Abobi: Okay, but for you to continue, you will have to make a deposit of 500k each

(the three friends exclaims in shock)

The three friends: What? 500 thousand naira? Is this a prank?

Sophie: Babe, that's too much naa

Prisca: That's actually the only amount we have left and you want us to give it away?

Chisom: OMG!!! This is so enormous

Abobi: Are you guys in or out? With this 500 thousand Naira, you can make up to 1.5million Naira each from this business. So in or out?

ACT 4 SCENE 2

(Inside the classroom, Aunty Essy is seen speaking with the headmeaster)

Mr. Tony: So, you mean Chisom Obi, Prisca Onome and Sophie Daniels have not been in school for the past 5 months?

Aunty Essy: Yes sir.

Mr. Tony: So, does that also mean that they didn't write the termly examination?

Aunty Essy: Yes sir, they didn't. They skipped school for a whole term sir.

Mr. Tony: This is so outrageous. Get me their parents' phone numbers now in my office.

(Aunty Essy scampers and gets the class register which contains the students' bio data to the headmaster)

Mrs. Obi: What do you mean my daughter hasn't been coming to school for a whole term? My child is not like that Headmaster Sir. I think you are mistaken.

Aunty Essy: Ma, with all due respect, your daughter and her friends have been skipping school.

Mr. Tony: Excuse us Aunty Essy, let me handle this.

(Aunty Essy leaves)

Mr. Tony: So, ma I think the best option is to rusticate your daughter and her friends from our school. Because if this is not handled, other students might start behaving in like manner.

Mrs. Obi: Please sir, I am a single mother and I know the pain in that. Okay can you at least give her and her friends a last chance?

Mr. Tony: With all due respect, ma'am, your daughter would influence my students if I decided otherwise. But, let's wait till the end of the term and if we don't see her then we'll go into full action.

ACT 5 SCENE 1

(Chisom is seen carrying her jaw with her hands, Prisca crying uncontrollably and Sophie rolling on the floor)

Sophie: So, all my money is lost?

Chisom: My mind told me not to invest that 500k but I did my own (she said crying)

Prisca: If someone had told me that Abobi would run with our money, I wouldn't believe. But see what happened now... we are doomed.

Chisom: I should have listened to Aunty Essy ooo. I should have listened her and learn first, now we've been scammed. Our mates are in school learning and we were busy looking for fast money (she sighs)

Prisca: My mom warned me but I gave no listening ear, now this is my fate. We are scammed.

Sophie: So, Abobi get mind scam us, even me his babe. We've been blinded long time ago and now that the blindfold is untied, we've been doomed.

Prisca: Chisom, you caused all this. You brought this devilish money-making scheme first. Now, see the mess we are into.

Chisom: Don't you ever in your life blame me for your actions or else...

Prisca: Or else what? Chisom, I said, unless what? Just take a good look at the mess you put is in.

Chisom: I swear Prisca, if I ever hear my name in your mouth again, if head doesn't roll call me bastard. Did I drag you with a rope to enter the business? Did i?

Sophie: Please guys, stop this. This is not the time for this, so stop.

(Prisca angrily leaves the place while cursing and shouting at Chisom)

Act 5 Scene 2

In the Headmaster's office, Chisom and her friends together with their parents are seen begging the Headmaster

Mrs. Obi: Please Mr. Headmaster, forgive them.

Mr. Tony: Ma, I told you this earlier. I'm afraid we have to let them go.

Prisca; Sir, please we are extremely sorry, forgive us.

Mr. Tony: I have forgiven you and your friends, but for the sake of other students, I can't accept you guys back. It's too late.

Chisom: So this is it? (Chisom lamented as she leaves the office)

Who would have believed this would happen?

My fellow students and young people, school is not sham and never was. In this life, get knowledge, learn, unlearn and relearn before you try venturing into any

business. Also, make sure you make enquiries about a particular business before venturing into it, especially online business.

(she walks home crying)

The curtain closes

CRITICAL ESSAYS & BOOK REVIEWS

Critical Review on Child Abuse and Trauma in Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail*

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In this review, we will examine the experiences of children, especially the girl-child in Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail*. The story is set in Nigeria and London as it alternates moments from Abigail's past life in Nigeria and her present life in London. The novella has two strands which flips between characters headed "now and then" through which Abani tells a haunting story of a young girl named Abigail, introducing her dead mother also known as Abigail, her father, Peter and Derek. They all in one way or the other contributed to the circumstances that influenced Abigail's becoming.

Through Abigail's memories and flashbacks, we get to see that Abigail was born immediately after the death of her mother. Suffice to say that, Abigail's life begins when her mother's life ends. This was like a stigma that haunted her throughout the novel especially during her days with her father, who so much cherished his wife that even the birth of his daughter couldn't console him, but was more like a salt added to his wounds as he continues to cling to the memories of his wife, to the extent of neglecting his daughter. As seen in the below excerpt:

The first time she saw that expression she'd been eight, he had been drinking, which he did sometimes when he was sad. Although that word sad seemed inadequate. And this sadness was the memory of Abigail overwhelming him, when he felt it rise he would drink and play jazz (18).

It could be seen how sad and depressed Abigail's father was due to his wife's death, that he couldn't help but drown away his sorrows by drinking and playing jazz. This made him push his daughters feelings and needs aside, instead of acknowledging Abigail and seeing her for his daughter she is and as an individual with feelings and needs, he rather saw her as his wife due to her

striking resemblance to his dead wife. He tries to project his dead wife on his daughter thereby suppressing Abigail's needs as a daughter and as an individual, as seen here; "he turned and looked at her and saw it and recognized what it was. She looked so much like her mother that when he saw her suddenly she knew he wanted her to be Abigail"(18-19).

Abigail was constantly neglected and to some extent, she had to look after her depressed father whenever he got drunk and unstable, not minding that she was a child. She not only felt abandoned as a result of her mother who died while giving birth to her, she also felt abandoned by her only family who was her father as he selfishly continues to mourn his dead wife to the detriment of the needs and well-being of his daughter. This could be argued to be a form of child abuse known as child neglect as Abigail has to practically beg for her needs from her father who in such occasions, would compare her to her dead mother and admonish her for behaving in such manner. As seen in this excerpt: "your mother would never have talked like this, you know? She knew the right way to conduct herself, he said" (34).

This constant need to see herself for who she is, to search for her identity of self led her to some bizarre behaviour that would rather be portrayed as "mentally unstable"but to Abigail was her grieving and mourning for her dead mother. As seen here: "she took seven photographs of her mother from the family album, tore the faces out, turned them upside down with seven candles on them while she muttered an incantation over the faces. Collecting with the deliberateness reserved for communion wafers, she then took the candles off the photo fragments, picked up the fragment and held the severed photos of her mother's face up to the light before cramming them into her mouth". (28).

Also, her acts of identifying herself was through cutting and burning her skin which to her was a way of reminding herself that she was the real Abigail and not the dead mother; "At first, it was a curiosity, a genuine wonder at the burgeoning of a self, a self that was still Abigail, yet still her with the tip of a wax crayon she would write "me", over and over on the brown rise of them, and when she washed in the shower the next day, the color would bleed, but the wax left a sheen, the memory of night and her reclamation"(22).

Abigail acts are both a form of mourning as she mutters incantations over her mother's photographs, cuts and burns herself. This is also seen as a desperate attempt to gain her fathers attention who neglected her and abandoned her emotionally and these actions forced her father to take her to a psychiatrist because at that point she was seen as an abnormal child. Abigail went through

sexual abuse and molestation which she experienced at the hands of Peter, husband to Mary who was her cousin. It was one of the major predicaments that shaped her being. Her first encounter with him was when he cornered her in the bathroom during his wedding ceremony and fingered her. This was where Peter was introduced in the novel, his actions painted him in a bad light and gives us an insight of who Peter really is. Although, his dark side is not known by his family members who are ignorant of Peter's true intentions as seen through Abigail's father actions, he do not only speak highly of Peter but also respects him as seen in this excerpt; "he always takes one young relative back to London as well, he used to explain, "imagine how lucky those children are"(45). This prompted Abigail's father to allow Peter to take Abigail back to London, not knowing that he was throwing his daughter to the wolf as a result of being ignorant to Peter's true intentions towards taking Abigail to London. And, this gave Peter an upper hand in abusing Abigail the way he sees fit.

In page 61, it could be seen how Peter and Mary fought on the night of Abigail's arrival to London from which it is deduced that Mary was against Abigail's coming to London. This was strange to Abigail as she was close to Mary, not knowing that Mary was fighting to prevent her from undergoing the foreseeable abuse she would experience in the hands of Peter. "They seemed to be arguing about her, from what she could gather Mary did not want her there, which she found strange as they were really close. Another crack, Peter's backhand across Mary's face decided it for her. She flew at him, gouging a deed furrow under his eye, he shouted and kicked wildly, one of the kicks caught her in the stomach knocking her clear across the room". (61).

From the above quote, Peter is portrayed as a woman beater who not only beats his wife at any slightest provocation but also abuses her as seen when Mary narrated to Abigail how their daughter died. "And when Peter was out, at work. The angel came. Sometimes it wore the face of Mary's dead daughter. Sometimes Mary told her stories how Peter had beaten the girl just months old because she wasn't a boy, beaten Mary, until that night when he threw her down the stairs, she fell on the body she was holding, how the child died Accidental, the coroner ruled"(pg 65). Peter had always been an abuser who preys on children and women because of their vulnerable and weak nature which Mary, their dead daughter and Abigail were his victims.

Although Abigail suspected that Peter was up to no good by taking her to London, she vows to watch him closely and make sure nothing happens to her. Yet, she never expected to be pimped to a man by Peter. Abigail refused to sleep with him and fought wildly against Peter and the man, this made Peter

angry and he led Abigail to a dog house where he chained and tied her to a dog house as he said to her; "This is what we do to dogs"(63). "He spat at her and she flinched away, he turned to go, then stopped pulling his penis out, he peed all over her laughing as she trashed about. "That's my dirty dig, he said, "dirty dog"(pg 63). From the quote, Peter continuously compared Abigail to a "dog". Dogs, especially stray dogs, are treated as lesser beings, ignored or subjected to cruelty. They are frequently seen as nuisance rather than animals with needs like other animals. Peter, through his actions, treated Abigail as an object rather than as a person, due to her weak nature he exploits her vulnerability and the fact that she was alone and has nobody to protect her, as she was removed from the only family she knows, her father. Peter reduced her to the status of a dog which means that she is worthless and has no value thus, stripping away her humanity.

Abigail's treatment reflects societal attitudes towards marginalized individuals, particularly women and children who are often viewed as disposable or insignificant as seen through the actions of Peter who symbolizes the society and the dark side of man. We get to see how Peter continues to dehumanize her as she was kept in a dog house for fifteen days where Peter feeds her leftovers and rancid water, sometimes his urine, some other days he starves her. To Abani, this is how Abigail was made, which is the status of a 'dog'. "Wrapping her guilt in an electric blanket wrapped around a girl slowly becoming a dog". (65).For Abigail, Derek the social worker she fell in love with represents a potential source of stability and care contrasting sharply with the neglect and abuse she experienced.

Despite her initial resistance and mistrust towards him, as a result of her past history of abuse and loss which left her emotionally scarred and deeply distrustful of others. Derek remained patient and consistent in his efforts to connect with her and for the first time, she saw someone who sees her for the Abigail she is and does not shove her or her feelings aside. As seen during her first encounter with Derek; "That stung and there was the brief flare of anger in her eyes. He smiled, "I'm sorry" he said, he had seen it. She was impressed. most people she knew never really looked at her". (72). Regardless of Abigail being a minor and her relationship with Derek could be seen as Derek taking advantage of her to satisfy his lustful desires. Abigail didn't see it as such, as a result of the trauma embedded in the need to be seen and be visible to others, which nobody could give her that but Derek and to her was love enough for her. This goes ahead to indicate the psychological impact of neglect from her father who continuously neglected his daughter's well-being and took to drinking

to be able to drown his sorrows and sadness. In such cases, Abigail had to tend to his needs instead of the other way round. Abigail's needs were suppressed and when voiced out to her father would be compared to her mother along with a constant reminder of how her mother wouldn't behave in such a manner. This further left a psychological mark on her self esteem as a person as she had to constantly battle with the need to be identified as her own person, her Abigail, this Abigail; "And the words: not Abigail, my Abigail, her Abigail?, Ghosts, Death. - me - me - me - Not Nobody. She stared at them"(26). and not the dead Abigail. The abuse inflicted by Peter left Abigail with deep emotional wounds, she experienced intense feelings of worthlessness and shame as she was reduced to a mere object and was treated as a stray dog: with disdain and cruelty. This undermines her self-esteem and sense of identity, as her self-esteem that has been affected by her fathers constant criticisms and comparison to her dead mother was further bruised by Peter's abuse. Not only did he treat her as an object and a dog, he also took advantage of her vulnerable state by raping her; "fifteen days, passing in the silence of snow, and she no longer fought when Peter mounted her"(67).

All these shredded her last piece of humanity in her, and made her devoid of any emotion, incapable of processing human feelings as she tore off Peter's Penis when she couldn't take it anymore. "One night, unable to stand it anymore, she screamed, invoking the spirit of Abigail, and with her teeth tore off Peter penis"(68).Abigail's action here could be seen as a manifestation of the deep psychological trauma she had endured, her extreme response underscores the severity of her emotional and mental state. It highlights the devastating impact of the abuse on her psyche and the lengths to which her limits were stretched and pushed for her to reclaim some sense of self.

Abani portrays Abigail's self-harm and emotional withdrawal not simply as symptoms of trauma but as communication tools, herself harm emerges as a desperate form of self- expression, a way to articulate her internal chaos when words fail. In which, in some acts of indulging in self-harm would be to engrave the memories she gathered about her dead mother in her skin as a sort of ritual, as a way of absorbing her mother's traits and memories and becoming like her: "insatiable for her mother, she would seek out anyone who had known Abigail and offer to trade a chore for an anecdote, trying to create memory, make it concrete, physical. She collected vignettes about Abigail, hoarding them fiercely. Then late at night, when all was silent apart from the occasional call of night birds and dogs baying at the moon, she would unwrap them in her mind and feast, gorging herself sated, she traced their outlines on her skin with soft fingers,

burning them in with the heat of loss, tattooing them with a need as desperate as it was confused". (34).

In conclusion, *Becoming Abigail* reveals a profound insight into the complex realities of child abuse and trauma within the society, the novel not only depict the pain and struggle of the protagonist but also offer commentary on the societal influences that shape these experiences.

Denja Abdullahi

**LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE IN THE PURSUIT OF NATIONAL UNITY:
THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE**

Abstract

The paper highlights the fact that literature and language are veritable instruments in championing the cause of national unity viewed from the perspective of the agency to which they could be put to use. Literature has the interpretative and regenerative powers that can be extended beyond the text to repair our damaged world if only we are committed to learn from what we read and see literature as an applied art rather an exercise in esoteric amusement. Language on its part is an inherently connective entity that is always amenable to extensions and adaptations to suit the business of interaction and communication in a diverse society. It is therefore not far-fetched, given the experience of a country like Nigeria, to conclude that literature and language can be the new creative tools in town that can be applied to pursue the cause of peace and harmony towards sustainable national development.

Keyword: Literature, Language, National Unity, Agency, Applied Art.

Introduction

Literature and language are handmaidens of the same humanistic preoccupation and this present study will not attempt to define what each is as their meanings are often self-defining. Rather, it will presently delve into the justification of linking a seeming abstraction, non-material and intangible field of human endeavor such as literature or language to the insistent and contemporary necessity of the pursuit of national unity, referencing a nation such as Nigeria .

The justification of our present endeavor in linking literature to the issue of national peace has been best expressed by Onyebuchi Ile who posited in his book *The Text, The Critic and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria* that:

... it was high time scholarship, especially scholarship in the humanities occupied itself practically with all these devastating occurrences of the contemporary world. It does not, however, mean that the new trends in the humanities entail making literary studies too utilitarian to make it lose its literariness; but again it should not be too "literary" as if literature had no vital function in society apart from entertainment or an aloof reflection on life (ix).

The scholarly study and general appreciation of literature through the ages has always been a battle of two contending positions: that stance which sees literature as a reflection of life with the possibility of engaging with the reality outside the text and that other narcissistic ideology which sees literature as an end in itself. Many schools of thoughts have evolved and transformed through the ages to champion the said two contentions in varying critical theoretical postulations.

Out of all these critical theoretical standpoints, the formalist and the Marxist critical schools, in their earliest flowering, best expressed the opposing views about the presence or not of the utilitarian value of literature. While the formalist school views it as heretical to read any meaning to a literary piece beyond the actual text and its internal coherence, the Marxist school sees it as fallacious to regard literature as a product divorced from its producer or the environment in which it was created.

It need not be said where Africa and the larger part of the Third World stand between these two critical conceptions of literature. It has been said overtime again and again that the concept of art for art's sake is not a tenable one in the African world or much of the global South.

If we should review all the undergraduate and post-graduate theses in the literary studies departments of Nigerian Universities over the years, we will be re-enforcing the position of the utilitarian value of literature as most of them often focus on the sociological dimension to the criticism and appreciation of literary texts. Inherent in the topic we are looking at today, as said earlier, is the absolute that literature has a function to perform in society. How it does it is what we will be examining in the course of this study.

Language is a much more interesting and more directly functional field than literature I dare say, because, it is basically the carrier of whatever knowledge we have come to possess in our world. It is primarily a means of encoding thoughts and meanings in forms that are intelligible to a group who share the language system and even those outside the group who make the efforts to learn the language system. Language is the carrier of literature and culture and we can by this alone deduce that we cannot divorce language from the quest to have a peaceful and harmonious society.

Literature in the Pursuit of National Peace and Unity

At the 2012 International Convention of the Association of Nigerian Authors(ANA),the Association, the keynote Speaker, Prof Pius Adesanmi, in talking around his topic “What Does(Nigerian)Literature Secure?” wondered about the audacious connection of literature to the issue of national security(1). To him, at face value, one can hardly find any relationship to what writers do in the isolation of their writing space which later manifests into what we call literature and the insecurity that is all over the place as in the ethnic clashes, kidnappings, politically motivated violence, armed robbery, Boko Haram insurgency and the likes. Later on in his presentation, he was able to point out that, at the end, literature indeed does secure memories, fictional truths and is a bulwark against forgetting our common humanity(7).

Taking off from that standpoint, we can conclude that indeed literature has a lot of role to perform in the quest for national peace. Literature reflects life, analyses society, propounds visions with the implicit understanding that whatever is written will be read somewhere by someone who is expected to take away something from what has been read. The history of Nigeria from its

amalgamation in 1914 to the independence era in 1960 and through to the present times is replete with the pains of coming together of a very diverse peoples to form a nation. These pains have been expressed in political battles, ethno-religious crises, electoral violence, general disillusionment, dictatorship, failure of leadership and a Civil War that nearly tore the then young nation apart. Correspondingly, Nigerian literature is replete with texts that have devoted a lot of attention in focusing and analyzing all these pains of our coming together, viewed from different and divergent sociological and stylistically unique premises.

To illustrate this further, let us reflect on the works of D.O Fagunwa, Abubakar Imam and even Cyprian Ekwensi to find out what they tell us about the pre-1960 Nigeria, the social relations and the cultural connections, along with the attendant tensions. What have we made of the multiple literary texts that came out from our Civil War experience of 1967-1970 in the light of the recent agitations for the dismemberment of the country, mainly from the part of the country whose geographical space was the theater of that war? In what way has the angst in the literature of our third generation writers, as they reflected on the years of military dictatorship and political disillusionment, affected us? The attempt to answers these questions lead us back to the supposition that in our clime, literature shares close affinity to reality and cannot be divorced from any engagement set up to confront the issues and problems within that same reality.

Even now as we speak, there are poets, dramatists and novelists penning down pieces that bear direct relationship with emergent problems of our contemporary society, be that the baby factory syndrome, kidnapping, farmers-Fulani clashes, assassinations, political chicanery, banditry and the Boko Haram insurgency. Can we say these contemporary writers and those of old did their job for the fun of it, to revel in the artistry of their craft? Definitely the answer is no. These writings are done with the expectation that the society will find uses for them in overcoming the present debacle of violence and insecurity that have befallen us in the past and that are still plaguing our society.

To foreground the fact that we are making that literature has a bearing to the pursuit of national peace, let us briefly re-examine a body of work which is referred to as Nigerian Civil War Literature. Chidi Amuta said thus about war:

War, as the most logical means of settling inter-communal and international disputes , offers the greatest opportunity for the display of heroism as well as the infliction of great pain and death. Because war puts the greatest pressure on human nature , relationships and institutions ,it becomes also a fertile ground for the literary imagination(86).

Also Chinyere Nwahunanya, in *A Harvest From Tragedy: Critical Perspectives on Nigerian Civil War Literature* stated that:

Probably because of the socio-political implications and significance of the

Nigerian Civil War ,the literature arising out of or based on it is not just

the fastest growing aspect of contemporary Nigerian literature....(255).

She went on to compile an extensive (but not exhaustive) bibliography of the Nigerian Civil war literature, ranging from novels, plays, poetry, short stories, memoirs, articles in Journals, books, interviews and bibliographies(257-277).

From Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset at Dawn*(1976) to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006)and Chinua Achebe's *There Was a Country* (2012) , we can see that the Civil War is still resonating creatively and factually among Nigerian writers. But the sad truth is that while our writers have written about the war from every perspective imaginable, the readers and the nation in which the writers have afforded these remembering, appear to have learned very little from that horrible experience.

The literature on the Nigerian Civil War are not mere attempts to glorify the war or glamorize clay-footed heroes but to bring to the readers and for posterity the great human sufferings occasioned by the war through the devices of fiction. Underlying this concentrated concern of our literature on the subject matter of the Nigerian Civil War is the admonition for us not to contemplate following the paths that led to that war. Reading these war narratives, one would definitely come away with a variety of scenarios of the ethnicities, prejudices, stereotypes and injustices that led to the war and its aftermath; and a reader of such texts should be better informed on the way to avoid furthering such negatives in our national space. Therefore, the summation on the role of literature in the pursuit of national peace and unity is that our writers, like philosophers, have done enough interpretation (and are still doing that) of our world, it is left for every active player in all field of endeavor, to change it for the better. Characters in a novel or play would not jump outside the frame of the text to re-order our society based on the analyses and scenarios well explained in their textual worlds. It is those who read such texts, who live in the referential world of the texts; who are students, workers, intellectuals, administrators, politicians and literary critics, who should translate the visions gleaned from the texts into workable dispositions or objectives for societal re-armament and transformation.

Language and the Quest for National Peace and Unity

If we are to go biblical in theorizing on the origin of languages or the reasons behind the multiplicity of languages we have in our world today, it may be surmised that language is a divisive factor in human experience. The Tower of Babel experience relates a story of once upon a time when humanity spoke the same tongue until their attempt to challenge God resulted into the seed of dissension being sowed into their midst by the divine introduction of different tongues.

Linguists and language scholars will readily classify this biblical story as a mere religious fable attempting to explain the reason behind the diversity of languages and expressions we have today. This is because; there have been many scientific language researches and discoveries that have resulted in the construction of believable schema accounting for the different languages and dialects existing in the world of today. What we however cannot take away from

the biblical account on language diversity is the fact that a language or languages can be, on the face of it, sources of dissension, exclusion and gate-keeping directed at “others.”

When people talk of cultural diversity, not too far off from that concept is the fact of the diversity of languages. A language is the first marker of culture and is the receptacle and the transmitter of culture. When people construct their identities or re-construct them, a language goes a long way in making those constructions effective. Thus in Nigeria, where, at the last count, we are said to have about 450 languages with a corresponding ethnic nationalities holding firmly to at least one of those languages as theirs, it is easy for a layman to conclude that the immense number of tongues and peoples, could be sources of our strife and discords as a nation. Thus in Nigeria, we may thus be back to the Tower of Babel, for how could we build a nation with a cacophony of voices and aspirations?

It is provable, without presently going into the depth of it, that the diversity of languages or expressions is not the cause of the apparent problem of dissension, disunity and strife in our society, but rather our attitude to our diversity. In fact, these same problems have been found to be occurring within even the same language group.

An in-depth study of the origin and evolution of the languages existing in Nigeria will reveal a long history of interconnections and influences that often seem wondrous and incredible. Language scholars and linguists may further confound the layman when they posit with adequate proofs that apparently dissimilar languages come from the same language group. If taken further, it may be eventually concluded that the over 450 languages that Nigeria prides herself to be speaking today may after all be later manifestations of about 3 or 4 original languages.

The diversity of languages may have come about as a result of migrations, conquests, influences and other forms of interactions. If that be the case, it tells us that we are by nature, race and biological make-up, the same people; languages should not then be the divisive elements among us. We should rather appropriate the variety of expressions in our nation to enrich our existence.

A UNESCO study asserts that “ language diversity is essential to the human heritage. Each and every language embodies the unique cultural wisdom of a people. The loss of any language is thus a loss for all humanity”(1). Bukar Usman(2014) also emphasizes the importance of a language thus:

When a language dies, an irreplaceable intellectual and social wealth of the people also dies, and the larger society’s pool of educational, social and cultural values is diminished. The death of any language is a great tragedy (10).

Kwesi Kwaa Prah re-enforces the importance of language in human society further thus;

...language is the central pillar and the transactional medium through which culture

is created, shaped, adapted and adopted. As such, language is also a register of the

records of humanity. It is indeed a representation of the history of humankind.

It is collective memory par excellence of its owners and users. That is why

language is so crucial to development(18).

From the foregoing, it is thus illogical and irresponsible to dwell on the exclusionary potential of every language which we read as the disuniting propensity of language. Rather, we should see a language as a vital interactive tool, the loss of any, which is a grievous assault on our common humanity. In Nigeria, the much touted 450 or so languages we speak, may ultimately become hollow statistics, because it has been reported in UNESCO Atlas of the World Languages in Danger that “about half of some 6,000 languages spoken today are in danger of disappearing”(4). If we are to apply UNESCO’s criteria for considering a language as endangered to Nigerian languages, we may discover

that over 90 percent of our languages are actually endangered and may with time go extinct. What then happens to the future of our world and civilization if this happens? It is better not contemplated; rather we should start taking actions now to remedy the precarious existence of our languages, whether classified as majority or minority and probe further on how to use our languages to promote national cohesion and unity.

If we are thus really interested in using language to pursue national peace and unity, we should do the followings:

Respect each language being spoken and avoid the stigmatization of a language as belonging to an ethnic minority or quaint to avoid the kind of violent clash at the crossroad where three foot paths meet in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame*, where a man was enraged to murderous action because another man made jest of his tongue.

Encourage multilingualism in our society as it is stated by Irina Bokova, UNESCO's former Director General, that it is an "ally in ensuring quality education for all, in promoting inclusion and in combating discrimination" (1). This is a challenge to our educationists and policy makers in formulating and implementing relevant educational policies that promote multilingualism in our school going population.

Multilingualism will eventually lead us to regard all languages as equal and that none is superior to the other and that every language is basically a means of communication and a carrier of unique cultural properties that all humanity can benefit from.

Further experimentation should be made in the area of devising inclusive language structure like "Gossa" which was made popular by a researcher some years back by combining the lexicon of Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo to form a new language system borne out of the quest to unify the nation through language.

Conduct researches into our various languages and rescue elements in them that promote inter-cultural, inter-ethnic cooperation and understanding for wider dissemination in the society.

Re-appraise those languages that have the potentials of cutting across barriers in our community such as “Pidgin English” or what is now referred to as “Naija langwej” to see how we can promote them to semi-national or national languages.

Conclusion

This study has been able to highlight the fact that literature and language are veritable instruments in championing the cause of national peace viewed from the perspective of the agency to which they could be put. Literature has the interpretative and regenerative powers that can be extended beyond the text to repair our damaged world if only we are committed to learn from what we read and see literature as an applied art rather an exercise in esoteric amusement. Language on its part is an inherently connective entity that is always amenable to extensions and adaptations to suit the business of interaction and communication in a diverse society. It is therefore not far-fetched if we conclude that literature and language can be the new creative tools in town we can use to pursue the cause of peace and harmony for sustainable national development.

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**LITERATURE AND DIDACTICISM: TOWARDS A REVIEW OF IKECHUKWU
EMMANUEL ASIKA'S CORD OF LIFE**

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Category: A Play

Where there is a problem, there is need for speaking out and literature has always been used as one of the viable means of exposing the societal anomalies with a view to effecting a lasting change. Literature has an indelible history with canvassing for the moral and normative health of human society. This being that it stands as an agency for restoring sanity into the society. One of the age long assertions about literature especially in African literary terrain is that literature has been enshrined with the responsibility of reforming the very society where it exists.

It is a social reformative tool, bequeathed with the responsibility of impacting the core Mores and norms on this very society. However, this notion has been adjudged to be inconsistent and questionable especially by the formalist school of literary criticism. They believe rather, that the text is a universe of its own, whole and self-contained without any recourse to the world outside the text. But as far as African literature is concerned, the literary work is a product of the society that produces it and as such, it has the sole function of preserving the norms of that society by impacting these norms onto generations unborn. Hence, no literature exists in a vacuum. The social function of literary works could be collapsed to its didactic import: its ethical preachments.

Didactic literature according to Meyer Abrams, "are works of literature that are designed to expound a branch of knowledge or else to embody , in imaginative or fictional form, a moral , religious,or philosophical doctrine or theme" (88). In other words, they are analytical distinction but this distinction however, is not absolute but a matter of relative emphasis on instructing and persuading an audience, as against rendering a subject in such a way as to maximize its power to move and give artistic delight in its own right (Meyer 89).

This presupposes that the term "didactic literature" is purely used as an analytical term for works that harbour the persuasive and instructive import of a particular knowledge or moral theme. Ikechukwu Asika's *Cord of Life* as one the oeuvres in African literary tradition, fulfils this destiny of social reformation. As an experimental modernist play, it explores the theme of moral decadence in general and the selling of children in particular.

With the character of Nwabunwanne, the play dives into the complexities of modern life as it takes the reader through the birth and coming of age of Nwabunwanne as the hero of the work. It is like a coming of age story, a bildungsroman of Nwabunwanne.

The play starts off as an oral rendition from a middle aged narrator, Nwaanyi Ike. The play typifies a social commentary against the social malaise of selling children especially by university girls. It stands as a piece of advice especially for every university freshman even as it replicates a correction of past mistakes of those students already in the system.

The character of Natasha, whose real name before she gained admission to the university was Nnedimma, stands as a metaphor with which this message of deep reflection about the complexity of crimes and social vices within the forewalls of the university is being explored.

Her story is typical of an undergraduate Nigerian female student who faces a lot of temptations from a world markedly different from the world she used to be conversant with. This play interrogates the intrigues and complexities of the moral rot that have eaten deep into the sanctity and sense of humanity of the Modern world with a view to satirizing them. *Poker Man* , a viable accomplice and bad influence to Natasha stands tall as a vivid replica of some university

guys whose main ambition is to thwart and destroy the destiny and life of the unsuspecting and guillible girls in campus. Asika's *Cord of Life* just like as earlier stated, reimagines the complexity of the moral decadence within the textual universe, reflecting a Nigerian situation. The play exemplifies Asika's ideal social vision and activism.

The graphical portrayal of the decadence in the 21st century Nigerian tertiary institution setting reiterates this social vision of Asika, an affirmation of what Julie Agbasiere describes as a writer being "a chronicler of the permutations occurring in his society" with the chief aim of instigating a process of change (qtd in *Major Themes in African Literature* 73).

In the light of this, Asika's oeuvre follows a conclusive pattern of the down principles of committed writing and this is ever present in this play, *Cord of Life*. Just as Julie Agbasiere elaborates: The fictional society is peopled with characters who go about their daily business trying to respond and adjust to the problems of existence. It is a society that has values, norms, culture, rights and privileges, as in real life. Thus the writer incorporates sociological material into his work, influenced as he is, by his experiences of real life (77).

Asika's *Cord of Life* can be reflected upon as being suggestive of a concatenation of the playwright's real life experience, a supposition that is valid when considered under the psychoanalytic lens, where the intentionality and experience of a writer is ascribed as viable source of his imaginative art.

Additionally, philosophically speaking, Asika's *Cord of Life* is a graphical representation of Percy Bysshe Shelley's assertion that poets (writers) are unacknowledged legislators of the world...priests of an unapprehended inspiration, mirrors of gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present...(Shelley 3). Shelley's assertion finds footing with Uzoma Umezurike's laconic view that "the writer - be he literary or journalistic can, to a great extent help in restoring the health of his ailing nation, propelling its values from decrepit stagnation to flourishing progression just like a competent medical doctor takes care of a sick patient" (22). It is this urge to restore the dignity and moral health within the Nigerian society in particular and that of African in general, that informs the plot formative of most of Asika's work in which *Cord of Life* is an

embodiment. The plot of the play is basically informed by the principles of "poetic justice" where the evil are punished and the good, exonerated. This pattern of incident is targeted at a single integral end: to brandish a message of morality, piety and good behaviour. This is possible because literature just like Aristotle explains, is mimesis of human actions by the means of language alone. To this end, this shows that indeed, no literature exists in a vacuum as every literary work "looks up to human life and character as a model and from them, derive a language which is true to life" (Horace qtd in Akwanya 155). Reflecting on this, Nicholas Akwanya asserts that "poetic mimesis is also tied to human nature: the poetic works of writers like Aristophanes imitates persons acting and doing". Hence, some say, a play is given such name as a represented action (155). Asika's Cord of Life fulfils this destiny as a play distinct in its kind. It is in a bid to represent this "just and lively image of human nature" according to John Dryden that Asika's Cord of Life is perceived as an embodiment of didactic import as a literary work of art. The whole issue of child selling which is a major issue at stake in the work is a mere attempt at exposing and speaking against such emerging evil, trendy in the modern reality. The didactic import of the work which emanates from the contention against child selling business establishes the work as a functional. Ordinarily, every art work according to the Aristotelian orientation has no use-value but mere 'aisthetikos' which is that they are objects of thought generation and beauty but Asika's Cord of Life aligns with the platonic orientation of art as an entity that performs a function, an instructive and entertaining function to the society.

Furthermore, the plot structuration of the work is unique and could be said to be adaptive and obedient to the Aristotelian organic plot structure, intricately fused together by the element of 'causality'. The patterning of Asika's Cord of Life is fleeced with intensity and suspense and it is this phenomenon that holds the reader's attention and interest even as the actions of the play progresses from exposition through complication, then to the eventual denouement. The didactic import of the work wouldn't have been auspicious without the success of the plot of the play in weaving in elements that capture the reader's attention. Patterned in "Intermissions" and "Movements", each of these identifying segmentation foregrounds a transgression and rise in the intensity and suspense in the actions of the work.

Ultimately, Asika's Cord of Life blends love, filial complexities, long-suffering, secrecy, regret and apprehension engulfed in rich suspense. It is an entirely saturating literary piece, allegorical and humor-filled. The dramaturgy of the plot structure mounts Asika as an in-depth playwright with creative foresight. This play is well drafted with rich aesthetic aura.

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BORDER CROSSING AND SELF-ALIENATION IN CHIKA UNIGWES ON BLACK SISTERS STREET

Abstract

Border crossing has had many effects on the African migrant. According to critics, the experiences of migration such as the meeting and mixing of cultures resulting to new hybridised world views have contributed a great deal to the formation of the character and the existential being of the African migrants. Protagonists in texts of African migrant authors have been described by critics as having the characteristics of restlessness, ambivalence, anxiety, de-territorialized self, being skilled in re-orientation, having an expanded vision, quest for freedom, individual self-realisation and constantly going through the process of trans-culturality. Using Martin Heideggers theory of existence and being as the heuristic tool for textual exigency and interpretation, this research paper investigates the internal space of existence of the main protagonist of *On Black Sisters Street* authored by Nigerian migrant writer, Chika Unigwe. This paper postulates that self-alienation is an effect of the experience of border crossing on the African migrant and attributes the characteristics of an alienated self to the main protagonists of Unigwes novels.

Keyword: self-alienation, border crossing, existence, in-being, internal space.

Introduction

Border crossing has become a thriving theme in literature for centuries from the time of Homer in *Iliad* to featuring Odysseus travelling two worlds in *Odyssey*. Literary writers with a focus on migration have explored characters' experiences; internal and external conflicts as they struggle to survive connect and explore

the complexities of identity in transnational spaces. Border crossing experiences entails confrontation of strange cultures in unfamiliar spaces which often lead to growth and change for the characters. As a recurring theme, border crossing has been explored from different angles, examining the challenges of migration, displacements, identity crises, culture conflict, discrimination, In Teju Coles *Open City*, Julius embarks on a journey of self-discovery by crossing one border after another with the hope of finding his grandmother who will give him answers that will help him come to terms with his complex identity. For Sefi Atta's protagonist in her novel *A Bit of Difference*, border crossing is a symbol of resilience and strength as Deolas experience of racism, hegemony turns her into a strong, self-willed and determined woman. Ifemelu in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* faces the challenges of identity, racism and the complexities of globalization as she attempts to belong in the new country, America that she relocates to in search of a financially stable life. In Aburazak Gurnah's *The Last Gift* confronts the dilemma of the major characters, Hanna and Jamal as they struggle to find roots into their identity. This paper deviates from the many different angles explored on border crossing by critics to focus on self-alienation as an effect of border crossing in Chika Unigwe's novel namely *On Black Sisters Street*.

Protagonists who cross boundaries between cultures and countries are referred to as afro-politan characters by critics who refer to themselves as afro-politan critics. Characters who cross borders in literary texts such as Unigwe's texts, and that of other migrant authors, have been described by these critics as having the characteristics of restlessness, ambivalence, anxiety, de-territorialized self, being skilled in re-orientation, having an expanded vision, quest for freedom, individual self-realisation and constantly going through the process of trans-culturality. This paper differs from the researches made by afropolitan critics as none has yet attributed the characteristics of an alienated self to any of Unigwe's characters or studied any of Chika Unigwe's novels from the point of view of self-alienation using Martin Heidegger's theory of in-being.

Theorising

Martin Heidegger's theory of the in-being is suitable in the analysis of Unigwe's *On Black Sisters Street* in this paper because it is an existential theory that

investigates the internal space of existence of characters. Heidegger's theory of in-being explains how human beings comport themselves in one way or another in a socially influenced world, and this comportment is referred to as existence. In-being is a concept used by Heidegger in his study of man's being in order to explain the human beings' inherent potentials of existence. In other words, in-being is "the structural characteristics of man or the human's existential constitution (4). Two fundamental kinds of being inherent in man are the authentic and in-authentic being. The authentic state is self-being and individualism while the inauthentic state is a condition of loss of identity and loss of one's true self or self-loss resulting from surrender to societal or social pressures, views, criteria and standards of existence. The mode of being which becomes predominant depends on the person's comportment towards his world. This also implies that the kind of being which an individual possesses and which underlies the individual's in-being are essential in determining the character of every phenomenon in their lives. Heidegger explores self-alienation as inauthentic in-being where an individual estranges himself from self, from other beings and from society. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes self-alienation as a fleeing from oneself, and he analyzes the concept of self-alienation as a mode of being in an existential ontological context. As a result of social or societal pressures, the self-alienated individual lives in fear, there is a lack of an authentic understanding of self and as a result, self and individuality is lost in public opinion and discourse, and interpretation of man is accepted without question, reasoning or consideration of self. It is an understanding that comes from accepting the opinions and views of others without question, believing them to be right or ideal.

Self-alienation, an inauthentic human mode of existence where a person is estranged from others or themselves" and in everyday social existence, can be overcome. This condition does not mean that the self-alienated persons have become torn away from their true self. The alienation can drive the individual into a state of self-dissection. Though self-alienation blocks off man's authenticity and possibilities from him, overcoming it can be achieved in the fallen state from the point of self-dissection, if the alienated individual turns away his attention from others encountered environmentally, looks away from Experiences and the centre of its actions, or does not as yet see them at all (Heidegger 119). The

possibility of overcoming alienation lies in the fact that the in-being consists of not just an unauthentic trait for existence which can lead to alienation but also an authentic potentiality for being and resoluteness for overcoming alienation.

The journey back to self, just like self-alienation, is a process that is grounded in the three fundamental aspects of the in-being: the state of mind, understanding, and speech. The process begins with anxiety becoming the mode of the state of mind, making the self-alienated persons anxious about their situation, and gradually coming to an understanding of existing in the authentic self-potentials and the freedom to the self which is individualised. The process of being anxious is a state of mind that discloses to the self-alienated persons their authentic potentiality for existence and the freedom to choose. It reveals the possession of self-will, possibilities and their ability to make decisions on their own and be individualised. It leads to an authentic or genuine understanding of self and alignment with the authentic individual self and freedom which allows transcendence from the fallen state of self-alienation.

The process back to self or wholeness is described by Heidegger as the call of conscience. Heidegger describes it as a distinctive kind of discourse for Dasein (322). The self-alienated individual possesses the potential of authentic being and has the ability to change his mode to being himself. Heidegger explains this process as the individual summoning, appealing itself back to itself from its lostness in the they' (312) and becoming authentic Being-ones-Self (313). Going back to being ones self is a choice the alienated individual makes himself when the call of conscience, an authentic potentiality-for-being of the human, appeals to him. Conscience reveals the individuals authentic potentials to him that he begins to have a genuine understanding of himself. Heidegger describes it as an appeal to the self (318) summoning the individuals self from falling and lostness.

Using Heideggers theory, this paper examines the protagonists internal heterogeneity triggered by her desire to migrate and her experience of the trans-national space she ends up in. Usually, border crossing criticism focuses on an analysis that entails studying from the microcosm with a focus on protagonists global movements in space and time, community fashioning, encounters, conversations, negotiations and resistances to hegemonic processes. This paper deviates from this approach to scrutinize the protagonists

state of mind, a mindset formed from the understanding she has about border crossing based on public discourse on migration.

Textual Exigency: The Fall

Unigwe, *On Black Sisters Street* presents Chisom (who later names herself Sisi), who experiences the financial and economic pressures of the society. Convinced that the only solution lies in the western world, she makes the decision to migrate under compromised conditions to Belgium in search of financially stable life. It is a compromise which causes her to dissociate herself from her true self in order to fit into their new compromised status. Daria Tunca in her work "Redressing the Narrative Balance: Subjection and Subjectivity in Chika Unigwes *On Black Sisters Street* insinuates that Sisi has been misled to think that happiness can only be reached through affluence and social status so that her inability to find a job in Lagos, and her frustrating experiences, coupled with her adoption of the view that everything is for sale in Nigeria, make her decide to migrate to Belgium, hopeful that the money she makes there will enable her to buy her father "some respect in the form of a chieftaincy title in their village. Sisi seems to be misguided in systematically equating social status with happiness.

Chisom is burdened from birth with a prophecy and a dream of being the light in the family and the sole person who will transform her family's living condition from the state abject poverty to wealth and affluence. Her father with all his hopes on Chisom was positive that with her university degree, nothing should stand in the way of the good job (Unigwe 20) that would provide for everything comfortable money can buy. As a result of her inability to secure a job some years after her graduation and the obvious fact that less intelligent and qualified classmates were being offered jobs made her conclude that having a connection was the only way to secure a job in Nigeria. Chisom's fear and worry is that Lagos has no future for her. Living in Lagos, she will never meet up to the expectations of her family, and the fear that her dreams will never materialized if she does not leave Lagos so engulfed her that she sees herself as a failure. Chisom finds herself "watching with anger as life laughed at the grandiosity of her dreams (Unigwe 22), as the entire economy was in a mess (28). Europe and America seem to be the better option and she regrets her lack of foresight. She

should have studied nursing because At Christmas most of the men returning home from Europe and America with wallets full of foreign currency, to scout for wives, always went for the nurses. They said it was easier for nurses to get jobs abroad (28). The whole situation begins to suffocate her that she feel There is no room to breathe here (26), “she knew she could not stand another year in Lagos. Not like this. I must escape (29). Deles loud exclamation concerning the girl he walks into the salon with Oya! Make am beautiful. She dey go abroad. Today! Beautify am! quips her interest and curiosity as she asks the girl her reasons for going abroad.” Dele interrupts their conversation and answers on the girls behalf: She dey go work. You wan go, too? You wan go abroad, too? If you wan comot for dis our nonsense country, come see me, make we talk (30). Deles words seem to have occupied a permanent place in her senses and his offer to help her relocate to the abroad refuses to leave her mind.

Chisom is beginning to believe that it is her vow to escape that throws “her directly in the path of providence (29). Deles offer which she initially repelled begins to make more and more sense to her. When his words sank in, she expected to be furious. To ask him what type of girl he thought she was. To say, “Do you know I have a university degree? Do you know I am a graduate? She expected that her anger would give her the courage to slap his fat face. She expected to want to smash his mobile phones through his double-glazed windows. She waited for the hurricane of anger that would drive her to start breaking things and shout, Stupid, useless man. Oloshi! Old man way no get shame (40).

Her anger and disgust becomes suddenly weakened by a picture of her familys state of abject poverty:

Her father folded, trying to be invisible. Her mothers vacant eyes interested in nothing. Finally, she saw Peter and the way he was easing into the lot life had thrown at him. She did not want to be sucked into that life. She imagined her life, one year from now, if she stayed in Lagos. But could she really resort to that? She was not that sort of girl. She turned to go, but her feet stuck in the quicksand. They would not move (40).

A different mode of being begins to rear its head from within her. A personality and potential she is seeing for the first time. It presents itself as an alternative mode of existence which seems to her to be equally as good as any other. It is so strong that she is beginning to give in, to fall into it. It begins to seem like it is God orchestrated. An opportunity given to Make the most of the trump card God has wedged in between their legs (25). After all the end justifies the means. Her final and definite fall into the in-authentic mode is signified by her lack of reaction when Dele says, But I swear, with your melons, you go dey mint money anyhow! Rather than rant and rave, she took in his words with a calm that assured her that she would do as he said (40). Any doubt that creeps into her mind is a weak whisper almost a silence, But was she really capable of this? There had to be another way. Something else she could do (41), the voice of enunciation convinced her.

This marks Chisoms fallen and her subsequent self-alienation taking a predominant position goes into decision making, planning and action in line with her new mode of existence: from mineness to others.). She begins to drift along the inauthentic way of existence and beomes carried away by the publicness of everyday living, and have thereby become alienated from her own trueness of being, for when Dasein [loosely translated as human existence] occupies itself entirely with its world of care and gives itself up to the publicity of the one like many, something like a fight of the Dasein from itself as from its authentic potentiality of self-being reveals itself (Heidegger 60). At this stage of her life She would rename herself. She would go through a baptism of fire and be reborn as Sisi: a stranger yet familiar. Chisom would be airbrushed out of existence, at least for a while, and in her place would be Sisi. She would earn her money by using her punani. And once she hit it big, she would reincarnate as Chisom (41). Feelings of anger, disgust, confusion, doubt give way for a feeling of tranquility, she suddenly felt immortal. The energy she felt oozing from her, enough to defeat love, enough to repel even death. She was ready to set forth into her future (44).

The Journey Back to Self

Chisom eventually comes to terms with her authentic self. That one is born short, slim, black, poor, born into a certain family and country are existential

givens, in Heidegger's habit of thought, which have the capacity to weigh man down in perpetual grumbling. These facts are not of man's making. He is born into them and most often make man fallen with tendencies for resignation. As such, the feeling that we are factually thrown into the world, most often makes man run away from action, from choice and from himself. Man at birth, does not choose to be born nor the type of family to be born into, yet he is born anyway, and expected to accept these facts of existence with existential equanimity, which is where authenticity comes in. Her realisation that she will perpetually remain a migrant character abroad opens her eyes to find root into her own identity. Her real self that would now prefer to be called Chisom with Mr. Agbo voice, instead of the soft and easy name, Sisi surges up from her perfect understanding of herself. Though Sisi is still in the state of fallenness, it does not feel right anymore, the tranquillising effect has gradually disappeared and epiphany begins to set in. Since she is still in an in-authentic mode of being her understanding of herself still comes from public opinion. She now sees the prophecy of her future as misunderstood by her and her whole family. The bright lights the soothsayer had seen around her were not a bright future but the bright lights of Antwerp. Blue and red lights, like Christmas lights, decorating her window, and she in the middle of all those lights, on display, waiting for buyers to admire and buy (Unigwe 211).

As Sisi waits to process her documents in the Ministry of External Affairs, we see the call of conscience trying to surface. She surpasses her guilt by trying to block the voices that came to her head - her mother's mainly, telling her that she was disappointed. Asking her if she would really sell her body for a chance at making some money (Unigwe 146). The appeasing voice overcomes the call of conscience, justifying her decisions and intended actions, making it seem tranquil as she fills:

Her head with visions of a future in which she would have earned enough to buy her father a car, buy her mother a house in Ikoyi, and buy herself a good man who would father her children and give her parents the grandchildren they had always dreamed of before they were too old to appreciate them. With the amount of money she imagined she would earn, there would be no limit to purchasing power. She would even be able to buy

her father a chieftaincy title in their village. Buy him some respect and a posture that belonged a man his age (146-7).

After five months and two weeks working as a prostitute she “falls into a state of anxiety, shame and guilt (212). She begins her “solitary walk that ushers her slowly into her authentic self (213). Sisi begins a journey back to self and authenticity: an attempted rise from the fallen state, as Heidegger phrases it. Following Akinbimpe Akintayo Akinyeles view in his paper titled Re-Emergence of Slavery in 21st Century: A Reading of Chika Unigwes On Black Sisters Street and Ifeanyi Ajaegbos Sarah House that during Sisi's affair with Luc, her effort to redefine her sense of self heightens, and she starts imagining a more meaningful life beyond her entrapped status, making her see herself as a worthy woman who can dig deep in her inner strengths and reconstruct the possibility of freedom and reassertion of her humanity (Unigwe 90). Here, readers encounter how Sisi perfectly fits in as an existential being dissecting herself in the in-being in search of meaning. Akinyeles essay is relevant to this paper because of its psychoanalytic approach, but differs in the approach through which the existential being of the characters is analysed. Heidegger refers to the state in which Sisi is in as the state of anxiety where she directs herself and the call of conscience appeals to her in her fallen state to rise back to authenticity.

Conclusion

Sisi's self-alienation occurs because she is enslaved to fulfilling a prophecy that promises a bright future. She is however, too impatient to ensure a gradual transcend to her glory. Consciously or unconsciously, the type of responsibility that the society places on these characters has got a way to influence their actions and inactions. Like Sisi, African migrant characters should trace and re/locate their root for them to actually have a well-defined understanding of themselves. It is time Africans moved and owned their authentic selves both in writing and in action. Rediscovery and reassertion are the key functional relations the African migrant characters, and of course, in the life-world, should aim at and become intentional with. The good news is that no time is too late to call the self out from the they lifeworld and affirm the self. In other words, the they life experience is just a stroll away which can be reversed the moment one realizes oneself and takes a firm and resolute decision towards self-retrieval.

That is, it is not a permanent state of being. Therefore, the existential call for self-retrieval from the they world is what Heidegger understands as authenticity, When Dasein thus brings itself back from the they, the they-self is modified in all existential manner so that it becomes authentic Being-ones self (313). The effort so far made in this paper is targeted at exposing Daseins potentiality to transcend its thrownness, fallenness in order to actualize its individuality.

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David Jagboro

ILLOCUTIONARY FORCES OF POLITICAL RHETORIC IN BOLA AHMED TINUBU'S INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Abstract

This study examines the Inaugural Address of Nigeria's President Bola Ahmed Tinubu using the Speech Acts Theory to pay attention to Illocutionary Forces at work. The research aims to reveal how Tinubu's speech acts perform different roles in influencing, persuading, and involving his audience while shaping political realities and public opinions. Using this analysis, John Searle's categorization of speech acts that include assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations is used to unearth the strategic use of language in Tinubu's rhetoric.

The study also reveals several uses of illocutionary acts. Assertives in Tinubu's speech confirm his commitment to democracy and national unity in a bid to enhance credibility and trustworthiness. Directives rally citizens and government officials towards corporate goals serving as an invitation for actions and cooperation among people.

Commissives spell out Tinubu's pledges as well as policy directions thereby binding him to future courses of action that may generate expectations from the population. Expressives reveal emotions and attitudes therefore creating a sense of common purpose or vision among individuals within a certain group or community.

The article shows that rather than being just ceremonial speeches an inaugural address like that of Tinubu is a political act with strategic purposes. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of political discourse in Nigerian politics and demonstrates the efficacy of Speech Acts Theory in analyzing the performative aspects of political rhetoric.

INTRODUCTION

The political arena is deeply rooted in ideology, and so are the practices within it. This means that effective communication is essential to appeal to the various interest groups involved in political discourse. Politicians and political figures use communication tools to unite people behind them and maintain a harmonious social order, as noted by van Dijk [16]. Given that politicians tend to align with specific ideologies, it's important to recognize that their speech reflects their ideological stance. Therefore, when analyzing political discourse, it's crucial to consider that the choices made by political figures are not ideologically neutral. Political speeches are typically delivered by politicians at political events, and they often revolve around the struggle for power or the maintenance and control of it. According to Bayram [21], politics is essentially a field for power struggles, and politicians engage in these struggles to implement their political, economic, and social ideas. In the realm of politics, language plays a critical role; politicians use language as a vital tool to shape the political thoughts of the electorate and persuade them to embrace their ideologies (Bayram *ibid*).

Political language conveys moral information about people's affairs and issues. It serves to disguise, transform, and deepen phenomena, and to persuade the audience to adopt the speaker's point of view. Seidel [85] suggests that political speech may be considered a genre, a domain, or a field. It represents an outstanding achievement at a specific time and place, and it consists of three major elements: the speaker (addressor), the audience (addressee), and the political speech itself.

Sharndama [115] asserts that political speech is associated with either a struggle for power or maintenance or control of it. It is diverse because it encompasses the different forms of speeches that politicians deliver at political forums. Chilton [25] affirms that politics is "the art of governance and power" while language is "the universal capacity of humans in all societies to communicate". Okoro C. N [17] subscribes to this view when she asserts that politics is concerned with the power to make decisions, control resources, control other people's behaviour, and, at times control their values.

Political speeches hold immense power, serving as a platform for leaders to convey their vision, rally support, and shape public opinion. This research analyzes President Ahmed Tinubu's inaugural address using Speech Act Theory to uncover the speech acts, intentions, and rhetorical implications.

Political Discourse

Political discourse is the central object of political linguistics research. There are dozens of definitions of it, but most often they turn to the definition of A.N. Baranov: political discourse is "the totality of all speech acts used in political discussions, as well as rules of public policy, sanctified by tradition and proven by experience" [1]. Creating her own definition of political discourse, E.R. Levenkova also includes in it a reference to the mental sphere of human existence, without the analysis of which modern studies of discourse would be incomplete. According to the researcher, political discourse is "a linguistic expression of public practice in the sphere of political culture, which is the professional use of language, which is based on the nationally and socio-historically conditioned mentality of its speakers"[2].

The authors of these definitions, along with foreign (T.A. van Dijk and R. Vodak) and domestic (E.G. Kazakevich) scientists, in the study of political discourse, concentrate only on the forms of public communication of professional politicians to win and retain power. Thus, van Dijk asks in his book "The Discourse of Power" whether the media can be considered a "power group", and, consequently, whether the results of the activities of journalists, reporters, and other representatives of this group can be attributed to political discourse. According to the author, the media only contribute to the dissemination of political discourse, and facilitate access to it by citizens of the whole world, but they cannot be considered political discourse [3].

A broad approach to political discourse can also be attributed to Zelensky, who distinguishes two levels of politics: official and personal. The first is based on all kinds of manifestations of politics in the social life of people in any country. It also includes the mass media. The second level of politics is actualized when there is a relationship of the individual with other people or the surrounding world [7].

The main function of political communication seems to be the incentive function, which consists in influencing the addressee in order to gain and retain power. E.I. Sheigal even brings this feature into his definition of political discourse: this is "communication, the main intention of which is the struggle for power" [5]. Indeed, behind the political discourse there is a desire to gain power, so it is often used as a way of manipulating people. The power struggle implies the need to encourage the audience to act (for example, before elections), to convince them of the purity of intentions, the correctness of the speaker's judgments, etc. That is why political language is so rich in various stylistic means by which the speaker makes his speech more convincing and impressive.

Persuasion

Analyzing political discourse is essential for anyone interested in how language is used in the world of politics. This idea is based on Aristotle's concept that "we are all political animals, able to use language to pursue our own ends" (Chilton, 1). According to Benoit, there are three functions of discourse that influence voters: acclaims, which emphasize a candidate's benefits and increase their perceived preferability; attacks, which highlight an opponent's undesirable attributes; and defenses, which help a candidate minimize the loss of preferability (Benoit, 18). Additionally, Chilton views politics as both a struggle for power and a cooperation for resolving clashes of interest over money, influence, liberty, and more (Chilton, 3). Hague points out that politics involves reconciling through discussion and persuasion, making communication central to politics (Chilton, 3). Furthermore, language and politics are closely linked. Aristotle classified humans as creatures with the capacity for speech and nicknamed them political animals, "politikon zoon" (Chilton, 5). Aristotle believed that language had evolved to perform social functions that correspond to what we understand as "political" (Chilton, 6). Politicians also recognize the role of language, as its use has effects and politics largely involves the use of language (Chilton, 13).

Speech Act Theory

The speech act theory, developed by J.L. Austin and expanded by John Searle, explains how language goes beyond literal meaning and performs actions in

social contexts. It focuses on the pragmatic aspects of language, emphasizing the intentionality and effects of speech acts. Austin's "How to Do Things with Words" introduces speech acts and distinguishes constative (describing) and performative (accomplishing) utterances. He also discusses felicity conditions, necessary for successful speech acts, such as sincerely expressing regret in an apology.

John Searle, in his work "Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language" [19], expands on Austin's ideas and presents a more comprehensive framework for analyzing speech acts. Searle identifies three dimensions of speech acts: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. The locutionary act refers to the act of uttering words and producing meaningful sentences. For example, when someone says "I promise to help you," it constitutes a locutionary act. The illocutionary act refers to the intended force or function of the utterance, representing the speaker's communicative intention and the illocutionary force performed by the speech act. Using the same example, the illocutionary act of promising implies the speaker's commitment to fulfill the stated promise. The perlocutionary act, on the other hand, refers to the intended effect or impact of the speech act on the hearer or audience, encompassing the consequences or reactions that the speaker intends to elicit. In the case of the promise, the perlocutionary act might aim to inspire trust, reassurance, or a sense of obligation in the hearer. Searle reclassifies the five illocutionary acts introduced by Austin as assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. Each type corresponds to different illocutionary forces and performs different actions. For instance, an assertive speech act aims to state a fact or make a claim, while a directive speech act seeks to influence or direct the behavior of the hearer.

Data Analysis

The analysis involves identifying and classifying selected expressions into the five types of illocutionary acts as discussed in the preceding section. The force of each utterance is identified and discussed to help us understand the intention of the speaker regarding the overall meaning of the speech.

ASSERTIVES

(i) Describing: This is describing the facts as the speakers see them. President Tinubu makes several assertions throughout his speech, expressing his confidence in the Nigerian people, his faith in God Almighty, and his commitment to governing on behalf of the citizens. Excerpts from the speech that typify assertion include:

My confidence in its people, unwavering.

And my faith in God Almighty, absolute.

This handover symbolizes our trust in God, our enduring faith in representative governance and our belief in our ability to reshape this nation into the society it was always meant to be.

I stand before you honoured to assume the sacred mandate you have given me.

Our burdens may make us bend at times, but they shall never break us.

Nigeria shall exist.

The following text describes Tinubu's strong beliefs and confidence in the Nigerian people, in God, and in the potential for national progress. The statement is a descriptive speech act, expressing the speaker's confidence in the people of the country, without attempting to change the listener's belief or influence their actions. The speaker asserts that their confidence is unwavering, making a factual claim that is not open to debate. The statement is also universal in nature, as it makes a general statement about the people of the country as a whole. The next statement is a predicative assertion, describing the speaker's faith in God.

This speech primarily serves as an emotional appeal, using words and imagery to appeal to the listener's emotions, rather than presenting facts and evidence to support its claims. The speaker is appealing to the listener's sense of hope and optimism about the future of the nation.

(ii) Affirming: President Tinubu affirms the enduring existence of Nigeria as a nation and declares his dedication to its progress, unity, and prosperity.

As citizens, we declare as one unified people devoted to one unified national cause, that as long as this world exists, NIGERIA SHALL EXIST.

We hold this beam aloft because it lights our path with compassion, brotherhood,

and peace.

The first statement emphasizes the collective commitment of the citizens of Nigeria to their nation and asserts the unwavering existence of Nigeria. It portrays a resilient and determined attitude, reflecting a strong belief in the endurance and continuity of Nigeria. The second statement uses metaphorical language to convey the significance of a "beam" symbolizing compassion, brotherhood, and peace. It emphasizes the importance of fostering positive virtues and creating a harmonious society.

(iii) Declaring: This is exemplified below:

We are too great a nation and too grounded as a people to rob ourselves of our finest destiny.

We lift high this torch so that it might shine on every household and in every heart that calls itself Nigerian."

We shall defend the nation from terror and all forms of criminality that threaten the peace and stability of our country and our sub-region.

These declarations serve to assert Tinubu's vision and goals for Nigeria, expressing his determination and resolve.

The president uses strong assertions to express belief and confidence in the Nigerian people, in God, and the potential for national progress. The purpose is to convey unwavering convictions and establish trust and convey a sense of responsibility and accountability to the people.

EXPRESSIVES

Thanking: President Tinubu expresses gratitude and appreciation to his supporters, as well as extends a hand of unity and cooperation to those who voted for his opponents.

My supporters, I thank you.

To those who voted otherwise, I extend my hand across the political divide.

Mr. President (ex-president, Buhari), you have been an honest, patriotic leader who has done his best for the nation you love. On a more personal note, you are a worthy partner and friend. May History be kind to you.

Tinubu expresses gratitude towards President Muhammadu Buhari, showing respect and acknowledging his contributions. This reflects the speaker's feelings and is a way of building rapport with supporters. The speaker also expresses a willingness to reach out to those who did not vote for him, aiming to build or improve their relationships, despite different political views. The speaker's appreciation and respect for the former president demonstrate the complex and multifaceted nature of expressive speech acts.

(ii) commending: President Tinubu commends his predecessor, President Muhammadu Buhari, for his leadership and patriotism, acknowledging his contributions to the nation.

Mr. President, you have been an honest, patriotic leader who has done his best for the nation you love.

May History be kind to you.

The speaker expressed his admiration and respect for the president's character and leadership. He is commending the president for his honesty, patriotism, and dedication to his country.

The speaker is wishing the former president well, hoping that history will remember him in a positive light. It's a way of acknowledging the president's

accomplishments and the legacy he has left behind. It's also a way of showing respect and admiration for the president and celebrating his achievements.

COMMISSIVES

(i) Promising: The President makes promises to the Nigerian people, such as impartial governance, defence against insecurity, economic growth, job creation, and addressing social issues. Some of these are encapsulated in the statements below:

Our administration shall govern on your behalf but never rule over you.

We shall reach out to all but never put down a single person for holding views contrary to our own.

President Tinubu's promises demonstrate a commitment to democratic principles, inclusive governance, and respect for diverse opinions. He pledges to govern on behalf of the citizens, rejecting authoritarianism and promoting freedom of expression. Additionally, he expresses a desire to engage with different segments of society and foster an inclusive political environment.

We shall defend the nation from terror and all forms of criminality that threaten the peace and stability of our country and our sub-region.

We shall remodel our economy to bring about growth and development. Security shall be the top priority of our administration

My administration must create meaningful opportunities for our youth.

Tinubu's speech contained different types of speech acts. He used expressive speech acts to show gratitude and unity, directive speech acts to emphasize his vision and agenda, and commissive speech acts to make commitments to the Nigerian people.

DIRECTIVES

Invoking: The spirit of unity, compassion, and collective effort among Nigerians are invoked and emphasis is laid on the need to work together for a better future:

Today, Fate and Destiny join together to place the torch of human progress in our very hands. We dare not let it slip.

Today, let us recommit our very selves to placing Nigeria in our hearts as the indispensable home for each and every one of us.

The speaker urges Nigerians to tap into specific emotions and strive for a better future, inspiring unity and a common purpose. They emphasize the power of individuals to shape the future and call for a genuine commitment to effect lasting change.

Outlining: Here, key aspects of his administration's program such as highlighting principles and initiatives related to governance, security, the economy, jobs, agriculture, infrastructure, and foreign policy are outlined as exemplified below:

The principles that will guide our administration are simple...

Security shall be the top priority of our administration.

On the economy, we target a higher GDP growth and to significantly reduce unemployment.

President Tinubu's speeches aim to inspire, reassure, express gratitude, make promises, affirm beliefs, commend others, and rally support from the Nigerian people. He also outlines his vision and agenda for his presidency, emphasizing security as a top priority. The speaker identified specific targets for GDP growth and unemployment reduction. This type of outlining speech act is very common in political speeches, as it allows the speaker to show that they have a clear plan and are focused on concrete results.

Directing: These directives urge the audience to take specific actions or follow a particular course of action:

Let us take the next great step in the journey they began and believed in.

Today, permit me to outline in broad terms a few initiatives that define our concept of progressive good governance.

Throughout the speech, Tinubu aims to inspire and rally support by employing persuasive techniques and appeals to emotion. He emphasizes unity, national identity, and the importance of collective effort in achieving Nigeria's progress. Tinubu also acknowledges the challenges and the need for collaboration and dialogue with different stakeholders.

The president reaffirms the unity and resilience of the Nigerian nation, aiming to inspire confidence and national pride. He also expresses admiration for the outgoing President, emphasizing the significance of the moment and rallying the audience to embrace their roles in shaping Nigeria's future. Finally, the speech outlines the administration's plans and priorities, setting expectations and signaling the administration's commitment to specific areas of concern.

Findings and Conclusion

President Tinubu's speech contained expressive, directive, and commissive speech acts. Expressive speech acts, consisting of thanking, commending, congratulating, and praising, were used to show gratitude and appreciation to supporters and to extend a hand of unity and cooperation to those who voted for their opponents. Directive speech acts were used to urge the Nigerian people to set forth their expectations on his vision and agenda, emphasizing principles and initiatives related to governance, security, the economy, jobs, agriculture, infrastructure, and foreign policy. Commissive speech acts, consisting of promising and offering, were employed to make promises to the Nigerian people, indicating democratic and patriotic principles and high expectations from the speaker.

In conclusion, the study has provided a comprehensive understanding of President Tinubu's speech, shedding light on his communication strategies and the potential impact of his words in shaping public opinion and mobilizing support.

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Maura Madu

African Languages and Production of Knowledge Globally

Introduction

This essay explores the evolving landscape of African languages and their crucial role in the production and dissemination of knowledge across the African continent and beyond. With globalization and technological advancements, there is a growing concern about the future of indigenous African languages and their impact on knowledge creation and preservation. This essay will examine the historical and colonial influences that have shaped the status of African languages, leading to the dominance of the European language in academic, professional, and other spheres. It discusses the challenges faced by African languages, such as digital divide issues, limited institutional support, linguistic marginalization, and so on. Next, the essay looks into current efforts and initiatives aimed at revitalizing African languages, and integrating them into knowledge production processes. The author examines the prospect of African languages serving as a source of knowledge production in Africa. Furthermore, the essay explores the potential benefits of embracing African languages in knowledge production, including the preservation of cultural heritage, and the promotion of diverse perspectives in research and academia. Lastly, the essay discusses strategies and prospects for promoting African languages as vibrant mediums for knowledge production in a globalized world. It emphasizes the importance of collaboration between policymakers, educators, language experts, and technology developers and programmers to create sustainable frameworks that empower African languages in the digital age.

1. Historical Context of African Languages

African languages have a long history of oral tradition and written systems dating back thousands of years. These languages were used for communication, storytelling, trade, and cultural expression within diverse societies across the continent. Kwesi (2008) observes that the issue of how many languages exist in Africa is a complex consideration. Estimates vary very widely. They range from

Lord Hailey's figure of 700 to Grimes's figure quoted by UNESCO of "about 2000" (Grimes, 2000; Hailey, 1938, p. 68). Gregersen (1977) asserts that the nearly 300 million people in Africa speak something over 1000 languages, with only about 40 languages spoken by more than a million people.

The colonial era had a profound impact on African languages. European powers imposed their languages as official languages of administration, education, and law, leading to the marginalization and suppression of indigenous African languages. During the colonial era, Africans and African communities were faced with the imposition of European languages. Anglophone regions were often compelled to adopt English, while Francophone regions were required to use French. This had profound implications for African Languages and cultures, as indigenous languages were marginalized or suppressed. Mohammad (2011) asserts that the people of territories which are dominated by language cannot think with their unit and interact with their language and they accept dependence on colonialism. Again, Gibson (1999) opines that the approach of powerful government with language can be propounded, an approach based on the invalidation of subordinate languages through forgetting, weakening, and saluting them by sovereignty language. Equally, Fanon (1962) asserts that with the perception of this fact that "other" lingual acceptance meaning is to confess its existence, colonialist try to alter lingual identity because if speaking meaning is absolutely existing, speaking in one's language expresses an independent identity.

Many African countries gained independence in the mid-20th century. Post-independence, there were efforts to promote African languages and reclaim linguistic and cultural identities. Some nations adopted policies of linguistic pluralism, recognizing multiple languages as official or promoting indigenous languages in education and media. Hassana (2006) asserts that to promote the use of African languages for literacy and education, African governments have signed several international, regional, and national conventions and charters. They have also pledged to implement several plans of action including the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Cultural Charter for Africa (1976), the Lagos Plan of Action (1980), the Declaration of the Cultural Aspects of the Lagos Plan of Action (1985), the OAU Language Plan of Action for Africa (1986), the draft charter for the promotion of African languages in

education developed in 1996 in Accra, Ghana, and the Harare Declaration (1997). Yes, after all these many years ago we are still talking about African Languages and the Production of Knowledge in Africa. I think we need a more practical way of doing this, taking the English Language as our common ground (CM), we need to learn the English Language properly to use it to promote, preserve, and create knowledge in our indigenous languages.

Globalization brought both opportunities and challenges for African languages. Chinweude (2022) asserts that globalization refers to the process of increasing economic, social, political, and cultural relations across international boundaries. Ahmed et al (2018) opine that one major consequence of globalization is the high rise in the spread and interconnectedness of languages. Again, Nweze et al (2019) observe that media globalization is seen as a cultural phenomenon. Ugochi et al (2017) assert that the goals of education cannot be achieved without a language. Following the assertions above, globalization while it facilitated the spread of information and technology, it also contributed to language shifts, with younger generations often preferring to use dominant global languages such as English or French over their native languages.

The relationship between language and the production of knowledge is crucial. Historically, knowledge in Africa was transmitted orally and through indigenous languages. However, the dominance of colonial languages in the education and professional sphere has sometimes limited the production and dissemination of knowledge in African languages. However, Africans can stand on a common ground (CG) of having little or full knowledge of the English Language to promote and preserve their mother tongue (MT). Recently, there has been a renewed interest in African languages and their role in knowledge production. Efforts to revitalize indigenous languages, promote multilingualism, and integrate African languages into formal education and research are gaining momentum. Despite these positive trends, challenges remain, such as limited resources for language development, the influence of global languages, and the need for effective language policies that balance linguistic diversity with practical considerations.

3. African languages and Technological Innovation

Africa is linguistically diverse, with over 2,000 languages spoken. However, many of these languages are endangered due to factors such as: globalization, urbanization, and the dominance of colonial languages. There is a growing recognition of the importance of preserving and revitalizing African languages. Governments, organizations, and communities are implementing programmes to promote Indigenous languages in education, media, and public discourse.

Some African countries have adopted language policies that promote the use of indigenous languages alongside colonial languages in various sectors. These policies aim to empower local communities and preserve cultural heritage. African languages play a crucial role in the production of knowledge. They are carriers of indigenous knowledge systems, oral traditions, and cultural values that are often not fully captured in colonial languages.

Despite efforts to promote African languages, there are challenges such as limited resources, lack of standardized orthographies, and the need for trained language professionals. However, there are also opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and technology-driven solutions to bridge linguistic divides and enhance knowledge production in Africa. The future of African language in the production of knowledge in Africa depends on concerted efforts to preserve linguistic diversity, promote multilingualism, and integrate indigenous knowledge systems into educational and research frameworks.

4. Role of African Languages in Knowledge Production

Preserving Indigenous Knowledge: African languages play a crucial role in knowledge production in Africa for several reasons which can never be exhausted. African languages are often the carriers of indigenous knowledge system, including traditional medicine, agricultural practices, and cultural heritage. Preserving and using these languages is essential for maintaining and transmitting this valuable knowledge to future generations.

Access to Education: many Africans primarily speak local languages rather than colonial languages like English, French, or Portuguese. Utilizing African

languages in education can improve access to learning and enhance understanding, especially for those who may struggle with foreign languages.

Promoting Cultural Diversity: Africa is incredibly diverse linguistically, with thousands of languages spoken across the continent. Embracing this linguistic diversity in knowledge production promotes inclusivity, respects cultural identities, and fosters a sense of pride in one's heritage.

Enhancing Communication and Participation: Using African languages in academic and professional settings enables broader participation and engagement from communities that may be marginalized or excluded due to language barriers. It facilitates effective communication and ensures that diverse voices are heard and valued in knowledge creation processes.

Enriching Academic Discourse: Incorporating African languages in academic discourse adds depth and richness to discussions on various topics, including history, literature, philosophy, and social sciences. It allows for nuanced interpretations and insights that may not be fully captured through translation or discussions solely in colonial languages.

Encouraging Language Development: emphasizing African languages in knowledge production encourages language development, promotes linguistic research, and contributes to the vitality and sustainability of these languages. It supports efforts to standardize, modernize, and adapt African languages for contemporary contexts, including scientific and technical domains.

Empowering Local Communities: by valuing and utilizing African languages, knowledge production becomes more accessible and relevant to local communities. It empowers individuals to contribute their expertise, perspectives, and innovations in their own languages, fostering a sense of ownership and agency in shaping knowledge pathways. Overall, recognizing and harnessing the potential of African languages in knowledge production not only benefits African societies but also contributes to global diversity, cross-cultural understanding, and the advancement of human knowledge as a whole.

5. Technologies and Innovations

Digital Technologies: with the increasing digitalization of information, there's a growing opportunity to leverage technology for the preservation, promotion, and utilization of African languages. This includes developing language learning apps, online resources, and digital libraries in local languages.

Language Revitalization Efforts: Many African countries are recognizing the importance of preserving and revitalizing indigenous languages. Government initiatives, educational programs, and community-driven projects aimed at promoting local languages are likely to gain momentum in the future.

Globalization and Cultural Exchange: as globalization continues to connect diverse cultures and communities, there's a potential for African languages to gain prominence on the global stage. This can lead to increased demand for language experts, translators, and interpreters proficient in African languages.

Education and Research: African languages are integral to unlocking indigenous knowledge systems. Future prospects include integrating local languages into formal education systems, promoting research in linguistics, literature, and cultural studies in African languages, and fostering interdisciplinary collaborations to explore the unique perspectives embedded in these languages.

Economic Opportunities: the use of African languages in various sectors such as tourism, media, and business can create economic opportunities for language professionals and contribute to the overall socio-economic development of African nations.

Innovation in Language Technologies: Advancements in natural language processing and machine learning present opportunities for developing tools and platforms that support African languages, including automated translation, speech recognition, and text-to-speech systems.

Collaborative Efforts: partnerships between governments, academic institutions, language advocates, and technology companies can drive innovation and sustainable development in the use of African languages, fostering a rich linguistic landscape that contributes to Africa's cultural diversity and intellectual heritage. These future prospects underscore the importance of

recognizing and investing in African languages as valuable assets for knowledge production, cultural preservation, and societal advancement in Africa and beyond.

6. Policy and Advocacy

Language Preservation Policies: Government and institutions can enact policies aimed at preserving and promoting African languages. This includes initiatives such as funding language revitalization programmes, incorporating African languages into education curricula, and supporting the creation of language resources and materials.

Advocacy for Linguistic Diversity: Advocacy plays a crucial role in raising awareness about the importance of linguistic diversity in Africa. This involves engaging with policymakers, educators, and the public to emphasize the value of African languages in preserving cultural heritage, fostering inclusive development, and enhancing communication within communities.

Multilingual Education: Policies promoting multilingual education can significantly impact the future of African languages. By integrating African languages into formal education systems alongside dominant languages, students can develop proficiency in their native languages while also gaining proficiency in global languages, fostering cognitive development and cultural pride.

Access to Information and Technology: Advocacy efforts should also focus on ensuring equitable access to information and technology in African languages. This includes supporting the translation of digital content, software, and online resources into African languages, as well as promoting the development of technology tools that facilitate communication and knowledge-sharing in diverse linguistic contexts.

Collaborative Partnerships: collaboration between governments, educational institutions, NGOs, and language experts is essential for effective policy implementation and advocacy. By working together, stakeholders can leverage their resources and expertise to create sustainable solutions for promoting African languages and advancing knowledge production in Africa.

Recognition and Support for Indigenous Knowledge Systems: Policies should recognize and support indigenous knowledge systems preserved within African languages. This involves valuing traditional knowledge in areas such as medicine, agriculture, and cultural practices, and integrating this knowledge into broader research and development initiatives.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Regular monitoring and evaluation of language policies and advocacy effort are crucial to assess their impact and make necessary adjustments. This includes gathering data on language use, literacy rates, educational outcomes, and the availability of language resources to inform evidence-based decision-making. By focusing on these aspects of policy and advocacy, stakeholders can contribute to a future where African languages thrive, fostering cultural richness, knowledge diversity, and inclusive development across the continent.

7. Technology and Innovations Enhancing the Production of Knowledge in Africa

Digital Preservation and Documentation: Technology plays a crucial role in preserving and documenting African languages. Digital platforms and tools such as language archives, multimedia databases, and linguistic software can help in recording, transcribing, and storing linguistic data, ensuring that African languages are not lost or forgotten.

Language Revitalization: Innovative technologies can aid in revitalizing endangered African languages. Language learning apps, interactive e-learning platforms, and virtual reality (VR) experiences can make language learning more accessible and engaging, especially for younger generations who are more accustomed to digital learning environments.

Machine Translation and Natural Language Processing (NLP): Advancements in machine translation and NLP technologies can bridge communication gaps between African languages and other widely spoken languages. This can facilitate knowledge exchange, academic collaboration, and broader dissemination of African knowledge on global platforms.

Crowdsourcing and Community Participation: Digital platforms can enable crowdsourcing efforts for language data collection, translation projects, and cultural preservation initiatives. Engaging local communities and leveraging their knowledge can lead to more accurate and culturally relevant language resources.

Multilingual Content Creation: Technologies can support the creation of multilingual content in African languages, including literature, educational materials, and digital media. This not only promotes linguistic diversity but also enhances the representation of African cultures and perspectives in the digital space.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Language Analysis: AI-driven tools can assist linguists and researchers in analyzing African languages, identifying linguistic patterns, and studying language evolution. This can contribute to a deeper understanding of language structures and dynamics within African linguistic contexts.

Mobile Technology and Access: Mobile devices are ubiquitous in Africa, presenting opportunities to deliver language-related services, educational content, and knowledge resources directly to user's fingertips. Mobile apps, SMS-based platforms, and voice technologies can democratize access to linguistic and educational resources across diverse language communities. By harnessing these technologies and fostering innovation, African languages can not only survive but thrive in the digital age, playing a vital role in the production and dissemination of knowledge in African and beyond.

8. Recommendations

Engaging in international collaboration and partnerships to advocate for the recognition and support of African languages on global platforms is important. This includes collaborating with international organizations, universities, and language advocacy groups to raise awareness and promote linguistic diversity worldwide. This cannot be achieved without the full knowledge of the English language, especially within international organizations where English is used as a means of communication.

Fostering collaboration among linguists, educators, policymakers, and language advocates to exchange best practices, share resources, and work towards common goals in promoting African languages and knowledge production is important. This could be done through the production of applications (apps) with native language with English interpretation (here the English Language serves as our Common Ground (CG)) where Africans from other African communities can learn the African Language with the help of the English interpretation using audio and videos. Certainly, this demands a lot of work from linguists.

Again, the introduction of Language Technology (LT) as a course in African universities where students are thought to develop applications that will portray the Mother Tongue (MT or L1) with English interpretation for wider consumption within the African content. Here the English Language department will collaborate with the Department of Computer Science so that the students can learn coding, programming, and other relevant courses, that will help them to become Language Technology experts in developing applications that will help to promote and preserve African languages. Also, make African languages a source of knowledge production in African Continent and beyond. The only university I have interacted with in the area of Language Technology is Uppsala University, Sweden; we can engage them to see how this dream could be a reality.

Involve local communities in language revitalization efforts, empower speakers of African languages to take pride in their linguistic heritage, and create opportunities for community-led initiatives in language preservation and promotion. Develop and implement language policies that recognize the importance of African languages in knowledge production, education, media, and governance. These policies should promote linguistic diversity, equality, and inclusion in all sectors of society.

Integration of African Language in Technology: Develop and integrate African languages into digital platforms, software, and communication technologies. This will facilitate access to information and knowledge for speakers of African languages, bridging digital divides and promoting inclusive knowledge production.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, the future of African languages in the production of knowledge in Africa is both promising and challenging. Throughout this essay, we have explored the current status of African languages, their invaluable role in preserving cultural heritage and fostering local knowledge systems, and the obstacles they face in the modern era. While language endangerment and the dominance of global languages present significant challenges, there are also unprecedented opportunities emerging through technological innovations and renewed interest in linguistic diversity. It is imperative that we recognize the importance of African languages not only for cultural preservation but also for promoting inclusivity, equity, and a richer understanding of the world. To ensure a vibrant future for African languages, concerted efforts are needed. This includes increased investment in language revitalization programmes, the integration of African languages in educational curricula at all levels, and the promotion of multilingualism in academic and professional spheres. By embracing linguistic diversity and supporting local language initiatives, we can create a future where African languages thrive, contribute meaningfully to knowledge production, and empower communities to engage actively in the global discourse while celebrating their unique linguistic and cultural identities.

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INTERVIEWS

A Midday Conversation with Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, an essayist, literary theorist, novelist, playwright, poet, short story writer and children's author. Adimora-Ezeigbo is a multiple award-winning author of *The Last of the Strong Ones*, *House of Symbols*, *Children of the Eagle*, *Trafficked*, *Roses and Bullets* among many others.



Opuluiche Crew: What inspired you to be a writer, ma?

Adimora-Ezeigbo: Well, writing for me has always been about passion. I began writing early, actually in secondary school. I was the president of the dramatic society of my school in Port Harcourt and wrote a play for the society to stage. I also sketched another play which was a dramatization of the founding of our school, Archdeacon Crowther Memorial Girls' School (ACMGS) by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Elelenwa, near Port Harcourt. I continued writing as

an undergraduate at the University of Lagos where I was a member of the editorial board of the English Department's students' Journal, *The Shuttle*. I published poems and short stories in the Journal. I started writing and when I would write I would give my works to people to vet it for me and with time, the more I practiced my craft, the better I got.

Opuluiche Crew: Interesting. How do you find inspiration for your characters, especially the women in your stories?

Adimora-Ezeigbo: I have always drawn my stories from myself and the experiences I have gathered both from observing others and the behaviors around me. I come from a family of strong women, which is why three of my works discuss three generations of women. If you notice, writers like Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka often have a very not well developed perspective of women that reduces them to one-dimensional characters because they are male writers. But writers like Buchi Emecheta, Ayi Kwei Armah, and Chimamanda Adichie offer a more in-depth portrayal of female characters because they can relate to the issues women face.

Opuluiche Crew: What are some of the challenges you faced as an upcoming writer in the early stages of your career?

Adimora-Ezeigbo: As a young writer, one of my major challenges was finding a publisher. When you're an upstart, no one wants to publish your works, unlike now that I have attained a level of fame and have so many publishers asking me to turn in manuscripts. When I started, no publisher wanted to take my work. It wasn't until I traveled out of the country that I got opportunities with Koman and Heinemann publishing houses. That same year, I won a competition for the junior African writers and was paid for it; that's how I was able to publish my works. Another challenge I faced at some point in my life was finding time to write. I became so occupied with teaching that I couldn't find the time to write. Then a friend of my husband paid for a hotel room for me for two weeks when ASUU was on strike, and I was able to complete a novel within that time space.

Opuluiche Crew: Who are some of your literary influences?

Adimora-Ezeigbo: I've always been an avid reader. As a young girl in secondary school, we had a very good library, and even a moving library that would come and let us borrow books, then return the next week or so. I read a lot of books. African writers had not started writing a lot of books then, so I read mostly white writers like Jane Austen and Mark Twain. I read so many books I can't even remember most.

Opuluiche Crew: What do you think about writing for fame and money?

Adimora-Ezeigbo: Writing has never been about money for me. Writing has made more money for me through the selling of my works and the prizes I have won than my teaching profession has made for me. Yet, when I started, it wasn't so. I advise young writers to focus on writing for the love of writing. If they are committed to it, money will eventually come.

Opuluiche Crew: How has literature and writing impacted the way you see life?

Adimora-Ezeigbo: It has definitely affected how I see life. Aristotle says that literature is greater than history because it tells the past, present, and future. Literature has the ability to predict where a society is headed and give warnings, a good example being George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Literature also broadens your knowledge because it encompasses all areas of life, from science to technology, which is why we have futuristic literature, science fiction, historical novels, etc. Literature is the genre that encompasses all areas of life, and so it has made me more empathetic and accommodating as I have a way of putting myself in another person's shoes.

Opuluiche Crew: What is your advice for upcoming writers?

Adimora-Ezeigbo: My advice for upcoming writers is first to read a lot. You cannot channel out what you do not have. If poetry is the genre you want to focus on writing, then it should be the genre you read the most. Practice makes perfect. Also, don't give up as there will be a lot of discouragements, especially with finding a publisher. If as a writer you wait too long and still can't get a

publisher, then you can self-publish your work. A lot of self-published works have won prizes, including the Commonwealth Prize. I don't always advise writers to self-publish unless they have tried their best and still can't get a publisher. Then they can go ahead. Lastly, they should write for fulfillment and not for fame, as it is only the passion that can keep them going even when challenges come.

Opuluiche Crew: Thank you very much, ma for creating out time to speak to us.

Akachi Ezeigbo – essayist, literary theorist, novelist, playwright, poet, short story writer and children’s author – is a Professor of English who taught for three decades at the University of Lagos before moving eastwards to teach at Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo, in Ebony State. A multiple award-winning writer and scholar, Ezeigbo has received several national and international awards that include a Commonwealth Fellowship (1989/90), a British Council Fellow at Cambridge University (1998), the first Best Researcher Award in the Arts and Humanities at the University of Lagos, Cadbury Poetry Prize, WORDOC Short Story Prize, Flora Nwapa Prize, The Nigeria Prize for Literature, ALA Best Short Story Prize, USA and Fonlon-Nichols Award for excellence in Creative Writing.

She has authored and edited over sixty books and published over fifty articles in scholarly journals and edited volumes. Ezeigbo is a Fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Letters (NAL), the English Scholars Association of Nigeria (ESAN) and the Literary Society of Nigeria (LSN), and a Fellow and former National Treasurer of the Association of Nigerian Authors. She is a Director in the Board of Directors of University Press PLC, Ibadan since 2013 and was a former Member of the Governing Council of the National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN), Aba, 2018-2021.

Ezeigbo is a Non-Executive Director in the Board of Uga Microfinance Bank (UMFB) since 2021. She was the Chair of the Panel of Judges for the 2011 The Nigeria Prize for Literature in the Children Literature category, and in March 2021 was appointed Chair of the Advisory Board of The Nigeria Prize for Literature & The Nigeria Prize for Literary Criticism sponsored by Nigeria LNG Ltd.

A Royal Conversation with HRM, Igwe Chidubem Iweka (Eze Iweka III of Obosi)- A film maker, theatre artist, poet and writer. HRM Igwe Chidubem Iweka is the author *The Ancient Curse* which was nominated for the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) Ken Saro-Wiwa Prize in Prose. His stage play, *August Inmates* was nominated for NLNG's The Nigerian Book Prize while his anthology of poetry, *Reflections of Hope*, is gearing up.



Opuluiche Crew: What inspired you to be a writer? We have seen some of your books and it's surprising that a king is also a writer and a poet.

A.C. Iweka: I guess it started quite early. As a little boy, I used to like to tell stories and fairy tales of those days (akụkọ irò) as a primary school boy and as I grew older, I noticed a lot of people would always advise me to be a policeman or a detective because I was good with facial recognition and I kept wondering if

I should actually become a police man but as I grew up I found out that recognizing faces wasn't the main thing, It was about recognizing faces and also images and that's imagery, like I go to a place like New York or Kaduna, probably I have been to that place just once and I want to write about that place. I can recreate it because it's there in my memory. I think the first time I noticed that I could write was in class 2. I remember writing an essay and the teacher who's a retired ESUT lecturer now called me and started questioning me on the essay I wrote. He said he wouldn't have believed I wrote it if not for the fact that the essay was written in class. He would have thought someone wrote it for me. I think that gave me my first inspiration that I do have a little knack for writing fiction and from fiction I went over to writing other things. So, basically that's it.

Opuluiche Crew: From the little time we've spent here, we noticed how busy your schedule is and we're wondering how hectic being a king and also a writer can be. Was there ever a time you felt like quitting writing for your kingly duties?

A.C. Iweka: No, no way.

Opuluiche Crew: Why, if we may ask, Sir?

A.C. Iweka: Well as you can see, today's Friday and I'm not busy. Of course, because there are days you would come here and find about 200 persons seated both outside and inside waiting for their turn. Obosi is a vast kingdom

and it encompasses some of these places you call Onitsha and people come from different parts of the kingdom with their problems because as vast as the kingdom is, so are the problems. I write in the night mainly.

Opuluiche Crew: That means there's literally no excuse not to write? The reason is because we see students in our contemporary time always complaining about workload from studies. So, do you think that responsibility isn't an excuse to write?

A.C. Iweka: No, there's no excuse for a writer who has stories in his head. In fact, the stories I have in my head I can't keep up with the pace of churning them out because you can't stop writing. It's like when there's a tap running and there is a bucket that the water is running into and even when it gets full it overflows unless you bring something and start taking water out, it keeps going and never stops. That's why sometimes you see writers in their 80s and 90s and they still write. I may be driving my car and an inspiration comes, I find somewhere and park then put it down. During the day I take care of the kingdom and at night I write.

Opuluiche Crew: Do you feel the experiences you've gathered as a king has motivated your writing.

A.C. Iweka: I've only been a king for twelve (12) years and I have been writing long before then. I write anything that comes to my mind. It's like an endless thing. I guess a writer writes till he dies.

Opuluiche Crew: Does being a writer help shape the morals you apply as a king?

A.C. Iweka: Yes, definitely. Most writers and poets are people that work on morality. Someone who teaches morals has to show examples because I can't be a poet who tries to correct with his writing and I turn around and start acting out of line with what I write.

Opuluiche Crew: This journal is for students, and there are some who want to write but don't know how to. I want to know if there is a particular way to write. And what's your advice to upcoming writers?

A.C. Iweka: Writing had different genres, drama, prose and poetry. It all depends on the one you're working on. If you're looking at a blanket approach to it all, I'll just say that you should follow your talent, your inspiration and you work on it. For instance, if you're writing a thriller, you need to bear in mind that you need to keep the suspense at every step of the way; you don't let the cat out of the bag too early in order to keep the reader's interest. People actually do hold workshops on writing and sometimes it can be conceived that it kind of puts a

constraint on a way a person should write. It's not bad anyways, it helps to coach persons who want to write and also give pointers on how to write but I think that every writer has uniqueness and that's what you need to nurture. You can also have creative friends whom you can give your works to for critical review like I do when you're done writing. They can give you their own take on what you've written before you send it off to the publisher.

Opuluiche Crew: Thank you for your time, Igwe. We hope to be back again, sir.

HRM Igwe Chidubem Iweka read Theatre Arts at California State University, Hayward and worked for a production company, Creative Associates, as a writer/composer/ instrumentalist/ Artiste and Rapporteur. Iweka taught drama in two performing arts schools. He is an accomplished novelist, playwright and poet. He was the M/D of Nigerian Mirror Newspapers for many years and contributed numerous articles as well. His book *The Ancient Curse* was nominated for the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) Ken Saro-Wiwa Prize in Prose. His stage play, 'August Inmates' won a nomination for NLNG's The Nigerian Book Prize while his anthology of poetry, *Reflections of Hope*, is gearing up. His books are used in many universities for literature. Iweka has written, produced and featured in a number of Nollywood movies. He is also a businessman with special interests in real estate. He is the Eze Iweka III of Obosi Kingdom and remains one of the most prolific, dynamic and passionate youthful kings in the Eastern Nigeria and his giant and innovative strides continue to place and reposition the town of Obosi in the global map.

An Evening of Exchange with Sir Odili Ujubuoñu, the author of *Pregnancy of the Gods*, *Treasure in the Winds*, *Pride of the Spider Clan* and *Crows of the Yellow Stream*. *Pregnancy of the Gods* won the 2006, ANA/Jacaranda Prize for Prose, *Treasure in the Winds* won the 2008 ANA/Chevron Prize on Environmental Issues and was nominated for the Nigeria Prize for Literature 2008, while *Pride of the Spider Clan* was nominated for the 2010 Wole Soyinka Prize for Africa and won the 2010 ANA Prose Prize.



Opuluiche Crew: What inspired you to write?

Odili: I am a conscript of the muse. When I was young, I loved to tell stories. Even as a child, my sister would make jokes at me saying my mouth can never go dry. I am a child of two worlds: the world of imagination and the real world—that is the world I see. When I was eight, I lived in the village and the war just ended. I saw so much at a young age. I came from a very old family, with so much history in it, and the *obi* system was still in use then, where people come together to listen to stories. I lived through the war and that was when I began to understand my environment and hear a lot of things. I didn't entirely feel the trauma of the war, because the war didn't affect my family. It was at Christ the Kings College, Onitsha, my secondary school that I began to discover my talents. On a faithful day, I was playing with birds when our priest back then, he was also our Principal too, saw me playing with the birds and called me. He asked me what I was doing. I began telling him stories in order to explain what I was doing. He brought out a cane, gave me a lash and dragged me by the ear to library and pointed at the books, and said to me, "If I have nothing doing I should come here and read the books here, that maybe one day I might tell the world these stories I was telling him." So I began to read and read till I finished all the books in the library before I left the school. I was reading for entertainment, I didn't study literature but I loved reading books. So, when I entered the

university, my course, Political Science, demanded I should read, and my roommates then studied English and Literature and this helped me to know a little about literature, because they would come back from school and they would argue about something and I would listen to them and grab some things and from there I knew and was sure where I should go. I knew I could write not literature though but I could write very well, so I started doing articles and newspapers. When I finished my youth service, I was asked to become a police officer but I refused. I went back to Lagos and fortunately I got a job as an advertiser. Advertising demands so much, I have to think strategically, there should be a purpose for writing each article, so because of that I began to write with my ears, and also my eyes, I began to visualize words more. In 1993, Abiola's election was canceled, I was 27 then and a bachelor, I was not doing anything then because everywhere was shut down. I bought an exercise book, 80 leaves, from a Mallam down our street, then I wrote the first sentence and that first sentence is first sentence of my novel, *The Pregnancy of the Gods*. When I wrote the first sentence, everything else came easily, like I had everything inside of me, and I was just vomiting them. I couldn't stop. When I come back from work, since I was a bachelor, I would lie flat on my stomach and begin to write until I finish one exercise book and close it and keep it and begin to write in another one, I wrote and wrote till my pen finished, that was when I

realized that the ink of a pen can really finish. I am a conscript of the muse, a conscript is simply a person or someone forcefully taken to fight in a war, and the muse conscripted me to come tell the story to the world.

Opuluiche Crew: That is quite an interesting beginning and encounter. What can you say about people that have desire to write but can't write? I am sure that everybody is not as imaginative as you are and everybody did not come from an environment as yours.

Odili: Firstly, writing is a labor of love and not for gain. I didn't write to gain fame, to earn wealth, I was never motivated by those. I am not saying one cannot write to gain fame but that was never the reason I wanted to write and money and fame can motivated someone to write too. I see my writing as a duty that if I carried it I will be rewarded maybe not as a writer but maybe with some other things. I have always had advertising to pay my bills. I write because I enjoyed writing, it makes me happy. I composed the Anambra State anthem for the State, and when you were kids I'm sure you heard the song "I love my chickki noodles", so that's the work of a copy writer. So, I use these things to pay my bills. Because I am the conscript of the muse, is what the muse wants to do that I will do and if I have to live all over again I will still want to be writer because it is what gives me the greatest joy and happiness in life and I always have something to write at a particular time and I am currently writing something

now.

Opuluiche Crew: Has being a writer changed how you see the world?

Odili: Yes, it gives you or will I say you are much more empathetic, you are concerned about the feelings of other people and you look at things from a fourth dimensional way, remember your character is your creation, a character is not a single dimensional thing, it is three dimensional and then that fourth dimensional is what the write enjoys, what the writer sees that the character does not see or even know of, which is the character that will die, the character that will live, the character that will fail or succeed. It kind of gives you a god gene; we tap into a god gene by being creative, that is to make things there are not there to be, to create things into existence. It is a power that literature gives you. It is a power you shouldn't abuse that's why you have to be empathetic-one to your character and to society because there should be a moral message in whatever you write, so it is not because you have a pen and that a pen is mightier than the sword, then you turn yourself into a god and use it to finish the whole world, whereas you should use it to change the world to a better place.

Opuluiche Crew: Do you think writing a novel differs from writing an advertisement?

Odili: Yes, definitely, but they complement each other. One is that because you need a lot of time to work on a book it trains and gives you the discipline to write

for a very long time, and because you write sensual writing, like writing with your senses in advertising it helps you make your readers enjoy your work more. I remember a critic after reading *Treasure in the Wind*, he said it was cinematographic in the sense that it was like a movie, like he was reading it and he was seeing a movie. It's being able to create images in people's mind, the images you create is what writing advertising helps us to do while writing creatively.

Opuluiche Crew: If you had the opportunity to write for the sake of fame would you accept it?

Odili: Just like my friends, I had opportunities but I chose not to, because my voice is different. For me, I know my stories does not belong to me they belong to the future. If I die or if people who write like me dies, the mind field from where I extract the raw materials I write will no longer exist. Then where will the future generation create it from? It will be from my books. That's why I do a lot of research while working in my books.

Opuluiche Crew: Do you think a book needs to go global or person needs to be famous for his book to be worth something?

Odili: The greatest validation one gets or should I say I get from my books is when young people who have read my work tell me about my work, what they learnt from my work, and what empathy they had from it, the lesson they learnt. I

didn't chose writing, writing chose me and since writing chose me I try to live and obey the principles of what I am working on. Sometimes I am a human being. I feel like if I were popular universal writer and things like that, but people are craved out for different purpose. There are two things people work in life for you either work for profits or you work for purpose, mine is purpose, the purpose is whatever I have written will be able to connect the future with the past, that someone can read the novel and have experience a life. When a writer gets that satisfaction I will be like "wow". So it is how happy are you about this. I am very very happy. I am extremely happy, maybe I started writing late in my life because I had to find a way to pay my bills so that if I am dependent on writing or not, it won't matter. Probably if I wasn't an advert man, I would probably be a teacher in the university writing my books and still be teaching which are what most my colleagues are doing in the overseas abroad but it is just what you choose. For me, the happiest moment of my life is when I see the end. You know when you write, "THE END", when you are done writing, it gives me joy, that is the sweetest moment.

Opuluiche Crew: Do you have any particular time you write?

Odili: No, I do not have any particular time to write, I write anytime I feel like writing, but whenever I want to write you would not see anything on my table just my laptop. I clear my table off any material only my laptop because I write with

my laptop, I like my table free, so I will be able to focus properly.

Opuiche Crew: Thank you very much for your time and warm reception, sir.

Odili Ujubuoñu's debut novel, *Pregnancy of the Gods*, was an instant success. Since then he has published follow-ups *Treasure in the Winds* and *Pride of the Spider Clan*. The three books are woven around a magical musical instrument – sacred flute lost and sought after in communities around the lower Niger. *Pregnancy of the Gods* won the 2006, ANA/Jacaranda Prize for Prose, *Treasure in the Winds* won the 2008 ANA/Chevron Prize on Environmental Issues and was nominated for the Nigeria Prize for Literature 2008, while *Pride of the Spider Clan* was nominated for the 2010 Wole Soyinka Prize for Africa and won the 2010 ANA Prose Prize. Ujubuoñu has practised Advertising since 1991. He lives in Lagos and Awka, Nigeria.

Interview with Mr. James Eze, the author of the award-winning poetry collection, *Dispossessed*. *Dispossessed* won the ANA Prize for Poetry in 2020 and was long listed for the [Nigerian Prize for Literature in 2022](#).



Opuluiche Crew: What inspired your writing?

James Eze: I was inspired in many ways. As a child, I was delighted whenever my immediate elder sister would bring home books for me to read, books like *Chike and the River*, etc. I was fascinated to read the works of Chinua Achebe, Cyril Ekwensi, etc. When I was in JSS 3, I decided to go beyond reading, thus writing my own work titled, *The Village Calamity*. The works of Okigbo Christopher sparked my interest in poetry. When I was working as a journalist, I met a friend, AJ Dangatola, who triggered or perhaps made me read and write more. I was able to write the poem, "Lagos Morning" due to the experiences I had in Lagos. I was able to visualize the daily lives and routine of a Lagosian, T.S. Eliot also inspired one of my writings.

Opuluiche Crew: What are the themes majorly explored in your poems?

James Eze: My themes are diverse. I grew up with stories told by my parents about Biafra and with those stories; I was able to write the poem "Dispossessed." There is also the theme of superimposition where countries like

America, China, want to take charge of some countries that are underdeveloped. There is the theme of atonement. Here, the poet persona is grown, thereby asking questions about war, the instability of the country. The poet persona asked the question, "Why are we so blessed yet so wretched?" My second collection of poems titled, *Goosebumps* is essentially about love. I am also a songwriter. I wrote "Survival" when I was disenchanted about Nigeria. I wrote newspapers, articles, journals about Nigeria so that my voice could be heard. I also wrote the song titled, "Shege."

Opuluiche Crew: How do you handle criticism as a writer?

James Eze: Criticism is very important in the growth of a writer. I take criticism in good faith because criticism helps me to do and write better. I have people around me who assist me to criticize my works. One in particular is Professor Oluogwibe. He is fierce and very blunt when criticizing a work.

Opuluiche Crew: What advice would you give upcoming writers?

James Eze: I would advise them to read very serious works of some prominent writers. If you want to write anything about love poems, search or goggle about Pablo Neruda. He wrote about love in a way that is unforgettable. I advise the young generation to read, they should not relent.

Opuluiche Crew: Any upcoming project and what should we expect from it?

James Eze: I am currently working on my second album, "We Shall Never Forget," and it will soon be ready. My next collection of poems will be released after releasing my second album.

Opuluiche Crew: Thank you very much, sir for your time.

James Eze began his career as a journalist with Thisday Newspaper in Lagos. There he established himself as a man of superb letters before joining The Sun Publishing as the Literary Editor of Sunday Sun. In this position, he met and interviewed the star novelist, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The meeting marked the beginning of a friendship that would lead to the formation of the highly successful Fidelity Bank International Creative Writing Workshop series, taught

by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie but co-ordinated by Eze who had moved to the banking sector to become the head of external communications at Fidelity Bank.

Eze came to poetry through Gabriel Okara's poems and had since established himself as a poet to reckon with. His debut collection, *dispossessed*, won the ANA Poetry Prize in 2020 and was longlisted for the Nigerian Prize for Literature in 2022. Beyond being a poet, Eze is a literary evangelist and a curator of many poetry and literary events. He also founded the Udala Nation Crew whose debut EP, *Daybreak*, blurs the line between poetry and song.

(This bio-data is culled from WRITING AS THE CREATION OF CULTURE A DIALOGUE WITH JAMES EZE by Ugochukwu Anadi. <https://africaindialogue.com/2023/06/07/writing-as-the-creation-of-culture-a-dialogue-with-james-eze/>)

A Lunch Break and Moment with Ikechukwu Asika- an award winning playwright, novelist, poet, a teacher and a critic. Asika is the author of the winning novel, *Tamara, Love of an Angel, Erimma* and recently, *Omalinze* which won the ANA Prize for Drama in 2022.



Opuluiche Crew: First, I want to say thank you, sir, for accepting our offer to interview you.

Asika: The honor is mine.

Opuluiche Crew: I can't move forward with this interview without getting this question out of my mind, what inspired you to be a writer?

Asika: I have always loved writing, creativity, and imagination. I grew up reading works and writers like Achebe's *Chike and the River*, Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to be Blame*, *The Concubine* by Elechi Amadi, and many other works that at the moment I was not supposed to be reading because I was still in primary cum secondary school. I loved the creative words of this writers and how they made me feel after reading them, and the stories they told. I have always been fascinated with storytelling. I think it's the love for it that pushed me into writing. Importantly, I came from a lineage of storytellers. My mother is a storyteller and the singer too. Her mother told stories too and danced so beautifully that she earned the name, Ngalakwesili. I think it's something I inherited from my maternal home. I didn't inherit the dance part though. (Laughs). My father too is a good orator and a traditionalist. So, I think all of these combined genetically to build my muse, the very reservoir and fountain I draw many of my stories. So, I think the art of storytelling- creating and imagining works and making people read your work are all part of what inspired me to be a writer- that fascination to keep a date with the muse. So, I think it's the love for creativity and growing up that made me fancy the idea of being a writer, the idea of being immortalized through literature. So, that's it, my initial motivation was love for storytelling,

imagination and creativity. Even as a child I have always loved telling stories and also I enjoyed being told stories in return. Finally, I also wanted to be like some of the writers I've read, so that is it and here I am, the journey of my career as a writer that is still unfolding.

Opuluiche Crew: Interesting, I must confess. As a writer, where do you find inspiration for the characters you develop?

Asika: The world is full of stories, and characters. Every day you live you come across individuals who ordinarily do not act the way you act, who ordinarily do not believe in things you believe in. So, there are shades of characters as there are different shades of individuals. So coming across characters, and reading about characters, listening to people talk, these are things that inspired me to create my characters and model them after some of these personalities I have come across. For example, I have encountered soft-easy going people, emotional people, petty people, determined people, easily broken people, in fact, all kinds of individuals that can fit in a particular story I want to tell. Just like I said, the world is full of stories and characters so at any point in time, I try to explore different shades of characters. But it is important to note that all the characters in my works are not necessarily characters that I've met, they are also characters that I have imagined that are possible to be part of our world from stories I have read and tales I have listened to. So, I create my characters

from all of these shades. In fact, it's more or less 60% of people I've never met and 40% of people that I've met. Just like in *Tamara*, I've never had any encounter with someone who had be trafficked; nobody who had gone through that process had been my friend. I've never had a prostitute who was a close friend of mine. So, in other words, I created Tamara from stories I have heard, issues I have read, and from what I imagined is possible. I grew up listening to stories of trafficking and prostitution in Italy and other parts of Europe and across the globe. In other words, I imagined Tamara. I gave life to her. I have never met her and I have never had a close friend that had experienced something like that. Characters come to me from experiences; people that I believe exist: from travels, from listening to stories. I hardly create characters based on people I know because I think I know them to well except on one or two scenarios. In my *Love of an Angel*, some characters were inspired by people that I knew while growing up. I wanted to write on child abuse which I had seen while growing up. Also in my work *My Hero*, Chikamso wasn't real, though Chikamso was more or less me because I heaped on that character some of the fears I had while growing up and still in the university. For example, when I was in the university, I was faced with a lot of existential questions like: where was life taking me to after graduation? What was going to be my fate with the rising curve of unemployment and so on? I have terrifying heard stories of people graduating

without finding jobs for ten to fifteen years. So, that fear I had, after giving it my all my best in the university only to end up unemployed, was heaped on Chikamso. At the end of the day Chikamso got a job and it cost him. The story is a tragic story because at the end of the day Chikamso died. I think it was my own way of sounding a note of warning to society that if it does not treat me right, I would give up like Chikamso (Laughs). So, when I talk about the biographical approach of literature, I feel the closest I have come to creating myself was in my first novel, *My Hero*, but as God would have it, my fears did not come to pass as I am gainfully employed and I am doing well by the grace of God. In fact, I secured employment just three months after my youth service. In other words, my characters are imagined and real. Tamara was imagined but Olachi was almost real in *Love of an Angel*. Olachi was real though coated with exaggerated fictional elements and then in *My Hero*, Chikamso was imagined but it had a little bit of myself. So, in my fictional works, I create characters that I imagined and that are real. I create them all.

Opuluiche Crew: In most of your works, the lead characters are females for example, Omalinze in *Omalinze*, Tamara in *Tamara*, Olachi in *Love of an angel*, etc. How is it that you as a male writer can relate to female characters so well?

Asika: I have always said that one of the things art does for a human being is the status of a god. Art confers on human beings the status of a god. That is one of

the things I enjoy about creativity, it gives me the power to create, to do and undo. That said, regarding the question you asked me on how it is that I relate to girls or women in my works despite being a man, I think the answer is simple. It has to do with my family and growing up. I think my survival in a nuclear family of five girls helped in shaping my understanding of women and girls. I grew up to understand the way girls think, the way they do things. I grew up in the midst of my five sisters in a family of seven children- five daughters and two sons. So, I think I grew up understanding the psychology of women more than I ever did with men before now. I feel it was even easier for me to create a girl like in Tamara and some other ones in my works. I think it was from studying and knowing my sisters, their temperaments, their joys and all that they did which unconsciously shaped my understanding of female psyche. I started understanding the psychology of men when I lived in a boarding school full of boys at St Mary's High School, Ifitedunu, during my secondary school days. So, it was my sisters that gave me insights on how women work. So they made it easier for me.

Opuluiche Crew: Wow, wonderful. Well, as a writer, do you think that being a writer have helped you to relate to people's problems?

Asika: Vey well, and in several ways too. It has helped me to be able to relating to people's pain and feelings. Writing has always helped me relate with people's

travails, joy and complexities. It has shaped my humanity because sometimes I imagine things I've read. I try to practice what I preach to people. Some of the things I've written about in my works I have been able to relate to them. So, I think writing has helped me feel people's suffering, appreciate differences, appreciate complexities, appreciate the fact that people would never act the same. Writing has made me to understand that what people need sometimes is love and affection and other times, just avoid them and let them be. Other times encourage them and motivated them. Just a lot people need at different times and I keep doing my best to understand and offer what is needed at any point in time and I owe it to my writing and deep rooted insights in people's complex nature and experiences.

Opuluiche Crew: How do you think literature has helped you to see yourself in other people?

Asika: Literature has happened me to understand people, to manage people's pain and most importantly, literature has helped me in understanding that everyone must not act the way I want them to act. That's why I love the saying that "a writer who goes to a psychiatrist is paying for what he should be paid for." So, writing literature made me a psychologist, writing literature taught me to understand people's mindset and complexities like I said earlier so that I can

recreate these characteristics in my fiction and in doing so, understand them in real life.

Opuluiche Crew: Do you think that your perspective about life and as a writer has made you detach from people so much?

Asika: Well, yes, it has its undeniable influences. Knowing so much of people and then real life experiences, can influence even the way you judge people you are yet to meet and interact with. My work as a writer goes between fiction and reality. So, there are people I've come across and had interest in but I detached myself from them just to be able to study them. I tend to be selective when it comes to people and friendship. I think I spend the moments I should be enjoying people to read them and try to understand them. So, yes, my perspective of life has made me detached from a lot of people.

Opuluiche Crew: Do you think your desire to immortalize yourself have pushed you to create expectations for yourself that you could not reach? Does it affect you in anyway? I mean as a writer, does that desires to be known affect you in anyway?

Asika: I'm not sure wanting to be known has affected me as a person. Just that sometimes it put a lot of pressure on me which has pushed me outside my comfort zone when it comes to the desire to write better and more creatively too.

Opuluiche Crew: Why do you have that ambition to be known all over the world?

Asika: What are we here to do in this world? I think it is because there's nothing else we have in this world other than living this life, touch lives and leaving our legacies behind. That's why we marry and give birth to children. There is this saying that goes "men are hunted by the vastness of eternity..." so, for my ambition, it is all about being the better in my field. So, as a writer, there are levels I want to get to. I see it as a challenge which I must face. This ambition helps me move out of my comfort zone to explore new things creatively. But sometimes it can be depressing because you see new works every day that you feel are better than yours. On the other side, you see people/fans who are inspired so much by your works and they believe in you. These are people rooting for you and cheering you on as their idol. So, you have to turn that depression to motivation to create better works of art.

Opuluiche Crew: As a writer and as the current HOD of the English Department of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, how do you make out time to write? When you do write? Do you go through a particular process because most students always complain that they don't know where to start from, that they are stuck somewhere. So as a writer what is your advice to upcoming writers?

Asika: Being the HOD of English has been tough for me. It has been stressful I must confess, and to be frank I've not written anything since acquiring that status. The job has never allowed me or given me breathing space because I want to make a mark in the department. I want to open the eyes of our students to the potentials they have as English students and also I want to create a department that everyone loves. I am involved in many innovative programmes and I think it is the reason I am stressed. But I have welcomed it with joy. Once I've achieved those laudable projects in the pipeline, I would take a break and I would pick up my pen again.

Opuluiche Crew: When you do write? Do you go through a particular process because most students complain that they don't know where to start from, they are stuck somewhere so what's your advice?

Asika: The process I take for writing is first to plot my story or sketch the story out then I try to imagine it chapter by chapter even though everything sometimes goes beyond what I expected initially but the sketch is important always to lead the way and inspire the entire process. For drama, I try to plot it scene by scene, for novels I try to picture how many chapters it would be and so on. So, basically you have to plot first then sketch after that you try to picture your chapters, and you begin to write and the muse takes it up from there. However way it turns out, embrace it as exactly what the muse desires and that you are

only a vessel. Importantly, when you are done writing, don't rush to press to publish. Give your story time. Let it ferment. Writing demands time, patience and motivation to be able to work out. Give your writing time to mature.

Opuluiche Crew: So as a writer what is your advice for upcoming writers?

Asika: I have said it already but in addition, my advice for young writers is that writing is beyond making money but rather fulfilling a calling and leaving a legacy. We can look at Achebe, Wole Soyinka and so on. So every young writer out there should try and forget about money when writing but rather chase a legacy or try to change the world with your writing and I believe that every writer should have what I call writer's heart to endure through the torturing process, because writing process can be daunting and challenging but know that the end would always be justify the means. The end is always salutary and celebratory.

Opuluiche Crew: Thank you very much for your time, sir.

The winner of the ANA Prize for Drama 2022, Ikechukwu Asika is a novelist, poet, playwright, and critic. He has published in almost all the genres of literature. Asika is dedicated to the business of knowledge production and creative writing and has distinguished himself as a prolific and burgeoning Nigerian creative writer with award-winning works in all genres. He has published over twelve novels, ten plays, and five anthologies of both poetry and short stories. *My Hero* (2008), *Love of an Angel* (2009), *Follow the River* (2010),

Tamara (2013), *Under the Mango Tree* (2019), *Pimples on Wrinkles* (2018), *Dance of Shame* (2020) *The Last of the Brave Souls* (2020), *Heart of Gold* (2021), *A Drop of Kindness* (2021), and *Journey in the Jungle* (2022) are among his prose works. *Blind Decision* (2006), *Burying whom we Killed* (2007), *Erimma* (2014), *Cord of Life* (2016), *When Gold Rusts* (2015), *Tears of the Rising Sun* (2016), *Our Daughters Have Gone Mad Again* (2021), *Beyond the Darkling Clouds* (2020), *Tears on the Mountain* (2021) *Pain in the Bone* (2022) *Omalinze* (2023) make the list of his dramatic outputs. *Omeile Vol I & II* (2011), *Operation Python Dance* (2018), and *Who Poetry Epp* (2018) are among his poetic outpourings. His short story collections include but are not exhaustive of *The Portrait of an Artist as a Mad Man* (2015), and *Vacancy for the Post of a Bride* (2016). His novel, *Tamara*, won the Youth Achievers Award for Prose (Senior Category) in 2013 and was 2nd Runner-Up for the ANA Prose Prize for Fiction in 2013. The play, *Erimma*, made the shortlist for the ANA Esiaba Irobi Prize for Playwriting in 2014. His recent play, *Omalinze*, an adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone*, is the Winner of the ANA Drama Prize 2022. The play is a prodigious and ground-breaking dramatic output that reinforces adaptation issues with greater charms possessed and admired in the adaptive dramaturgy of Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, J.P. Clark, and Zulu Sofola. *Pain in the Bone* (drama) won the Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo Prize for Drama, in 2023. Some of his short stories have appeared in *Heart Links*, *ANA Review*, *African Writers.com*, and *Voices from the Veil: Anthology of Short Stories from Africa and the Diaspora*. His first solo play, *Colours of Madness*, is featured in the recently released book entitled: *The Power of One: An Anthology of Nigerian Solo Plays* edited by Greg Mbajorgu and published by Kraftgriots.

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